

A wide-angle photograph of a courtyard with several large, mature trees and a two-story building in the background. The text 'CHAUTARI QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER No. 5 | April-June 2024' is overlaid in large, bold, yellow letters.

# CHAUTARI QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

## No. 5 | April-June 2024

### REGULAR DISCUSSIONS

Martin Chautari (MC) organized 26 discussions in its regular series on Sundays and Tuesdays between April and June 2024. The topics of these discussions varied and included themes such as digital sovereignty, mental health, the governance of farmer managed irrigation systems, the history of school education, the federal civil service act, civic space, land rights issues in the Madhesh, Dalit literature, and the reading habits of children.

In collaboration with other institutions, MC organized six discussions on the current challenges faced by Nepal's economy. The discussion themes under this series included the current crisis in the cooperatives movement, the economic crisis and its impact on the hydroelectricity sector, the challenges faced by small entrepreneurs, the political economy of the most recent budget, subnational revenue and expenditure systems, and planning and budget allocation at the level of the local governments.

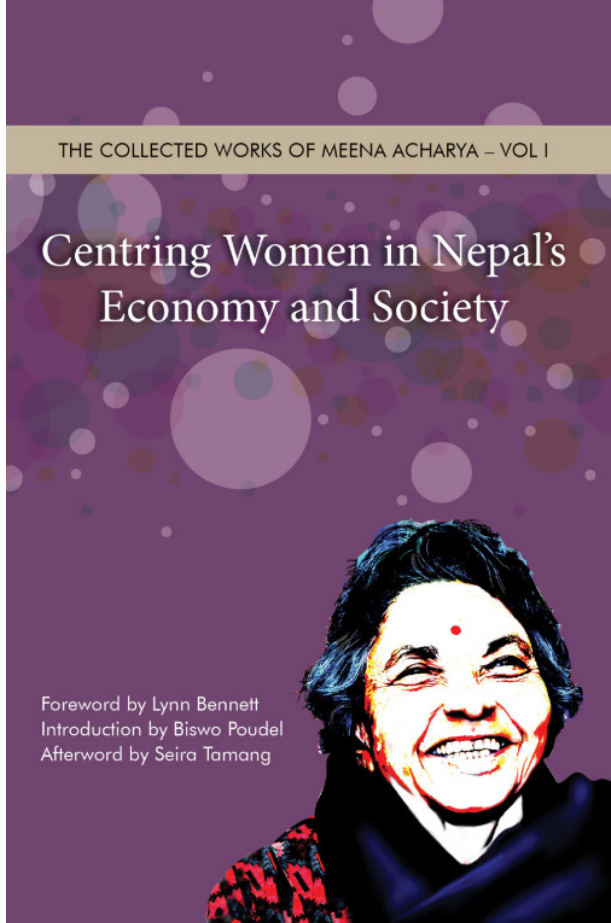
Nepal Madhesh Foundation and Martin Chautari had been jointly organizing a monthly Madhesh Discussion Series since November 2017. At the request of the Foundation, this series has been temporarily discontinued since June 2024.

Two books were discussed during the regular discussion series. These were: *Aamsanchar ra Samavesi Patrakarita* (Mass Communication and Inclusive Journalism, 2080 v.s.) by Tara Mani Sapkota and *Adhura Kranti: Sangharsha Matribhumika Lagi* (Incomplete Revolution: The Struggle for the Motherland; 2024) by Rajendra Mahato.



Prof. Richard Bownas (left) speaking on June 30, 2024





## BOOK LAUNCH

On April 2, 2024, Social Science Baha and Martin Chautari jointly released the book *Centring Women in Nepal's Economy and Society: The Collected Works of Meena Acharya* (2024). The 790-page book has been published in two volumes and contains 31 articles by the pioneering feminist economist. On the occasion, the former vice-chair of the National Planning Commission, Dr Biswo Nath Poudel and Martin Chautari Vice-chair Kailash Rai commented on the book. Author Meena Acharya also spoke on the occasion. Acharya's book also contains an afterword by the former chair of Martin Chautari, Seira Tamang. Titled



Dr Biswo Nath Poudel, Dr Meena Acharya and Kailash Rai at the book release program on April 2, 2024. (Photo by Social Science Baha)

"Beyond Respectability to Demanding Respect: The Work of Meena Acharya," this text was first delivered as a lecture in Kathmandu in October 2019 in honor of the work of Dr Acharya.

## CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVES

### WORKSHOP OF WOMEN RESEARCHERS-II



Dil Kumari Karki (right) presenting her paper at the Workshop of Women Researchers II. On the left is MC Treasurer Manu Thada

Martin Chautari held a second workshop of women researchers in its premises on May 19, 2024. The aim of this workshop was to encourage women scholars in the humanities and social sciences and to increase women's engagement in public forums. As reported in the previous newsletter, the first of such workshop for this year was held on March 17, 2024. Three research papers were presented in two separate sessions. The first by Sirjana Koirala focused on the participation of Dalit women in Nepali politics. The second by Jamuna Siwakoti analyzed the views of various professionals on rape. The final paper by Dil Kumari Karki discussed school teachers' awareness and capability enhancement approaches regarding disaster management in Kathmandu. Following each presentation, there was an open discussion. Altogether 18 participants, 16 of whom were women, participated in the workshop. MC will organize a similar workshop of women researchers in March 2025.

### ENERGY POLICY DIALOGUE SERIES

As part of its capacity building initiatives, Martin Chautari in collaboration with the Urja Khabar media team has started a monthly "Energy Policy Dialogue" series from April 2024. The dialogue is held at Chautari's seminar hall on the last Tuesday of each month. The first discussion held on April 30 was about cross-border trade of Nepal's electricity and the associated risks for Nepali consumers. The speaker was Sher Singh Bhat, former deputy executive director of Nepal Electricity Authority. The second discussion held on

(ऊर्जा खबर र मार्टिन चौतारीको संयुक्त आयोजना)

## ऊर्जा सुरक्षा र स्वच्छ ऊर्जा रूपान्तरणका लागि जलविद्युत् वर्तमान परिदृश्य र भावी कार्यदिशा



मिति, समय र स्थान  
असार १९, २०८१ (June 25, 2024), मंगलबार  
दिउँसो ३:००-४:३० बजे  
मार्टिन चौतारी सभाकक्ष | थापाथली, काठमाडौं

प्रबल अधिकारी  
ऊर्जाविद् तथा पूर्वउपकार्यकारी निर्देशक, नेपाल विद्युत् प्राधिकरण

ऊर्जा खबर



LIVE  
fb.com/UrjaKhabarOfficial  
fb.com/martinchautari.f  
youtube.com/MChautari

May 28 focused on the impact of the current economic crisis on the development of Nepal's hydroelectricity. The speaker was Ms Suman Joshi, a former banker and now an independent power producer. The third discussion held on June 25 focused on the role of hydroelectricity in energy security and the production of clean energy. The speaker was Prabal Adhikari, former deputy executive director of Nepal Electricity Authority.

### READING SEMINAR ON CASTE



Chautari will be organizing a reading seminar entitled "Unravelling New Layers of Caste: Embodiment, Affect, Emotion, and Performative" in August 2024. Cultural anthropologist Dr Amar BK will lead this seminar. The seminar will explore groundbreaking literature that delves into the emotional, affective, performative, and experiential dimensions of caste, with the concept of touch being the central focus. This seminar promises to offer deep insights and foster rich discussions on the multifaceted experiences of caste in contemporary society. The seminar is targeted to MA, MPhil, PhD students and early career scholars. More details about this reading seminar can be found here: <https://martinchautari.org.np/events/reading-seminar-on-unravelling-new-layers-of-caste-embodiment-affect-emotion-and-performative-with-dr-amar-bk>.

### THE CHAUTARI ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2024

The next Chautari Annual Conference will be held on November 27–29, 2024. The call for papers was put out in early February 2024. More than 90 abstracts in diverse subjects were received from researchers who are based in higher education institutions in Nepal, India, China, Bangladesh, Japan, the UK, Denmark, Norway, Austria, Switzerland, Canada, the US and Australia. The Conference Organizing Committee has selected 82 of the submitted abstracts and have invited their authors to submit their full papers by October 31, 2024. The list of selected abstracts for the conference is available here: <https://martinchautari.org.np/blogs/selected-abstracts-and-panels-for-the-chautari-annual-conference-2024>.

### LIBRARY

During this quarter, members of the Chautari library staff continued the scanning of important historical documents. In particular, they managed to scan more than 100 documents related to the Panchayat era (1960–1990) of Nepali history. About seven dozen such scanned documents—originally produced by the Panchayat state as part of its governing and propaganda operation—have now been uploaded to the Chautari website at [www.martinchautari.org.np/blogs/panchayat-system](http://www.martinchautari.org.np/blogs/panchayat-system). These documents, now relatively obscure and inaccessible to researchers, will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of our collective past. More such documents will be uploaded in the coming months.

