



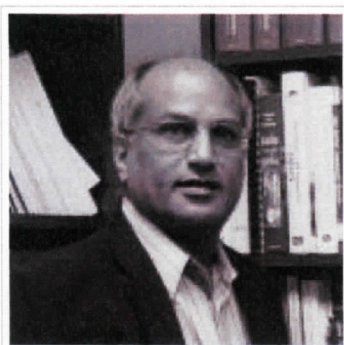
## Nepal: Magnificent Tanahu Treads Comprehensively to Prosperity

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Professor Durga Dutta Poudel  
University of Louisiana at Lafayette, USA

Tanahu (reportedly derived from Sanskrit word "Tritung" meaning "three hills") district in Gandaki Zone of Nepal is the "central district" of Nepal both from the east-west or the north-south (Fig. 1). This district has special significance to the nation and society as Damauli, the district headquarters, is the birthplace of Veda Vyasa who is one of the very highly respected Maharsis in Hinduism. In addition to many other contributions, Veda Vyasa divided the Vedas into four parts and also authored the Mahabharat (the longest Sanskrit epic). The Mahabharat is one of the two famous Sanskrit epics (the next is the Ramayan) in Hinduism. Hindus believe that Veda Vyasa was basically the

representation of Lord Vishnu and he was born to enrich people with the divine knowledge of Vedas. Veda Vyasa is one of the Asta Chiranjeevi (Ashwatthama, Bali Chakravarthi, Hanuman, Kripacharya, Parashuram, Vibishana, Veda Vyasa, and Markendeya) meaning "immortals" or "permanently living being" in Hinduism. Veda Vyasa's father was Parashar Rishi and his mother (Satyavati) was the daughter of a fisherman. Veda Vyasa was born in the confluence of the Seti and the Madi River where the town of Damauli is located at present.



In the modern times, Tanahu is the birth place of Aadikabi Bhanubhakta Acharya, the first poet of Nepal, who translated the epic of Ramayana from Sanskrit language to Nepali language. Before this translation, the knowledge of Ramayana was not available to the most common people because they did not know Sanskrit language. In addition to this contribution, Bhanubhakta's famous sloka "*Bharajanma ghas tira mana dee dhan kamyo, nama kehi rahos pachhi bhaner kuwa khanayo. Ghashi daridri gharako tara budhi kasto, mo Bhanubhakta dhani bhaikan aaja yesto*" conveys the importance of social responsibility to the present society.

The famous holy place of Devghatdham in Tanahu lies in the junction of the Kali Gandaki and the Trishuli Rivers. Located about 4.3 miles north of Narayanghat, Devghat has many temples including Radha Krishna Temple, Sita Ram Temple, Laxmi Narayan Temple, Bageshowari Temple, Sankaracharya Temple, asrams, dharmasalas and caves. Religious mela occurs in maker Shakranti every year and devotees take baths in the Kali Gandaki River. Devghat also hosts modern projects such as retirement home projects, old age home projects, guest houses, ayurvedic station, colleges and high schools. The holy place of Devghatdham is considered as a place where gods and goddesses abode. People historically have been going there for meditation and spiritual enrichment. Available literature tells that King Mukunda Sen from Palpa died here in Devghat while he was in deep mediation.

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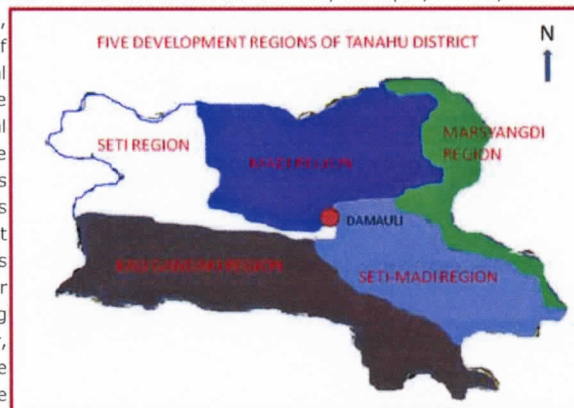


Tanahu district sits on the lap of famous Annapurna Himalaya Range and is blessed with several perennial and major rivers, streams, valleys, fertile lands, fascinating vistas, pleasant weather year-round, and very diverse flora and fauna. While the Seti River enters into the district from the western part and bends eastwardly and meets the Madi River (which flows straight in the middle of the district) at Damauli then flows south-east to meet Trishuli River at the boundary of the district, the Marshyangdi River borders the district in the east and meets the Trishuli River at Mugling. The Trishuli River borders the district in south-east. The Kali Gandaki River which flows through bordering Shyanga and Palpa districts in the west borders the district of Nawalparasi and Tanahu in the south. Thus, the district of Tanahu is very nicely surrounded by the major rivers (the Marshyangdi, the Trishuli, and the Kali Gandaki) in the east, south-east, and the south, while its northern landscapes sit on the lap of mesmerizing Annapurna Himalayan range. These rivers offer a great potential for hydroelectricity development, irrigation, recreational use, municipal water supply, and tourism. These rivers have also a lot of religious significance and are associated with people's traditions and life styles.

