

I. Introduction

This is an era of globalization, whether we take it positively or negatively, and in this era, the life of the subalterns is getting more complex despite the fact that the subalterns are being involved in the struggle of existence rigorously throughout their life for generation after generation. The subalterns are contributing a lot in each and every aspect; they are playing vital role in the socio-political and every kind of other activities, but they are still historyless and voiceless as they are helpless in the complex structure of power hegemony. The subalterns speak but their voice is not heard. They have remarkable history of struggle, of pains and pathos, but their stories and histories are not written in the mainstream. These much neglected history and voice of the subalterns are becoming the main subject matter of literary discourse these days. People of each discipline are speaking for the subalterns and their issues of struggle for liberation are coming at the core in academia as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak claimed that the subaltern cannot speak within the power structures of domination and subordination and if they speak, their voice is not heard. Spivak critiques against those who are speaking for the subaltern and in the name of speaking for the subalterns, the voiceless groups are making silenced.

However, intellectuals are speaking for the subalterns by representing the subaltern characters and their subversive roles in the literary texts for centuries and, recently, the issue of subalternity more positively has come at the core in each and every discipline including literary practices and academia. Local issues have now international connection in this era of globalization and nothing is limited as a local. Particular issues have got international attention in the context of raising voice of the

margin. By the use of English language, local or subaltern issues have been extended up to the global space that subaltern issues are now, therefore, not inferior.

Subaltern Studies has come to exist as an important methodology for the discussion of the local particular issues in global context. Nepali literary activities as well are getting extended globally through the process of writing Nepalese issues in the global language, that is, the English language for connecting local to global.

Nepal, the so-called semi-feudal and semi-colonial country, has a brief history of written literary tradition. It has hardly about two and half century's literary history as the writing and producing literary texts began with the unification mission of king Prithivi Narayan Shah and the literary texts of that time basically moves around the kings, their deeds and about their exaltations. But, we can find interesting references for the subaltern studies if we concentrate on the Nepali texts. Therefore, Nepali literature is rich now as it has large bodies of literature, multiple modes of themes and critical discourses.

But there is still a lack of Nepali writers writing in English and we have very few texts in English based on the Nepali content which is sad news in the context of globalization and migration in the dawn of hybrid world of twenty first century. The subaltern issues of Nepali context have not been produced in English and not extended in the wider world.

To fulfill this gap and lack of writing and publishing Nepalese issues in English, few Nepali writers are writing in English and among them, Nepali women writers writing in English is even less in numbers in comparison to the male writers. One of them is Manjushree Thapa, a young Nepali woman writer writing and publishing continuously in English, which has become a symbol of hope for promoting Nepalese issues through the medium of English. It is a way of extending

subaltern issues in the present context of globalization and Manjushree Thapa has created a space for the Nepali subaltern women characters to exist and speak through and their plight or the struggle for existence extends up to the broader world as it has existed as an English literary text though the representation of these women characters and their struggle is from one angle completely ambivalent. This issue, how the struggle of the subaltern women characters in the novel *Seasons of Flight* by Manjushree Thapa is ambivalent, as my main argument of this dissertation, will be discussed more in detail with the references from the text in the next chapter. But it does not mean that Manjushree Thapa's representation of the subalterns in this novel is of no value. Though Nepali writers writing in English is generally from the elite background in comparison to Nepali writers writing in Nepali language, and it is a debatable issue how they are or not representing the elite class, but the role of Thapa in the course of representing the subaltern in this particular novel is remarkable.

Manjushree Thapa, a Nepali writer writing in English, is now not a new name in Nepali academia and abroad as well because she preferred to write in English to Nepali language and her other contribution as well cannot be undermined. The background of the author's biography is important here to state that she became an established Nepali writer writing in English is not an easy task for many other Nepali writers, but Manjushree Thapa has created an important space in this area of writing in English. Manjushree Thapa was born in Kathmandu in 1968 and grew up in Nepal, Canada and the United States of America. Her career as a writer began early.

Manjushree Thapa began to write after completing her BFA in photography at the Rhode Island School of Design. She got experience of studying in various schools. She studied in St. Mary's School (Kathmandu), the National Cathedral School (Washington DC) and the Rhode Island School of Design, where she majored in

photography and her mission of writing was continued. She took study and writing simultaneously. She has got an MFA from the University of Washington, which she attended on a Fulbright scholarship, and it was a good opportunity for her to be more mixed up with western cultures and English language.

Manjushree Thapa's first book, *Mustang Bhot in Fragments* was a travelogue published in Nepal in 1992. This book is a non-fiction book. In 2001 she published the novel *The Tutor of History*, which she had begun as her MFA thesis in the creative writing program at the University of Washington. This book helped her to establish as a fiction writer. Thapa's *The Tutor of History* is her first novel and another fiction work is *Tilled Earth* which is a collection of short stories. Her best known book is *Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy* (2005), published just weeks before the royal coup in Nepal on 1 February 2005: after the publication of this book, Thapa left the country to write against the coup as it was not easy to write freely at that time and she came back later when there was no crisis. She is still writing on various genres. Many of her short stories, along with the collection of stories in *Tilled Earth* (2007), have been published in the magazines and journals.

Except *Mustang Bhot in Fragments* her another non-fiction work is *Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy*. According to the reviews published in the renowned magazines like 'The Indian Express' and others, *Forget Kathmandu* is 'a splendid brief history of Nepal and according to the paper *The Economist*, it is a part memoir drawn from living through the recent turmoil, part history of the royal family and partly also 'a reflection on what has gone so desperately wrong with her country'. In this best selling study of the tangled politics of Nepal, Manjushree Thapa examines what has gone wrong with her country over the years, and why has it happened. Starting with an account of the June 2001 massacre at the Narayanhiti Royal Palace

and its aftermath, she goes back in the 18th century and of the struggle in the 20th century for genuine democracy. She ends with a record of her trek into Maoist-held territories in western part of Nepal, where teenagers have taken to the gun as compulsion and she has documented critically why revolution has come to be essential as the people think in the remote parts of the country. She has published several translations of Nepali literature. More recently she published *The Country is Yours: Contemporary Nepali Literature*.

Thapa's latest work, *Seasons of Flight* (2010) is one of the important novels among few of number in the present context as a novel written by a Nepali author in English. From the date of its publication, this novel has now drawn a critical attention. The novel deals with the various contemporary issues. This novel can be studied from various critical perspectives such as feminism, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, immigration, Diaspora, globalization, hybridization, quest for identity, eco-critical studies and more importantly it can be critically studied from the perspective of Subaltern Studies.

Thapa has used interesting theme and impressive writing style in *Seasons of Flight*. The novel has drawn critical attention of the critics, who have reviewed on the various aspects of the text. To quote Amishraj Mulmi:

One of the things about being a published writer is that the reader always expects the next book to be better than the last one, that the writer has improved upon the art of storytelling, and that the new book is more polished in terms of style, language, and creativity. It wouldn't be inappropriate to say that with *Seasons of Flight*, Manjushree Thapa has done exactly that: her prose has become more lyrical, her storytelling grabs your attention at the right time, and she displays the

kind of controlled, yet freely flowing, writing that is a hallmark of authors who know their craft. In essence, this is Thapa's most accomplished work yet. (4)

Twenty first century is getting more complex for the subalterns. It is not an easy job for the subalterns to adjust in the new world in the age of globalization where migration, hybridization and struggle for settlement is getting more complex in the sense that only the well skilled people of recent technology can exist and the subaltern people who have no agency in the new place cannot exist and create their space.

