

The State of
HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Teaching and Research in the Madhesh Province, Nepal



Martin Chautari

The State of Humanities and Social Sciences Teaching and
Research in the Madhesh Province, Nepal

Preferred citation

Martin Chautari. 2022. *The State of Humanities and Social Sciences Teaching and Research in the Madhesh Province, Nepal*. Research Brief No. 33. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.

Copyright © Martin Chautari

Publisher

Martin Chautari

27 Jeetjung Marg, Thapathali

GPO Box 13470, Kathmandu, Nepal

Tel: +977-1-5338050/4102027; Fax: +977-1-5340059

chautari@mos.com.np

www.martinchautari.org.np

INTRODUCTION

While reviewing the state of teaching and research in the humanities and social sciences (hereafter HSS) in Nepal, scholars have mainly confined their studies to institutions located in the Kathmandu Valley.¹ So our knowledge of the state of HSS teaching and research in most parts of Nepal is rather slim. Since much has not been written about the colleges which were established before Tribhuvan University (TU) came into existence in 1959, we also know little about them.

This research brief focuses on the state of HSS in the Madhesh Province² of Nepal for four reasons. First, this province comprises eight southern Tarai districts: Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Bara and Parsa. It covers about 6.6 percent of Nepal's geographical territories but a fifth of the country's population lives in this province, making it the most densely populated among the seven provinces of the country (GoN 2020: 19). Despite its rich linguistic, literary and artistic traditions, this province has remained peripheral in national discussions about HSS teaching and research. Second, social indicators suggest that this province lags behind most of the other provinces (see, Nepal Sarkar 2076 v.s.). The literacy rate and data regarding access to educational institutions are also not very encouraging in this province. Third, the elites there believe that the state of HSS has deteriorated in recent years. As part of this "decline" thesis, many faculty members who teach in the colleges located in the Madhesh Province say that the state of higher education was better during the Panchayat period (1960–1990). They claim that the quality of higher education started to deteriorate after 1990 and became even worse after the first Madhesh revolt of 2007 and the

¹ There are a few exceptions to this trend (see, for example, Parajuli 2008).

² Madhesh Province was known as Province Two until January 2022.

declaration of Nepal as a republic in 2008. Fourth, this brief allows us to better understand the practices of teaching and research activities in the colleges located in the Madhesh Province and creates the basic analytical platform on which further, more detailed studies can be undertaken in this province in the future.

The feeling that once “vibrant” regional higher educational institutions are now facing a “crisis” is popular among the elites. This feeling is fueled by various anecdotes regarding general discipline (or lack thereof) and performance of students in the past and in the present. However, longitudinal data to “prove” this thesis is not easily available. Hence, this brief focuses on the present state of HSS in the Madhesh Province. It shows that student enrollment in HSS subjects is low and that there is widespread lack of interest in research in the college campuses located in this province. As a result, the brief concludes that the state of HSS teaching and research is dismal in the Madhesh Province.

This research brief examines the state of HSS teaching and research in the Madhesh Province by focusing on four constituent campuses of TU.³ They are: Shree Mahendra Bindeshwori Multiple Campus (SMBM Campus) established in Rajbiraj, Saptari in 1957; Suryanarayan Satyanarayan Morbaita Yadav Multiple Campus (SSMYM Campus) established in Siraha in 2024 v.s. (c. 1967);⁴ Ramsworup Ramsagar Multiple Campus (RRM Campus) established in Janakpur, Dhanusha in 1957; and Thakur Ram Multiple Campus (TRM Campus) established in Birganj, Parsa in 1952 (Sharma

³ Constituent campuses are college campuses of TU located in various districts of Nepal. TU has 60 such entities. They need to be distinguished from more than 1,000 community and private colleges which are affiliated with TU.

⁴ The date (2024 v.s.) refers to the establishment of the National Educational Teacher Training Center which was later converted into this Campus. See, <https://ssmymcsiraha.edu.np/school-introducion/>; accessed February 1, 2022.

