

Post colonial critique of sara suleri's meatless days. assignment

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Before the development of Nationalism, people were generally loyal to a city or a particular leader rather than to their nation. Encyclopedia Britannica (vol. no. viii. 2009) identifies that the movement has genesis with the late 18th century's American and French revolutions. Other historians point specifically to the rise of ultra-nationalist party in France during French revolution. The term was coined by Johann Gottfried Herder during the late 1770s. (Smith) The emergence of the notion of Nationalism is often connected with the French revolution of 1789, when the first "nation-state"(p 98) is said to have been created.

Although states where the boundaries of the state and the nation coincide have existed earlier, before 1789 states had not used the situation to their advantage to the extent that France was able to. It was here that nationalism entered as such a powerful idea. Since then, Nationalism has become one of the most significant, political and social forces in history, perhaps most notably as a major postulate of World War 1 and specially World War II. (Blanning) Philosopher A. C. Grayling describes nation as an artificial construct, " their boundaries drawn in the blood of past wars. (78) He argues that there is no country of the world which is not home to more than one different culturally co-existing culture (Grayling). Nationalism has been defined by its critics as a divisive, incoherent, unstable and incoherently weak discourse. In the first instance the very notion of nationalism is considered to be oppressive as an individual loses his distinctive individual identity within the folds of wider national identity. This in turn provides the political elite with potential opportunities to control and manipulate the masses.

Bhabha, in his essay "Dissemination: Time, Narrative and Margins", has defined discourse of nationalism as highly unstable and inherently weak for the reason that it is unable to produce the unity it promises. He is of the view that it contains breakdowns and cannot be termed as a 'unified discourse' because it, too, has marginalized groups that are suppressed by the discourse as they are found on the margins which undermines the coherence of the discourse. In the light of Bhabha's comments it is important to identify that who the marginalized groups are?

Partha Chatterjee in his book "Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World" talks about the anguish of westernized elite of the third world. Chatterjee presents the very dilemma of the Nationalism before his readers. The discourse of nationalism on one hand celebrates and sings the glory of national culture, but on the other hand it is anguished by its perceived backwardness. Hence the westernized elite bring forth a project of modernity to alleviate that sense of backwardness and to come to term with the standards of modernity set by the European world.

Chatterjee highlights an important point in the midst of this dichotomy found in the discourse of nationalism. That the elite with their concerns for modernizing their backward national culture assume the role of their bygone colonial masters while the general masses with their perceived backwardness are placed again in the position of the colonized subjects, who are considered to be incapable of any rational thinking. This again places the masses in a marginalized position. Franz Fanon in his book "Wretched of the

Earth" shows that how nationalism is complicit in undemocratic form of government.

He too like Chatterjee talks about the illiberal dilemma at the heart of the discourse of nationalism, that how the political elite is unaware of the problems and issues of the general masses, who are merely tools in the struggle between the ruling and the opposition forces in the newly independent countries. Fanon talks about the injustices prevalent in the newly independent countries, where only a small section of influential political elite is able to avail the political and economic benefits, while the rest of the population is unable to and most of the time denied the fruits of political and economic benefits.

This again shows that how the general masses are ignored whose needs and aspirations are neither understood nor provided by the political elite. Such injustices than become the source of angry violence against the corrupt and unjust political elite. Franz Fanon further uncovers the real face of the political elite in his essay " Pitfalls of National Consciousness" where he talks about how the political elite manipulated the masses with the promise of liberation before independence but once it was achieved they were left on their own. Before independence the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity, but as soon as independence is declared far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land and restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose : to become the general president of the company

of profiteers impatient for their return that constitutes the national bourgeoisie. Fanon explains in his essay the reason why the postcolonial nations could not experience the true independence. He has laid the blame on the incompetent political elite who lack in political will and any political vision they were “ not engaged in production, or in invention, nor building, nor labor. ” They neglected their role as the national enablers and had become the intermediary for the economic forces of the richest countries, a fact that has been highlighted by Fanon as, “... [T]he bourgeois doesn't hesitate to invest in the foreign banks the profits that it makes out of its native soil” (54).

In the essay the author further highlights the corruption of the political elite in these words “ On the other hand large sums are spent on display, on cars, country houses, and on all those things which have been justly described by economists as characterizing an underdeveloped bourgeoisie” (56) Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* is one of the well known texts that highlight the corruption of the political elite who manipulated the masses according to their own benefits and interests.

Moreover, this text also highlights the dilemma of the marginalized communities of the society. All the issues discussed in the above review have been discussed in detail in the analysis of the text. *Meatless days* by Sara Suleri is an autobiographical novel depicting her experiences in the Pakistani postcolonial society of 1950s-1970s. The novel, while focusing on the course of the writer's personal life, makes implicit references to the external political and social events of that era.

