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**Use of Irony as a Feminist Device to Deter Gender-Nationalistic Duo in Meatless Days**

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**Abstract**

*The analogy of critical representation of the feminine issues prohibits a sustained continuation of the ideological manuscript of gender division in Pakistan. The Postcolonial nativity, the charisma of nationalism; and rigid concentration of aristocratic Westernization create a hard line between the social, cultural, and political identification of regional/national roles after the establishment of Pakistan. Bhabha (1994) reminds us that postcoloniality is a salutary reminder of the persistent neo-colonial relations within new world order' (p.06). The structure of crucial gender boundaries is drawn in Pakistani society to promote the collective nationalistic consciousness in the wake of political achievements. Whereas, '...the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions' (1994, p.09). This invasion confuses 'borders between home and world' and combines public and private to a more disorienting vision of life. This paper tries to recollect the gist of deformed gender rhetoric in the nationalistic restructuring of Pakistani society in Meatless Days by Sara Suleri. The paper concentrates on the artistic development in the course of the memoir to identify the stretch of irony in the representation of people as the considerable dichotomy between the real and the fictional re-appropriation of Postcolonial Pakistan.*

**Key Words:** Feminism, Nationalistic consciousness, Gender-boundaries, Memoir, Irony, Postcolonial Pakistan.

## Introduction

Jones (2011) recreates the concept of nationalist identity in a Postcolonial country when she writes "...national identity is used as a weapon to separate and conflate the "pollution" of those who are different from the pure national identity" (p.27). Sara Suleri in *Meatless Days* tries to connect her family experiences with that of the national rebuilding after partition. Solera's memoir reflects her family configuration towards the dichotomies of cultural, social, and historical realities in the Postcolonial context. Mohanty (2004) analyzes the problem of gender in the presence of "average Third World woman" who "leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "Third World" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.) (p.22).

This study projects to highlight the oppositions and paradoxical structures in *Meatless Days* which are somehow embedded within the text. The paper concentrates on identifying some textual references within the memoir which point out the national and socio-political construction of Pakistani society after partition to relocate the problem of a family structure in gender representation. The study shall try to identify through the analysis of characterization in the memoir to discover the post-partition national, cultural, and social ironies.

## Literature Review

Art, literature, and society are associated structures in the representation of human behaviors and attitudes towards the idealistic prototype of history and culture. *Meatless Days* (1999) a fictional memoir confiscates and at the same time relieves the essence of national and political history as the discursive component of social rationalization after the partition. The element of the socio-political mixture in *Meatless Days* constitutes a deliberate viewing of the consolidated picture of the Pakistani structure of gender toxicities being retrieved from the colonial and Eurocentric manifestation. Zaidi (2011) observes that "In *Meatless Days* Solera's disregard of chronology, blending of fact and fiction and search for identity singularizes her work". However, Zaidi proclaims that "the most important aspect of her work is the representation of women". In this respect, Zaidi manifests that "Suleri's *Meatless Days*" appears to be a "protest against patriarchy and the socio/political set-up of Pakistani society". This setup Zaidi testifies "...establishes values and gender prescriptions entrenched in prejudices and biases".

Malaviya (2019) declares that “*Meatless Days* narrates the tale of a nation that metamorphosed gradually into an Islamic fundamentalist nation”. However, Malaviya observes that “*Meatless Days* is not a mere retelling of the history of Pakistan; it is a very personal account of all that happens to a family caught in the social and political crossfire”. According to Malaviya “Suleri has tried hard to reveal how history has only deceived and seduced the postcolonial world”. The concept of retribution is materialized within the world of *Meatless Days*. Malaviya proposes here that, “*Meatless Days* is an account of the heavy price those who dare to revolt against the social setup are forced to pay in conservative countries like Pakistan”. Whereas, women and children become the direct recipient of colonial and postcolonial effects in Pakistani society. Sujatha (2017) writes that “*Meatless Days* is a postcolonial autobiography”. Sujatha explains that the memoir “...represents the re-construction of identities denied, displaced, disabled and disavowed by the forces of personal and historical migration and cultural relocation”. She observes that “This is a piece of expatriate writing”, and a “feminist confessional writing” too. Murtaza et al. (2020) write “Suleri’s *Meatless Days* is a polyphonous pastiche that questions the ‘Islamic’ and patriarchal values of Pakistani society”.

