

## **Chapter I: *Season of Flight* and Plight of Nepalese in America**

This research based on Manjushree Thapa's novel *Seasons of Flight*, is an attempt to assert that Thapa's narrative flows directly into the social phenomena, the celebrated sensibility of tour, abhorring the postcolonial world for its lies, its mediocrity, cruelty, violence and self-indulgence. This research comes to illumine Thapa's immigrant characters and their experiences as first generation of Nepali immigrants in America that is, life of immigrant is strongly compelling to think about but terrible to experience. Immigrant's life is the unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: essential sadness can never be surmounted.

Thapa's story objectifies anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience first-hand. The postcolonial 'global' world has begotten millions of bereaved people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography. Thapa's work has primarily focused on Nepali first generation immigrants, exploring themes of exile, isolation, and assimilation. While it is true that *Seasons of Flight* contains heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episode in immigrant's lives, these are more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrows of estrangement. The material achievement that the immigrant family gets is permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever, living the life if succeeding generation spiritually orphaned and alienated. This research explores the bitter experiences that Prema undergoes as an immigrant in America borrowing from the critical insights of postcolonial literary theory.

*Seasons of Flight* continues to examine this territory while enlarging and further universalizing its scope. Grewal writes that

Thapa as an author incorporates her opinions and perspective into the literature to better portray the experiences of her characters. The interpretation and comprehension of this story is largely dependent on the inclusion of accounts from the author's own life and experiences. In *Seasons of Flight*, diaspora makes it difficult for the characters to assimilate to the new customs and moral convictions of each new environment. (27)

When she first started writing, Thapa was not conscious that her subject would be the Nepali-American experience. What drew her to this craft is the desire to force the two worlds she occupied to mingle on the page. "On the cup of a new century, the term 'Nepali-American' has become part of this country's [America's] vocabulary," Thapa resents on her character's compulsion to leave her homeland, "I've heard it so often that these days, if asked about my background, I use the term myself, pleasantly surprised that I do not have to explain further" (153).

Her experience of cultural intermingling are shocking and interesting at the same time: "the traditions on either side of the hyphen dwell in me like siblings, still occasionally sparring, and one outshining the other depending on the day" (154). But like siblings they are intimately familiar with one another, forgiving and intertwined. The publication of *Seasons of Flight* marks the tradition of immigrant experience of Nepali diaspora being scripted in English. In *Seasons of Flight*, Thapa continues to explore the theme of sense of identity crisis in others land , this time with a focus on the lives of first-generation immigrant parents and the mainstream American values of their peer.

Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* is at once a personal drama depicting the life of Prema, a Nepali immigrant to United States of America, and a social panorama pointing up aspects of identity and cross-cultural experiences. Thapa's narrative skills and keen observations are evident throughout the text rendered in its restrained, reasonable, almost matter-of-fact ventilation of her own attitudes and experiences and the ones of those whose culture has left distinguishing scars on her identity. Her observations include comments on the life of Prema as a Nepali-Immigrant, the mechanics of immigrations, traditional Nepali society, and the condition of immigrants in America. The lived reality of relocations and dislocations of vast populations makes the phenomenon of diaspora a commonplace in our time. In this paper, the researcher contends that a strikingly troubling embrace of American nationality is expressed in a recent novel by Manjushree Thapa, a Nepali writer in English. Nepali-ness is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world. Prema's life in the novel becomes a thing thrown to darkness. So, Hansen writes :

I did not attend Sunday school, did not know how to ice-skate, and disappeared to oblivion for months at a time. Many of these friends proudly called themselves Irish-American or Italian-American. But they were several generations removed from the frequently humiliating process of immigration, so that the ethnic roots they claimed had descended underground whereas mine were still tangled and green. I was not American by birth, nor would I ever be no matter how hard I tried. I felt doomed by this pronouncement, misunderstood and gradually defiant. (152)

Though the major female character in this novel, Prema, is-or was-Nepali, the researcher sees most of the episode in her story as stories of broken identities and discarded languages and the will to bond oneself to a new community against the ever-present fear of failure and betrayal. Prema embraces being ‘American,’ not Nepali and American, not hyphenated. Further, she wants to be recognized as ‘an American chick’ in the tradition of American people. In one moment, Prema delineates ‘aesthetics of dislocation’ as one component of an Nepali American identity. She writes "It is from this consciousness that I create my life and new identity" (16).

Nepal-born generation of immigrants like Prema embark on the psychological and socio-cultural journey of becoming ‘America’ and, more specifically, adopting a Nepali American identity. In the story, Prema once returns to Nepal after five years to visit her family. As she crosses national border, she is forced to recognize her own dual identify-more American in clothing, speech, body language than Nepali, though ethnically marked. Nepali Americans are also described in Nepal as NRNs-Non-Resident Nepalis. Although Nepal does not allow dual nationality, this is a way to retain close emotional ties; hence, even as American citizens, they are still identified as ‘Nepalis’ albeit ‘non-resident’ - a form of “flexible citizenship,” to borrow Inderal Grewal’s phrase. As Grewal notes this condition in India.

The Indian government nurtures the ties to home since they want to entice NRI financial investments to India; this NRI population is not interested in forming coalitions with other people of color in the US, and most are uncritical of the US ‘ideology of ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’. (2)

Prema gets bad experiences living in the US, others travel back to Nepal through the character's imagination and history. Some are set in Nepal with the ever-present West looming in the wings. There are women who have affairs, men who leave their wives, women who chose careers over family, non-traditional women and men. Thapa's characters demonstrate the diversity of the South Asian American community with their various languages, religions and regional food cultures. Their daily lives in this diaspora location unfold as they struggle and dream, argue and entertain. These portrayals broaden the representations of Nepali Americans, abandoning any fixed notion of 'great' Nepali culture.

Language uses are a significant part of diasporic experience. In the novel Thapa recreates the levels of ignorance about Asian languages and cultures in US society: "Can you speak Mexican No I am from Nepa Can you speak Hindi?" (118). Such ignorance compounds an immigrant generation's conflict about learning mother-tongues that are not heard in mainstream culture. Yet those languages, especially those mother-tongues, cling to them, stuck almost like a second skin that cannot be shed. In yet another episode, a second-generation daughter leaves home. The cultural gulf between daughter and parents is so wide that she has to make an escape in the middle of the night, and has to face the question: "in which language would she leave a note to her parents?" (142). How can she write in English to her parents who have never spoken to her in anything but Nepali: "who will have to have someone translate the lines and curves, the bewildering black slashes she has left behind?" (142). She hopes that later, as she learns to make her own space in the world, she will be able to communicate more openly with her parents: "Maybe the words will come to her halting but clear, in the language of her parents, the language that she carries with her, for it is hers too, no matter where she goes" (142).

In another episode, a mother struggles with the knowledge that her son is being racially harassed in school. The mother feels helpless because she is not fluent enough in English to argue with the teacher: “My few English phrases,” she thinks. “She [the teacher] will pluck them from me, nail shut my lips” (202). Through a few deft phrases, she evokes fear and cultural impasse. Longing for homes left behind may be intense for first-generation immigrants who seek a community to belong to. In becoming diasporic, we need to keep in mind the political parameters of home, community and nation, as analyzed usefully in Chandra Mohanty’s essay, “Defining Genealogies: Feminist Reflections on being South Asian in North America.”

Where I grew up? Where I live and work as an adult? Where I locate my community-my people? Who are ‘my people’? is home a geographical space, a historical space, an emotional sensory space? Home is always so crucial to immigrants and migrants I am convinced that this question-how one understands and defines home-is a profoundly political one Political solidarity and a sense of family could be melded together imaginatively to create a strategic space I could call ‘home’. (5)

Pema tries to buy her freedom despite undergoing Bhabhian hybridity, the mixture of Nepali and American forces. She creates herself, or her ‘selves,’ as she moves through those worlds. She is not able to purchase her freedom, pursuing a most unusual career as a kitchen attendant, maid servant, and environment activist.