Thapa's latest novel has touched this crux that can be a good insight to the readers to be more familiar with the more complex scenario of the globalized world. For Mulmi too, Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* can be "summed up as a book for the 21st century Nepali: young, eager to migrate because of the lack of opportunities, and tormented by the constant turmoil back home. It is a book that must be read, if only to understand the invariably-difficult questions that plague the youth today" (ibid 4).

The complex world of twenty first century of the globalized world is the burning issue for the Nepali subaltern characters as there is no opportunity at homeland and they are forced to go abroad to work as a cheap labor as Prema works in the US or involve in the war like Bijaya that she joined Maoist revolution because she had no other alternative to do in her youthful stage of life.

Manjushree Thapa's another significant contribution is her command in English language. There are many more literary texts based on the contemporary burning issues like the impacts of Maoist revolution in Nepali, but we cannot get good number of texts in English. *Seasons of Flight* has fulfilled a gap of lack of texts based on burning Nepali issue in English. Critics have acknowledged this aspect of

contribution of Manushree Thapa as well, as CK Lal, one of the prominent contemporary Nepali writers, states,

Manjushree has the reputation of being as fiercely independent recluse. What sets her apart from all other Kathmandu-based writers—men and women—is the fact that English is the primary language of expression for her, and that is an important aspect in Nepali literature in the context of globalization. (7)

Subaltern Studies began from India, from South Asia, but its medium of expression is English, despite the fact that English is taken as an elitist language or the language of colonists. Similarly, now English is not taken as a property of western people only; English has now established its position of a language of connecting the people of the world. In this context, Thapa's contribution of writing Nepali issue in English is significant on one hand and on the other hand she takes subaltern women characters as the protagonist in the subversive manner with the conscience of liberating them, though the struggle of the subaltern characters in the novel is ambivalent. Critics have pointed out this critical aspect of the novel, *The Seasons of Flights*, as Rabi Thapa writes:

So this country of emigrants finally gets some immigrant literature in English. It's only fitting that *Seasons of Flight* comes from Manjushree Thapa, perhaps the most accomplished of Nepali writers who have published fiction in English... The book puts one in mind of Thapa's most recent collection of short stories, *Tilled Earth*, not simply for its smooth, practiced prose and the abundance of charming, touching episodes, but also because of the way the novel is put together. The short chapters of *Seasons of Flight* are morsels unto themselves,

illuminating as they do particular aspects of Nepalian abroad, such as Prema's encounter with Americans ignorant of Nepal, and the mundaneness of working menial jobs to get by. But does this add up to a substantial repast along the well-worn lines of immigrant literature? One cannot help but think Manjushree Thapa, herself prone to considerable migratory flight, is addressing herself rather more to an audience outside Nepal. The very first chapter, 'being nepali', suggests as much. Many Nepalis will nod and smile as they read about Prema's encounter with foreigners who think Nepal is Naples. But is evoking the familiar enough to provoke deep reflection on why and how people migrate? (7)

The representation of Nepaliness and subaltern issues in the context of globalization is an important trend of writing in English in the changed global scenario that the voice from the margin is, more recently, raising more significantly as a resistance against elitist structures of domination and subordination. *Seasons of Flight* is a serious attempt to delve into the journey of life across time, space and human society where a large number of the subaltern groups of people are in the course of struggle for changing the subaltern position as the central two subaltern women characters, Prema and Bijaya do in the novel and still there is no hope of their liberation from the helpless subaltern position whether they live in remote village of Nepal or the United States of America, whether they hold the gun or not.

Undoubtedly, however, the novel speaks the voice of many Nepalese subaltern groups of people who have experienced the pleasure and pain of leaving one's home behind and seeking another in the present context of globalization. It will also reach those who may have wondered, however fleetingly, what the lives of the other in their

own cities are like in the sense that whether the subaltern characters are within or outside of the country, it is not easy to change their subaltern position. Manjushree Thapa manages to capture the nuances of America and its variegated social and physical landscape where subaltern characters struggle, as seen through the eyes of Prema. As an addition to the corpus of immigration literature, *Seasons of Flight* makes for absorbing reading and Subaltern Studies can be one of the most suitable perspectives.

The subversive roles of the two subaltern woman characters, Prema, the elder sister and Bijaya, the younger sister, try to dismantle the structures of domination and subordination from the beginning of the novel to the end but their struggle turns to be futile and ambivalent as they are nowhere when the position of the subaltern is concerned. Why do the subalterns remain subalterns despite their ceaseless effort for transforming their subaltern position? Can an ambivalent representation of the struggle of the subalterns in literature be helpful for raising the voice for the subaltern consciousness? Why do the women subaltern characters of this novel unable to create agency to speak and cannot change their subaltern position? These critical questions are easy to make but hard to answer and Subaltern Studies tries to reveal the secret of how the power hegemony is practiced for making the subaltern voiceless and historyless.

To discuss the above stated problematic issues of the representation of the subaltern, this thesis has been divided into four chapters and Subaltern Studies has been used as a theoretical methodology for the textual analysis.

The First Chapter introduces the overall outline of the dissertation, as discussed above in this chapter. It deals with the major claim, methodology and outline of the implementation of the methodology on a particular text. Chapter Second

is based on textual analysis from the perspective of Subaltern Studies. This chapter has been concentrated on the ambivalent role of the protagonist Prema and her struggle in the effort of transforming the subaltern position. Sufficient references will be taken from the text to support the central idea or the claim of this dissertation about how Prema plays the role of subversive struggle and how she is unable to transform her position despite the fact that she struggles a lot from the beginning to the end of the novel.

The Third Chapter is based on the textual analysis itself as the next part of analysis. This chapter has focused on the second main character, Bijaya, the younger sister of Prema, and it discusses on the issues of the major claim that how Bijaya as well plays ambivalent role of struggle in the course of rupturing the structures of domination and subordination. The references concentrate on the ambivalent struggle of the protagonist subaltern female character Bijaya, like of Prema, and it discusses how Bijaya as well remained helpless to change her subaltern position. For the textual analysis this researcher has focused mostly on the struggle of the two women subaltern characters Prema and Bijaya. Subalternity has been applied as a critical tool as it is a novel by a Nepali writer writing in English and the issues are more based on Nepali women involved in the struggle of subverting the rigid structure of domination and subordination in the context of globalization and immigration or changed scenario of the status of the subaltern people and their role in the societies of the twenty first century. And, the Forth Chapter is based on the conclusion and findings of this research.

Though Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* concerns on multiple contemporary issues, but it is more importantly concerned with the issues of the Nepali subaltern women and their struggle in the context of the dawn of the twenty

first century. They struggle within and outside the country in the quest for existence by performing the subversive role that a typical Nepali subaltern woman cannot perform; however, their struggle from the perspective of Subaltern Studies is ambivalent, but it does not necessarily mean that the text has not played role to extend the subaltern consciousness for raising the subaltern voice for transforming their subaltern position and to give the sense of liberation. This particular issue in the Nepali context for the subaltern studies is important and the studies on this area have not been carried on more. So this study has tried to explore the position of the subaltern women and their representation in the texts, with reference to Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* and the role of the two subaltern woman characters, Prema and Bijaya.

This study similarly has made an attempt to develop critical discourse on the representation of the subalterns in Nepali context from the subaltern perspective on one hand and on the other hand it has analyzed how Nepali subaltern issues have been internationalized in the global context through English language on the literary text written by Nepali writer writing in English as we find in Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight*.

