

CHARTING PREMA'S JOURNEY IN MANJUSHREE THAPA'S  
SEASONS OF FLIGHT

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## ABSTRACT-

*Manjushree Thapa's Seasons of Flight is the account of a young girl Prema who leaves behind her familiar background to go the U.S., an unknown territory for her which poses a challenge to her individuality due to cultural and linguistic differences. She struggles to invent a space for herself, explores possibilities and capabilities of her own with courage. She attempts to get assimilated into the western culture to certain extent which helped her coping with the unfamiliar atmosphere. She struggles without giving up - finds love, experiences physical company of her lover. The journey to the U.S. becomes an exploration of her own identity and self. The novel exhibits the effect of political unrest in Nepal on the common masses of the countrymen.*

**Keyword-** Individuality, Journey, Self-Assertion, Belongingness, Language, Memory

Manjushree Thapa's novel *Seasons of Flight* is about the struggle of the protagonist who is affected by the political unrest and conflicts between Maoist group and the government of Nepal. The protagonist Prema immigrates to the U.S. through a chance happening of winning a lottery which allows her to immigrate to the U.S. The novel is an exceptional journey of the protagonist who is from Nepal. The Nepali diaspora literature has made a significant place in the south Asian literature. The journey for Prema to the U.S. enriches her life experiences and gives her new insights. The journey was torturous for her. The novel exhibits a woman's experience of diaspora who come from Nepal, a south Asian country.

A chance happening of winning a green card lottery takes Prema, the protagonist to the US. She hails from a simple village background from Nepal. She courageously took the opportunity and goes to the U.S. Her father supports her wish and allows her to choose her own path. Prema leaves behind father and sister which is the accustomed surrounding of the beautiful village and the adorable, familiar setting.

The protagonist's past is revealed to the readers through the memories. Her past is sorrowful. She lost her mother in her early childhood. She goes to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. Her younger sister Bijaya joins Maoist group. Prema studies forestry and later joins forest conservation programme, a NGO initiative.

The Maoist clashes with the Nepali government is at the backdrop of the narrative. The various activities, the unrest caused by the conflict between Maoist organization and

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government has been truly portrayed by the novelist. The discussion between Prema and Rajan who works with an NGO throws light on the political upheaval in Nepal. The conflict has shook the country. The youth in the country gets affected by the circumstances so mostly they consider exploring the opportunities outside their own country. The decision of going to America was not easy for Prema as she was from very moderate background with the issue of money.

There seems to be a cult of immigration to the Western countries in the youth of south Asian countries. Therefore, Prema's friends suggest her to go to the West for making fortune and to get better opportunities. The conflicts have killed many innocent people in Nepal. Kancha, a computer center owner's tale is disturbing and represents the common man and the treatment given to them. Kancha was manhandled and was beaten by the army and later the army took him. Prema's sister, Bijaya's comment lays bare the current political situation when she says "I hate where we're from" (210). The two characters Bijaya and Prema are the two ends, as Prema sets out to the Western countries to get new experiences and opportunities and escapes her own country whereas Bijaya stays in her own country and attempts to struggle for it.

Memory plays important role in the diaspora literature. This novel also has the element of memory in it. The past experiences of the hometown are always alive with the diasporic individual. The past memories bridges past and present. The host culture and circumstances may not be always happy and favourable hence nostalgia gives a momentary escape into the fond memories of childhood and the adorable memories of the home town. Prema goes back to her past memories of delicious food and the festivals. The past memories give her warmth and psychological support. Ammonite is the symbol of past for Prema. She carries it with her as a element of memory with her. It gives her the sense of warmth and closeness which represents her past. The food offered by Neeru makes Prema happy as it also revives her memories of the past.

In her attempt to get assimilated into the western culture, she takes effort for learning English, driving a car and tries to know about the United States of America in detail through newspaper like Los Angeles Times by visiting the cyber café.

The course for Prema was not easy as she moves out of her cozy, familiar atmosphere and leads to the challenging unknown country. Hence, the character of Prema suffers the movement - though her shifting to U.S was a chance happening of winning a lottery from Nepal to U.S. leaving behind what was of her 'own'. Religion plays a significant part in Prema's life. She is attached to Nepali roots through Hindu religion. The ammonite becomes a significant tool to connect her to the nation and to the memories of her mother. Prema carried it with her where ever she went. Luis and Prema's relations are also affected by the regional differences. They share a bond of love with each other. Prema even tries to teach Luis the Nepali language so as to make the close bond with him. She visits Luis' relatives to become one with his family and tries to know more about Luis. But the relations could not go far beyond than casual encounters. Diverse cultural background of both of them has an adverse impact on their relation. They could not share things to each other.

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In South Asian diaspora, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are the countries whose literature is well known in the international literary world. South Asian diaspora literature is rich with varied cultural experiences and various languages and various religious background. Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* appears to be a significant novel from Nepali diaspora literature.

Prema is troubled on the issues of nationality, language competence and complexion. The conflict in her mind is due to the comparison of her past life in Nepal which gave her a sense of belongingness and the life in the U.S. where she lives her life without any restriction but feels rootless and lives a distanced immigrant's life. Nepal is considered to be a part of Indian territory by most of the westerners erroneously. Nepal's identity for the western world is associated to the Indian culture and British colony. It is not considered to be a non-colonized nation.

Language too becomes hindrance in Prema's comprehension of the American culture and life. She could not understand certain expressions of English which creates confusion for her. She finds oneness with the Nepali language and feels happy whenever she gets an opportunity to speak in Nepali, the language through which she could express her feelings and sorrow. Language is the tool of getting assimilated to the culture of the host country, of which Prema was lacking the competence to some extent.

Prema goes back to visit the Nepali citizens at Los Angeles and also she visits her own country, Nepal. The visits gave Prema the sense of connect between her culture and present life in Los Angeles. Later she decides to work with the environmentalist lady, Fiona and does not leave the diseased Esther on humanitarian ground.

The displacement stirs Prema's whole being and the effect of it can be seen in her decisions. She decides to live her life lonely without getting married, stays aloof from her Nepali roots in U.S ghettos and with her relations in Nepal. She could not comprehend herself in the foreign atmosphere and hence could not get assimilated to the western culture on its terms. She gets engrossed in defining herself and seeks fulfillment. Thapa also seems to focus on the issue of identity of Nepali diaspora literature. The issues seems to be raised through the identity of Prema which is not considered as Nepali by the Americans as a separate and different nation from India.

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