2071 v.s.). We chose these four constituent campuses of TU for two reasons: First, the number of students enrolled in HSS courses in the community and private colleges is negligible as compared to those enrolled in TU's constituent campuses in the Madhesh Province. Second, three of these four campuses were established prior to the founding of TU.

Field visits to these four campuses were made between September and November 2021. During those visits, we conducted various formal and informal interactions with students, serving and retired faculty members and college administrators. In addition, materials such as course syllabi, journals and “souvenirs” published by the campuses were collected. Data related to the number of faculties and students was also collected. The state of libraries and other research infrastructure was also observed during our visits to these campuses. Subsequently, telephone conversations with some informants were also held.

Apart from the introduction, this research brief contains three sections. The second section presents data on student enrollment and faculty numbers. The third section discusses the weaknesses in the production of HSS researchers in the colleges in the Madhesh Province. In the final section, we discuss the broader implications of our core findings.

DISMAL STATE OF HSS TEACHING

Among all the students enrolled in HSS subjects nationally, those enrolled in colleges in the Madhesh Province account for only 3.90 percent. As shown in Table 1, this figure is only slightly better than the corresponding number for Karnali Province (3.41%).⁵ The regional

⁵ It is generally believed that HSS enrollment is declining because of the state's patronage of science and technology (S&T) subjects. However, only 22.17 percent of the students nationwide are enrolled in S&T subjects

disparities in the distribution of students enrolled in various higher education subjects across the provinces are alarming. For instance, an overwhelming share of HSS students are enrolled in institutions in the Bagmati Province (at 63.48% of the total nationwide). As shown in Table 1, the same is also true for subjects such as science & technology (S&T), engineering and medicine.

Table 1: Province-wise Distribution of Student Enrollment in Various Subjects (in percent)

Subjects/ Streams	Provinces						
	One	Madhesh	Bagmati	Gandaki	Lumbini	Karnali	Sudur-pashchim
HSS	8.57	3.90	63.48	4.72	8.27	3.41	7.64
Management	12.46	7.57	49.51	9.39	12.62	2.00	6.47
Education	15.37	13.57	19.65	9.41	17.68	12.15	12.17
S&T	11.19	4.29	66.11	5.28	8.23	1.23	3.66
Engineering	6.79	2.64	72.41	10.59	3.37	2.40	1.79
Medicine	13.69	2.80	60.82	9.69	12.79	0.21	0.00
Agriculture	10.65	2.86	43.41	10.43	18.95	2.33	11.36
Total students in all subjects	11.94	7.30	49.40	8.63	12.14	3.94	6.66

Source: UGC (2021).

The campuses of the four constituent colleges of TU in the Madhesh Province wear a “deserted” look (maybe this is equally (including agriculture, medicine, animal, ayurveda, veterinary, fisheries, engineering, etc.) while the corresponding number for HSS is 12.61 percent. Enrollment of students in S&T subjects (including all allied S&T subjects) in the Madhesh Province just make up 3.23 percent of the national total. This is marginally better than the corresponding figures for Sudurpashchim (2.44%) and Karnali (1.32%) Provinces. See UGC (2021) for the data on all the S&T related subjects combined.

true for other TU constituent colleges in the other provinces as well). In the main, economically marginalized students and women are enrolled at the regional constituent campuses of TU. Even these students are often absent in the college campuses. The number of students enrolled in HSS subjects in the four TU constituent campuses in the Madhesh Province is small. Frustrated with low student enrollment figures, several campus chiefs and administrative staff that we spoke to during our research said that the HSS subjects should be shut since they had become a burden to college faculty and administrators.⁶

For example, altogether there are about 400 students at the Bachelor's level and the Master's level at the SMBM Campus, Rajbiraj in 18 HSS related subjects.⁷ Among them, fewer than 100 students are enrolled in the Bachelor's level. Interestingly in many subjects such as culture, psychology, etc., there are no students at the Bachelor's level. In subjects like geography, there are no students and teachers. Most of the students enrolled at the Master's level are pursuing degrees in economics and sociology. However, many of those enrolled students rarely attend regular classes. We know from the examination department of the SMBM Campus that only one student in economics and 36 students in sociology appeared for the fourth-semester MA exams in the fiscal year 2077 v.s. It was found that mostly lower-ranked security officers (from Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, and the Nepal Army) enroll in HSS courses at the Bachelor's course but they rarely attend the classes.⁸ These

⁶ Informal conversations at the RRM Campus, Janakpur and at the SMBM Campus, Rajbiraj.