There are dozens of stances of hybridity in Prema’s story, where she appears neither Nepali nor American. Some of these moments occur shortly after Prema’s arrival in America as, alienated and lonely, the girl seeks acceptance into her new

environment. Bhabha seeks assistance from Edward Said to formulate his thesis on the nature of mimicry: “Said describes as the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination-the demand for identity stasis and the counter-measure of the diachrony of history-changes, differences mimicry represents an ironic compromise” (Bhabha 87). Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable ‘Other,’ as a subject of a difference that is almost the same. This is to say, in Bhabha’s terms, that the discourse in mimicry “is constructed around ambivalence” (86). In order to be effective, mimicry must “continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (88). The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that Bhabha has called mimicry is therefore stricken by indeterminacy: “mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (87). Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the other as it visualizes power. Bhabha further holds that mimicry is also “the sign of the inappropriate [ness]” (90). However, mimicry ferments a difference which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both normalized knowledge and disciplinary powers. The text challenges the reader to think about the process of acculturation, and the extent to which a mind can be colonized by the dominant culture.

Thapa’s narrative captures the humanity of ordinary people, struggling with traditions, arranged marriage, food preparation, and helping the destitute. Her characters take diasporic leaps to create new lives even as they keep hold on the small details of their culture-eating with fingers, enjoying a specific regional pickle, speaking native languages, being dutiful. While her characters remain self-consciously aware of their ethnicity, they participate in this US culture through their

intimate relationships, married, single, raising children, driving that extra mile to get an absolutely necessary ingredient for a favorite recipe. Even as their ethnicity as Nepali Americans is performed in daily life, they work towards a hybrid realization of their subjectivity as Nepalis and as Americans.

Since its first publication in 2010, Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* has received many critical acclamations as a brilliant literacy exploration of Nepali immigrants living in America. Shraya Pandit writes in *The Kathmandu Post*: "Though the major female character in this novel, Prema, is-or was-Nepali, I see most of the episodes in her story as stories of broken identities and discarded languages and the will to bond oneself to a new community against the ever-present fear of failure and betrayal" (5). Exploration of themes of exile, isolation and assimilation has been of particular research interest to various critics on the works of Thapa. Sanjeev Shakya describes *Seasons of Flight* as "beautifully crafted story that reaffirm Thapa's status as one of this country's most accomplished and graceful young writers" (6). "Though she is a young writer, her work is confident and timeless," Shakya reiterates, "*Seasons of Flight* is a fiction that will be read deservedly for years to come" (27). Prema embraces being 'American,' not Nepali and American, not hyphenated. Further, she wants to be recognized as 'an American chick' in the tradition of American people. In one moment, Prema delineates an 'aesthetics of dislocation' as one component of an Nepali American identity: "the other is that we have all come under the sign of America. In Nepal, no one would ask me if I were Asian American or Asian. Here we are part of a minority, and the vision of being 'unserved' comes into our consciousness. It is from this consciousness that I create my life and identity" (16).

Nepal-born generation of immigrants like Prema embark on the psychological and socio-cultural journey of becoming 'American' and, more specially, adopting a

Nepali American identity. In the story, Prema once returns to Nepal after five years to visit her family. Speaking to Prema Dhakal on the issue of her characters often playing the life of exile, Thapa clarifies her stance:

In the first collection, the characters were moving for more or less the same reason (which was also the reason my parents came to the United States): for opportunities or job. In this collection there is a similar pattern of movement, but the reasons are more personal somehow—they are reasons of family dynamics or death in the family or things like that. In this book, I spent more time with characters who are not immigrants themselves but the children of immigrants. (6)

The complexity of Prema's dual identity, shifting between Nepali and American, is a persistent and at times richly contradictory theme in her life-story, one which neatly illustrates Homi Bhabha's important concept of cultural hybridity, or the condition of in-between-ness. Hybrid identities open up a 'third space' for oppositional critique, challenging the monolithic opposites which structure so much of our thinking, such as black and white, good and bad, male and female (86). In Bhabha's words, hybridity allows for "the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other" (85).

Thapa tells the stories of immigrant characters and their experiences as Nepali immigrants living in America in *Seasons of Flight*. In the course of her narrative, Thapa discovers alienated self in her characters: the heroic, triumphant, and even glorious episode in the lives of Nepali-American people often marked with material prosperity is permanently undermined by the loss of culture left behind. They are spiritually orphaned and alienated. Thapa's characters in the novel suffer, it is

hypothesized, because immigrant's life is the unbearable rift protruded as a gift of globalization forced between a human being and a native place, between self and its true home.

There is, however, the lack of studies based on the reasons of exile and the circumstances that compel and individual Nepali immigrant to live a life as culturally and therefore psychologically alienated diaspora in Thapa's *Seasons of Flight*, which is the issue of this research. Given to the qualitative nature of the study, the task requires extensive and analytical reading of secondary materials published on the subject and the theory. As the novel is interpreted in the light of postcolonial theoretical practices specially on the issue of diasporic consciousness, the second chapter develops a theory with analysis of major voices in postcolonial consciousness and their relation to this research.

The third chapter elaborates the episodes from the novel in the light of the theory developed earlier. This chapter is crucial in locating Thapa's text and her observation of the life of immigrants in postcolonial condition. The chapter further explores the risks and challenge associated with taking a new 'flight' to an unknown and distant land far from home.

Thus, this research comes to examine this sensitivity of Thapa on the life of exiles in *Seasons of Flight*. Deriving from many of the critical voices on life in exile that has become a new born part of human civilization, this research will proceed to apply and search the relevance of these theories in the following chapters. The research aims to unfold the propensity of Thapa's annoyance to this postcolonial condition. As a writer, she conveys her feelings from the "solitude of an outsider" (5)

which overcomes her feeling of “habitually being” (qtd. in Said, 5) in the cultured if exile.

## **Chapter II: Post colonialism**

This chapter consist of definitions of ‘Post colonialism’ deriving from variety of scholars whose contributions consider the ways in which colonial discourse studies and post colonial modes of thought have shaped intellectual, political, and literacy agenda within the discipline. Theoretical modality, for the present research purpose, is designated to reflect on most crucial issues for the study of post colonialism and the contemporary world pertaining to the vital issues like diaspora, hybridity, and cultural variation. Moreover, the chapter outlines the most recent theoretical voices on the impact of cultural dislocation to serve our purpose of research.

### **Postcolonial Studies**

The term addresses all aspects of colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact. Postcolonial studies do not refer only to the meaning of the term such as ‘after colonialism’ or ‘after independence.’ All the postcolonial societies are subjected to in one way or another to over or subtle forms of neocolonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem. The development societies, often buttressed by neo-colonial institution, the development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discrimination; the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in setter/invader societies all these testify to the fact that post colonialism is the continuing process of resistance and reconstruction.

Ella Shohat, in “Notes in Postcolonial: Anxieties and Ambivalences,” remarks that “spreading from India into Anglo-American academic contexts, the ‘post-colonial’ tends to be associated with Third World countries which gained independence after World War II” (102). However, it also refers to the Third World diaspora circumstances of the last four decades – “from forced exile to voluntary

immigration within First World metropolises” (102). Postcolonial studies have focused especially on Third World countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean Islands, South America. Shohat contends on the diverse coverage of Postcolonial studies: “some scholars extend the scope of such analysis also to the discourse and cultural productions of such countries as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, which achieved much earlier than the Third World countries” (124).

In recent years, the term postcolonial is used various purposes. The term refers to text and practices, to psychological condition and concrete historical process, and to the intermingling of all these. In this regard Padmini Mongia admits, “postcolonial theory becomes the locus of complex debates and the target of virulent criticisms” (2). Mongia notes Homi Bhabha’s contribution on defining the term: “Homi Bhabha asserted that the term postcolonial is increasingly used to describe that forms of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven process of representation by which the historical experience of the once colonized Third World comes to be framed in the west” (1). Thus, for Bhabha, Postcolonial Studies debate the complexities of its locus. It seems to direct the attention, indeed to bear witness, to inequalities in modes of representation.

