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# NEGOTIATION OF MIGRATION AND TRAUMA: A CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTER IN MANJUSHREE THAPA'S SEASONS OF FLIGHT

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## ABSTRACT

War causes death and displacement of people. Thapa's novel *Seasons of Flight* illustrates the psychological trauma of displacement experienced by the people of Nepal due to the Nepalese Civil War, and how Nepalese migrants coped with and responded to the problems and inherent challenges of their host countries. The Nepalese Civil War (1996-2006) engulfed the entire country in catastrophe and destruction. The life of Prema, the protagonist, vividly describes the psychological implications of war and displacement, community cohesion, collective memory, identity crisis and the quest for belonging. In order to escape the authoritarian regime and persecution, Prema absconded from Nepal, her native country, in haste, and took shelter in the U.S. She demonstrates how relinquishing Nepal and settling in an unacquainted cultural province is painful and traumatic. Yet, resilience helps Prema to endure exile, adapt to unfamiliar spaces, and confront her past. Methodologically, the paper employs a qualitative textual investigation and a close reading of Thapa's novel. The research is theoretically informed by Trauma and Migration studies, particularly the works of Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Salman Akhtar, Goutam Karmakar and Zeenat Khan, Gloria Kwok, Joanne Stubbley, Meryam Schouler-Ocak and others. Establishing the novel within the historical context of Nepal's Civil War and political conflict, the paper explores how individual memories evolve into narratives of collective memory through shared experiences and alienation. By employing Nepali literature, the research contributes to enlarging trauma theory beyond its predominantly Western paradigm, such as the Holocaust and World Wars. The research highlights the significance of South Asian perspectives on global trauma discourse. It provides a critical lens to comprehend how Nepali literature demonstrate psychological aftermath of civil war and socio-political upheaval.

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**KEYWORDS:** Trauma, Migration, Maoist Insurgency, Nepalese Civil War, Guatemalan Genocide

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

For more than two decades, Manjushree Thapa, a Nepali author, has been striving to bring before the world the troubled socio-political condition of Nepal and the pain and plight of the Nepali people. Thapa's writings predominantly include transgressive themes such as war, trauma, insurgency, gender, violence, loss, death, diaspora, and exile. Through her writings, she attempts to establish a connection between the native country and the host country. In her novels, she transcends the Western intertextual references and themes to include Nepali experiences, so as to universalise the trauma of exiled and displaced people. The pertinent question to be investigated here is: To what extent do the themes of trauma, war, displacement and duality communicate and negotiate with each other? This paper aims to probe the intricate relationship between trauma and migration from South Asian perspectives in general, and Nepal in particular. Nepali migration and displacement are not new phenomena, but for the first time, Manjushree Thapa has endeavoured to portray the plight of migrants and exiles through Nepali literature from trauma perspectives. Thapa's novel *Seasons of Flight* was published in 2010 after the abolishment of monarchy from Nepal. Her novel is set against the backdrop of Insurgency and post-Insurgency period in Nepal. Thapa, through her characters in the novel demonstrates the traumatic condition of Nepali migrants in the U.S. and in some other Gulf countries, and how they tackle it through their resilience.

In today's globalised world, migration has become one of the essential features of human life. Levent Küey (2015) defines migration as a "geographical movement" from one location to another which involves a "complex web of cultural, economic, social, psychological and political reasons, motives and implications, including the ones relevant to the mental well-being and mental ill health of the peoples involved" (p.58). Migration takes place mainly due to people's aspiration, fear, and tragedies. Considering the significance of migration in human life, this research work seems not only interesting and relevant but also compelling.

