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## Women, History And Faith: Suleri's Critique Of Pakistan's National Culture In *Meatless Days And Boys Will Be Boys*

**Abstract** *Sara Suleri is divided between her fascination for her father's strong character and her repulsion for the consequent effect on woman's space in family life, connoting a critique of Pakistani patriarchal society in which women, irrespective of their social status, suffer from marginalization. Although Suleri's Boys Will Be Boys is an elegy for her father, as she announces in the sub-title of the work, she manages her tilt toward her father despite her advocacy of the woman's space miserably shrunk to domestic life in Pakistani society. Besides women's position, she questions the dominant version of history and the state's political manipulation of religion for ulterior motives. She is close to Boehmer's theorization of the elitist continuities and intimacies with a view that develops from geographically and historically multiple contexts and histories. Her role as a native intellectual is two-pronged: her view is colored by western discourse, but her status as a 'representative' Pakistani voice is also significant. This article analyzes how far Suleri's representation of women, religion and history of Pakistani society is colored by western context.*

**Key Words:** Pakistani Literature in English, Nation, Representation, Feminism, Patriarchy, Gender, Sara Suleri

### Introduction

Pakistani writers of literature in English have used Western literary modes and strategies for the expression of their sense of national belonging and have brought forth a strong representative voice for Pakistani culture. Their perspective may be western; their focus is Pakistan. As a result literary contribution of Pakistani writers, including Sara Suleri from the first generation of Pakistani writers and Nadeem Aslam, Muhammad Hanif, Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie from recent writers, Pakistanis have come up with strong Pakistani literary discourse. George Lamming's observation on postcolonial writers is valid for Pakistani writers who are divided between the desire for representation of the margin and fascination for the centre (cited in [Ashcroft et al. 1995](#)). Pakistani writers being published and critiqued in the west, and almost all of them completely or partially educated and trained in the west, are bound to think about Pakistan through their western glasses. This context sometimes makes their presentation of Pakistani culture questionable for the natives and the traditionalists. Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* is a polyphonous pastiche that questions the 'Islamic' and patriarchal values of Pakistani society. It has been written in memoir form with no single clear line of thought and development of the story. Every chapter is a separate story, and almost ten-odd essays-cum-stories have loosely been put together to give the semblance of a single work, but Pakistani culture and history make a unifying factor of all of them.

Sara is a professor of women's literature at Yale University, and her view of Pakistani culture is visibly colored with the western approach to existence and reality. The mode of a life lived by the previous two generations, of her parents and grandparents, becomes questionable in the hands of Sara. Mr. Z.A. Suleri, for instance, proudly narrated to Sara the story of his father that he was a devout

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Muslim, got a mosque constructed, went to pilgrimage on foot, and married Sara's Dadi when he was 50, and she was 16, "that slip of thing" (1989, p. 110). Sara could not digest this anomaly, but her father felt it to be an absolutely normal social occurrence. Spivak rightly observes living a narrative affects one way of thinking so deeply that one forgets that it is a narrative; one begins to feel that it is the only true version of reality (Harasym, 1990, p. 19). The demands of culture are so overwhelming that Sara's mother, an English lady, native speaker of English, taught Jane Austen at Punjab University Lahore, went through conception after conception un murmuring, though she was exhausted and fatigued. One reason for Sara's looking at Pakistani culture that way is her being removed from Pakistani culture like W. B. Yeats alienates himself from the world of flux but then sings of "past, present and to come". Had Sara been part of this culture like her sisters, Tillat and Ifat, she would have interacted with and thought of it differently. The anthropological definition of culture is 'what people do, think and have' (Ferraro, 2001). In literary representation, what a community has – the cultural artefacts, the geographical features, physical objects, environment, mountain, rivers, jungles etc. – is less important; it is what we think and do is more important, and this is Sara's focus in *Meatless Days* with an ultimate focus on what/how Pakistani people think about situations, attitudes, people, men and women. To demonstrate the complex case of Pakistani Muslim nationhood, Suleri's memoirs, *Meatless Days* and *Boys Will Be Boys*, cover history from the traumatic birth of the nation in 1947 up to the 1970s when she left for the US. What complicates her approach is that she views her pre-diasporic life in Pakistan from a diasporic perspective.