Critics read the ‘Post’ in postcolonial as signifying both changes in power structures after the official end of colonialism as well as colonialism’s continuing effects; particularly as they are manifested discursively. For them, postcolonial theory is an umbrella term that covers different critical approaches which deconstruct European sociology and political science. From this perspective the term postcolonial refers not to a simple periodization but rather a methodological revisionism which enables wholesale critiques of Western Structure of knowledge and power, particularly after the period of Enlightenment. Postcolonial Studies have embraced a

number of aims. Most fundamentally, to reexamine the history of colonialism from the perspective of colonized; to determine the economic, political and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized people and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of deep colonization; and above all to participate in the goals of political liberation which includes equal access to material resource, the contestation of forms of domination, and the articulation of political and cultural identities" (739). It seems that these studies focus on the overall right, liberation, and the access to all the once colonized countries. It analyzes the economic, political and cultural impact of colonialism. Habib further seems to illustrate that postcolonial studies signify both official end of colonialism.

Published in 1978, Edward Said's *Orientalism* is a crucial text for what has become known as postcolonial theory where his most influential argument is that orientalism need to be understood as a "discourse by which European culture was able to manage-and even produce –the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enghenment period" (qtd. in Mongia, 3). In *Orientalism*, Said comes to the same line as Habib in that post colonialism seems to be a pervasive term which affects the overall aspects of human life especially in the Third World. Said seed the relationship between 'occident' and 'Orient' as a relationship "of power, of domination, and varying degree of complex hegemony" (Said "introduction" 23). The vast majority of postcolonial critics and theorists seem to agree that the discourse surroundings 'post-nationalism' offers a more satisfactory reading of the colonial experience. The random flow of global capital is accompanied by an unprecedented movement of people, technologies, and information from one location to another. In such circumstances post colonialism is

"just another name for the globalization of cultures and histories" (qtd. in Ashorft et al., 126).

Post-colonial theory deals most significantly with cultural contradictions, ambiguities and ambivalences. It accounts for the "displacement of Third World people in the metropolitan centers and the cultural syncretism generated by First/Third World intersections in a relatively binaristic, fixed and stable mapping of power relations between 'colonizer/colonized' and 'center/periphery' (Shohat, 107-8). It seems that such articulations help to create discourse which allows for movement, mobility and fluidity. It further helps to foreground hybridity and syncreticism to imbricate central and peripheral cultures. Over the last decades the term has been replaced with what earlier went under the names of 'Third World' or 'Commonwealth' literature, "to describe colonial discourse analysis, to detail the situation of migrant groups within First World states and to specify oppositional reading practices" (Mongia, "Introduction" 2).

Postcolonial studies involve a dialectical relationship between European 'ontology,' and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity. It has generated an enormous corpus of specialized academic writing because of its diverse and interdisciplinary uses. Nevertheless, although much has been written under its rubric 'post colonialism' itself remains a diffuse and nebulous term. On one level, the 'post' signifies after, it potentially inhibits forceful articulation of what one might call "neo-colonialism". It includes a multi-racial/ethnic composition that have been subject to political and economic structural domination of recently independent third world countries such as Libya. India etc" (2).

The term 'postcolonial' carries with it the implication that colonialism is now a matter of past, undermining colonialism's economic political and cultural deformities traces in the present: "the 'post-colonial' inadvertently glosses over the fact that global hegemony, even in the post-cold war era, persists in form other than colonial rule" (qtd. in Shohat, 105). Shohat seems to define postcolonial in relation to other terms such as 'neo-colonial' and 'post-independence' which allows for mutual illumination of the concepts. 'New-colonialism' is designated for the broad relations of geo-economic hegemony. Likewise, 'post-independence' invokes an achieved history of resistance, shifting the analytical focus to the emergent nation state. Therefore, 'post-independence' provides an analytical spaces for confronting some issues like religion, ethnicity, patriarchy, sex, gender etc.

In sum, the concept of post-colonial should be interrogated and contextualized historically, geopolitically and culturally. But what is apparent is that a postcolonial study is not necessarily the righteousness of one conceptual frame over another one. Rather, each frame illuminates only partial aspects of systemic modes of dominations, overlapping collective identities, and of contemporary global relations. Shohat concludes: "[it] can address the politics of location which is important not only for pointing out historical and geographical contradictions and differences but also for reaffirming historical and geographical links, structural analogies,, and openings for agency and resistance" (112)

### **Diaspora**

Diaspora, the voluntary or forcible movement of people from their homelands into a new region, is a central historical fact of colonization. The concept of Diaspora has been epistemologically derived from that of dispersal experiences of those ancient

jews almost four thousand years ago. It deals with the strategic disintegration of territory, race, language, culture, religion, history, sovereignty. The concept of diaspora goes back to a very long history of human civilization-from a scattering of the Jews after the Babylonian captivity to the colonial and postcolonial phases. Ashcroft et al. remark on the connection of diaspora to colonialism: itself was a radically diasporic movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlement of millions of Europeans over the entire world" (69). This remark illuminates that colonialism and diaspora have been running simultaneously which cover a wide range of different cultural and ethnic groups who shared a common culture and religious commitment. Observing diaspora from this standpoint, Thomas Bloom Hansen opines:

The term 'diaspora' not only transmits a certain sense of shared destiny and predicament, but also an inherent will to preservation and celebration of the ancestral culture and equality inherent impulse towards forging and maintaining like with the 'old country' Thus, diaspora is contentious of the ancestral culture and culturally inherent impulses. (24)

At the heart of diaspora the key concepts such as dislocation, cultural identity, hybridity, ethnicity, and nativism are merged. After the slave trade, the need of cheap agriculture labors in colonial plantation economics was met by the development of system of indentured labor. This involved transporting a large population of agriculture labor from highly populated areas, such as China and India, to the areas where they were needed for farming and plantation. Analyzing the history of colonial diaspora, Ashcroft et al.

The recent diasporic theorists engage on the discussion of how the two generations have their different starting points regarding diaspora. Radha krishnan remarks: "the older generation cannot afford to involve India in authoritarian mode to resolve problems in diaspora and the younger generation would be ill advised to indulge in a spree of forgetfulness about where they have come from" (206).

Shukla talks about the situation of South Asian diaspora in "Location of South Asian Diaspora". "the expression of South Asian diaspora produces a range of analytical dilemmas, not least of which a kind of essentializing of character, identity and inclination" (552). Her point seems to question the origins and location of diaspora. It deals with the real and imagined world of all people, especially migrant people. She foreshadows a brief assertion on the relationship between India and the world as:

Postcolonial theory has established one important axis on which the development of South Asian subjectivities turn. The realities, memories and rebuttals to British colonialism have profoundly affected diasporic people and their cultures. In idea and deed, colonialism, then, has created a language in which to understand the development of nationalisms, at home and abroad. (553)

South Asian migrant culture seems to have more inclination to utilize transnationalism or diaspora as explanatory set of instructions that post colonialism can be of service. This field also contains questions related to gender sexuality that illuminate the imaginaries central to South Asian diaspora cultural productions and experiences. Shukla connotes the old and new nations of diaspora in a postwar period where diverse multicultural societies have existed. Concerning Indians, she says: "the

language of nationality has been ultimately tied to and created within the actual power structures of colonialism" (560).

Shukla finds the most dramatic of illustrative events regarding diasporic effect is the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (Rusahdie: 1998). It has tremendous response elicited from British Muslims, largely migrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh. She defines the impact of Rushdie's work around the globe: "spectacular events to support the Iranian Ayatollah's death warrant, Muslims in London and other British cities burned books as well as effigies of Rushdie" (563).

Shukla further reiterates: Expressing a sense of profound victimization by the text itself, the Rushdie affair, and its effects in diasporic cultures, a text has to do not only with whether it is actually read by community members but also with what it and its author represent because they command psychic and even bodily identification" (563). This citation encapsulates a vital trend that the local-global tension of diasporic formations expresses the specificity of migrant communities. Thus, the version of postcolonial studies is to a larger extent focuses on questions of diaspora, migration, exile, displacement.

