

Knowledge Production and Learning in Nepal's Madhes Movement: Struggle, Achievements and Disappointments

Executive Summary

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Nepal Case Study: The Nepal Madhesh Foundation (NEMAF)

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Background

Nepal has experienced a turbulent political system over the last two centuries constituting absolute monarchies under the Shah Kings (1769- 1846), Rana oligarchy with monarchies as titular heads (1846- 1951), a fragile period of governance shared by the monarchy and various political parties (1951-1959), a brief period of parliamentary democracy (1959-1960) leading to the reestablishment of absolute monarchy (1960-1990), constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy (1990- 2006) and finally, a democratic republic after the abolition of the monarchy in 2006. Despite the series of political shifts over time, the basic structure of the society remains the same in which the country has been ruled by political elites who have enjoyed widespread power and control over resources. Ethnic minorities and indigenous communities have long been marginalised and excluded from opportunity in the state's decision-making and processes of development (Pherali, Smith and Vaux, 2011). One of the main ethnic groups who have been at the margins is the Madhesi community, living in the Southern plains of the country.

The Madhes uprising (2007 – 2015) was a largely peaceful mass resistance of the Madhesi ethnic groups against exclusionary political structures. It remained at the centre of political negotiations during Nepal's struggle to promulgate a federal constitution. The movement demanded equitable representation in politics and recognition of Madhesis as equal citizens of Nepal. The Madhes uprising was the culmination of a longstanding ethnic struggle that had surfaced in national political spheres in different forms since the 1950s, but gained renewed momentum against the backdrop of Nepal's Maoist rebellion (1996 – 2006) and the subsequent opportunities for state restructuring at the political moment when the traditional Nepali state was forced to negotiate with popular forces.

The existing body of literature around the Madhes movement either discusses the forms of historical marginalisation of Madhesis in the Nepali state, providing a rationale for the struggle; or the processes of the movement, highlighting the chronology of political negotiations, the role

of movement leaders and the outcomes of mass protests. There has been, however, no previous attempt to study the process of learning and knowledge production within the movement in a way that could be theorised and drawn on by activists to strengthen their struggle. This research aims to fill this gap by developing an understanding of how the Madhes movement produced knowledge about structural inequalities, political marginalisation and dehumanisation of Madhesis in Nepal's nation building process. In this this process, it aims to show how the movement organisation, the Nepal Madhes Foundation (NEMAF) in our case, contributed to establishing and developing the intellectual life of the Madhes movement.

This study was part of the broader social movement learning project which aimed at understanding the processes of learning within four social movements in four different conflict-affected countries – Colombia, Nepal, South Africa and Turkey. Beyond the academic inquiry into how social movements produce knowledge as they create a space for collective agendas for social justice, the project engaged with the process of knowledge exchange amongst social activists across the four countries. The project also aimed to provide an opportunity for inter-movement learning, building solidarity among the activists and most importantly, to investigate approaches through which the knowledge produced from research is relevant and applicable for the activists to inform their strategies for struggle. The research team consisted of social researchers and movement activists who constantly engaged in critical debates about the movement agenda, movement strategies and processes of knowledge production.

The Madhes Uprisings

Clear signs of resentment amongst Madhesis became evident in the aftermath of the April 2006 people's movement when the mainstream political parties were rejoicing their return to power and focused on negotiations with the Maoists, but failed to address the demands of Madhesis. When the draft of the Interim Constitution was made public in December 2006 by the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the Maoists, without adequate consultations with other political groups, Madhesi organisations including Madhesi members of the parliament (MPs) representing various parties objected to the draft constitution that had failed to address the problem of centralised political structure and the unfair electoral system.

In January 2007, a group of Madhesi activists affiliated to Upendra Yadav-led Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) burnt copies of the interim constitution at Maitighar Mandala, Kathmandu, as a symbolic protest. This led to a mass outbreak of the longstanding discontent among Madhesi populations across the Tarai region. On January 19, a mass demonstration in Lahan was confronted by the Maoist Cadres who had recently entered the peace process. The Madhesi strike was perceived as a threat to the ongoing peace process and Maoists' chance to gain control over national politics. The local demonstrators were violently dispersed by the police, who shot and killed Ramesh Mahato, a schoolboy. Following this incident, violence broke out in other districts of Madhes and angry protesters began to set fire on transportation vehicles and government offices across the region. Businesses were shut down for twenty-one days. The East-West Mahendra Highway, the only route that served the supply of goods and services in Kathmandu was blocked, creating a shortage of basic supplies to the country (Gautam, 2012).

The repressive measures adopted by the government led the MJF to continue with protests indefinitely until the interim constitution was amended, thus sparking off what became known as the first *Madhes Andolan I* (Madhes uprising) (ICG 2007). The movement forced the then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to directly address the nation twice. The movement temporally subsided only when Upendra Yadav, the head of MJF and Ram Chandra Poudel, on behalf of the government of Nepal, signed a 22-point Agreement on August 30, 2007.

Following the 22-point agreement, the Madhesi parties formed a temporary political front under the banner of Samyukta Loktantrik Madheshi Morcha (United Democratic Madhesi Front) (SLMM) to challenge the government's indifference in implementing the past agreements which promised to reform the electoral system (Mathema, 2011). This led to the second Madhes uprising starting in mid- February 2008 and lasting for 17 days. During this second uprising, demands were concerned with autonomous Madhes province, proportional and inclusive representation in the state politics; and mass entry of Madhesis into the Nepal Army. The second Madhes uprising established Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) led by Mahanta Thakur, an influential political leader who defected his long-affiliated Nepali Congress. Subsequently, the April 2008 election resulted in the election of 77 Madhesi members in the constituent assembly, representing various Madhes-based parties, who began to play a significant role in the process

of designing a new constitution as well as the power sharing in the national government. The outcome of the election was historical in the sense that for the first time, Madhesis disrupted historical monopoly of national parties and elected ethnic Madhesis as their representatives, sending a message to Kathmandu that Madhesis were a key constituency in Nepal's politics. The victory of Madhesi parties helped them popularise the agenda of "*One Madhes, One Pradesh (province)*".

The first Constituent Assembly was dissolved on May 28, 2012 after its original and extended total tenure of 4 years, due to its failure in the process of drafting a new constitution. After being postponed several times, the elections for the second constituent assembly were held on November 19, 2013. The results of this election were detrimental to both the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), that was the largest party in the first constituent assembly, and to the Madhes movement as many of its parties had been too occupied in power politics and faced factionalism. After two years of political negotiations and in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in April 2015, the Constitution of Nepal 2015 came into effect on Sept 20, 2015, replacing the Interim Constitution of 2007.

However, the Constitution of Nepal 2015 backtracked some of provisions that were guaranteed by the Interim Constitution 2007 in favour of Nepal's minority groups. This triggered the third Madhes uprising, demanding: 1) creation of two provinces in Tarai-Madhes; 2) demarcation of electoral constituencies on the basis of population to provide fair representation of Madhesis; 3) proportional representation of all ethnic groups in all state organs; and 4) fair citizenship provisions.

The three Madhes uprisings gave birth of several movement organisations that played important roles in political campaigning, knowledge production and building political alliances for organisation of the resistance. In this study, we particularly examine the contributions of and learning processes within one such organisation – Nepal Madhes Foundation.

The Nepal Madhes Foundation

The Nepal Madhes Foundation (NEMAF) is a non-governmental organisation that works as an independent intellectual and advocacy arm of the Madhes movement. Established in 2007, in the

aftermath of the first Madhes uprising, the organisation's work broadly focuses on social, political and economic development in the most marginalised areas of Tarai. In the past 12 years, it has implemented a wide range of programmes to promote social harmony, peace, security and good governance in Madhes. At the core of its work is the goal of social justice through the empowerment of the Madhesi people. NEMAF aims to help secure social, economic and political rights for Madhesis within the Nepali state. NEMAF conceptualises the notion of empowerment as a process of gaining critical knowledge about Madhesi history, language and literature, geography, social issues; and promotes these through activism at grassroots, national and international levels. This organisation was conceived by a group of youth who were inspired by the historic Madhes uprising which, for the first time, compelled the government to seriously engage with Madhesi demands.

NEMAF primarily operates within two interrelated domains of activity: the first of which relates to activism which primarily supports and strengthens the gains of Madhes movement and advocates for the protection of these gains – such as reservation for Madhesis in civil service, legislatures and security forces as well as promoting good governance and protection of human rights in Madhes. It publishes opinion pieces in national newspapers and digital media, organises public discussion forums and documents and archives knowledge about Madhes. The second domain is purely under the auspices of an NGO framework which operates with the support from external funding to implement development projects in Madhes. It also carries out funded research to support programme implementation, advocacy and policy debate. All these activities are interconnected and mutually reinforcing to the Madhesi cause.

In this study, we approach the Madhes movement from the perspective of Madhesis, and enter into the debate about knowledge production drawing upon the activism promoted by NEMAF. We analyse the conception of the organisation, its strategy and methodology of knowledge production to promote the agenda of equity. In that regard, the study examines how NEMAF emerged with its primary objective of Madhes Studies Centre, as an intellectual project to redress historical omission of and disseminate academic analysis from a Madhesi perspective. We provide an analysis of historical, economic, social, cultural, political and geographical context of Madhes in which systemic marginalisation and injustices are reproduced. We then report on

learning in the movement drawing upon qualitative interviews with a broad range of respondents including Madhesi activists, political leaders, journalists, youth and business communities in Madhes. Finally, we develop an analysis of concepts, issues and processes of learning, focusing on: Learning about the movement agenda, exploring how activists developed their critical understanding of the goals of the movement; Learning about the movement/ resistance strategies, examining how activists improved their strategies and tactics of resistance over a period of time to survive state hostilities; and finally, Learning about the movement survival strategy through which the movement preserves its critical position, protects itself from turning violent or being co-opted in the hegemonic manipulation.

It is important to clarify that we view the political parties that are at the forefront of the movement and movement organisations such as NEMAF as separate but integral constituencies of the Madhes movement. We conceptualise the Madhes movement as a collective struggle of the excluded, marginalised, oppressed or invisible people of Madhes, which enables them to challenge discrimination and political exclusion based on their ethnic identity, and claim their equitable rights to representation and recognition in the Nepali state. The movement, political parties and movement organisations are interconnected and, sometimes, operate interchangeably, and therefore, it is our claim that the inquiry into how the Madhes movement learns could only be meaningful through this holistic lens. Hence, we focus on NEMAF, the movement organisation as an entry point for learning, refer to political actors of Madhes as movement leaders and approach the movement as a case study for the purpose of this research. Another point to clarify is the use of term Madhes or Tarai. The term 'Madhes' represents the political, social and cultural characteristics of the Southern plains of Nepal. It is also crucial to recognise that the term Madhes is itself a mosaic of different castes, cultures and linguistic group and Tharu communities, the indigenous populations of this region sometimes reject this labelling. Tarai is a geographical representation of the region where diverse communities of Madhesi people as well as migrants from the hills have historically lived in. Even though the Tarai region now spans across six politically divided provinces, Madhesi activists still prefer to use the term 'Madhes' for cultural and emotional kinship. The hegemonic narratives tend to refer to the region of Tarai as a neutral geographical territory of the Nepali state.