Saleem (2013) observes “*Meatless Days*, written in geographical and temporal dislocation” and “is embedded with social and political connotations”. He proclaims that “Suleri has interwoven the turbulent phase of her country with the reminiscences of tragic events in her family”. Saleem analyzes that Suleri in *Meatless Days* “...tried to theorize the problematic issues of gender, religion, and Pakistan as a Postcolonial nation”. Andleeb (2021) writes that “*Meatless Days* (1999) is a fictional memoir that reflects the political, cultural, and social structures of Pakistan”. She observes that “the subject matter in memoir identifies a vista of individual, social and cultural disparities that result in family disorders”. Ali & Ahmad (2018) analyze, “*Meatless Days* encompasses personal memoir, the history of the development of Pakistan, and female position within Pakistani culture”. Apeksha (2020) writes, “*Meatless Days* provides a forum to Suleri’s dissatisfaction with the social structure in her country for ignoring any room or worth to women”. Parameswaran (2013) writes, “Goodyear is intensely aware of the ways writing and memory shape each other”. He observes, Suleri “writes most beautifully around what she struggles to avoid”.

## Research Methodology

Mohanty (2003) observes “Decolonization has always been central to the project of Third World feminist theorizing” (p.08). This study endeavors to map out the discursive systematization of the postcolonial feministic stance in *Meatless Days* by Suleri being enveloped within the artistic literary values of a discourse. The study projects to analyze the literary aspect of characterization as people, in the memoir which contributes to the construction of irony. A qualitative research pattern has opted for this study. APA style and close reading pattern of research method are applied. Postcolonial Feminism serves as the central critical theory for this paper. C.T. Mohanty and Homi. K. Bhabha is the major theorists for this study. Mimicry, civility, solidarity, and home are the featured terms of this paper.

Jones (2011) writes, “European ideas about ideal femininity that policed the strict lines between gender roles and behaviors were exported to the colonies (p.11). Bhabha (1994) proclaims “...the demand for identity, stasis and the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history change, difference – mimicry represents an ironic compromise” (p.86). Loomba (1998) claims, “Colonialism was the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism (p.04). Here, Bhabha insists on “Ambivalence of mimicry” which is “almost the same but not quite”. Butler (1990) insists on the need for the “development of a language that adequately represents women” to “foster the political visibility of women” (p.01). She claims “Gender is a relation or a set of relations, not an individual attribute” (p.09). Leela Gandhi (1998) claims, “anti-colonial nationalism deflects attention away from internal orthodoxies and injustice” (p.81). She observes that Postcolonialism and feminism are collaborating to become, “offensive against the aggressive myth of both imperial and nationalist masculinity” (p.98).

## Discussion and analysis.

### a. People in *Meatless Days*

Suleri’s art of characterization in her memoir *Meatless Days* is systematic and significant. The originality of character selection has its suggestive association with that of the theme of the memoir. The characters are comprised of family and friends. Thus, they are not superficial people with extraordinary characteristics but they are common people with faults and failures. This balancing view of people adds realism to their activities in the novel.

**b. *Meatless days*: A veritable picture gallery of postcolonial Feminism reiterated.**

Bhabha (1994) analyzes, “Mimicry is a sign of double articulation, a complex strategy of reform and discipline which appropriates the other” (p.86). Suleri appears as an original artist in the series of sketches of her family and friends in *Meatless Days*. All these people are so vividly and curiously drawn that they create an impression of national and personal logistics towards the mechanism of the socio-political history of Pakistan. Though ‘mimicry’ is a sign of ‘inappropriate’ according to Bhabha (1994), however, the development of the discourse in the memoir appropriates the tone of the subjugated ones. Sujatha (2017) analyzes that Suleri’s *Meatless Days* “...extends her family stories into the public domain of literature”. Suleri narrates about partition and the birth of a newly born nation. Whereas, she reacts sharply at her father’s celebration of partition. The hierarchy of characterization along with the chronic details of each character, its physical appearance, social status, and its response towards family and nationalistic internalization projects a curiosity of the historical sense of social maturity. The colorful portraits of Dadi, Mamma, Papa, Shahid, Tom, Tillat, and Mustakori are sketched through artistic vitality and liveliness to represent the nuances of a family pattern. Dadi’s picture comes first in the picture gallery of *Meatless Days*. Sisterhood, claims Mohanty “cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis” (2004, p.24). Therefore the projection of manners and moods of Dadi’s character is made visual through specific words and fermented nationalistic ideology. Her strange eating habits and rigid religious beliefs are shown curiously to somehow project the traditional cum socialistic mindset. The idiosyncrasy and physiognomic details expose Dadi’s personal and moral traits as “Her flair for drama” (Suleri, 1999, p.02) provide devastating opportunities to “...life to sit so heavily upon her back that her spine wilted and froze into a perfect curve” (1999, p.02).

