

Children's Voices from Kathmandu and Lalitpur, Nepal

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This article addresses the general lack of research on children in Nepal by presenting drawings and essays produced in 1996 by the children of classes 3 and 5 from two schools, one in Kathmandu and one in Lalitpur, Nepal. The school in Lalitpur is a standard, urban government school, while that in Kathmandu is a unique private institution supported by a Japanese social service NGO and run as a Nepal Bhasha- (Newari-) medium school by Newar cultural activists. The topics addressed by the children were family, illness, and locality. The material they produced under each of these headings is examined in turn, and the results are placed in context. Whereas the topic of illness seemed to lend itself naturally to *narratives* of suffering and recovery, that of 'my neighbourhood' often produced detailed *descriptions*. Consideration is also given to a justification of the methods used to obtain the material, and to their limitations.

Background and methods

The field sites

Family (task 1): Love, help, and support

Illness (task 2): Suffering and recovery

My neighbourhood (task 3): Gods, dogs, and people

Conclusions

Background and methods

In November 1996 I returned to Nepal for three months' fieldwork, for approximately the seventh time since my original doctoral fieldwork in 1982–84.¹⁾ Having

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- 1) This article could not have been written without the help of Anne de Sales and Gina Burrows in retrieving my notes. I wish also to thank Brunel University for supporting three months of fieldwork, 1996–97, through one of its BRIEF awards and associated research leave. I am also grateful to the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo, which supported research on ethnicity as part of a larger project funded by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (see Gellner 2003). Without a Visiting Fellowship at ILCAA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, and its highly supportive environment for research, this material might well never have been published. For the results of my earlier research in the 1980s, which focused on religion and social organization, see Gellner (1992, 2001) and Gellner & Quigley (1995). For help with talking to the ↗

joined the Department of Human Sciences of Brunel University, west London, in 1994, I was very conscious—thanks to the education I was receiving from my new anthropological colleagues and students—that among the many obvious gaps in my previous research, there was one particularly outstanding one. Despite living next door to a school for 19 months, I had never investigated, either systematically or informally, what children thought on the many issues to do with local religion, culture, and society that I was interested in.²⁾ In fact I had never even stepped into the school (except when it was being used for other, usually ritual, purposes). Thus I decided to carry out, over two weeks in December 1996 at the end of the school term, after exams were over and before the start of the winter holiday, a small research project. I would ask children from classes 3 and 5 in two different primary schools to draw pictures and write short accounts about their families, about a time when they had been ill, and about the locality where they lived. The results of these investigations are presented here.

Very little has been written about children in Nepal, even less than has been written on children elsewhere. Or rather, a lot has written about children but very little has been written that attempts to convey children's own points of view. As Onta-Bhatta (1997: 249) remarks, "Children are hardly ever the key informants of social inquiry, and their perspectives are rarely sought after by anthropologists and other social researchers."³⁾ Among works on Nepal, Lynn Bennett's classic ethnography (1983) describes brilliantly how pre-pubertal girls are worshipped (and indulged) as goddesses in Bahun and Chetri culture, before becoming oppressed and distrusted as wives and daughters-in-law.⁴⁾ It includes one long and detailed life history, but it is a question here of *memories* of childhood rather than of child perspectives as such. Prem Khattry's PhD (1986) was on childrearing and socialization among the Newars of Dol-

↗ children of school A about their essays and drawings I would like to thank Saruna Shrestha. Mrigendra Karki deserves special thanks for gathering recent information on both schools. For helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay, I would like to thank my wife, D.P. Martinez, and also Sarah LeVine, Bob LeVine, Emily Dexter, Shovana Vajracharya, Purna Shakya, John Whelpton, Carole Faucher, Hiroshi Ishii, Roger Goodman, Ian Harper, and Katsuo Nawa. My greatest debt is of course to the children who entered into the spirit of the exercises so willingly and enthusiastically without understanding precisely (or possibly even vaguely) why I was asking them to carry them out.

- 2) In this connection I must add still further thanks to my former colleague, Christina Toren (see Toren 1999), and the students she attracted to Brunel to do the MSc in the Anthropology of Children and Child Development. This ethnographic data report is a very modest, and relatively untheorized, offering in the direction of their concerns. I would also like to thank Ian Robinson who persuaded me to make an initial presentation of the material at the 'Children in their Places' international conference, held at Brunel University, June 21–23, 2001.
- 3) This claim about social-scientific studies of Nepal needs to be distinguished from the much more general claim frequently made in the newer sociology and anthropology of children that children or child perspectives have never been studied before, which is a considerable exaggeration.
- 4) See Bennett (1983). Bennett's fieldwork was carried out in the 1970s. It is possible that in many places the practices and attitudes she describes may have been modified or transformed by migration, later female education, and other processes.

akha and Bungamati; this reported some interesting findings about parents' attitudes and preferences, about punishments, and about children's work responsibilities. However, only four pages are devoted to reporting the opinions of teenagers and that on the basis of a questionnaire. The framework he adopts is that of socialization, where little or no scope is given to the active engagement of children themselves in the process; there appears to be only one direct quotation from a child in the whole thesis. Many other anthropological works on Nepal deal with childhood life-cycle rituals, and there is of course a considerable literature by development specialists and agencies documenting the backwardness or lack of education of Nepal's children. None of the literature discussed so far really attempts to convey what Nepali children say or think themselves. So far as I know, exceptions to these strictures are to be found only in Debra Skinner's PhD thesis (Skinner 1990), and in some of the recent work on street children, notably by Onta-Bhatta (see Onta-Bhatta 1996, 1997, 2001). Two other important works, worth mentioning in relation to the subject-matter of this article, are Ragsdale (1989) and Ahearn (2003). Though neither foregrounds children's voices, they are the two outstanding ethnographies of literacy and education in rural Nepal. It is surely no coincidence that both authors were Peace Corps volunteer teachers before writing doctorates on Nepal.⁵⁾

Debra Skinner's doctorate, based on fieldwork in a multi-caste village near Pokhara, is then a very rare example of a thesis specifically focusing on ordinary Nepali children and their understandings of life. One of the strengths of Skinner's approach, which may yield very interesting results in future, is that she has followed the children who were part of her original 1980s study over the years since then. A small part of Skinner's material appears in Skinner and Holland (1996). Unfortunately, in my opinion, although Skinner's thesis was rich in ethnography, in two other published articles (Skinner and Holland 1998, Skinner, Valsina, and Holland 2001) a rather thin amount of primary field data is made to bear an enormous weight of theoretical argument. That theoretical argument may or may not be persuasive in its own terms, but I cannot see that such thin data as are presented to illustrate the theory really make it any more plausible. The relative paucity of ethnographic material recording Nepali children's voices is, then, my primary justification for publishing the following descriptive account of children's writings and drawings from the cities of Kathmandu and Lalitpur (Patan).⁶⁾

It may be worth outlining the methodology adopted for this research. While to some the following remarks will appear obvious to the point of redundancy, to many

5) Surprisingly, Ahearn fails to refer to Ragsdale in her book. For a passionate critique of the state of education in Nepal, by someone who is herself the headmistress of a successful private school, see Dixit (2002); for an analysis of educational provision by gender and district, see Graner (1998). On children in India, the best ethnography is Seymour (1999); Kurtz (1992) provides a summary of the largely psychoanalytic literature on Indian childrearing.

6) This is not to claim, of course, that my own material is anything like as rich as it could or should be, merely that in a desert even a few drops of water are welcome.

others they may be new and possibly even outrageous in their advocacy of imprecise methods of data collection. In seeking to find out what children think and how they experience life, it is even more useless to adopt survey questionnaire techniques than it is with adults. Very little genuine information about Nepali society would emerge from tabulating children's responses to a question of the following sort: 'What are the relations within your household like? Tick a box from one to ten, with one being terrible and ten being excellent'. Even if the children understood the question, the aggregated responses would provide pseudo facts of highly questionable significance.⁷⁾ At the very best, the results would be merely suggestive and their interpretation would require detailed qualitative investigation. Closed questionnaires do, of course, have their uses for counting those things that are susceptible of quantification, such as numbers of people in a household or levels of education within a given population, but they are rarely a suitable tool for explaining people's opinions and cannot generate 'rich' data. Even when questionnaires are appropriate, they are often liable to significant errors because of the ways in which they are collected.⁸⁾

It would have been possible to try and interview children singly using open-ended interview schedules, and to tape their responses. This procedure has in some cases proved fruitful (e.g. Cullingford 1991). But this method would have had several disadvantages for me in this Nepalese context. It would have been extremely time consuming; many, perhaps most, of the younger children would very likely have been extremely intimidated by it; and there would have been difficult issues of informed consent to negotiate.

Considerations such as these have led researchers in the development field to evolve an arsenal of 'action methods' which combine relative speed (the option of long-term participant observation before any recommendations are made not usually being open to them) with an attempt to get ordinary people to articulate their understandings and knowledge of their own environment. These methods, including creating diagrams using local materials such as sticks and stones, usually go under the name Participatory Rural Appraisal.⁹⁾ Some of the critiques of these methods have suggested that, for all the emphasis on participation, the very public nature of the procedures makes it hard for the poor or the marginal to express their views in front of powerful neighbours.

In a similar way, when working with children, it is essential to bear in mind the weight of expectations and power that will inevitably be in place when an adult asks them to carry out tasks in a classroom setting. But at least asking school children to

7) The article by Stoddard mentioned in footnote 35 (p.31) might be cited as an example of research carried out with adults that is susceptible to this sort of criticism.

