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The Nepal flood did not begin in the mountains, says philosopher Acharya Prashant

Acharya Prashant links Nepal's Rasuwa flood to climate change, human consumption and the deeper crisis of consciousness behind environmental destruction.

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Flood that tore through Nepal's Rasuwa district



The flood that tore through Nepal's Rasuwa district did

not begin in the mountains, philosopher and author Acharya Prashant has said. It began, in his account, in the restless human desire that treats the earth as fuel for itself. Asked why climate change was conspicuously missing from the news coverage of this tragedy, he said the word was kept out because naming it would implicate everyone who lives an ordinary consuming life. “Every emitter is responsible for these deaths,” he said.

The avoidance begins in a wish to look respectable, he said. People cannot accept that they carry responsibility for deaths already in the hundreds and likely to climb into the thousands. The emitter tells himself he is decent, he said, mouthing the ordinary person’s self-defence: “You know I am the regular family man.” The well-behaved citizen is no less an emitter for it.

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Asked why the mainstream press would not use the word, he pointed to who owns it. The heaviest emitters, he said, also control the media and have put their money into hotels, hydroelectric projects and roads across the same fragile landscapes. To report the cause honestly would be to tell investors their money sat under a melting glacier.

“That would simply spook the investors,” he said. “It’s a risky investment.” Sympathy did the work of concealment: keep the cameras on grieving families and no one asks why it keeps happening.

He traced the disaster, in a recent op-ed for *The Pioneer*, ‘Nepal Tragedy: Why Hide the Real Cause?’, to the twenty-sixth of August, when a mass of ice and rock broke away above the Lhunde river in Tibet and burst into Rasuwa. A 2020 ICIMOD inventory with the United Nations had flagged 47 glacial lakes as potentially dangerous, but the one that burst above Rasuwa was not among them: it formed within hours behind an ice-and-rock avalanche and gave way almost at once. Scientists call the probable trigger that avalanche rather than a confirmed glacial lake outburst, with formal attribution still months off. Warming, he wrote, loads the gun even when another finger appears to pull the trigger, since heat thaws the permafrost holding these slopes together and makes such avalanches more frequent.

Even under the gentlest warming the world has promised itself, he said, the Himalayas would lose about a third of their glaciers, and the worst case approached near-total loss this century, a range that matches ICIMOD’s own projections. The rivers look fuller now because the ice is melting, he said, but the flow will crest in about twenty years and then never recover; the children who are three and four today will be young adults when the Ganga and the Yamuna start to shrink.

No Indian should treat this as a neighbour’s misfortune, he said. The stream that flooded feeds the Trishuli, which becomes the Narayani, enters India as the Gandak and joins the Ganga above Patna, watering the fields of Bihar

and eastern Uttar Pradesh. “It is an arm of the Ganga,” he has written of the Trishuli. He also pressed the injustice of it: Nepal produces about a tenth of one per cent of global emissions, and those the flood killed had burned almost nothing.

Much of his answer dwelt on the language of evasion. He objected to the passive constructions in the reporting. “The river swept them away,” he quoted, and “millions have perished.” Such phrasing erases the doer and leaves the river to take the blame. He was equally direct on the framing of the flood as an act of God, and on the economics of rebuilding, since reconstruction lifts the numbers governments live by. “Money is the God for the family and GDP is the God for the country,” he said. Nationalism and the call for better sensors were further ways of changing the subject. “We should have better early warning systems,” he said, giving the standard line, then asked what evacuation could mean when survivors of one flood had already been resettled in the path of the next.

A responsible scientist will not stamp certainty on an event until the analysis is done, he said, and will say only that it was “probably due to climate change but we need to investigate,” even when the odds are overwhelming. “Even if the probability is 0.99,” he said, the honest word stays probably. That caution becomes a loophole: confirmation arrives months later, by which time “the matter would be dead and frozen by that time,” and attention has moved on.

The core of his answer moved inward. The carbon crisis, he said, is not at bottom a crisis of a molecule; it is a “crisis in consciousness” whose root is what he called

“the egoic illusion.” He contrasted it with the ozone crisis, which an earlier generation solved because it touched only a corner of life, the gas in a fridge or an air-conditioner. Carbon dioxide is attached to every step a person takes, which is why it cannot be beaten without a change of heart. In the op-ed he sharpens the point: “Everything that you love is carbon dioxide.” He rejected the opposition of development to environment as a “false binary,” asking what development can mean once the rivers stop flowing.

Green technology, electric vehicles, carbon capture and recycling all have their use, he said, but this time they will not be enough. He named a measure campaigns rarely do, that “the most effective way of curbing carbon emission is having one less child,” and pointed to war as an enormous and uncounted source of emissions. The only remedy equal to the cause, he said, was “a mass based education of the self.” As he puts it in the op-ed, “Self-knowledge is the last environmentalism, and in truth the only one.” It is the premise behind Operation 2030, the climate initiative he launched in 2025 for the UN’s deadline to hold warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, which locates the first work in a person’s own decisions about family, food and consumption, and their own self.

Pressed on a local construction dispute and on street protests, he returned to the same centre. A molecule of carbon dioxide is not local, he said, and neither is the crisis; saving one tree while the centre goes untouched offers only a cheap certificate to the one who does it. A cancer patient does not chant slogans against the cancer, he said; he seeks treatment. What he proposed might be “operationally difficult” while every local fix was

“operationally easy,” yet the local fix was “conceptually bogus” and his own answer “conceptually accurate.”

The disaster is better read as a mirror than as a piece of news. The generation now alive will watch these mountains change in its own lifetime, he said, and its children will live inside that ruin. What the hour asks for is not a wait for cleverer technology, but the one labour no policy can perform: bringing human beings back to knowing themselves. That work, which Operation 2030 exists to carry, is what he calls the real environmentalism

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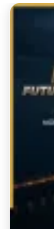
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