



CHAUTARI QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

No. 14 | July–September 2026

REGULAR DISCUSSIONS

Between July 1 and September 30, 24 regular discussions were held at Martin Chautari. Only a few of them are highlighted here. On July 7, a reading based conversation with the Nepali-American anthropologist Tina Shrestha was held under the title “Academic Parenthood and Ambivalent Choice.” Participants were asked to read her essay with the same title, published in *Feminist Anthropologist*, before the meeting. In the abstract of the essay, she writes, “In this auto-ethnography, I draw attention to the inverse relationship between my career trajectory and scholarly productivity to develop a notion of academic parenthood. Importantly, I situate it within the wider feminist scholarship, especially feminist discourse on ambivalent choice and ‘closure as a political possibility’ for the emergence of academic parent of color. Here, I emphasize this emergence as neither linear nor singular but manifesting into a collection of necessary and interrelated lifeworlds. Rather than offer a conclusive argument or a critique of achieving optimal “work-family balance” in academia, the essay intends to spark further discussions on the ways academic parenthood may be imagined and embraced in its entirety.” There were 21 participants.

In June 2026, Chautari started a collaboration with Body & Data to co-run a monthly discussion series called “Tech and Society.” Body & Data was founded in 2017 and “works to enhance understanding and access to information on digital rights among women, queer people and marginalized groups where they are able to exercise their rights in a safe and just digital space.” Under this series, on July 14, Monisha Chaudhary and Nuva Rai gave a presentation on “Dissecting AI Data Centres: The Environmental and Human Cost of Intelligence Infrastructures.” The following discussion held on August 11 was titled “Power in the Age of AI” and was based on these three books: *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2018) by Shoshana Zuboff; *Techno-Feudalism: What Killed Capitalism* (2023) by Yanis Varoufakis and *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman’s OpenAI* (2025) by Karen Hao. The next discussion in this series, held on September 8, discussed social movements in online spaces.

On August 4, Bimal Acharya, editor at the publication house Nepa~laya, spoke about the then ongoing closure of the Kathmandu Valley Public Library. On August 9, Deeya Dahal, an undergrad student intern from Ashoka University spoke about “Undoing Classroom Hierarchies: Learning Beyond the Classroom and Everyday Practices of Interdisciplinarity.” On August 16, Suyog Prajapati, a

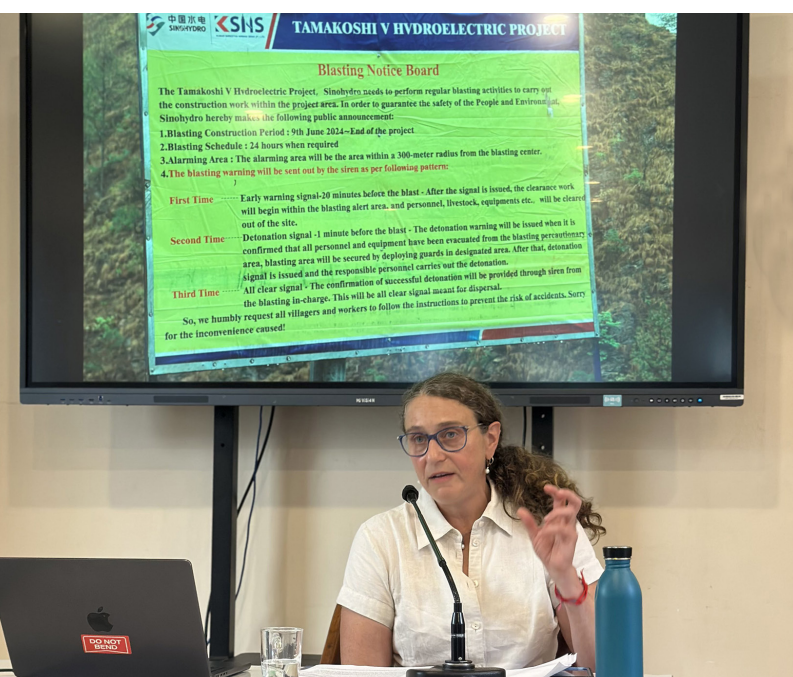




Bimal Acharya speaking at MC on August 4, 2026.