8) The classic critique of the statistics on which Nepalese government policy has been based is by Campbell, Shrestha, and Stone (1979). For a classic analysis of the limitations of statistical survey research, see Leach (1967). For a thoughtful recent critique of discourses of development in Nepal, see Fujikura (2001).

9) See Chambers (1997) and for critiques Mosse *et al.* (1998) and Mosse (2001).

write essays and draw pictures on a given topic is a procedure with which they are familiar; and by trying to ensure that they had time to explain the pictures and essays at the end of the session there was some chance of getting close to their points of view.¹⁰ In translating the children's accounts I have included the original words or phrases where these seemed to me significant, and in doing so I have retained the children's own spellings. These essays—at least some of them—convey the children's own ideas, feelings, and experiences—i.e. their voices in the widest sense—in more detail and greater variety than could have been captured in any questionnaire. At the same time it was possible to access far more children than would have been possible simply by speaking to them one by one (even if the practical problems involved in direct questioning mentioned above could have been overcome). It may be objected that in doing fieldwork with adults the questioning is rarely so directive. But the point here was to generate comparable material from a range of children, and in this the classroom environment confers an advantage on anthropologists working with children: there is no similar context where one could generate so much comparable material from adults in such a short time.

Scepticism about how socially representative what the children wrote is, and about how far it represents their own personal opinions and experience, is certainly in order. It is the fieldworker's duty, most anthropologists would surely agree, to maintain a critical awareness about all the information they receive. But this duty of scepticism applies just as much to material generated by or supplied by adults as it does to children. It is undoubtedly true that children are presented in school with textbook models to learn by heart and reproduce, and I have to try to be cognizant of this danger. While there are certainly phrases and sentences of the essays presented below that derive directly from such textbook accounts, the examples presented show, I believe, that the children were mostly able to adapt these models to their own circumstances.

The fact that the children often produced textbook-influenced accounts and textbook drawings is—it should not be necessary to add—in no way reprehensible. They were doing what they had been taught to do, and mostly doing it very well. Despite the ideology of creativity and individuality in the West, learning to reproduce normative models is what all education—perhaps necessarily and inevitably—is about. What is remarkable, then, is not that so many of the children produced derivative drawings and descriptions, but that some did not (e.g. Figures 19 and 20 below), and that their written accounts, especially those on illness and locality, were so rich in information and were sometimes far more interesting than the pious and didactic essays of the textbooks.

In an essay written with Eric Hirsch, I have tried to specify what counts, or should count, as good ethnography (Hirsch and Gellner 2001: 8–10). The principal respect in which the following research fails to live up to the criteria listed there is precisely in

10) For discussions of how to do ethnographic research with children, see Grieg and Taylor (1998) and Christensen and James (1999).

the lack of contextualizing fieldwork with the teachers and children of the two schools. Material was gathered in the formal setting of the school, but not in informal settings inside and outside the school (e.g. in the children's homes). (On the other hand, I have accumulated roughly three years of fieldwork experience in more than twenty years of working on the general cultural setting of the schools.) In other respects—e.g. making plain the way in which material was gathered, not claiming more than one knows, and providing material in sufficiently rich and 'experience-near' (Geertz 1983: 57) a form that others can work it over for their own purposes—I have attempted to live up to the canons of good ethnography.

The field sites

The two schools studied were located in Nag Bahal, Lalitpur (where I had lived from October 1982 to May 1984), and in Dalu, Kathmandu; I label them A and B respectively. The two schools were chosen for the following reasons. I had lived next door to school A thirteen years previously, while carrying out my doctoral research on Buddhism, religion, and culture among the Newars, the predominant ethnic group in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Thus I was known to the teachers and in the locality, and access was no problem. In 1996 one of the main topics of my research was developments in Newar ethnicity. It therefore seemed a good idea to work in school B, which was and is a flagship for Newar cultural nationalism because it is the only school in the country in which the primary medium of instruction is Nepal Bhasa (Newari). In this school also, since I speak Nepal Bhasa (better in fact than Nepali, the national language), access was easy to arrange.

Whereas A was a typical government school (although even here children had to pay small fees for registration), B was a unique private school (at which at the time about 80% of the children had Japanese sponsors, who paid their fees, and other children were supported by other institutions as well). Both schools had a majority of Newar children and a representative spread of Newar castes. The only difference in caste make-up was that in A there was a slight bias to upper castes; in other words, there were fewer members of formerly stigmatized 'low' castes, and none of the very lowest. This difference in social make-up reflects the neighbourhoods in which the schools are located. School A is in the heart of the old city of Lalitpur, an area inhabited by high castes for hundreds of years. School B was built on land on the west bank of the Vishnumati river, which had become one of the new suburbs of Kathmandu. The area, previously open land near the river, had long had associations with scavengers and Untouchables; squatters have settled perilously along the river bank nearby.¹¹⁾

11) For more on the founding of school B, see Shrestha and Van den Hoek (1995). Some of the parents they interviewed (*ibid.*: 78) were unhappy about the school's location, but others did not object. The school lost a quarter of its plot in 2002 to the new Kalimati-Balaju Vishnumati riverside link road. Many other details are given in Nepal Bhasa in Manandhar (2003).

The medium of instruction in school A, as in all government schools, is the national language, Nepali, despite the fact that the mother tongue of nearly all the teachers and most of the children is Nepal Bhasa (Newari).¹²⁾ The medium of instruction in school B, as mentioned, is Nepal Bhasa, thus making it the probably the only primary school in the Kathmandu Valley, and one of very few in the country as a whole, that operates mainly in one of Nepal's officially designated 'languages of the nation' (i.e. all languages spoken within Nepal), and not in the officially designated 'national language', Nepali.¹³⁾ It was one of the much-trumpeted gains of the 1990 Constitution that there was now a constitutional right to have primary schools in the mother tongue. The Constitution did not say, however, that the government had to support such schools, and it did not give the constitutional right to run such schools beyond primary school, i.e. beyond class 5. There is no bar, of course, on the English-medium schools used by the elite and new middle class.

The emergence of a new, urban middle class, and the consumption styles by which it defines itself, is the focus of the monograph by Liechty (2003). One of the key ways in which households attempt to ensure their place in this new middle class is by sending their children to the most expensive private schools they can afford and to which they can get their children admitted.¹⁴⁾ Such private English-medium schools spread out even to villages in the 1980s: the village of Bungamati had one already in the early 1980s when Khatri studied there (1986: 164). In 1997 a private school was opened in the Magar village near Tansen studied by Ahearn and within a year was threatening the viability of the local high school (Ahearn 2003: 198–199). The inequalities that such schools have introduced have made them a target of Maoist action in 2002–03, forcing many rural private schools to close and extracting promises from urban ones to reduce their fees. In the present study, the fact that children were at the government-funded school A indicates that their parents had either opted out of this educational rat-race, or could not afford the fees of private schools. The parents of children at school B no doubt aspired to middle-class status, or to the education they imagined a private school would provide, without being able to afford it. One of the girls at school B (a 10-year-old Maharjan in class 5 who, like all but one of her class, had a Japanese schol-

12) Today (2003) three of the teachers (out of 19) are Parbatiya Bahuns.

13) In 2003 a private Nepal Bhasa medium kindergarten and pre-school was established in Kathmandu by Dipak Tuladhar, called the Modern Newa English School. It lists its objectives as "to provide quality education through mother language, to make the children who speak Newari at home feel easy while learning, to teach the Newari language to those who don't speak Newari at home or non-Newar children, to preserve the Newari language right from the children's circle effectively in a practical way." It also claims to be "Fully English Medium from LKG with one subject of Newari+Nepali all the way" (<http://newaschool.com.np>).

14) A very minor exception to this generalization would be those families who send their children to St Xavier's or St Mary's, the two oldest private schools, run by the Jesuits, where fees have deliberately been kept low. Their previous status as undisputedly the most highly regarded private schools is now contested by a host of other more expensive establishments, which aim to place their graduates directly into US colleges.

arship) ended her essay on her family by writing that her father was extremely happy that they did not have to pay fees.

School A was founded on the initiative of the local community in 1948, though it had predecessors elsewhere in the city before that. It is called the Adarsh Saral High School. 'Adarsh Saral' translates as something like 'Model Straightforward', 'Adarsh' being a very popular epithet for schools at the time. It was probably taken over by the state in 1971 (VS 2028) when the new education policy was introduced. Whereas school B is a new foundation with new buildings and good facilities by Nepali standards, A is dilapidated and the teachers sometimes discouraged. As one of the first schools in Lalitpur, A had for many years an excellent reputation, and some children still come a considerable distance to attend because of this. One of the pupils, a Gurung girl one of whose essays is quoted below, spontaneously wrote the following description for me:

Our school: Our school was founded in 2008 [VS, i.e. 1951–2, out by four years]. The name of our school is Adarsh Saral Mā. Vi.¹⁵⁾ Our school has 15 female teachers (*mis*) and 5 male teachers (*sar*). Some of the students who have studied here have become engineers and some have become doctors. Very good things are taught here.

Today (2003) there are nineteen teachers (15 female, 4 male) and 315 students (199 boys and 116 girls). Since 1979 children from class 10 have taken their school leaving certificate (SLC) from this school. For some years it has participated in the general decline of government schools in Nepal. Most of the families who live in the locality (which is relatively prosperous) send their children to private schools elsewhere.¹⁶⁾

School B is a private, but government-recognized, institution founded in 1990. Its name, Jagat Sundar Bwone Kuthi, comes from one of the heroes of Newar cultural nationalism, Jagat Sundar Malla (1882–1952), a schoolmaster from Bhaktapur who translated Aesop's fables into Nepal Bhasha (Newari).¹⁷⁾ It is funded almost entirely by a non-governmental social service foundation called HIKIVA (Hirakata Katano International Volunteer Association), based in Osaka, Japan. Japanese members of HIKIVA pay ¥17,000 (approx. US\$150) per year most of which goes to pay the educational expenses of a Nepali child.¹⁸⁾ HIKIVA currently funds three schools in Nepal: the other two are Nilbarahi primary school in Kathmandu and Satyawati secondary school in Kumpur village, Dhading, 235 kilometres west of Kathmandu. Jagat Sundar Bwone Kuthi is the school with which it has had the longest connection and where it supports the most children. The connection goes back to 1991 when one of HIKIVA's members was very impressed by the spirit of service of the original teachers, who

15) 'Mā. Vi.' stands for *mādhyaṃik vidyālaya*, high school.