⁷ The total number of students in the SMBM Campus is approximately 2,300. Telephone conversation with Chandeshwor Prasad Yadav, January 18, 2022.

⁸ Informal communication at the SMBM Campus, Rajbiraj.

students apparently enroll in these courses to simply get certificates which they need for their promotion.

The story of RRM Campus, Janakpur is not different when it comes to students being irregular in classes. There are at least 15 subjects at the Bachelor's level and six subjects (sociology, economics, population studies, political science, Nepali and English) offered at the Master's level at this campus. From among a total of more than 3,500 students, fewer than 300 students are enrolled at the Bachelor's level and approximately 700 students at the Master's level in HSS courses. However, hardly 100 students take regular classes and most of them are studying sociology. In other subjects, classes are not held regularly.

The enrollment of students at the SSMYM Campus, Siraha is not good either. This campus was a premier national teacher training center after the implementation of the National Education System Plan (NESP) in 1971 but this is no longer the case. Fewer than 700 students are currently enrolled in this campus. More than half of them are studying in the education faculty and fewer than 100 students are studying HSS subjects. The regular presence of students is extremely weak in the campus.

According to Ashok Kumar Yadav, a faculty member at the SSMYM Campus,

No good students apply to this Campus. Students migrate to study “plus 2” in Kathmandu and other places. Only economically backward students and women who stay at home apply to study here. Earlier, students from Sindhuli, Udaypur and Saptari districts used to come to this Campus to study at the Bachelor's level. Once the Intermediate level was phased out, this campus has become deserted.⁹

⁹ Interview with Yadav, teacher of Nepali (education stream), in November 2021. At one time, students could join college after finishing

The “deserted” look of these campuses highlights the dismal state of HSS teaching in these four constituent campuses of TU. As a consequence, the number of students committed to higher education in HSS subjects and research has decreased.

Exact data on the faculty members teaching different HSS subjects in the four constituent campuses of TU in the Madhesh Province is difficult to access. But, the total number of faculty data is available. For instance, there are 45 permanent teaching staff members (20 in HSS, 20 in S&T, 2 in Management, 2 in Law, and 1 in Education) in the SMBM Campus. In addition, there are currently 21 “part-time” (who get paid on a per class taught basis) teaching staff members (17 in HSS, 2 in S&T and 2 in Management).

The HSS status can be explored in three ways at the RRM Campus, Janakpur.¹⁰ First, there is no faculty member at the rank of a full professor in any of the HSS subjects in this Campus. Political Science has considerable strength in terms of student enrollment but there are no permanent or “contractual” faculty members in this discipline. “Part-time” teachers are somehow managing the classes for the enrolled students. Second, there is only one permanent teaching staff member each in at least nine HSS subjects (namely, Nepali, Hindi, history, sociology, philosophy, psychology, culture, population, and rural development). Interestingly, in geography, there is no teaching staff (permanent or part-time). Third, there are 42 teaching staff members (readers, lecturers, “contract” and “part-time” teachers) in HSS subjects whereas the number of regular

10th grade in school. The first two years of college were informally called the “Intermediate level.” Starting from the year 2008, this level was phased out from TU.

¹⁰ As the comprehensive faculty data of TRM Campus, SMBM Campus and SSMYM Campus was difficult to access, the data of RRM Campus has been used to suggest trends. Field data collected at the RRM Campus on November 25, 2021.

students at the Bachelor's level, as mentioned earlier, is small. At RRM, almost half of the teaching staff are either part-time teachers or are on annual "course-contracts."