The current study endeavours to understand the process of forced migration of the Nepali people due to state terror, political instability, and violence during Insurgency and post- Insurgency period. The brutal conflicts made it indispensable for the Nepalese to migrate from Nepal to different corners of the world. Nepal's fragmented history, chaotic

political scenario, economic disempowerment, cultural clashes and persistent Maoist insurgencies had created "psychological torture to the Nepalis, prompting them to leave the country until a congenial atmosphere was created" (Baral, 2017, p. 169). Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* illustrates not only the suffering and anguish of migrants, but also of the family members, who were left behind at home. As it is evident from the case of the protagonist of the novel Prema, who left Nepal due to surge in insurgencies and counter-insurgencies, but her father, who was left behind at home, suffers the emotional trauma of being disconnected and dissociated from his daughter. Additionally, the warlike scenario further worsens his psychological condition. Highlighting the vicious ambience of Nepal, Acharya (2013) asserts that during the Nepalese Civil War, more than 17 thousand Nepalese, including combatants and non-combatants, were killed, and approximately two lakhs people were displaced and dislocated both internally and across borders, nearly 75 thousand people were injured due to guerrilla wars and bloodshed between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) and the Royal Nepalese Government (p.80).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In *Rethinking Trauma as a Global Challenge*, Duncan Pedersen (2015) describes that the term 'trauma' first evolved in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to encompass an assortment of psychological repercussions of being exposed to or confronted with violence, destruction, and loss (p.9). Another prominent scholar, Cathy Caruth (1996) in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* delineates trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (p.11).

According to Stef Craps (2014), Trauma theory is epistemologically Eurocentric in origin and nature, in which mostly the events such as the Holocaust and the 9/11 events were the predominant incidents for inducing people into trauma and displacement. Major trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Ruth Leys, Geoffrey Hartman, and Dominic LaCapara and their respective theories are predominantly restricted to the analysis of traumatic and brain-shattering incidents that unfolded in Europe and America. They marginalise the Non-Western literary representations of traumatic incidents. The inquiry into the multiple traumatic and agonising incidents,

which occurred in South Asian countries, have remained untouched by the Eurocentric trauma approaches (Craps, 2014; Karmakar & Khan, 2022). Highlighting the multiple horrendous and traumatic events witnessed by the South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka, Karmakar & Khan (2022) write:

Colonialism, Partition, the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, the Mumbai Attacks, the Gujarat Riots, the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots, the concurrent Kashmir dispute, violent history of the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka Black July (The 1983 Anti-Tamil pogroms in Sri Lanka), The Sri Lankan Civil War (De Votta 2009: Chattoraj 2022), The Nepalese Civil War, the Rohingya Crisis (Ullah and Chattoraj 2018), or natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, and droughts have impacted the people of the region in a bizarre and devastating way. (p. 9-10)

In *Immigration and Acculturation*, Akhtar (2011) examines how geographical displacement becomes traumatic and stigmatic. He emphasises that displacement from the original home can have destabilizing impacts on human mind, and the severity of trauma depend on: at which age migration occurs, the unfathomable love and attachment to the birth country, degree of choice in absconding, and "the extent of anticipatory planning for such a change, the intrapsychic capacity to tolerate separations, and the magnitude of difference between the two places of residence" (Akhtar, 2011, p. 3). Migration-led trauma reaches high magnitude in those conditions, in which migration and displacement are more likely forced or involuntary, as in the case of asylum seekers, refugees, tribal people, and disaster-affected people, who have less time to arrange and plan to escape (Ventriglio & Bhugra 2015; Thamothersampillai & Somasundaram 2021; Schouler-Ocak 2015; & Chattoraj 2022). Stublely (2021) delineates how the uprooting and dislocation, "with the change in both human and non-human environments, can be traumatic by threatening the 'safety feeling' that all human beings need" (p.97). Thamothersampillai and Somasundaram (2021) point out that "migration occurs when the current habitat becomes inhospitable or another environment is more alluring, out of choice or under compulsion, in desperation, for various push and pull factors" (p.5) In *Nepal: Trauma of Political Development and Stability*, Baral (2017) outlines some specific reasons for human migration:

Better life, protection from both natural and human disasters such as landslides, floods, earth quake, fear of being killed in sectarian violence,

ethnic and other forms of social and political conflicts or wars. Psychologically people travel long distance transcending national and internal boundaries in quest of economically secure life in addition to be free from fear and anxiety. (p.168)

Brunnet et al. (2020, p.3) emphasise that in this universe of approximately seven billion residents, it is estimated that "one billion are on the move nationally and internationally and are variously called migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers" and also displaced. Migrants and refugees often face potentially traumatic events and post-migratory stressors. The displaced people undergo traumatic experiences due to the "memories, perceptions, ideas, deriving from cathetic relationships with the human and non-human environment" (Akhtar, 2011, p.4).