### Theoretical Framework

On the construction of self in a woman's memoir, Gusdorf observes that "the individual does not feel herself to exist outside of interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community ... The important unit is thus never the isolated being" (cited in Lovesey, 1997, p. 36). Gusdorf makes this observation because he rightly feels that the lives of the characters in the life narratives are "thoroughly entangled" (p. 36). But the case of Suleri is different in that she – even when she was in Pakistan – did not share with her father his sense of pride and satisfaction with Pakistan's history. When she goes to America, she is further alienated from her 'homeland culture' and writes less as "interdependent existence" and more as an "isolated being". Vikko (1997) considers autobiography a "context-dependent [...] storage of themes and narratives that organize our lives [and are] our common property, our culture" (p. 92). Making "the personal political" (Roberts, 2002, p. 77), Suleri poses a feminist challenge to Pakistan's grand narrative of patriarchy, but the national culture gets serious blows by her memoir. Jalinec (1998) is right to observe that women's autobiographies focus on their family issues, personal experiences and interactions with intimate friends (p. xiii). But this observation fails to cope with the amplitude of Suleri's work because she had been deciphering "the undecipherable hand" (1989) of her father, Z.A. Suleri, who was at the helm of the affairs of Pakistani politics for a long. Resultantly, Suleri's work includes but is not limited to subjective experiences; it reverberates in the family-nation circumference.

Boehmer (2002) observes that postcolonial critics following a Subaltern school of Indian historiography have recently focused on "continuities and intimacies" (p. 2). Boehmer's own intention is to evaluate "the ways in which such continuities were manifested between colonial (and proto-national spaces), especially between the native elites, during the decades of formal or high empire, 1890-1920" (p. 2). Boehmer opines that national consciousness draws its strength from its own "internal political and cultural resources or the political culture of [its] oppressors" (p. 3).

As a self-conscious writer embedded in colonial and postcolonial history, Sara (1992) says that post/colonial stories are bound to be ambivalent in consequence of "the greater mobility of disempowerment. To tell the history of another is to be pressed against the limits of one's own" (p. 2). This critical observation is relevant to this article as her own placement is complicated with a Pakistani father, British mother, American husband, and friends across the globe.

## Literature Review

One major focus of Sara's work is woman's position in Pakistan, the aspect that has got critical attention. Dalal considers the colonial history of Pakistan and patriarchy embedded in Pakistani culture responsible for her Welsh mother's marginalization in this society (2007, p. 3). Tallat and Ghani (2004) have analyzed the style of Suleri's *Meatless Days* with their focus on her metaphors. [Murtaza \(2011\)](#) also studied Sara Suleri's metaphorical language in *Meatless Days* in his M. Phil thesis Analysis of Metaphorical Language in *Meatless Days: An Arraignment of Pakistan's Socio-Cultural Set-Up*, later on, published as *Metaphor and Patriarchy: A Linguistic Analysis of Metaphors in Sara Suleri's Meatless Days* (2011). As the title sums up, the work analyzes Suleri's metaphors that focus on Pakistani patriarchy and its destructive impact on women. But this is only one dimension of the work, of course. [Ray's \(1993\)](#) observation rightly sees it balanced between personal and political: "Suleri's memoir constantly imbricates her family in the reconstruction of the nation of Pakistan so that the gap between the micro-political and the macro-political is continuously collapsed" (p. 49).

[Linda Warley \(1992\)](#) observes the complex configuration of the identity of the postcolonial subject in the memoir: the problematic notion of identity is the obsession of all postcolonial autobiographers because of "the postcolonial subject's double-interpellation by competing for indigenous and colonial discourses, "identity" can never be entirely located within a single, coherent subjective space" (p. 107).