Simultaneously, it is important to remain attentive to the differences within diaspora or between overlapping diaspora. To assert this Sen's skepticism in "The Women's Review of Books" seems relevant: "in a different register, we need to move from one position, 'is this hybrid?' to the question, 'how is this hybrid?' (8). Sen further interrogates. "are all hybridity, to put it bluntly, built equal or how useful is it to read Shani Mootoo, Meera Syal, Jhumpa Lahiri and Anita Desai as all parts of South Asian diaspora?" (8).

Contemporary discussion on diaspora speculates on some theoretical relation between the concept of diaspora and double consciousness. The debates about multiculturalism and transnationalism demand a rethinking of diaspora. This debate finds a resonance in resurgent multicultural debates. In this regard, Dayal in "Diaspora and Double Consciousness" quotes James Clifford: "we are seeing the emergence of new maps: broad land cultural areas, populated by strong, diasporic ethnicities assimilated to dominant nation states" (46). Dayal sees a strategic value in cultivating a diasporic double consciousness. "It affords an interstitial perspective on what it means to be, say, 'British' or 'American' a perspective that allows for the emergence of excessive and differential meaning of belonging," Dayal contends, "as well as a 'parasitic' location, where double consciousness is not synthetically and dialectically resolved, but rather enables and internal critique while suspending the mundane questions of assimilation" (47). Thus, Dayal finds 'double-consciousness' as bearing a strategic value of cultivation. This helps European perspective to have the "differential meaning of belonging as well as parasitic." That is why the question of assimilation for him is not more than a mundane, he conceptualized double consciousness as "neither just this/nor just that". (47)

The diasporic perspective as double-consciousness seems fruitful particularly in such emphasis like transnational scope for contemporary Cultural Studies. All diasporic elements seem to have the automatic possession of double consciousness, that they are fully self reflexive ambivalent and cosmopolitan riding of cultural differences. To prove this Dayal insists that "diaspora in the First World, furthermore, is not always an elective or volunteerism condition diasporic sensibility presented in the fiction of Hanif Kureishi or Anitav Ghosh is very different from that in Tayob Salih's or in Yambo Ouloguem's" (49). The cosmopolitan does not always share the

same cultural location as the refugee or the exile. The figure of diaspora defines the limit of 'nation-ness' and its operational rhetoric of assimilation or belonging, of ethnicity, of the other. Such double-consciousness holds the power to split, to render irrecoverably multiple- the official narratives that together make up the nation.

Diasporic double consciousness can be the name for transcultural studies which includes the possibilities of reading one culture's space and time from the space and time of another. It problematizes the correspondence different identity and place or biology, and the cultural differences in a more pivotal case of post colonial hybridity. Said shows a political touch regarding diaspora by the different perspectives of Nair and Fusco. He further writes:

Fusco's more fully theorized interest is in the circulation of a symbolic economy, where recognition and representation are redeemed into a new uneasiness about the confrontation of self and other in transnational frame. Both Nair and Fusco thematize double consciousness as irony. Fusco explicitly theorizes a counter-ethnographic irony, where else Nair confidently turns this irony upon the diasporic themselves. (58)

This helps to conclude that for Nair double consciousness is less politicalized, less pained. And on other hand, Fusco's sense of hybridity seems more acute, as a desire or nostalgia for some cultural solidarity. These diverse experiences of diasporic double consciousness offers a starting point for exploring the implication for cultural and postcolonial studies and criticisms.

Despite the popularity in Diasporic writing, the theory of diaspora is not free from controversies. The diasporic writers and theorists have been assailed or being

inauthentic and misrepresenting the reality. They are also critiqued for using more fantasy and exaggerating the reality of their faraway homeland in order to create an aesthetic effect on the reader or to engage large audiences. Despite the adverse criticism, fantasy is still an inevitable part of diasporic writing. It is the only source that makes it possible for the immigrant characters to be connected between their past and present.

### **Hybridity**

Hybridity is a term that commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization as the most widely used and most disputed term in post colonial theories. Hybridity is a result of bringing together of people and their culture from different parts of the world. The term is related to the traumatic colonial experience. The term hybridity has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha whose analysis of colonizer/colonized relation stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. Ashcroft et al quote Bhabha's definition: "hybridity contends that all cultural statement and system are constructed in a space that is the 'third space of enunciation'" (118).

One of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in postcolonial theory, hybridity, commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone. To culminate the scientific definition and the different forms of hybridity, Ashcroft explains, "in horticultural, the term refers to a cross breeding or cross pollination to form a third ,hybrid species, hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial, etc ... linguistic examples include pidgins and creoles languages" (119). Hybridity has frequently been used in postcolonial

discourse to mean simply cross cultural exchange. But the term has been widely criticized because it neglects the imbalance and inequality of the power relations. Ashcroft further views that “it is the ‘in –between’ space that carries the burden and meaning of culture, and this is what makes the notion of hybridity so important” (119) . By stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic and political impacts on both the colonized and the colonizer, it has been regarded as replicating assimilations policies by masking or ‘whitewashing’ cultural differences. Robert Young suggest that many terms have made the contribution to colonial discourse analysis, and concepts such as hybridity:

Hybridity provides a significant framework for that other work by emphasizing that all perspectives on colonialism share and have to deal with a common discursive medium which was also that of colonialism itself. Colonial discourse analysis can therefore look at the wide variety of texts of colonialism as something more than mere documents or evidence (120).

Young notes the influence of the term hybridity in imperial and colonial discourse. Hybridity thus became, particularly at the turn of the century, part of a colonialist discourse of racism. This is , however , the way in which some proponents of decolonization and anti-colonialism have interpreted its current uses in colonial discourse theory . The idea of hybridity also underlies other attempts to stress the mutability of cultures in the colonial and postcolonial process. It also involves the idea of an equal exchange. Hybridity is politicized so that it embarrasses the subversion and challenges the division and separation. It is similar to Bakhtin’s formulation of hybridity: “sets different points of view against each other in a conflictual structure, which returns a certain elemental, organic energy and open-endedness”( 120).

The twentieth century definition of hybridity emphasizes the concerns within a field rather than with an analysis of discrete objects, and the production of such relations. Ashcroft illustrates the occurrence of hybridity in postcolonial societies. He further remarks:

Hybridity occurs in postcolonial societies both as a result of conscious moments of culture suppression, as when the colonial power invades to consolidate political and economic control, or when settler-invaders dispossess indigenous peoples and force them to ‘assimilate’ to new social patterns. It may also occur in later periods when patterns of immigration from the metropolitan societies and from other imperial areas of influence from the metropolitan societies and from other imperial areas of influence . (87)

It is probably true to say that no postcolonial form has able to avoid the impact of the shifts shadowed upon the postcolonial world. The term hybridity has been sometimes misinterpreted as indicating that denices that traditions which all post colonial forms inevitably subscribe. The degree to which these forms became hybridized varies greatly across practices and between cultures.

### **Cultural Variation**

Culture is a fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions. Such actions then take the forms of social structure, the actually existing network of social relations. Culture and social structure are then different abstractions from the same phenomena. The culture is a term defined in a ethnographic way too. E.B. Tylor in “Culture or Civilization: Rudimentary Definition,” contends that “Culture or civilization taken in its wide

ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (11). Thus, the object or target of culture is to refresh the morals, manners and ways of life of subordinate social strata.

In the contemporary postcolonial period, the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involve in political and social authority within the world order. It forces us to involve in an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value other composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival. Homi K. Bhabha, one of the postcolonial critics, takes culture as strategy of survival:

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement. It is translational because such spatial histories of displacement make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, rather complex issues. (Bhabha 438)

In contemporary postcolonial studies, the varieties of culture and the need to acknowledge these varieties to avoid universal cultural definitions plays a vital role. In common uses the cultural diversity or cultural variation suggests the cultural authority resides not in a series of fixed and determined diverse objects but in the process of how these objects come to be known and so come into being. In this regard, Ashroft quotes Homi Bhabha: "cultural variation employs the terms as oppositions to draw a distinction between two ways of representing culture" (60). It is insufficient to record signifiers of cultural diversity which merely acknowledge a

range of separate and distinct systems of behavior, attitudes and values. Thus, Bhabha's view seems to contend that cultural differences enhance to create different identities because cultural diversity includes "a range of separate and distinct systems of behavior, attitudes and values" (60).