16) According to Dixit (2002: 193, 208) between 20 and 25% of children go to private schools.

17) A statue to him was erected in the school in 2001.

18) See HIKIVA website: www.kcat.zaq.ne.jp/aaahu309/.



Plate 1. Children reciting the daily prayer to Sarasvati (goddess of learning) and the national anthem at the beginning of the school day, Jagat Sundar Bwone Kuthi (8/12/2003).

taught for free in the ground floor of the home of Rajbhai Jahkami, which he also gave freely. The new buildings were opened in 1993.¹⁹⁾

The pupils of school B are largely from poor and/or low-caste backgrounds. Most, but not all, are Newars.²⁰⁾ On the basis of very brief and casual observation, it appeared to me that the playground was a completely bilingual sphere in which Nepali and Nepal Bhasa were used more or less equally by the children, even though the teachers were careful always to use Nepal Bhasa.²¹⁾ There were only eight children

19) A separate article could be written about the very different expectations and understandings of the parents, children, Newar activists, teachers, and Japanese donors involved in Jagat Sundar Bwone Kuthi. It is clear from the contribution of the HIKIVA vice-president, Takashi Khajita [sic], to Manandhar (2003) that HIKIVA expects the school to become 'self-sustaining' within the next ten years. He reiterated the point to me in an interview in Osaka on 8/3/04. He told me that he has argued to the teachers and to the School Board that by providing more instruction in English and Nepali the school could make itself attractive to the middle class who could afford the fees. Mr Khajita stressed that, because of the selflessness of the teachers and the moral education provided, he regarded JSBK as a model school.

20) Though there were no non-Newars in the two classes I studied, in 1996 the other classes had the following non-Newars according to the school's register: Class 4: one Rai (total in class 11), Class 2: 2 Tamangs (total 28), Class 1: one Tamang (total 38), Upper KG: one Tharu (total 23), Lower KG: one Jha Brahman (total 39), nursery: one Tharu and one Magar (total 68).

21) I also heard the Class 5 children consulting among themselves in Nepali during the exercises. On language policy in Nepal, see Gellner *et al.* (1997), Sonntag (1995). On Newar ethno- or cultural nationalism, see Gellner (1986, 1997, 2003) and Shrestha (1999).

Table 1. Schools and respondents

	School A (Nag Bahal)		School B (JSBK)	
	Class 3	Class 5	Class 3	Class 5
Enrolled students (1996)	12 boys, 8 girls	10 boys, 24 girls	9 boys, 15 girls	3 boys, 5 girls
Median age	9.5*	12**	10.6***	12.5
Percent Newar	90%	82%	100%	100%
Castes present	3VC, 2S, 5Sh, 3M, 3T, 1Su, 1Kh, 1Ba, 1Ch	1RB, 5VC, 11S, 1Sh, 5M, 2T, 2N, 1Kh, 4Ba, 1G, 1Ta	1VC, 3S, 5Sh, 1U, 4M, 1Rj, 3M, 1N, 1Chi, 1Kh, 3D	3M, 3Mn, 1Sh, 1R
Present (task 1)	6 boys, 4 girls	8 boys, 19 girls	5 boys, 9 girls	3 boys, 5 girls
Present (task 2)	4 boys, 6 girls	9 boys, 19 girls	6 boys, 9 girls	1 boy, 2 girls
Present (task 3)	4 boys, 4 girls	6 boys, 18 girls	3 boys, 7 girls	1 boy, 2 girls

Key to castes:

RB: Rajopadhyaya (Newar) Brahman, VC: Vajracharya, S: Shakya, Sh: Shrestha (incl. Joshi), U: Uday (Tuladhar *et al.*), M: Maharjan (incl. Dangol), Mn: Manandhar, R: Ranjitkar, T: Tandukar, Rj: Rajbahak, Su: Shuddhikar, N: Napit, Chi: Chitrakar, Kh: Khadgi/Shahi, D: Dyahla/Newa/Chyamkhala, Ba: Bahun (Parbatiya Brahman), Ch: Chetri, G: Gurung, Ta: Tamang.
(For details of Newar castes, see Toffin (1984) and Gellner & Quigley (1995); on ethnicity, one may consult, i.a., Gellner *et al.* eds 1997)

* In five cases date of birth was not recorded. There were two 7-year-olds and two 13-year-olds.

** In one case date of birth was not recorded. The youngest child was nearly 10, the oldest over 17.

*** In seven cases date of birth was not recorded, and in one case the student claimed to be 9, while the school roll indicated she was 7. The oldest student was 14, the youngest 7.

School A: in class 3 today (2003) there are 23 students (8 boys, 15 girls) and in class 5 there are 26 (18 boys and 8 girls).

School B: in class 3 today (2003) there are 32 students (18 boys, 14 girls) and in class 5 there are 23 (11 boys, 12 girls).

enrolled in class 5 of this school in 1996, because theirs was the first year in which the school had accepted pupils, but in each subsequent year more and more children had applied.

My aim in investigating these two schools was to see what the children thought about their family, illness, and locality. I hoped that the children might reveal something of their views on their society and religion too. For example, would they say anything about ethnicity? Would there be a specifically child-centred view of illness? After some initial meetings with the children in classes 3 and 5 in each school, during some of which I taught them some English, I asked them on three separate occasions to draw a picture and write a text, first on 'my family', second on 'when I got ill', and third 'about my locality'. Every picture was discussed with the child who drew it in order to identify what was in the drawing. In many cases the texts were also discussed with the children, and this often elicited contextual information.

The children were given the option of writing either in Nepali (the national language) or in Nepal Bhasa (the mother tongue of nearly all of them). I myself

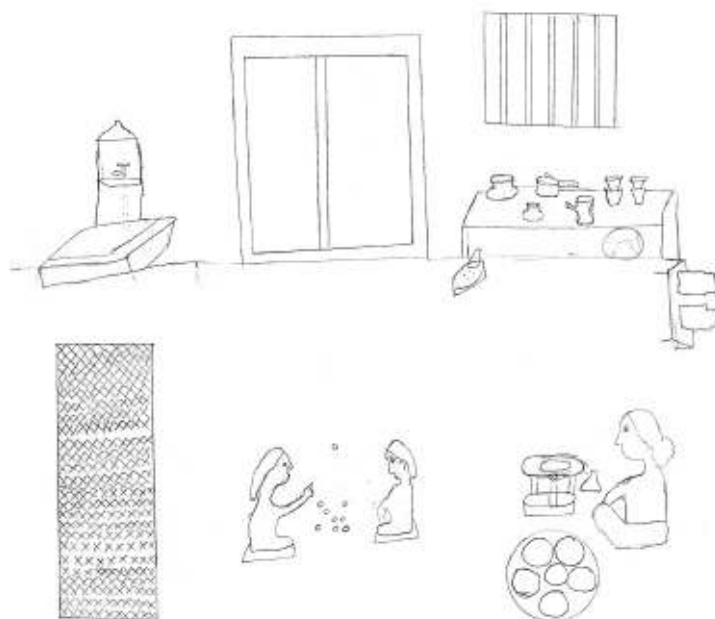
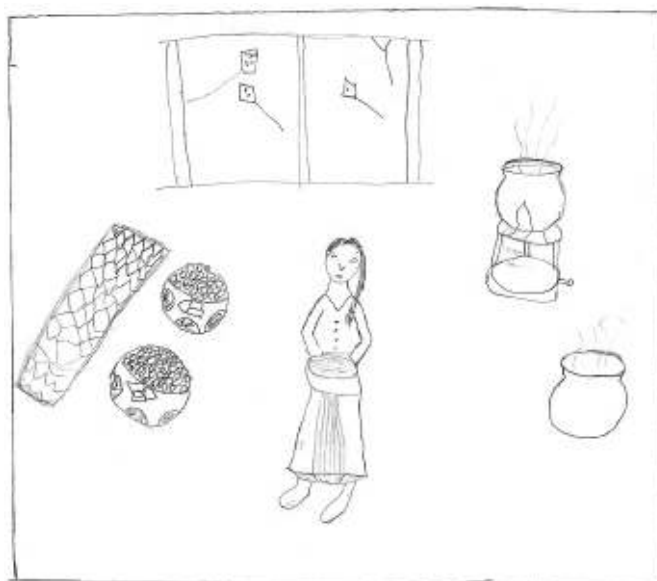


Figure 1. The inside of a Newar kitchen, showing the mother frying flat bread (*mari*) on an electric stove, and the drawer playing marbles with her younger sister. Behind her is a straw mat (*suku*) and above that a water filter (Vajracharya girl, age 13, A5).

addressed them in both languages, but mostly in Nepal Bhasa. Given that the children in school A are educated entirely in Nepali it is no surprise that all them, with two exceptions, chose to write all their essays in Nepali.²²⁾ On the other hand, given that school B was set up with the express intention of providing education in Nepal Bhasa, it may be disappointing for the committed activists who run the school that 23 out of the 53 essays there (and 9 out of 14 in class 5) were written in Nepali. This fact, like the observations from the playground mentioned above, may be interpreted to illustrate the dominance of Nepali over Nepal Bhasa among Newars of this age group, a dominance which has proceeded further and is even more marked in 2003 than it was in 1996.