Besides Devghatdham, other famous religious places in the district include Chhimeshowari mai, Chhabdibarahi, Dhorbarahi, and Akala Devi Mandir. Chhabdi Barahi temple is located nearby Damauli Bazaar. Devotees visit the temple throughout the year with sacrificing animals (goats, pigeons). People also offer panchabali to Chhabdi goddess praying for overcoming their difficulties. People assemble for puja in Chhabdibarahi during the new year day and the Dashain. Similarly, people also offer panchabali to Dhorbarahi in Dhorphirdi and assemble for puja in the new year day and during the Dashain. Chhimeshowari is located at a higher elevation of Mahabharat range in the eastern part of the district. Devotees trek to visit Chhimeshowari temple from Aabu Khaireni or from Dumre Bazar. Akala Devi Mandir is located in Galbubeshi near Damauli Bazar. People worship the Goddess believing that she fulfills their wishes. Besides these major temples and religious places, there are many other temples and shaktipiths in the district where people worship gods and goddesses daily.

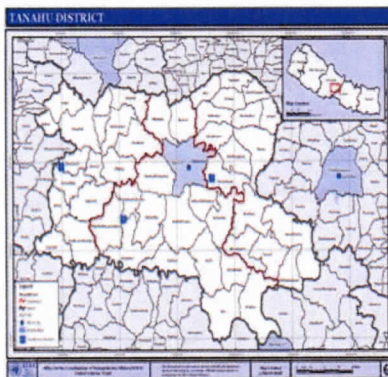
Tanahusur is a historic place of political and cultural significance in Tanahu. It was the capital of Tanahu Sen Dynasty. It contains a historic palace of 200 years old Sen Dynasty including the temple of Goddess Khadga Kali, Gola Ghar, Dhikuri Ghar, Gaddi Chautara, Rani Chautara, old cannons and other artifacts. It is the birthplace of one of the four queens (youngest queen Subhadrabati) of King Narabhupal Shah, the father of the Great King Prithivi Narayan Shah who created modern Nepal. King Prithvi was born from the second queen (Queen Kaushalyabati, the princess of Palpa). The last king of Tanahu was Harkumar Dutta Sen. Tanahu was a very strategic kingdom for King Prithvi as Tanahu shared border with British India in the south.

Some of the major business centers and towns in Tanahu include Abu Khaireni, Bandipur, Dumre, Bhansar, Damauli, Tharpu, Khairenitar, Dulaigaunda, Bhimad, and Shishaghat. While each of these locations offer specific natural beauties and business significance, the town of Bandipur deserves special recognition here. Bandipur is one of the most attractive, historical, and business hilltop stations in Nepal. Bandipur served as an important trade center and was district headquarters of Tanhu until Damauli was established about 40 years ago. Bandipur hosts the largest caves of Nepal attracting many visitors every year. From Bandipur, one can see an extraordinary landscape view of the Marshyangdi Valley, the Marshyangdi River, the green mountains, the Annapurna Himalayan range, and several peaks of Himalayas. The town of Bandipur is located on the saddle of a hill giving unique perspective on both sides of the town with narrow terraces, steep slopes, and deep cliff. The beauty of Bandipur is ascribed with several phrases such as the "Mountain Queen City of Bandipur", "Queen Hill Bandipur", or "Queen of Mountains". Bandipur is located at 3,400 ft above sea level.