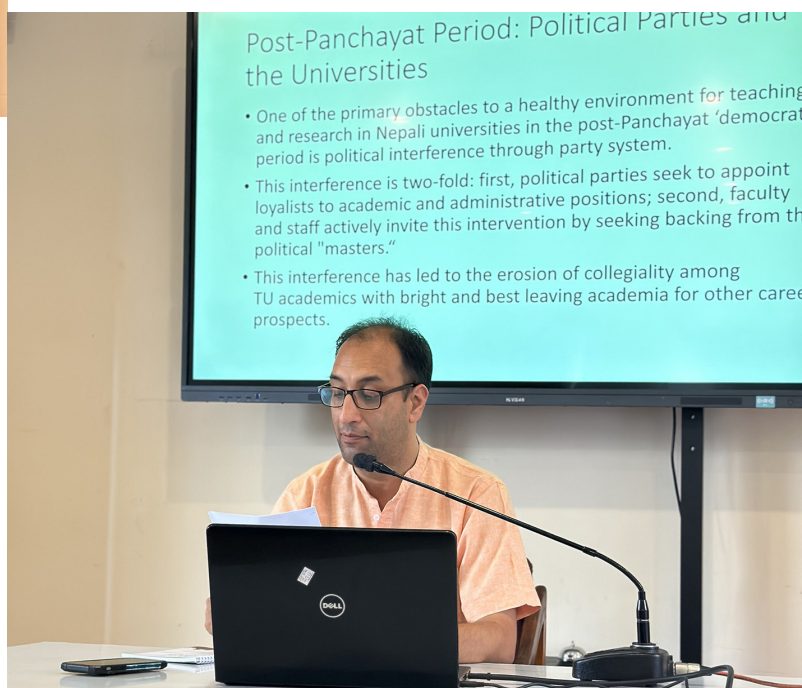
doctoral student at the University of Michigan, gave a talk on “Ethnohistory or Social Reality? Architecture and Monasticism of Naka Bahi (Lalitpur).” On August 18, Maina Karki and Ram Kumar Bhandari spoke about transitional justice in Nepal. That event was held under the “Democracy Dialogue Series” co-organized with Democracy Resource Center Nepal.

Niraj Lawoju, a doctoral student at Sichuan University, gave a talk on “Reading ‘Sanskriti Gyan Pariksha’ as a Hindu Nationalist Pedagogical Project” on August 23. The following week, on August 30, Sara Shneiderman, an anthropologist who teaches at the University of British Columbia and who is also one of the editors of the book *The Infrastructures of Democracy: Politics and Process of Road Building in Nepal* (2026, Martin Chautari) gave a talk on “The Hydropower Tower: An Infrastructural Biography of Transmission and Transformation in Dolakha, Nepal.”



Sara Shneiderman speaking at MC on August 30, 2026.

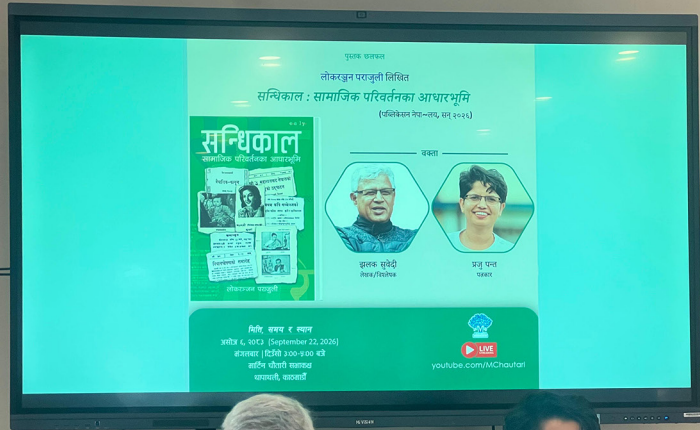
A special seminar on “Academic Freedom in Nepal” was held on September 1. Three researchers associated with MC, Pratyoush Onta, Pranab Kharel and Lokranjan Parajuli spoke on the occasion. The presentations by Onta and Kharel were based on their jointly written paper “Mapping the Landscape of Academic Freedom in Nepali Universities, 1951–2025.” Parajuli’s presentation was based on his paper “In the Name of Reform: The World Bank and the Privatization of Nepal’s Higher Education.” Both papers were written for a South Asia-wide project coordinated by the Social Scientists’ Association based in Colombo, Sri Lanka.