The cultural diversity seems to grasp the Spirit of multiculturalism, cultural exchange and culture of humanity. It also helps to know the formation of cultural totalities by emphasizing our awareness of the homogenizing effects of cultural symbols and icons. Stuart Hall in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" mentions two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. He further defines:

Cultural identity is defined in terms of its own shared cultural, a soil of collective 'one true self. Hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting division and vicissitudes of our actual history. (111)

Hall's argument regarding cultural identity seems to reflect that identity is a shared culture, and a sort of collective true self. It focuses the communal feeling and a sense of 'us'. These identities share common historical experiences and cultural codes, it connotes that cultural identity is a formation of particular social and cultural necessities which has a long historical lineage.

Cultural identity has played a critical role in the postcolonial struggles which has reshaped our perception of the world. It continues to be a very powerful and

creative force in emergent forms of representation among hitherto marginalized people. Cultural identity, which follows along the many points of similarity, has critical points of deep and significant difference that constitute what we really are, or rather what we have become. Hall expands his notion:

Cultural identity is a matter ‘becoming’ as well as that of being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Culture identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything, which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (112)

In this sense, identity is subject to continuous play of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere recovery of the past, waiting to be found, identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. It is only from this second position of the identity proposed by Hall seems that we can properly understand the traumatic character such as Indianness, Carribeanness, Africanness and Blackness.

In a nutshell, postcolonial discourse is formed in a common belief that people deprived of their root are judiciously resisting and assimilating the alien culture. Proponents of postcolonial studies like Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and others tend to theorize resistance which erupts from cultural shock and negotiation. In the light of aforementioned issues central to postcolonial discourse: hybridity, diaspora, and cultural varieties, this research proposes to trace out identities that are dislocated, particularly that of Nepali immigrants in Thapa’s *Seasons of Flight*.

### **Chapter III: Subjectivity Crisis in Thapa's *Seasons of Flight***

Manjushree Thapa establishes herself as a clear-eyed and compassionate chronicler of the lives of expatriate Nepalis and their experiences in her work, *Seasons of Flight*. Those people have left their native place and are starting families of their own, as they struggle both with tangled relationships and the demands of ultimate joy. The straddling of two cultures has been compounded with straddling of relationships. The alienation and straddling that most of the characters experience in *Seasons of Flight* by Manjushree Thapa, despite their glazing material life, is because of their displacement from native Nepali culture and adoption of unaccustomed culture in America. Thapa is primarily concerned with the problems of identity as they beset the Nepali-Americans, shipwrecked as they are between two cultures. Her reflections of her characters focus on their sense of dislocation and their complex relationship with foreign geography and environment. In Spite of her enormous appetite for good life, Prema's life reveals the lost energies of her generations; or perhaps her own inability to identify herself entirely with her adopted homeland. This is the proto-colonial curse that afflicts her, causing much of her family's ensuing chronicle to unfold in a void. Yet, when Prema's own voice comes to the fore, in the end, the novel is redeemed.

Prema's talent for dialect and mimicry is brilliantly exploited in this segment; Prema's love-life embodies the decline of the Nepaliness, and the Nepali-American dilemma, in the moving and perfectly realized conclusion of the novel. Prema's view of Nepal is mediated through the diaspora sensibility and perspective of a Nepali writer; this story of a life lived on the margins of Americanism describes, with equal insight and objectivity, the racism and fallacies of globalization, and the misogynistic

superstitions holding Nepal back from progress. The changing geographical and political landscapes of Nepal are skillfully deployed as a backdrop to the central story.

This chapter is designated to reflect on most crucial issues for the study of postcolonial world in Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* and the world of Prema, a representative figure of first generation of Nepali immigrants pertaining to the effects of diaspora, hybridity, and cultural variation. Moreover, the chapter outlines the narrative voices on the impact of cultural dislocation to serve our purpose of research.

In the opening pages of *Seasons of Flight*, Prema, a young Nepali living in the US, is asked where she's from. She tries explaining: “‘It is near India’, or ‘Where Mt Everest is’, or ‘You’ve heard of the Sherpas?’”, so that they might say, ‘Geez, that’s real far’, or ‘I could have sworn you were Mexican/ Italian/Spanish’, or ‘You speak good English’” (1). In this efficient, endearingly familiar way, second-time novelist Manjushree Thapa introduces us to a story about displacement, self-definition and one South Asian woman’s search for fulfillment.

Prema’s story starts in a small village near Kathmandu, ascending quickly through the loss of her mother in childhood and the commonplace hardships of poverty, to a college degree in forestry, resulting in a job with an NGO. Secondary plot-lines include a younger sister who runs off with Maoist rebels when they come calling, Prema’s romance with a fellow NGO worker and a stoic, undemanding father who only wants to see her daughter go forward in her life.

Thapa has a light touch and maintains an admirable balance between telling a story and making socio-cultural observations. The beginning of the story is resonant with all the ambiguities and complexities of the many different cultural experiences it implicates. It addresses several aspects of first generation Nepali-Americans. All the

characters in the novel are subjected in one way or another way to overt or subtle forms of western domination. The material fulfillment does not blur the divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations. The continuing unequal treatment of immigrant peoples in American society testifies to the fact that Thapa's narrative is the continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. At the literal level, this citation provokes humor in the narrator's commentary that to get the news of her Father "she watched the news," But it punches at the middle of confused relationship in between family members of immigrant Nepalis. What if a daughter realizes her father's presence only when going through a newsreel.

One day, in a spirit of indifference, Prema signs up for the US Green Card Lottery. When she wins, her response is characteristically laconic, as if resigned to her fate. Her inner world, however, is taut with emotion and she turns her face westward with a faint quickening of hope. When she finds a lover in the US, an attractive Guatemalan, she responds with an ardour native to her own passionate nature and her mountain culture. She knows her path is an "ever-directionless zigzag trail" (7). In the spirit of a true seeker, she exceeds the stereotype. Her strength lies in the miniature scale of her aspirations. Like a tiny field-mouse "setting out to find a niche in the limitless sprawl of the North American cornfield," (24) she succeeds by being undeterred by her smallness.

The generational gap that prevails in the family of Nepali-immigrants can be noticed through the very formal delivery of stuffs and expressions that serve to deposit the whole narrative as a conspicuous commentary of their existence. Life in America, as it is believed, serves to strengthen economic security. But the opposite is applicable in Prema's life:

Thapa's work involves in a dialectical relationship between the impulses to create or recreate independent local identity. It includes a bizarre life that has been subjected to political and economic structural domination to immigrant people from third world country. The inconsistency of psychology in Nepali-Americans is the result of inconsistency of a living place that they could call the home.

Family and distance between relatives home is the revered concept in Nepal, and even daughters are married off in nearby villages in Nepal. But what a contradiction in the lives of people living in America who come from same heritage: she lived on a separate coast thousands of miles from where she grew up, a place where her parents knew no one, where neither of her parents, until today, had set foot" (11). After losing a root perhaps, it remains as a fatal curse that even a daughter and father cannot meet each-other.

Not quite the same, not quite the other, Prema stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out: "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 couldn't get far enough away from it" (2). Prema is both physically and psychologically distanced from her home. Home for her has been a place that naturally haunts her as she is lonely in the foreign land. The narrator further unfolds Prema's dilemma: "She lived now in America in a spare uncluttered flat with a transient feel. Her only memento from home was an ammonite, a lustrous stone the color of shale, the shape of lopsided egg. her mother, devout, used to worship the coil at the center as a Shaligram, an avatar of Bishnu praying for what?" (2-3).

Prema wants to reinvent herself in America, but faces the ultimate dilemma of humanity in exile, for she repeatedly ventures through the question, "what is there to

being human?” (3). Most of the time she remains inconclusive: “the body which desires, persistent and unreasonable; thoughts and temperaments, instincts, a capacity to harm, and history, which lingers as a spectre” (3). She roams through uncertainty: “every now and then she still wondered what she was doing in America” (3).