Meryam S. Ocak (2015) points out that in times of crisis such as war, violence and pandemic in the country of origin, the migrants and refugees undergo adverse and contrite experiences of trauma that could lead to "not only in 'adjustment disorder,' but also in chronic psychiatric disorders such as anxiety, depression and somatoform disorders" (p. 3). To escape from such a horrific environment, an innumerable number of people have migrated from their homelands and have taken shelter in foreign countries to save their lives. In recent times, Nepal has also endured heterogeneous and dynamic transformation internally due to warlike situations and violence. Poverty and Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) had forced Nepali people to migrate to another countries. The pain and plight of Nepalis in the host countries were not brought to fore due to Eurocentric trauma theories. The exclusionary nature of the Eurocentric literary trauma theory and its constrictiveness to traumatic incidents that happened in Europe and America only is "ethically questionable and imperialist in nature" (Karmakar & Khan, 2022, p. 9). Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate the traumatic experiences faced by the people of South Asian countries. A study undertaken on the above-mentioned subject matter would indeed enlarge the existing theoretical framework of Trauma studies.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Trauma theory dates back to Sigmund Freud's publication of *Studies on Hysteria* in 1895. It gained further momentum with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* in 1996. Her interpretation of trauma theory comes from Freud's insight on traumatic experiences in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and*

*Monotheism* (1939). In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Cathy Caruth (1996) defines 'traumatic neuroses' through Freud's text as "the way that the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will. Freud will call "traumatic neurosis"—emerges as the unwitting re-enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (2). Freud's term 'traumatic neurosis' was later perceived as "Post Traumatic Stressed Disorder" by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. It is known as the disorder of memory. It occurs when the human mind is shattered by a horrific incident, and all the emotions of terror and shock are linked to that particular incident.

Leys (2010) understands Post Traumatic Stressed Disorder (PTSD) as:

The experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented as past, but is perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present. All the symptoms characteristic of PTSD- flashbacks, nightmares and other reexperiences, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, autonomic arousal, explosive violence or tendency to hypervigilance- are thought to be the result of this fundamental mental dissociation. (p.2)

Thapa's in *Season of Flight* shows that Prema, the protagonist experiences nightmares and flashbacks of traumatic incidents witnessed by her in the Nepalese Civil War. Cathy Caruth defines PTSD as:

A response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with the numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. ...The event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. (qtd. in Osman 31-32)

Prema gets dreams of family members left behind in Nepal. She also feels hallucinations. Rubin and others in "Military Bereavement and Combat Trauma" (2012), express their opinion on PTSD:

In PTSD, the symptomatic state can now be "prolonged" or "chronic". This diagnosis reflects the clinical awareness that traumatic events can have severe, extensive, and protracted emotional and mental sequelae. It was argued that if a healthy individual suffered psychological effects as a result of a life-threatening event, these would resolve

naturally, in a manner akin to a self-healing wound and without long-term effects. (p.132)

Prema had witnessed the torturing of Nepali teenager, Kanchha. The event haunts her consistently even in the USA. Highlighting his understanding of PTSD, Hunt (2010) writes:

There is often a whole series of psychological symptoms of anxiety and depression, what we recognise as PTSD, and problems relating to drugs, violence or suicidal tendencies. Initially there is a slow deterioration in their psychological health. At first it is not really a problem; it is only over months or years that it becomes clinically significant. The proportion of civilians affected by war in the twentieth century rose from around 10% of casualties in World War One, to 50% of casualties in World War Two, to 90% in Bosnia. (p.10)

