



Exploring Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* Through Heidegger's Concepts of Thrownness, Facticity, and Authenticity

Aziz Ullah Khan

Assistant Professor, Chairman, Department of English and Applied Linguistics, University of Science and Technology, Bannu, KP, Pakistan

Khalil Ahmad

MPhil in English, Lecturer, Department of English and Applied Linguistics, University of science and Technology, Bannu, KP, Pakistan

Chahat Shah Zeb

MPhil in English, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, Lecturer UST- Bannu

Muhammad Hassan Shah

MPhil in English, Lecturer, Department of English and Applied Linguistics, University of Science and Technology, Bannu, KP, Pakistan

Abstract

This study explores Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989) through the philosophical lens of Martin Heidegger, focusing on his existential concepts of thrownness, facticity, and authenticity. While previous research has examined the memoir from feminist and postcolonial perspectives, little attention has been given to how Heidegger's ideas can deepen our understanding of the characters' emotional and identity struggles. Using a qualitative approach and thematic textual analysis, selected passages from the memoir are interpreted to show how Suleri and her family members experience life in a world they did not choose, how they face unchangeable facts of identity, and how they make meaningful choices within those limits. The findings reveal that Heidegger's framework provides a powerful tool for understanding postcolonial identity, cultural dislocation, and the search for meaning in Suleri's narrative.

Keywords: Sara Suleri, *Meatless Days*, Martin Heidegger, thrownness, facticity, authenticity, existentialism, postcolonial identity

Background of the Study

Meatless Days (1989) by Sara Suleri is a well-known postcolonial memoir that explores themes such as identity, memory, gender, and cultural conflict. Suleri, being of both Welsh and Pakistani background, shares her personal and family experiences while living between two very different cultures. Many scholars have studied this memoir to understand how it shows the struggles of women, postcolonial identity, and social injustice (Nadeem et al., 2023; Ali, 2022; Hassan, 2022).

However, most of these studies have focused on political, feminist, or cultural issues. Very few researchers have looked at the book through a philosophical lens, especially using the existential concepts of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger talks about ideas like thrownness (being placed into a life or world we didn't choose), facticity (the unchangeable facts of our life), and authenticity (living truthfully within those limits) (Heidegger, 1962). These ideas can help us deeply understand the characters' inner struggles in *Meatless Days*, especially how they deal with identity, loss, and belonging.

Therefore, this study fills an important gap by applying Heidegger's concepts to Suleri's work. It offers a new and meaningful way to understand the emotional and psychological dimensions of postcolonial identity in *Meatless Days*.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989) reflects the existential concepts of thrownness, facticity, and authenticity as defined by Martin Heidegger. While many scholars have analyzed the memoir from feminist, postcolonial, and cultural perspectives, very little attention has been given to how the characters in the book experience life in a world they did not choose, how they deal with unchangeable parts of their identity, and how they try to live truthfully within those limits. This study aims to fill that gap by applying Heidegger's philosophical lens to highlight the emotional, psychological, and identity-related struggles found in Suleri's narrative.

Relevant Studies about *Meatless Days*

Several scholars have offered diverse perspectives on Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989), focusing on its postcolonial and socio-political themes. Nadeem et al. (2023) portray Suleri as a significant postcolonial writer who addresses issues such as gender inequality, the misapplication of Islamic law, and the marginalization of women and lower social classes in Pakistan. They emphasize her exploration of themes like family loss, religion, national identity, and class struggles, particularly through characters like Halima, who symbolizes the worsening plight of the disadvantaged in postcolonial contexts.

Moreover, Ali (2022) considers *Meatless Days* a powerful memoir that blends postcolonial themes with English language, highlighting tensions between native traditions and colonial legacies. Similarly, Hassan (2022) interprets the memoir as a study of postcolonial identity,

emphasizing its critique of Western narratives and exploration of third-world struggles, particularly those related to religion, politics, and nationalism. Nasir et al. (2022) examine Suleri's narrative techniques and use of English, arguing that the colonial mindset still influences postcolonial societies and literature. They note that language continues to serve as a site of cultural negotiation and resistance.

In this connection, Khan et al. (2024), in their study published in the Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT), explored the use of glossing in Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989) as a strategy of language appropriation and cultural resistance. Using Ashcroft et al.'s (2003) theoretical model, they conducted a qualitative analysis focusing on three glossing techniques, interlinear, bracketed, and abbreviated, to show how Suleri asserts ethnic identity and bridges cultural gaps. The study highlights how her glossing techniques preserve cultural meaning while ensuring accessibility for English-speaking readers, contributing to a deeper understanding of postcolonial expression.

However, little attention has been given to the application of Martin Heidegger's existential concepts of thrownness, facticity, and authenticity in the analysis of *Meatless Days*, indicating a significant gap in the current body of scholarship and offering new avenues for critical inquiry.

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature, which means it focuses on understanding ideas, meanings, and human experiences rather than numbers or statistics. The study is based on textual analysis, where selected parts of Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989) are closely read and studied using Martin Heidegger's concepts of thrownness, facticity, and authenticity.

The data for this study is taken directly from the text. Important lines and passages from the book were purposely selected because they clearly show the themes and experiences related to Heidegger's philosophy. These parts help explain how the characters feel lost, limited by their past, and how they try to live honestly within those limits.