There are many reasons for a Nepali individual to adopt another country for living, and the most persistent is the political cause. Thapa boldly juxtaposes the political insecurity with the demands of globalization in her work. The seemingly voluntary retirement into the foreign land appears at once to hold the forced exile as the native soil is no longer livable for an independent professional. The life at home and of family members living there becomes a constant cause of anxiety for the immigrants. Thapa observes the recent political turmoil in Nepal:

By then the war had come to her birth village. The Maoist rebels had come one day, recruiting one member from each family. From Prema's family they had taken her sixteen-year-old sister Bijaya. Her father had feared a similar fate for Prema. Month after month when she had telephoned home, her father had advised her not to visit. Years past. She didn't go back. (4)

Thapa's objective analysis of the situation reveals the diasporic existence of those people who come to cities in search of study and work. They cannot go back to their birth villages for the fear of being recruited into Maoist army. Even her father is reluctant about her returning back to the village as her only sister is already taken away.

Thapa presses Prema to be a part of this 'luck game' in Nepal and other places of underdeveloped world where the US 'pulls' citizens from across the world and

allows them to live and work with a status of a Green Card holder. Thapa lines up Prema in the long line of applicants for American diversity visa who comprise of top-level beurocrats and professionals from all walks of life: “yet, one day, she entered her name in the American green card lottery . . . late in the season of winds, the season of restlessness, when the breezes shook the last of the dead leaves off the trees, denuding the branches” (10).

Most of the stories of Prema’s home country, Nepal, are her retrospections. The events simultaneously occur back and forth between Nepal and America. Its like something around her room, inside and outside of it, catches Prema’s attention and holds her for hours. This swinging back and forth is the objective correlative of Prema’s psychological state of mind itself. There is Prema, a caregiver in a posh Washington mansion who repeatedly goes back to her village and country in her mind. And there is Prema who is attending to American state of affairs. And a real question persists through out the text: which one is the real Prema! Perhaps this is what postcolonial critics call ‘half and half way of life.’ The story is told from this perspective of Prema inconsistent state of mind where she paces back and forth, always recalling her ‘before’ and ‘later’ of life: “three years later she was working as a homecare attendant for an old lady, Esther King, who lived in a beachside neighborhood in Los Angeles” (13). And yes, this citation demands for the further exploration of the exploitation of migrant workers whose profession back home is simply ignored, their previous life become irrelevant. For example, Prema has been a officer who has specialized in forestry and soil conservation. In Los Angeles, she is among the ‘fortunate’ immigrants who make her living as a homecare attendant. And many other immigrants are forced to believe that they never had any past. So past

becomes a constant source of their nagging, after some years in America immigrants are not so sure of their past.

It is equally hard for Prema to get accustomed to the demands of free society in terms of love and sex relationships. Prema comes from a Hindu family in Nepal where both these concepts of love and sex follows after marriage. And, both these necessities are viewed as inseparable practices. But, America demands Prema to get accustomed to the practices before marriage. Marriage in America is altogether a malign concept: so foreign as love and sex are immediate and accidental which can occur and break in no time. Thapa further unravels Prema's American experience: "she had already had American sex once, and had found it wanting in love . . . it was enough to have an attachment to one person, and to have left him" (38). In America, sex is less spiritual and more physical need. Moreover, Prema hops from one relationship to another in search of 'true' love. Love happens to her over and over again and with someone whose cultural upbringing is completely different to hers: "rare though it was to meet an American who knew anything about Nepal, it did not occur to Prema that she and Luis would be friends" (39). Though Luis does not know many things about Nepal as "his notion of Nepal was touristy" (39), and "Americans didn't know where she was from" (39), he happens to evoke a sense of love for Prema.

Her love life is the inevitable consequence of her longing for more: "till she had won the green card lottery, Prema had been content enough, having wrested a middle class life out of a childhood of poverty" (45). She is supposed to remain contented with what she had as "there was nothing wrong with what she had" (45). 'More' is the buzzword for a Nepali middle class then which equally applies to Prema as well: "yet it seemed she wanted more" (45). The narrator pushes on the irony

of Nepali middle class, their lust for 'more' which is inflicted as a curse of capitalism and economic liberalism. This wanting bluntly puts the middle class within the 'circle' of need. It is long before they realize that there is no gateway from this vicious circle. In between, many things are bound to change; their religion, nationality, culture and even relatives including the loved ones.

Thapa presents Prema as the part and parcel of this global phenomenon. Prema voluntarily submits herself to this phenomenon as she "lacked the heart to stay (in Nepal)" (46). And, again, the political insecurity fortifies Prema's desire to give her heart away: "there had been thousands of such army arrests-abductions-during the course of the war and few had ever made the news" (48). As the narrator puts it:

The Maoists would not give up, and neither would the king and the army; and the 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 on progressing? America was rich, it was proper, solid. She kept feeling a shivering in the marrow. America. Nepal. America. Nepal. (51)

Domestic political turmoil obviously provides with some reason to migrate, but the discourse which divides West from the South Asia, the circulation of the knowledge that 'West' fares well in economic as well as political solidarity to the Asian and African societies, fuels the desire of 'third-world' people to opt for migration. That the 'third-world' is 'shabby,' 'insecure,' and 'yet to be civilized,' plays with the sentiment of people around here which is why they migrate in-masse. The like of Prema are the most potent believers as now they have something to loose,

as they have a 'bright' future ahead, and as they have now accumulated the 'knowledge' of the world. Though a birth place with friends and family around, Nepal becomes a 'hated' choice to spend a life-time whereas America at once becomes a mystery garden where one can live 'free' earning in hundred-folds turning a simple Nepali into a millionaire in no time. America is the desired destination, a passion of a life time for many people, including Prema.

Prema now is placed in the 'ocean' of faiths, cultures, races, and development. Luis appears as a boatman who alone can rescue her from the aloofness of life, her long and 'native' desire to mingle into a promising and permanent relationship. Thapa writes: "She asked him out in the end her swim in the ocean had changed her somehow" (68). She feels as if her desperation has now come to an end: "for the first time in America she was happy" (68). She feels it is possible to "reinvent" herself: "every morning now living the hot, stifled inland for the coast, she kept wanting to go farther" (68).

Thapa explores the nature of profession and the role of 'middleman' in 'fixing' things for the newly arrived Asian immigrants in America. The people who went before manage places to live and work for the later droppings in the cities of America for the handsome sum of money. But, neither the job or the place the newly arrived are promised to land into is realized in truth. Thus, newly immigrated people in America find it very hard to get a nice and expected start in the new land. Their first day begins with uncertainty and anxiety. The narrator thus explores the anxiety-filled first day of Prema in the US:

When she awoke the next day, the husband, Sushil, told her that his wife had gone to work. Neeru worked at an Indian restaurant where the

middleman's nephew had also found a job for Prema. 'That's the best kind of work you can find when you come first to this country, bahini,' Sushil explained to her delicately, as though to allay her disappointment. I myself deliver pizza for a food chain. (89)

South Asian immigrants in the US either land up working in a restaurant or some cleaning job irrespective of their academic credentials or trainings back home. This is more hardened by the laws for the immigrants. Prema's life as a US citizen begins thus with a second class status. Prema's life is further marred by her lack of the knowledge of American life and custom and the accent, which is equally alien to her, mostly unlike the English she had been accustomed to back home. And Prema share this state of affairs with many other immigrants as well: "others too would share the absurdities of life here" (92). America becomes some 'gothic' place for many others:

They [immigrants] talked of Americans-foreigners-with some perplexity. 'Every time a black man comes to the shop, I'm worried he will rob us,' one man said. 'Don't be friendly with Mexicans, one woman told Prema every time they met: if they talk to you, just say no hablaespanol.' Another woman told her, 'never trust the Chinese. Or the Koreans. (92-3)

The notion of cultural purity exists as America claims herself to be multicultural. In the multicultural restaurants, cities and subways there is always a reason to be offended by someone who is not white. Every other citizen from country other than America and every man/woman who does not belong to 'white' class is to be 'watched out' and 'not believed.' This notion creates a hierarchy and discrimination among citizens in America. Friends suddenly turn out to be foes in this

place of earth. African descendants are portrayed as robbers, Mexicans as thugs, Koreans and Chinese as untrustworthy, and Indians as some very dangerous element to believe to. This Prema hears with a certain palpitation. She feels as if there is no one she can trust to. This situation compounds to ferment a constant notion about immigrants in general.

