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Unveiling Xenophobia: An Examination of Ideological Constructs in Sara Suleri's "Meatless Days": A post-colonial Perspective

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Abstract

Meatless Days has social and political overtones and written in a geographically and temporally dislocated manner. It documents Sara Suleri's recollections and her demonstration against the oppression and subjection of women in Pakistani culture due to erroneous, misunderstood, and incorrect interpretations of Islamic law. Since its founding, patriarchal behaviors have been more prevalent in Pakistani culture, which is a classic patriarchal group. The father of Sara Suleri is a man of words, and he completely understands himself via natural and intuitive speech. Sara Suleri attempted to include that entire condition of circumstances in the novella *Meatless Days*. In the setting of postcolonial Pakistan, she tells her experience about cultural differences, memories of the past, and her female partners in particular. Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* is the main literature chosen for that aim. The theoretical framework used to analyze character from the perspective of Homi K Bhabha.

Key Words: Meatless Days, Sara Suleri, Postcolonial literature, Patriarchy, Gender oppression, Homi K. Bhabha

Introduction

Sara Suleri's "*Meatless Days*" is a poignant memoir that intricately weaves personal narrative with the political upheavals of postcolonial Pakistan. Suleri's work does not merely serve as an autobiographical recount of her life but also functions as a critical lens through which the reader can examine the ideological constructs that pervade her experiences. Among these constructs, xenophobia emerges as a salient theme that Suleri both confronts and deconstructs throughout the text.

A strong and frequently harmful force that may penetrate societies and affect both individual behavior and institutional policy is xenophobia, which is defined as the fear or hate of outsiders

or foreigners (Gay, 1978). Suleri traverses this difficult terrain in *"Meatless Days,"* considering her own multicultural upbringing as the daughter of a Pakistani father and a Welsh mother. She is well positioned to examine the xenophobic sentiments present in her environment because of her multiracial status.

Suleri's story is characterized by xenophobic incidents that she and her family experience. These interactions are deeply ingrained in the larger framework of Pakistan's post-British national identity struggle. The nation struggles with the lingering colonial mentality that treats anything alien with distrust and contempt as it adjusts to its newfound independence. Despite having strong family and personal ties to Pakistan, Suleri's mother in particular becomes a focus point for this xenophobia as she is frequently seen as an outsider (Jove, 2002).

Suleri, however, explores the intellectual foundations that support these viewpoints rather than just retelling these incidents. She looks at the cultural and historical myths that have influenced Pakistani society and fueled the nation's fear of the "other." Suleri challenges the legitimacy of creating inflexible national identities that don't allow for variety and hybridity through her investigation.

Furthermore, as noted by Loakf Suleri's memoir confronts the gendered nature of xenophobia. She highlights the intersectionality of her experience as a woman of mixed heritage, addressing the double marginalization that comes with being both female and perceived as foreign in a patriarchal society. This intersectionality amplifies the impact of xenophobic ideologies, as women often bear the brunt of societal fears and prejudices (Loakf, 2003).

In *"Meatless Days,"* Suleri offers a nuanced critique of xenophobia by juxtaposing it with the richness of intercultural exchange. Through her family's story, she illustrates that embracing difference can lead to a more inclusive and empathetic society. Her memoir becomes a testament to the power of personal narratives in challenging ideological constructs and fostering a deeper understanding of the human condition (Rhiya, 2002).

In the end, *"Meatless Days"* is a cry to demolish the xenophobic notions that separate us, not only a story about Suleri's existence. Suleri challenges readers to consider their own biases and perspectives by analyzing how different beliefs affected her personal experiences. Her art serves as a reminder that xenophobia must be urgently rejected in favor of a more compassionate and inclusive worldview in a society that is becoming more and more linked on a global scale.

Although *"Meatless Days"* is a memoir that addresses xenophobia in a variety of ways, it is not a work that specifically addresses the issue. Critics value Suleri's capacity to analyze more general concerns like cultural identity, belonging, and the xenophobic sentiments that may occur both inside and across civilizations by drawing on her own experiences. The work is regarded as a significant addition to postcolonial literature and a moving examination of the human condition in a divided yet interrelated globe (Thobman, 1998).