Conceptual and methodological approach

We recognise that there are disagreements and tensions about whether the Madhes movement is a social movement or political uprising of Madhes-based forces to secure access to political power. For this research, we define social movements as forms of collective action that emerge in response to situations of inequality, oppression and/or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands. They are comprised of *'an organised set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action'* (Batliwala 2012: 3). Furthermore, social movements are *'processes that build the collective power of an organised constituency of excluded, marginalised, oppressed or invisible people, around a change agenda that enables them to access the full body of human rights, challenge the distribution of wealth and control of resources, challenge dominant ideologies, and transform social power relations in their favour'* (Batliwala 2010, cited in Horn, 2013: 22). For us, the Madhes movement does reflect these tensions and manifest characteristics of collective action against social, political and economic inequalities, and draws on the constituency of disenfranchised ethnic groups who have struggled to gain equity in political representation.

This research draws upon Roy Bhaskar's theory of critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008) that characterises social reality as comprising three layers, recognising that there are causal mechanisms beneath what is observed empirically. Critical realism allows us to study mechanisms and structures that have reproductive effects. In other words, critical realism enables researchers to reveal what is absent from the empirical inquiry by asking questions about history, culture and deeply entrenched social values. In this sense critical realism is a theory of absence that studies the being and becoming of the social phenomenon in which the external environment plays a role (Norrie, 2010: 33). When we observe events and narratives, we need to look for what is absent through the lens of inter-relations between the tri-unity – causality, time and space. The cause of social struggle is influenced by time (the effects of our past) and space (the effects of our context). The study of social movement as it manifests (being) has to be related to how it has come to being (becoming). In this sense, the past is always in the present - the meshwork that is the process of our constitution (Norrie, 2010: 33).

Bhaskar's three levels of reality depict the empirical (experience thought) that we experience, observe and record the reality (e.g. experience of being Madhesi, mass demonstrations, blockade of roads and border, physical violence, disappearance of activists, imprisonment, self-awareness of discrimination, emotions, memories and political intentions); the actual (objects, events and being) that underpin observable actions (e.g. actual embodied Madhesi identity, decisions about protests, interactions between people, resistance strategies, movement resources – agents interacting with structures); and the real (causal mechanisms) that are invisible but come to being through their effects (e.g. Madhesi people's motives, authoritarianism, ultranationalism, values, memories, complicity or resistance to social, economic, political structures or injustices, histories, geopolitics and cultural and symbolic violence of the state). These notions provide intellectual tools to understand social reality, much of which *'exists and operates independently of our awareness or knowledge of it. Reality does not wholly answer to empirical surveying or hermeneutical examination'* (Archer et al, 2016). As Archer et al (2016) argue *'critical realism is concerned with the nature of causation, agency, structure, and relations, and the implicit or explicit ontologies we are operating with'*. For example, the absence of popular mass demonstration could be observable empirical reality which is explained by the actual events that underpin the low participation such as movement fatigue, protractedness of the same movement tactic, increased police brutality or lack of women's participation in mass demonstration. These events have the real mechanisms beneath such as Pahadi dominance in the police force, history of oppression by the state causing internalisation of fear, the media controlled by the state or Pahadis and women's subordinate or constrained role in Madhesi communities. This does not necessarily mean that the movement is fading away, instead, activists might be organising in different forms, developing new strategies, reflecting on the events and systematising their knowledge to inform new movement strategies. These actual movement processes are beneath the empirical reality and therefore, require a deeper level inquiry and analysis. Before resistance becomes observable, a great deal of organising, dialogue and strategising takes place in which activists at the grassroots are involved in preparing grounds for movement actions. Archer et al (2016: n.p.) argue that *'critical realists are concerned with mapping the ontological character of social reality: those realities which*

produce the facts and events that we experience and empirically examine'. In other words, '... combining explanation and interpretation, the aim is an historical inquiry into artefacts, culture, social structures, persons, and what affects human action and interaction' and therefore, 'we require a good account of the nature of the social world which does not naïvely import causal models from natural sciences' (Archer et al, 2016: n.p.).

Using the critical realist framework and systematisation methodology, this research sought to understand how the Madhes movement produces knowledge, develops strategy, and educates activists to institutionalise the movement outcomes and then set out new agenda for future. In this process, we explore some of the key dimensions of the movement such as movement agenda, movement organisation, leadership, financing of the movement activities and sustainability, security, strategy, communication, resistance techniques, internal cohesion, internal and international alliance and solidarity.

We organised interaction programmes between Madhesi activists and activists from Colombia, Turkey and South Africa in Janakpur, Saptari and Lahan, the origin of Madhes uprising in 2007. Secondly, we carried out qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with a broad range of movement activists across the Madhes region. In total, 29 interviews were conducted with prominent individuals who were involved in the Madhes movement. Additionally, a total of six FGDs were conducted which included one FGD with the Kathmandu based youth activists, two with activists in Birgunj and Nepalgunj and three with the local people of Birgunj, Saptari and Bhairahawa. The FGDs were also recorded and transcribed later for a detailed analysis. Finally, a workshop was organised with 25 Kathmandu-based academics, activists, journalists and Madhesi scholars who had been working on Madhes issues at least over five years.

Throughout the process of data collection, participants' experiences of historical memory of injustices, relevance of the context, perceptions of informants, political affiliations, interpretations and reasoning around political events were accounted for. Through the systematisation lens the researchers observed how interviewees were reporting on critical reflection on their movement activities and strategising their subsequent steps to effectively advocate, mobilise masses and build solidarity and a shared purpose of the struggle. In addition

to the collection of primary data through interviews, the study drew upon the existing knowledge which was often scattered and located in different places and forms. The secondary information disseminated in movement documents, reports, articles and books were also built upon to provide a historical narrative of the movement and analyse interview data. The secondary data helped in devising the conceptual and contextual framework to develop detailed narratives of experiences and processes of the movement.

Findings:

RQ1) How does the Madhes movement, located in Nepal's current social, political and economic structure, learn and produce knowledge?

NEMAF's role in knowledge production about the Madhes movement

The success of the Madhes movement in 2007 was that the term 'Madhes' and 'Madhesi' gained constitutional acceptance, which was an historic achievement. Soon after this, NEMAF was officially registered and started advocating in favour of Madhesi rights to support the movement. Many of the NEMAF members had been involved in the movement in different forms including writing about the Madhesi issues in the media, fighting legal battles against discriminatory practices, and mobilising youth and cultural groups to join the Madhes struggle. Their backgrounds enabled the process of knowledge production through continuous engagement with grassroots populations and reporting of their grievances and struggle through publications. This systematic documentation has contributed to the legitimization of the struggle – that the resistance had a theoretical rationale based on intellectual ideas, social and political realities and the desperation and aspiration of the Madhesi population to achieve a dignified life in various realms of Nepali society. By engaging with public intellectuals, political leadership and the media, these grassroots narratives were translated into popular movement discourses to inform movement actions as well as to put pressure on the state to accede to social justice reforms.

In the early years of its inception, NEMAF concentrated its work on advocacy for constitutional issues such as federalism, social inclusion, state restructuring, citizenship rights, electoral reforms etc. It organised a series of discussions, dialogues and seminars and began to document, compile and publish ideas emerging in these events. Aligning its activities with the agendas of the Madhes

movement, it provided evidence-based justification to the grievances of the Madhes among the urban elites in Kathmandu. These events contributed to the sensitisation of the prevalence of historical state domination and discrimination against the Madhesi people. In this sense, NEMAF served as a *dialogic bridge* between the dominant political discourses in the centre and Madhesi democratic rights, the question of equity and civic engagement. This could be understood as a process of *'political translation,' 'a disruptive and communicative practice developed by activists and grassroots community organisers to address the inequities that hinder democratic deliberation, and to entreat powerful groups to work more inclusively with disempowered ones'* (Doerr, 2018: 3). NEMAF plays a role not as a neutral facilitator of the dialogue between the marginalised Madhesi voice and elitism but as a *'disruptive third'* that is able to utilise its persuasive power drawn from its understanding of *'the values of the privileged groups and the needs of marginalized ones'* by *'...directing attention to power imbalances and drawing on the egalitarian commitments of those who otherwise would be unlikely to recognise their own structural privilege'* (Doerr, 2018: 4). The *dialogic bridge* is built not only through the translation of Madhesi grievances into evidence-based persuasive narratives that rupture elitist approaches to purported grassroots representation, but also as a process in which the dominant political actors are compelled to listen to lived experiences of Madhesis in discussion forums. Hence, NEMAF's intellectual endeavours are not limited to mitigation of linguistic or cultural subordination of Madhesis, but seek to develop agency for transformative change.

The historical repression of Madhesi communities has systematically obscured Madhesi grievances in mainstream academic and political debates at the national level, leading to the inability of Madhesis to articulate and effectively negotiate their agendas with the state. Some Madhesi public intellectuals had also been co-opted by dominant political narratives and the agenda of ethnic and cultural liberation had hence been largely unacknowledged. NEMAF assisted the Madhes movement in intellectually articulating and revindicating those agendas in the wider political arena, through intellectual public debates and publication of relevant analysis which would have been rare previously. As the founder of NEMAF reported:

I felt that non-Madhesis were unable to understand the notion of ethnic domination and therefore, could not make sense of Madhesi agitation.

Likewise, Madhesis lacked in ability and sophistication in presenting well founded arguments about structural domination. In other words, they were unable to articulate their feelings and experiences of discrimination when challenged about the rationale for their discontent towards the state. (Madhesi civil society leader 1, Kathmandu)

The hegemonic control of discourses and systematic marginalisation of Madhesis over centuries had resulted in the normalisation of existing power relationships and the weakening of intellectual ability of Madhesis to be able to critique the system of oppression. As postcolonial theorists would argue, this process of control is a mode of exercising non-coercive power on ‘subaltern’ populations in a way that the interests of the ruling class become those of the entire population (Spivak, 1988). In the same vein, as the postcolonial critique exposes the limitations and misrepresentations of colonised subjects’ lived experiences, it is the same kind of ‘epistemic fallacy’ (i.e. knowledge misrepresentation) (Bhaskar, 2008) that occurs in most literature produced by non-Madhesis writers. Without social and cultural experiences of being a Madhesi and fully appreciating the causal mechanisms (e.g. actual and real), the study and portrayal of Madhesi discrimination is likely to be a partial description of the reality. The dominance of Khas-Arya authors in the intellectual circle including the media suffers from framing the Madhesi struggle through a non-native lens.

Hence, the question is – can Madhesis speak for themselves? The systematic process of cultural repression, non-recognition of Madhesi languages in the national arena and systemic exclusion in all domains of national processes have left Madhesis with strong emotions of anger and feelings of grievances that are structurally deprived of intellectual spaces to unpack and explicate the processes of their marginalisation.