Sara Suleri's father was a widely published journalist and had enthusiastic affiliation with the concept of Muslim nationhood (109). Though Suleri was raised by a European mother, as evident from the text, still she maintains a very strong relationship with the social and cultural life of Pakistan. This staunch affiliation of hers is reflected in her concern for the deteriorating social fabric of her homeland. She makes implicit allusions to the maneuvering of the political elite of the newly found country. In the 1st chapter Suleri talks about " The era of the trying times. It was the tumultuous moment in Pakistan's history " when Indra Gandhi hailed the demise of the two nation theory" (8). In these lines the writer brings forth the very incompetent and inconsistent attitude of the political elites of their nation. Pakistan was attained in the name of Islam evoking the ideological unity and brotherhood of the Muslims as a valid reason for a separate nation, but the slogan of the two nation theory that had become the motivational force in the creation of Pakistan had to face a blatant failure when Pakistan, a single country, divided into two.

In the text, Suleri makes a hint towards the cause of the fall of Dhaka and the major reason was General Yahya's response to the fall of Dhaka, as evident from the text " The following morning, General Yahya's mistress came to mourn with us over breakfast...with swathes of overscented silk. The Brigadier lit an English cigarette. He was frequently known to avow that Pakistani cigarettes gave him a cough...it is so trying, she continued, I find it so trying it is trying to us all to live in these trying trying times"(9).

These very lines explicitly show that how the political elite was delved in corruption and focused merely on their own material and physical comforts. The hollow remarks of those at the helm of affairs, while the country was splitting into two, shows their indifference towards the aggravated situation created by their own wrong-doings and indifferences. In this line, Suleri epitomizes the very fragile, insecure and unpredictable state of the affairs of Pakistan. In the following line, Suleri epitomizes the fragile, insecure and unpredictable state of affairs of Pakistan. We lived in the expectation of threatening surprise. " The Pakistan of Suleri's novel is a place where mismanagement is rampant and social security is nowhere to be found. The things that are taken as granted in other welfare societies are made a source of fear in Pakistan. To give an example, the items of groceries were never made available to the common masses, as it evident in the text, " Items of security__such as flour or butter or cigarettes were always vanishing, or returning in such dubiously shiny attire that we could barely stand to look at them" (29).

These lines illustrate the administrative mismanagement of the Pakistani government. As Suleri talks about the meatless days which was an effort initiated by the government to preserve the national supply of goats and cattle for which government designated two days Tuesday and Wednesday off for the meat selling. Suleri has pointed out the very impracticality of this scheme because general public was not in a position to even afford meat for them, so meatless days were just a meaningless measure of the government. the people who could afford to buy meat, afterall, were those who could afford refrigeration, so the only thing government

accomplished was to make some people's Monday very busy indeed..."(31)
The novel shows that the agonies of the masses are different from what the government prioritizes. Instead of sorting out the existing needs of the general public, government was busy in making schemes and plans that did not in any way resonate with the core issues faced by the local masses.

Mustakor, Sara Suleri's foreigner friend, entered the Pakistani social periphery keeping in mind the plaguing issues of the third world societies, "... tiny annoyances, electrical breakdowns, open drains, beggars in the streets like locust- she had expected, and they did not bother her..." (54) . These very lines highlight the core issues of the society that were consciously ignored by the incompetent and corrupt political elite. Suleri constantly refers to the events that took place in the 70's era and how the tumultuous times that was the creation of the egoistic politicians affected the lives of the common masses.

Referring to the death of Tariq Khan, younger brother of her friend who died in the war of 1971, Suleri has raised an important question that how wars are a result of stubbornness and egoism of the political elite and how they can be easily averted through mediation and talks. In the chapter, Suleri has very clearly commented on the fact that wars can be avoided through negotiations but that was totally ignored by the corrupt politicians of Pakistan. Bhutto came to power after the war in Bangladesh, making Pip say darkly, " if he had negotiated, if he had conceded, this would not have happened" (122). The indifference of the political elite has been highlighted at various places in the text. To mention one of them, " How different

Pakistan would be today if Ayub had held elections at that time, in 1968, instead of holding on until the end and then handing power over to __ of all people! __ Yahya” (120). As a result of this careless and indifferent attitude of the politicians, many young men lost their lives in vain.

The political elite clutched to their power and were so much obsessed with the glitter of autonomous authority and power that they employed every malicious means to accomplish their agendas. As evident from the text, “ It makes for a people who, however hungry for ownership, seen more at home with singing deeds on the paper than with the ground on which they stand” (75). According to Bhabha, nationalism is an incoherent discourse which though outwardly claims unity but is unable to unify the diverse elements in its folds. “..... alance, I would say is the word we want, its euphemism tautly strung like all the crazily over loaded telephone wires that scribble ill-connections from centre to urban centre..... but what price earth when tiny bones of disequilibrium keep chattering about once and future partition in your head. ” (pg 74-75) These lines manifest that the centre is unable to treat all four provinces on equal levels. And this was the reason that Pakistan lost its Eastern half. All this chaos and loss was the result of short sightedness of the political elite who instead of following the aspirations of the general masses followed their own impulses.

The short sightedness of politicians, mentioned earlier, is further elaborated by commenting on the policies of Yahya's regime, as it was in that time, Pakistan lost its Eastern half. “ General Yahya's government, which held an election and, not knowing how to face its consequences clamped a massive

military emergency on single province that lead not just to its secession but to the bloody war of Bangladesh" (120). Pakistan was created so that democratic practices could flourish but Suleri pinpoints the undemocratic forces that were ruling the country from time to time.

