Nepal is on a cusp of a major “transformation” from a relatively stable condition of reproduction of socio-economic relations based on feudal and caste stricutures to a more fluid and open condition where the old “order” is changing if not collapsing and a new order is emerging. Based on a fieldwork in rural Nepal since 2008, this paper discusses that alongside the rapid and compressed political change in Nepal, there is clear evidence of a qualitative “step-change” in the way Nepali society is organized which is beyond the continual or “regular ” process of incremental change that are always at work. Many existing social norms and patterns are being challenged and are being re-negotiated. A major transformation is taking place in the political economy of rural livelihoods with its diversification and population mobility. Although traditional forms of semi-feudal labor relations have not disappeared completely and some poorer households are still engaged in semi-feudal and caste-based labor arrangements in agriculture, there is a clear evidence of increasing numbers of laboring households involved in wage labor within, or increasingly outside, the village. At the same time awareness of rights about discrimination based on caste, ethnicity and gender has increased massively, the collective agency of women, oppressed and marginalized groups has escalated and has led to a durable step-change in how individuals, groups, and institutions interrelate. However, ‘transformation,’ such as it is, has yet to make a serious dent in the structural violence that continues to characterize life amongst Nepalis either at home or abroad. Mobility of labor has not necessarily meant more freedom for poorer migrants, although the idea of freedom appears to be driving much of the out-migration from rural Nepal.

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