The numbers of children present were not very high for two reasons. In the case of school A, many children stopped coming to school since the exams were over. Thus, as can be seen from Table 1, only half of the 20 children in class 3 were present; some children who had not been there on the first day turned up later, when the rumour spread that I was giving free drawing classes. In school B, likewise, many chil-

22) The two exceptions were a Maharjan/Dangol boy (he signed his surname in both ways) who wrote his first essay in Nepali and the subsequent two in Nepal Bhasa, and a Vajracharya girl who wrote her first two essays in Nepali and her third in Nepal Bhasa.



दशैं वकै जिम्मे परिवार पिनी अं दई बिनो
 अतमलि पैका जिम्मे अं, दिदी, भाउजू पित्तसं जौरेउअन
 जिं पन पना किया दरो वकै जिम्मे समाहिलो जुल
 जिम्मे परिवार १० जना है

Figure 2. Another Newar interior, showing the mother holding a pot of water. There are kites flying outside the window, as it is Dasain, and there are two plates of feast food laid out in front of the straw mat. The text reads 'At Dasain in my family my brothers fly kites, my mother, elder sister, and elder brother's wife cook, and I go to the shop. At Dasain we have fun. There are ten people in our family.' (Vajracharya girl, age 12, A5).

dren did not appear because exams were over. Whereas school B, with its foreign funding, had expanding rolls, school A was suffering from falling rolls as children were taken out and put in other, fee-paying schools.²³⁾

There were considerable differences in age between the oldest and the youngest in all the classes studied. Table 1 also shows that children in school A were generally slightly ahead of those in school B, which may possibly be put down to the relatively poorer and more disadvantaged backgrounds of the latter.

Family (task 1): Love, help, and support

Notions about the family that the children expressed were largely conventional, but relating this directly to the social studies textbooks in use in the two schools was by no means straightforward. In the school textbooks of the Panchayat era (1960–90)

23) The figures for 2003 show that the decline in school A enrollment has been stemmed; this may be due to the influx to the cities of refugees from the civil war in the hills of Nepal.

children began their courses in social studies with sentences such as 'Father and Mother care for us' (*bā, āmāle māyā garnuhuncha*), 'In a family we learn to live together and cooperate' (*pariwārmā milera basna sikchaū*), 'Mother helps us; we help mother' (*āmāle hāmīlāi madat garnuhuncha; hāmi āmālāi madat garchaū*).²⁴ These kinds of sentiment, as will be seen below, appeared frequently in the children's essays. However, the more up-to-date Nepali-language social studies textbooks from school A that I was able to see, entitled *Mero Serophero* (My Environment) from years 1 to 3, and *Mero Desh* (My Country) for years 4 and 5, are in fact a lot more sophisticated than this.²⁵ Not only do they avoid describing any normative or typical Nepali family, from the second year they introduce families who, from their names and the descriptions of their environment, clearly belong to non-mainstream communities, e.g. Tharu, Madeshi (plains-people), Gurung, and so on. This is in marked contrast to the textbooks of the Panchayat era, which tended to ignore cultural diversity and assume that the culture of the dominant Bahuns and Chetris was and should be normative for all Nepalis.²⁶

In contrast, school B's Nepal Bhasha social studies textbooks, entitled *Nhū Paleswā* (New Lotus Readers), do not attempt or pretend to apply to the whole country of Nepal, but rather assume that the reader is a Newar and lives in a Newar settlement similar to Kathmandu. Most of the chapters are animal stories of the Aesop's Fables type, but one in book 2, by Baldev Juju, is on 'The Festival of Worshipping Mother and Father'. It begins:

Mothers and fathers experience a lot of suffering (*duḥkha*) bringing us up. We should never forget this. Mother gives birth to us. She holds in her lap and breastfeeds us. She clears up our faces and urine... (Juju 1996: 60)

Both sets of textbooks gave considerable emphasis to rules of cleanliness (see below).

It remains likely that in other textbooks the children were exposed to, and had to learn by heart, there were texts about love (*māyā*) within the family. Whether in textbooks or elsewhere, seniors are supposed to show love and consideration (*māyā*) to juniors, and juniors to show respect (*mān, ādar*) towards seniors. This *māyā* is the opposite of the *helā* (disregard, even violence) that seniors actually displayed towards the children who ran away and ended up living on the street in the accounts recorded

24) I take these sentences from pages 10, 11, 28, of the *Sāmājīk Śikṣā, bhāg 1* (Social Education, part 1), fifth printing of VS 2031 (1974–75).

25) The series *Mero Serophero* are principally written by Mohan Gopal Nyachyon, with the help of Jit Bahadur Thapa. *Mero Desh 4* is by Jit Bahadur Thapa and *Mero Desh 5* is by Bishwambar Ghimire. All five books are published by the government's Curriculum Development Centre in Sano Thimi; the books first appeared in order between 1988 and 1996. For a more detailed discussion of the textbooks used in school and adult literacy classes in her village, some of which were also by Bishwambar Ghimire, see Ahearn (2003: 152–171).

26) See Pigg (1992) for a critique of the Panchayat-era textbooks for this, and for their unthinking alignment of development with urban ways, and Ahearn (2003) for a very careful ethnographic assessment of the ways in which the development discourse advocated in such texts affects individuals' thinking. I have attempted to describe the emerging multiculturalism of post-1990 Nepal in Gellner (2001d, 2003).

by Onta-Bhatta (1997). All these Nepali terms—*mān*, *ādar*, *māyā*, and *helā*—can equally, and just as idiomatically, be used in Nepal Bhasha.²⁷⁾

A typical account by a girl living in Joche, in the heart of the old city of Kathmandu, ran as follows:

There are seven people in my family (lit. ‘in my house there is a seven-person family’). I do the work of the house. I help mother. Now I study [i.e. do some schoolwork] at home. There is a small shop in my house. My mother and father’s names are [...] My mother loves (‘does *māyā* to’) me. And I also love my mother. My younger sister and brother study at home. I don’t hit my younger brother and sister because they love mother. I get up at seven in the morning, wash my face and teeth, and drink tea with milk. In the middle of the day I eat rice and lentils. I eat home-made food. I don’t eat food bought outside. I eat fresh food of the house. I want to study well and grow up to be an important (‘big’) person. I am now eleven years old. Our house has altogether four floors. I am in class 3. If I am successful in the end-of-year exam I will go into class 4.

(Manandhar girl, age 10, B3, N)²⁸⁾

One of the most basic responses of this sort ran simply:

My family (*santān*): My mother cooks rice, my father works, I study at school, and my younger brother also studies at school. My older sister works and studies and that’s how (each member of) our family works.

(Maharjan boy, age 13, A5, N)

Many of the essays followed this kind of formula, even if at greater length, listing the members of their families, their occupations, sometimes their names. The association between mothers and cooking was, unsurprisingly, strong also in those drawings which depicted the inside of the house (Figures 1 and 2). Many children added details to their essays about how many storeys the house had and whether anyone else was living there. In the following case I omit almost half the essay, which simply lists family members’ names:

[...] In our house there are twelve people in our family [...] My father works as a plumber. My mother does the housework. My older brothers work repairing motorcycles. My older sisters weave hats (*topi*). My younger brothers go to school. And my younger sisters also go to school. My family loves (does *māyā* to) me. I also have one sister-in-law (older brother’s wife). My sister-in-law also loves me. My mother and father make sure I study. My older brothers and sisters have

27) A letter in *Nhū Paleswā 2*, p.47, purportedly from a pupil at the school, includes the sentence ‘The teachers do *māyā* to us’ (*guru wa gurumāpīsā jimita māyā yāh*). On the term *māyā*, see Ahearn (2003: 49–50).

28) This indicates that the girl was in school B, class 3, and wrote in Nepali (NBh=Nepal Bhasha). She writes her age as 11 because Nepalis give the year in which they currently are, not, as in the Western style, completed years only. The three dots in brackets indicate omitted material.



Figure 3. Father, mother, elder sister, and self setting off for a picnic at Ratna Park (Chitrakar girl, age 12, B3).

not studied. I teach my older sisters at home. Thanks to my family I have the chance to study today. I like my family [...].

(Maharjan girl, age 13, B5, N)

A female perspective on the domestic division of labour was reflected in this kind of essay:

I live in a courtyard (*nani*). My family is small. We drink water from the tap. If water doesn't come from the tap we drink water from the well. Behind the well there is a temple. We get up early in the morning and go to perform *pūjā*. After coming back from the *pūjā* I go home. In the evening my older sister and I go to take water. And sometimes mother cooks rice, and sometimes I and my older sister cook rice. And my father and older brother work. I also work sometimes. And I also go to play with my friends. Every day I go to school.

(Shakya girl, age 11, A5, N)

Of the 59 children (37 girls, 22 boys) who completed this task in both schools, 13 mentioned that they helped with housework, 9 of them girls, 4 of them boys. This is not as big a difference between the sexes (24% of the girls versus 18% of the boys) as one might have expected. Several of the children mentioned other kinds of work at home (working in the fields, weaving hat material).²⁹⁾

One essay, by a Newar girl whose family had re-migrated from Biratnagar to Kathmandu, where they lived in rented accommodation, painted an idyllic picture of family

29) Onta-Bhatta notes several examples of children working both inside and outside the home ↗

picnics at the weekend (Figure 3):

In my house live my father, mother, elder sister, and me. We all love each other ('do *māyā* one to the other'). We never fight. On Saturdays we sometimes go for a picnic. On the picnic we eat meat, chutney, beans (*borī*), beaten rice, and so on. My mother also goes to work. With two people working, they [are able to] feed us, and buy us clothes [...]