Pranab Kharel speaking at MC on September 1, 2026.

On September 6, Shubhanga Pandey, a PhD student in history at the University of California, Los Angeles presented part of his ongoing doctoral research under the title “Lahore Tira Baralida: Notes on Nepal-Punjab Connections, 1800–1850.” On September 27, Rajan Khatiwoda of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities spoke about “Diplomatics and Linguistic-Stylistic Diversity in Shah and Rana-Era Administrative Documents.” This was a primer on how to read such documents available in large numbers at the National Archive in Kathmandu. In between, Nirjala Prajapati from Thames International College gave a presentation based on her MA thesis: “Weaving Roles and Lives: Understanding Experiences of Women Workers of the Carpet Industry in Bhaktapur.” Also, Chautari member Bhaskar Gautam and others spoke about “Looking Nepal Through Polycrisis: Technology, Economy, and Politics” on September 13.

Lokranjan Parajuli’s book *Sandhikal: Samajik Pariwartanka Adharbhumi* was published by Nepa~laya in April 2026. A discussion based on it was held on September 22. Journalist Praju Pant and writer and political commentator



Jhalak Subedi and Praju Pant commenting on Sandhikal on September 22, 2026.

Jhalak Subedi commented on the book. Author Parajuli also spoke on the occasion and addressed some of their comments. Several reviews of this book have been published. For example, a review in English was published in The Kathmandu Post: <https://kathmandupost.com/art-culture/2026/05/30/book-review-history-beyond-the-palace-walls>. Another review in Nepali was published in Himal Khabar: <https://www.himalkhabar.com/144915/nepals-democratic-transition-beganlong-before-the-rana-regime-officially-collapsed>.

WORKSHOP ON “CONTESTED SOCIAL CONTRACTS AND DEMOCRATIC FUTURES: NEPAL, BANGLADESH AND SRI LANKA”

Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS), the Rule of Law Programme Asia of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and Martin Chautari organized a joint workshop titled “Contested Social Contracts and Democratic Futures: Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka” in Lalitpur on July 27–28. This workshop brought together scholars, activists and practitioners to discuss and analyze the contradictions that shaped the social upheavals in these three countries and what they mean for democratic (re)imaginings in South Asia. This workshop was a follow-up to a joint workshop convened in Singapore in January 2026, which focused on protest politics in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and their evolving political trajectories.

Dr Harsh Mander, Chairperson, Centre for Equity Studies, India and Dr Ammar Jan, General Secretary, Haqooq-e-Khalq Party, Pakistan delivered their keynotes on broader regional trends across South Asia, particularly in relation to government legitimacy, challenges for protecting democracy and the management of public dissatisfaction. The program was organized in a hybrid model. Dr Mander spoke in-person whereas Dr Jan gave his keynote speech via Zoom.

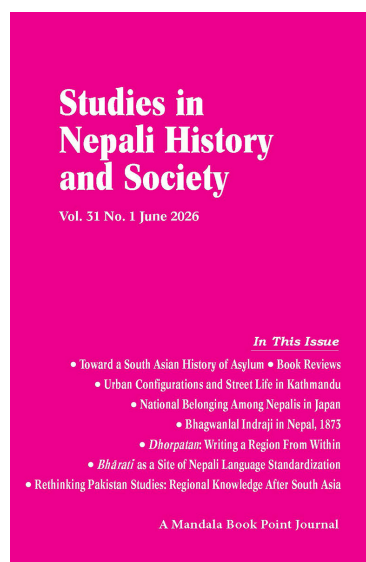
There were four sessions on various themes and one concluding round table. Altogether 15 speakers from Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India gave their presentations in these sessions. MC’s Chair Kumar Pandey; Iqbal Singh Sevea (via Zoom), Associate Professor and Director, ISAS-NUS; and Mr Stefan Samse (via Zoom), Director, Rule of Law Programme gave their opening remarks. More than 30 people attended the workshop each day.