Harriet looks at how critics who study xenophobia also focus on the terminology used in *"Meatless Days."* The sense of alienation that might result from living in a culture that perceives one as an outsider is well-represented in Suleri's elegant words. The ambiguities of identification

and the isolation that frequently results from xenophobic sentiments are reflected in the memoir's linguistic style (Harriet, 2000).

As a counterweight to xenophobia, Maxlay and Deu (1998) frequently address the issue of dislocation and the want for belonging in Suleri's work. Suleri conveys a common yearning for connection that cuts beyond national and cultural borders via her own story. The xenophobic idea that identity is immutable and unique is challenged by her analysis of her own sense of belonging.

Critics contend that "*Meatless Days*" challenges the xenophobic sentiments that have been ingrained by colonial history in the postcolonial era. The fight for identity in Pakistan following the end of British rule serves as the backdrop for Suleri's tales about her family and life there. This conflict frequently entails resolving a colonial society's internalized xenophobia, which Suleri tackles openly and nuanced.

We have explored "*Meatless Days*" through various lenses, with some focusing on elements of xenophobia that can be discerned in the narrative. Xenophobia, the fear or hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange, can manifest in subtle ways within literature, often intertwined with themes of identity, belonging, and otherness. The idea of the "other" is explored in Suleri's art from the perspective of someone who has lived in between civilizations. The story looks at Pakistani and Western society's propensity for xenophobia. Critics note out that Suleri's thoughts on her stay in the US challenge xenophobic clichés and promote a more complex view of her own country while also criticizing Western views of Pakistan and the East in general.

1.1. Research Questions

1. How does "*Meatless Days*" depict the intersections of xenophobia with gender and colonial history in postcolonial Pakistan?
2. What role does the author's multicultural background play in shaping the narrative's perspective on xenophobia?

1.2. Objectives

1. To study the intersections of xenophobia
2. To examine the factors shaping narrative perspective on xenophobia

1.3. Problem Statement

The study work focuses on a comprehensive framework to explore the xenophobia ideology in Sara Suleri's "*Meatless Days*." The current study will delve into the narrative techniques used by the author to critique xenophobia, the socio-political context of postcolonial Pakistan, and the implications of such ideologies on individual and collective identities. Through this analysis, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how xenophobia is depicted in postcolonial literature.

1.4. Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the present paper study is that through various lenses, with some focusing on elements of xenophobia can be discerned in the narrative. Xenophobia is the fear or hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange.

2. Research Methodology

Current research paper is qualitative in nature. This paper aims to challenge the counter side of post-colonial approach as described in the selected text; Sara Suleri's *Meatless days: A Memoir*. The aim is to analyze the selected text with a post-colonial perspective in light of Homi k Bhaba's post-colonial model, is applied to meet the proposed questions and objectives for the present research paper.

The procedure that is utilized in the present examination is both explicit and analytical. It looks to discover the outside settings behind the improvement of the characters topics and plots of the novel *Meatless Days: A Memoir* (1989), the descriptions of female protagonists and dialogue reveal the constructed social ideology about the ideology of xenophobia. Moreover, perusing and talking about the manners which are utilized by the significant character to free herself from the cruel conditions that are forced on her. It is critical to be accustomed to the idea of "post-colonialism" which is significant in the novel to reflect the possibility of female characterized that are considered as a defining moment in the character's life to oppose parting and to re-manufacture her own character and personality. The present paper comprises of introduction of the terms culture, xenophobia, feminism and post-colonial analysis.

2.1. Materials and Methods

Methods of Data Collection

The data will be collected from two sources i.e., primary sources and the secondary sources. The primary sources are the selected textbooks. The secondary resources are as the data collected from internet through different websites.

3. Literature Review

The title *Meatless Days* refers to the controversial and much debated decision of the government of the newly born nation, following the formation of Pakistan (in 1947) to restrain from eating meat two days a week, so as to preserve the national supply of cattle and goats. The literal meaning not withstand, Suleri's days are far from meatless. In fact, they are very much food-focused, with images of meat, and of food in general, figuring either literally –as part of religious traditions– or symbolically, in association with the nurturing maternal body. The centrality of food in the shaping of her subjectivity is clearly stated by the author when she claims: I am wrong, then, to say that my parable has to do with nothing less than the imaginative extravagance of food and all the transmogrifications of which it is capable? Food certainly gave us a way not simply of ordering a week or a day but of living inside history, measuring everything we remember against a chronology of cooks. Just as Papa had his own yardstick – a word he loved – with which to measure history and would talk about the Ayub era, or the second martial law, or the Bhutto regime, so my sisters and I would place ourselves in time by remembering and naming cooks (*Meatless Days* 34). (2022, Maria Morelli, p.131).

