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Nepalese Children's Drawings: A Summary of Early Research and Suggestions for the Future

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Research Reports

Nepalese Children's Drawings: A Summary of Early Research and Suggestions for the Future

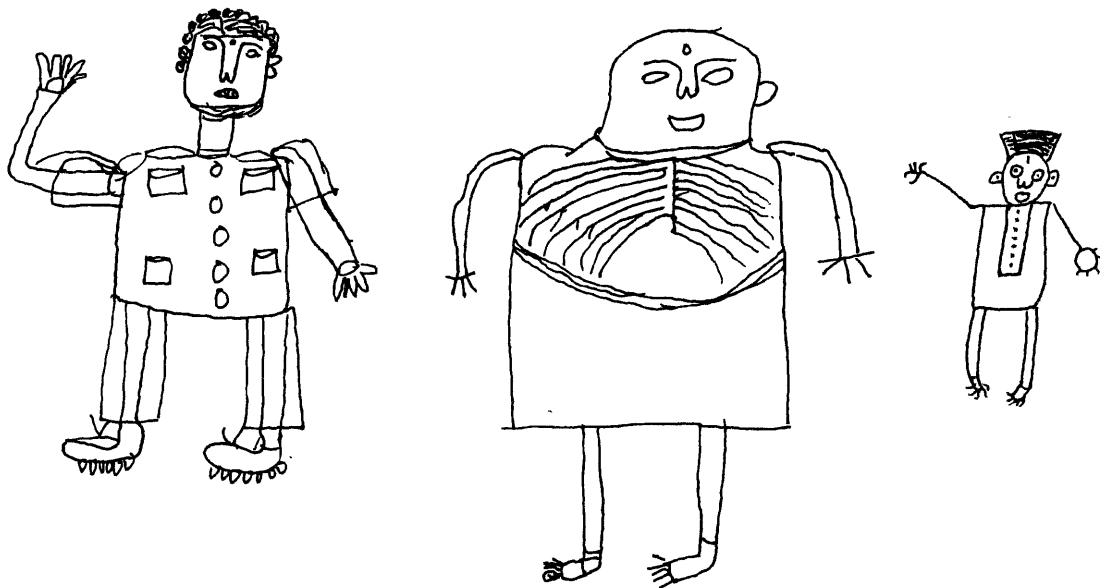
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The purposes for this brief report are two: (1) to summarize our work with a large number of Nepalese children's drawings collected in the 1950s and (2) to explore questions and possibilities for future research. Drawings of children are interesting aesthetically and scientifically. They help reveal how children conceive and attend to their world. Drawings have been found to be related to intellectual maturity and personality and cultural attributes. Drawings of children in developing countries with little or no art training should be particularly revealing.

In 1956-1958 one of us (Professor Ballinger) was part of a project to develop education in Nepal, training teachers in art and drawing. Many free drawings were collected. Also we planned and carried out the Draw-A-Man-Woman-Self project, with the assistance of local teachers in 34 elementary schools dispersed throughout

Nepal. The teachers were trained to obtain background data on each child and give instructions for drawings on blank places in a booklet. Altogether drawings from over 800 children were collected.

So far as we know, this was the first study of children's drawings in Nepal, and a survey of recent literature shows no such studies subsequently. (If readers know of any, please get in touch.) In 1956-58, the time of the collection of the drawings, Nepal had been opened to collaborative relations with foreigners only a few years; so this was at a pristine time before the move toward modernization. The following report is a highly abbreviated account. For more details, see Ballinger and Sundberg (1968) and Sundberg and Ballinger (1968). Working in the same general educational program, Dart and Pradhan (1967) used drawings to examine children's concepts of the physical environment.



Draw-A-Man Results: We obtained usable drawings of a man from 593 boys (75%) and 199 girls (25%). The average age was 9.8 years, and nearly all were between 6 and 13. Part of the study involved scoring the drawings using the well-known Goodenough Draw-A-Man procedure aimed at revealing intellectual maturity. The researcher scores 51 items for such features as

presence of body details and correct proportions. We recognized the problems of using an American scoring system and norms, and the dangerous connotations of terms like "intelligence" and "IQ." So the reader should see the results as only an interesting comparison which must be investigated further. As with several other little educated groups of children the Nepalese scored at the

American Goodenough IQ average in the early years (100 at age 6 and 98 at age 7), but by age 13 the average had dropped to 75. The absolute scores increased with age, but not as much as those of American children. We looked at regional differences: The central Kathmandu valley (with 354 subjects) scored significantly higher than the western and northeastern regions. The differences between boys and girls and between Brahmins and non-Brahmins were not significant. (Regarding the later point, it should be recognized that very few lower caste and lower socio-economic children attended schools then.)

Other characteristics of drawings of self: Using a sample of 100 Nepalese children matched on Goodenough IQ scores with 100 American elementary children representing different ages and socio-economic levels, we examined self drawings. Americans drew the self as smaller than the man and woman and drew profiles more often than the Nepalese. There were clear cultural differences in details; the Nepalese often showed a forehead mark (tika), bare feet, and a nose continuous with the eyebrows. About 30 of the 100 Nepalese children showed genitalia and the navel; only 2 Americans showed genitalia.

Other drawings by Nepalese children: Using the above drawings and a large number of free drawings, we looked at a variety of characteristics impressionistically. Acquired motor skills for drawing are different for Nepalese children because of lack of familiarity with drawing in daily life and in school; even the word for drawing is the same as for writing in Nepali. The children used many recognizable symbols, such as flowers, and they often employed symmetry. In free-hand drawings some modern things appear in the Kathmandu valley, such as automobiles, probably showing the high value placed on cars, then quite rare in Nepal. The representation of the nose is interesting. It often appears as a "W" shape, which, though anatomically incorrect, seems to represent reality to the child in a feeling or haptic sense, and it does show the knowledge and importance of nostrils. Teeth often appear as saw-toothed and sharp, and eyes are often drawn in an almond or lotus shape. Surprisingly, the sun symbol was rarely found. Dart and Pradhan (1967) asked Nepalese children, mainly older than ours, to draw maps of how they went from home to school. They concluded that the drawings showed what children directly experienced rather than a more abstracted layout of crossing streets, distances and directions, which is often found with children schooled in more developed countries. We concluded that Nepalese children's drawings reflect the culture and social values and priorities there. As with children anywhere, the

Nepalese children tell the observer what they understand and know about their universe.

Other possibilities with Nepalese drawings: This is a very short report of our ideas and findings. There were great individual differences among the drawings. Some impress the American observer as remarkably modern and advanced; others look very primitive (Terwilliger, 1960). We did not do much analysis of the drawings of the self and woman. It would be most interesting to compare these drawings with a sample collected recently; it is now almost 40 years later. Would intellectual maturity scores be different, now that schooling is much more common? Do current drawings at these ages show more accuracy in representing the human figure? Or more stereotypy? Do they reflect modernization in Nepal, especially in the Kathmandu valley? How would children represent the paths from home to school now? How would the family be represented now, as compared with man, woman and self? Are the drawings more or less creative and original now?

Availability of drawings: The drawings of man, woman and self by roughly 800 children are in the Archives of the University of Oregon in Eugene, and are available for research purposes. They could be used by researchers there, or possibly copies of some could be sent (for a fee) for research at other places. If a repository for Himalayan research materials is developed, perhaps the drawings could be sent there. We would welcome research questions and proposals from readers. Send comments to Norman Sundberg, Department of Psychology, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403 [503-346-4909; E-mail: nds@oregon.uoregon.edu; FAX 503-346-4911]

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