In this context, NEMAF has played a role as the knowledge enabler, making research-based evidence and arguments available to movement actors such as political leaders and activists. As the NEMAF director further mentions:

We worked on three areas to support the movement. We developed a practical approach in which we worked with public intellectuals to produce literature and evidence-based narratives about discrimination and marginalisation of Madhesis in Nepali society and got them to train Madhesi law makers who were involved in the constitution making process. The

Madhesi leaders represented emotions of Madhesi people but they lacked in robust political substance to assert and justify their positions. (Tula Narayan Shah, Kathmandu)

NEMAF claims that its research and training programmes helped instil the intellectual and theoretical soul to the movement by offering research-based knowledge about the social realities in which the struggle was born. Its series of publications on ‘Madhes Manthan’¹ [Madhes Brainstorming] deal with a broad range of issues relating to the Madhes movement (NEMAF, 2020). These collections include discussions on the relationship between society and state; Madhes, Federalism and the debate about violence; Madhesism, inclusion and elections debate; Madhes in the new constitution; the Inclusion Act, Madhesism in the army and Madhes in state restructuring. In the Madhes Manthan on the ‘Relationship between Society and State’, Lal (2013) points out the disconnection between the Nepali state and Madhesi society. He argues

we have, so far, been living in the state that inflicts fear. We have not even reached to a contract with the state. There is a continuous conflict between the state and society. Citizens have no faith in the state. So, we should search for the basis of a contract. (Lal, 2013: 21)

He highlights the absence of Madhesism in state structures, citing a list of recently promoted civil servants, the majority of whom belong to the dominant ethnic groups. Similarly, another civil society activist, public intellectual and author argues that:

the relationship between the rulers/ administrators and the general public seems like the one that is of an oppressor and the oppressed. The rulers/ administrators have not yet transformed into servants or friends of the public. Due to these problems, federalism has surfaced as a question in the political process (Sangraula, 2013: 29).

He further notes how the state’s language policy has become central to the elimination of Madhesi identity:

¹ *Madhes Manthan* is a compilation of discussions organised by NEMAF on different contemporary issues relating to the Madhes movement. These publications capture the voice of Madhesi people in their own words (some translated into Nepali whereas many would share their views in a Madhesi language) that describe their grievances and lived experiences of marginalisation. <http://nemaf.org.np/madhesh-manthan/>

In order to eliminate the identity of a cultural group, one should kill the language their language. By legislating Nepali as the mandatory language of instruction in the curriculum and negating rest of the native languages in the media and public offices, all cultural and indigenous groups were linguistically repressed. If one is weak in Nepali language, despite possessing the wealth of information, knowledge, skills and aptitudes, they would barely be able to express one fourth of these. In this situation, it is inevitable that non-native speakers of Nepali language would lag behind in accessing public services, compete for opportunities and engage in public debates. (Sangraula, 2013: 30)

The Madhes Manthan series also documents perspectives and experiences of Madhesi participants in Bardaiya, Kapilvastu, Sunsari, Siraha, Bara and other parts of Madhes and response to participants' comments and questions from public intellectuals. At least six books of Madhes Manthan, published over a period of ten years (2008 – 2018), document rich accounts of public debates on Madhes issues and their relevance to the movement. These processes enabled Madhesi activists to engage in public debates to sharpen their ability to articulate their thoughts, and documented their narratives and debates for wider readership. The involvement of public intellectuals in these regional events also inspired them to write opinion pieces in national newspapers and present their reflections at national level events. This process contributed to knowledge production and documentation of the Madhes movement. Occasionally, public intellectuals who were sympathetic to the Madhesi struggle were blamed as spoilers of peace and social cohesion in Nepali society.

Similarly, NEMAF's 'Madhes Adhdhayan'²[Madhes Studies] series serves as the only Nepali academic journal that is primarily dedicated to Madhes studies. As a biannual journal, it publishes research-based academic articles on issues relating to the exclusion of Madhesis, issue of citizenship, Madhesi identity, culture, intra-Madhes political dynamics, Madhesi Dalits, and state-Madhesi relations. These articles provide an evidence-based academic basis to justify the need for a transformative political agenda, provide resources to scientific research on Madhes and

² Madhes Adhdhayan is a semi academic journal published biannually by NEMAF in Nepali language. The publications are available to download freely at: <http://nemaf.org.np/madhesh-adhyan/>

contribute to revindicate the struggle of Madhesi people. Occasionally, the journal also publishes poems that capture the revolutionary sentiments of Madhesis.

The movement pedagogy

NEMAF has adopted various strategies for assisting learning within the Madhes movement. Madhesis often have an emotional attachment with the movement and their involvement in the protests was a response to discriminations they have endured, yet the movement needed to sharpen its theoretical base to enable activists to assert logical arguments and articulate narratives of grievances effectively both in movement organising and political negotiations. To broaden the movement's intellectual space, NEMAF's programmes were designed to systematically articulate the Madhesi agenda by working with political analysts, sociologists and human rights activists who engaged in analysis of Madhesi history, geography, politics, culture and identities by documenting knowledge, publishing research, and dissemination of knowledge through various means. Some of NEMAF's publications were released in English, targeting youths and international readers to enable them to critically appreciate Madhes issues, constitutional limitations and a way forward for progressive political reforms. Over the past decade, NEMAF has concentrated on establishing Madhes studies as an area of research and scholarly domain.

NEMAF now also holds a monthly discussion series in collaboration with Martin Chautari, a Kathmandu-based research institution, where it invites speakers with a broad range of expertise on Madhes movement. Similarly, owing to the marginal stake and historical exclusion of Madhes in academic studies, NEMAF also organises an immersion course on Madhes studies aimed at educating young scholars with critical studies on Madhes, the Nepali state and political change. It targets young researchers, activists and policy makers who shape the public discourse on Madhes politics. This course mainly intends to promote knowledge production and translation of knowledge into practice such social activism, policy making and leadership development.

Since its inception, NEMAF's pedagogical approach has been based on the idea of participatory discussion, academic publications and community engagement, which can be best described as 'public pedagogy' which is '*a critical public engagement that challenges existing social practices and hegemonic forms of discrimination*' (Brady, 2006: 58). It is an approach to learning that

acknowledges learning sites as dynamic and intersectional, and is ethically committed to critical engagement with democratic principles. What is important to appreciate is that public pedagogues are not merely educators, they include a broad range of activists and community groups that constantly produce a democratic vision that problematises inequalities and injustices in social institutions and people's everyday practice (Dentith and Brady, 2005). As Brady (2006: 58) argues-

It is an activism embedded in collective action, not only situated in institutionalized structures, but in multiple spaces, including grassroots organizations, neighborhood projects, art collectives, and town meetings—spaces that provide a site for compassion, outrage, humor, and action. Such pedagogy disrupts processes of injustice and creates opportunities for the expression of complex, contesting, and subaltern perspectives.

In this sense, the *'public pedagogy is concerned with both the socially reproductive and counterhegemonic dimensions of pedagogical sites that are distinct from formal schooling'* and hence, research into public pedagogy focuses on social contexts in order to *'advance either dominant oppressive structures or possibilities for democratic resistance and reconfiguration'* (O'Malley, Sandlin and Burdick, 2010: 2). In social movements, Giroux's notion of critical public pedagogy (Giroux, 2000) is particularly relevant in the context of Madhes movement. Drawing upon Stuart Hall's work on culture, politics and power, Giroux (2000) argues that public intellectuals working in diverse social and political domains can enhance possibilities for democratic struggles. Hall's work is relevant in understanding pedagogy as a cultural critique, allowing those involved to challenge *'the conditions under which knowledge is produced and subject positions are put into place, negotiated, taken up, or refused'* (Giroux, 2000: 342). Hall (1996) points out that culture is embedded in manifestations of power through educational, political and economic institutions. Therefore, NEMAF's work particularly concentrates on exposing the hegemonic culture that is implicit in legitimising the state's power despite its exclusionary treatment to Madhesi cultural groups. Simultaneously, it provides a space for reclaiming history, culture and language of the Madhesis.

Learning to articulate the movement agenda

NEMAF, through its Madhes Manthan publications, works against hegemonic ideologies by legitimising and celebrating the grassroots perspectives in shaping the public discourse of the Madhes movement. As Hall (1986: 52) notes *'the politics which follows from saying that the masses are nothing but a passive reflection of the historical, economic and political forces which have gone into the construction of modern industrial mass society, seems to me historically incorrect and politically inadequate'*. Here, Hall's (1986: 52) theory of articulation is relevant:

The silent majorities do think; if they do not speak, it may be because we have taken their speech away from them, deprived them of the means of enunciation, not because they have nothing to say. I would argue that, in spite of the fact that the popular masses have never been able to become in any complete sense the subject-authors of the cultural practices in the twentieth century, their continuing presence, as a kind of passive historical-cultural force, has constantly interrupted, limited and disrupted everything else. It is as if the masses have kept a secret to themselves while the intellectuals keep running around in circles trying to make out what it is, what is going on.

What Hall (1986) notes above resonates the ethos of this research and is also rooted in the philosophy and ethics of NEMAF's work. The idea that social movements are the site of knowledge production and activists as producers of that knowledge challenges the elitist representation of the social movements and their learning processes. Social movement activist and scholar Aziz Choudry provides a resourceful critique of the narratives of social change that are attributed to individual charismatic leadership, arguing that glorification of *'individual achievements, characteristics or charisma'* as the factor of movement success *'often do disservice to understanding social movements and the learning that takes place within and about them'* and *'... such accounts of history and of movements can obscure or divert attention away from the real nature of the dynamics of broader struggles for social change, rendering invisible the role of a wider array of social forces for transformation'* (Choudry, 2015: 13). NEMAF's publication of uninterpreted concrete voices of grassroots activists in Madhes Manthan can be understood as an attempt to disrupt elitisation of public narratives that are often detached from movement needs. The narratives of the people provide readers an opportunity to connect with vivid descriptions of Madhesi's lived experiences. The public interaction programmes across the Madhes region served as non-formal learning spaces in addition to the broad informal and

incidental learning that was happening within communities and public places as the people participated in the movement.

During the initial phase of NEMAF's work, it focused on establishing a culture of intellectual debates about Madhes in Kathmandu. The general public in Kathmandu usually dismissed the discourse of Madhesi marginalisation and Madhes-related issues were rarely debated in academic and intellectual forums in the capital. The Madhes movement was regularly characterised as being based on the manipulation of Madhesis by leaders who were motivated by their own political gains rather than representing the demands of Madhesi people. Additionally, there was a lack of intellectual resources to promote serious debates about Madhesi grievances. This clearly indicated the absence of Madhesi voices in the national level intellectual realms and the need to fill this gap. A Madhesi civil society leader mentions that:

We needed the content for our activism which could logically shape the discourse and narrative of exclusion – which could be explained in a way that made sense both to the audience in Kathmandu and activists in Madhes. More importantly, we needed to identify the location of the problem. The problem lay not in the way Pahadi people viewed Madhesis but the historical discourses and constitutional provisions that maintained and legitimised structural inequalities. These issues were related to the crisis of identity, inequitable political representation and exclusion of Madhesis in the state apparatus. (Madhesi civil society leader 1, Kathmandu)

This highlights a deeper level problem of normalisation of social realities through hegemonic narratives, and therefore the need for counter-hegemonic discourses that rupture '*the blending of persuasion and coercion*' (Carroll, 2007: 19). To this end, these disruptive narratives could only emerge out of the revindication of the people's histories and lived experiences that have been obscured, silenced or repressed. From a critical realist perspective, the empirical representation of discrimination without interrogating the 'generative mechanisms' such as history, structures of the state apparatus and constitutional provisions cannot explain the social reality in its totality (Alderson, 2019).

