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Editorial

Moments of Rupture in an Exhausted Political World

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It is difficult to recall a recent year marked by such sustained turbulence and moral exhaustion as 2025. Across much of the world, political violence has unfolded with relentless regularity. The mass killing of civilians in Gaza, Sudan, the eastern Congo, Ukraine, and Lebanon has been widely documented and continuously broadcast, yet with strikingly little effective intervention or accountability. These crises are neither isolated nor exhaustive. Civilian lives continue to be lost through violence, hunger, displacement, and political collapse, often unfolding slowly and beyond sustained public attention. International humanitarian organisations, already operating under severe strain, have faced defunding, restriction, and in some cases dismantling. Millions have been left increasingly exposed to preventable death. In this climate, outrage has often given way to fatigue, and grief to paralysis. History, however, rarely moves in a single direction.

Amid what can feel like a political tide flowing toward impunity and enclosure, moments of rupture still occur. They are uneven and costly, often marked by loss, yet they remain consequential. In Nepal, the past year witnessed such a moment. The events that unfolded in September were chaotic and deeply painful, involving violence, repression, and the deaths of civilians. They resist romanticisation. At the same time, they revealed a collective refusal to accept the routinisation of injustice, a refusal that has become increasingly rare in contemporary political life.

Moments of political rupture have long been recognised within South Asian historical and literary reflection as signs of exhausted legitimacy. In Nepal, the historian Mahesh Chandra Regmi traced the political economy of state formation and the uneven grounds on which authority has been built, maintained, and contested. His work shows how state power has depended on fragile arrangements of consent, obligation, and coercion, arrangements that become unstable when their moral foundations weaken. Writers such as Parijat gave literary form to this condition, capturing the disillusionment and ethical exhaustion that accompany political upheaval and violence. In these historical and literary accounts, rupture appears as a symptom of political failure, a moment when authority loses its capacity to persuade and

relies increasingly on force. Walter Benjamin, and later Slavoj Žižek, articulated a related concern through the concept of "divine violence," using the term to describe situations in which political order loses its claim to legitimacy and exposes its dependence on coercion. Read cautiously in this analytic register, aspects of the recent unrest in Nepal can be approached in similar terms. The protests emerged from long-standing frustrations over governance, inequality, and generational exclusion, and they unfolded through confrontation that proved tragic, unstable, and unresolved. Through this breakdown, political assumptions long treated as settled were reopened, prompting renewed reflection on authority, responsibility, and the limits of existing political arrangements.

The cover of this issue, designed by Salil Gulal, renders this tension with striking clarity. The image draws from the visual language of Kathmandu's urban landscape, a city dense with warnings, prohibitions, surveillance, and instructional signage. Across this field appear bright blue birds in motion. Their presence unsettles the composition and signals movement where stillness is demanded. Read alongside familiar "Kennel Club" signs and other markers of discipline, the birds can be read as suggesting a generational refusal of inherited fear. The image invites us to see Nepal, and the Himalaya more broadly, as a space shaped by contestation and political vitality rather than timeless stasis.

Jeevan R. Sharma, editor-at-large for *HIMALAYA*, was in Kathmandu during the early days of what came to be widely described as a generational uprising against corruption. The immediate catalyst was associated with sweeping restrictions on a number of digital communication platforms, though the protests quickly exceeded any single grievance. Sharma described a city suspended between grief and resolve, uncertainty and determination. The days that followed were marked by violence and loss, and were followed by rapid political shifts that included changes in leadership and a temporary easing of unrest. No single narrative can contain these events. What they demonstrate is that political life, even under conditions of constraint, remains unsettled and open to disruption. Hope, when it appears, rarely does so cleanly.

For *HIMALAYA*, such moments clarify the journal's task. Since its founding in 1972, the journal has sought to provide a space for careful, historically grounded, and ethically serious scholarship on life in the Himalayan region and its diasporas. Now in our fifty-third year of publication, we remain committed to work that confronts difficulty directly, whether through ethnography, history, or theory. Against the normalisation of political fatalism, we continue to insist on analysis that keeps open questions of responsibility, agency, and possibility. It is in this spirit that we present *Volume 44, Issue 2 (Winter 2025)*.

The contributions gathered here engage questions of death, ritual, gender, ecology, art, migration, and care. Each is grounded in specific Himalayan contexts, while also speaking beyond them. Tara Emily Adhikari's study of the *Kichkini* legend in Nepal examines how ghost narratives articulate anxieties surrounding gender, sexuality, and social change. Padma Rigzin traces the transformation of the snow leopard into what Karl Polanyi termed a fictitious commodity within Ladakh's tourism economy, attending to questions of visibility, value, and conservation. Austin Simoes-Gomes explores gossip as a form of ritual criticism among Newar Buddhist practitioners, revealing how normative judgments circulate outside formal settings. Elena Neri's ethnography of Bhutanese migration to Australia challenges linear models of detachment by showing how food practices sustain obligation and continuity across distance. Karma Norbu Bhutia and Mitashree Srivastava document the living tradition of Thangka art in Sikkim,

examining its sacred techniques alongside the pressures that threaten its transmission.

The issue also includes a conference report from *Entangled Medical Futures*, held in Edinburgh in October 2025, which brought together scholars and clinicians to examine plural medical worlds shaped by ecological change, infrastructural precarity, and shifting expectations of care. The book and film reviews that close the volume extend *HIMALAYA*'s long-standing engagement with literature, history, and visual culture across the region.

Taken together, the work in this issue reaffirms the journal's enduring orientation. Scholarship matters, especially in periods marked by violence and epistemic narrowing, because it resists simplification and keeps open spaces for thought, critique, and ethical attention. That commitment has sustained *HIMALAYA* for over half a century. It continues here.