The fundamental and undisputed concept of trauma is that it represents a phase of aftermath rather than a singular catastrophic incident or experience. It is a subsequent process that resists assimilation and integration after a traumatic encounter. The aftermath of trauma manifests itself in a range of chronic symptoms or consequences that are commonly referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current approaches to Trauma studies have limited their scope of study to the traumatic events unfolded in the Western countries. The literary works, illustrating the traumatic events of the South Asian countries, were either ignored or underrepresented in the theoretical framework of Trauma studies. An investigation of case studies from the South Asian countries is indispensable to enrich this interdisciplinary area of research. The current study conducts a critical textual analysis of Manjushree Thapa's novel *Season of Flight* taking into account the theoretical contributions made by the prominent theorists namely Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Khagendra Acharya, Salman Akhtar, Goutam Karmakar and Zeenat Khan, Gloria Kwok, Joanne Stubbley, Meryam Schouler-Ocak and others in the field of Trauma and Migration studies. A critical investigation into the recent incident, The Nepalese Civil War (1996-2006), provides an insight into the interconnectedness between war, migration and trauma. The study interrogates the pre- and post-migration trauma of people displaced forcefully due to a relentless civil war. Further, the study examines the impact of past traumatic memories of people on their daily life. The research highlights how individual memories of traumatic

events like Nepalese Civil war and Guatemalan Civil war form narrative of collective memories. Taking into consideration the critical perspectives of various scholars of Trauma studies and Memory Studies, the article attempts to analyse Manjushree Thapa's novel *Season of Flight* within the larger discourse of Trauma studies.

## 5. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

### 5.1 *Nepalese Civil War, Displacement and Thanatophobic Experiences*

Thapa's *Season of Flight* depicts traumatic experiences of a girl, Prema, a forestry student, who lives in a rural village of Nepal and later migrates to America due to Nepalese civil war. The novel illustrates the trauma of Nepali migrants arising from war and violence in the homeland, and "cultural disjunctions, sense of uprootness, quest for belonging, and sense of nostalgia", in the host country (Bhandari, 2022, p. 116). In an attempt to get rid of the appalling circumstances of the Maoist Insurgency or Civil War (1996-2006) in Nepal and in pursuit of better career opportunities and peace, Prema stealthily moved to the United States, but displacement is not always pleasing. Thapa's protagonist Prema represents the first-generation poor immigrants and requires "henceforth to learn to negotiate a double heritage, the native one and the adopted one" (Kwok, 2020, p. 60).

Manjushree Thapa herself, like her protagonist, is a displaced author and an immigrant. For both, the writer and the character, duality such as "two selves, two cultures, two languages" characterises their lives (Kwok, 2020, p. 60). Displacement and exile are traumatic experiences that resulted from the Nepalese Civil War, which continued for a long decade (1996-2006). The novel mirrors Prema's relationship as a migrant to her home country and her 'tormented self' due to the difference in language, culture, and home environment in the native and host country. She is separated from her father and sister, and also from her country, and unable to return to her native country. Prema did not find a suitable place for herself in the host nation, which is also a crucial factor for her psychological imbalance. Prema represents the "split self of the immigrant" (Kwok, 2020, p. 62) and also the plight of thousand Nepali migrants who carry their painful memories of native political turbulence and instability to the host nations. Prema was the victim of both internal and international migration. When Prema embarks on her journey to America, her life there as an immigrant is "emotionally and

psychologically torn between her homeland and host country" (Bhandari, 2022, p.116).

It appears that the migration, whether forced or voluntarily, is not always pleasing. On one side, the forced migration due to unprecedented events such as war, genocide, political instability and civil war create trauma in the psyche of the migrants. On the other side, the self-intended migration creates Thanatophobia in their mind due to the difference in language and culture of the native land and the host country. The migrants often suffer duality, which causes chaos and confusion in their mind.