This article endorses Warley and offers textual evidence for multiple-interpretation of the subject in Sara's works. Mara Scanlon rightly views *Meatless Days* as "the chronicle of an Asian American woman's coming to terms with Pakistan, the politically turbulent nation of her birth and young adulthood, from the relative geographical safety of New Haven, Connecticut" (p. 411). "Mairi tries to erase markers of her difference to be part of Pakistan but can never fully meld" into postcolonial Pakistan, whereas Sara's father was one of the seminal figures in the making and evolution of Pakistan as a nation and a state. This dichotomy of lineages complicates Sara's position in the Pakistani nation: her view is colored by these two lenses, and like her mother, she could never leave Pakistan though she leaves for America for good and for Goodyear. [Shazia Rahman \(2004\)](#) refers to this complexity of Suleri's narrative when she suggests that it "make[s] incursions against orientalist ideology by deconstructing terms such as women, native, and a third world without completely dismissing them" (p. 347). "Suleri's memoir," Rahman continues, "fights orientalism by critiquing categories as diverse as women and nation while simultaneously creating a relational subjectivity at the intersections of the categories it deconstructs" (p. 348). Ali Usman Saleem interprets Suleri's memoir as a "protest against female subjugation and suppression through false, misconstrued and wrong interpretation of Islamic laws in the Pakistani society" (p.1). "Female identity in Pakistan," continues Saleem, "is ... interlinked with the place of Islam in the socio-political structures of the country" (p.2). Spivak's theorization of the position of the postcolonial critic/creative writer is aptly relevant: "there are no literal referents, there are no 'true' examples of the 'true worker'" (1990, p. 104). To get rid of this monolithic of 'truth', she observes, a nuanced deconstructive understanding helps.

## Representation of Pakistani Culture

Sara, like most of the Pakistani writers of English, has an ambivalent attitude towards Pakistani culture. She is far from taking pride in this culture, but she is sure of her belonging to this culture. Her work bears witness to this belonging. When she settles in America, she looks back with pain and pleasure: living in Pakistan, she wanted to be away from here because it was always too heavy and harsh on her soft palate (1989); only far away from here she could find the lightness of burden of the responsibility of living. But she also missed the company of women: "Now I live in New Heaven and feel quite happy with my life. I miss, of course, the absence of women and grow increasingly nostalgic" (Suleri, p. 19).

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

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 centre of life in Pakistan. Dadi, her sisters, younger brother Shahid, her foreigner mother Mare Jones (renamed Surraya Suleri after marriage) and most importantly, their maidservant Halima serves 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.

### Politics and Domesticity

Politics is a major issue dealt with by Sara with informed consciousness of Pakistani context; this makes her more explicit than fictional literature can afford. The wars of 1965 and 1971 are significant events in Pakistani history. Both sides of the borders keep trumpeting their claims of great victory of their own and severe hypocrisy and cunningness and cowardliness of the enemy. *Meatless Days* unfolds a common person's view of these mega-events. Sara says that they remember only songs of Noor Jehan because people sitting in their homes got only this much of this mega event. The war of 1971 resulted in the disintegration of Pakistan. Sara says that they were in London when they got the news that Decca had fallen, that we had fallen. This fall was the interpretation of the consequences given by the metanarrative of history. Sara wonders whether they had really fallen and in what sense they had fallen. Then she goes on to explore the effects and consequences of the war on the life of her sister Ifat whose husband was arrested, and when he came back from India, he was a broken man. Ifat had to build him up again brick by brick (1989, p. 144). She went through this ordeal with tight lips like a Hemingway code hero. She was a lady who liked to keep her head erect and back straight; she never lost her leopard like a way of facing the situation, whatever it might be. The point is that ultimately the burden of the big events falls upon the shoulders of women whosoever celebrates or bemoans the victory/defeat.