Hence, NEMAF as a social movement organisation constantly and dynamically rearticulates its role in public spheres through its public pedagogy and development projects. It recognises that

there are several intra-movement tensions which are manifested across caste, gender, ethnicity and regional levels in Madhes. What appears to be the case now is that movement organisations such as NEMAF have a wider role in diversifying activism beyond ethnic lines as well as recalibrating the dimensions of the movement to engage with social inequalities within and across the movements.

RQ 2) What knowledge has the Madhes movement developed and what has it learned?

Understanding Nepal's geopolitical location and the Madhes movement

The Madhes movement has developed a critical understanding of the geopolitical dynamics that influence struggle for political transformation in Nepal. The open border with India in the South, and ethnic similarities between Madhesis and people in Northern India, have played a crucial role in the political dynamics of the Madhes movement. India's interference in Nepal's political dynamics is historically well-documented. The overthrow of the Rana oligarchy in Nepal in 1951 is attributed largely to the support of India that provided safe sanctuary to the rebelling Nepali Congress leaders. After the restoration of democratic polity until 1961, India had a strong influence on Nepal's political affairs which only began to diminish during the period of absolute monarchy (1961 – 1990). In 1990, India supported the political movement in Nepal and brokered a deal with political parties and monarchy to restore multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy. Even though India has aligned with different political forces at different times of history, Indian political, security and economic interests have always been at the centre of their involvement in Nepal's political affairs. In the case of Madhes movement, Madhesi leaders increasingly relied on Indian patronage and sympathy on the Madhes movement. However, the movement leadership insufficiently appreciated that India's role would shift to suit their own strategic interests which could be better fulfilled through alignment with the power centre in Kathmandu. In other words, India would utilise instability in Madhes as a negotiating position with Kathmandu but would barely risk its favourable diplomatic relations with the central political leadership in Nepal. As the journalist of prominent national daily notes:

I do not think the establishment in Delhi was sympathetic to Madhes at all. They had not imposed the blockade to support the Madhes struggle.
(Journalist 1, Kathmandu)

This statement indicates that Madhesi activists do see India as a decisive factor in Nepal's political movements but are also aware that Indian support to Madhes movement was no different from their self-serving role in Nepal's political history. Another journalist who is based in Madhes and reports regularly on Madhes issues reported:

Delhi felt that the [blockade] could no longer be sustained. Various forces played up in this juncture. Delhi began to negotiate with Kathmandu that demanded border to be opened and at the same time, some Madhesi leaders were involved in illegal trade and were weak in asserting their positions. This resulted in loss of people's enthusiasm to continue with the protest. When Delhi shifted its position and withdrew their support for the movement, the six-monthlong blockade ended without securing its key demands. (Journalist 2, Birgunj)

A prominent Madhesi leader provides much deeper insights into the role of India in the Madhes movement. He notes:

The reality is that Beijing and New Delhi deal with Kathmandu. I can claim this not just from my knowledge but the experience I have had as a government minister. I have observed the reality from very close. If India had not supported the political movement in 1990, the Panchayat system would not have been defeated. Why would India choose to play with the issues of Madhes? If it did so, it would distance itself from the mainstream political establishment in Nepal. All the leaders here ultimately do business with the Indian establishment. They have nothing to do with the ideology. It is really nonsense to say that India wants to add Madhes in its territory. (Madhesi leader 1)

The above perspective is particularly interesting in the sense that Nepali nationalism mobilises the fear that India intends to see Madhes seceded from Nepal and their sympathetic views and support to Madhesi leaders is to achieve this goal. Ethno-nationalist leaders in Nepal continue to spread this fear in their political campaigns, and ordinary Nepalis in the hills are broadly convinced by this narrative. Another Madhesi youth activist in Kathmandu also agrees with the misunderstanding that India is loyal to the Madhesi cause. He lamented:

Madhesi people believe that India supports them, and it can be seen during the time of blockade also. Though India has its own hidden interest behind the blockade, the common Madhesi believed that the bigger power India was with them. Because of this belief, they kept hope and stayed motivated in the protest. But I feel India had nothing to do with the Madhesi cause nor

has any kinds of sympathy with Madhes. It only uses Madhes as a bargaining chip. Though we have grievances with our own state, we, Madhesis have never seen [merger with] India as an option for us. (Madhesi Activist 1, Kathmandu)

Here, the participant alludes that the assumption that Madhesis are loyal to India due to their ethnic affinity with North Indian people is flawed. He is also conscious about the fact that Madhes struggle is strictly about securing justice, dignity and constitutional recognition as equal citizens within Nepal's political system. Throughout our interviews and FGDs with Madhesi activists, we find that they were aware of the lack of trust from Pahadi communities with regards to national integrity, but there is a strong sense that this questioning of their loyalty to their own nation is a reactionary ploy to maintain the status quo and deprive them of their legitimate rights to equity in all realms of the society. Therefore, they rarely see the need to reassure anyone about their being Nepali. In this sense, the Madhesi agenda is to rupture the hegemonic notion of what it means to be 'Nepali' and diversify the manifestation of national identity which truly represents their own culture, unlike the characteristics of Nepaliness that the state has historically promoted.

Hence, Madhes occupies a complex geopolitical location, exposing it to the strategic interests of India as well as the internal colonisation of Khas-Arya political dogma. Nevertheless, the resourcefulness of the geography of Madhes plays a central role in Nepal's economic development. Madhesis have a strong feeling that the state has historically owned Madhesi territory but not its people, which drives their discontent, and brought about the emergence of the movement. In recent years, the Madhes movement has developed an explanatory framework to decipher this complexity and explain the different dimensions of the relationship between Madhes and the Nepali state. Even though the Madhes uprisings were driven by lived experiences of discrimination and systemic marginalisation, the dynamic processes of the movement have taught Madhesi activists to explain their political position in a way that exposes the exclusionary hegemonic narratives and increasingly allows non-Madhesi people to appreciate the genuine historical grievances of Madhes. Most importantly, the Madhes movement has also appreciated that India's sympathy towards Madhes is linked to the country's wider geopolitical goals rather than solidarity with the Madhesi cause.

Overcoming social differences for a common cause

Different caste groups in Madhes collectively played an instrumental role in the expansion and sustenance of the Madhes movement. Historically, caste-based organisations in Madhes have mobilised for their own caste interests, dignity and rights within Madhes. During the Madhes uprisings, these sub-groups were mobilised for mass protests. Because there were already existing organisational structures within various caste groups, the movement was able to draw strengths more easily through their members. A Madhesi journalist notes:

There is indigenous knowledge about struggle for rights in Madhes in terms of mobilisation of communal or caste groups. As a predominantly Hindu caste system, there are a number of caste-based community organisations in Madhesi society. For example, Teli, Yadav, Brahman and Kayastha have their own caste-based organisations. Madhesi leaders were able to collectivise and harmonise the narratives of grievances across all caste groups which persuaded these organisations to join the movement with the hope of freedom from caste-based discriminations, collective rights and representation in the centre. (Journalist 2, Birgunj)

There have been other favourable conditions for Madhes uprisings. Firstly, the geographical convenience, high density of population and strong feelings of discrimination seem to have been conducive to mass mobilisation. Also, cross-border flow of historical knowledge and caste-based movement processes inspired struggle in Madhes. For example, Tharu Welfare Council one of the oldest political parties in Madhes, was inspired by the peasant movement in Northern India that shared cultural and social connections with the marginalised populations living in the southern plains of Nepal.

Secondly, the Maoist movement played a contributing role to intensifying Madhes uprisings. For example, there were two diverging outcomes of Maoist influence in Madhes that began around 2001. On the one hand, the formation of Madhesi National Liberation Front within the Maoist party paved the way for an organised campaign against ethnic marginalisation in Madhes and, built confidence to resist the exclusionary state. The Front's organisational expansion and political campaigns sensitised the deeply rooted issues of discrimination, and mobilised Madhesi youth into the Maoist ranks. On the other hand, the Maoist leadership failed to manage its political campaign, creating a space for criminalisation towards the latter stage of the rebellion.

As a result, Madhesi community gradually turned against the Maoist political movement. Additionally, Madhesi people began to realise that even the Maoist party and its political campaign was insensitive towards Madhesi grievances. The movement that claimed to have been resisting ethnic marginalisation harboured Khas-Arya monopoly in its top leadership, party ranks and policy formulation.

Thirdly, Kathmandu's attitude towards the Madhes movement was perceived to be biased. At the early stage of the Madhes uprising, the movement was portrayed as a social unrest fuelled by Madhesi landlords who sought political space in the national politics, influenced also by Indian strategic interests. Along these lines, the Kathmandu-based media often depicted a negative picture of Madhesi leaders or promoted a narrative of negation. For example, following the promulgation of the interim constitution of Nepal 2008, a progressively inclusive constituent assembly was achieved through the 60 percent proportional representation and increased number of constituencies in the historically underrepresented Tarai region. As a result, some of the nationally unknown grassroots leaders were elected. These new leaders were often mocked at by the Kathmandu-based media about their ordinary public backgrounds. There were headlines such as 'Clearers turned MP' and 'Barber turned MP' that aimed to delegitimise the voice of movement leaders and grassroots activists. The underlying message was that political leadership is an elite enterprise. Nevertheless, the Maoist uprising and the Madhes movement, to a great extent, did succeed in securing a unique constituent assembly, rupturing the bourgeois notion of who deserved to represent the people. Madhes-based media such as local newspapers and FM radios played a crucial role in promoting the voice of the movement and their representatives. A journalist in Birgunj noted that -

Kathmandu's media was biased towards the news of Madhes but the local media in Madhes was fully in support of the Madhes. The local FM radios would disseminate information about the details about movement activities such as protest, blockade and mass rallies. (Journalist 2, Birgunj)

Some Madhesi journalists who were writing in established National Dailies made efforts to present movement perspectives, trying to problematise the hegemonic discourses and making a case about why Madhes was resisting. They were either forced to resign or side-lined by media owners. One of the Madhesi youth activists lamented:

During the first Madhes movement, I used to run a Maithali language programme called "Kamala Koshi" through *Nepal FM*. My programme became little political during that time because I started reporting the 'right' and complete news about the movement which the Nepali media did not do. For doing this, I was fired from my job. (Madhesi Youth activist 4, Kathmandu)

As they realised that the media in the capital was also controlled by the interests of the hegemonic state, Madhesi activists learned to mobilise their local media to share information and communicate important messages to Madhesi people. As the struggle was protracted, there was increased use of the social media among the young activists. Hence, the movement learnt that despite the exclusionary behaviour of the national media, the locally owned and managed media could be usefully mobilised to disseminate the agenda of the movement and organise the activists.