Tanahu's population is 369,877 with the total households of 79,804. The total area of Tanahu is 156,877 hectare. Various linguistic populations that exist in Tanahu include Nepali, Magar, Gurung, Newar, Darai, Tamang, and Urdu. With the total cultivated area of 48,223 hectare, paddy, maize, millet, and wheat is produced respectively in 19,050 ha, 22,150 ha, 6,710 ha, and 1,900 ha. In terms of livestock, there are 93,296 cattle, 103,937 buffaloes, 151,916 goats, 10,289 pigs, and 4,128 sheep. There are a total of 46 VDCs (Village Development Committees) and one Nagar Palika in Tanahu district. These VDCs and Nagar Palika constitute the three election constituencies as shown in the figure 2. The constituency no. 1 includes 16 VDCs (Chhimeshowari, Aabukhaireni, Deurali, Dharampani, Bandipur, Ghansikuwa, Barbhanjyang, Bhanu, Tanahusur, Basantapur, Purkot, Satishawara, Mirlung, Chokchisapani, Risti, and Rupakot). Similarly, the constituency no. 2 contains 15 VDCs and one Nagar Palika (Debghat, Kota, Chipchipe, Baidi, Bhirkot,

Ramjakot, Shamubhagawatipur, Ranipokhari (Reising), Kotdurbar, Kahunshivapur, Keshavtar, Pokharibhanjyang, Jamunebhanjyang, Byas Municipality, Shyamgha, and Kyamin). The constituency no. 3 contains 15 VDCs (Gajarkot, Ghiringsundhara, Kahun, Majhkot, Arunodaya, Bhanumati, Bhimad, Chhang, Dhorphirdi, Dulaigaunda, Khairenitar, Manapang, Thaprek, Raipur, and Phirphire).



The VDC and Nagar Palika-wide analysis of literacy rates (data source District Development Profile 2010/2011, MPRC) reveals that the literacy rate range between 24.3% (Chhimeshowari) to 71.9% (Chhang) with an average of 56.3% in this district. The VDCs with below average literacy rate from the bottom up are: Chhimeshowari (24.3%) < Deurali (28.4%) < Dharampani (35.8%) < Baidi (40.5%) < Kyamin (43.2%) < Devghat (44.6%) < Gajarkot (44.8%) < Shyamgha (45.7%) < Kotdurbar (46.3%) < Ranipokhari (Reising) (46.9%) < Purkot (47%) < Tanahusur (48%) < Rupakot (48.4%) < Keshavtar (48.8%) < Khairenitar (52.7%) < Majhkot (54.4%) < Kota (55%). Thus, excluding Nagar Palika, 37% of the VDCs in Tanahu district have below 56.3% projected literacy rate for 2011. Out of these 17 VDCs with below average literacy rate, the constituency no.1 contains six VDCs (Chhimeshowari, Deurali, Dharampani, Tanahusur, Purkot, and Rupakot).

It is an irony that the VDC of the Tanahusur once which was the capital place of the Tanahu Sen dynasty for 200 years currently falls below average on the literacy rate in the district. The constituency no. 2 contains eight (Devghat, Kota, Baidi, Keshavtar, Kotdurbar, Ranipokhari (Reising), Kyamin, and Shyamgha) out of 17 VDCs with below average literacy rate in the district. Similarly, the constituency no. 3 contains three VDCs (Gajarkot, Majhkot, and Khairenitar). Since the literacy rate relates closely with many aspect of life such as health and sanitation, income generation, child care, economic activities, environmental awareness, community capacity-building, women empowerment, and ethnic differences, it is critical to pay attention to those VDCs that have low literacy rates in the district for their socio-economic development. It is also noteworthy that 11 VDCs out of the 17 VDCs that have below average literacy rate are located south of the Prithvi Highway, suggesting that the developmental priorities should be given to the southern VDCs in the district.

Developmental planning for poverty alleviation and socio-economic transformation of a society requires a very fine-tuned, pragmatic, scientific, and regional approach for problem solving, community mobilization, natural resources conservation, research and development, institution-building, and infrastructural advancement. Such an approach should encompass landscape, lifescape, and natural resource base of the region. Considering these facts, Tanahu district can be divided into five developmental regions (Fig. 3) for comprehensive district planning and development and community mobilization. These five developmental regions are based on the drainage areas of the major river systems in the district (The Marshyangdi River, the Madi River, the Seti River, the Madi-Seti River, and the Kali Gandaki River). Although the boundaries may shift with a higher resolution dataset and ground truthing, figure 3 sufficiently conveys the concept of regional planning to the readers. By correlating the 17 VDCs with below average on literacy rate with figure 3, it can be easily found that the VDCs of Rupakot and Purkot belong to the Marshyangdi Region; Shyamgha, Kyamin, and Tanahusur belong to the Madi Region; and Khairenitar VDC belongs to the Seti region. The remaining 11 VDCs are in the southern parts of the Prithvi Highway; and, they belong to the Kali Gandaki and the Seti-Madi Regions and almost all of them have very low literacy rates.