(Chitrakar girl, age 12, B3, N)

An articulate boy from the Lalitpur school expressed the hierarchical principles at work explicitly as follows:

Altogether I have seven people in my family. My older brother's work is to make images of gods. My mother does the work in the kitchen. My father is a shop-keeper. My older sister and I go to school. We have one room for cooking and one room for sleeping. I and my older sister both help my mother in the kitchen. We have one younger brother who doesn't go to school. Mother says that next year he will also be enrolled in my school. Mother and father have said to me that one should show respect and deference (*ādar ra mān*) to those who are older (lit. 'bigger') than oneself and love/consideration (*māyā*) to those who are younger (lit. 'smaller'). One has to be good (*gyānī*). One should not fight with friends (*sāthibhāī*). My house has two floors. I am studying in class 3. Mother and father have said that one should be good and hardworking (*lagansīl*). One must listen/obey what older people tell you. Mother says that one shouldn't play too much, one must study.

(Shrestha boy, age 7, A3, N)

A simple list-style essay went as follows:

- (1) My mother and elder sister do the cleaning in our house.
- (2) Our house has seven storeys.
- (3) To go out of our house we have to go via [place name].
- (4) In our house my elder sister cooks the rice.
- (5) Our house is good.
- (6) In our house, including me, there are five people in our family.
- (7) In our house there is also one old lady living on rent.
- (8) In our house we pass the time exceedingly well [i.e. we get on well].

↗ in testimony from the first half of the twentieth century, and she concludes: "Autobiographies and oral narratives suggest that working was an integral part of growing up as children were perceived to have the ability to carry out various household chores from as early as age five. However, children's social class played a critical role in whether or not work became part of their childhood experiences. For example, upper class children had longer childhood filled with play and leisure, while middle and working class children worked for long hours every day" (Onta-Bhatta 2001, p.266). Village children, even today, are even more likely to have to combine study at school with work in the house or fields or gathering fodder (Skinner 1990, pp.134–136).

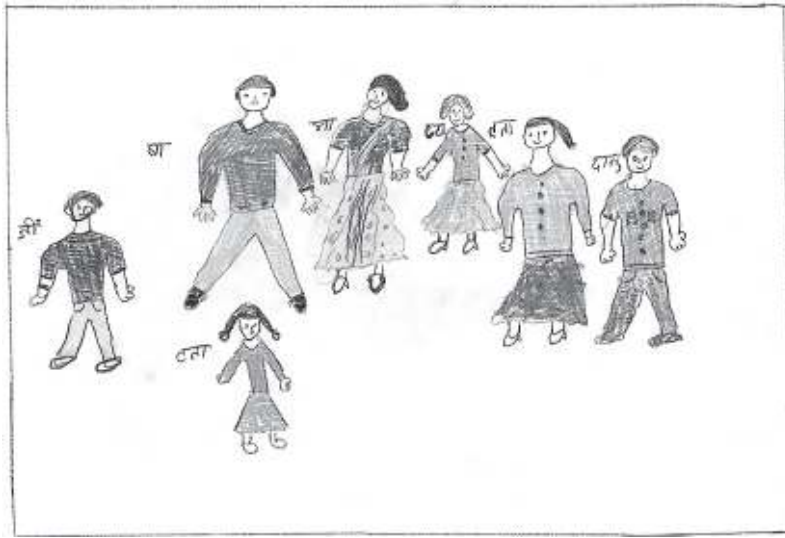


Figure 4. Self, father, mother, older sister, older sister, older brother, and a third older sister in the foreground, all labelled in Nepal Bhasha. A fourth older sister is not shown as she is already married (Ranjitkar boy, age 11, B5).

(9) We also have a lot of things in our house.

(10) When my older sister is doing housework I also help her.

(Maharjan boy, age 9, A3, N)

A girl in the same class made twenty-six such sentences by giving the names of everyone in her family, as well as the ages, classes, and school roll numbers, of all her siblings:

- (1) My mother loves me.
- (2) My father loves me.
- (3) Mother cooks rice.
- (4) Mother buys clothes for me.
- (5) Mother is a god (*āmā deuṭā ho*).
- (6) Father is also a god (*bā paṇi deuṭā ho*).
- (7) I have four older sisters.
- (8) I am studying in class 3 [...]

(Shrestha girl, age 8, A3, N)

In one case the picture of happy families was modified slightly (see Figure 4):³⁰⁾

[...] My father works in an office. My mother stays at home. My older sister goes

30) Hiroshi Ishii has pointed out to me that the references to fights or to avoiding fights within the family may have special resonance for Newars, because their system for splitting the joint family seems nearly always to involve intra-family quarrels, unlike that of the Parbatiyas. As splits ↗



Figure 5. A picture of home in the Tarai (plains) at Dasain time by a girl whose family had moved to Kathmandu (Bahun girl, age 12, A5).

to school. My older brother goes to work. I also go to school. In our family there is happiness. Everyone at home shows love (does *māyā*) to me. In our home there are never quarrels. Just occasionally there are very small ones [...]

(Ranjitkar boy, age 11, B5, N)

A girl from the squatter settlement opposite school B divided her essay into two parts, family and house:

About my family: In my house the family consists of six people: mother, father, older brother, older sister, I, and my younger brother. We all love each other. We—mother, father, older brother, older sister, and younger brother—don't hurt (*dukha dīne*) (each other). I behave well to my family (*rāmri rākhchu*). If anything

↗ necessarily occur in each generation or more frequently, all Newar families will have experienced or will remember serious intra-family disputes, and the assertion of harmony on an everyday basis will be all the more meaningful. But even in Parbatiya households the threat and possibility of serious disputes is real.

happens to my family, I buy medicine for them.

About my house: My house is in Chakhal. There are six people in our family. I love my younger brother. I play with my friends. I bring my friends to the house. I give my friends tea. I get on well with my friends. If anyone hits my friends, I tell them not to.

(Chyamkhala—'Newa'—girl, age 10, B3, N)

Just as the written accounts of families often relied on stereotypical representations of family harmony, so did many of the pictures. Many depicted houses which are typical of the Nepalese hills (see Figures 6 and 14), which most of the children had probably never been inside, and would have seen only on expeditions to the countryside (picnics, pilgrimages), rather than the terraced townhouses in which they actually lived. In fact, many of the children in school A, class 5, interpreted the first task to be about the national festival of Dasain and wrote textbook accounts of how pleasant (*ramāilo*) the festival is because it involves new clothes, feasting, meeting relatives, and so on.

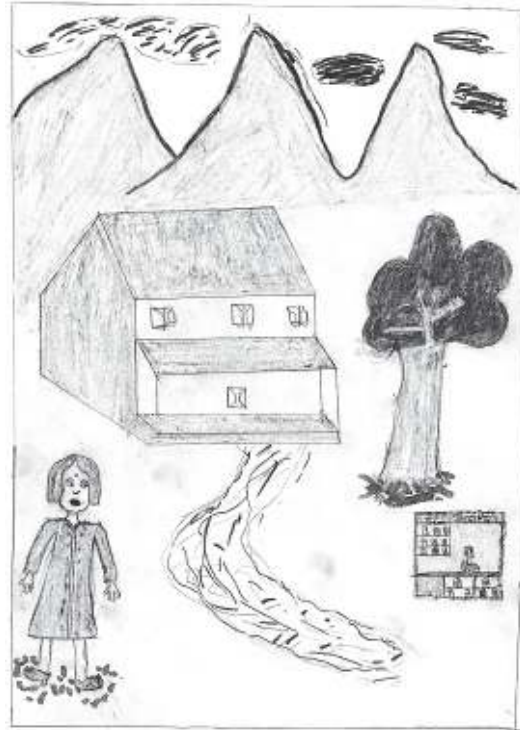


Figure 6. A picture of a typical hill house, with a medical shop nearby, and self in the foreground (Shakya girl, age 10, A5).

Illness (task 2): Suffering and recovery

Textbook passages relating to this topic were easier to locate than those on family relationships. One example from a book used in school B is an essay called 'Health' (*swāsthya*) in *Nhū Paleswā* (*New Lotus Reader for Class 2*), pp. 78–79. It bluntly attacks the notion that one only gets ill if one's fate (*daśā*) is bad as false and pernicious, and it continues:

You have to keep your body in good order. Stale, rotten, spoilt (*syāgu*), dirty (*phohargu*), or bad quality (*mabhīgu*) food or drink should not be consumed. You should only play or exercise the right amount. You should live in a neat and clean (*yacupicuka*) fashion, and should not be dirty/messy (*phoharī*). You should go to sleep at the right time and get up at the right time. If we do not do this, we

become unwell. It causes great suffering (*duhkha*) to be unwell. If you take care of your health, you will never be unwell.