Meatless Days is a work of art. The thought of its writer is carefully folded into the rich tapestry of external objects as Suleri herself points out "I knew it was easier to be invaded by a body than by a notion" (1999, p.67). This allusion to "body" is the alternative platform for Suleri's empathy for ethnic suppression. She chooses to utter the objectifying item of the body to correlate her

artistic sympathy with her emotional experience of depravity. If *Meatless Days* is cherished on the level of imagery then it is a valid account of retrospective voice empurpled beyond any sense impression. Suleri conjures up the literary classics by invoking them in her narrative to signify her psychic suppression at the gender and racial level. (Shaista Andaleeb, 2021, p.319).

Sara's *Meatless Days* are a very significant document on the representation of Pakistani culture. Sara takes her home as a microcosm of Pakistani society and proves an apt technique to look at history from the perspective of the marginalized segments of women and children in society. *Meatless Days* are not free from Sara's own prejudices, but they are prejudices of mini-narrative to counter-balance 635 Vol. V, No. I (Winter 2020) Ghulam Murtaza, Mazhar Hayat and Syed Ali Waqar Hashmi the prejudices of the grand narrative of history. A rich, heavy layer of the political scenario of Pakistani history makes the upper plot of the text. The main plot revolves around the domestic life of an elite class family: Mr. Suleri was once the chief of ISI, the antagonist of Bhutto and an established writer. But Sara manages well not to let the text be a voice of the patriarchal center of life in Pakistan. Dadi, her sisters, younger brother Shahid, her Welsh mother Mare Jones (renamed Surraya Suleri after marriage) and most importantly, their maidservant Halima serve well to represent the position of the marginalized groups in Pakistani society. This document is further validated by the description of cultural events of Eid and Ramazan and sehri and aftari, which provide rich occasions to see the position of various segments of society (Ghulam Murtaza, 2020, p.635).

4. Analysis

The post-colonial autobiography *Meatless Days* by Pakistani author Sara Suleri depicts the re-creation of identities that have been denied, displaced, handicapped, and disavowed by the forces of historical and personal migration and cultural displacement.

A woman's identity in Pakistan is defined by her biological duties, which either make her dependent on or subordinate to her male counterparts. Suleri's discontent with her nation's social framework for depriving its women of any importance or space is expressed in *Meatless Days*. By giving female characters far more room in her narrative than male characters, she has reversed this trend. Within the context of the author's personal anecdotes from her own life, Sarah Suleri's *Meatless Days* addresses a wide range of subjects, from gender issues in Pakistan to the history and politics of the nation.

In *Meatless Days*, post-colonialism is used, like the English language itself, self-consciously. Post-colonialism and English have become not just historical links, but tools used by the authors to communicate their unique, non-Western visions of life. Discussion of post-colonialism in this novel illustrates the confrontations of two worlds, Western and colonized, but this conflict is not bemoaned or decried. In fact, post-colonial rhetoric, metaphors, and imagery have been appropriated in it, as it has the very use of English. *Meatless Days* deliver a forceful image of a unique culture that has collided with Western tradition in no uncertain way. Works such as this can illustrate the effect the fermenting residue of colonial power will ultimately have on nations confronting the dual identities of indigenous and imposed culture. *Meatless Days*, colored by the effects of colonialism, provides a unique vision that is not explicitly post-colonial in nature.

Sara and Tillat were khalas for Ifat's children once she became a mother. The terms Khalas and Bangan ka Bharta are also employed here in the book. This demonstrates how the phrase imitation appears in this autobiography. We learnt how to become that desirable personage, a khala, mother's sister, and when our married sisters visited with their entourage, we delighted in the practice of khala-love. Tillat and I felt blessed at this vicarious taste of motherhood.