#### Panchayat System

2024-05-08

पञ्चायतकालमा उत्पादित केही छानिएका दस्तावेज/पाठ्य सामग्री

राजा महेन्द्रले पुस १, २०१७ मा विदेशी प्रसाद कोइराला नेतृत्वको जननिर्वाचित सरकारलाई अपदस्व गरी सम्पूर्ण शासनसत्ता आफ्नो हातमा लिए। यसको ठीक दुई वर्षपछि उनले नेपालको संविधान २०१९ जारी गरी निर्दलीय पञ्चायत व्यवस्थाको सुरुवात गरे, जुन २०४६ सालसम्म टिक्ने। पञ्चायत व्यवस्थाको प्रारम्भ लगत्तै तत्कालीन राजा संयन्त्रबाट सो व्यवस्थाको धुमधाम पक्षपात गरी अनेकौं दस्तावेज एवं प्रचार सामग्री उत्पादन र वितरण गर्ने कार्यको थालनी भयो। पञ्चायतकालमा उत्पादित यस्ता केही दस्तावेज/पाठ्य सामग्री हामीले यहाँ राखेका छौं। आउँदा दिनमा यस्ता अरू सामग्री हामी यहाँ थप्दै जानेछौं। सो व्यवस्थाबारे अध्ययन अनुसन्धानमा रुचि हुनेलाई यी सामग्री उपयोगी हुने छ।

केन्द्रीय पंच भेला २०५२  
गाउँ अञ्चल अभियान समिति नियमावली २०३१  
गाउँ फर्क राष्ट्रिय अभियान  
गाउँ फर्क राष्ट्रिय अभियान कार्यविधि सम्बन्धी केही सुझावहरू  
गाउँफर्क अञ्चल अभियान खर्च सम्बन्धी कार्याविधि नियम २०३१  
गाउँफर्क राष्ट्रिय अभियान २०३१  
गाउँ पंचायत र गाउँलेको कर्तव्य  
गृहमन्त्री श्री विश्वबन्धुपायाको रेडियो भाषण  
दलविहीन प्रजातन्त्रिक पञ्चायत व्यवस्थाका मूलभूत सिद्धान्तको व्याख्या  
नेपाल २०१७ सालको परीवर्तन विन र अब के गर्नु पर्ने  
नेपाल किसान संगठनको विधान  
नेपाल बाल संगठनको विधान  
नेपाल मजदुर संगठनको विधान  
नेपाल युवक संगठनको विधान  
नेपाल विद्यार्थी संगठनको विधान  
नेपाल संविधान २०१९ तेशो संशोधन  
नेपालको राष्ट्रिय चिन्हहरू  
नेपालको संविधान - २०१९ - बनाइ जारी गरी बसेको बारे  
पंचायत  
पंचायत के कसो

Screenshot of the related MC web page for the uploaded Panchayat documents

### PUBLICATIONS

Starting from the year 2001, Chautari began publishing books in the Chautari Book Series. Most of the books have been published in the thematic areas in which Chautari researchers have worked. By June 2024, 115 books had been published in this Series, 70 percent of them in the





Nepali language. In addition to books written/edited by Chautari researchers, books written by other scholars have also been published in this Series. Published books have included monographs, edited volumes, collected essays of a single author, readers/anthologies, bibliographies, dictionaries, etc. These books are available for purchase from Chautari and the main bookstores in Kathmandu and some shops in several other cities of Nepal. They can also be found in more than 100 libraries in Nepal and other countries. In this context, we asked Dr Katharine Rankin, Professor of Geography and Planning at the University of Toronto, to reflect on what the Chautari Book Series has meant to her as an academic who has been doing research on Nepal for close to 30 years. Here is what she wrote.



### CHAUTARI BOOK SERIES PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE

— Dr Katharine Rankin

The Chautari Book Series plays a critical role on the academic landscape of Nepal and South Asia. It contributes empirically rich and theoretically-engaged scholarship across traditional academic disciplines, which bear directly on matters of pressing political and ethical significance. The series aligns with the wider mission of Martin Chautari to build a robust public sphere by promoting informed dialogue among a wide constituency of scholars, policy makers, development practitioners, journalists and politicians. This is a highly unusual and laudable function for an academic institution. As a “self-governing, non-profit entity,” situated outside universities and state-supported academies, Martin Chautari has thus curated a book series that manifests roles for scholarship that are at once critical and applied. The significant Nepali language offerings reflect this commitment (and a fundamental post-colonial ethos).

Chautari books have featured significantly in my scholarship. As a long-time student of Nepal Studies, I have sought to explore how the making of markets and politics articulates social worlds and cultural ideologies. This inquiry has more specifically entailed studies of a Newar entrepot town; microfinance and state-led development finance; and place-based experiences with post-conflict state restructuring, infrastructure development and earthquake recovery.

