MRS Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Studies
ISSN *(Online) 3049-1398*
Vol-3, Iss-1 (January-2026)
Journal homepage: https://mrspublisher.com/journals

From Homeland to Alien Land: Migration and Displacement in Manjushree Thapa's Seasons of Flight

Dr. Ankur Tripathi*

Assistant Professor, Department of English, H. D. Jain College, Ara

Received: 16 / 12 / 2025	Accepted: 12 / 01 / 2026	Published: 30 / 01 / 2026

Abstract: Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* (2010) follows a young Nepali woman from a rural homeland through the precarious spaces of Kathmandu and into the United States, where she must live as an immigrant. This article reads the novel as a sustained meditation on migration and displacement, arguing that Thapa represents movement not as a simple passage from deprivation to opportunity but as a continuous experience of dislocation that begins before the migrant leaves home and persists after arrival. Drawing on theories of exile, diaspora, place and transnationalism developed by Said, Bhabha, Hall, Brah, Clifford, Appadurai and others, the study examines four interrelated concerns: the economic and political pressures that unsettle the homeland, the ambivalent promise of the migratory opportunity, the experience of racialised and gendered labour in the host society, and the work of memory and nostalgia in sustaining a fractured identity. The article concludes that the novel reconceives home as a contingent, negotiated and portable condition rather than a fixed geographical origin, and that this reconception makes the text an important contribution to South Asian and Nepali literature in English.

Keywords: *Manjushree Thapa; Seasons of Flight; migration; displacement; diaspora; Nepali literature in English; gender; home..*

Cite this article: Tripathi, A. (2026). From Homeland to Alien Land: Migration and Displacement in Manjushree Thapa's Seasons of Flight. *MRS Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Studies, 3(1),55-58.*

Introduction

Migration has become one of the defining experiences of the contemporary world, and literature has proved one of the most sensitive instruments for recording what it does to the individuals who undertake it. In South Asian writing in English, the theme has been explored extensively in relation to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, but fiction from Nepal has received comparatively little critical attention. Manjushree Thapa, one of the most accomplished Nepali writers in English, has addressed that gap through novels, essays and a work of political reportage that together present a layered portrait of her country (Thapa, 2005). Her novel *Seasons of Flight* (2010) is distinctive among them because it follows a Nepali woman beyond the borders of Nepal and into the unfamiliar social landscape of the United States.

The title of this article, From Homeland to Alien Land, identifies the movement that structures the novel. It would be a mistake, however, to read that movement as a simple crossing from one fixed place to another. The homeland that Thapa depicts is already unstable, marked by poverty, political turbulence and limited opportunity for young women, while the alien land is a space in which the protagonist is simultaneously offered new freedoms and subjected to new forms of marginality. The novel therefore resists the familiar narrative in which migration resolves hardship, and equally resists the nostalgic narrative in which the homeland is an unspoiled source of belonging. Its central insight is that displacement is a condition that accompanies the migrant in both directions.

This study asks how *Seasons of Flight* represents the experience of leaving one's home and living as an outsider elsewhere. It proposes that the novel builds its account of displacement through four connected movements. The first concerns the conditions of the homeland that make departure imaginable. The second concerns the ambivalent promise of the migratory opportunity. The third concerns the lived reality of the host society, in which race, class and gender determine what kind of presence the migrant is permitted. The fourth concerns memory and identity, through which the migrant attempts to hold together a self divided between places. The analysis proceeds through a close reading informed by theoretical work on exile, diaspora, space and transnationalism, and it concludes by considering the novel's redefinition of home.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on several bodies of theory that have shaped contemporary understanding of migration. Edward Said (2000) describes exile as an unhealable rift between a person and a native place, a condition marked by loss yet also by a distinctive plurality of vision, since the exile perceives things in relation to at least two settings. This plural awareness is helpful for reading a novel whose protagonist cannot see her new surroundings without simultaneously recalling her old ones. Salman Rushdie (1991) similarly argues that migrants reconstruct their origins through imagination, so that the homeland they carry is necessarily an imaginary one, assembled from fragments of memory rather than recovered whole.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This open-access article is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0), permitting non-commercial use, sharing, and reproduction with proper credit to the author(s) and source.

Homi Bhabha (1994) offers the concept of the in-between or liminal space in which cultural identities are negotiated, and in which the migrant occupies a position that is neither wholly inside nor wholly outside the dominant culture. Stuart Hall (1990) insists that cultural identity is a matter of becoming as much as of being, subject to continuous transformation, while Avtar Brah (1996) distinguishes the idea of a diaspora space, in which the migrant and the native inhabitants are both implicated in the politics of belonging, from the simple notion of a community in dispersal. James Clifford (1994) emphasises that diasporic experience combines roots and routes, attachment and travel, so that the diasporic subject is defined by relationships that stretch across borders. Arjun Appadurai (1996) adds the observation that global flows of people, images and capital produce new imaginative resources, so that people increasingly imagine lives elsewhere before they ever depart.