### 5.2 *Alienation, Memories and Trauma*

Prema, the protagonist, lives in Los Angeles under conditions marked by numerous inconveniences and unpredictable challenges. Dissatisfaction with the job characterises her professional life. At the same time, her personal life remains unstable, marred by multiple affairs and experiences of separation. She experiences a significant lack of social support, which further intensifies her emotional vulnerability. Her relationship with her American boyfriend, Luis, is marked by discontent and emotional strain. In addition, she is persistently anxious about the safety and survival of her father and sister due to continuous civil war in Nepal. Simultaneously, she is also psychologically entangled with the traumatic legacy of the Guatemalan Civil War faced by Carlos Reyes, Luis's father, which continues to shape her emotional and mental state. On one side, she is beleaguered by the extreme brutalities and utter callousness in the Nepalese Civil War, and on the other side, she is entangled profoundly with the Guatemalan Civil War. Illustrating Prema's traumatic experience of an horrific incident that unfolded before her eyes in Nepal, Thapa writes,

The atmosphere in the bazaar grew tense. The bazaar-dwellers watched as the boy writhed in the soldiers' grasp, screaming. 'Let me go, let me go, let me go!' His father, the retired Gurkha soldier, ran behind, pleading: There's been a mistake, Sah'b, he's not a Maoist, he's my son, let him be! ...they hurled Kanchha on to the ground. 'Where are they, saala? Chuthiya! Tell us where they are!' ...He's my son, Sah'b, he's not a Maoist! Spare him!' ...'Get up, saala! Up, up!' They dragged him off the ground, then left, prodding him along. (2010, p. 61-62)

A Nepali teenager, Kanchha, with no connection with Maoists, is alleged to be a Maoist by the Army. The Army, coercively and unlawfully, attempts to extract information from him about the whereabouts of the Maoists groups, but he was unaware of these

things. He was then abducted and imprisoned by the army in the barrack. Later, the boy disappeared or was executed by the army remains unknown. His father attempts constantly to release him from the prison, but he fails. Although Prema now lives away from Nepal, but this horrific event haunts her regularly. Additionally, the incident caused 'community trauma' and apprehension in villagers. The state army and police terrorised the populace by kidnapping, imprisoning, torturing and killing the innocent people in public, committing human rights violations.

The novel also portrays "in minutiae the inner thoughts, memories, and activities" of the childhood days of Prema (Kwok, 2020, p. 65). The reminiscence of memories of childhood with her parents and siblings, the death of some of her infant siblings, her school days, the love life with Rajan and painful separation from him and her father, violence, and death of several acquaintances caused alienation and trauma in the protagonist. Depicting the past traumatic memories of Prema, Thapa explains that Prema is also haunted by her traumatic childhood memories. Her mother was alive and was struggling to produce a son for her family so that she could fulfil her duty as a mother and wife which Nepali society demands from a woman. And one day, in this process, her mother died of birth complications, which overwhelmed Prema and gave her an 'unforgettable traumatic scar' on her brain, which she carries throughout her life. The incident affected her in such a way that she decided not to marry and have a child in her entire life. The protagonist, Prema now lives in America, but she could not forget her family members and homeland disputes and challenges. It keeps her in a state of loss and 'emotional trauma'. Thapa states that Prema continuously thinks about "The war, she thought of her father. Was he safe? Her sister. Was Bijiya still Maoists? Was she even alive? She thought of Kanchha, back in Hill Bazar. Had he ever been found?" (2010, p.168). These questions forbade her from connecting and assimilate to the American way of life, which made her survival difficult and traumatic.

Thapa, through Prema and her father, shows that displacement is not traumatic and distressing only to those who are relocated or uprooted from their home country, but also to those who remained at home or are abandoned at home to suffer. In this case, Prema escapes stealthily without letting her father and sister know about it. After knowing about her plan, the father feels 'emotional disconnected' from his daughter. Illustrating the emotional moment

between Prema and her father, Thapa writes, "Ba (Father), I'm going to America.'

'When will you come back, Chhori (daughter)?' he asked, his voice soft and gravelly on the line. I'm going to live there, Ba.'

'And when will you come back?' he asked, uncomprehending.

'No,' she said. 'I'm going to live there. Forever.'

