

A photograph of a two-story building with a covered porch, surrounded by lush green trees and a paved walkway. The image is used as a background for the newsletter header.

CHAUTARI QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

No. 7 | October–December 2024

REGULAR SEMINARS

Martin Chautari's regular discussion/seminar series are held on Sundays and Tuesdays. Between October and December 2024, 22 such seminars were held including three book discussions. The first of these was held on November 10 and was focused on *Homicide Law in 19th-Century Nepal: A Study of the Muluki Ains and Legal Documents* (2024). This event was jointly organized with Vajra Books and the South Asia Institute Kathmandu Branch Office of Heidelberg University. Former professor of history at Tribhuvan University, Dr. Tri Ratna Manandhar and Shubhanga Pandey, a doctoral student in history at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) commented on the book. Its author Rajan Khatiwoda responded to those comments and answered questions posed by other participants.

The second book discussion was held on December 3 and was focused on *Chhalbato: Kailash Dekhi Ganga Samma* (2081 v.s.) authored by environmental journalist Ramesh Bhusal. The book documents Bhusal's travels from Tibet to Nepal and India along the river which is known as Karnali inside Nepal. Senior watershed expert Madhukar Upadhyaya commented on the book. Author Bhusal also participated in the discussion. The third discussion focused on two books: *Bhikshu, Byapar ra Vidroha* (2024) and *Himal Pariko Huri* (2024) written by journalist and author Sudheer Sharma. Political analyst and researcher Chandra Dev

Bhatta commented on these books which analyze Nepal's historical and contemporary relationship with China. The author Sharma responded to comments offered by Bhatta and questions posed by the participants.

CHAUTARI ANNUAL CONFERENCE-2024

The Chautari Annual Conference was held on November 27–29, 2024 at the MC premises in Thapathali. The aim of this annual conference is to promote research culture in the humanities and social sciences in Nepal. Martin Chautari has been organizing annual conferences since 2010.

Following a public call made in January 2024, a total of 86 paper abstracts had been received by the extended deadline of June 20, 2024. The conference organizing committee had accepted 82 of the abstracts received. Fifty-five full papers were received by the final deadline of November 10. Out of these, 52 research papers were presented during the three-day conference which saw a participation of nearly 150 individuals.

There were three open sessions. On the first day, there was a discussion on the recently Chautari-published book, *Nepal in the Long 1950s* which is edited by Pratyoush Onta, Lokranjan Parajuli and Mark Liechty. Moderated by MC member Pranab Kharel, analyst CK Lal and writer Manjushree Thapa commented on the book. On the second

day Prof. Katharine Rankin from the University of Toronto gave a keynote lecture under the title “Between Eating and Being Fed: Competing Ethics of Community-based Road Building in Nepal.” On the last day, researcher Xing Li from China did a stand-up comedy—“Nepali Jastai” (Almost a Nepali). Further details about the conference are available here: <https://martinchautari.org.np/events/chautari-annual-conference-2024>

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

BAREFOOT RESEARCH PROGRAM

Martin Chautari is implementing a one-year project named “Enhancing the Capacity of Women, Youth, and Marginalized Communities through Barefoot Research Activities” in the Madhesh and Lumbini Provinces since September 1, 2024. The project is being carried out under the USAID Civil Society and Media (CMS) program, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Nepal through the CSM-STAND LWA and implemented by The Asia Foundation. The main aim of this project is to strengthen the capacity of members of women, youth and marginalized (WYM) communities to engage in civic space by enabling them to identify and document their issues and implement local solutions for those issues, and advocacy.

By December 2024, Chautari had selected 10 barefoot researchers (BRs) in each of the two provinces. Initially, over 50 applicants from the Lumbini Province and 67 from the Madhesh Province had applied to become BRs. After a rigorous evaluation, 21 applicants from each province were shortlisted. These candidates shared their research concept notes in separate workshops held in late November 2024. Eventually 10 BRs from each of the two provinces were selected.



Diksha Das, a Barefoot Researcher, presenting her research concept in a workshop held in Janakpur on November 27, 2024

MC organized a three-day “Research Methodology Workshop” in the central Tarai town of Bhairahawa in late December 2024 for the selected BRs of the Lumbini Province. The second workshop for BRs from the Madhesh Province will be held in January 2025. In this workshop, the BRs presented revised versions of their concept notes and several MC researchers provided trainings on research methods. Each BR received comments and feedback from the resource persons, as well as from fellow BRs and others.