Seira Tamang, Director of Research of MC, speaking in a session at the workshop on July 28, 2026.

PUBLICATIONS

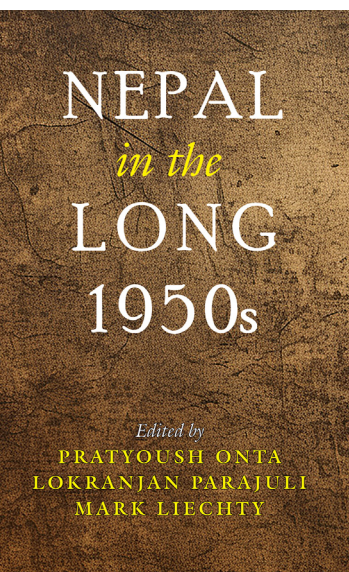
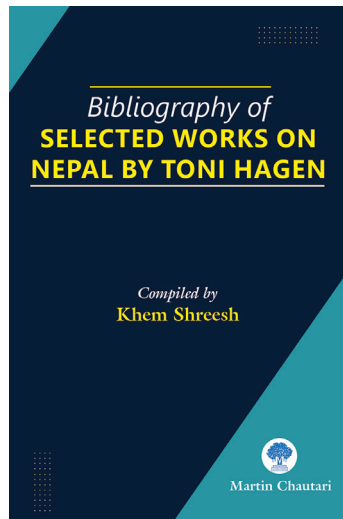
Studies in Nepali History and Society (SINHAS) is a semi-annual academic journal edited at Martin Chautari and published by Mandala Book Point. The volume 31 no 1 June 2026 issue was published recently. It contains five articles, a review essay, a translated research report



from the late 19th century, and five book reviews. Further details about this issue can be found at: <https://martinchautari.org.np/mc-publications/sinhas-volume-31-number-1>

Reviews of *Nepal in the Long 1950s*, an edited volume published by Martin Chautari in late 2024, were published in two academic journals in the month of September. In the first review published in *South Asia Research*, reviewer Gaurav J. Pathania concludes that this “volume significantly enriches Nepal’s historiography and holds broader regional relevance.” In the second review published in *Contemporary South Asia*, reviewer Jayant Chandel writes, “the editors have done a delightful job of bringing together a coherent volume on a common theme. It is a must-read for those interested in 1950s Nepal.”

The table of contents of *Nepal in the Long 1950s* is available at www.martinchautari.org.np/mc-publications/nepal-in-the-long-1950s-1. Several previous reviews of this book is also available at the above link.



“A Bibliography of Selected Works on Nepal by Toni Hagen,” compiled by independent researcher Khem Shreesh, was uploaded on the MC website in September. Hagen (1917–2003) was a geologist who explored Nepal extensively during the 1950s and published his famous book *Nepal: The Kingdom in the Himalaya* in 1960. This book is “credited with introducing Nepal to the outside world.”

According to Shreesh, Hagen was a “multi-faceted personality” who later wrote about various aspects of Nepal’s development and society. The Bibliography of Selected Works on Nepal by Toni Hagen is available at <https://martinchautari.org.np/mc-publications/bibliography-of-selected-works-on-nepal-by-toni-hagen>.

CAPACITY BUILDING

URJA POLICY DISCUSSION SERIES

In collaboration with Urja Khabar, Martin Chautari has been organizing a monthly energy policy dialogue for more than two years. In this quarter, three discussions in total were held under this series. On July 28, Mohan Kumar Dangi, President of Independent Power Producers’ Association, Nepal (IPPAN) spoke on challenges facing independent power producers. Ranju Pandey, who is a Director at Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), spoke about what NEA had done for sustainable energy future. Ajaya Dixit, a renowned expert on water resources, spoke on September 29. He urged a room full of participants to re-think the basics that had guided the development of hydropower in Nepal following the massive Bhotekoshi/Trishuli disaster of late August.