In SSMYM Campus, Siraha, currently there are 43 teaching staff members. This total includes permanent, contract and part-time teachers. However, there is no faculty at the rank of a full professor on the campus. Faculty strength has come down considerably when compared to 15 years ago (about 2006). At that time there were 76 teaching staff and 54 of them were full-time permanent faculty and 22 were part-time teachers (see, Bhuder 2062 v.s.: 3). After the phasing out of Intermediate-level at TU's constituent campuses starting from 2008, the number of faculty members was reduced.

Since even many of the students enrolled in HSS subjects do not attend classes regularly, the actual (namely, in-class) student-teacher ratio in these colleges is low. Hence, theoretically the faculty members can give plenty of time to teaching the few students who do show up for classes and their own research. In the next section, the state of research at these campuses will be discussed.

CRISIS IN THE PRODUCTION OF RESEARCHERS

There is a symbiotic relationship between the production of research and researchers. If there are enough researchers, research can be produced. However, this statement does not take into consideration who is doing the research and where these researchers are located. Although Nepal's Tarai including what is now the Madhesh Province had not received much research attention in an earlier era, one cannot say that that is still the case. At least two detailed bibliographies compiled at Martin Chautari give a broad overview of the research done on Nepal's Tarai/Madhesh region including the Madhesh

Province (see Rupakheti 2000; Bista and Manandhar 2009).¹¹ These bibliographies are evidence of the fact that research on the Tarai has been produced in the recent past.

HSS research about the Madhesh Province is happening from various institutional locations including entities related to Nepal's federal government, foreign and Nepali universities, academic NGOs, etc. In terms of the nationality of researchers, both Nepali and *videshi* researchers have done research on the Madhesh Province. Hence, one could say that when it comes to the production of research on the Madhesh Province, various possibilities exist. However, much of this research is being done by researchers *not* based in the Madhesh Province. In other words, researchers based in the Madhesh Province are not contributing to the production of knowledge about the Province. HSS research capacity in the Madhesh Province is extremely weak because there are hardly any research exercises happening in the four TU constituent campuses located in the Province.

This status quo suggests that we need to analytically distinguish between the production of research *on* the Madhesh Province from the production process of researchers *in* the Madhesh Province. In doing so, we take cue from the Indian sociologist Satish Deshpande who pointed out some important questions for discussion regarding capacity for social science research in South Asia. Writing 20 years ago, he asserted that the “major crisis in South Asian social science research capacity is not so much in the production of research as in the production of researchers” (Deshpande 2002: 3628). We will

¹¹ It is obvious that an updated bibliography of HSS research on the Tarai/Madhesh is urgently necessary. Also see the various publications of the NGO Nepal Madhesh Foundation, especially its journal *Madhesh Adhyayan* (established 2013). Seven issue of this journal published thus far contain many important articles and commentaries on the Madhesh Province and other parts of the Tarai.

paraphrase him and say that the crisis in HSS research related to the Madhesh Province is in the lack of the production of competent researchers in the province itself rather than the production of research about the province.

This status quo might be attributed to various factors. First, there is the issue of lack of proper training of students to become competent researchers. Another Indian sociologist Veena Das has explained the importance of grooming students to become researchers:

Research in any field is sustained over some time not by the brilliance of a few outstanding scholars but by the patient building up of competence in the average researcher. What Thomas Kuhn called “normal science” provides the backbone of research in any subject. While students cannot be trained to do brilliant research they can and must be trained to do competent research. (Das 1993: 1159)

However, you can only train students to be competent researchers if they are interested in research to begin with. Moreover, this process demands the availability of faculty members who are themselves engaged in research and are committed to the process of research mentoring. Research is further made possible when there is a supporting community of researchers and an academic infrastructure (seminars, workshops, good libraries, journal and other academic publications) that enables the continuous production, dissemination and discussion of research. Such an environment also needs to be financially bolstered by the availability of funds to support research over a long-term period.