The Nepali textbooks *Mero Serophero* and *Mero Desh* are even more insistent. The Year One book has pictures of dirty and clean behaviour to discuss under the chapter heading *ma saphā garchu* (I behave cleanly/I clean up): throwing kitchen waste outside, playing in rubbish, expelling snot on to the street, sneezing over food, and excreting outdoors are shown as examples of dirty behaviour, and using a latrine, brushing one's teeth, combing one's hair, using clean water from a tank to wash one's hands, and helping mother to sweep up are shown as examples of clean behaviour. The Class 3 textbook has a chapter on 'Visiting the Health Post', the Class 4 book has a chapter entitled 'Social Institutions and Our Life' describing a visit to a hospital, and the Class 5 book has a chapter entitled 'We are all one' (*hāmī sab ekai haun*). It begins by describing the cultural and religious diversity of Nepal, and draws the moral that all should respect each other and that there should be no discrimination on the basis of caste, gender, age, or religion. It continues:

Today is a scientific era (*vijñānko samay*) in which everything is only possible through reason (*tarka*) and intelligence (*buddhi*). But many things which are carried on in our society may not be based on reason and intelligence. Whatever work or thing we do, it may change according to the times... We should never spend money we cannot afford on entertaining at life-cycle rituals just to show off ... In the times of our grandfathers, if anyone was sick, there were no health posts or hospitals. There were very few doctors. People believed in ghosts and spirits (*bhūtpret*). So if anyone got ill it was the custom to take them to a shaman or healer (*dhāmī jhānkri*), but we are not in that time today. The big cities have big hospitals. The villages have health posts and health centres. Doctors, health assistants, and nurses are available to prescribe medicine. That is why it is now customary to take an ill person to be examined at a hospital or health post. Only after a doctor specializing in that particular illness, whichever it may be, has examined (the patient), will providing a cure be easy. If we relied only on the shamans and healers who had come down to us from long ago, our illnesses might not be cured. That is why people consider it wise to adapt to the times.

(Ghimire 1996: 52–53)

The children's narratives about illness mostly followed the format (a) somebody got ill; (b) they were taken to the doctor; (c) they got better. Variations can be introduced to this basic schema with repeated visits to the same doctor, or to various different doctors, in search of a cure, but in the end, the patient gets better. The basic format undoubtedly follows the normative narratives of the textbooks in which parents care for children and take them to doctors to find a cure. But, none the less, the topic was one that engaged the children and within this framework they often introduced much original material and at times even ignored or subverted normative expectations.³¹⁾

A typical example of the basic narrative would be the following:

When I was ill, at first I was only a little ill and the next day I got more ill. And then afterwards I was taken to the hospital and to the doctor's and my family had a lot of trouble. And they came with medicine from the hospital. And I took that medicine every day and I got better. After me, my older brother also got ill. And my brother was taken to the doctor's. And my brother was also given medicine and brought home. And my brother took it every day. And my brother also got better.

(Shakya girl, age 11, A5, N)

In discussion with this girl afterwards it emerged that actually she had also been taken to visit a *vaidya* (which could mean either an Ayurvedic doctor or a Tantric healer who uses both ritual and Ayurvedic methods to cure).³²⁾

In some cases the children went well beyond the schoolbook messages in praising doctors. One girl wrote:

[...] It is three days since my mother and sister began to be ill. Even though my mother and sister are taking their medicine, they haven't really got better. My mother and sister are not eating anything at all. Now they have to be looked at properly again. Since last night my brother's daughter (*bhincā*) has been ill as well. She is extremely unwell. Early this morning my sister went to the doctor and he gave her medicine. Since she took the medicine she got a little better. If she is looked at properly again and given medicine, she will get better. Both my mother and sister will get better. If there were no doctors here, people wouldn't really be able to survive. Doctors are able to tell what illness it is that people have in their bodies. And then they give us medicine. A doctor (*daktar*) is like a god (*dyah*).

(Maharjan girl, age 13, B5, NBh)

Some children were not at all reticent to write about visits to practitioners whom the official school view would have seen as 'backward' (*avikasit*) and 'superstitious' (*andhaviśvās bhaeko*), perhaps because their accounts demonstrated the superiority of doctors to traditional medical practitioners. The following account also includes an implied moral about taking your medicine to the end of the course:

I got ill when I was at home. After two days, we went to show me. And we went to see a *vaidya*. And after we had shown it to a *vaidya*, we showed it to a doctor. And after he had examined me, the doctor gave me two or three medicines to take away. And I ate those medicines. The next day I was better. And when I was bet-

31) On the range of medical systems actually available to inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, see Gellner (2001c). For a classic study of healthcare bureaucracy in the Nepalese hills, see Justice (1986). On the role of Nepali doctors in the People's Movement of 1990, see Adams (1998). For medical anthropological themes in Tansen, see Harper (2003). See also Pigg (1995, 1996, 2001), Subedi (2001), Kristvik (1999), and Devkota (1983).

32) For an excellent, detailed study of Ayurvedic *vaidyas* in Kathmandu, see Durkin-Longley (1982); on Tantric *vaidyas*, see Gellner (2001b).

ter I stopped taking the medicine. Because I didn't take the medicine I got ill again. The next day I went to the doctor's again in order to take medicine. That day I got better. And after many days my older brother got ill. My older brother was also taken to the doctor's. After he was taken to the doctor's, he examined my brother's chest. And after he had examined it, the doctor gave him some medicines to take away. After two days he finished taking the medicines. The next day he was better.

(Shakya girl, age 13, A5, N)

In discussion afterwards the girl concerned said that the *vaidya* had been to the house and recommended a ritual, and that the doctor had told them not to consult *vaidyas*.

The following account is similar in its demonstration of the inferiority of the *vaidya*; it also shows how illness episodes are seen to afflict one member of the family after another:

When I was ill I had a fever and I took medicine and got better after 2–4 days. And after my fever got better my younger sister also got ill. And because blood was coming out of my younger sister's nose, she was taken to a *vaidya*. And the *vaidya*'s medicine didn't make her better. And she was taken to a doctor and the medicine lasted 10 or 12 days after going to the doctor's. And she got better. And my mother also got sick. And she went to the doctor's and the doctor gave her medicine. And my father had diarrhoea and vomiting. And the doctor made him better in two or three days.

(Tandukar boy, age 12, A5, N)

Many accounts mentioned many different family members, and emphasized their interdependence. For example (see Figure 7):

When I got ill, I was taken to the doctor's. When I was shown to the doctor, he gave me Cetamol [paracetamol] medicine. And when I was ill my mother and father had a very tough time (*dukha āpat paryo*). My fever got higher and higher and they took me to Patan Hospital. My father and mother and everyone had trouble. I couldn't do anything about it. I couldn't drink water. My mother, father, grandfather, grandmother, maternal uncle and wife (*māmā māiju*), younger brothers, younger sisters all came to the hospital. I couldn't do anything. My mother, grandmother, grandfather, and father brought me various kinds of fruit. I couldn't eat any of that fruit. I took that fruit and divided it up between my younger brothers and sisters. They were happy. I was ill for many days. My uncles, aunts, sisters, friends, younger brothers all came to see me from the village. They brought me all kinds of fruits. My younger brothers and sisters did nothing but cry all the time. I took my medicine and got better and I went home.

(Tamang girl, age 10, A5, N)

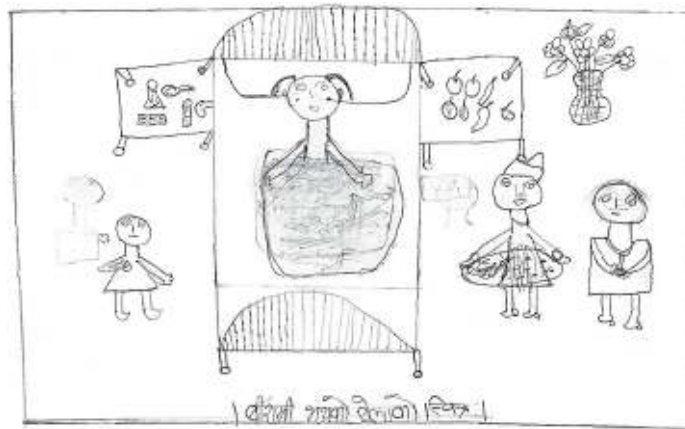


Figure 7. Self in Patan Hospital, with nurse and doctor to the right, and younger sister to the left (Tamang girl, age 10, A5).



Figure 8. A girl who spent 17 days in Bir Hospital. Her younger sister is shown to the left, with a doll in the foreground; to the right are her younger brother, a nurse, and a doctor (Bahun girl, age 12, A5).

One essay gave a vivid picture of self-medication within the family:

When my Mummy (*hāmro mamī*) was ill, we made *khichari* [rice mixed with other foods/risotto] with nutmeg in it, and when she had eaten it, she got better. When my younger brother got jaundice (*jannis*), we pressed a small piece of grass and gave it [the juice] to him to take. When my grandfather's body hurts, we give him god's medicine (*daibako oṣadhī*) and he gets better. When my elder sister has a

cold, she takes really hot water and after it is better. When I get worms, they give me something like an *amlā* fruit and afterwards it is better.

(Chetri girl, age 9, A3, N)

Another account emphasizing mutual sympathy within the family ran as follows:

When I got ill I was taken to the doctor and the doctor gave me medicine. When I took that medicine my illness got better. When one of my family got ill, they went to the doctor, he gave medicine, and they got better. When again they got a fever they showed it to a big doctor, and they took medicine, and they got better. When one of our family got fever, the whole family felt bad (*duḥkha jula*) and when they got better the whole family was happy (*sukha jula*). Now no one in the house has a fever and we are happy. So no one of the family has a fever.

(Maharjan boy, age 11, A5, NBh)

It is striking that, despite the frequent mention of other family members becoming ill, it is very rare for any causal connection to be postulated, i.e. the notion that diseases may be infectious seems to be absent, or is at least not explicit; rather, disease just happens, and has to be dealt with. One unusual account which did posit infection was the following (cf. the exceptional account of TB, p.281 below):

The other day I was playing in water and got ill. My mother and father took me to many doctors. But I didn't get better. Then my mother and father took me to [...] doctor. Then he gave me Cetamol and Vitamin medicine. And by taking that medicine I got better. And my mother, father, older sister, and younger sister were very happy. And after that my sickness crossed over to my younger sister. She too was taken to many doctors but she didn't get better. After that they took her to the same doctor I had seen. He gave the same medicine he had given to me the other day. Then she too got better.