Her “papery skin”, “brittle bones”, and “light and tiny” existence can least disturb her gusto for God and Food. For god and food, “Could move her to intensities” (1999, p.03). She is bestowed with a special inclination to talk but she chooses her audience: God, Satan, “And people on the street and give them all the gossip” (1999, p.03). The manner through which she scuttles “in the posture of a shrimp” is amazing and worth seeing. In her burning incident, Dadi is labeled as a “flaming ball” which enhances the effect of the scene through sensory appeal. Mastakori’s character is portrayed colorfully. She is “small” and “lived in the metaphor of clothing”, the one who “wears

clothes of macaw” (1999, p.62). She has a “natural genius for the profession” (p.63) and “...her campaign for Fabron” gave her “...to dress like a cockatoo in all kinds of unlikely colors, yellow trousers, shirts of red and blue” (1999, p.63).

These details of dressing present Mustakor’s love for aesthetics and variable qualities. Mustakori is a woman of a “Slavish disposition” (1999, p.45). This is an ironic expression for her devoting love to Suleri. Moreover, she is “desperate” to wear “crimsoles for sex” (p.56). Her psychological disposition is reflected through her choice of dressing and her act of perpetual migration. Her stupidity which is a term of affection used by Suleri for Mustakor is painted in the manner of “perfect ignorance” (p.71). Sometimes a college girl pretends to behave wise and devises her unique method to “Put a nipple on a coke bottle so that when” she says, “in bed reading,” she “didn’t have to sit up each time” (1999, p.58). Such an interesting portrait adds life to the overall picture of the novel. However, such a character not only glimpses its individual qualities but also exercises its effective role in the collective theme of the novel. Saleem (2013) notices that “Each female character in *Meatless Days* reflects upon the national scenario”. Whereas, “none of them seem satisfied with the scheme of things in the social and political arena of Pakistan”. Saleem analyzes that “The frustration of these characters is evident throughout the memoir, but the prospects of finding any means of catharsis are absent. They feel suppressed and suffocated”.

Shahid’s portrait is sketched from his childhood to middle age. His shiny personality is illuminated through his dressings, physiognomy, and manners: “It was when he was a nymphet of a lad, a silken kneed slip in a uniform that included a turquoise turban” (p.91). His manners and actions are described through a copied earnestness, “The aesthetics of his face...his eyes, their lag of lid” (1999, p.102). One important factor about Suleri’s art of characterization is that she uses specific vocabulary and linguistic techniques to represent a character which determines her literary objective to locate the position of each character in the significance of the memoir e.g. the description of Dadi’s typical character, specific narration and words are used like “shrimp” and “slip of a thing”. This type of narration clearly shows the writer’s attitude towards this character and the message she wants to convey through such a character. Tom’s character is sketched through more physical details. Tom, “...the man was so large that he could conceive of himself only in a bit” (1999, p.37). Along with his physiognomy, his characteristics are tied up beautifully which gives a complete

introduction of his character to a reader. He is a “man mountain” who “...have a head the size of a bowl of porridge and a brain a size of a pea” (1999, p.38).

Such a selection of words to portray Tom’s character shows Suleri's intimate relationship with this character. Papa is one of the central figures of the novel. His picture is an amalgam of his social and private life. Bhabha (1994) writes “The discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence” (p.86). He adds, “...in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage” (p.86). The colonized male takes part in the sustenance of a colonial project even after colonization. Observing such Postcolonial reality Malaviya (2019) writes that, “...a Rajput Salahria, who is an employee of the Imperial government in India, aspires to change his identity and become an up to date and trendy writer, Z. A. Suleri”.

