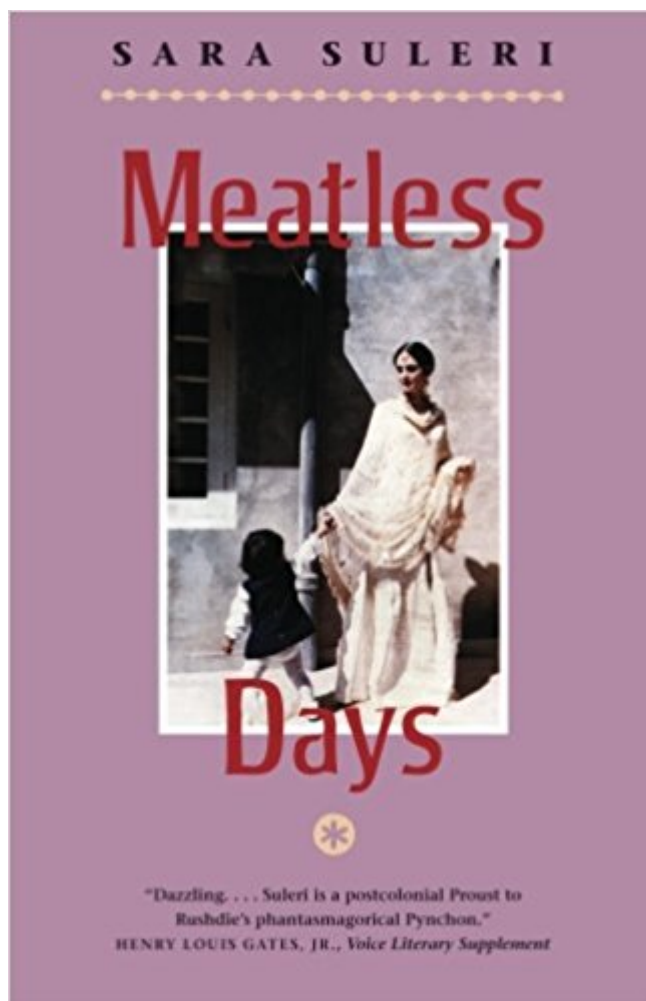




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# Meatless Days



## Synopsis

In this finely wrought memoir of life in postcolonial Pakistan, Suleri intertwines the violent history of Pakistan's independence with her own most intimate memories—of her Welsh mother; of her Pakistani father, prominent political journalist Z.A. Suleri; of her tenacious grandmother Dadi and five siblings; and of her own passage to the West. "Nine autobiographical tales that move easily back and forth among Pakistan, Britain, and the United States. . . . She forays lightly into Pakistani history, and deeply into the history of her family and friends. . . . The Suleri women at home in Pakistan make this book sing." —Daniel Wolfe, *New York Times Book Review* "A jewel of insight and beauty. . . . Suleri's voice has the same authority when she speaks about Pakistani politics as it does in her literary interludes." —Rone Tempest, *Los Angeles Times Book Review* "The author has a gift for rendering her family with a few, deft strokes, turning them out as whole and complete as eggs." —Anita Desai, *Washington Post Book World* "Meatless Days takes the reader through a Third World that will surprise and confound him even as it records the author's similar perplexities while coming to terms with the West. Those voyages Suleri narrates in great strings of words and images so rich that they left this reader . . . hungry for more." —Ron Grossman, *Chicago Tribune* "Dazzling. . . . Suleri is a postcolonial Proust to Rushdie's phantasmagorical Pynchon." —Henry Louise Gates, Jr., *Voice Literary Supplement*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Suleri's memoir of postcolonial Pakistan focuses on language as a means to personal and cultural self-definition. "In interpreting an intricate past so resourcefully, Suleri . . . expands the usual

boundaries of autobiography to include philosophical, literary, historical and linguistic issues in an elegantly unified document," said PW. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is an intriguing, yet unsatisfying book. Intriguing because the author weaves the private history of her family into the public and political history of her homeland, Pakistan. Unsatisfying, in that neither tale seems complete. The author's personal joys and losses play against the violence of a country as it fights for and wins its independence. That independence was central to the family seems both obvious and abstract. Though the family's existence was in many ways defined by events, it seems oddly disassociated from these events. Still, the book is engaging. It is mainly through family relationships, especially those of the women, that the two stories are joined. This is a very personal autobiography. It should be considered for purchase in that context.- Frada L.

Mozenter, Univ. of North Carolina at Charlotte Lib. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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Enjoyed the juxtaposition of family life and national political scene.