As is evident from the order in which Pakistan was ruled by democratic and Military officials. " After General Ayub came General Yahya; after the Bhutto years came General Zulu Haq"(34). These consecutives martial laws implemented by the Generals are one of the major causes of Pakistan's political instability and refer to the fact that Pakistan as a nation was going through a process of error and trial where government toppled and a dictator rose, leaving behind a gruesome legacy of corruption and mutilation of people's aspiration.

As during the era of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, slogans of nationalism were made with great fervor but the result was a disintegrated Pakistan. It was the era of liberalism and secularism which is highlighted by Suleri's comment, " In an unspoken way though I think we dimly knew we were about to witness Islam's departure from the land of Pakistan. " But Bhutto's liberal and secular era was followed by Zia-ul-Haq who brought a new slogan of Islamization of Pakistan, evident from the words, " God could now leave the home and soon would join the government. General Zia-ul-Haq's coming to power led to the political victimization of Bhutto, "...who was in prison and waiting for the trial and General Zia was presiding over the Islamization of Pakistan". There is an irony in these lines is that General Zia-ul-Haq like his adversary, made use of a hollow slogan though it was poles apart from what

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto propagated. But still like him, he exploited the aspirations of innocent masses. Pakistan as nation was created in the name of Islam; slogans of Islam and Muslim nationhood were made to mobilize the Muslims of the subcontinent on a single unified platform.

But what happened after the independence was contrary to what was claimed and promised. Every political leader followed his own ideology and implemented whatever favored his agendas, forgetting the core ideology which was the basis of the creation of Pakistan. Bhabha and A. C. Grayling have defined Nation as an ideological and artificial construct whose “ boundaries are drawn in the blood of past wars. ” However, this ideological construction by unifying the people becomes successful in the achievement of an independent nation.

They form their collective language, and make a flag that represents them at a collective level. This concept, given by the nationalist critics, is supported in the text when Suleri mentions that, “ We picked up that segment and colored it green, but not all the leafy vegetables of the world could obscure our knowledge that independence___ a big word___actually signified a silvering up of space” (74), thus depicting the ideological constructs, formulated to exploit the masses.

Suleri's personal life was marked by the scars of loss of loved ones she lost her elder sister Iffat who was murdered on account of her father's political leanings and the case was closed without any investigation. This shows the appalling condition of law and justice in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The novel also serves as the Post colonial feminist critique. All the females are

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shown to be suffering on account of the deeds of their male. This shows attitude of the society towards the females.

A female is targeted to malign a male in the society. In order to pressurize Z. A. Suleri his wife and daughter were brutally murdered (124, 125). Women, even after independence, were not the controllers of their destiny. Iffat married of her own accord thus making herself an outcast in her own family, as Suleri recounts her father's response in these words: " Pip would not let her name be mentioned in his presence, so total was her banishment" (72).

Sara Suleri while narrating an incident from her days of youth recalls a memory of being harassed by a group of vagabonds, emphasizes the point that even in an independent Islamic state the women are still unable to enjoy true liberty and a dignified life they are still a marginalize segment of the society and this painful truth is made obvious in the text when Suleri was prevented from entering a mosque simply for the reason that she was a woman, " Muslim women were not allowed in the mosque between the hours of Maghrib and Isha" (80).

Suleri has raised the query: ' Are We to Live or Perish Forever' criticizing the nation which was gained by many sacrifices of health and wealth. An ideology: ' The Mussalmans are not a minority. The Mussalmans are a nation by any definition' (114) that caused death everywhere: ' 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' (116).

Such sacrifices must have formed a nation devoid of any grudges or hatred but it was not the case the murder of Ifat depicts the corruption prevailing in the lives of Pakistani people who are still insecure the 'enemies' are still there to threaten the lives of the nation preservers: 'And then came the murder case, endless investigations that led nowhere but to greater trouble to our souls' (125). Suleri depicts another extremity of the hatred that crosses all limits she refers to Polo game in which: 'in place of a ball, the tribes most commonly played with an enemy's head instead'.

Thus Pakistan portrayed in Suleri's memoir is not the one of which Muslims of subcontinent had dreamed of. It wasn't the land of pure rather it was overshadowed by thick clouds of political corruption and mismanagement. There was a sense of fear, insecurity and uncertainty among the masses. This wasn't the promised land of whose vision was created before the Muslims of the sub continent. McLeod, John. *Beginning Post-colonialism* (Manchester University Press, South Asian edition 2007) Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds), *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (Routledge, 1998) Bhabha, Homi K. ed), *Nation and Narration* (Routledge 1990) Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist thought and the colonial World: A Derivative discourse?* (Zed, 1986) Jayawardena, Kumari. *Feminism and Nationalism in third world*. (Zed, 1986) Heywood, Andrew. *Political theory an introduction*. (London, Mcmillan Press, 1999) Grayling, A. C, *The Meaning of things applying Philosophy to life*. (London, Weidenfield and Nikolson, 2001) Heywood, Andrew. *Key Concepts in Politics* (London, Mcmillan Press, 2000)