Suleri has given certain attributes to this “flamboyant” character of her father; whose “Indignant nature” (1999, p.109) allows the reader to review Suleri’s handling of such an adamant character. Papa is portrayed “like a cannibal” and “a wonderful consumer of context” (1999, p.110). His “lion head” looks “like a beast” (1999, p.174) at the same time he presumes the status of “a jailbird”. The words and similes which are attributed to Papa reflect the duality in his personal and public life along with the writer’s intimate view of this character.

The most natural and lively artistic skill expounded by Suleri is, in the character portrait of Ifat. Ifat is described as “tall and erect”, a “finely boned” (1999, p.104) creature with “the lasting glamour of a face” (1999, p.134). She is a spirited woman of modern times who believes in the superiority of womanhood. She was the only member of the family who warmly welcomed her newly born sister Tillat. While Papa and Shahid were openly dejected over the arrival of “Another girl.” Mamma’s portrait is not a mere representation of the baldness of the narrative canvas. Despite her silence, she is exhibited through gestures and dramatic monologue. Her vignette appears to be a classic; a prototype of abstract art. Her character holds a significant role in the memoir. However, her very presence knits the intricacies of the plot. She is a mysterious character and “...her face wears like the binding of the book” (1999, p.157). She had to keep this identity of selflessness after arriving in Pakistan which was “a greater strain” for an English woman like her, who came to Pakistan soon after partition when Pakistani people’s hatred was fresh for the English and “would not tell her”, “the rules of Pakistan” (1999, p.165). Thus “...she had long since intuited”, “...the hidden laws”,

and "...had to redistribute herself through several new syllables" (1999, p.165)... She became Surraya Suleri from Mair Jones. Suleri defines the significance of these "syllables" in a textual way.

Sara is the first-person narrator in her memoir. Although, the characters she has chosen reflect their intimacy with her. This connection establishes authenticity in the description of the characters as in each portrait Suleri's observation is involved. Sara's character is a two-fold edge. She comments on her characters and is herself one of the main characters. Thus, her character is self-revelatory. Sara's physical and personal characteristics are described in a descriptive style in association with other characters of the novel. She is the "wheaten daughter" of her father, "small" and "stupid", "cold" and "proud". Moreover, she shows a special concern for her family and friends. She smokes in her adulthood but did not like meat over vegetables in her childhood. She has a special taste for literature and a long list of friends from both sexes. She is a widely traveled character but belongs to Pakistan both emotionally and geographically...

### c. Deviant and non-deviant characters in *Meatless Days*.

In *Aspects of the Novel* (2002) E.M. Forster defines five natural procedures in human life through which a fiction writer knits his characters and determines their public and private life. These factors are birth, food, sleep, death, and love. Suleri follows this dictum to a great extent and develops her character's response to the same. In *Meatless Days*, she describes both at literal and symbolic levels those incidents and events which are related to the elements of food, death, and birth to illuminate their influence on her characters. However, these characters express their variable tendencies and peculiar behaviors that distinguish them from one another. Critically, Suleri divides people in *Meatless Days* into two categories:

- a) Deviant characters
- b) Non-deviant characters

Deviant or Complex characters in *Meatless Days* are three-dimensional i.e. having length, breadth, and depth. Papa is the towering figure and the guardian of the Suleri family. He holds the pedestal of one of the most complex characters in the novel. He is an erratic, dynamic, and desperate person. His restless and moving nature always pricks him to change his professions and ideology like a "turncoat". He would leave civil services in Delhi and decided to become "Z.A Suleri the



writer” to serve the newly coined “...particular Pakistani question”: “Now or Never” (1999, p.110), in 1930. Papa appears as a political journalist before us the one who idealizes Jinnah, “an actor” and “more pragmatic” (1999, pp.113-114) on the stage of Indian politics. Papa’s devotion to the idea of nationhood along with his single-mindedness made him leave his first wife and a daughter in India to represent the Pakistani cause in England. Bhabha (1994) writes “success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects” (p.86). Papa married an English woman and divorced her cousin in Pakistan which projects Papa’s unconscious mimicry of his colonial masters both as resemblance and menace. Such details about a character prove him not a simple or ordinary one because we cannot presume about Papa what shall come next. He is not a docile and limited character but an authoritative and indefinite one; for “...there was always an alacrity to his switch of allegiance” (1999, p.116). He is a man of action and words. Sara recalls Papa as ‘Pip’, or little ‘P’, to “deflate” his “wedge-shaped lion’s head” (1999, p.116). ‘Pip’ is an obvious inter-textual reference to “Pip” in Charles Dickinson’s *Great Expectations*.