Suleri experiences a sense of national displacement since, although her homeland is Pakistan, her own mother, a White Welsh colonizer, seldom speaks the "mother tongue." As it confronts the past with the present and draws a comparison between living in Lahore and the United States, Suleri's recollection of her life in *Meatless Days* moves over time and place. She discusses her mother, a Walsh lady and professor; her sisters, Ifat and Tillat; her brother Shahid and her friend Mostakhori, a self-sufficient girl; and her father, a journalist who is quite involved in Pakistani politics, in this life story.

She talks about her Dadi, who is a little stubborn and doesn't fit the mold of a modern woman. She lost part of her recollections of the past, including the nation where her son relocated, her husband's work, and the number of children she had. Her father, who was not religious, later showed extraordinary religious knowledge, and her father was a devout lady who later forgot to say prayers. Suleri sees herself as the American Pakistani who is also the alien double of her own culture because of Pakistani's status as the "alien double" in regard to the West. She perceives herself as residing between two cultures and ideologies, none of which is true, as a result of her misinterpretation of some of her own cultural traditions. Suleri gives history a human face via Sara's accounts of her father's political intrigue and labor for Pakistan. Additionally, she provides examples of how she envisions Pakistan as a method of achieving exile.

Suleri invokes the idea of lost things -- audiences, people, culture, history, geography, words, and so on:

"My audience is lost, and angry to be lost, and both of us must find some token of exchange for this failed conversation." (2)

"Our congregation in Lahore was brief, and then we swiftly returned to a more geographic reality. "We are lost, Sara," Shahid said to me on the phone from England. "Yes, Shahid," I firmly said, "We're lost." (19)

"When I teach topics in third world literature, much time is lost in trying to explain that the third world is locatable only as a discourse of convenience. Trying to find it is like trying to pretend that history or home is real and not located precisely where you are sitting.

Her primary area of interest was Pakistani politics and how they affected women. She also discussed how this political misinformation affected her family and the country. Suleri's mother is from Walsh, a very different culture, but she moved in Pakistan, where she still felt alienated because of her recollections of colonialism and division.

Because she was a member of the colonizer race, many viewed her with distrust and skepticism because of recent colonial memories. She was from a different culture, and even after living here her entire life, she was still unfit to enjoy both. She was not proficient in learning a single culture, and she experienced a crisis of self-discovery.

The female characters in Suleri's "*Meatless Days*" are stereotypical and typical of the third world. They act as representatives of a particular patriarchal society that keeps them quiet. Ironically, their wives utilize their mother tongues. While Mama studied Urdu, Ifat learned Punjabi, her husband's language, to communicate with her slaves.

"A woman can't home". Her face was clouded then, making me watch intently the way that meaning shadowed itself came and went around her eyes. "Why Ifat" I finally asked " Oh home is where your mother is one, it is one when you are mother, two and in between its almost as though your spirits must retract" (P.147. L.15-----21).

Suleri emphasizes the idea that women are "others" as their expectations differ greatly from those of males. The aforementioned lines, which represent the agonized cries of a displaced "other," are never securely established or thoroughly anchored. The issue now becomes, if women are socially distinct, why are they "others"? Since the responsibilities allocated to them differ from those assigned to males, the answer is rather straightforward. This may be inferred from the fact that women are limited to effective support roles while males are interpreted as the effective administrators of things in any discourse. This can be interpreted as the appropriation of women's perceived otherness.

Placelessness is correlated with women being "other".

I've lived many years as an otherness machine, had more than my fair share of being other" *Meatless Days*, 105.

Ifat, Suleri's sister, dedicates her life to Pakistan. Maybe she is forced to marry Javed, a black Pakistani who plays polo, because of her pale skin. She picks up Punjabi and even becomes fluent in the Jehlum dialect. She makes an effort to learn about the history of the army and the traditions of Javed's hometown. Ifat turns into Pakistan and rejects displacement.

Despite the opening statement, the book is full with women, but their lives are tragically interspersed with tragedies: the author's mother was killed when she was struck by a rickshaw, and her sister Ifat was murdered for unspecified reasons. Additionally, there are humorous tales and situations, such as Mustakori's amusing nicknames or the incident in which Sara's mother's Urdu is made fun of:

The touching good faith of her Pakistani passport could hardly change the fact that even as my mother thought she was arriving, she actually had returned. There were centuries worth of mistrust of English women in their eyes when they looked at her who chose to come after the English should have been gone: what did she mean by saying. I wish to be part of you? Perhaps, they feared, she mocked (Suleri,1989,p.163)

She was also assigned the position of an "other" in the household. Her husband, Mr. Suleri, is portrayed as having complete control over not only her but the entire family since he is a man of power and domination throughout the narrative. Mair Jones was not Mr. Suleri's life partner; rather, she lived in subordination to him. When I visit her in his chamber, she is usually gazing down and listening solemnly, according to Suleri, who says that "Papa's powerful discourse would surround her night and day" (Suleri 1989, p.157).