Seven of the 11 southern VDCs with low literacy rate that fall in the Kali Gandaki Region are Devghat, Kota, Baidi, Kotdurbar, Ranipokhari (Reising), Majhkot, and Gajarkot, and remaining four VDCs that fall in the Seti-Madi Region are Chhimeshowari, Deurali, Dharampani, and Keshavtar. Altogether these 11 VDCs have a population of about 51,189 (24,047 male and 27,142 female). This disproportion of male (47%) and female (53%) population in these VDCs is a matter of concern. It may suggest that there is a massive outmigration of young male population for outside employment leaving women, children and old population in villages. It also suggests that there is a heavy increase on women workloads in these regions. In addition, having no access to roads, steep slopes, isolation, very high degree of remoteness, difficult terrain, very low literacy rates, lack of income generation activities, poor sanitation and health, climate change impacts on agricultural and livestock production, dwindling natural resource base, and lack of comprehensive community developmental activities have resulted in very dismal living and socio-economic conditions of the local communities in these regions.

Considering the gravity of the socio-economic problems, climate change adaptation issues, lack of infrastructures and support system especially in the southern VDCs of Tanahu district, the Asta-Ja Abhiyan Nepal has decided to launch a comprehensive community capacity-building developmental project in these regions. The Asta-Ja Abhiyan Nepal is currently working closely with various donor agencies, governmental organizations, local communities, and other stakeholders in developing this collaborative, self-reliance, participatory, and multidisciplinary project, which will be targeting smallholder women population in these regions. The community development project aims at poverty alleviation in these regions by enhancing income generation activities, adult literacy program, nutrition and diets, child and family health, reducing

women workload, water quality and quantity, environmental quality, and climate change adaptation. Basic approach taken by the project is the formation of/ or working with existing self-help groups or community groups in the regions initially for enhancing community capacity-building and then eventually reaching out to the whole population. These groups will be trained on various aspects of mixed farming system such as organic fruits and vegetables production, products packaging and marketing, animal care and feed formulation, bee keeping, production of high-value crops, land improvements, soil and water conservation, sustainable intensification of the mixed farming system, rainwater harvesting, source water protection, and agroforestry intervention. Emphasis will be given to the development of agricultural entrepreneurs. The whole population in the region will be reached out for income generation, community capacity-building, and socio-economic transformation as the project advances.

Asta-Ja Abhiyan Nepal ([www.astajanepal.com](http://www.astajanepal.com)), a non-profit organization, is founded on the basis of the conceptual framework of Asta-Ja meaning eight Ja in Nepali language that includes Jal (water), Jamin (land), Jungle (forest), Jadibuti (medicinal and aromatic plants), Janashakti (manpower), Janawar (animals), Jarajuri (agricultural crops, fruits, and vegetables), and Jalabayu (climate) for socio-economic transformation of Nepal. It emphasizes sustainable utilization, development, and management of Asta-Ja. Asta-Ja Abhiyan Nepal believes that while economic transformation must undoubtedly address the basic necessities of education, health, employment, income generation, and environmental quality, it should also create an equitable, just, and sustainable society. With its noble mission and vision, the Asta-Ja Abhiyan Nepal has been working with numerous grass-root communities across the country for the last five years. Its activities span from community capacity-building to climate change adaptation, organizing trainings for smallholders on vegetable, poultry, pig, milk, and goats production and management; agricultural entrepreneurship development, community outreach, agricultural networking, policy advocacy, and agricultural research to hosting several interaction programs with governmental officials, businessmen, community stakeholders, researchers, and academicians. Asta-Ja Abhiyan Nepal has expanded its activities to more than 25 districts and over 500 agricultural entrepreneurs across the country are associated with this campaign.

With a clear goal, right approaches and strategies, strong commitment and dedication, and collaborative partnerships, it is certain that the devastating poverty, demoralizing literacy rates, frightening socio-economic gaps, and overwhelming climate change adaptation problems can be overcome quickly in the district of Tanahu. With this in mind, the district of Tanahu will be spearheading soon for its rapid socio-economic transformation and climate change adaptation adopting a regional developmental approach and community capacity-building, and eventually developing itself into a "model district" for Asta-Ja Abhiyan Nepal. All stakeholders including the district governmental agencies, businesses, individuals, and community organizations are requested for their full support and help in this noble initiative for socio-economic transformation of Tanahu, the "central district of Nepal".



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