Movement strategies

People's motivations for the struggle

Two key themes emerge in this research about people's motivation for involvement in the Madhes movement. Firstly, the experience of discrimination by the state and poor living conditions in Madhes fuelled anger among Madhesis which spontaneously brought them together to join the movement. Secondly, the movement mobilised activists at the grassroots to create political consciousness and persuade them to join mass demonstrations. The movement was utilising the historic opportunity of the post-war constitution-making process by creating pressures on the political leadership for the new constitution to pave the way for redressing inequalities and exclusion of Madhes. Hence, the collective sense of grievances among the ethnic Madhesis contributed to their innate motivation to participate in mass protests. A Madhesi youth noted:

The villagers do not know what in the constitution excluded Madhesis from opportunities, but they all have experienced discriminations. Their feeling of discrimination was so high that they participated in the movement by bringing their own food supplies from home and cooking and feeding themselves on the roadside while organising mass protests. (Madhesi youth 5, FGD, Birgunj)

The movement agenda spoke to the people of all ages. Participants reported that it was the movement in which parents were encouraging their children and children were motivating their parents to join the mass demonstrations. The entire family was involved, villages and towns across Madhes were united.

Mobilisation

The movement leaders often reached out to the grassroots to organise political meetings and mobilise people for resistance. They strategically collaborated with Madhesi individuals who had respected positions and reputations within local communities to organise political meetings and mass gatherings. There were also public campaigns in towns and villages. A Madhesi youth in Birgunj reported:

Leaders along with their cadre used to visit door to door in the villages from early morning to late evening to convince the people to join the movement. They used to talk to the village head (Mukhiya) about the activities planned. Sometimes, loudspeaker was used to impart the message about the movement activities and to appeal for mass participation. (Youth activist 6, FGD, Birgunj)

Another youth described how they organised movement activities:

We fitted a loudspeaker in our vehicles and drove around announcing the programme to the general public. The public meetings often had big success. During informal meetings in the village, we would discuss the details of planned resistance activities among ourselves. Each of us would share the programme details in our respective villages. People from neighboring villages would first gather at Pokharia [a local town] and then travel to Birgunj together for mass demonstrations. (Youth activist 7, Birgunj)

Some of the movement leaders who were elected in the 2017 elections also described how door-to-door canvassing was a key approach to mobilise support. Through this process, movement leaders were able to connect with local people; understand their concerns; and communicate the political agenda of the movement. For them, this was also an opportunity to build their political base which they were able to draw upon during the elections.

Growing support amid movement success

As the movement gained its momentum, its base expanded rapidly across the Tarai region. When public sentiment in Madhes increased in favour of the Madhes movement, several Madhesi political leaders and cadres who were affiliated to the mainstream political parties began to defect to join the movement either by establishing their own Madhes-based political parties or entering the Madhesi People's Rights Forum which was leading the movement. A Madhesi woman activist in Kathmandu mentioned:

Millions of people participated in the movement. Not only those who supported Madhesi parties but also the local leaders from Congress, UML and Maoists began to organise in support of the movement. It was because they had to rely on their constituents who would boycott them unless they were on the side of the movement. Many people supported the movement silently. The government officials also went on strike and refused to do the work. The caste-based organisations also supported the movement by organising rallies. Professional organisations like labour organisations, organisations of journalists, and organisations of doctors also participated in the movement (Madhesi woman activist 2, Kathmandu)

This shows that the struggle received support not only from ordinary Madhesis in villages and towns but also from professional organisations who were key constituencies of state institutions. However, there was no participation of non-Madhesi public, or individuals in the named organisations above from non-Madhesi backgrounds. After 2012, the non-Madhesi public was beginning to recognise that Madhes had been historically suppressed and the grievances were genuine. However, the 2015 blockade had a direct impact on hilly people's everyday life and therefore intensified anti-Madhes and anti-Indian sentiments among non-Madhesi populations. Madhesis continued to support the resistance in different ways. Those who did not explicitly participate in mass demonstrations also supported the protesters through other means.

There were different levels of movement processes. Mass demonstrations were the key movement action, but in the background, activists were engaged in planning meetings, close interactions with their leaders and developing strategies before decisions were taken about where to stage demonstrations, when to gather and how to mobilise people.

Participants reported of some positive social impact within the movement as a result of the ways in which activists were organising. During FGDs in Birgunj, participants reported that the

movement helped reduce social divisions between different caste groups across the region. Low caste groups such as Musahar, Dhobi, Paswan, Chamar etc., who were experiencing social exclusions and discrimination, put their internal grievances aside and joined the movement. The collective feeling of victimisation by the state and the goal of achieving broader Madhesi rights and political representation reduced intra-community differences and hierarchies. This shows that the creation of a collective enemy increases intergroup solidarity. A Madhesi activist puts it as:

During the protests, everyone used to eat together and share their meals at the common place. Even Dalits who are usually considered untouchable sat together with upper caste people to share their food. Dalits cooked meals for everyone when the highway was blocked in Siraha. In the Madhesi community, women generally do not eat alongside men. But during protests and sit-ins, everyone ate together. (Youth activist 8, Siraha)

It is interesting to see that internal practices of social discrimination diminished, at least during times of mass agitation, through the imagination of a collective goal of ethnic liberation. This did not necessarily mean that suppressed caste groups within Madhes felt completely emancipated within the social order of the Madhesi society, but their experience of concrete behavioural change during the protest provided them with a sense of equality and acceptance. The promotion of collective Madhesi identity, irrespective of caste and gender, within the context of a caste-based society had an immense benefit for the social struggle.

The use of media in the movement

The use of social media, local radio and newspapers played a key role in mobilising the people in the movement. Activists had to rely on local media to disseminate information about the movement. The local FM radios usually invited Madhesi leaders to participate in talk programmes through which they would raise issues of Madhes and educate people about the struggle. Local radios stations also campaigned about mass demonstrations, and informed people about the date, time, venue and other details about movement activities. Local newspapers reported on movement activities; incidents of police brutality; and provided critical analyses of political negotiations with the government that were taking place in Kathmandu. At a time when the

national media was by and large unfriendly towards the Madhes uprising, the local media in Madhes unapologetically promoted the voice of the movement.

Some youths initiated a chat group on Facebook where youth of 22 districts of Madhes were connected. Although the activists did not know each other in person, they used to discuss how they were organising in their districts, what had worked more effectively and what mistakes were to avoid. The participants shared their movement strategies to learn from each other. This is a key example of how activists organically develop methods of resistance without being directly instructed by their leaders. These social media platforms provided them a sense of unity and belonging to the movement. They were able to learn about how to be safe; deal with police repression; and put pressures on their leaders to hold their positions in negotiations with the state. Some of the movement techniques were replicated widely across the region.

This analysis reveals that social/political movements are likely to be more effective when activists are able to use diverse approaches for mass mobilisation. Firstly, building a wide network of activists and communicating their experiences, ideas and techniques provides them useful knowledge and motivation for the struggle. Secondly, the use of the local media such as radio and social media is instrumental for learning activism. Thirdly, participation in the movement and active engagement with fellow activists provides a sense of identity and undeterred commitment to the collective agenda of freedom. Finally, movement strategies emerge out of active interactions between activists, particularly the youth who are able to think creatively about how to mobilise people more effectively.

State tactics to foil the movement since 2007

The Madhes movement remained at the centre of political debates in Nepal between 2007 and 2016. All three Madhes uprisings broke out as a response to key moments of the constitution-making process. After the 2007 uprising, there were some positive gestures from the political leadership in Kathmandu that gave assurances about addressing Madhesi agendas in the constitution. However, as this Madhesi civil society activist lamented, the state's bureaucratic system would decimate any attempts to enshrine the agreements in the law:

The ruling state often delayed in passing the relevant laws as per the agreement with the Madhesi parties. It created many unfavourable conditions that would restrict Madhesis from achieving their rights. For example, if any agreements were made and laws drafted according to the agreements, some groups would petition against these laws, filing a case in the court. Then, the interim order would stop it. There are many instances, such as the Citizenship Act; laws on the use of official language at the local level; recruiting Madhesis in the armed forces; appointment of Madhesis jobs such as a lecturer or professor etc. At the same time, media groups were created to defame our movement's agendas (Madhesi lawyer 1, Janakpur)

Hence, the state took a three dimensional approach to deal with the movement: firstly, it adopted the strategy of *persuasion* by assuring the movement leaders that the constitution would address their demands and continued resistance was an unnecessary distraction to political stability that was needed for peace and prosperity; secondly, they used excessive force to *frighten* activists and movement leaders in Madhes; and finally, they took the approach of 'managing' the movement – neither meeting the demands nor letting the movement escalate, a tactic that was used to *exhaust* the movement.

Demonstrations with symbolic meanings

A range of creative and symbolically meaningful demonstrations were observed during the Madhes movement. These methods of resistance helped gain media attention and added soul to conventionally mundane methods of mass demonstration that simply involved marching with slogans. For example, activists organised lamp rallies during the day. This symbolised the quest for justice even in the daylight (obviously visible) and also the sense that justice was lost, and that the state had ignored Madhesi grievances to an extent that a lamp was needed even during the day. In some places, protesters used donkeys in the rallies to satirise the authorities and symbolise that they lacked wisdom. On a different occasion, activists presented themselves on the streets with chains in their hands symbolising the plight of Madhesis as prisoners in their own country and making a point that they were fighting for their freedom. Similarly, activists played dead on the road to commemorate the death of their comrades. It was also aimed at reminding the state how repressive and inhumane it had become against the Madhesi people. On a different

occasion, they rallied half-naked on the road to symbolise that the state was shameless in treating Madhesis as the second-class citizens.

Resistance as a response to humiliation

The experience of social discrimination and being humiliated as Madhesis was the most recurring theme in all the interviews and FGDs. Every Madhesi activist who participated in this study had their own unique story of how they had been discriminated against for being a Madhesi – the way they looked and spoke: the abuses they experienced relating to their darker complexion, dress, and accent when they spoke in Nepali which is not their mother tongue. Most importantly, these personal experiences were the entry points of learning in the movement which allowed them to reach beyond the descriptive empirical experiences of neglect, dismissal and belittlement to engage in more reflective dialogue about the underlying causal mechanisms that generated those experiences. The activists realised that the structural subjugation, exclusion in state structures and domination by the Khas-Arya hegemony were the ‘actual’ generative mechanisms of their everyday discrimination (Alderson, 2019; Bhaskar, 2008). In order to redress the historical forms of dominance, Madhesis realised that a new constitutional arrangement was necessary to ensure that their political rights were guaranteed, culture and language recognised and affirmative actions were set in motion.

The widespread experience of humiliation and exclusionary behaviour of state institutions had a deep psychological impact on Madhesi people. We observed that most incidents of verbal abuse, physical violence and trivialisation were manifested at two levels: firstly, while traveling on public transport and living in the capital and Pahadi dominated urban areas, Madhesis were ridiculed and treated by people of hilly origin as non-Nepali subjects and therefore worthless. Secondly, they were often degraded while dealing with state authorities, such as the District Administration Office (DAO), revenue office and police administration. Despite being a Nepali citizen, they were treated as Indian immigrants by the Pahadi dominated public offices because of their physical appearance and non-Nepali mother-tongue. These experiences cumulatively made them feel neglected and humiliated within their own nation.