There was a pause." (2010, p.74)

Prema keeps an irregular contact with her father on the telephone, "thus maintaining a tie with the homeland" (Kwok, 2020, p. 65). Prema seems Kafkaesque, nostalgic, lost and alienated in the foreign country. She strives to endure the existential crisis due to her displacement by negotiating between two diverse cultures, languages and environments and tries to settle herself, but her 'post-migratory stressors' (Brunnet et al. 2020) are attached to her forever.

The above analysis shows that migration cause alienation among migrants. The alienation is due to cultural shock migrants face in the host country. The magnitude of alienation increases, if the migrant is attached to the homeland. The memories of people and the native land create and aggravate the traumatic experience of the migrants.

### *5.3 Pre-Migration Trauma, Identity Crisis and the Quest of Belongingness*

Highlighting the deep consideration of pre-migration precarity of Prema, Thapa states, "Yet the thought- 'I am leaving' -was akin to awareness of an impending death. It altered everything" (2010, p. 58). The indispensable thought to leave her nation and family members was haunting as well as shaking her profoundly. The persistent conflict affected her pre-migration period. She was entangled in ambiguous thoughts about whether she should leave the country or remain here. Her feeling was oscillating between the two "America. Nepal. America. Nepal" (p. 66). To depict the dilemma faced by Prema, Thapa writes, 'What would she do there? What would she do here, though?' (p. 66). Prema was stuck somewhere within 'what to decide'. She understands that being displaced from the nation is distressing, but staying is traumatic too (Akhtar 2011; Küey 2015; & Stubbley 2021). Prema was going through 'undecidable trauma' along with "pre-migration trauma" (Stubbley, 2021, p. 98). Thapa through Prema attempts to showcase the experience of women migrants from the Third World countries. Prema's disentanglement from her nation was made possible by two contradictory forces (Maoists and the Royal Government), who never wanted to reach to an end

or a solution to the war. Prema sensed that “the war would escalate from here on. The Maoists would not give up, and neither would the king and the army” (Thapa, 2010, p. 66). To remain in power, the Monarchs of Nepal were taking help of sustaining, unceasing war and conflict. On one side, the Maoists wanted to overthrow the monarchy from Nepal and on the other side, the Monarchs wanted to suppress the Maoist movements and continue to be in power. Monarchs were using their armies to suppress the Maoist movement. In response to the Monarch’s atrocities over innocent, poor and country people, the Maoists waged war against them in 1996 to be called Maoists Insurgency. The Monarchy was abolished in 2006, and the country was announced republic in 2008 (Acharya 2011; Thapa and Sijapati 2004; & Subedi 2015).

Prema’s life is defined by loss due to the feeling of uprootedness in America. She longs for a stable identity. The displacement causes her to face an identity crisis because she was caught in the “magnitude of difference between the two places of residence” (Akhtar, 2011, p. 3). She feels that she does not belong to American society either. When Luis, boyfriend of Prema, requested her to take him into her world, she refused and articulated her latent pain and agony, “I do not have a world!... I left the world I had, and do not belong to one I am in now – your world, I do not have any place to take you, Luis. I do not have a place in the world” (Thapa, 2010, p. 186). Prema’s melancholic utterances reveal a profound attachment to her world- Nepal and her family- which has long been jettisoned. However, she currently belongs to neither Nepal nor America. Then, how will she integrate Luis into her world? She is torn, what Gloria Kwok (2020) claimed, between “two selves, two cultures, two languages,” none of which is completely her own (p. 60).

Prema regretted her decision to abandon her native country, but the warlike situation was out of control, which made her “current habitat becomes inhospitable” and forced her to leave it as soon as possible (Thamotharampillai & Somasundaram, 2021, p. 105). The major themes of the novel are “cultural disjunctions, sense of uprootedness, quest of belonging, and sense of nostalgia” that Prema and Luis’s father undergo in the host country (Bhandari, 2022, p. 116). To showcase Prema’s unsuccessful efforts to assimilate to American culture and establish her independent identity, Thapa writes:

Prema had wanted to reinvent herself in America, but- What is there to being human? The body which desires, persistent and unreasonable; thoughts and temperaments. Instincts. A capacity to harm. And

history, which lingers as a spectre. Los Angeles. (2010, p. 13)