To have a look at history from the common people's point of view, Sara places the historical events and situations in a routine and homely day-to-day context. For example, Mr. Jinnah is a key figure in the history of Pakistan. Mr. Suleri idealizes him so devotedly that it becomes impossible to question the Father of the Nation; he becomes a homely god. But the result of this excessive veneration is that Mr. Suleri himself likes to be *the Father* at home instead of *a father*. As Mr. Jinnah says Sara mishandled Pakistan into being (p. 120), Papa too never took his children as flesh and blood human beings with their own psychological needs and desires. He kept juggling with them as he played with facts. In *Boys Will Be Boys*, Sara refers to his father as Quaidy-Daddy, a phrase that satirically refers to the confusion of identity between the father of the family and the father of the nation in Papa's mind, the confusion that made him Pip with two p's, for pompous and preposterous. And when Sara has established Papa's desire to be placed so highly, she brings a moment of anticlimax: when Sara comes back from America to see her father, she congratulates him on the birth of a brand new baby. He answers that he has his needs. Sara admits it to be all right, but the very next moment, he adds that it was an act of frustration, exhaustion and shamelessness. Sara does not like the romance between her father and the Father of the nation because it destroyed the loving atmosphere of the house.

In the backdrop of the Fall of Decca and then hanging of Bhutto, martial law government and the fuss over the political tumult, Sara tells what happened to two ladies at her home, Mamma and Dadi: the former became speechless and the latter prayerless. When big men were doing a lot of work in terms of making history, what was happening with homes in Pakistan? The answer is that they were wronged and ignored.

### Festivals in *Meatless Days*

Sara discusses the festival of *Eid-ul-Azha*, the Eid of sacrifice, in the first chapter of *Meatless Days*. Sara's style is that she chooses a ritual, and looks at it from different angles, places it in relation to

different members of her home, who stand for different segments of society. At Eid, a goat is brought home, and Dadi serves it with peas and butter. The children get an activity; they have no sense of religiosity. Dadi feeds it to fatten it and sacrifice it on the specified day. Sara raises the meaning of the sacrifice for Dadi, who takes vicarious pleasure in the sacrifice. She associates herself with Abraham and assures God that as the prophet sacrificed his son for Him, she too can do so, and the sacrifice of the goat is proof. Ironically, Mr. Z. A. Suleri is not mentioned in this regard though it is the most important festival in Pakistani Muslim culture. The suggestion is that he has got many *important* things of higher significance than this festival. Dadi and children need this festivity because they have got nothing to do with their life. They are marginalized members of family life, and this festival is important because it gives them centrality, though only for a brief span of time, which proves an oasis for them. Papa does not need this kind of pseudo activity because he has the proud assurance of being at the centre of the history of Pakistan: he was the chief of ISI of Pakistan; he was in direct antagonism with Z. A. Bhutto; he was editor of Pakistan Times and so on and so forth. Mare Jones, Sara's mother, Mr. Suleri's second wife. Through her, Sara presents another approach towards this festival: she could never understand how slaughtering animals could please God after all. But Sara says that she could not locate the metaphor. Actually, when Dadi ate the meat of the goat, she was also eating something else with it, and she cut the very tissues of festivity. Dadi's purpose is to find a centre for herself that otherwise cannot be available to her. *Ramazan*, the month of fasting, provides another occasion to Dadi to assert her centrality. Fasting actually was significant for feasting because Dadi was concerned with the variety and quantity of food available at *sehri* and *aftari* rather than any serious relationship with God. The real importance of the occasion for her was that she presided over it. Sara's indirect criticism is that religion in Pakistan is a matter of the invalid and marginalized sections and communities who observe it more for their catharsis and festivity rather than in the strictly religious sense of the festivals. Those who carry real power in society are indifferent to them. Sara presents Dadi's eccentricities with tongue-in-cheek metaphors. In winter, she sees her Dadi "alone, painstakingly dragging her straw mat out to the courtyard of the house ... with her would her Quran. None of us was pure enough to carry these items" (1989, p. 6). This sense of religious purity of herself and impurity of the children gives her self-satisfying status that her patriarchal surroundings deny her. Sara is a critical observer of the maneuvering of the nation as well as family life through religion.