Theories of place are equally useful. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) distinguishes space, which is open and abstract, from place, which is space made meaningful by lived experience. Edward Relph (1976) describes placelessness as the weakening of distinctive attachment to location, and Doreen Massey (1994) argues that places are not bounded and static but are formed by their connections to elsewhere, an argument with particular bearing on gender, because women's movement through space is regulated differently from that of men. Liisa Malkki (1992) cautions against treating people as naturally rooted in particular territories, a metaphor that makes displacement appear pathological. Finally, scholars of transnationalism such as Steven Vertovec (2009) show that contemporary migrants often maintain active ties to more than one society, which complicates the older assumption that migration entails a clean break with the homeland. Taken together, these approaches provide a vocabulary for analysing Thapa's novel without reducing it to either a narrative of loss or a narrative of success.

Manjushree Thapa and the Context of Nepali Writing in English

Thapa belongs to a generation of Nepali writers who have used English to present their country to readers inside and outside the subcontinent. Nepal's literary tradition is rich in its own languages, but English has become a medium through which questions of national identity, political transformation and global mobility can be addressed to a wider audience. Thapa's early novel *The Tutor of History* (2001) examined the workings of local politics, and her nonfiction work *Forget Kathmandu* (2005) offered an account of the country's democratic crisis and the insurgency that overshadowed it. Her interest in the connection between politics and everyday life continues in *Seasons of Flight*, where political and economic conditions in Nepal are not merely background but form part of the explanation for why the protagonist leaves.

The Homeland: Departure Before Departure

The first movement of the novel concerns the homeland that the protagonist, Prema, leaves behind. Thapa does not present Nepal as a paradise from which Prema is torn. Her village is a place of intimate familiarity, shaped by the rhythms of the land and by close social relations, but it is also a place of economic constraint and limited horizons for a young woman. The attachments that bind Prema to her origins are real, yet they coexist with pressures that make staying difficult. In this sense the novel complicates the romantic opposition between a warm rural homeland and a cold urban or foreign host society. As Said (2000) observes, the exile's sense of loss is intensified by the knowledge that the place left behind can never be recovered in its original form, and Thapa's homeland is already subject to change before Prema departs.

Kathmandu, to which Prema first moves, functions as an intermediate space in the novel's geography of displacement. It is not a homeland in the sense of the village, nor is it yet an alien land in the sense of the United States, but it introduces her to the experience of being a newcomer in an unfamiliar environment. The movement from village to capital is a form of internal migration that prepares her, imperfectly, for the larger movement to come. The city offers employment and anonymity but also exposes her to precarious work, to unfamiliar social codes and to the uneven distribution of opportunity that characterises Nepal's urban economy. Thapa's description of this stage suggests that displacement is not confined to international borders. Rural migrants to the capital experience a form of alienation that anticipates the more extreme alienation of the transnational migrant.

The political environment also shapes the homeland that Prema inhabits. The years of conflict and instability that Thapa has described in her nonfiction (Thapa, 2005) form part of the atmosphere in which young people calculate their futures. A country that cannot guarantee security or livelihood becomes a place from which departure appears rational, even where it is emotionally costly. The novel thus frames migration as a response to structural conditions as much as to individual ambition. Appadurai's (1996) observation that global flows allow people to imagine alternative lives is relevant, because Prema's imagination of life elsewhere is shaped by the circulation of images and rumours of foreign prosperity. The homeland is therefore already penetrated by the global, and the line between home and abroad is less secure than it first appears.

Passage: Opportunity, Chance and Ambivalence

The second movement of the novel concerns the opportunity to migrate and the ambivalence that accompanies it. The visa lottery that enables Prema to travel to the United States is an apt device for a novel about displacement, because it renders migration an event that happens to the individual as much as one that the individual chooses. The element of chance undermines the idealised narrative in which migrants are self-made agents who rationally pursue success. Prema's access to the opportunity is not the result of effort or merit, and she must therefore decide how to respond to a fortune she did not exactly seek. This conflict between agency and circumstance recurs throughout the novel and gives its treatment of migration an ethical complexity.

Thapa's representation of the moment of departure resists triumphalism. Leaving is accompanied by a sense of rupture, and Prema's emotions combine anticipation with an awareness of what is being abandoned. The ambivalence expresses what Clifford (1994) describes as the tension between roots and routes: the migrant is drawn toward the possibilities of travel while remaining tied by attachments that cannot be easily severed. The novel suggests that the decision to go is never wholly voluntary, since it is shaped by family expectations, economic necessity and the lack of satisfactory alternatives at home. Migration is thus presented as a negotiated choice made under constraint, a formulation that

avoids both the celebration of mobility and the sentimentalisation of staying.