Dadi places herself among complex characters for multiple reasons. One, she holds a dominant place in the Suleri family because she is the mother of Mr. Suleri. Two, her eccentric and superficial habits directly influence other characters of the novel. Thirdly, no one can predict what is she cooking in her mind or what shall be her next plan to manifest her authority, however, it is hard to “deal with Dadi” (1999, p.02). She can surprise us with her gestures and postures. Dadi belongs to the traditional background and is full of religious zest and fervor. God is her possession and her only companion in old age. Such a traditionalist would not allow modernism (Satan) to cross the boundaries of her house. She does not know the meanings of compassion, compromise, and sympathy. She would never forgive her son for the sin he had committed by marrying a “white-legged” Christian woman and by divorcing “the rightful” Muslim wife. She sees Papa, Mamma, and their miscegenated children as the exploiters of her ex-daughter-in-law's rights.

To carry her self-evolved judiciary she does not let any chance slip to punish her culprits. She confronts bravely the only devastating and fearsome person of the house—Papa. She pests him by some designed mischievous, rather “...her favorite days were those when she could circumnavigate Papa” (1999, p.03). She is angry with her grandchildren and plays with their psychology. Once, “She made the mistake of buying a baby goat and bringing him home in advance of Eid” (1999, p.04). Children “greeted the goat in the family” as their pet but they were innocent enough to comprehend

Dadi's tricks. She butchered the goat on Eid with full knowledge that such an act would make children cry, "Dadi's victory brought the butcher. Dadi ate through the tissues of festivity and gave damn to Tillat and Irfan's "...baby sobs over such a slaughter" (1999, p.05). Her childish rivalry persuades her to live apart from her children. That is why when she dies no family member is located at her funeral except Irfan. Ifat stands like a twinkling star among other characters of the novel. Her humanistic views, aesthetics, and clamoring manners contribute to the perfection and harmony of the narrative. For Ifat's presence in the novel is itself a proof of beauty and balance. Her manifold personality is "always two" (1999, p.133) and her homogenous nature manifests itself through "several voices" (1999, p.132).

Ifat is the most intimate character for a reader. For, she has a special flair for amazing us by her vibrant activities and essentially rebellious nature. Representation of Ifat's character is itself a reward for the reader's act of reading. The type of courage and boldness Ifat has to survive in Pakistani society is praiseworthy because for achieving this element "...she matched her courage with compassion", to learn "...the names of Pakistan" (1999, p.142). Not a Western but a sensible Pakistani reader can understand the mechanism behind such philosophy. She is rich and fertile in physical and personal traits. She stands before us in her juvenile slenderness with "the lasting glamour of the face" (p.134).

She chooses Javed to love "an army man" who represents Pakistani manhood. Here, the catastrophe of her character begins. Despite Papa's and Sara's disapproval of Javed, Ifat elopes with him. She dies in a hit-and-run accident afterward, because, "it was an irritant to the world, her continued merriments" (1999, p.146). In other words, Suleri exposes the fabrication of this "world" at an implicit level in a singular noun Pakistan. Javed who has been an ardent lover of Ifat marries again after the death of his once beloved wife. The end of this fairy tale is very pathetic and Suleri seems to appear harsh to such a delicacy as Ifat. She is more sinned than her sinning. Overall, Ifat fulfills all the picturesque qualities which are essential for the heroine of feminine novels in Urdu.

Shahid does not represent any extraordinary faculties and skills at a professional or personal level like Papa. But he appears before us "...slightly forgetful as a child" (1999, p.93) and grows into a sensible man. The twist in his character lays in the in-between of the procedure of his childhood and youth to acquire this sensibility. His prominent quality is making reparations for his exaggerating actions. Shahid tries to represent the psychology of the Pakistani male community and

complains to Ifat and Sara that they have, “engulfed his youth, the two of them”. This makes Shahid yearn for a brother, a comrade. However, when Irfan was born, Shahid had left the tendency to play. Although he finds in his childhood a comrade in, “...his father, in a father-sized pen” (1999, p.93). However, in his youth, Shahid disagrees with Papa’s tyrannical dependence on history and womanhood. Sara and Ifat have been his good childhood friends but after Ifat’s elopement and Papa’s dependence over Sara for his professional needs, Shahid decides to marry and settle in London. He is torn between his desires and circumstances.