When an individual is targeted with derogatory remarks based on their ethnic identity, they begin to relate it with a broad range of discriminations that their fellow ethnic members have experienced. The perception in Madhes is that Pahadis get the courage to discriminate against Madhesis because of their dominance in the state apparatus. For an ordinary Madhesi, this means that Pahadis are protected by the state institutions which are monopolised by people of their ethnic origin. At a deeper level mechanism, Pahadis' mindset is shaped by dominant discourses that characterise the authentic Nepaliness as equivalent to the cultural character of the Khas-Arya ethnic groups. These discourses are constantly legitimised through messages in the national media; promoted in the education system; religious and cultural celebrations; promotion of Nepali language and literature; and monopoly in state structures such as, bureaucracy, judiciary, military institutions and civil society organisations. Madhesis felt that they had no resort to a fair justice system, as the state was deeply biased and oppressive towards the people who did not confirm to the state sponsored national identity.

The use of violent actions: This research also reveals an interesting dimension of how activists decide the boundaries of protest actions. We find that struggles for political rights can sometimes adopt what may be considered violent movement strategies that react to the often-repressive actions by the state. As della Porta (2008: 222) notes, *'during cycles of protest, the development of the forms of protest actions follows a reciprocal process of innovation and adaptation, with each side responding to the other'*. Activists are also prepared to use some degree of violence in response to state repression and violence; when they feel that their peaceful protests are being ignored by the state; or that resistance is losing its momentum. This is part of their tactical adaptation to continue mobilisation in order to counter their adversaries' repressive behaviour (della Porta, 2008). We find plenty of examples in the Madhes movement whereby activists were involved in violence either to defend themselves, to counter police brutality or to strategically intensify resistance by pelting stones at security forces, vandalising government properties, throwing petrol bombs at the police and violent attacks on the people and businesses that disobeyed their call for strike. These forms of violence were manifestations of anger and means of defence against state repression rather than random acts of violence.

As one of the movement leaders mentioned:

I gathered a dozen of my close youth activists. We filled water bottles with petrol. Six of them hid the bottles inside their jackets and from Birtatol to Ghantaghar, we burnt tyres at six locations which created an ambience of resistance in the city. The vehicle movement stopped, people landed on the streets and demonstrations began. When we arrived at the Birta police station, we pelted stones at the police station. To intensify the protest, we had to provoke the police. At Adarshanagar, we pelted rocks at a few banks. We moved forward up to Maisthan but the police did not intervene. Then my fellow activists started pelting stones at the telecommunication office. The staff of the telecom office responded by throwing bricks at us. I was then hit by a brick and sustained injury on my head. I climbed on the wall of the telecom office and threatened them – ‘Listen, my name is [annonymised]. I know you and your families. Unless you stop throwing bricks at us, you will see what we can do at night. Then they stopped. (Madhesi leader 8, Birgunj)

The above description shows activists resort to calculated violent methods to maintain the pressure of resistance. They learn to coordinate their activities, decide to target strategic locations to cause the maximum level of disruption, and harness courage to take risky actions to maintain the momentum of the movement. It is also observed that activists often overcome the fear of being targeted by security forces and trivialise associated physical risks on their own lives when they are part of a popular resistance. In some ways, it also represents the joy of resistance in which an activist ascends to a new identity as a protester or freedom fighter, absenting from all other personal identities.

International solidarity in the Madhes movement: The Madhes movement was geographically limited within Madhes except for occasional demonstrations in Kathmandu. India was vocally in favour of the movement but was usually manipulative and precarious in terms of its stand. Madhesi leaders also engaged with foreign diplomatic missions based in Kathmandu to garner their support, particularly on the issue of human rights violations. Occasionally, Madhesi intellectuals used UN platforms abroad to raise the issues of Madhes.

Madhesi civil society leaders mobilised international support, including that of the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States, in Nepal’s constitutional debate. They staged a sit-in outside the UN office in Kathmandu to create international pressures on the government. This demonstrates that Madhesi activists pursued multilevel and multidimensional strategies:

resistance on the streets; utilising national assemblies and legislatures to influence the process of constitution-making; and international engagement to build external pressures on the state. However, the Madhes movement seemed to have paid little attention to the possibility of building international solidarity with similar social/ political movements in other countries. There appear to be some genuine reasons behind the lack of interest in building international social movement collaborations. Firstly, the Madhes movement was intensified at a unique political juncture of post-insurgency constitution-making when an intense pressure was necessary for the maximum constitutional outcomes in favour of Madhes. Secondly, the Madhes movement was often portrayed by the state as an externally fermented agitation (by India) rather than representing internal grievances. Strategic collaborations or links with international social movements could have deflected or weakened its central narrative of struggle against injustices and internal colonisation. More importantly, the hegemonic state could have exploited the movement's links with international social movements to fuel anti-Madhes nationalist ideology. Hence, it was strategically important to deter further ethno-nationalist attacks on the movement. Despite these reasons, civil society actors, as described above, did make attempts to gain international support within the global legal frameworks by interacting with diplomatic missions in Kathmandu.

The grassroots at the helm of organising – The existing body of literature on Madhes movement rarely prioritises analysis of grassroots activists' actual movement actions: the processes of mass involvement in the movement; sources of motivations; innovative movement actions; and the organising process of grassroots activists and wider Madhesi ordinary people. Even though the extent of success of social movements relies heavily on how people on the ground maintain resistance, research generally focuses on the analysis of movement agendas, the role of leadership and the movement's macro level interactions with the state. As a result, how the foot soldiers of the movements perform activism and how they learn, adapt and mobilise their cadres is usually obscured (Choudry, 2015). Hence, this research makes a unique contribution by investigating the movement experiences of grassroots activists, particularly highlighting descriptions of how activists mobilise their movement actions at the local levels.

With regards to the question of where these movement strategies originated, activists reported that the top movement leadership would plan and coordinate mass demonstrations, but a number of organic and locally adaptable tactics also emerged simultaneously. All interviewees acknowledged Upendra Yadav as the main leader of the Madhes movement, but some recognised that Jay Prakash Gupta had played a major role in organisational development and political education among the grassroots.

There were, however, some contestations about who played prominent roles of organising movement actions. The senior movement leaders held the view that the movement was strategised centrally whereas, local youths and community members claimed that local activists were in charge of devising and implementing movement actions. A Madhesi youth leader in Kathmandu reported that:

The strategy for the activities during the movement were decided by the core Madhesi leaders. All the programme of the movement used to be set out at the central level like when to declare the general strike, when to hold the torch rally, when to tie the black flag in the arms to show symbolic protest etc. The district level political leaders put together their programmes on the basis of the resistance roadmap given by the central leadership. The nature and level of police repression during the movement also determined the kind of strategy that would be suitable to deal with the situation. (Madhesi youth leader 3, Kathmandu)

However, a female activist claimed that:

Although it appeared that the core movement leaders had devised the strategy for the movement, it was not always the case. At the local level youth formed their own organisations and political committees. They would not wait for instructions [from the movement leaders]. They would work together and decide what actions to take. During the day, they would participate in the protest and in the evening, they would gather and develop an appropriate strategy for the following day. (Madhesi woman activist 2, Kathmandu)

As the above interviewee notes, local activists were systematising the knowledge generated through the experience of struggle. Through planning and daily post-action reflective meetings, they were synthesising their learning and using it to strategise subsequent actions. They were

becoming aware of local level anti-movement elements that needed to be dealt with tactfully through critical reflections and strategising.

Inter-movement solidarity

The counter-movement strategy of the state that labelled the Madhes movement as inspired by separatism created barriers to building solidarity with other movements of marginalised communities such as Dalits, Tharu and indigenous peoples. Some civil society leaders from the Pahadi community also supported the Madhes movement, but many who were sympathetic to the movement were hesitant to speak out publicly. There were some progressive writers from Pahadi community who wrote opinion pieces in National Dailies in favour of the movement.

Even though they recognised that some educated members of their community made a distinct contribution by exposing human rights violations by the state at the national and international fora and by defending the struggle in public debates, there was also belief that some of these individuals gained direct financial, personal and professional benefits through international aid which did not necessarily support the 'foot soldiers' of the movement. Nevertheless, some Madhesi activists in Kathmandu were also involved in various civil society campaigning, and most importantly, as a female activist based in Kathmandu mentioned –

Youth doctors of Madhesi backgrounds established an organization called "Koshish Foundation" to provide free treatment to the injured activists. (Madhesi woman activist 1, Kathmandu)

She further highlights:

Some youths and I formed a loose network called "Kathmandu with Madhes" and conducted various activities in Maitighar Mandala to pressurise the government here. There was one gentleman from the Pahadi community named "Nishan" who visited several places in Madhes to support the activists who were injured in the movement. During the time of blockade, a Marwadi businessman from Raxual used to serve food for free to the protestors of the movement. (Madhesi woman activist 1, Kathmandu)

It appears that with a proper coordination, different types of engagements across the local and national levels can be mutually reinforcing to the movement cause. Some activists reported that non-Madhesi social movements such as, the Tharu movement, indigenous movement and Dalits movement, though sceptic about the ethnic nature of the Madhes movement in early days, were

beginning to align themselves with the Madhesi demands for equity, and largely recognised that the Madhes movement was a national movement reflecting the common agenda of all marginalised communities in Nepal.

Financial sustainability of the movement

The Madhes movement relied upon common Madhesi people's spontaneous participation and individual contributions. The main resource of the movement was the people themselves. A Madhesi intellectual and literary figure in Kathmandu said:

The movement was not expensive in its operation. There were no expensive media channels, programmes or technologies used in the movement. It was the movement of the people so, they managed it with locally available resources. The protestors tied their snacks in their "gamchha" [towel] and protested the whole day eating their own food. I interviewed one Rickshaw puller during the movement in my radio programme "Hello Mithila" and asked him about how he was managing his family expenses to be able to participate in the protest. He replied, "I am ready to face this crisis for a certain time period but will support the movement because it is my struggle."
(Madhesi activist 5, Kathmandu)

During the movement, as interviewees reported, some people offered financial help without disclosing their identity. People would voluntarily donate money to make banners and activists collected money when they needed it for specific activities. Another activist noted that some affluent Madhesis, and occasionally, some Indian businessmen also supported with food for the protestors (Interview with Madhesi woman activist 2, Kathmandu). The following extract provides insights into how the movement was sustained financially -

People in the movement used to manage their expenses for food and transportation themselves. I had observed this at the Bindhawashini of Parsa district where people were joining the movement carrying rice, vegetables and other necessary things with them in tractors. Some companies in Birgunj provided mineral water and fruit juice to the protestors in support of the movement. We also collected fund to pay for the treatment of the injured.
(Madhesi woman activist 1, Kathmandu)

Even though social movements are usually organic and self-funded by the activists themselves, additional financial resources are needed to cover for a range of logistical expenses. As Corrigan-Brown (2016: 330) notes, '*grassroots mobilisation also requires resources, including money to*

pay for buses to transport individuals to events, make signs at protests, or print flyers to be distributed'. Madhesi activists generally report that no major funding was available to support the movement even though a businessman in Birgunj mentioned that those who were able to afford voluntarily contributed donations including himself who claimed to have provided 5-10 thousand rupees on a regular basis.