Beside of legally documented citizens like Prema, America is also a heaven for other illegal immigrants. The narrator pecks a cursory glance at the varying status of immigrant workers beginning with the place where Prema works: “the staffs were furtive about their private lives [. . .] Prema found out that [. . .] Ganga and Shyam were illegal; undocumented workers, Narayan had arrived years ago, on a student visa, now expired” (93). The illegal immigrants are not arrested or deported to their home country as they are ready to work in places where American themselves are reluctant to work, and in a low wage. They are kept there to fulfill the crushing demand for lowly paid manual jobs.

Flashy American-ness begins to crawl over Prema all of sudden: “she had become one of those Americans whose lives she had wanted for herself” (87). Imagination about homeland forms the vital part of discussion among Nepali immigrants: “her compatriots spoke in the Nepali language among themselves; and their talk inevitably turned homeward; the Maoist rebels, the king and the army, the faltering movement for peace” (92). Home begins to come as a distant thought after sometime for Prema:

After the operator had fetched her father, she had told him she had found work. Chhori, you're on your way, then,' he had said in his soft, gravelly voice. She had agreed: 'yes ba.' She didn't offer to send him

money: what little she earned at the Shalimar she needed for herself. Nor did he ask her to send any. Still when she hung up, she felt she had abandoned him, and her sister, to their broken fates. The war. She did not know what to do with this feeling. She never called home again. (96-7)

In her voyage to be an American, the thought of her country, her village and her father, all become hindrances. The thought of home alone comes with multiple obligations and responsibilities which Prema cannot afford to fulfill. And again these thoughts were her barriers to individualist American life. Prema gets accustomed into American living: “so began a lonely year of stocking the shelves with tinned food, bottled drinks, packaged meats” (104). But she, like many other immigrants, is careful about her crispy Dollars as if that is the single thing she wants in life: “on payday Prema would count each dollar carefully: this note is legal tender for all debts, public and private she felt desperate-and was this what poverty did?- she felt hungry, wanting” (105). First, she falls for Andy:

‘I have a date,’ Prema announced: ‘the man who is making the house.’ ‘Mr home builder, next door? Oh, he’s all right.’ Susan winked. ‘I went out with him last week, he’s stud. You know what you’ll need, though? She rummaged through her handbag and brought out a plastic pack. A condom. Keep this handy, she said. I mean it! A girl’s gottawatchout for herself!’ then she hugged Prema. Oh honey, knock'em dead!’ (108)

In search of the physical pleasure of American body, Prema rummages through some leftovers of her room mate, and Andy comes in perfect as one who was

amazing in bed with her room mate. Unlike in her home country, she is quite sure and prepared to gift him a condom and get into his bed in the first date. Perhaps, she is getting accustomed to the American life. But some memories never end: “When he [Andy] kissed her she kissed him back . . . but when he held her she couldn’t help thinking of Rajan” (109). In the midst of love-embrace, Prema sees Rajan’s face. Rajan is non other than an NGO activist in Nepal, Prema’s first love. So, the more intense the situation gets, the more she is back to her country. Homeland and memories back home lingers there within: “Prema’s hunger, her wanting, remained as did her desire for what, she did not know” (111).

Prema’s condition is best portrayed in the *Indian Express*, Devyani Oniyal contends that Prema’s journey “follows a trajectory familiar to many immigrants” (23). Oniyal writes:

Winning a green card in the US government’s diversity lottery, a young Nepali girl arrives in Los Angeles. Her journey from finding a corner of home away from home — in her case living with a Nepali family in Little Nepal — to moving out and embracing the American way of life to realising that the past can be put on hold but can’t really be shaken off and that reinventing oneself is not as final as it sounds. “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. (23)

In Manjushree Thapa’s novel, Prema leaves behind a country caught between Maoist insurgency and brutal counter-insurgency, and a sister who has joined the Maoists. Her flight takes her from her village up in the hills of Nepal to a beachside neighborhood of LA. She leaves behind an ageing father to work as a homecare

attendant of an elderly American woman. Oniyal empathetically places the dilemma of expatriates at the heart of *Seasons of Flight*.

*Seasons of Flight* is the 'zigzag' tale of a young Nepali woman, Prema, whose life follows a butterfly-like trajectory in every sense of the word. Flitting from her village in eastern Nepal to Los Angeles, she juggles jobs and men to little satisfaction, before she finally begins to connect with the world around her. Manjushree Thapa's latest novel will speak to those who have sought a destiny apart from what the Nepali milieu offers them.

A review posted in *Himal South Asia* by Vidyadhar Gadgil further confirms the nature of Thapa's writings:

When Thapa's *The Tutor of History* was published, in 2001, it was hailed as the first significant novel to be written by a Nepali author in English. It has been a long wait for the author's next novel, but *Seasons of Flight* has been well worth the wait. A nice change of pace, this slim novel does not deal with politics, except as background. Prema, a young Nepali woman from a remote village, wins a 'diversity visa' to the US and migrates to Los Angeles. Finding work as a home-care attendant for the elderly Esther, Prema gets involved in an intense, live-in relationship with the divorced Luis, the son of a Guatemalan immigrant father and a WASP mother. She finally breaks off the relationship for reasons she cannot explain clearly, just as she cannot fully understand why she left Nepal in the first place. Dealing sensitively with the dilemmas faced by immigrants who find themselves at home neither in their land of origin nor in their adopted

country, Thapa avoids the temptation to make larger political or social statements about the two societies. (68)

A simple tale simply told, Thapa's lucid prose describing Prema's confused thoughts and emotions rings true to life, and is the novel's most significant strength. The device used to bring the book to a conclusion – Prema finding a purpose to her life in her efforts to protect a rare type of butterfly – is unconvincing, but this is a minor blemish in a near-perfect performance.

The process of accommodating into alien world, language and culture comes at the cost of own culture and language. Prema is thrown into a world of Luis's friends and families; mostly their language and accent is incomprehensible and confusing. Yet, Prema is obliged to accept her destination for the fulfillment of 'more' in life: "this despite the gaps-small and large-in their worlds (Some were minor) Prema just found queer" (112). She is given to some nodding and yea-saying during the conversations: "other gaps arose from English language: misunderstood words and phrases" (112). And Prema further takes a dip into the confusing ocean of American people and culture: "soon Prema got to know all Luis's friends. Americans . . . they were all so . . . exotic" (114). She goes on liking these 'queer' people. She however feels puzzled at their irony of living: "Prema thought back to what Luis had said, early on , about life in America being about working and shopping and paying taxes and dying" (117). Her decisive Americanness comes with her decision to move with Luis into her flat: "a few weeks later, Luis suggested she move into his flat, and she readily said yes" (117). Yet, sense of awkward loneliness results from western self-centric living: "she wouldn't recognize either of her home mates if she were to pass them on the streets a few years later" (118). Seer utilitarian logic pervades West: "nothing about their acquaintance had any destiny" (118). After adopting many of American

ways and a American man by her bed side, Prema seems to find her longing realized: “finally . . . finally she had reached America,” the occasion she marks with adding christian culture to her celebrating list, “Prema celebrated her first thanksgiving that year” (121).

Home, nonetheless, remains in the food she wish to prepare, the Nepali taste does not forsake her: “Prema made black dal in Nepali style, though without an iron pot it came out brown, not black, and the main herb, jimbu, was missing,” (127) unable however to satisfy her taste because of some missing ingredients. This is symbolic of her incapability to brew home in foreign land; had she found all the ingredients, the air would have spoiled the taste. Her dream of composing home in the foreign land thus remains unfulfilled though she has found some luck in making herself American.