Subalternity, as a new mode of critical approach, soon was popular not only in India but outside the territory as a scholarly South Asian movement. This movement aspires at rewriting nationalist historiographies from below; a peoples' history to oppose elitism and recover the past information. It appeals for the need to refocus history writing on subaltern classes hitherto ignored by colonial and nationalist bourgeois historiography. Subalternity, for Jim Masselos, "confronted a dominant South Asian historiographical mode which focuses on the politics of elite nationalism and substituted another modality that drew from the current intellectual contexts and

political debates [...]" (201). So, as this researcher comes to realize that, it is important here to study Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* from the subaltern perspective.

II. Ambivalent Struggle of Prema in *Seasons of Flight*

Prema is the central character of the latest novel *Seasons of Flight* (published in 2010 by Penguin Viking) by Manjushree Thapa, one of the most renowned Nepali woman writers writing in English. Manjushree Thapa in this novel has developed an ordinary subaltern woman character called Prema into a subversive figure in order to cross the limitations of all sort of barriers of patriarchy, taboos, stigmas and the structures of domination and subordination; but her struggle of subversion and effort of liberation of the protagonist Prema is not beyond ambivalence as the protagonists remain helpless till the end of the novel.

Prema is a subaltern girl born in the remote part of a village in Nepal. The terminology 'subaltern' has been derived from two Latin terms 'sub' and 'alter' which respectively means 'under' and 'other'. The term today refers to those who are deprived of the opportunities and access in each and every aspects of the society, which refers to any person or group of inferior rank of people in terms of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or religion. Thus, 'subaltern' is a term that commonly refers to people who are socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure, who do not have the agency or space to exist in the mainstream. The origin of the subaltern can be traced back to the medieval age. In the medieval age, this term applied to vassals and peasants. By eighteenth century, it however, came to denote lower ranks in military suggesting peasant origin. These subaltern classes include marginalized groups such as peasant, workers and others, who were forced to stay away from the hegemonic power.

The subaltern writers intend to identify subalternity as an autonomous domain(area). They want to write their own historiography that can confirm their

representation. The elite historiography is regarded as official history by sidelining the repressed or peoples history. The elite groups of intellectuals as well only valorized their own cultures, codes, religion and castes at the expense of culture, religion values and castes of the marginalized. In this regard, the issues of the marginalized have always been neglected; they are not incorporated in any crucial activities. Hence, the voices of the peoples remain silenced and unheard. Those voices were not included in the mainstream historiography.

Prema represents a marginalized group of people from various angles as she firstly is a woman in patriarchal Nepalese society where she has to be alert of various kinds of restrictions, limitations, rituals and taboos. Though she subverts all these structures of restriction in her private life, but she is often fearful of publicizing her subversive roles. Her father, relatives and people of her village believe that Prema is a good or ethically normal girl as other typical women, who are supposed to be obedient and moral in their socio-cultural roles.

Secondly, Prema is from the remote village where there are no good facilities and the village is affected by the Maoist revolution of the so-called Ten Years' People's War. She does not visit her village for a long time as it was a far flung village and it was critical situation due to the increasing conflict between Maoist combatants and the government armies, the then Royal Nepal Army (now Nepal Army). There is no electricity, road, TV and radio even when she was a child.

Thirdly, Prema is from economically poor family background. Her father and sister live in the village without any regular economic source. Prema often sends little amount of money from her income that she earned from a small job and that little amount of money sent by Prema to her father would be of big celebration to the family and relative and neighbors. It was believed in her village that Prema was the

one who had left the village and she was the one who had progressed in the city. She telephoned her father every month and deposited a share of her salary directly into his bank account and with his pride his father expressed, “You are as good as a son to me” (11).

The whole plot of the novel *Seasons of Flight* by Manjushree Thapa moves around the subaltern character, Prema. The novel tells the story of Prema, who is from a remote village of Nepal and she is later fortunately comes to be an immigrant Nepali in the United States of America. In Nepali context to get a lottery and being able to go to the United States of America is called one of the greatest opportunities in one’s life. But it is neither easy to transform subaltern position in her country Nepal and nor in the so-called one of the most prosperous countries in the world, the United States of America. She struggles a lot for the existence in America but she is unable to create her better identity. The reference from Gramsci’s ‘Notes on Italian History’ has been often cited in Subaltern Studies, who has claimed that ‘the history of subaltern groups is fragmented and episodic’ and the act of unification of the historical activity of these groups is continuously interrupted by the activity of ruling groups. For Gramsci, subaltern groups are always the subject to the activities of the ruling groups even when they rebel and rise up. As a Marxist, Gramsci claimed that ‘only permanent victory breaks that subordination’. In Gramsci’s own words,

The history of subaltern social groups of people is necessarily fragmented and episodic. There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to (at least provisional stages of) unification in the historical activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups; it therefore can only be demonstrated when an historical cycle is

completed and this cycle culminates in a success. Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only 'permanent' victory breaks their subordination and that not immediately. (Prison Notebooks 54-55)

Subaltern Studies represents a significant divergence from the Gramscian idea of the subaltern in the sense that, for Gramsci, subaltern groups by definition cannot possess autonomy. So is the condition of Prema. It is not easy to get a good job to Prema from the very beginning and settle in the cities or headquarters as a single girl, even to the girl who is from a remote war affected village. There was nothing really wrong with Prema while living in Nepal. Though the country was at war, she was safe in comparison to others. However, there were rumors that any time anything could or may happen as the situation of the conflict was getting worse. She had a wish to live in better and safer place. Her wish has been expressed as:

Had it been in her power, she would have changed a few things, of course. She might have lived in a town rather than in a bazaar, a town large enough to have a cinema, and shops, and restaurants of the kind she and her friends used to go to in college. She might have had more like-minded friends for company. She might have been more-free. (10)

She works as a forester and visits from jungle to cities while she is in Nepal. She faced hindrances in the course of working in Nepal as a forester. The conversation between Prema and Maoist combatants and activists justify her condition. On the one hand she was unable to go back to the village to meet her father and other relatives and she goes to America after getting lottery easily or boldly without meeting father and sister. On the other hand, she faces obstacles on her duty as a

forester to work and go to the field in the jungle due to the war. The conversation between Prema's team and the rebel commander of Maoist revolution is significant here to quote:

'At the start our struggle was limited to a few areas,' he told them gravely, 'but now it is nationwide. You must support us. When we are victorious there will be a great task before educated people like ourselves. You must help us build a new society along revolutionary lines.'...Prema wondered whether her sister, too, entertained such grandiose visions. Out of curiosity, she asked the rebel commander about his-and his comrades'-view on conservation. He had to think about it. 'The people,' he said tentatively, 'should control their natural resources.', and then more tentatively, he said, 'The centre has always exploited the peripheries. It is a matter of historical redress. All this'- he gestured at the hills outside the window-'belongs to the people. The people at the peripheries should benefit from their use.' He glanced over for conformation. 'Isn't that so, Sister?'(27)

Accidently or luckily, she got lottery to US and she left her country leaving her secret lover Rajan, her father, sister and relatives. The new place for an immigrant is unfamiliar metropolis and she faces from the identity crisis to many others. She involves in various jobs, meets various people in new places, changes her jobs and everything including lover. She suffers psychologically as well. She suffers recalling her childhood and youth, drifts her thoughts from Nepal to the U.S. and feels loneliness, as this expression shows:

It was and it was not far, where she came from. Some days her birth village felt centuries away, and other days it was too close; she could

not get far enough away from it. Her family home-which she still thought of as hers, though she had not lived in it since she was seventeen-was sturdy, two-storied, of stone. It had felt sheltering, and safe, when she used to run through the bamboo grove past the Shiva-Parvati temple that bordered the terraced rice fields, to school. Only later, when she had left the village to go to high school, then college, in the capital, Kathmandu, she had discovered that her family had been poor. (2)

There is transformation in her life, no doubt, in each and every angle, as she is able to study and get a job though she is from a war-torn rural Nepal; she wins a green card in a US government lottery and becomes able to immigrate to Los Angeles of the United States and in this unfamiliar metropolis she struggles to invent a life she can call her own, even a strange love in Nepali context, and sexual awakening, she transforms herself. There are no constraints, or signposts, as she navigates the territory of her new world. But her commitment to Esther, the old woman she is employed to care for, her passionate relationship with Luis, her American lover, and her growing involvement with the endangered El Segundo Blue butterfly, but all these things give her a fragile sense of belonging. As critics have pointed out that *Seasons of Flight*, for Rabi Thapa, is “the 'zigzag' tale of a young Nepali woman, Prema, whose life follows a butterfly-like trajectory in every sense of the word. She flits from her village in eastern Nepal to Kathmandu, then to a job in the west of the country, and then to Los Angeles, courtesy of the green card lottery” (7). The main issue is that the transformation of the subaltern position is not an easy task. Does Prema speak autonomously? Has she created an agency to exist and speak so that her presence can

be felt and her voice can be heard in the mainstream? This is the major issue of subaltern studies that comes to be prominent in this study as well.

What Prema does not do for her existence, from her job as a forester in Nepal to restaurant worker and taking care of an elderly lady to conservationist again, but what does she get ultimately is an important question. She suffered rather more in the U.S. as she has unknown hardship in the alien world. Not only Prema, her country's identity is in crisis as she can hardly find people who are familiar there while getting introduced. The following lines show her identity crisis in the alien land of the United States:

‘Mind if I ask where you’re from?’Sometimes Prema would help them out by adding, ‘It is near India’, or ‘Where Mount Everest is,’ of ‘You have heard of the Sherpas?’Another man, a dark-skinned grocer, South Asian himself, baffled her with, ‘Aren’t you usually from Pakistan?’ It was Prema’s turn to stammer. She had also learnt that to the foreign ear, the country’s name could sound like ‘nipple’. More commonly, though, what Americans heard was Naples, as in: ‘I just love pasta,’ or, ‘My husband and I went to Rome for our honeymoon, but we never made it to Naples. (1)

Prema faces double identity crisis in the U.S. as on the one hand she is a woman from a poor tiny country that the country Nepal itself is unknown for most of the people living there, and on the other hand she herself has no security of job and other facilities in the alien place of the United States of America. She is fed up justifying her country and her national identity. In the opening of the novel, this feeling of rootlessness and identity crisis has been presented remarkably as it is

common problem of any Nepalese who are living in the alien countries in the first world like USA. Prema sometimes even lied that she is from India:

‘Where are you from?’

If possible Prema dodged the truth....Sometimes she would say, ‘I am from India,’ because Americans had at least heard of India. She envied Indians this..., and when she said she was Indian he said, ‘Me too,’ and asked, ‘Which tribe?’ Unable to explain herself, she retracted: ‘I am from the state of Indiana, actually.’ ‘Geez,’ he said. ‘That’s real far.’ (2)

She speaks lies one after another unable to present her clear national identity. Though she is able to get lottery and immigrate to Los Angeles, US; she is insignificant there. She has no agency to exist in the vast Los Angeles city. She lives in a spare, uncluttered flat with a transient feel.

Before she came to Los Angeles US, she was living with a Mongolia family and Prema had known early of the world’s sorrows. She had been eight when her mother died giving birth to her sister Bijaya. There was a joy at the home in the arrival of next sister. Prema had skipped the game of marbles that she used to play. But that happiness could not stay longer. To quote the deteriorating situation:

Her mother had complained the cold, shivering despite the blankets her father drew over her and the coal-fires he lit by the besides. At night her tremors rattled the bed. One morning she lost consciousness. When Prema returned from school that afternoon, she saw that the neighbors had gathered outside. Prema rushed to the mother’s bedside. It took her a while to understand why it was vacant. Her father had already taken her mother to the riverside for the cremation. (5)

Her mother's loss ended her childhood. Their father had been an energetic man once, full of plans; but his ambitions now moved like phantom in the empty spaces of the family home. All he wanted was a better life for his daughters. Prema joined college just after finishing the school from the village itself. The father encouraged her to go to city for further study. She studied forestry. She worked as a forester alongside a senior forester, Trailokya. They convinced people to use alternative sources like kerosene to protect forest. Prema had studied forestry to get better job as it was very difficult to get a job and her friends had gone to India in search of cheap works or further Arab countries and even further Europe and America. But who knows life is better in abroad but it was compulsion to hatch a dream of going abroad. Prema thought:

There was so little in Nepal, everyone just wanted to leave. And also, for those who felt they were from a shabby third-world country, it was hard not to believe that life in a richer land was more-proper, solid. At a certain age Prema had also wondered whether she shouldn't go abroad... (7)

Prema gets lottery and shifts to Los Angeles, US. She ultimately works as a homecare attendant for an old lady, Esther King. She has tackled a list of instructions on the kitchen corkboard: "a list of DOs, DONTs and NEVERs...Following instructions, Prema would feed Esther's cat every morning as the jet-black Bengal against her legs, purring" (14). Though she is in the US, but she is compelled to involve in the inferior job and the subaltern is measured in terms of inferior rank of the post of the job as well.

The term 'subaltern' used in *Subaltern Studies* refers to the meaning 'of inferior rank', as stated in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. As an operational definition,

the word 'subaltern' is defined first more clearly by Ranjit Guha in relation to subordination in South Asia as follow:

The word 'subaltern' in the title stands for the meaning as given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, that is, 'of inferior rank'. It will be used in these pages as a name for the general attributes of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or any other way. (vii)

In the introduction of *Subaltrn Studies* Vol I, Guha gives a valuable account of subaltern history's genealogy and legacies, its purpose and accomplishments, the developments that have broadened its empirical and theoretical bases and its importance to the scholarly community in general. He includes rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper-middle peasants into the category of subaltern classes but, in his view, they can under certain circumstances be the agents of the upper dominant group and can act for the elite.

The notion of the subaltern, meaning of 'inferior rank', was adopted by Gramsci as a concept referring to groups in society subjected to the hegemony of the dominant ruling classes, firstly used to refer to the proletariat in his *Prison Notebooks* (1973). He also claimed that the history of the subaltern classes is as complex as the history of the dominant classes despite the fact that it is fragmented and episodic as the subalterns are subject to the activities of the elite groups.