Gendered dimensions of the Madhes movement

The involvement of women in political movements is not new in Nepal. Despite cultural barriers and traditions that limited women's role to the domestic sphere, women had participated in Nepal's historical democratic struggles. In the struggle to restore multiparty democracy in 1990, three female protesters, Janaki Devi Yadav, Bhuwaneshwori Devi Yadav and Sonawati Devi Yadav, from Yadukuha village were shot dead in Dhanusha district (Yadav, 2003).

During the Maoist insurgency, women played prominent roles in the People's Liberation Army and they 'felt empowered by the Maoist ideology as they were able to raise their voice against the suffering they were witnessing and resist the inequalities and discrimination they and their families were experiencing' (K.C. and Van Der Haar, 2019: 441). In particular, as K.C. and Van Der Haar (2019: 443 – 444) reported, women found the Maoist commitment to women's issue to be real on the ground, at least during the period of armed resistance, women were often assigned '*public roles equal to and sometimes above their male peers, and in some cases, placed in powerful positions: managing military tasks, and taking charge of various attacks and departments'*.

The Madhes movement also produced new political leaders representing diverse constituencies of Madhes such as women, marginalised castes and deprived social groups. There was a strong belief amongst women activists that they were involved in the movement in order to secure a brighter future for their children. They recognised that structural inequalities and marginalisation that had disadvantaged their families, and therefore the Madhes movement was no longer a male-dominated phenomenon unlike most gendered tasks, given the cultural traditions in Madhes. Even though women's freedom from patriarchy was a central gender-based agenda in the Maoist movement, the Madhes movement did not explicitly spell out women's suppressed

social positions. Women joined the movement like anyone else to struggle for their ethnic rights, freedoms and representation. As a result, female activists also emerged as political leaders as an outcome of the Madhes movement. As an activist in Kathmandu noted-

... women leaders, such as Kalawati Paswan (Dalit woman), Karima Begam (Muslim woman), Salma Khatun (Muslim woman) and Ramani Ram (Dalit) as the leaders of Madhes (Madhesi civil society leader 1, Kathmandu).

Despite the largely disadvantaged position of women in Madhesi society, their role in the movement has been significant. During the 2015 uprising, women were at the forefront of the movement to oppose the constitutional provision that children of Madhesi women who are married to Indian citizens would be deprived of citizen rights. Their stance concentrated on the demand for a legislative remedy on the right to citizenship for their children. In total, at least 10 women lost their life during the three Madhes uprisings. However, when discussing Madhesi women, much attention is placed on the needs of empowerment rather than their agency and strengths to shape the struggle, and their contribution to the Madhes movement has not yet been systematically examined.

Female activists reported that they were able to engage in political debates about Madhesi issues during the movement which provided them with an opportunity to learn about societal issues beyond the boundaries of their homes. It was an opportunity to educate themselves and connect with fellow Madhesi activists to understand structural inequalities and marginalisation of Madhesis, which inspired them to take equal responsibility to participate in the struggle for freedom, rights and representation. A female Former State Minister and current member of the Provincial Legislative of province 2 from Birgunj puts it as -

... there were mostly men participating in the movement. It made me think what we, women would be doing by staying at home while our husbands and sons were risking their lives by fighting the oppressive state; it is our movement so both male and female should fight together for justice. (Madhesi woman leader 1, Birgunj)

Another female protester in Nepalgunj reported:

During the 2007 Madhes movement, my husband tried to pull me inside the room and lock it from the outside so that I could not go for the

demonstration. According to him, women should not participate in the protest activities like men as it's quite impractical, but I reacted and pushed him back and locked the room for outside and went for the demonstration. I believe that the women should also speak for their society as they are part of it. (Madhesi woman activist 3, Nepalgunj)

This reveals that women were intrinsically motivated to participate in the protest. As mentioned by the female activist above, the ongoing movement enabled her to rebel against the cultural barriers within her home and claim her equal rights to protest. Particularly during the 2015 movement, women performed various constructive roles. Their presence in the movement increased general enthusiasm amongst all protesters; symbolised inclusivity; and minimised the loss during the demonstration by providing a security defence to the protesters. When the movement reached its peak and the police violence increased, Madhesi women came to the front line of demonstrations.

However, female activists reported gender-related challenges whilst participating in the movement. Firstly, protest sites were not gender friendly. As the demonstrations were organised mostly in public places, there invariably lacked toilet facilities for women. One of the female participants in FGD mentioned:

We used to protest throughout the day but there were no toilets in the area, and it was embarrassing to use public places for excretion. We are not like man to perform the activities anywhere; it feels odd. Because of this, we, sometimes refrained from drinking enough water or eating food during the protest. (Madhesi woman activist 5, Nepalgunj)

These basic human needs are not accounted for when demonstrations were planned. Female participants in this research pointed out that the Movement Mobilisation Committees consisted mostly of male activists so, as a consequence, this basic need was often overlooked.

Secondly, security forces often harassed and physically maltreated female protesters. One of the woman activists from Saptari stated:

I always remained at the frontline of rallies during the movement. The Superintendent of Police always targeted me and got me arrested each time. The police used various abusive languages to me and hit at my sensitive body

parts. Our society does not like women who have spent nights in police custody. (Madhesi woman activist 6, Saptari)

Interestingly, women's involvement in mass demonstrations also created moral pressures on men who were hesitant about joining the protest. It challenged their masculinity or the notion of 'boldness' as associated with 'men' who felt embarrassed about staying at home whilst women were protesting on the streets. This is not necessarily a socially transformative behaviour that views women as equal members of the society, but a by-product of a problematic exclusionary social order.

The movement has also learnt to distinguish between the modes of resistance, movement agenda and leadership. Madhesi activists realise that the three Madhes uprisings played a significant role in securing federalism and their increased representation in politics, but the role of the movement in securing social transformation is still incomplete. In this sense, the struggle continues until the basic conditions of livelihood are fulfilled, deeply rooted social injustices redressed and life with dignity guaranteed.

RQ 3) What has been the effects of the Madhes movement on the promotion and realization of peace with social justice in Nepal?

Knowledge production in the Madhes movement has reinforced Madhesi people's struggle for recognition of their culture, right to representation and life with dignity within the Nepali nation. It has a strong dimension of social enforceability and bottom-up pressure for peace with social justice. Such a process of knowledge production is happening across three dimensions. Firstly, at the grassroots level, activists learn about the agenda of the struggle, develop protest strategies and engage in reflective practice of movement actions. This learning takes place through the collective experience of mass mobilisation, public learning activities (e.g. activists addressing the mass; sharing information about movement actions, door-to-door canvassing) and informal interactions among activists at the grassroots.

Secondly, more formal knowledge about the history of the movement, state policies and ongoing negotiations between the movement and state is produced by social movement organisations, academics and journalists/ authors. The primary beneficiaries of the knowledge produced through academic documentation is largely the conventional political leadership, as well as organic intellectuals that emerge out of the movement actions. This kind of scholarship influences the leadership by providing intellectual resources to advocate for the rights of the marginalised and present evidence-based arguments in support of their agenda.

Thirdly, the organisations that represent, support or lead the struggle also produce knowledge within their organisational structures. For example, movement organisations involved in negotiations with the state develop unique sets of communication skills and knowledge about how to engage in dialogue; present a case assertively with evidence; appreciate the interests and positions of opponents in the process of negotiations. They also develop knowledge about how to formulate movement strategies; set up an organisational structure to lead movement actions; implement disciplinary measures within the organisation to avoid reputational damage; and engage strategically with national and international diplomatic/ civil society organisations.

Effects of NEMAF's systematisation of experience

Drawing upon its decade long systematisation of learning, NEMAF has learnt that the figure of the social movement organisation as an NGO, operating under the regulatory framework of the state, struggles to connect with grassroots populations beyond the funding of projects. The NGO structures and programming tend to bureaucratise movement actions and are reliant on the availability of funding (Lewis, 2010). There is a realisation that the agenda of social transformation should be situated within the political struggle, rather than NGO-based campaigning. Hence, the movement organisation should carefully gauge the appropriate use of external funding. However, NEMAF's scholarly activities, such as Madhes-focused public seminars, journal publications and the media-based critical analysis of Madhes-related issues have given NEMAF a unique identity as an organisation for Madhes knowledge production. It also serves as a 'school' for promoting learning for struggle and its activities promote 'popular education' that challenge unequal political structures (Kane, 2012).

Effects of knowledge about injustices

The Madhes movement has produced influential knowledge about forms of oppression, social and economic grievances, and Madhesi's right to representation in key realms of society. This critical knowledge has been systematically archived as research evidence, narratives of struggle and artefacts, and circulated discursively among Madhesi populations. The process of knowledge production accelerated after the Maoist campaign expanded in the Tarai region around 2002. Maoist activities in Madhes not only promoted a critique of the system but also offered a methodology for resistance and political change. Building upon this historical-political context, the series of Madhes uprisings advanced people's learning about forms of oppressions and injustices and how to express political claims with reference to social and economic grievances.

The Madhes movement has generated a remarkable level of political consciousness amongst ordinary Madhesis. It helped them rupture historically imposed hegemonic discourses about what counts as being a 'Nepali' (Lal, 2012). By engaging in the movement, Madhesis not only learnt about their economic, political and social marginality within the state but also learnt how to resist against marginalisation. In this process, the widespread experience of discrimination and injustices became an entry point for learning about the 'generative mechanisms' (Bhaskar, 2008) that produced those experiences. It provided them with an opportunity to engage with much deeper causes of discrimination such as the history, political system, state policies on education, language, civil service recruitment which speak to 'critical realist' approach to social inquiry (Bhaskar, 2008). A female activist in a town near Birgunj mentioned:

I was at college during the first Madhes movement. The Federal Socialist Forum Nepal [FSFN] had organised an interaction programme in our college. There, for the first time, I got to know how Madhesis were being marginalised. Their agenda deeply interested me. In the college hostel, we, Madhesi girls used to face discrimination but had never thought about it from a political perspective. Slowly, I came to realise broader structural issues in our society. Then, I began to participate in various interaction programmes at schools and colleges. I also received training on how to politically educate and mobilise people for the struggle (Madhesi woman activist 4, Birgunj)

The Madhes movement observed that the involvement of its leaders in the power-sharing government led to a gradual decline of popular support for the movement. This research also

reveals that the political forces which emerge out of popular uprisings are likely to be influential only temporarily unless they have gained a complete victory over the state. So, the failure to capitalise on the political influence of the movement at its peak, leads to a waste of movement energy.

The Madhes movement has learnt that its ethnic exclusivity, lack of clarity in its ideological framework and inability or unwillingness to recognise different forms of inequalities within Madhes are going to be critical points of reflection moving forward. Indifference to internal social divisions may have been a political strategy of the leadership to mobilise the whole of Madhes against the Khas-Arya hegemony. But the political remedy around ethnic hegemony would not necessarily address the caste-based, gender, religious or regional domination within Madhes. The diverse Madhesi parties converge on ethnic rights but their ideological positions may be nonaligned given the diverse backgrounds of their leaders. Therefore, the narrative of ethnic exclusion requires a clear ideological positioning. Consequently, the Madhes movement and its political parties failed to build an alliance with other social movements or political parties in the constituent assembly. Even the coalition between Madhesi and Maoist parties, both of which advocated for social justice and ethnic rights in the country, could not survive. This significantly weakened the Madhesi agenda and led to a gradual polarisation of power between Madhes-based parties and the four major parties in the second constituent assembly.