Unfortunately, all of these necessary ingredients seem to be lacking in the Madhesh Province at the moment. First, the students enrolled in the four constituent colleges of TU in the Madhesh

Province are not interested in research. Two observations made by faculty members working in two different colleges in the Madhesh Province are worth noting here. According to Sushil Yadav, the head of the sociology department at the RRM Campus in Janakpur:

Most of the students in Master's program in sociology are already working professionals. For them, a thesis is a thing they need to complete to get a degree. Out of 100 students, only 5-10 go to their field while working on their theses and write them seriously.

Supporting this line of analysis, Basudev Lal Das, a professor of history at the TRM Campus in Birganj added:

Now, people study not for acquiring knowledge but for evidence [that they have a certificate saying they have completed some level of education]. I often comment, "Vidyarthi se besi, pramanapatradhari" [more than students, they are degree aspirants].

The above two observations suggest that the problem begins with the students who are least interested in research. This is further explained by what Shyam Sundar Yadav, a third-semester MA sociology student in the SMBM Campus in Rajbiraj told us:

In sociology, there are mostly "sleeping students" at the SMBM Campus, Rajbiraj. We can say there are two types of students in the master's program: first, those students who are already engaged in full-time jobs at governmental/non-government organizations; second, students who are involved in "student politics" may need to hang around the campus premises to

sustain their politics. Forget about research, all they need from the faculty members is to get the “subject notes” to pass the exam. There will be an exception if you find any students regularly taking the class.¹²

Second, if there is little interest on the part of students to engage in research, much the same could be said about the faculty members teaching in these four colleges, some of which, as discussed above, are severely under-staffed in particular HSS disciplines. Surendra Yadav who teaches sociology in the SMBM Campus told us:

I am the only teacher in the sociology course at this Campus. That too a part-time teacher who has to take at least five classes or more per day. For the research, we need a like-minded group of faculty members which is almost impossible to get here. At this Campus, there are two types of faculty: members of the old and new generations. Old folks never took research seriously. New folks want to do research but do not get adequate support from peers in the Campus.¹³

What Yadav says points to two dynamics. One is that there are many faculty members for whom research is of no interest. Two, those who are interested in research do not find the time and energy to engage in that activity because they are too busy teaching, and work in an environment which does not support research.

Third, the lack of a supporting community of researchers to sustain research was a refrain heard from various informants. This is what Manoj Sah, a third-semester MA student in sociology at

¹² Telephone conversation with Yadav, April 8, 2022.

¹³ Telephone conversation with Yadav, SMBM Campus, Rajbiraj, April 8, 2022.

the RRM Campus, told us about the lack of research seminars and research mentoring:

In two major courses (political science and sociology), the thesis is compulsory. Until now, I have never attended any research seminars at this Campus. Here things are running on an ad hoc basis. The central aim is to get “smart solutions notes” to pass the exams and find shortcuts to thesis writing. So far, I have not received any training on research methodology or any serious mentorship from my campus department for thesis writing.¹⁴

Lack of research seminars run by the faculty and the lack of research mentoring of the students on the part of the faculty are further evidence of the lack of interest and commitment on the part of the faculty of TU’s constituent colleges in the Madhesh Province toward the enterprise of knowledge production. These factors contribute to an environment which does not enable research.

Fourth, another factor that contributes to a poor environment for research is the absence of functional libraries with significant volumes of reference resources and reading space. We visited all the libraries of the four college campuses and a few other public libraries in Siraha and Janakpur as part of our research. The college libraries mainly hold textbooks necessary for students enrolled in various BA and MA degree programs. Books held were generally kept in a disorganized manner. Other reference materials were mostly lacking in these libraries, and hence they are not of particular use for supporting research. During our visits, we did not find any computers in the college libraries. Online library catalogs did not exist in all four libraries. None of these libraries have access to online journals and

¹⁴ Telephone conversation with Manoj Sah, RRM Campus, Janakpur, April 8, 2022.

research databases via the Central Library of TU where such facility is available. Additionally, there is no reading space and students and faculty do not have direct access to the bookshelves. Hence, both students and teaching staff members rarely visit the libraries.¹⁵ In the cities in which these four colleges are located, there are no good bookstores where students/faculty can buy academic books which they cannot find in their college libraries. The bookstores that do exist sell textbooks, “smart solutions” notes for various courses and resources useful to prepare for the federal civil service (Loksewa) qualifying examinations.