### **Attitude towards Partition and Pakistan Movement**

Sara's attitude towards the partition of India does not suit the traditional sentimental history. For her, it was a panorama of death and panic. She mourns the extravagant and wrenching price of history:

... farmers, villagers, living in some other world, one day awoke to find they no longer inhabited the familiar homes but a most modern thing, a Muslim or Hindu nation. There was death and panic in the cities when they rose up to flee, the Muslims travelling in one direction, the Hindus in the other. I wish, today, that Pip had been a witness of it all: surely that would have given him *a pause and conferred the blessing of doubt*. (Suleri, 1989, p. 116, emphasis added)

She questions her father's emotional attachment to the idea of Pakistan. He was fighting manfully single-handed against the sweeping Indian press in England. And then he came across Mare Jones, who, with her white legs, to use Dadi's derogatory phrase, was too powerful to be resisted, and Papa was carried away by her leaving behind the ideology of Pakistan. The man who idealized Mr. Jinnah, and who wanted to write a book on Pakistan with the title of *Whither the Lost Years of Pakistan?*, was so hollow in his domestic life that he took ten years of Baji's life without any compunction of conscience and no question arose in his mind because it was pre-occupied with Pakistan. She comments that Papa's dedication to Pakistan's cause was not meant for religion: "The genesis of Pakistan was not religion ... it was Muslim nationhood" (p. 127). Suleri, with postmodern temper, "blessed with doubt", deviates from her father's narrative of Muslim nationhood and treats it from the perspective of more literal losses. After the establishment of Bangla Desh in 1971, she met her father and wept. This simple emotional outpouring of a daughter to her father is stretched in implications to the deconstruction of

the narrative of Pakistan's history, ideology and culture: "I am not talking about two-nation theory ... I am talking about blood! He would not reply, and so we went our separate ways: he mourning for a theory, and I – more literal – for a limb, or a child or a voice" (p. 122). Her separate way of mourning for a limb, or a child or a voice is her difference and deviation from the dominant narrative of history rooted in two-nation theory. Sara is also sarcastically critical of religious nationalism characteristics of Pakistani history, especially the politicization of religion. Pakistan, with its colonial history, has manipulated religion to make its tradition more authentic and inviolable. Governments have, therefore, been exploiting religion for political purposes.

Suleri views the presence of her Welsh mother in Pakistan as a critical issue of Pakistani history and identity: "I am curious to locate whether she knew of the niceties that living in someone else's history must entail, of how she managed to dismantle that other history she was supposed to represent" (p. 164). Walder is right "the real human dimension can only be read through a sense of history, which is a form of collective memory, continually revised" (2005, p. 190). But Suleri's simultaneous presence in multiple histories is responsible for her approach to Pakistani nationhood and secondly, her acquisition of American nationality and marriage with Mr. Goodyear, an American, leaves her only dimly related to Pakistani history and identity. If history is collective memory, Suleri observes it from an outsider's position, not as a cherisher of this collective memory. When she and her father mourn after the Fall of Decca, he mourns from within the collective memory and she from outside: she weeps for the literal: "for a limb, or a child or a voice" (p. 122). But in the case of Muharram, she cannot weep even literally "for a limb, or a child or a voice". It suggests that perhaps her point of view is determined by postmodern deconstruction rather than by the people and their collective communal passion and compassion. Otherwise, Pakistanis with the overwhelming majority "mourn" and nationally "share" the grief of Muharram that she dismisses humorously (2003).