Sara is a complex character as she is one of the characters in the memoir and is the narrator of the story too. Sara is a sensible, secretive, and understanding girl. Her literary sensibility teaches her to observe the happenings around her with a critical eye. She comments on the gestures and motifs of her characters and puts herself in the situation directly. She is a kind-hearted and obedient daughter who has given ten years to his father’s newspaper. Her character turns its shape when she feels, “...bone-tired after ten years of reading articles in galley proofs” and needs to “sink into the first chair she finds” (1999, p.102). She decides to leave Pakistan to settle in America. However, she prefers to live as a minority in another’s country than to have the status of an exploitable majority in Pakistan. Her escape from the weariness of life and the dictatorship of Papa makes her character dynamic and alive.

Mamma’s portrait cannot be categorized as a simple character. It is not an easy task to access her manners and gestures for Suleri to describe as her daughter. Mama hates extremes of any kind. However, surprisingly she bears her passionate husband who always talks of “greatness”. Mamma is the most reticent woman in the house and her silence is itself a character. Mamma is a British woman but marries a Pakistani man after her own choice. She is an English teacher, and her life is nothing, “without Jane Austen”. This element shows Mamma’s Victorian spirit. However, she does not impose the modalities of her nation, culture, and personality even on her children. She is a peace-loving character who believes in democracy. She is aware of the hatred of post-colonial Pakistan for the British because she knows, “...what would that world do with a woman who called herself a Pakistani but who looked suspiciously like the past it sought to forget”(1999, p.164). However, she is capable of knowing the art of survival even by dismantling her identity. “She learned to live apart, and let commitment and belongings to her husband’s business”. This seems true when Sara comments on her mother’s sheer knowledge of tactfulness, “Mamma was more political, she did not

have to put it into print". More critically viewed Mamma believes in the philosophy of life and let be lived. For this purpose, she will not object to any of her husband's or children's needs. Thus she is seen repeatedly saying to her children, "Child I will not grip". All these character details prove Mamma a complex character. Mustakori is a strange character. She is friendly and affectionate, for, "...she is never energetic than when bustling her energies to the betterment of someone else" (1999, p.45). She never minds being called by several names, for, "Faze Mackaw changed names like clothes, getting up as Fancy and going to sleep as the Fonz" (1999, p.63). She is a good stage performer and believes that "acting was reality" (p.50). It is true textually which represents the artificiality of her personal life.

Since her birth, she has been constantly migrating from country to country while by the order of native culture she has changed her names and clothes accordingly to avoid foreignness. She appears before us as a Hyperion. She has the desperate need to "concentrate", to settle down in her birthplace Africa. She loves to live in pre-independence Kenya and it's all a happy meld of East and West (p.52). Whereas, "...temperate was not her cup of tea, so in spite of her enmity towards duality and disapproval of the West, she lives in America" (1999, p.71).

Almost all the major characters are complex ones. The simple or flat characters come as dramatic links to the story. That is why not much detail is given about these characters e.g. Tillat, Nuzi, Dale, Irfan, and Richard-x, Tariq khan, Javed, Perin Cooper, children's teachers, or cooks. Tillat is serene and simple. She lives in Kuwait and has borne four children. She is described by Sara as a "baby factory" which produces "chocolate milk". Tillat appears before us when the narrator needs someone to create a dramatic effect "Sara you must learn how to settle now. She was talking about the stringent graces of monogamy. 'Oh sister most monogamous,' my brain groaned" (1999, p.83). Nuzi's character is a flat one in the sense that despite great tragedies in her life she remains constant and does not show any change in her behavior. Her father left her mother and her forlorn in Pakistan and married in Britain and "The divorce was conducted by mail and in Karachi Nuz at nine was told that her grandparents were her parents, that Baji was her sister" (1999, p.83). Nuz is unaffected by any of the troubles in her life; her father has given to her; rather she establishes strong sibling relationships with Suleri children.