In Gramsci's theory, the term 'subaltern' linked up with the subordinated consciousness of non-elite groups. Moreover, he used the word 'subaltern' to term the subordinated consciousness of non-elite social groups who, in the process of creating the nation and nationalist historiographies, never integrated in the mainstream due to power hegemony of the elite groups as the dominant bourgeoisie are unable to realize

the subaltern consciousness. He used the term 'subaltern' in corporation to other terms like 'hegemony', 'domination' and 'subordination'. For him non-hegemonic groups or classes are the 'subalterns' who are always hegemonic to the ruling class. Although the term 'subaltern' was taken from Gramsci's euphemism for the proletariat in his *Prison Notebooks*, however, the Subaltern Studies collective used it as a catch-all term for all groups they viewed as oppressed - the proletariat, the peasantry, women, tribal people. Conclusively, subalterns are groups of people who exist outside of a society's hegemonic system, often because of poverty or ethnic discrimination. Traditionally, they have been misrepresented, if not excluded altogether from academic research and study, which is conducted by intellectuals who themselves are generally a part of the dominant hegemonic system. The realization that colonial and post independence elites agreed in their views of the subaltern led the Subaltern Studies Group to question the master paradigms used in representing colonial and postcolonial societies, both in the cultural practices of hegemony developed by elite groups and in the disciplinary discourses of the humanities and social sciences that seek to represent the workings of these societies.

Prema in America is compelled to engage in the inferior works. She has no agency to maintain her better position in terms of economy and other socio-political and cultural identity. The following lines itself say about her rank of the job there in Los Angeles:

After Esther was done with her toilet, Prema would help her into one of the fine, finicky dress she liked to wear, allowing her to fuss awhile in front of a full-length mirror...Prema would brush and set her hair and help her put on cream, perfume, lipstick....Did the delivery boy

bring in the papers? Read me the headlines! What is your name?’

‘Prema.’ (vii)

Prema takes Esther to the beach, takes her back to home, bathe her, and put her, soft and warm, into bed, where she would read novels. Her relation with Luis, Meg and Susan also show her inferior position in USA. Susan and Meg have their private car; they are free to go anywhere. They have more free sexual life. Prema makes sexual relation to Luis, a middle aged man who has a daughter from a divorced wife.

Prema cannot live in the US as she is often haunted with the memories of Nepal, Rajan, family, Bijaya, Kancha, who was arrested and was disappeared by the royal armies. While Prema was in Nepal, she worked in a project as a forester when the Maoist movement was rising towards the peak. Though the country was at war, curfew had been imposed normally, and near the bazaar of the headquarters, Maoist rebels were camped, it was normal life in the cities. Prema’s life before she got lottery for the US was not as worse as of the typical Nepali women and war affected people as she was freer and she was longing for even more free life.

Soon Prema felt that life a burden and she started to visit her Nepali friends without giving information to Luis. Prema stole away to the dry, grassy hills and she did not know why she did not tell Luis that she was going there. As soon as he and July, Luis daughter, left the flat, Prema left too. She stopped enjoying as she enjoyed before with Luis. She came to know that there was ceasefire in Nepal. She phoned to her father and she is surprised by hearing about her sister, Bijaya. She recalled her past this way:

Prema was convinced the war would escalate from here on. The Maoist would not give up, and neither would the king and the army; and

people who had nothing to do with either side would get drawn in. Should she not leave? This shabby, third-world country. Having received a chance—having won a lottery. Was this not an opportunity to keep progressing? America was rich, it was proper, solid. But wasn't it also-an agent of corporate capitalist expansionism? ...she recalled....

(51)

Prema had never thought of herself as an Asian woman. She had never felt so aloof in her life. She was fed up by having tined food. She was no more enjoying with Luis and her sexual relation with him as well, that an American relationship. Prema began to “feel out of place where she was. Living in a flat on a toy street, working as a homecare attendant, ensconced snugly in Luis's life, his very-American-life. She hadn't actually reinvented herself, had she? She had just drifted along a zigzag trail, as always” (150). And though there was nothing wrong with the life she had now, though she was content enough, it is just that was no really her place, Prema began to think. “There was still so much about Luis that Prema did not understand. He was so-foreign”(153). The tension got to Prema. She was feeling the throb of the headache coming on. In the meditation center there is a debate about the Hindu god. Prema tells the story of her mother:

‘Luis, do you know about the reality?’ she cried. ‘I told you, my mother-Do you know?’ Unable to stop herself, she sputtered: ‘She kept getting pregnant because she wanted a son! You know how many times? One baby before me, two afterwards—they all died. And she—All she wanted was a son! In Nepal they still—People still—All these stupid white people American Hindus call this Krishna love?’

‘That is a bit racist,’ he said.

‘I am racist? I am racist?’ she cried, stung.

‘Reverse racism is just another form of racism. But listen-’. (159)

It was then that she realized she had to go: she had to set out again on her zigzag trail. But which direction was she to take, she was confused. She did not know. “She thought of her movements from her present life with Luis to her life on the dry, grassy hill, and her life in Little Nepal, and her life further back...Her birth village, her school and college years, her attachment to Rajan, her flight to America” (161). Prema feels that she is not enjoying with Luis, July (Luis’s daughter from the ex-wife, and so on). She rather visits Nepali people living in US like Niru Didi and others. But Luis is becoming kind to her; he gives her a gift: ivory and other.

There was ceasefire on back home. The UN had got involved. A peace process had gone under a way preceded by a mass uprising against the king and the army. There had been an election of the Constituent Assembly and the monarchy had been abolished. The country was a republic now and the political parties were drafting a new constitution.

But that weekend, Luis and she argued. They had accepted a brunch invitation from Steve and Camilla; but Prema wanted to wire-transfer money to her father’s account. Then Prema left the following weekend and she could not bear to tell Luis beforehand. On Saturday Luis took July to the party and as soon as they left, Prema ordered a taxi, then threw her clothes into her suitcase and left tracing her way along her ever-directionless zigzag trail and if she lived frugally for a few months, she would be able to buy an airplane ticket back to Nepal. She moved here and there, helplessly, in dilemma, indecisive as “while she was drifting and drifting. Not progressing. Just getting through one day after another. Surviving” (193).

It is very difficult to transform subaltern position in the complex world where the structure of domination and subordination of colonialism, racism, patriarchy and capitalism is dominant and the subaltern has no agency there to exist. Prema is in such condition in America. The following lines show her helplessness:

This was the life she had chosen? Apparently, yes. In any case: did it matter? Could she progress? She, who had only ever followed a trail of chance and happenstance, no matter where it led. Who had pegged her fortunes on a lottery? (193)

She closed her eyes and felt, all around, the shiny across-air, water, minerals. She felt out her wounds, the relics below the adamantine deposits. Her mind drifted apart. “A Nepali from the high hill, misty hills. A nobody lost in America. A nothing. An ephemera. Even she needed to lead a complete life. Could she, though? Need she even bother to try?” (194).

She still lived in the flat in Niru and Sushil’s house. She befriended with new people. She met Meg time and again. She returned back to home empty hand. Her father overjoyed to see her. He was very aged, but still spry. Over the days, Prema met her relatives, neighbors, family, and friends. Is there any significant transformation in the life of Prema in terms of transforming her subaltern position whether she is in the US or in Nepal? She cannot adjust in Nepal too any longer and returns back to Los Angeles again, meets Luis and there is reconciliation of their relationship; but the question of subalternity is still there; her ambivalent struggle for transforming her position hopelessly is still there because she Prema is unable to get agency for existing properly in the US despite her so called success of getting green card after getting the lottery.

III. Ambivalent Struggle of Bijaya in *Seasons of Flight*

Bijaya, the protagonist Prema's sister, is the second main character of the novel *Seasons of Flight* by Manjushree Thapa. When Prema was eight, her mother gave birth to Bijaya. Before that, during the gap of that time, the mother had given birth to the two babies and they died and the mother as well died later just after giving birth to Bijaya.