The metaphor of flight in the title is itself double. Flight may signify liberation, the freedom of the bird that rises above constraint, but it also signifies escape, the movement of one who flees what cannot be endured. The seasons that the title invokes suggest cyclical movement, the migration of birds that depart and return in response to changing conditions. The novel plays on these meanings to suggest that migration is neither a single decisive act nor a permanent relocation but a recurring pattern of departure and orientation. The title thus anticipates the novel's refusal of closure and its suggestion that home and away are positions between which the migrant continually moves.

The Alien Land: Labour, Invisibility and Belonging

The third movement of the novel concerns Prema's life in the host society, where the promise of opportunity encounters the reality of structural inequality. Migrants who arrive without capital or institutional support are frequently absorbed into low-paid and insecure forms of work, and Thapa's depiction of Prema's working life reflects this pattern. Saskia Sassen (1998) has argued that global cities depend on a labour force of migrants who perform essential but poorly rewarded services while remaining largely invisible to the wider society. Prema's experience conforms to this pattern, and the novel registers the paradox that she is necessary to the economy of the host society yet scarcely recognised as a member of it.

The host society also confronts Prema with the problem of classification. In her homeland she was known through her family, her village and her language, but in the new setting she becomes legible primarily through categories of race, nationality and immigrant status. Sara Ahmed (2000) argues that societies produce the figure of the stranger as someone who is recognised as not belonging, and that this recognition shapes how the stranger is treated. Prema is repeatedly positioned as a stranger, and her sense of self is destabilised by the need to respond to identities imposed from outside. Bhabha's (1994) account of the in-between space is useful here, since Prema occupies a position in which neither her Nepali identity nor her new status as an immigrant provides a stable foundation. The result is a condition of cultural liminality that is experienced as both a burden and a form of heightened perception.

The novel is also attentive to the relationships that Prema forms with other people on the margins of the host society. The immigrant city is a space of overlapping communities, and Thapa suggests that solidarity and misunderstanding can coexist among those who share the experience of displacement. This is consistent with Brah's (1996) concept of diaspora space, in which different groups are implicated in each other's histories and negotiate belonging through relations of both affinity and difference. Prema's encounters with others who have also come from elsewhere complicate the notion that the immigrant experience is the story of a single nationality encountering a native majority. Instead, the host society appears as a plural and unequal environment in which many kinds of strangeness are present.

Gender, Mobility and the Female Migrant

The gendered character of Prema's experience is central to the novel's meaning. Massey (1994) argues that mobility is itself a gendered phenomenon, since women's movement through space is conditioned by expectations of safety, propriety and dependency. Prema's journey takes place within a patriarchal framework in which a young woman's independence is regarded with suspicion, and the decision to travel alone challenges that framework. In the homeland, the expectation that a woman's life should be oriented toward marriage and family limits her choices. Migration offers a means of escaping those constraints, but it exposes her to new forms of vulnerability, including economic dependence, social isolation and the risk of exploitation.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) has emphasised that women's labour in the global economy is shaped by intersecting structures of gender, race and class, and that the figure of the female migrant worker occupies a particularly vulnerable position. Thapa's protagonist exemplifies this vulnerability while also resisting a reduction to victimhood. She exercises judgment, forms attachments and makes decisions that reflect her own desires, and the novel is careful to present her as a person with an inner life rather than a representative of a category. This balance between structural analysis and individual characterisation is one of the novel's achievements. It allows Thapa to show how larger forces shape a life without erasing the particularity of the person who lives it.

Memory, Nostalgia and the Fractured Self

The fourth movement of the novel concerns memory and identity. Migrants carry the homeland with them as an inner landscape, and Thapa shows how this landscape sustains Prema even as it becomes a source of pain. Rushdie (1991) describes the migrant's act of looking back as an act that produces imaginary homelands, countries of the mind that are shaped by distance and by the passage of time. Prema's recollections of her village are tinged with longing, but they also reveal how selective memory can be. The novel does not permit the reader to treat these recollections as an unmediated truth about the homeland, since they are coloured by the circumstances in which they are recalled.

Svetlana Boym's (2001) distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia is helpful for understanding the novel's approach. Restorative nostalgia seeks to rebuild a lost home and to recover a pure past, while reflective nostalgia dwells in the longing itself and accepts that the past cannot be restored. Thapa's treatment of memory leans toward the reflective. Prema's memories do not issue in a fantasy of return that would repair the rupture, but in a heightened awareness of what has changed and of the impossibility of going back to an unchanged origin. Return, if it occurs, would be to a transformed place, and Prema herself has been transformed by her experience.