I routinely turn to Martin Chautari publications for astute analysis of the wider political-economic dynamics in which my research is situated. The recent *Reading Nepali Transition (2006–2015)*, edited by Pranab Kharel (2022) has proved indispensable for its critical account

of the Constituent Assemblies and Constitution drafting processes at the national scale, which directly informs my understanding of local-scale articulations that are the focus of my work. In particular, the section on how state-society relations developed as newly empowered social groups made claims on the state aligns constructively with my own place-based exploration of post-conflict and post-disaster claims making in relation to infrastructure development. *Reading Nepali Transition* pairs well with *Nepal’s Federal Conundrum: Negotiating a Strong Federal System on Weak Democratic Foundations*, edited by Seira Tamang (2023). The latter volume offers grounded accounts of federalization in specific localities. The emphasis in that collection on negotiated governance, the agency of a wide range of actors, and the dialectics of rupture and continuity furnishes important theoretical and methodological, as well as empirical, contributions.

I would also note that Chautari has been diligent about getting books out quickly on matters of utmost policy and political significance. As several research teams galvanized to assess the impacts and implications of the devastating 2015 earthquakes, *Courage in Chaos: Early Rescue and Relief after the April Earthquake*, by Yogesh Raj and Bhaskar Gautam (2015) made an early statement about the role of ordinary citizens in processes of rescue and repair, while also pointing to the “amnesia” of a state hungry for data, but ineffectual at directing information toward effective care for its citizens. In *Track II – Nepal’s Pluralistic Hydropower Development Post-Arun* (2016), Bikash Panday makes the case for the role of small-scale hydropower for the transition to clean, renewable—and secure—energy. The book documents the “organic” emergence of alternative developers in the wake of the failed mega Arun III hydropower project in the mid-1990s; in so doing it has contributed to securing institutional supports for micro-hydro across Africa, Latin America and Asia today. *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*, edited by Deepak Thapa (2003) and *Food Crisis in Karnali: A Historical and Politico-economic Perspective* by Jagannath Adhikari (2008) are additional examples of MC books that furnish a timely political-economic analysis of significant contemporaneous developments. A cluster of books offering historical perspective (e.g., *Autocratic Monarchy: Politics in Panchayat Nepal* by L.S. Baral 2012), meanwhile, serves as a check against narrow, presentist analyses of current events.

Another cluster of books serves the critical function of orienting Nepal Studies scholars to academic disciplines as they are institutionalized in Nepal (and the UK). MC has published books on “*The State of*” the discipline for Anthropology/Sociology, Geography, and History, all in 2014, as well as *Nepal Studies in the UK: Conversations with Practitioners* by Pratyoush Onta (2004). While preparing a special issue for *Studies on Nepali History and Society* 25(1), 2020 on “Nepal Geographies,” our editorial team (Elsie Lewison, Galen Murton, Dinesh Paudel and myself)

drew on these resources in order to position our argument within a wider field of Nepal Studies—and to make the case that Nepal and Himalayan geographies have proved catalytic in advancing certain key areas of geographic thought, namely sustainability, disaster and infrastructure. At the same time, we suggest, the scholarly community also continues to grapple with the uneven geographies of power and privilege—which the Nepali language offerings in the Chautari Book Series go a long ways toward redressing.

The editorial team at Martin Chautari is simply extraordinary. As a result, Chautari Books meet rigorous standards of academic scholarship—and collectively they make theoretical, methodological, and policy-relevant contributions that have elevated Nepal Studies within the wider landscapes of area studies, social science and humanities disciplines, and development studies and practice.

## SELECTIVE EXCERPTS FROM TESTIMONIES THAT DESCRIBE MC'S “IMPACT”

In late 2023 and early 2024, we asked various friends and colleagues to write short testimonies of how Martin Chautari's work over the years has impacted their work and lives. We also asked them to reflect on the general importance of Chautari's work for Nepal's public sphere, research and publication landscapes. Here are some excerpts from what three of them have said in their testimonies.