It was an accession of celebration at home when Bijaya was born. The father was happy and her sister Prema also was happy. To quote that happy moment of Bijaya's birth, it was "a baby, a baby who, unlike the ones before, had come warm and pulsing into life. A sister! Her parents had named the baby Bijaya: Victory" (5). But unfortunately, Bijaya could not get the love and care of her mother as Prema had got till eight years. Few days after Bijaya's birth, her mother had died and the cause of her death was not diagnosed. Her aunt, mother's sister, nursed to Bijaya after the death of her mother.

Bijaya and Prema's father always encouraged both daughters that they must be progressed by studying hard and getting higher education degree. For Prema's case the father's dream got fulfilled to some extent but in the case of Bijaya it is different. When the Maoist rebels came by the village to force youths to join them and Bijaya was not forced to join them, however, she joined Maoist army, the so-called People's Liberation Army (PLA). Her sister Prema then was living small hill town working as a forester. It was not suitable to return home as there was rumor that young girls or boys of the age of Prema are forcefully to be enlisted in the Maoist army. Her father informed Prema that it was not good there in the village and told her not to come. But Bijaya turned out to be a strange girl. According to her father, as he narrates to Prema

about Bijaya on the telephone, "...the Maoist rebels came by the village, they had had to force others to join them. Not Bijaya. She went just like that..."(11).

Unlike Prema, Bijaya's role in the novel is very short but it is not less important than the role given to Prema. Both subaltern women characters are important as they represent two contrastive and conflicting ideologies. To some extent, Bijaya represents more revolutionary role than Prema and Prema hates Bijaya's decision of joining Maoist army willingly. This debatable thought between them remains unresolved till the end of the novel despite the fact that there is no expressed misunderstanding and quarrel between Prema and Bijaya. Prema hates Bijaya when she joins Maoist PLA and so does Bijaya to Prema. They are like class enemy that is what Prema believes at the end when she comes back from the US to home and Bijaya does not give priority to her talks and questions; and the conversations between them get obstructed without significant cause.

However, the sympathy goes no less to Bijaya in comparison to Prema. When Bijaya was born, the mother died and she could not get shelter from her mother. She left school and joined Maoist army, took the gun and fought. Actually, this subaltern character, Bijaya, speaks revolutionary voice, debates with the oppositions, tries to deconstruct the elite structures through the ideology of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism, as what she has been trained; but how does she speak and can her voice be heard? Such questions are relevant here to address as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak concerns on these issues of representation that subalterns cannot speak though they are speaking or others are speaking for them.

In 1988, Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" got published. This essay is credited to have brought the subalternity into postcolonial domain. One of the most important and complex aspects of Spivak's thought is her ongoing attempt

to find critical vocabulary that is appropriate to describe the experiences and histories of particular individuals and social groups, who have been historically dispossessed and exploited by European colonialism. In the context of political struggles for national independence or anti-colonial resistance, the use of master words like ‘the colonized’, ‘woman’, or ‘the worker’ may seem to provide a coherent political identity for disempowered individuals and groups to unite against a common oppressor. But she argues these master words do not do justice to the lives and histories of those people who were frequently ignored and subsequently forgotten by anti-colonial national independence movements. In the place of these political master words, Spivak proposes the word subaltern to encompass a range of different subject positions which are not predefined by dominant political discourses.

For Spivak the term ‘subaltern’ is useful because it is flexible; it can accommodate social identities and struggles (such as woman and the colonized) that do not fall under the reductive term of ‘strict class analysis’. As she asserts in an interview published in the US journal *Polygraph*:

I like the word ‘subaltern’ for one reason. It is truly situational. ‘Subaltern’ began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was used under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism ‘monism,’ and was obliged to call the proletarian ‘subaltern’. That word used under duress, has been transformed into the description of every thing that does not fall under strict class analysis. I like that because has no theoretical rigor. (Spivak1990:141)

In her influential essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak clearly asserts that subaltern cannot speak. The subaltern, a member of the non-ruling class, has to face the bias of the elite intellectuals. In other words, there is every chance that the elite

intellectual overshadows the subaltern people, whom he represents. Spivak consistently draws the attention to the problem of representation, as it is privileged position of the elite intellectual scholars that let them serve as the spokesperson of marginalized subaltern. This kind of representation is not rooted in socio-cultural reality. Instead it tends to give false impression about the represented subaltern class. The privileged elite manipulate in the representation of the subaltern group, and this representation brings the elite writer to the limelight at the cost of the represented subaltern.

In the same manner Bijaya speaks, but her voice is not heard; she fights for freedom or existence but her contribution is not significantly addressed; she struggles but her struggle comes to be ambivalent or useless at the end that after the ceasefire she returns back to her father's house with a son; she lives with the father with her son as a helpless woman who has nowhere to go and settle despite the fact that she fought bravely and contributed to the revolution that brought a big changed, positive or negative depends on the perspective and personal thoughts in Nepali history.

Like Prema, Bijaya was born in the same remote village. She could not enjoy her childhood. There were no televisions, radios, toys, and other goods to play in the childhood. The village was not touched by the roads or highways. It was for her sister Bijaya, more than for herself that Prema wished a different life as she wished she could do something about the lack of prospects, the lack of a future with which Bijaya had come into this world, motherless.

She is a subaltern girl in terms of many other aspects though she looks very bold and moody character. Bijaya had grown into a determined girl who wanted to fulfill everything whatever she desired from her childhood. She did not like to continue her study and could not pass out of her high school despite their father's

encouragement and exhortation that their father would recite ‘You must progress’ all the time. But Bijaya joined Maoist insurgency, the People’s War as the Maoists like to call it boldly despite the disagreement of the non-Maoists, as a People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and visited many parts of the country by facing the obstacles and fighting against the then Royal armies and the police. When Bijaya was PLA, Prema was forester. Prema encounters with her sister Bijaya in the forest while she is in duty. Prema took a narrow footpath along a rocky incline; she stood up, her heart pounding. She saw marching of the PLA. “The others, too, marched by in complete silence. Some were just boys—and girls. Two girls had short-crossed hair. Maoist rebels. They were carrying rifles...Soon they dipped past a bend in the trail. Her sister Bijaya” (29).

Prema lost the nerve to stay on. Rushing back down the hill, she cursed her sister. “The idiot girl. Where was she now? Did she really believe in war? The idiot, idiot girl” (29). But a girl is no longer a girl as Bijaya would be seventeen then and the age Prema had been when she had left home. That was the last time she had seen Bijaya. A neighbor was going to the capital, Prema was going with him to live in a girls’ hostel near her college. The widower father had put red ‘teeka’ on her forehead and a garland around her neck. At that time Bijaya had gone to fetch water that morning and had not come back and she wanted to be far from Prema as she was not happy when she got news of Prema’s leaving home for further study. May be she was unhappy on the sister’s departure. Prema found in the bamboo wood and their conversation was shocking:

‘I’m leaving, Bahini. I want to—‘

Bijaya’s eyes were glittery with rage. She hissed, ‘You are never coming back, are you?’

It took Prema a while to respond. 'Of course I will. I'll come back every chance I get.'

'You're leaving me,' Bijaya cried. She let out a gasp, as though choking. Then she said: 'What's it like in the cities? It can't be like this'—she gestured furiously at the fields. 'What's it like?'

'I don't know', Prema said.