Learning around inter-movement solidarity and geopolitics of social movements

After the promulgation of the new federal constitution in 2015, the Madhes movement seems to have entered a new phase of struggle. There are some important learning points that stem from the decade long intense resistance in Madhes which have led to development of new political alliances to facilitate social transformation. The effect of the decade long intense struggle has been that the Madhes movement must begin to overcome restrictive ethnic narratives and build cross-movement solidarities that address injustices experienced by different castes, women, indigenous nationalities, and ethnic minorities. Hence, the movement is beginning to find new avenues of convergence among the struggles of diverse ethnic and social communities to overcome reactionary manipulation by dominant groups. A prominent leader of the Madhes movement explains:

The movement realised that the struggle had entered the second phase and needed to build solidarity and consensus with other communities who had been historically marginalised. So, we formed an alliance with other political forces representing a broad range of marginalised communities and alternative forces that are committed to social transformation. (Upendra Yadav, Kathmandu)

This is a significant point of learning that has, in recent years, led to building a strategic alliance with other movements and political forces to enhance movement's negotiating power with the state. The recent merger of the major Madhes movement parties with political forces representing indigenous communities, albeit fragile, seems to be the outcome of this realisation.

Conclusion

RQ 4) What can we theorise about learning and knowledge production within Nepal's Madhes movement?

How does the Madhes movement learn?

Conventional social movement theories that overly emphasise socio-economic conditions with regards to movement organisation and resource mobilisation (Tilly, 1985; McAdam, 1982) cannot explain the central issues of identities in the geopolitical context of Nepal's Madhes movement. The Madhes movement is situated within the broader struggle for achieving 'positive peace', as Galtung (1976) puts it, as a social condition that is absent from structural violence. It is particularly relevant because of the Madhes movement's increased levels of mobilisation during the times of constitution-making in the aftermath of politically influential Maoist rebellion. The opportunity to promulgate a new constitution was viewed as an historic moment to redress structural inequalities that had been established and reproduced historically. The Madhes movement and its organisations represent the voice of the Madhesi people in Nepal's efforts for peace, development and prosperity. The social movement dynamics in Nepal, therefore, rupture the dominant practices of international 'liberal peacebuilding models' that promote neoliberal policies, undermining the voices of the grassroots and civil societies (Pugh et al., 2011). Without redressing the problem of social injustices, the conditions of violent conflict could not be transformed by simply ending the war. In this sense, 'New Social Movement' theories provide a

useful explanation (Buechler, 2013; Melucci, 1980) in relation to how the Madhes movement was able to raise concerns about social inequalities across the ethnic and regional levels; collectivise ethnic identity; and common lifestyle of Madhesis which had long been undermined in the process of nation building.

The Madhes struggle is primarily against the state structures that perpetuate exclusionary socio-political conditions that are characterised by different forms of discrimination and political exclusion of Madhesi people. These conditions provide reflective spaces for them to critically engage with the history, socio-political structures, geographical locations and ethnic construct of the state, which enable them to shape their activist identity. This was what Gramsci (1971: 5) would call a process of converting 'common sense,' under the tyranny of state hegemony into 'good sense' in which activists liberate themselves to exercise their agency informed by their own critical understanding of their everyday life experiences.

Unlike the conventional notion of formal learning in which the learner gains knowledge from their educator who provides an organised curriculum and pedagogy, social movements learn multidimensionally. Particularly, 'popular education' does not always occur in formal settings, instead people learn both informally (e.g. activists teaching each other while organising for mass demonstrations) and incidentally (e.g. while engaging in social actions) (Foley, 1999). Interactions among the activists, observations of incidents during protests and encounters with challenging situations enable invaluable learning experience to the activists. Hence, the movement itself becomes a school, and fellow activists learn from collective practical experience. There may be formal occasions such as workshops, seminars and meetings with movement leaders where more organised *formal learning* can occur but there are also other social settings (e.g. cultural organisations, party meetings and NGO programmes) where *non-formal learning* takes place.

Broadly speaking, we found that the learning within the Madhes movement takes place in three different intersecting domains: *grassroots organising, academic spaces and organisational learning*. At the grassroots, activists were learning dialectically as they organised themselves to develop their own movement strategies, public education initiatives and learning to articulate their agendas. In this sense, their actions were not always directed by their leaders but emerged organically within the circumstances of the struggle. As a consequence, the Madhes movement

has produced 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971) who contribute to the movement through their political and civil society activism. In academic spaces, Madhes movement organisations such as NEMAF carried out empirical research; supported academics and public intellectuals to publish peer-reviewed articles; and organised public events where the agenda of Madhes struggle were discussed. Finally, activists and movement leaders were developing their knowledge about political complexities, movement strategies and leadership skills alongside organisational and negotiation skills while working in party ranks or civil society positions.

What has the Madhes movement learnt?

The Madhes movement has mainly learnt that organising marginalised people under their common ethnic identity cannot only create political pressures on the state and its political leadership, but also lead to social polarisation and ethnic antagonism despite shared conditions of marginality with other ethnic groups. In this sense, multi-ethnic societies cannot cope with social movements that are fragmented along different ethnic lines because the hegemonic state frequently manipulates public sentiments by portraying ethnic movements as self-indulged, divisive struggles that are apathetic towards the grievances of other marginalised communities. Even though a movement of this nature might be aimed at achieving broader goals of social justice that would ultimately benefit other marginalised communities, the hegemonic forces often undermine and discredit the struggle citing its communal and exclusionary aims. This shows that ethnic movements that fail to collaborate and build solidarity with other ethnic, racial and caste-based struggles are unlikely to succeed in defeating reactionary political narratives.

Nevertheless, the Madhes movement has advanced counter-hegemonic knowledge in a remarkable way, and through its movement actions which combined the agenda of rights, freedom and political representation. Madhesis engaged in a 'pedagogy of praxis' (Pizzolato and Holst, 2017), enabling them to articulate '*forms of oppression and injustice, expressing political claims, identifying social and economic grievances and bringing new or neglected issues to public prominence*' (Chesters, 2012: 153). Over the last decade, Madhesis' political consciousness has intensified, equipping them with a critical understanding of power relationships with the state;

historically entrenched political structures that produce Khas-Arya ethnic monopoly; and internal social inequalities that obstruct transformative change within Madhes.

It is also revealed that the movement is likely to lose its wider support when it undermines people's needs of basic livelihood and survival. When the Madhes movement resorted to the blockade of the border between India and Nepal, obstructing the movement of goods in the country, it created a crisis of basic supplies in the country and those who were sympathetic to the Madhesi cause began to be suspicious about the genuine motive of the movement. As a consequence, the movement's strategy to pressurise the political leadership in Kathmandu by crippling the daily life of working-class people turned out to be counter-productive by producing anti-movement sentiments. This method of resistance only benefitted the regime, justifying repressive measures against activists and more broadly delegitimising the struggle.

Social movement organising is a prolonged, adaptive process and when it adopts a decisive path of loss or victory, it is likely that the hitherto gains are also at stake. The lack of appreciation of likely adverse impacts caused by resistance activities is counterproductive for the movement. Unlike in armed rebellion, which may face the risks of complete defeat and destruction by state armed forces, social movements are likely to achieve sustainable gains only through a long-term struggle promoting critical consciousness among the grassroots, garnering public support and mobilisation of multidimensional forces around the movement. In other words, social movements are less likely to succeed through forceful decisive actions, particularly with the support from external actors, i.e. economic blockade may backfire and harm the gains of the movement.

The Madhes movement's creative and symbolic actions during protests provided an aesthetic flavour to the struggle, preserving enthusiasm among protesters as well as maintaining media interest in the movement. The use of social media and local radio stations played an important role in the communication of movement messages; coordination of protest activities and increasing public awareness about the movement agenda. Similarly, the role of women was both tactically and socially significant to the movement, not only in reducing the level of state repression during protests, but also empowering women to participate in the struggle as equals. These are significant dimensions of learning in the Madhes movement.

To sum up, the Madhes movement produced knowledge around various dimensions of structural violence that Madhesis had experienced for centuries. This included learning around – why were Madhesis being marginalised? Why were they excluded from rights to citizenship? Why were they discriminated against by state institutions? Why were they treated as ‘second-class’ citizens? Why were their language and cultures suppressed in the process of nation building? In what ways the democratic system, capitalism and neoliberal policies were undermining Madhesi grievances? Secondly, they developed knowledge about how to deal with these structural forms of oppressions. Strategically, the movement utilised the historical moment of the post-conflict constitution-making to intensify the struggle through mass mobilisation and disruption of public order. In this process, the movement engaged multidimensionally: at the grassroots through mass resistance; taking part in the elections as political parties and exerting pressures on the national leadership through their elected members; and engaging at academic and civil society levels to document knowledge, promote civic engagement and disseminate knowledge through public events. Finally, the Madhes movement promoted an alternative vision of political order through a progressive constitution. Such a constitution could be utilised to defend the movement gains, such as federalism and proportional representation of diverse ethnicities, castes and gender in politics and state institutions. Hence, the Madhes movement can be understood as a school of learning and knowledge production about the techniques of structural critique, methods of resistance and political alternatives to redress the forms of oppressions.

What are the effects of the Madhes movement on peace with social justice?

The Madhes movement has played an instrumental role in challenging the social and political exclusion of ethnic Madhesis. As the Madhes uprisings erupted in the aftermath of the Maoist rebellion and during the period when Nepal’s major political forces were involved in the process of constitution-making, the movement had a significant impact on shaping the constitutional framework. Nepal’s social struggles stem from the problem of a centralised political structure that has promoted a monolithic version of national identity and obscured cultural and ethnic diversity in the Nepali society (Pherali, 2011). Hence, the federal political structure was imagined with a view to providing powers to the culturally diverse local communities so that they are able to determine their own development agenda. It can be argued that federalism, the main agenda

of the Madhes movement, is a political response to the grievances of the marginalised populations who have been underrepresented in decision-making bodies. It is also a mechanism to promote 'positive peace' by redressing the monopoly of Khas-Arya community in state power and improving representation of historically marginalised communities in positions of decision-making.

These political shifts have significant implications for peace and social transformation. Nepal's Madhes movement provides new avenues for analysis of peacebuilding in the sense that peace is not merely cessation of violence but also a strategic goal that addresses various forms of structural inequalities (Galtung, 1976). The notion of 'peace with justice' cannot be achieved through the model of liberal peacebuilding which relies on the majority views and economic development under the free market principles, thereby undermining injustices faced by minority groups. Without the pressures created by the Madhes movement, the political shifts towards political representation, federalism and recognition of cultural and ethnic identities could not have been possible. What remains to be seen is how new political forces capitalise on the political capital gained by the Madhes movement to deliver tangible change in the Madhesi people's living conditions.