Fifth, another element in an enabling research environment is the regular publication of research journals.¹⁶ In the comprehensive list of journals published from within Nepal compiled at the Martin Chautari library, only three journals were found to be published from institutions located in the Madhesh Province. In fact, all three were published from entities within the TRM Campus, Birganj. Two issues of *Nepalese Journal of Integrated Sciences* were published in 2011 and 2012, respectively.¹⁷ One issue of the journal *Smart Vision: A Journal of Educational Research* was published in 2013.¹⁸ Subsequently, both journals became defunct. *Academic Voices: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, founded in 2011, is an annual publication

¹⁵ This paragraph also relies on a telephone conversation with Arvind Mishra, RRM Campus library, February 15, 2022.

¹⁶ For details on the HSS journal landscape in Nepal, see Onta (2010). An update of this kind of overview is needed to account for the changes in the landscape over the past dozen years.

¹⁷ This annual journal was a publication of the Research Society of Integrated Sciences in the TRM Campus. Further details on the two issues published can be found at <https://njis.webs.com/>; accessed April 10, 2022.

¹⁸ Its publisher is identified as the Statistical and Mathematical Association for Research and Teaching in the TRM Campus.

of the TRM Campus. It has been published regularly since then.¹⁹ However, not counting a few exceptions, most of the research articles in this journal do not focus on regional socio-economic and cultural issues of the Madhesh Province.

Academic journals can only survive if the editorial team associated with them are supported by members of a research community who are interested in communicating about their research to their peers at large. Finding such support is an enormous challenge in many countries of the Global South with weak traditions of research. The absence of such support is the main factor behind the high mortality and irregularity of journals in Nepal.²⁰ This absence seems to be a central factor regarding why the *Nepalese Journal of Integrated Sciences* became defunct. Birendra Kumar Mishra, who served as one of the two executive editors of this journal, told us:

When we put out notices calling for submission of articles for the journal, some people sent their pieces to us. Few even pressurized us to publish their materials. However, often they had not done adequate research and they did not agree to revise their research papers [after we reviewed them]. We also identified a few dissertations done at the TRM Campus and thought that they could be converted into articles regularly. But this did not materialize and we lost hope in the process. We decided not to pursue the publication of the journal further. We are now retired from the campus.²¹

¹⁹ Up to volume 10 (2020) have been published in print already. However, only up to volume seven have been uploaded into the portal of Nepal Journals Online. See, <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/AV/issue/archive>; accessed April 11, 2022.

²⁰ For an elaborate discussion, see Onta (2021).

²¹ Telephone conversation with Mishra, February 23, 2022. Editors of other journals have also hoped that MA theses done in Nepal's universities could be converted into journal articles. For a discussion of this hope and

The absence of existing robust journals published from the Madhesh Province is disheartening to young academics based in the province who might be thinking about editing such journals or starting new ones to contribute toward a better supporting environment for research in the province.

Finally, an enabling environment for research requires funding support for research-related expenses. The TU system is not very generous when it comes to supporting research by its faculty. Some research support from the University Grants Commission is available to faculty members in Nepal's universities. However, this support is small in its volume and is mired in bureaucracy that makes it difficult for university faculty based outside of Kathmandu to access it.²²

Is the lack of funding an issue regarding the crisis in the production of researchers in the colleges of the Madhesh Province? Based on the discussion thus far, we think that funding is a necessary condition for the production of researchers but not a sufficient condition when it comes to the Madhesh Province. As mentioned earlier, building research capacity requires sustained training of students via mentorship, access to knowledge resources via good libraries and journals, and support from members in the proximate research community who are engaged in research. Since these constituting aspects of the research enterprise are currently missing, more funding alone will not transform the research landscape of the Madhesh Province anytime soon.