'I hate where we're from,' Bijaya hissed. (31)

Bijaya was right that Prema had never gone back. Prema rather went to America while Bijaya was fighting against the royal armies. The news of ceasefire forced Prema to return back to village. The news of Bijaya and the son had amused Prema even more. When Prema arrived back to home, the father was overjoyed. "He looked at her proudly through milky eyes. His grandson, already toddling, was clutching his legs. Prema's nephew: Bijaya's son" (210).

Bijaya was standing at the threshold, standing on at the reunion. She was tall now, taller than Prema, with a sturdy build, but with the same taciturn, mulish hair she had had as a girl. Bijaya smiled briefly when Prema acknowledged her, then returned to staring as their father led Prema in, fussing over her. The sweet feelings of Prema did not stay any longer:

'You've grown so,' Prema said to her sister

Bijaya laughed. 'Wouldn't I have? After all these years.' She turned away to attend to her chores.

Prema insistently recoiled. She remembered what Bijaya had said to her as a girl: 'I hate where we're from.' Did she blame Prema for abandoning her? (210)

Both of these subaltern women characters are helpless. Prema was not happy in the US, nor is she happy when she is at home now. Her feelings of attachment of the family cannot stay overjoyed any longer. How happy she was when she was informed on telephone by her father that Bijaya had returned back to home, with a son. To quote her father statement:

‘We are all living together here,’ he said. ‘Not our son-in-law, we don’t know where he is, but-Your sister is safe. I’m well,’ her father said. ‘By your mother’s blessing everything is all right here.’ Then he said, ‘It’s been an eon, daughter. It’s safe to come back now; Nobody knows how long the peace will....’(180)

Prema had known early of the world’s sufferings and sorrows as she had been eight when her mother had given birth to Bijaya. Prema had skipped the game of marbles that she used to play after school, running home in excitement to fuss over her sister. Her mother had died when Prema returned from school that afternoon. All these things come one after another in her mind.

Prema kept trying to talk to Bijaya; though her sister would answer questions, she would not be drawn into conversation. It is relevant to quote an interesting but conflicting conversation between Prema and Vijaya:

‘Your son looks just like you did as a child.’

‘It’s natural, isn’t it?’

‘Is there anything I can do around the house?’

‘What’s there to do?’

‘I can help.’

‘There’s nothing to do.’ (193)

The both subaltern characters involve in the conflict; they look subversive but their subversion is self destructive. Prema feels if Bijaya thinks of Prema politically as a class enemy and similarly Prema found herself judging Bijaya in turn as a former Maoist, a rebel, the idiot girl.

Prema did not ask, and Bijaya did not tell her, about she had done during the war. Nor did Bijaya talked about her husband, other than to mention, once, that he was off working for revolution by peaceful means. The father did not know the antagonistic attitudes growing between the two sisters.

One evening, as Bijaya cooked dinner for the family, the father asked to Prema about the work she had been doing in the US and from the wood stove Bijaya would stare at her as a rejection of her life style of the US. Prema recalls Bijaya's words as the response of Prema's view that she would hate her birth place and Bijaya had said harshly:

‘But I love my country.’ Bijaya's eyes glittered fiercely. ‘Everything I've done-I do-is for my country, for the liberation of my country, my people. How can anyone hate where they're from?’ she said, spitting out her words. It's like hating your mother,’ she said. Stunned, Prema turned to the footpath leading out of the village, desperate to be gone.

(212)

These two subaltern female characters are very subversive in nature but their subversion cannot help them to cross the boundary of their inferior rank. The term ‘subaltern’ literally meaning of “inferior rank” in the Oxford English Dictionary, and it has been used by the subaltern studies writer to designate the people who are not the “elite”-the dominant groups. The term was derived from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) in his celebrated collection *Selection from the Personal*

Notebooks .when he discussed the rural peasants in southern Italy, Gramsci categorized them into the non hegemonic classes. Having emphasized the formation of the subaltern groups, their relation to the dominant groups and their autonomy in political sphere, Gramsci listed six necessary points to study about the subaltern. Moreover, he thinks that history of subaltern classes was as complex as the history of the dominant classes. They have less access to social and cultural institutions even when they raise their voices against the elite groups. For Gramsci the only way to get rid of subordination is the permanent victory which, however, can only be achieved after revolution. Gramsci thinks that in course of bringing revolution and to recuperate the subaltern's cultural and political movement into hegemony, the role of the intellectual must be essential. As the subaltern people do not have the means as well as strategy to get access to hegemony, they need the special kind of support to show them the path ahead. Only then the subaltern classes can be turned into revolutionary character and can strive to achieve independence.

In its literal sense subaltern mentality refers to the attitude and feeling of thinking somebody else a submissive, dependent, uneducated, and inferior other etc who is always subjected to be subjugated. In fact, this type of mentality exists not only in the Europeans and the elites but also in the subaltern themselves. The rulers always have the mentality to rule over and have the opinion that only they deserve knowledge and power concerning whatever they doing. They even don't move back to show the lack of knowledge in the subaltern and always think themselves superiors in every domains. So they always desire to rule over the subaltern. On the contrary the subaltern group think themselves submissive and inferior in terms of politics, economics, culture, administration and so on. In this regard Gautam Bhadra states over the subaltern mentality in this way: "it is well known that defiance is not the only

characteristic of the behavior of the subaltern classes. Submissiveness to authority in the context is as frequent as defiance in another. It is two elements that together constitute the subaltern mentality”(54). Bhadra’s remarks exclusively focusing that the subaltern mentality not only refers to that the mentality of the submissiveness. The poor and the oppressed have time and again made voluntary sacrifices in favor of the rich and the dominant. They compelled to be subjected in varying degrees in every sphere of the society.

In the hierarchical community there is domination under the dominated themselves. This is a never ending process which is marked by struggle and resistance which ultimately creates the tension. In this hierarchical community, the dominant himself or herself will be dominated by another dominant. The trace of domination can be found within the repressed community itself. In this remarks Bhadra exemplifies in the poem ‘Kantanama’ that in hierarchical community, “one’s superiors also had their superiors, and one could always appeal to or in the name of the higher authority” (88). That’s why it can be argued that subaltern mentality is the mentality of hierarchy which exists not only between the two levels-the elite and the subaltern, but also within the level itself. Thus, it is a never ending phenomenon.

Ranjeet Guha includes rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper middle peasants into the category of subaltern classes. He however, admits that they “could under certain circumstances act for the elite...” (8). He declares that SS will study “the history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity...in short the culture informing that condition” (vii). Subaltern studies commitment to history and culture is rather conspicuous. The elite historiography is generally regarded as “official history” by sidelining the people’s history. SS has committed itself “to rectify the elitist bias characteristics of much research and academic work in this

particular area” (vii). He pointed out the ambiguities between the elite classes and the subalterns. How the subalterns were defined depended on the regional, social and economic conditions. In this connection Guha contrasts “politics of the people” with elite politics and privileges the former over the later. He views that the politics of the people “was an autonomous domain for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter” (4). It, despite of colonialism, was proceeding on by adjusting itself to the prevailing condition in different form and content. In this regard, it is as old as colonialism supposed to be. The development of nationalist consciousness in accordance with elitist historiography was an achievement either of colonialist administration, policy and culture or of elite Indian personalities or idea. For Guha, such historiography fails to “acknowledge or interpret the contribution made by people on their own, i.e., independently of the elite” (3). It of course, ignores the people’s politics. In fact, it is to say that the subaltern politics is different from the elite politics. But in terms of contribution the subaltern people have equal contribution as of the elite. Here we can realize the politics of domination over the subalterns by the so called power holding class or elite. The subaltern position of inferior rank has remained inferior despite the fact that the subalterns played important role in each sector of the society.