Z.A Suleri is also critical of the manipulation of religion in Pakistani history, but he himself was never cynical towards religion as Sara is: this is the difference between looking at a national discursivity from within and from outside it. He observed in *Lost Years of Pakistan* (1962):

Three factors bedevilled Pakistan's national life: continued preoccupation with constitution-making and the suspense caused thereby; stalemate and stagnation in the political process and lastly, confusion and uncertainty in assigning the place of Islam in the country's polity. Islam was involved both in constitution-making and party politics. (p. 3)

But his case is different from Sara's. He is a devotee of Quaid-e-Azam and regularly recites the Holy Quran, which gets a satirical response from Sara. Both these aspects of his character emerge from the collective communal sense of Pakistan, but Sara does not feel from within this fold. When she leaves for America, her father hands over to her a copy of the Quran, which she does not endorse. She observes that her religion is 'quest' (1989). Tillat is 'illa' in the child's expression, and this distorted word in the girls' naughty expression becomes 'illa Billa hoo' (2003). She adds that it was not a joke on religion, but it cannot be taken as respect for religion, either. Sara has taken her home as a microcosm of the nation, but how many homes in Pakistan have a father who is Editor of English newspapers, director of ISI and internationally fighting for Pakistan's cause and ideology, and the most important, how many houses in Pakistan have an English lady as a mother with such conflicting consciousness of history and religion? Sara uses this rarity as a representative of 'Pakistan's anomalous nationhood', stylistic maneuvering that is ideologically questionable.

Islam has, of course, been differently at the centre of the affairs in the Pakistan movement and later on in Pakistan's political history. Suleri dimly foresees the possibility of "Islam's departure from the land of Pakistan. The men would take it to the streets and make it vociferate, but the great romance between religion and the populace, the embrace that engendered Pakistan, was done. (1989, p., 15). This observation is valid in that during the Pakistan movement, Islam worked as a genuine push and cementing force – although this claim also is seriously questioned by the critics (Sheikh 2009, for instance), Sara's home becomes a metaphor of differences within the nation questioning the function of religion as a unifying factor for the nation. Dadi, mother, Pip and Sara herself have different approaches to religion. Dadi is passionately in love with religion, but Sara's observation is that she used

religion only to give significance to her otherwise insignificant position in Pakistan. Surraya Suleri, Sara's Welsh mother, is unable to understand how slaughtering goats on Eid-ul-Azha can please God because she looks at this Abrahamic ritual from outside the discursive limits of Pakistani Muslim nationhood or those of Islam. Ironically, Sara sides with this outsider position. Her father has respect for religion, but Sara suggests that her father and grandfather had employed religion only to justify their patriarchal position and their carnal/authoritative assertions.

One reason for Sara Suleri's difference of point of view is that she is a 'literal' observer of Pakistan's history, to use her own self-description, whereas "nations are imagined communities" ([Anderson, 1983](#), pp. x-xv). Pip was not such an ardent lover of Faiz politically but definitely like his poetry. Here is one of the verses he quietly recited to himself: "Kar raha tha gham e jehan ka hisaab / Aaj tum yad be hasab aay". Sara has translated it as follows: 'I was counting the griefs of the world. / Today I remembered you countless' (2003, p. 108). Sara questions: "What were you remembering, Pip? Was it us, or was it Mamma? Or was it Pakistan?" These are rhetorical questions because if the remembrance comes from Faiz, it is, of course, the nation, the recurring motif of his poetry, not personal affairs of love and family. But Sara, standing in literalness, outside the imagined community, can see the things and affairs with serious uninvolved unsentimental objectivity, an attitude which hardly qualifies for the sense of national belonging. Her attitude to the establishment Bangla Desh is one example of this realistic objectivity: she is not sorry at the establishment of Bangla Desh because "it was a stupid idea, anyway, to have an east wing and a west wing of Pakistan, separated by a thousand odd miles of enemy territory like a bird without a body" (2003, p. 108).