(Shakya girl, age 11, A5, N)

Occasionally the normative schema was reversed and the account had traditional healers succeeding where doctors had failed:

When I was ill my mother took me to the doctor's. He gave me medicine. I didn't forget to take the medicine and that medicine did not make me better. Then I was taken to a *vaidya*. Then I was given Nepali medicine. I took that medicine. After taking that medicine I got better. And I was able to do work. I went to school because they had asked why I wasn't coming to school. I said, 'I was ill so I couldn't come. Please mark my attendance' and it was done.

(Vajracharya girl, age 11, A5, N)

A similar account ran as follows:

About when I got a fever: When I had a fever I was taken to see the doctor. I

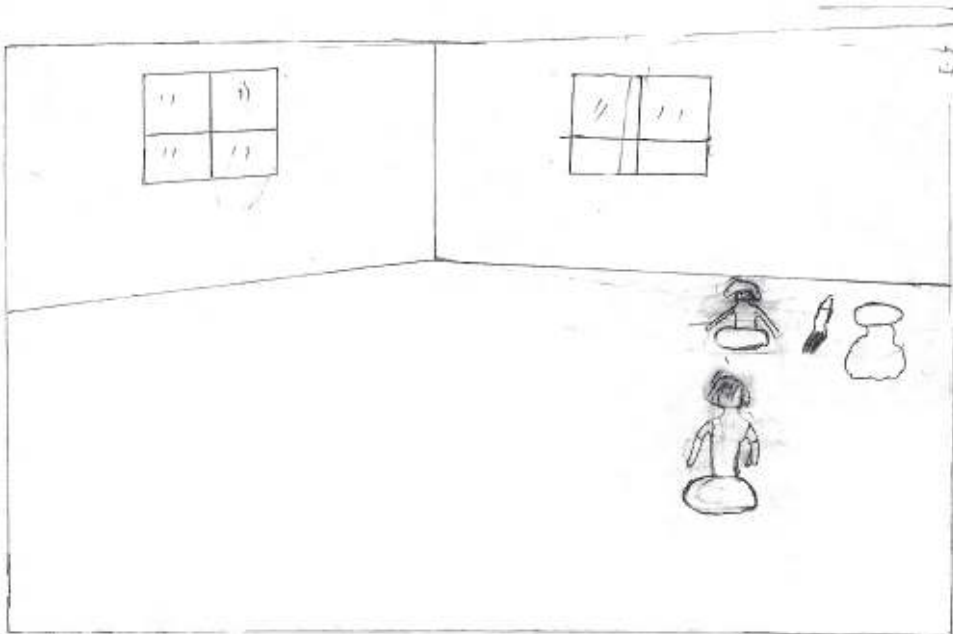


Figure 9. Self in front of a female medium (*aji*), with a broom for performing ritual brushing (*jhārphuk*) and a pot of holy water (*jal*) (Shrestha girl, age 10, B3).

threw up and was dizzy, and didn't get better. I took medicine. Then I was taken to a compounder (chemist). And still I was sick and dizzy. Then after four days I was taken to [...] doctor and he gave me medicine. After four days the medicine ran out and the doctor gave me what was left of the medicine. Then in the morning I was taken to see the medium (*aji*). Then one or two days later my fever got better.
(Khadgi boy, age 9, B3, NBh)

In other cases the normative schema was simply transferred to traditional healers:

When I got pustules, in order to show them (to someone), I was taken to an *ajimā* [literally 'grandmother-mother', i.e. a possessed female medium]. My mother gave me medicine to take. I was given an injection. I came home with my mother. My pustules stopped hurting. And my pustules got better. After that, ten days later, I came to school.

(Shrestha girl, age 10, B3, N)

In discussion afterwards, this girl confirmed that it had been a possessed medium, dressed in red, who had treated her with ritualized sweeping with a broom (*jhārphuke*) and the drinking of holy water (*jal*), and that the medium had recommended performing a ritual.³³⁾ This was the only child who actually drew a traditional medical prac-

33) On these mediums, see Gellner (2001a), Dietrich (1999).

tioner (see Figure 9). In the previously quoted case, a Khadgi boy wrote about visits to doctors not working, and a similar medium finally curing his fever, but his drawing was none the less a typical one of a doctor with a stethoscope.

Overall, out of 56 responses, six (11%) mentioned traditional medical practitioners (TMPs) spontaneously. A further eight (14%) mentioned having been taken to them in discussion afterwards. No doubt others had visited them also at some point, but did not mention it. There was no correlation between caste and willingness to admit to visiting TMPs. It would be interesting to know whether urban children are less afraid of being seen as 'backward' and 'superstitious' and therefore are more willing to admit to using such healers than village children, but this question cannot be answered on the basis of the material presented here.

Elsewhere (Gellner 2001c) I have outlined nine different 'systems', ranging from biomedicine and Ayurveda (the traditional South Asian system of medicine) to astrology, ritual healing, and herbal remedies, to which the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley can have resort in case of illness. These children's accounts support the conclusion that biomedicine is overwhelmingly dominant ('hegemonic' if you will). They also provide evidence for the co-existence of other systems as well. Both in discourse and in practice these systems are often in conflict; but it is likely too that the children understand that they can also be taken to be complementary alternatives: astrology or Tantric healing for problems sent by gods or other spiritual entities, biomedicine as the most powerful and fast-acting cure for physical ailments.³⁴⁾

In general the older children wrote longer narratives but sometimes even the younger ones produced long, complex, and moving accounts, in which the reality of recalcitrant illness and a suffering parent overwhelms the normative expectation of closure and recovery:

My mother has been sick many times. A small lump came on her backside. Later it grew big. When it was small it hurt only a little, but it didn't stay like that; later that lump of flesh began to hurt a great deal. It began to hurt a lot and after three or four days mother couldn't get out of bed. Father called maternal grandfather and father took mother to the hospital. The doctor said that we needed 'O' blood. It is extremely hard to get hold of 'O' blood. The younger brother of *phūphājyū* [father's sister's husband] brought the blood. They took that blood and got her admitted to the hospital. The doctor said they would do the operation one day later. When it was time for the operation he asked for the 'O' blood. Three hours after the operation mother gained consciousness. That lump of flesh was cut off. The doctor said to father that he could take her home the day after the operation. Father brought mother home. When she came home we looked where the lump had been. It was cut off and medicine had been put on and a bandage tied on. It had to be kept clean. For about a month she had to go every Thursday to have a

34) For one of the most detailed and sophisticated treatments of these themes in a South Asian context, see Nichter & Nichter (1996).

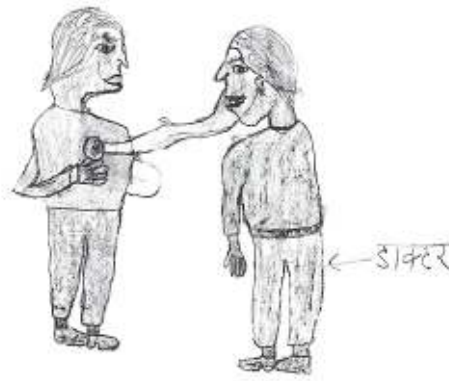


Figure 10. Father being examined by a doctor (Maharjan boy, age 9, A3).

check to see how the wound was. We had to take a ticket. Either my elder brother or father would go to get the ticket. Now there is a hole where that lump was cut off. A little flesh has come back. Now if she walks a lot or moves a lot of water around, or things like that, it hurts in that place and she can't get up, and then father sends my older brother to buy the medicine for the pain in the wound. When she has taken the medicine it is a little better and she can get up.

(Shrestha boy, age 7, A3, N)

Another boy (see Figure 10) in the same class wrote:

When my father got TB, my mother took him to the doctor's. The doctor gave him medicine. However many times my mother took him to the doctor's, he still didn't get better. However much medicine he took, he didn't get better. Only two or three years later did he get better. Then he got boils again, and again he was taken to the doctor's. He was given medicine to take and medicine to rub on. My mother would remove the pus from my father's boils twice every day. After many days it got better. Then he got boils in a different place and again he went to get medicine. Again we did the same and it got better. Again it came in a different place, that got better, and again it came in another, time and time again. My mother went to a temple and made a request (*arje*), but still he has boils. However many places my father has gone to ask how to make his boils better, however much medicine he has taken, however many injections (*injesan*) he has been given, they do not get better. However many doctors he has been to see, up till now he still has them.

(Maharjan boy, age 9, A3, N)

Only one child produced an almost textbook description, as opposed to a narrative about himself or his family. But in fact the description was based on his own experience, because his grandfather had the disease:

It can happen from time to time that we fall sick. When we fall sick we consult (lit. 'show to') the doctor. The doctor writes us a prescription for medicine that will make us better. We take the medicine that the doctor gives us. Then the illness gets better. Just near our house (*hāmro gharko taltira*) my grandfather fell ill. The name of his illness is TB (*kṣayarog*). When a person with TB sneezes, the contagion of the disease (*rogkā hāvā*) spreads. Then a person who isn't ill by breathing in [can contract the disease because] the bacteria (*kīṭāṇuharu*) enter their stomach. Then he gets TB. Mostly TB affects the lungs. A person who has TB doesn't feel like eating. They get a slight fever in the evening. Their chest hurts. They cough. When they cough, blood comes up mixed in [with the sputum]. If one has this disease one should not defecate or urinate just anywhere. You should only do it in the latrine (*carpī*). You have to pay attention to cleanliness (*sarsaphāī*). To be cured from (*bacna*) this illness you have to give an injection (*sui*) called DPT.