The two subaltern women characters Prema and Bijaya played vital role in the course of existential struggle, no doubt. They are very subversive in nature as well. They are subaltern in terms of class, gender, region, profession and nationality and they performed remarkably revolutionary role for transforming them into better position from the inferior subaltern position; but as Antonio Gramsci and Gayatri Chakkravorty Spivak and other subaltern critics believe, to deconstruct subaltern position and create an agency to exist and speak is not easy for the subaltern women.

Subaltern consciousness has been always a critical point of subalternity. Jim Masselos, as quoted by Ludden, criticized such kind of essentialist notion about peasant consciousness. He calls “subaltern...a creation, a reification of historians” (23). Likewise he thinks that it is merely a “stereotype of resistant subaltern people” (22). In other words, any theory, which endeavors to establish the autonomy of the subaltern classes, would erase them from the history. Nevertheless the peasants or subaltern groups tend to resist the elite domination. It emerges as an invariant feature about subaltern groups. Obviously, it somehow makes the discussion on the subaltern mentality fruitful. Like Prema, Bijaya also is helpless despite the fact that she struggles hard for her existence. Her struggle as an effort of transforming her subaltern position comes to be ambivalent that she is nowhere though she tried her best for her transformation; this is a kind of hopelessness of the subalterns on the one hand and on the other hand it is a form of resistance or representation of the bitter reality of the subaltern women’s position in Nepali context.

IV. Conclusion

The question of revolution and autonomy of the subalterns is one of the most complex issues for the subaltern study group members that they started to speak for the subaltern collectively by publishing the volumes called Subaltern Studies with the aim of writing about the history and society of the subalterns from South Asia. Subaltern Studies began from India by 1982 with the editorial leadership of Ranjit Guha and this movement has already published more than a dozen of volumes on Subaltern Studies. But there is full of debates and criticisms about the subalterns, subaltern studies movement and the subaltern studies group members because the struggle or movement is not beyond the ambivalence as we find in the two women characters Prema and Bijaya in the novel *Seasons of Flight* by Manjushree Thapa. Though these subaltern characters struggles a lot, try to transform their subaltern inferior position, they are very active and subversive as well, but what did they get at the end? Are they really autonomous and liberated? What is the significance of their struggle if there is no hope of liberation of them from the subaltern position? These kinds of critical issues remained crucial when the issue of autonomy and liberation of the subalterns is concerned.

Most of the subaltern historians claim that there is an autonomous domain of peasant politics exemplified by peasant insurgency that represents a significant divergence from the Gramscian idea of the subaltern. For Gramsci subaltern groups could not possess autonomy but he took peasantry as a live force and recommended for close examination of subaltern consciousness revealed in popular beliefs and folklores. Subaltern historians were concerned to show that the subaltern classes have their own consciousness, their own political resistance, mobilization and ideologies of

their position. They believed that the real subaltern consciousness could be revealed at the moment of their action against domination. Furthermore, Guha argued that the subaltern is the 'maker of his own history and the architect of his own destiny'.

Subaltern characters are active, subversive and revolutionary no doubt, like Prema and Bijay, the female protagonists in the novel *Seasons of Flight*, but there is often the problem of ambivalence and this problem often obstruct the subalterns in the course of forming the agency for transforming their subaltern position.

The protagonists Prema and Bijaya are subversive in their actions and the thoughts. They play very revolutionary role from the beginning to the end of the novel. Prema is successful to get higher education, work on various jobs, move different places from the remote village to the hill towns to the capital city Kathmandu to America after getting lottery. She lives with hybrid experiences of culture, interactions and even sexual intercourse. All her activities show that she is really a free individual and a moving character autonomously; but as far as the transformation of her inferior subaltern position is concerned, she is still a subaltern without any proper agency to exist and speak. She keep on walking in the zigzag road as she has no easy way to move ahead for achieving her destination whether she is in Nepal or in America. She is not transformed and liberated from the subaltern inferior position. Her struggle is ambivalent because she fought helpless and futile battle consistently, but on the other angle it is what the subalterns' real life is that subalterns cannot easily get liberation.

The case of Bijaya is no more different than the case of Prema. Bijaya left the school, joined Maoist army willingly, became underground, lived in the jungles and remote villages far from the royal armies, suffered with fear that she could be killed any time, fought against the so-called class enemy till the ceasefire many years and

ultimately returned back to home with a son though nobody in the village knows about her marriage. In a sense, a young girl holding a gun and fighting against the well-armed royal armies being underground is not a joke. It shows a very revolutionary characteristic of Bijaya, though criticizing or hating this act Prema called Bijaya an idiot girl. Similarly, Bijaya's all other activities and thoughts are subversive. She has patriotic consciousness as well that she hates her sister Prema who left the country after getting lottery. But from another perspective, the question of autonomy and liberation is still there in the case of Bijaya too. She got nothing as her own despite the fact that she struggles a lot for transforming her inferior subaltern position. She is still helpless; she has nowhere to go despite the fact that she is married and she is taking shelter in her father's home with a son that cannot be called a good way of life in the Nepali context. However, the subversive role of Bijaya cannot be ignored.

After analyzing the two women subaltern characters' roles in the novel *Seasons of Flight* by Manjushree Thapa, this researcher has come to a conclusion that most of the roles of the subaltern characters in the fiction or real life are ambivalent as of Bijaya and Prema in this novel. This researcher also came to realize that the issues of the autonomy of the subalterns and their liberation are very complex and the struggle of the subalterns in the vast world of the globalization in the twenty first century is often ambivalent due to the helplessness of the subalterns. Similarly, this researcher has a feeling that there are significant works done for empowering the subalterns and extending the subaltern consciousness.

This researcher came to a conclusion that literary texts like this novel *Seasons of Flight* by Manjushree Thapa can play important role for raising voice for the subalterns' autonomy and liberation. Thought this novel represents ambivalent

struggle of the women subaltern characters Prema and Bijaya, it is the reality of the common Nepalese in the new world scenario in the twenty first century when immigration and displacement have become very common and the subaltern Nepalese are suffering within and outside the country, wherever they are, despite the fact that they are struggling and working hard like Prema and Bijaya.

Another more important thing or positive aspect this researcher found about this novel is that, it is an English novel on the Nepali theme by a Nepali woman writer writing in English on contemporary Nepali issues. Manjushree Thapa, being a Nepali writer writing in English, has successfully represented the plight of the Nepali subaltern groups of people within and outside of the country through the protagonist female subaltern characters Prema and Bijaya in particular and many other subaltern characters like Kanchha, Neeru Didi, Sushil Bhinaju, Prema's Father, and many others in general. Such text on Nepali subaltern issues written in English can help to extend local subaltern issues up to global context which is one of the most important aspects of this novel.

Lastly, the novel *Seasons of Flight* by Manjushree Thapa represents ambivalent struggle of the Nepali subaltern women characters Prema and Bijaya in particular and other subaltern characters in general which is a kind of true representation of the subaltern consciousness of the contemporary poor Nepalese society where the subalterns are more similarly as helpless as Prema and Bijaya and their struggles also are as ambivalent as the struggle of the subaltern characters of the novel, whether they are within or outside the country.

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