I spent an entire week on *Meatless Days*, having picked it up after reading one of the book's chapters in an anthology of Indian writing. As a teenager, I'd just like to share my views about the book. Do note that it wasn't part of any required reading list, so I wasn't forced to complete it, nothing like that. Calling it her memoirs might not be completely accurate, because Ms Suleri has stated that not everything in the book actually happened, ie she did make up some of the events. However, she does insist that the language is a true reflection of the way in which she thinks, and speaks. If she is to be believed, I think that makes her quite an extraordinary woman. Of all the Sub-Cont. writers whom I've read, no other writer quite matches up to the complexity of her language, and the intricacy with which she readily assembles metaphors for largely universal concepts such as 'the enigma of arrival' (to borrow a Naipaulian title) and gender in the Indian/Pakistani home. Her writing is a joy to 'decode', and it really amazed me how she often drops hints of a certain image early in a chapter only to develop it beautifully many paragraphs later. I found myself intrigued by her style. This is a book that requires, and deserves utmost concentration in the reading. Missing out on a single conceit might render whole sentences incomprehensible to the less-attentive reader. I actually plan to re-read *Meatless Days*, just to enjoy it from the perspective of someone who has already made initial acquaintance. I do recommend re-reading it to most who've have the opportunity to finish this book once. I also enjoyed Ms Suleri's fresh, and often

satirical insights to such things as deaths, mourning, religion, and family. She certainly does put across her arguments very interestingly, and evocatively. There is a paragraph in which she cannot locate the graves of her mother and Ifat, and decides to leave the cemetery altogether, because she doesn't want to disrupt them from their restful peace. Not something that the reader might agree with, but the beauty of the book is that nothing is forced down the reader's throat. Ms Suleri certainly doesn't come across as someone who is philosophising at all. Very highly recommended!

Sara Suleri's command on the English language is of course quite clear from the first page. She is among the few contemporary writers who dare to use difficult words without feeling apologetic about looking 'prententious." Bravo! Of course the words are used very appropriately as well. We need a revival of good English usage -- after all what's the point of testing kids on SATs. Among South Asian writers she is a rare breed to balance a love for their homeland with candid criticism (unlike the much too celebrated Rushdie or Roy). She is an intellectual in the highest tradition -- it is no wonder that a University Press published this book instead of some market-frenzied publishing house. I disagree with some of her irreverent portrayal of Muslim society and traditional values but that is all tempered by the sardonic cadence of the work. Hope you will write a novel as well.

I looked briefly at the one-star reviews of this book, and for a moment wondered if they had read a different book. This book was wonderful. I read it at the end of a several-month visit to India, while I was in Calcutta. Having read and written (in university and during my visit) about other contemporary authors dealing with the subcontinent's history and weaving it together with their personal histories in novels, essays, and other works--Rushdie, Seth, Desai, etc.--I still found Suleri utterly original and provocative. One of these reviews uses the word 'incomprehensible'; Suleri's articulate and sometimes absolutely perfect sentences are much less deserving of the term than the review itself. Read it again--you missed something.

Sara Suleri's memoir is a wonderful example of the kind of literary production our faculty members should be producing--inspired, original, and compelling. Her non-academic writing, like her literary criticism, moves me to believe there are still people in the academy who understand what it is all about. Suleri is definitely more cerebral than a lot of more mainstream novelists of the subcontinent, and that is to be expected. It is part of this memoir's charm that there is a pull between her intellectual curiosities/asides and the more narrative moments of pathos. This book does exactly what a memoir *should* do--it represents memories as the palimpsests that they are, all the while

communicating the lingering feeling that the author associates with them. Really, a wonderful book.

Here is a book written with much candor, about a time and place most consider best left untouched. Suleri fills page after page with the heart-rending nostalgia of an immigrant who has gone, but has never forgotten. Her childhood, her innermost tormented thoughts, her journey across bonds and across continents - yes, even poor old Daadi - all are things that drive home the eloquence and the wit of her carefully crafted memoir. Not only is *Meatless Days* a gem in the miniscule canon of Pakistani literature in English, it is a treat for readers of the postcolonial experience the world over. It is highly recommended.

Ms Suleri perhaps falls victim to high expectations. Instead of trying to be her own self she wants to maintain B.Sidhwa's wit and Rushdie's somberness and guile in portrayal of her confused childhood. The book while appealing to a westerner wishing to get a superficial insight into a Pakistani family, is a complete waste of time for someone who has had even a slight exposure to sub continent literature

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