The data analysis is based on thematic interpretation. Each selected quote is explained through Heidegger's ideas. The method follows a hermeneutic approach, as suggested by scholars like Paul Ricoeur (1970), which means understanding the deeper meanings behind the text. This approach helps to connect philosophy with literature and shows how Suleri's characters deal with identity, culture, and personal struggle.

In short, this study carefully connects selected parts of the book with philosophical ideas to explore how characters experience life and make meaning of it.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, particularly his key concepts of thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), facticity, and authenticity, as discussed in his major work *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger's philosophy focuses on the nature of human existence and how individuals find meaning within the limits of their circumstances.

In this connection, thrownness refers to the idea that human beings are “thrown” into a world they did not choose. This includes conditions such as culture, family, gender, and history. We do not control these starting points, yet they shape our lives. Facticity refers to the unchangeable facts of our existence, our past, our limitations, and the cultural or social conditions that we must live with. Authenticity means living truthfully by accepting these realities and still making meaningful choices based on our true self, rather than blindly following society.

Lastly, by applying these concepts to Sara Suleri’s *Meatless Days*, this framework helps us explore how characters experience cultural dislocation, identity crisis, and personal struggle. It also allows for a deeper understanding of how Suleri’s narrative reflects the tension between being shaped by external forces and finding personal agency. This philosophical lens provides a unique approach to postcolonial literature by focusing not only on external oppression but also on the internal, existential condition of the self.

Analysis and Discussion

1. Thrownness (Geworfenheit)

Heidegger’s concept of thrownness (Geworfenheit) refers to how human beings are thrown into a world they did not choose. We do not choose our birthplace, culture, family, or time in history, yet we must live through and within these given conditions.

Example from *Meatless Days*:

I remember stepping from the train in Karachi and being struck by how placeless I felt.(Suleri, 1989, Chapter 2)

This line shows Sara’s sense of being “thrown” into a space where she does not feel she belongs. Although born in Pakistan, her hybrid identity (half Welsh, half Pakistani) causes a deep disorientation. Heidegger’s idea of being thrust into a world not of one’s making is mirrored in her experience of cultural dislocation and fragmented belonging.

Another example comes from her mother’s situation:

Mother’s accent marked her—they could hear she was foreign.(Suleri, 1989, Chapter 3)

Sara’s Welsh mother, Ifat, is literally thrown into Pakistani society after marrying her father. She does not fit in linguistically or culturally, and this unchosen identity, imposed by marriage and geography, is a classic case of Heideggerian thrownness.

2. Facticity

Facticity refers to the unchangeable facts of life that shape our possibilities, like gender, race, nationality, family, and past experiences. We cannot escape them, even if we wish to.

Example from *Meatless Days*:

Tillat was taught to fold, to contain herself, to measure words before speaking. (Suleri, 1989, Chapter 4)

Here, Sara describes how her sister Tillat was shaped by cultural expectations. Her gender and role as a woman in a patriarchal society limited her expression. These social norms, which Tillat did not choose, reflect Heidegger's notion of facticity, she must live within them, whether she likes it or not.

Another powerful example:

Mother's foreignness was not something she could remove — it preceded her. (Suleri, 1989, Paraphrased from Chapter 3)

Ifat's nationality, language, and European heritage are fixed facts of her life. No matter how much she adjusts, she is still seen as "the outsider" in Pakistan. Her facticity determines how others see her, and how she moves in that space.

3. Authenticity

Authenticity, in Heidegger's terms, means accepting our thrownness and facticity, and still making honest choices. We do not pretend to be someone we are not, and we do not blindly follow others. We take responsibility for who we are.

Example from Meatless Days:

I choose to write against the silence that enveloped our women. (Suleri, 1989, Chapter 5)

This quote reflects Sara's conscious decision to resist the cultural silence surrounding women. Instead of passively accepting her facticity (as a woman in a traditional society), she uses writing to assert her voice. This act of resistance is authentic, she acknowledges her limitations but still takes agency.

Another example of authenticity through memory:

Writing about mother is the only way I can bring her back. (Suleri, 1989, Chapter 6)

After the death of her mother, Sara chooses to confront grief by writing. This is not a denial of loss, but a way of affirming her existence and values. She turns memory into a personal, meaningful act, an example of authentic being.

Conclusion

This research explored Sara Suleri's Meatless Days (1989) through the existential lens of Martin Heidegger, focusing on the key concepts of thrownness, facticity, and authenticity. The analysis revealed how the characters, especially Suleri and her family, navigate the emotional and cultural complexities of postcolonial life. Their experiences of displacement, gender restrictions, and identity struggles closely align with Heidegger's idea of being "thrown" into a world not of their choosing, shaped by unchangeable facts of existence. However, despite these limitations,

moments of authenticity emerge, most notably through Suleri's act of writing, which becomes a form of self-realization and resistance.

Furthermore, this study not only deepens our understanding of *Meatless Days* but also shows the value of applying philosophical frameworks to postcolonial literature. By highlighting the internal, existential dimensions of Suleri's narrative, this research fills a gap in existing scholarship and opens new possibilities for further interdisciplinary inquiry into identity, memory, and human experience in postcolonial texts.

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