Ajaya Dixit speaking in an Urja Policy Discussion on September 29, 2026.

SHORT COURSES ON GOVERNANCE

Martin Chautari and Governance Lab have been offering a series of short courses under the title, *Gyan Shrinkhala: Short Courses on Governance*. From July 2 to 4, Dr Bhaskar Gautam, a member of Martin Chautari, offered the first course in this series entitled “The Borrowed Futures of Nepal’s Foreign Policy.” There were 27 participants. On August 8 and 9, a short course on “Citizens and Constitutional Rights: Implementation Challenges and What This Means for ‘Good Governance’” was offered by a trio of practising lawyers, Dr Aastha Dahal, Prajwal Raj Gyawali and Samman Humagain. Altogether 20 people participated in this course. From September 17 to 19, a similar short course



on “Disaster as Socio-political Processes” was offered by Dr Rachana Upadhyaya. There were 20 participants. Upadhyaya holds a PhD in Disaster Sociology from the University of Bristol, UK, and is affiliated with the University of Bristol. Her work focuses on understanding disaster not simply as a physical or natural event, but as a socio-political process shaped by power, institutions and social relations. The next short course will be offered in November–December 2026.



Course lead Bhaskar Gautam facilitating the Gyaan Shrinkhala I on July 2, 2026.

A SPACE OF ONE'S OWN



Deeya Dahal
Ashoka University, India

Whenever anybody asks me, “So, what did you learn at your internship?” I begin by telling them that I learned how to play table tennis. This usually elicits a laugh out of them, and it is a light enough preface to cushion the conversation before I begin to wax poetic about my summer at Chautari. I came to

know about Chautari from Anusha, who interned there last summer, and what I heard from her gave me a very vague idea about this magical place in Nepal where research in the social sciences happened.

I entered Chautari colored by my own views of academic life and a life of the mind, where acts of thinking and contemplation, while pushing the mind and language to its limits, remained cocooned in a body completely at rest by the desk. So, when I was invited to play table tennis with

everybody after lunch, I was hesitant, to say the least. Hesitant, partly because I did not know how to play table tennis, partly because I thought that employing the body in such a game would mean subtracting from what the mind could be focusing on. The first few days of scrambling to learn how to hold the bat and learning the rules of the game left me more confused than ever, and only confirmed my suspicions that it would be distracting me from my more serious task of thinking.

The “serious” thinking that I was eager to conserve my mental energies for translated into two projects I’d taken on for the summer—researching the social life of English in Nepal, and doing my own research about Nepal’s literary history for my senior year thesis. The first project hurled me into the early days of Tribhuvan University, and records of deliberations and discussions over what English education should look like in Nepal. These records, preserved in the form of conference reports and essays, alerted me to a particular anxiety about the teaching of the English language, where the language was seen as a foreign imposition, while also being deemed necessary for the development of the country through an English-speaking workforce that could communicate with the outside world. Fluency in the language, then, was considered an incredible skill that brought with it immense cultural capital alongside the material capital it promised. This was further confirmed for me by English graduates and professors from TU, who, when asked about why they chose to study English, told me that it brought with it a specific kind of prestige. For some university members, however, the study of English literature also came attached with a certain frivolousness and self-indulgence better suited to citizens of nations that could afford such self-indulgence.

Asking and working through such questions about my own discipline, then, forced me to reevaluate what I wanted four years of study to translate to. While doing my research for my senior thesis in Nepali literature, I began wondering if putting my training in English literature and theory in conversation with Nepali literature would yield anything. Doing so is not so much an effort in comparing a peripheral literary tradition to a central one—as classical comparative literature would have it—but rather an examination of how the literary production of a nation with newly opened doors to the rest of the world reaches across linguistic traditions to revise forms and traditions in both languages. During the course of these projects, I stumbled upon layers and layers of history, whose repercussions still flowed into the time I inhabited in the present. The place whose sanitized history had found me only in social studies textbooks finally began to take shape with all its contours this summer, and a present, who I had imagined to have shored its defenses against the past began tugging at my sleeve with all its hauntings.