We can say this based on a concrete example. As Nepal became a federal polity after the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015, the opportunities for research and research funding at the local and provincial government levels have increased. There are some new sources of funding available for research. For example,

its non-realization (largely) with respect to research on the Nepali media, see Humagain (2011).

²² For further details, see Uprety and Parajuli (2016).

the Madhesh Province government has allocated Rs. 15 million (one and half crore rupees) in its budget for the fiscal year 2078/2079 v.s. to support the writing of the history of Madhesh (see Madhesh Sarkar 2078 v.s.). But this research has not been conducted yet in the absence of capable researchers in the Province and some procedural delays.²³ Had the four constituent campuses of TU (and other campuses in the province) produced human resources with competent knowledge of research, presumably this research on the history of the Madhesh would have started by now.

To sum up, the crisis in the production of researchers in the Madhesh Province is a result of the combination of various factors including lack of interest in research on the part of students, lack of mentorship regimes led by interested and competent faculty members, and lack of a supporting academic infrastructure consisting of good libraries and research journals. In such an environment, the training of students at the four college campuses to become competent researchers is virtually nonexistent.²⁴ And this is the central crisis in HSS teaching and research in this province.²⁵

IMPLICATIONS

This research brief explored the state of the HSS research in the Madhesh Province. It focused on the data related to the number of students and teaching faculties in the HSS disciplines in the four

²³ Telephone conversation with Dipendra Jha, Chief Attorney, Government of the Madhesh Province, April 11, 2022.

²⁴ As far as we can figure out, most of the public intellectuals in the Madhesh Province are outside the TU college system. They are actively writing (mostly in the literary register) and doing research but rarely producing research-based articles in HSS.

²⁵ For comparative commentary on the situation of HSS teaching and research in three Tarai districts of Lumbini Province (previously known as Province Five), see Martin Chautari (2019).

constituent campuses in the province. It also analyzed the factors responsible for the lack of a functioning process in the production of competent researchers in those colleges. Our research reported here allows us to conclude that the state of HSS teaching and research training in the Madhesh Province is dismal. Hence, people with sound knowledge of experiential research (and associated activities) are lacking in critical numbers. Currently the HSS research capacity in this province is severely limited. This has hampered the possibility of conducting necessary research in this province for academic and non-academic purposes.

What are the broad implications of this status quo beyond the confines of the four constituent colleges of TU? First, the paucity of capable human resources with demonstrable capabilities for research is felt widely at the provincial and local levels of public life. Consequently, the possibility for TU's constituent colleges or their teaching faculty to collaboratively conduct research either with/for provincial or local governments in the Madhesh Province does not seem promising. In addition, journalism and other critical spheres of public life too have suffered because of this lack.

Second, as Nepal is undergoing a transition to become a fully functional federal republic, the challenges inherent in this process have become more complex in all three levels of government—federal, provincial and local. To understand these challenges from the bottom up and to suggest possible policy options available to provincial and local governments require that we have critical numbers of locally-embedded academics with competent skills for basic and policy research. In the absence of such individuals, public life in the country can be dominated by the noise emanating from Kathmandu's leading political class. Issues that need to be genuinely tackled at the provincial and local government levels will not even find space in the radar of public life at those levels, let alone the federal public sphere.

Finally, as members of the erstwhile marginalized communities try to find their voices in the local and provincial public spheres, they need research skills to advocate for issues that are important to their lives, livelihoods and social dignity.²⁶ Such skills are also needed to document violations of their rights by government actors at all three levels of the federal polity and to advocate for their fundamental rights in a *loktantrik* democracy.²⁷ Bad training in colleges shortchange such members of the erstwhile marginalized communities. Neither they nor their proximate supporters are equipped with the necessary research skills to engage in the fights for social justice in an increasingly more challenging polity that is Nepal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief was researched by Sohan Prasad Sha, researcher at Martin Chautari and written by him and Pratyoush Onta. Harsha Man Maharjan provided editorial support. He, Lokranjan Parajuli, Devraj Humagain, Devendra Uprety, Rukh Gurung, Shyam Kunwar, and Sanjila Moktan provided comments on previous drafts. We also thank those who gave useful comments when this research was presented at a Martin Chautari Research Seminar on March 20, 2022. Thanks to National Endowment for Democracy (NED) for providing financial support to Martin Chautari to research and publish this brief.