**d. Irony of character: A critical reference to socio-political austerity**

*The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1987) defines irony as “A mode of discourse for conveying meanings different from, and usually opposite to, the professed or ostensible ones” (p.123). Suleri uses different literary devices to construct her text; irony is one of them. Suleri’s use of irony is not as severe and derogatory as that of Swift’s. She describes the follies and faculties of her characters to create a balance in their very presentation which gives a realistic and rational suggestiveness to her narrative. Characters in *Meatless Days* are inhibited with specific flaws which generate dramatic situations at multiple levels. Tom’s flaw is his “blurring of vision” because he “had lost the art of location” (1999, p.81).

For his dilemma is the desire to become an urbanized and modern man by vast traveling which keeps him moving but ironically enough mars his ability to “Acknowledge the technologies of simple articulation”(1999, p.76). Tom’s character seems to have been inspired by Henry Fielding’s ‘Tom Jones’, because Suleri’s Tom, too, is busy traveling from city to city and does not spare time even to talk to his friends. He is vastly traveled but cannot explain the dimensions of his destiny. Here, Suleri speculates, “Whether or not his name is the root cause of it, of how deranging it must have been when at twelve that body began growing” (1999, p.78). His physical attributes have given him single-mindedness. He ironically becomes a nitwit who will be “Never worried about the top of his head, because he put it behind him” (1999, p.37) and his aspirations made him merely material.

Dadi’s caricature is a concrete allusion to irony. Dadi’s portrait involves the direct involvement of puns at the level of dialogue and action. Dadi gets angry with Shahid who calls her granddaughters ‘women’ but she “Never addressed any one of girls without first conferring the title of lady-----Tillat Begum, Iffatt begum” (1999, p.07). Dadi is stigmatized through ironical handling for her possessive and malignant nature. She is an ardent lover of God and Food. But disarrays from her love for God after the burning incident. During Ramadan “Dadi’s eating was a sight to behold and admire” (1999, p.30), and due to her direct relation to God, she would keep on eating despite municipal sirens to stop eating so that fast could be observed according to the proper Islamic time table. Whereas, Dadi gives a damn to such intimations because no one can instruct her about religion, and in “Her book” there is her own formulated time limit for her sehri, to which even God cannot dare to finger out. She has a specific habit of wailing which indicates her propensity to drama to get considerable attention: “Dadi behaved abysmally at my mother’s funeral, she demanded an irritating

amount of attention” (1999, p.16). Suleri has her style of literary justice which is significant in Dadi’s burning incident. However, Irfan’s burning is a questionable stance because he is portrayed as a “Gentle invalid”. Whereas, Suleri gives an apology for it when she announces, “I was so taken by the tenderness for his body that it took me years to realize yes, something female in me had been deeply shocked” (1999, p12).

Papa is an arrogant and powerful character who exercises his dominance over his family but talks about democracy as a journalist. He imposes on his family members to perform most of his professional tasks. He is a political writer for whom history is the only love and duty. He pays his full devotion and loyalty to his passions and love. He forces his own family to pay tribute to his fetishes at an intense level. He would not bear any distractions in this respect and would not give his family members a chance to think about their own life. However, at the most visible level of irony, Papa himself had never been good to his obligations; he always thought about himself and listened to his self-centered heart. He was not even there at his mother’s funeral because of his own business and he never showed any regrets. He has never bothered about what his wife wants and what his children need. Suleri is mildly harsh about Papa’s character for its painfully irritating nature but she tries to behave softly at certain levels, for “My father did not deserve to be questioned” (1999, p.174). Although, “To mock him would be too simple” as Ifat challenged his patriarchal authority and married an army man against his will. Sara would leave Pakistan and inspite of his request would not return. Papa never surrenders as he adopts a daughter or in other words does not want to let the number of his subjects decrease. He forgets even Mamma after her death when he adopted a Punjabi girl. Suleri apprehends this element of thanklessness in Papa’s nature when she writes “There is nothing of my mother left in his house now, of course” (p.129).

*e. Contrast: A connection of affordability between characters*

Suleri utilizes the technique of contrast and assimilation in drawing the portraits of her characters. This feature adds to the richness of narrative and style. There are some characters in the novel that represent a direct contrast or assimilation and connection to one another. This technique presents people in black and white. Mamma constitutes a direct contrast to Dadi in manners and nature. Dadi’s character is opposite to Mamma’s character in several ways. Dadi is a rebellious, imperious, traditional, and uneducated Pakistani woman who does not favor modernism. She considers Mamma the symbol of modernity and indirectly admonishes Mamma for berating Satan.