Furthermore, for the most of the memoir, her identity is established and defined by her roles as a mother or wife. The fact that Mair Jones is a member of the Suleri family supports the idea that males in patriarchal cultures view women as nothing more than physical beings who bear and care for children.

The fact that Sara's sister was a woman in patriarchal Pakistan also cost her dearly. Like her father, she was a mix of elegance, conceit, and self-will, but her physical grace and beauty were what attracted everyone's attention. Mr. Suleri rejected her because she was powerful and disobedient, preferring to defy her father's authority and wed anybody she wanted to:

She chose to enter into the heart of Pakistan in the most un-Pakistan way possible: she ran away from Kinnaid and called home a few days later to say, bravely, "Papa, I am married. 'Congratulations' he replied, put down the phone, and refused to utter her name again for years. (Suleri 1989, p. 141)

Suleri's stance on otherness of third country women seems to be self-contradictory, for she, again and again, via her characters strongly has tirades of outbursts of being other and of having more than her fair share of being other. Surprisingly, Suleri and Moi appear to agree on the issue of women's otherness. However, the situation is more complicated than it first appears. Suleri establishes throughout her memoir *Meatless Days* that women are others, but she comes to the conclusion that there are no women in the third world and that identity in the third world is defined by social status rather than strict binary distinctions between men and women. However, if I take into consideration Moi's statement above regarding women's otherness, I can easily understand Suleri's position on gender identity and the marginalization of women. Suleri may be trying to convey the same idea about women's otherness, which is that in a third world society, women are perceived as others, but if they have a strong financial position and a social standing, they are "less others than the others" (Fareeha khan, 2024.122).

Sara provides a hybrid approach to the problem of Pakistani culture, history, and identity as a result of her genetic roots in both national and colonial histories. When a model was already established in the previous generation, the decision to marry into a different history was simple and even common; she was replicating both her mother's example of entering a different history and her mother's quiet stance, as she implies in her marriage to Goodyear. Her postcolonial voice is neither fully situated in the indignity nor a real depiction of Pakistani life, hence it cannot be considered representative.

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5. Conclusion

I started my investigation into otherness in Suleri's *Meatless Days* by posing two fundamental research questions that would help me uncover some facts on the otherness of women in this work. The female characters in *Meatless Days* are a clear example of how women are categorized as others. Women are others because, as Sara saw, they are physically different; they are rendered speechless despite having the most eloquent speech style, as Mamma and Ifat experienced; and, as Ifat reflected and surmised, they are homeless. Women are generally stigmatized and viewed as inferior to males since they are thought to be weak and fair-skinned. By doing this, she has shown the skewed narrative that Western academics created in order to portray third-world people as less valuable. In addition to exposing the prejudice of the Western world, she has demonstrated her paternal grandmother to be religiously inflexible, educating the world that being inflexible in one's religious beliefs does not equate to being illogical. In a similar vein, she has described her mother as a marginal national identity (Welsh) who consistently supports her husband's political beliefs and is unable to adapt to Pakistan's patriarchal society. As Suleri notes, she starts to appreciate quiet history while concealing herself behind the everyday tasks of the house.

When a large number of individuals travel, either freely or under duress, the process is known as partition. Suleri recounted her family's agony and division, Bangladesh's secession, and the 1971 war in her book. One facet of post-colonialism is the cultural and similar predicament Suleri's mother encountered when obtaining. Although this narrative is written in English, there are some Urdu words mixed in as well.

The reader learns that *Meatless Days*' female characters are able to communicate; they may be defiant, obnoxious, and perplexing, but they are still accountable for the events in their life. Mothers had to endure their own traumas and maintain their strength to live after giving birth to their children and seeing their deaths. Dadi faces obstacles in her life since she forbade anyone from entering her personal space.

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