Research methodology workshop held in Bhairahawa on December 26–28, 2024

Four former BRs—Sanjay Kumar Pasi, Laxmi Shrestha, Ram Chandra Shrestha and Raksha Ram Harijan—who had participated in similar research mentoring programs carried out by MC during the years between 2018 and 2020 shared their experiences. Additionally, four resource persons were invited to make presentations on issues in which they had experience and expertise.

SCHOOL EDUCATION HISTORY RESEARCH

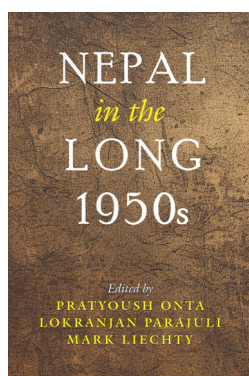
As reported in previous newsletters, Chautari has been implementing a research project “History of the Public School Education in Nepal” from April 1, 2023. Several researchers have been involved in studying various aspects of Nepal’s school history during the long 20th century. On December 27, 2024, Chautari organized an interactive event in the central Tarai city of Butwal where researchers Devendra Uprety, Pratyoush Onta and Lokranjan Parajuli discussed what non-state-centric approach to researching Nepal’s school history entails in terms of the archives to be consulted and the research methods to be deployed. They also shared the preliminary findings of their research and those of other team members. The event was co-organized by two Butwal-based organizations/groups, Readers Forum and Unnat Niti Institute. There were about five dozen participants, including many active and retired academics affiliated to various higher education institutions in the greater Butwal area.



A dissemination seminar on “History of the Public School Education in Nepal” held in Butwal on December 27, 2024

PUBLICATIONS

Nepal in the Long 1950s, edited by Pratyoush Onta, Lokranjan Parajuli and Mark Liechty was published in early October 2024. Details about the book are available here: <https://martinchautari.org.np/mc-publications/nepal-in-the-long-1950s>. It has been reviewed in *The Kathmandu Post* (<https://kathmandupost.com/books/2024/11/30/understanding-the-roots-of-modern-nepal>) and *The Annapurna Express* (<https://theannapurnaexpress.com/story/51763/>).



Studies in Nepali History and Society volume 29 issue 2 December 2024 is under preparation. It contains several articles, a notes from the archive and several book reviews.

CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE

ENERGY POLICY DIALOGUE SERIES

“Energy Policy Dialogue” has been continued since April 2024 as a part of MC’s capacity building initiative. The monthly dialogue is held in collaboration with the Urja Khabar media team on the last Tuesday of each month. The

objective of this dialogue series is to enhance the quality of debates and contribute in policy making on Nepal’s energy sector. In this series, Mr. Ram Krishna Khatriwada, former member of Electricity Regulatory Commission talked about the challenges and possibilities of capital markets in hydropower development on October 29. On November 26, energy entrepreneur Ms. Kabita Pokharel shared her experiences and opinions on women’s contribution in Nepal’s energy development. Similarly, Kuber Mani Nepal, an executive member of Independent Power Producers’ Association, Nepal (IPPAN), gave his presentation on the possibilities, opportunities and challenges of grid connected solar electricity. These discussions were well-attended and were also broadcast through the social media platforms of MC and Urja Khabar.

DIGITIZATION OF ODD HOFTUN ARCHIVE

The documents in the paper archives of the visionary Norwegian development practitioner Odd Hoftun (1927–2023) have been scanned and converted into digital files by the end of 2024. These documents comprise 35 record files and span from the year 1968 to 1996. These documents cover some of the development initiatives in post-Rana Nepal such as the Butwal Training Institute (BTI) and the Andhikhola Hydroelectric Project. The BTI was a collaborative project between the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) and the Industry Department of the Government of Nepal (GoN). BTI, based in Butwal, provides technical and vocational training via the apprenticeship method. The Andhikhola Project was a comprehensive project in the central hills involving hydropower generation, rural electrification, irrigation, and employment generation. The other major documents in this archive are meeting minutes of the UMN board, Institute of Technology and Industrial Development (ITID) board, agreement papers between the UMN and (GoN). However, this digital archive has not been properly indexed at this point.