In order for me to make sense of the time I inhabited, my readings demanded that I be reconstituted every day, and surprisingly, so did table tennis. Each game required me to call upon everything that I had been taught the previous days, and each reading demanded of me a reaching back into the past to better understand the present. These movements, from the past to the present and vice versa, initially only happened at their designated spaces, but three months was time enough for slippages, and suddenly I found myself deliberating over things like the education policies of the 1970s while swatting away at a ping-pong ball. The reconstitutions began working in tandem to bring about a clarity of mind and thought that I hadn't quite gotten to while at campus.

The clarity that I speak of came about because Chautari encourages a very tactile sort of thinking, and the daily game of table tennis was but a very small part of it. This tactility comes about in the sheer volume and wealth of knowledge that Chautari holds within its walls, and the warmth with which it not just encourages, but invites you to engage with said knowledge. Be that through hunting down a book in the library or sifting through dust and paper in the archives or chatting over tea, the act of thinking and engaging with knowledge stops being a solitary one at Chautari. It makes you acutely cognizant of the space you share with fellow academics and elders who you're constantly learning from while reorganizing itself into a space that you begin to care for as if your own. My summer at Chautari completely revised what I thought a life of the mind should and would look like and has left me looking forward to the changing textures of care and labor that thinking demands.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF MC MEMBERS

New MC member Ajapa Sharma successfully defended her history PhD dissertation entitled “States, Subjects and Jurisdictional Claims: Anglo-Nepal Extradition and the Problem of Nepali Sovereignty” at the University of Illinois Chicago in May 2026.

Here is the abstract of Ajapa's dissertation in her own words: “My dissertation narrates a history of extradition between British India and Nepal following the signing of the 1855 Treaty for the Mutual Surrender of Criminals. I consider the mid-19th century a critical conjuncture in which ideas about state and law-making, geopolitics, and the governance of populations and resources in the Tarai converge in the making of the treaty. I then trace subsequent negotiations over the practice of extradition that the document began to institutionalize, and the very language



Ajapa Sharma

of the treaty over its operational timespan between 1855 and 1952.

Extradition, as I argue, presents a checkered history of Nepali sovereignty. Sovereignty was not simply actualized in high diplomacy through treaties, but was articulated and asserted through claims of jurisdiction and governance over mobile populations. Through the story of extradition, my dissertation charts two interlinked historical processes—the expansion and entrenchment of legal-bureaucratic logics and practices in the governance of Nepali subject populations, and the emergence of Nepal as a legal-political entity in the interstate system. In each chapter, I analyze bureaucratic reports and diplomatic correspondence to understand contestations between British India and Nepal over the extradition of specific categories of populations: cattle thieves, embezzlers, Gurkha deserters, and political dissidents. In doing so, I consider how each category presented challenges to the Rana government's control over resources and territory. At the same time, I expose the power asymmetries between Nepal and the large imperial power across its Southern border over cultural and civilizational claims to law and governance. These asymmetries, I argue, tell us about how an uneven and unequal inter-state system emerged in the twentieth century and how international law acquired a colonial make-up.”



Sanjila Moktan

Another new member Sanjila Moktan started her MA in Asian Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in August 2026. She was previously a researcher in MC's education research team for several years.



On August 2, Social Science Baha held a discussion in Kathmandu with Pratyoush Onta, MC's Director of Research. This event was focused on two articles he had published 30 years ago (in 1996): "Creating a Brave Nepali Nation in British India: The Rhetoric of *Jāti* Improvement, Rediscovery of Bhanubhakta and the Writing of *Bir* History" and "Ambivalence Denied: The Making of *Rastriya Itihas* in Panchayat Era Textbooks." Michael Hutt, emeritus Professor of Nepali and Himalayan Studies at SOAS, University of London; Janak Rai, Professor of Anthropology at Tribhuvan University; Ajapa Sharma, who has just completed her PhD in history at University of Illinois Chicago; and Surabhi Pudasaini, historian at the Center for the Study of Knowledge, Materials, and Materiality (KaMM Center) commented on Onta's two articles. Some members of the audience also contributed to the discussion on that occasion.