She has her peculiar ways of catharsis; wailing, grumbling, and remaining indifferent. On the other hand, Mamma exhibits a complete contrast to her mother-in-law.

She is an erudite, sweet, and compromising British woman. She has surrendered her own identity and culture to serve her husband and his children. She never complains about anything rather she is the most reticent woman in the house. Papa too constitutes a contrast to Mamma and Irfan. He represents the patriarchy in Pakistan and asserts his power over the household. Thus, he “hated doves” at a more significant level. While Irfan is a sweet-natured and kindhearted boy who is far away from the word like, intensity. He likes pets and nourishes them. He had built a dovecot on the roof of the housekeeping it secret from Papa but finally, it was revealed to Papa who ordered Irfan to “shoo” them before they even dreamed of cooing.

All the characters in the novel are associated with one another somehow or another. However, some characters pose a more direct connection between them. Dadi and Papa belong to the same category of people to a great extent. Both are passionate, possessive assertive, and turncoats. Dadi is a religious bigot but after her burning incident, she refused and forgot God who is now “a finished love” and “could leave the house” (1999, p.163). Papa who was away from religion became a religious man after Mamma’s death. Sara announces an open emotional attachment with her mother who keeps on “putting words into my mouth”. Sara chooses to become a teacher like Mamma and determines to give voice to Mamma’s silent manners at a significant level of “saving daylight”. She moved to a foreign country as Mamma did and would live there being a minority. After feeling the same sense of alienation that could have been suffered by Mamma, Sara realized that “Abnegating power is a powerful thing to do as my mother must have learned to live” (p.163).

Ifat resembles both Papa and Mamma in her manners and gestures. Whereas, her association is divided into two levels: Before marriage, and after marriage. Iffat’s habits are of Papa’s before marriage, “From him, she learned her stance of wild inquiry, the arrogant angle at which she held her head” (p.139). She has been daring and fearless like her father. The incident in which she knocks down the vagabonds who have been irritating Sara indicates Ifat’s high spirits and matriarchal ideology. However, after a runaway marriage with a person who loves her only for “her face” not her spirit is purely patriarchal style, Ifat shifts her character to adopt Mamma’s compromising behavior to sustain her married life in Pakistan. She performs her duties as a traditional Pakistani

wife. On the return of her husband from the war in East Pakistan, Ifat wears her “bridal dress”. She remains true to her husband until death.

#### *f. Characters are types as well as individuals*

In *Meatless Days* a reader can find real characters of flesh and blood. People in the memoir not only represent their specific professions, culture, and geography but also expose their traits and characteristics. Papa is a Pakistani political journalist who represents all the modalities of his profession. He also represents manhood in an Islamic fundamentalist state. Mamma is the representative of the British nation and society. She is a successful English teacher at Punjab University. Sara and Mustakori are stage actresses and are teachers by profession. Dadi is the representative of a typical Pakistani woman. Javed and his Brigadier father belong to the Pakistan army and represent the typical Pakistani male community. In other words, characterization in *Meatless Days* fulfills all the criteria and requirements of intended rationalism through the metaphoric reconstruction by the writer.

### **5. Conclusion**

Gandhi (1998) observes, “Feminist and postcolonial theory alike began to invert prevailing hierarchies of gender/culture/race... to refuse the binary oppositions upon which patriarchal/colonial authority constructs itself” (p.83). To conclude the findings of this analysis on the use of irony in *Meatless Days*, it is stated that Suleri has chosen her family and friends as real cum fictional characters in her memoir to structure the socio-political ironies in Pakistan after partition. Andleeb (2021) analyzes, “The blurred view of the thematic expression in the memoir is somehow a conscious literary effort by Suleri to represent an impersonal authorial tone. She writes that “The metaphor of ‘meatless days’ represents an image that creates an irony of the socio-political system in Pakistan”. The way Suleri communicates with her characters to represent their drawbacks and qualities; is a significant showcasing of her family history. However, she does not talk about any of her characters plainly e.g. if she narrates about her father she uses different incidents and images to portray him. Her images and metaphors to present her characters become significant for a reader to understand her critical intentions. The images of Suleri women are dominant in the memoir which shows Suleri’s concern for the Suleri women, particularly for her dead mother and sister.



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