The digitization work was done by Birsana Shrestha while she was an intern at Martin Chautari. These documents have been previously consulted by the historian-anthropologist Mark Liechty while he was writing the history of Butwal Power Company which was founded by Odd Hoftun in 1965. Published in 2022 under the title *What Went Right: Sustainability Versus Dependence in Nepal’s Hydropower Development* (Cambridge University Press), Liechty’s book and *Power for Nepal: Odd Hoftun and the History of Hydropower Development* by Peter Svalheim (2015, Martin Chautari) provide comprehensive accounts of Hoftun’s life and work in Nepal over many decades.

SELECTED TESTIMONIES

I lived in Nepal from 1996 to 1999, the summer of 2000, and from 2003 to 2005, while doing anthropological research for my PhD. Although my main fieldwork site was in the mid-





Tatsuro Fujikura

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western hills, whenever I was in Kathmandu, I attended Tuesday discussions at Martin Chautari (later not only limited to Tuesdays). I attended because it was a truly unique forum where people from diverse professional and disciplinary backgrounds engaged in serious and civil discussions about important contemporary concerns of the Nepali society. It was

unlike any events organized by NGOs, because it was free from donor influence and any (hidden) agenda to guide the whole discussion towards certain direction. It was also unlike any events organized by academic societies and institutions inside or outside Nepal. Because the participants included non-academics from diverse backgrounds, it always went beyond parochial concerns of any academic disciplines and engaged with complex realities of Nepal in ways that any academic conferences I attended could not. Public discussions at Martin Chautari continued during the height of civil conflict, despite the declaration of emergency. During that difficult time, it remained a resilient place for civil discussion participated in by people of different political and ideological orientations, including liberals and radical leftists.

Martin Chautari has made and continues to make invaluable impacts on the academic studies of Nepal, in the fields of humanities and social sciences. *Studies in Nepali History and Society*, which is in its 29th year of uninterrupted publication, is indisputably the best journal of Nepal Studies in the world. Chautari's another journal, *Samaj Adhyayan* is a vehicle for publishing high-quality academic articles in Nepali. The standards and qualities of the articles published in these journals are much better than some of the articles published in major, "high-impact," international journals, such as *American Ethnologist*, whose submissions are sometimes peer-reviewed by those who do not know much about Nepal. The same goes for books published by Martin Chautari, in comparison to those by academic publishing houses abroad that are often produced by those who lack sufficient knowledge about Nepal or Nepali language.

By involving young students in its discussion and research projects, Martin Chautari is helping to train and produce new generations of competent, critical and public minded intellectuals. In these ways, Martin Chautari is

performing invaluable and indispensable role in advancing knowledge and democracy in Nepal.

A RESOURCEFUL AND VIBRANT SPACE



Kalpana Jha

PhD Research Fellow, University of Victoria, Canada

I have been a regular attendee and participant of the seminars, conferences and workshops held at Martin Chautari since 2007 until date. I have also formally worked as a researcher in Martin Chautari between 2017 and 2018. Within this span of 17 years I have not only found Chautari to be resourceful in terms of its publications but also the public discussions held on a

regular basis. These discussions make Chautari a vibrant space to engage with various civil society actors, individuals, change-makers, intellectuals and activists and build networks with people from diverse field across Nepal. Nepal clearly lacks such a space for deep engagement that accommodates both academic and non-academic activities within a single premise.

As a staff at Martin Chautari I got a space to engage in issues that most concerned me. I also started a discussion series called the "Madhesh Discussion Series" devoted to pressing issues that confront what is today the political geography called Madhesh. During my time as a staff I got the opportunity to work closely with academics and intellectuals associated with Chautari who helped me further enhance my writing, analytical and research skills. I have personally made profound use of all the academic and non-academic resources available at Martin Chautari to build my research proposal which has led me to pursue a PhD in the University of Victoria in Canada. I continue to make use of the networks I built and publications at Martin Chautari for various research and writing purposes.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Martin Chautari announces a call for papers for "Women Researchers Workshop-2025" which is going to be held on March 30, 2025. Those interested in participating in this workshop have been asked to submit a draft of their full-length research articles by February 27, 2025. More details can be found at: <https://martinchautari.org.np/events/call-for-papers-workshop-of-women-researchers-2025>



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