Luis is white but not sufficiently white to call himself ‘pure’ American. Most of the people in America come from a mixed blood: “Prema was still trying to think through all this; ‘if you are half Guatemalan-American, and Tina is Chinese-American, this makes July...what?’” (134). Identity crisis looms as a part of American existence. This feeling of motherly love that Prema feels for her country and culture is a distant thought in America. Hybridity is typically exemplified in July’s (Luis’s daughter) case, and Prema now shrivels for her destination too.

Sometimes, she cannot delineate love with hatred for her ‘lost’ home. In Nepal, a child has to realize his/her parents’ love for him/her in their bickering and naggings; parents are not so vocal about their love to their children. Prema has this mixed feeling about her childhood and mother:

She felt, instead, the wounds of her childhood she saw her mother with blankets drawn over her, a coal fire by her bedside. Unconscious. And in a flash it came to her; like her mother she had followed love. A dread seeped through her. Her father was whispering something into her mother's ear. Prema crept forward to hear. She heard him saying, 'it's not important. Her mother shook her head. 'it matters, she said, adamantly. 'only a son can open the gates of heaven. (157)

Because she is a female child, she becomes the victim of the superstition that looms large in Nepali society. Traditional Nepali society prefers male child to female child: a male child is believed to offer a chance for past souls to elevate into the heaven by offering certain forms of ritualized water and grains, which the female child is not allowed to do. Her parents seem to have wished for a male child as their first. This love-hate relationship emerges as a major force to denounce Nepali and more specifically Hindu culture of upbringing children. This in turn creates a sore point in the psychology of a child which Prema shares with most of her fellow beings. Prema is not quite certain with her affiliation to her home culture.

The fundamental curse inflicted to immigrants is that they repeatedly relapse into the memory of their home which in turn renders them with a sense of loss and sense of committing sin. They feel as if they are being watched. When sleeping, eating, and rehearsing his culture with foreign body becomes a part of daily routine for Prema, she feels a strong urge to escape: “it was then that she realizes she had to go; she had to set out again on her zigzag trail but which direction was she to take this time? that she did not know, she had lost her way” (161).

Time and again she attempts to recreate her past, sometimes visiting Little Nepal and other times savoring the taste of original Nepali cuisines: “the momos were soft and succulent, the chicken savoury with onion, cumin and coriander Prema felt she had never eaten anything quite nourishing” (172).

And, Time and again, her dreams for a permanent settlement in relationship is shattered, like her relationship with Luis is getting worse as she feels alienated with him now, a sense of loss makes its mark again: "He wanted her to stay. The relationship was a trap. It confused her. Or Luis confused her. He tempted her to think: may be there was no problem. Or the problem lay with her, with her being – abnormal. Jagged, unmade" (177) .

The problem is not Prema’s. Neither Luis has anything to do with this scattered state of relationships. This is because of the crisis of identity inherent in the psychology of the immigrant that the relationship with the immigrant succumbs to failure. Since capitalization of lost culture is almost impossible in the embrace of foreign culture, the relationship is bound to fail. The marriage between two worlds is a fictional theme which does not easily materialize into reality.

Luis demands to repair the damage: ““So take me to your world’- Luis softened” (186). Luis wants to venture through Prema’s culture. But Prema is unreparingly desperate: ““I do not have the world’-Prema cried” (186). She further pours her angst, "I left the world I had, and do not belong in the one I'm in now-your world” (186). Prema outcries the ultimate helplessness of immigrants: “I do not have any place to take you, Luis [. . .] I do not have a place in the world” (186). This pathetic resignation of Prema is the theme of this research. Prema, a young Nepali immigrant to US recognize that there is no recognition of people like her. Her identity

is jeopardized, squeezed in between two worlds. The world she belonged to is already left far behind; and the new world is altogether foreign, it will remain so for the rest of life because she was never a part of it.

Losing all her vitality and desire for better life that Prema had cultivated earlier when she left Nepal, she now lives a life like that of a pendulum of a clock, having meshed up all possible options of sticking to either side of the world:

She was left to the world. Tracing her way along her ever-directionless zigzag trail. Its been an eon.' If she lived frugally for a few months, she would be able to buy an airplane ticket back to Nepal. But what would she do there? What would she do here ,though? Nepal? America? America/? Nepal? Everything felt wrong. (190-91)

To take sanctuary from her indecision, Prema very fiercely urges herself to come back to Nepal: “she began to leave home early” (191). The following observations of the narrator is adrift with the questions of immigrant people’s supposedly successful life: "This was the life she had chosen? She was drifting and drifting. Not progressing. Just getting through one day after another. Only surviving. A Nepali from high misty hills. A nobody lost in America and everybody feels the same. Even she needed to lead a complete life. Could she, though?"(194).

And comes the summation of the whole work, the process of making a butterfly from the caterpillar, from which context the title for the work has been chosen, the season of flight. Thapa casts an observant eye over the time when a butterfly-turned- caterpillar pushes into the air:

For a long time the butterfly stayed still. Then suddenly it flew, its grey blue dorsal wings beating swiftly. All that was visible was the flutter of blue. When the flower-beads were consumed, the caterpillars would have dropped off the plant, burrowing underground for pupation. The hot autumn would have passed. The weather would have cooled over wintertime; the rains would have soaked the dunes. The warm spring, too would have passed eventually. And when summertime came around again, the chrysalises would have undergone a violent metamorphosis, enlarging dramatically, and transforming, messily, from caterpillar to butterfly. They would have eventually emerged from below the ground, fully formed. Unfolding their wings, blood would have rushed through the veins, then dried, forming a delicate superstructure. Only then would the butterfly be ready for the season of flight. there they were. Or here was one. A tiny creature staying still for long stretches , then taking flight in a flutter of blue. (201)

However, it also refers to the Third World diaspora circumstances from forced exile to voluntary immigration within First World metropolises. Thapa's text revolves around practices, psychological condition and concrete historical process, and to the intermingling of all these. Thapa exposes the forms of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once colonized Third World comes to be framed in the west. Thus, for Thapa, Prema's condition in America seems to direct the attention to inequalities in modes of representation. *Seasons of Flight* initiates wholesale critiques of Western Structure of knowledge and power, particularly after decolonization of nation states. Most fundamentally, the wanderlust of Prema is the consequence of the

economic, political and cultural impact of loss of cultural root, the contestation of forms of domination, and the articulation of political and cultural identities.

## Chapter IV: Conclusion

### Subjectivity Crisis due to Cultural Variation

This research comes to illumine Thapa's immigrant characters and their experiences as second generation of Indian immigrants in America-- that is, life of immigrant is strongly compelling to think about but terrible to experience. Immigrant's life is the unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. Each and every attempt in this paper resonates with Thapa's discovery of alienated self in her characters in *Seasons of Flight*. The material achievement that the immigrant family gets is permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever, living the life spiritually orphaned and alienated. Though true exile is a condition of terminal loss, it has been transformed into seemingly potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture. Expatriates have become accustomed to thinking of the modern existence itself as spiritually orphaned and alienated. However, the characters in Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* have taken this anxiety and estrangement as granted. But the frustrations and miseries that mark the life of people living in exile is imposed.

The losses it inflicts who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds is obscure and horrendous. Prema has to suffer despite affluence. Prema's father becomes a permanent sufferer. All these lives in Thapa's story are the victims of globalization—the most ubiquitous phenomenon of our time. Exile goes against the notion of humanism—it is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible. The poesy of transnational and transcultural life is a fiction created to justify western 'universalism.' This research reveals the same ambiguity of diasporic existence in

Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight*. Beginning with the critical insights into Thapa's work, this research has subsequently interwoven the theoretical framework upon which Thapa's story has been analyzed. The juxtaposition of material fulfillment and existential jeopardy in Thapa's convincing tale is the point of departure, as is stated in hypothesis earlier.

The whole research comes to conclude that the true happiness of human being lies in his/her affirmation of undeterred identity, and that can come only from where his/her home is. Human life is not a 'melting pot' which can easily assimilate to foreign culture. Rather, the forced existence draws human life to insurmountable loss of self. And this sense of loss and deprivation results in deep-rooted unhappiness.

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