The house in which Sara grew up was anomalous in one more way: the elders of the house were a highly serious breed, her grandmother, and grandfather, father and mother whereas the children were too naughty to retain any streak of seriousness. The comic joviality tempers Sara's postmodernist playfulness that sweeps away with it various dimensions of national belonging as well. Consider one example of this playfulness from *Boys Will Be Boys*, that deflates an epic into a mock-epic:

... Tillat at her junior school [had] a friend called Mushtabshera. Part of me groaned inside me when Tillat in all innocence mentioned her friend's name to Shahid ... "Mushtabshera?" repeated Shahid with surprised delight. He immediately began to concoct rhymes of epic dimensions to go with that somewhat epic name, and we all had to agree was that the best he came up with was "Mushtabshear, *hamla tera!*" ... We gradually became accustomed to hearing that refrain throughout the house. (2003, p. 81)

Sara describes the event of going to a clinic for a pregnancy test with a fear that might have to abort and sums up the incident with a heavy, tragic compassionate expression: "To abort in Pakistan – an over aborted country – would have been quite messy" (2003, p. 144). Stylistically, it is typically representative expression: she narrates a silly personal tale and then raises it in implications to Pakistani culture, history and ideology. "... [U]nmarried women are not supposed to be in need of pregnancy test in Pakistan" (p. 114). The comment is tongue-in-cheek questioning of women's right to their body in Pakistani culture. The phrase "an over aborted country" reflects Sara's bitterness for what Pakistan as a state and a nation has gone through since her inception. Conversely, telling along with the big issues of history and politics when she weaves small silly events, she is developing an "inventory of traces" to use [Ajaz Ahmad's phrase \(1999\)](#), which otherwise go untold but carry the real cultural significance.

Z. A. Suleri's marriage with Mare Jones before the establishment of Pakistan is a classic example of continuities and intimacies manifested between colonial and proto-national spaces. Resultantly, Sara, being genetically rooted in both colonial and national histories, gives a hybrid response to the issue of Pakistani culture, history and identity. The decision of getting married into another history was easy and even normal when in the previous generation an example had already been set; she was repeating her mother's example of stepping into another history, and her mother's subdued position as well, as she suggests in her relationship with her husband, Goodyear. Her postcolonial voice cannot be representative: it is neither a true reflection of the life in Pakistan, nor it is thoroughly placed in the indigeneity. It is informed by variously gleaned understandings from different histories. Her diaspora

experience has enriched her in many ways, but it is more of elitist cultural overlap and intimacy than indigenous rooted sensibility.

## **Conclusion**

Suleri has well interwoven big events of Pakistani history with minor day-to-day happenings in domestic life to see them in a different light and from the perspective of marginalized segments, i.e. children and women. Key events, festivals and celebrations and mourning in Pakistan are under constant focus of *Meatless Days*. The text brings before us a visible picture of life in Pakistan, the man-woman relationship, the dreams and desires of the parents and children, the generation gap between them, rather the whole feel of life in Pakistani culture.

Suleri seems to suggest that woman's status does not secure or guarantee her voice or space: Dadi with her elitist flair for drama and delicacy of Urdu, Mama with her insightful grasp of Jane Austen, Ifat with her leopard's head, the maid working even the day next to her new-born baby's death and Baji despite being the wife of one of the most influential men in Pakistani politics, all are equally condemned to 'thingification' in the hands of patriarchy. Ifat's husband, Javed, was Major in the army; maid's husband was a non-entity – not even mentioned in the text; Mama's husband, Sara's father, Mr. Suleri, was the director of ISI, senior editor of The News, a profile columnist of The Pakistan Times and Nawa-e-Waqt and editor-in-chief of The Pakistan Times, and all these ladies suffered: differences of the husbands' socio-economic positions do not affect the fates of their wives in either way. Sara's conclusion is that academic awareness or social position cannot resolve the crisis of woman's subjection; it is the discourse that runs through the capillary structure of the society that is responsible for it. This discourse comprises political to say that solely lies with men, pseudo-religiosity that empowers men and 'rationalizes' women's subjection, and established socio-cultural patterns that normalize man's exploitative role in socio-physical relationships.



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