Hall's (1990) conception of identity as a process of becoming offers a further way of understanding Prema's trajectory. Her identity is not a stable inheritance that is either preserved or lost, but a continuing negotiation among her origins, her present circumstances and her imagined futures. The novel represents this negotiation through scenes of hesitation, adaptation and self-questioning rather than through declarative statements. What emerges is a self composed of layers, in which Nepali and immigrant identities coexist without cancelling each other. The novel thereby affirms the possibility of a hybrid identity that is neither a betrayal of origins nor a simple assimilation to the host culture.

Rethinking Home

The novel's most significant achievement is its reconception of home. Conventional narratives of migration treat home as the place of origin, to which the migrant either returns or

whose loss she mourns. Thapa unsettles this assumption. Home in *Seasons of Flight* is not a stable location but a set of relations, memories and practices that the protagonist carries and constructs. It is partly the village she remembers, partly the places she has lived, and partly the human attachments she forms along the way. This understanding resonates with Gupta and Ferguson's (1992) argument that the identification of cultures and peoples with particular territories obscures the reality of movement and interconnection, and with Malkki's (1992) critique of the metaphor of roots.

This reconception does not remove pain. The novel is clear that displacement involves real losses, including the loss of familiar language, of social recognition and of the sense of effortless belonging. Yet Thapa does not conclude that displacement is only a tragedy. It also produces a capacity for perception, adaptability and empathy, and it opens a space in which new forms of identity may emerge. Said's (2000) idea of the exile's plural vision is borne out in Prema's increasing ability to see her homeland and her adopted society from multiple angles. In this respect the novel suggests that the condition of being between places, however uncomfortable, may be a source of insight.

The novel's open-endedness reinforces this reading. By declining to resolve Prema's situation in a decisive return or a triumphant integration, Thapa preserves the sense that migration is an ongoing process. The seasons of the title imply that movement recurs, and that the question of where one belongs is never finally answered. This refusal of closure is consistent with Vertovec's (2009) account of transnational lives, which are sustained through connections across borders rather than through a single fixed settlement. The migrant's home is thus plural and provisional, formed in the continual traffic between places.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* represents migration and displacement as a complex and continuing condition rather than a single event. The homeland is shown to be unsettled before departure, the opportunity to leave is marked by ambivalence and chance, the host society is a space of both new possibility and renewed marginality, and the migrant's memory and identity are shaped by negotiation between places. The experience of the female protagonist is further inflected by gender, which conditions her mobility, her labour and her relationships. Through these interlocking concerns, the novel offers a nuanced account of what it means to move from a homeland to an alien land.

The novel's deepest contribution lies in its reconception of home as a portable and negotiated condition. In an era in which migration has become a defining feature of global life, this reconception speaks to the experience of millions whose sense of belonging cannot be contained within a single national territory. It also extends the scope of South Asian diasporic writing by drawing attention to Nepali experiences that have too rarely been the subject of sustained critical study. Further research might compare Thapa's novel with other Nepali and South Asian fictions of migration, examine its relation to the political conditions she describes in her nonfiction, or consider how readers within the diaspora respond to its representation of displacement. Such work would deepen understanding of a literature that is still in the process of being mapped, and would confirm that Thapa's fiction deserves a place in the critical conversation about migration and identity in the contemporary world.

References

1. Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Routledge, 2000.
2. Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
3. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
4. Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, 2001.
5. Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge, 1996.
6. Clifford, James. "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1994, pp. 302–38.
7. Dugaje Manohar. Manjushree Thapa's Seasons of Flight: A Flight into an Alienated Land. Think India. Vol-22-Issue-4. Oct-Dec-2019. https://thinkindiaquarterly.org/index.php/think-india/article/view/10634
8. Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1992, pp. 6–23.
9. Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222–37.
10. Malkki, Liisa H. "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1992, pp. 24–44.
11. Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place and Gender*. Polity Press, 1994.
12. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press, 2003.
13. Relph, Edward. *Place and Placelessness*. Pion, 1976.
14. Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*. Granta Books, 1991.
15. Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press, 2000.
16. Sassen, Saskia. *Globalization and Its Discontents*. New Press, 1998.
17. Thapa, Manjushree. *The Tutor of History*. Penguin Books India, 2001.
18. ---. *Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy*. Penguin Books India, 2005.
19. ---. *Seasons of Flight*. Penguin Books India, 2010.
20. Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. University of Minnesota Press, 1977.
21. Vertovec, Steven. *Transnationalism*. Routledge, 2009.