### A WORLD-CLASS INSTITUTION IN THE HEART OF KATHMANDU



Amish Raj Mulmi, Author of *All Roads Lead North: Nepal's Turn to China* (2021)

Very few institutions in Nepal have produced a body of work with the longevity and impact that Martin Chautari has. Martin Chautari's research into the social sciences has revealed new facets of Nepal to a new generation of writers, scholars and researchers. Its multidisciplinary approach has always been particularly notable, as has its publications, especially the *SINHAS* journal, which has sustained itself for a long time despite the hardships the organization has faced. Its forays into academic publishing brings a new degree of editorial excellence to Nepali academic publishing that we rarely see, especially its efforts to bring out low-priced Nepali editions of works that are important and relevant to the Nepali reading public. Its endeavors to disseminate knowledge

through its weekly seminars—which are notably free to the public—is another aspect that makes Martin Chautari a world-class institution in the heart of Kathmandu, Nepal. For an independent researcher such as me, its free library is a treasure trove, one which allows scholars to access the best of world knowledge. I am in awe of the collective strength and determination that Martin Chautari's scholars and team demonstrate, challenging as funding for the social sciences is, in continuing their monumental efforts towards shaping and nurturing new scholars and researchers.

### AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE ENGAGED IN RIGOROUS YET THOUGHTFUL ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND LEARNINGS



Dr Meeta S. Pradhan, Senior Research Fellow, Southasia Institute for Advanced Studies (SIAS)

I remember attending a couple of the “development discussions” in the early 1990s, at the offices of the Intermediate Technology Development Group in Kamaladi, Kathmandu. I had just returned to Nepal after getting my master's degree, had joined my first job as a development professional, and was waiting to head off to Sankhuwasabha. It was exciting and inspiring to sit around with other development professionals, some who clearly had a lot of experience and interesting insights gained through their work. That was the beginning of the *Mangalbare* Discussion Series, which eventually evolved into much more than just developmental and academic discussions; it became the foundation for a research-oriented organization—Martin Chautari—probably the first of its kind in Nepal.

I went back to make my first ever presentation at Martin Chautari in 2013, then again in 2021 and yet once again in 2023. These were opportunities for me to share my research findings, my learnings, and my experiences that were at the cusp of development practices and academia. After the first few daunting minutes, those sessions became very interesting. There were always a good group of people who would listen respectfully and then throw out some challenging questions. I mostly focused on the “younger” ones—the students, researchers and scholars—and felt grateful for the opportunity not just to share my own learnings, but that there was a relatively safe space for young minds to listen, process, question, discuss and digest (or not!).

The journal of Martin Chautari—*Studies in Nepali History and Society*—is a result of hard work, dedication and commitment of many scholars in Nepal and beyond. The journal has been able to maintain its rigor and high quality,





and interdisciplinary scholars in Nepal and other countries have made their contributions. I had an opportunity to submit one of my articles as well; it went through the rigors of being peer-reviewed and revised, and finally published in 2015. I have also had opportunities to review papers and to write a book review.

The opportunity to be engaged in rigorous yet thoughtful academic research and learnings, to be able to listen to a wide variety of research topics, participate in diverse discourses and discussions presented and moderated by youthful (and seasoned) minds has been a tremendous contribution of Martin Chautari over all these years. There is a continued need for this kind of impact to scale up and scale out in the country—even more so in the present context where the state of pedagogy, critical thinking and compelling writing needs to be improved many folds in Nepal.

### CHAUTARI BRINGS FOREIGN AND NEPALI RESEARCHERS INTO A CONVERSATION

Martin Chautari provides a space for the presentation and discussion of research findings and ideas that is open, democratic, non-hierarchical, and accessible by all. This space is populated by academics, activists, journalists and interested members of the public and serves as an important interface between Nepali and non-Nepali researchers who are working on Nepali topics and issues.

Martin Chautari has generated impacts in many different contexts and in all sorts of ways, but there are two that loom largest in my mind.

The first is the way in which it has brought foreign and Nepali researchers into a conversation with one another.



Michael Hutt, Emeritus Professor of Nepali and Himalayan Studies, SOAS, University of London

Nepal has always attracted more than its share of academic researchers from the Global North. Prior to the 1990s, most of the research that was done on Nepali society was conducted by people (anthropologists, mainly) who were not themselves Nepali, and published in non-Nepali languages (primarily English) outside Nepal. Many of these

foreign researchers were alarmed at first when the local researchers nurtured and supported by Martin Chautari began to challenge and criticize their work. Thus began a dialogue that has led over the years to the development of an environment where mutual respect prevails. Nowadays the works of Nepali and foreign researchers sit comfortably side by side in MC's highly respected house journal, *Studies in Nepali History and Society*.

The second area of impact is the research generated and published by Martin Chautari itself, in both English and Nepali. This has evolved and changed over the years as a response to both challenges and opportunities, and has resulted in important bodies of published work in thematic areas such as the Nepali media and Nepali education. MC's fostering of and support for research-based writing and publication in Nepali as well as English plays a vital role in a context where the English language is becoming ever more dominant.



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