These lines show that Prema assiduously scrimmages to make an ‘independent identity’ in the host nation. However, she couldn’t dissociate and disentangle from her past. The blood-stained Nepali history is ingrained in her psyche so deeply that it prohibits her from forgetting those catastrophic days, which keep pertinaciously unsettling and discountenance her present days in Los Angeles. Prema’s melancholy and agony of earlier days or childhood days is evident in her statement, when she says “the wounds of childhood, relics around which deposits have hardened, adamantine. Prema had known early of the world’s sorrows” (Thapa, 2010, p. 15). The life of Prema was spent in deep pain because of her mother’s untimely death, which still lingers in her mind. Due to this, the protagonist suffers ‘post-settlement trauma’ in Los Angeles.

Childhood memories evoked trauma in Prema’s psyche in the host country. The political violence and the related painful memories remained ‘unforgettable and unscratchable scars on her brain’ and even ‘unrepairable’ for a long time. Dressler asserts that leaving one culture and assimilating into another one leads to “stressor and stress-induced psychiatric disorders”, which is perturbing Prema (Ventriglio & Bhugra, 2015, p. 76). The present condition of Prema reflects that dwelling abroad is not always pleasing and satisfying, but sometimes it is apprehensive, more complex and traumatic.

#### **5.4 Lived Experience of Guatemalan Genocide, Existential Angst and Social Support**

Thapa in *Seasons of Flight* introduces Carlos Reyes, father of Luis, to showcase the similarities in traumatic experiences of two characters due to civil wars. Carlos left his native land Guatemala during the long, unceasing Guatemalan Civil War, in which lakhs of Guatemalan people had been massacred, and a huge number of people took shelter in America and in other parts of the world. Thapa illustrates the traumatic experiences of Carlos during the Guatemalan Civil War. Luis’s father and numerous labourer migrants from Guatemala were victims of Guatemalan genocide. This genocide created dishevelment and scramble in the country, which forced common people to leave their country. Highlighting the brutality committed on people during the Guatemalan Civil War, Thapa writes:

To counter them, a series of militarised governments had led a brutal counter-insurgency in 1980s in Guatemala. The American government had supplied military aid for all this... had escalated the

counter-insurgency to genocide: people had been lined up and shot, hacked down with machetes, burned to death, tortured. Eyes gouged out, tongues cut, ears cut, limbs hacked-buried alive, tossed into mass graves amid corn fields and orchards, in wayside gulches. The land had been littered with skeletons still clothed, rope-bound bones, cloth-covering on their mouths, tibia, femurs covered with earth. (2010, p. 161-162)

The Guatemalan Civil War was created intentionally to oust the native people from their own country. But the Mayan people fought for their rights, and their fight metamorphosed into Guatemalan Civil War. In her novel, Manjushree Thapa has narrated about some Guatemalan displaced migrants who took shelter in the U.S. to escape the war, as Prema came to the U.S. from Nepal. During and after the war, many "Guatemalans had poured into America, seeking asylum from a war that America was supporting" (Thapa, 2010, p. 161).

The life of Prema seems intertwined with the war trauma, which keeps her distressed and estranged. Prema increasingly recognises a connection between herself and Guatemalans as victims of war. Prema faces 'double trauma', first as an immediate victim of Nepalese Civil War, and second after knowing the story of forced migration of Carlos from Guatemala to U.S due to Guatemalan Civil War. She feels peace nowhere; neither in Nepal nor in America. Thapa portrays Prema and Carlos to represent the trauma and pain of the migrants in a foreign land.