Deepak Thapa, Director of Social Science Baha introducing the discussion event on August 2, 2026.

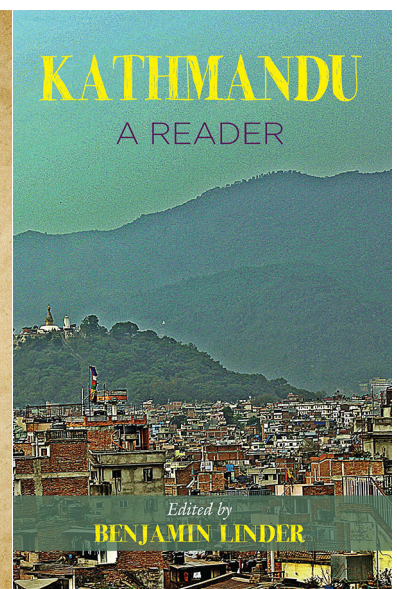
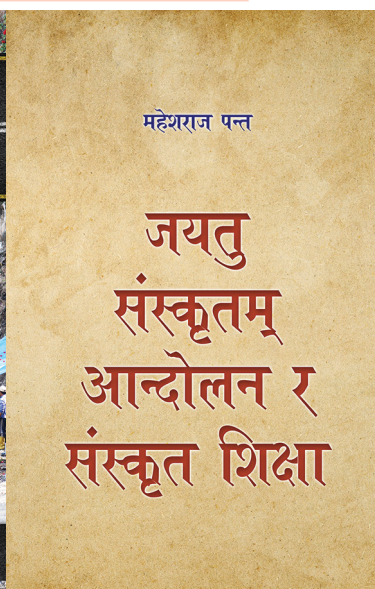
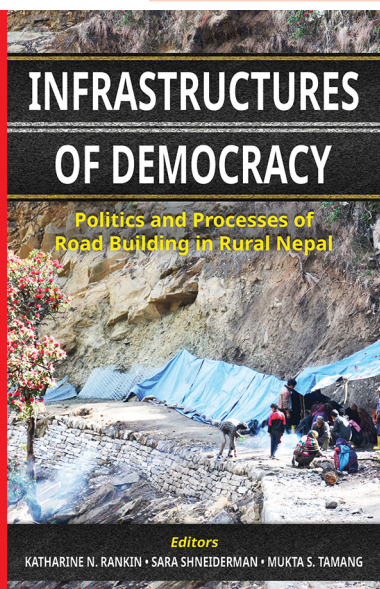
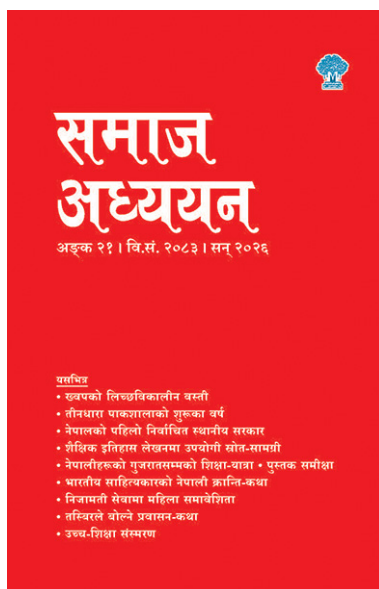
NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The annual general meeting of MC was held on September 25. Since the term of some of the executive committee members had ended, elections were held. The resulting new executive committee consists of Kumar Pandey (as chair), Kailash Rai (vice-chair), Seira Tamang (Secretary), Mana Kumari Thada (Treasurer), Pramod Bhatta, Pranab Kharel and JB Biswokarma (as members).



Annual General Meeting of Martin Chautari on September 25, 2026.

RECENT MC PUBLICATIONS



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