REFERENCES

Appadurai, Arjun. 2006. The Right to Research. *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 4(2): 167–177.

²⁶ This line of thought is influenced by Appadurai (2006).

²⁷ This argument has been discussed at great length in Sha (2020) and Martin Chautari (2020).

- Bhuder, Yugal Prasad. 2062 v.s. Shree Suryanarayan Satyanarayan Morbaita Yadav Bahumukhi Campus Sirahako Rajat Jayanti Samaroha-2062 ko Upalakshama Prastut Prativedan. An unpublished report, Siraha.
- Bista, Tirtha and Chiran Manandhar. 2009. *Tarai Madhes Bibliography*. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.
- Das, Veena. 1993. Sociological Research in India: The State of Crisis. *Economic and Political Weekly* 28(23): 1159–1161.
- Deshpande, Satish. 2002. Social Science Research Capacity in South Asia: Some Questions for Discussion. *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(35): 3628–3630.
- GoN (Government of Nepal). 2020. *Economic Survey: 2019–2020*. Kathmandu: GoN.
- Humagain, Devraj. 2011. Media Adhyayanko Panch Varshalai Farkera Herda. *Media Adhyayan* 6: 1–14.
- Madhesh Sarkar. 2078 v.s. *Rato Kitab 2078/2079*. Janakpur: Artha Mantralaya.
- Martin Chautari. 2019. *Institutional Assessment of Rights-based Advocacy in the Western Tarai*. Research Brief no. 25. Available at <https://martinchautari.org.np/mc-publications/37>; accessed April 10, 2022.
- Martin Chautari. 2020. ‘Writing as an Activism’: Barefoot Research Initiative in Nepal. Research Brief no. 29. Available at <https://martinchautari.org.np/mc-publications/41>; accessed April 10, 2022.
- Nepal Sarkar. 2076 v.s. *Pradesh No. 2 Ko Janasankhyikiya Sthiti*. Janakpurdham: Pradesh Niti tatha Yojana Ayog.
- Onta, Pratyoush. 2010. The Landscape of Social Science and Humanities Journals Published from Nepal: An Analysis of Its Structural Characteristics. *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 15(2): 331–380.

- Onta, Pratyoush. 2021. (Almost) Always Occasional: The World of Sociology and Anthropology Journals Published in Nepal. In *Practices of Sociology in Nepal*. Pranab Kharel and Gaurab KC, eds., pp. 79–119. Kathmandu: Vajra Books.
- Parajuli, Biswo Kalyan, ed. 2008. *Sociology and Anthropology in Nepal: Proceedings of National Workshop on Past, Present and Future of Sociology/Antropology in Nepal (1–2 December 2007)*. Pokhara: Department of Sociology and Anthropology (DSA), Prithvi Narayan Campus.
- Rupakheti, Sanjog. 2000. Tarai Studies: A Bibliography. *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 5(2): 299–349.
- Sha, Sohan P. 2020. “Paidal” Anusandhan: Avadharana ra Abhyas. In *Paidal Anusandhan: Prayog ra Upalabdhi*. Sohan P. Sah and Mahesh Raj Maharjan, eds., pp. 1–20. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.
- Sharma, Gopinath. 2071 v.s. *Nepalma Shikshako Itihas*. Part 2. Kathmandu: Makalu Prakashan.
- UGC (University Grants Commission). 2021. *Education Management Information System: Report on Higher Education, 2019/2020*. Bhaktapur: UGC.
- Uprety, Devendra and Lokranjan Parajuli. 2016. Nepalma Pragyk Anusandhanka lagi “Aarthik Purvadhar” ko Upalabdhatta: Prarambhik Tippani. *Samaj Adhyayan* 11: 187–208.