Thapa introduces Luis, son of Carlos, to highlight the difference of impact on the psyche of people, who do not have lived experience of a traumatic event. Luis's statement "You're really getting into this, huh" (Thapa, 2010, p. 163) indicates that he was not as much affected as Prema. Traumatic events affect people differently, as in the case of Prema and Luis. Prema is too much entangled in the Guatemalan war, and Luis, whose father left his country of origin because of this war, was not affected at all. Prema is drawn into it emotionally and mentally. The impact of traumatic event depends on a person's defence mechanism. Some gets traumatised badly from an overwhelming incident, and some don't even get any symptoms or are affected at all. The novel shows that Prema has internalised their pain and responds with anxieties which are actually not her own. She could correlate her pain with that of theirs (Guatemalans) in the host country. There was no one with whom she could 'articulate' her problems and pains in Los Angeles. Although Neeru and her husband were there to help but what Prema actually

wants is obscure. Her behaviour features what Kwok (2020) calls "existential angst" of the Nepali migration (p. 68). She wants to eradicate the traumatic memory of past atrocities committed by the monarchy and Maoists, but it persisted even in 'far away' in America. Manjushree Thapa, through her protagonist Prema and other characters, tries to universalise the pangs and plights of Nepali exiled and displaced individuals as well as groups. The way Prema lives her life in Los Angeles "symbolises all the displaced, lost, and alienated in their new environment" (Kwok, 2020, p. 70).

Schouler-Ocak (2015) opines that changing the place of residence has always been traumatic and excruciating, but it is more painful for migrants and refugees. Most asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, according to Wirtgen (2009), stay in very dilapidated corporeal and psychological conditions when they arrive in foreign countries to live permanently (Schouler-Ocak, 2015, p. 1). That's why Schouler-Ocak points out that the risk factors of trauma arise in migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers when they are displaced from their nation for the short-term or long-term. He writes that "various studies point out that the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is around ten times higher among refugees and asylum seekers than among the general population of the host country" (Schouler-Ocak, 2015, p. 3).

Stubley (2021) asserts that social support has a profound and strong impact on "resettlement outcomes" for the displaced and refugees. Displaced and immigrants getting more social support would help in alleviating the levels of depressive symptoms and PTSD (p. 99). The factors for Prema's trauma may be due to lack of "social support" from her own people (Stubley, 2021), different cultural and ideological clashes, remembrance of home and family, and traumatic experience of war.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Western approaches to Trauma studies were challenged by the South Asian scholars due to their focus restricted to the traumatic events unfolded in the West. This study was undertaken to analyse the traumatic experiences of forced migrants from a South Asian country. The inclusion of case studies from the South Asian countries will enrich and widen the scope of research in the field of Trauma studies. In this context, Manjushree Thapa, an immigrant author, in *Season of Flight*, highlights through the protagonist, Prema, a microcosm of Nepali migrants, the universal pain of exile and displacement. Thapa's novel sheds light on impact of

civil war on common people of a country. It illustrates the interconnectedness between the power, politics and people. Thapa's narrative demonstrate the traumatic experiences suffered by the Nepali migrants due to decade long Nepalese Civil War. Depicting the live of Prema in Los Angeles, Thapa shows that the attachment and love for the native country never wanes even when one leaves it. The quest to reunite with the native country, and being unable to achieve it, causes alienation and depression. Thapa's novel manifests the entrapment between two cultures and its effect on the mind of a migrant. This reflects that migration is not always pleasing. The novel showcases the relationship between memories and trauma. Memories of horrific incidents remain and haunt throughout the life. The protagonist, Prema never truly feels that she is 'living in America'; instead, she feels that she is 'merely living', reflecting her persistent sense of estrangement and lack of belonging. Reflecting upon the life Carlos and Prema, Thapa states that the migrants oscillate "in-between" two languages, cultures and nations and are torn apart. For migrants, the quest for assimilation to the host country remains a major

challenge due to the memories of the native land. The "in-between" status causes identity crisis among the migrants. Thapa's novel studies the existential angst the forced migrants face abroad and the significance of social support to overcome the fear. Pain and trauma are the universal responses to migration and exile. In such a situation, negotiation between two languages and two cultures could be a probable solution to alleviate pain and overcome trauma. Thapa's novel reveals the intersections between migration, identity crisis, trauma, and social support. Further analysis of traumatic experiences of forced migrants would provide a better understanding of trauma discourse in the South Asian countries.

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