(Rajbahak boy, age 14, B3, N)

The children's drawings reflect their experience that some doctors are female (see Figures 11 and 12). In every case the doctor is clearly identifiable by the stethoscope (see Figures 7, 8, 10–14) (cf. the Shakya girl's essay on p.22). I suspect that throughout the developing world the stethoscope, along with the injection, is the key symbol of biomedical legitimation. Certainly in Nepal it is so pervasive that even shamans have been known to make use of it. The importance of gifts of fruit as an expression of concern for those in hospital is also borne out by the pictures (Figures 7, 8, 11). In fact, both the narratives and the drawings on this topic provide plenty of material to illustrate the importance of kin and family relationships as well.

My neighbourhood (task 3): Gods, dogs, and people

In the old Newar cities, the neighbourhood or *ṭol* (*twāḥ* in Nepal Bhasha) is a key element of social organization. Each *ṭol* has its set of basic divinities and each is defined by a public square with its temples and shrines, wayside shelters to sit or sing hymns, and sunken stone water spouts. It was very clear from the vast majority of the children's accounts that temples continue to define public space (see Figures 15, 17–21)—a finding that will come as no surprise to those who have written about the organization of space in the Newar city, but which has rarely been tested in this way before.³⁵⁾

35) The manifesto for the study of Newar cities in this way was Gutschow & Kölver (1975),



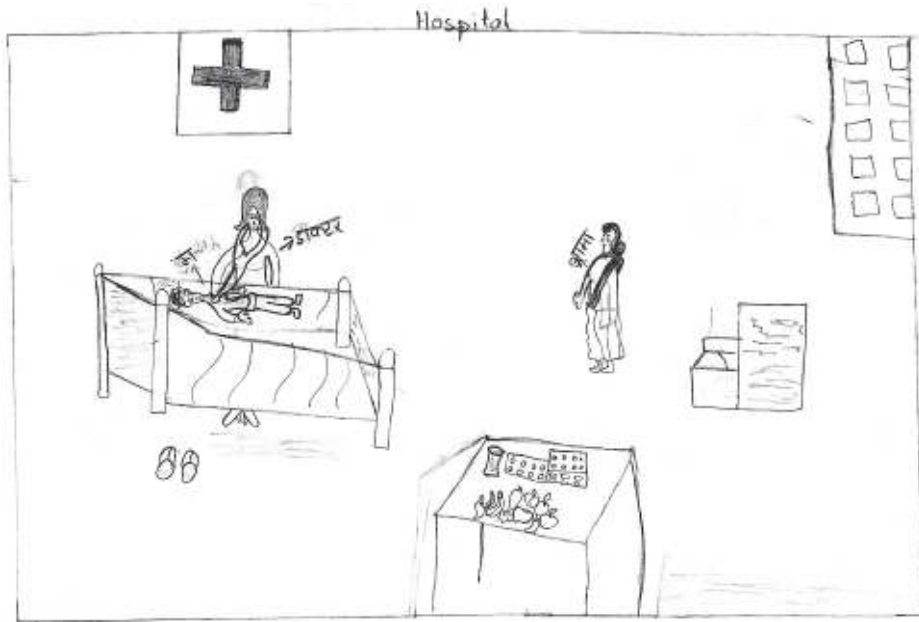


Figure 11. Self being examined by a doctor in hospital (Dyahla boy, age 11, B3).

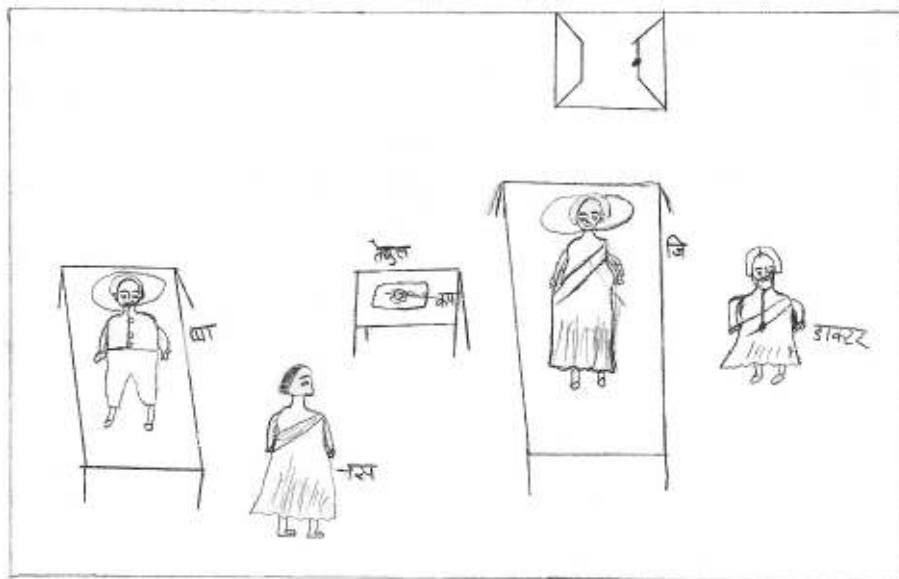


Figure 12. Self and father both in hospital, with nurse and doctor both labelled (Dyahla girl, age 10, B3).

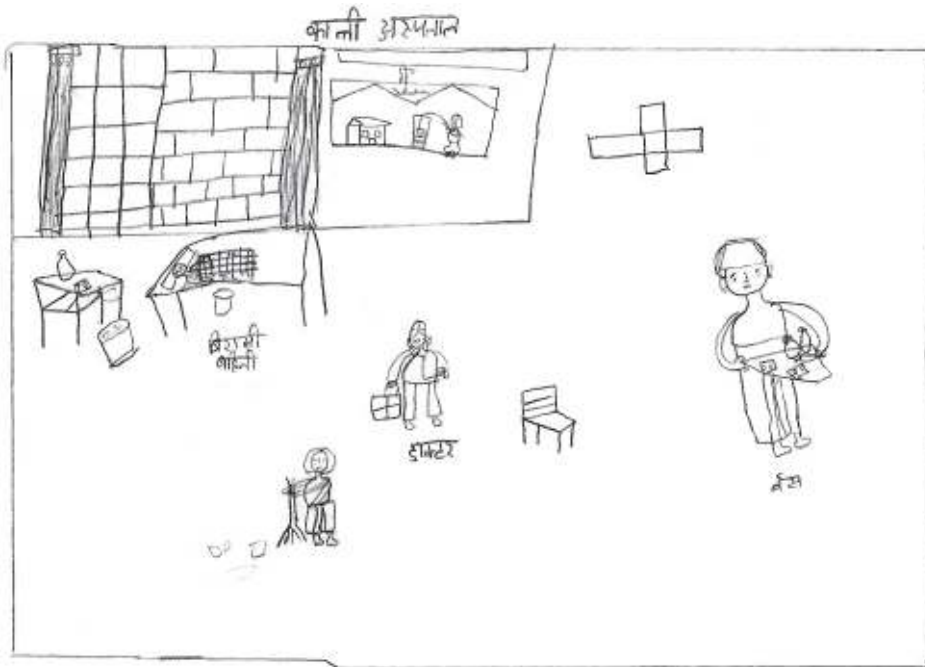


Figure 13. Younger sister in Kanti Hospital, where she had to have a 'video X-ray'. A sweeper, a doctor, and a nurse (the largest figure) all labelled (Shakya girl, age 10, B3).

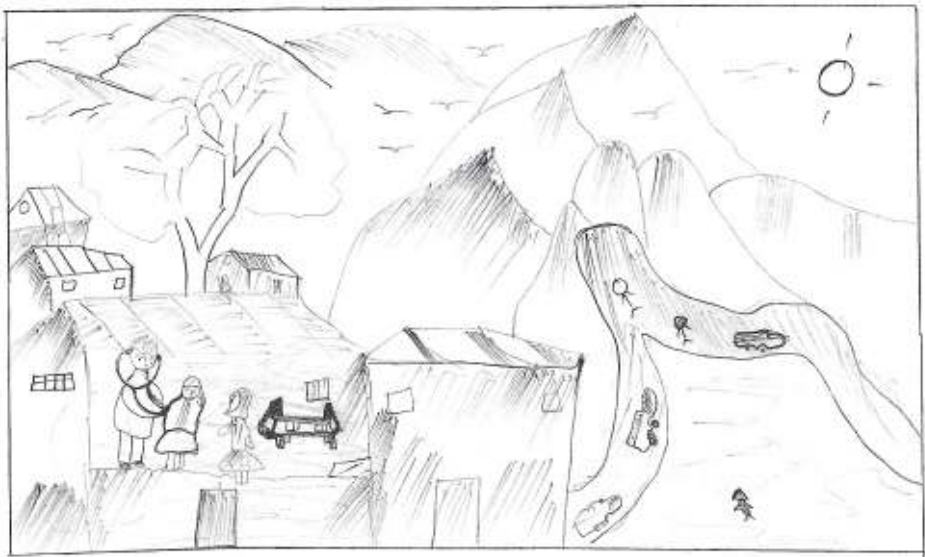


Figure 14. A country scene in which a doctor examines younger sister, while mother looks on, in front of own house (Maharjan boy, age 10, B3).



Figure 15. A person about to offer worship at the temple of the Mother Goddess Kankeshwari, which marks the boundary of the old city of Kathmandu by the Vishnumati river (Khadgi boy, age 9, B3).

There was evidently some influence of textbook essays in this topic as well. Many textbooks have descriptions of villages or neighbourhoods, emphasizing the improvements that have come in recent years and emphasizing the topic of cleanliness (see, for example, Ahearn 2003: 155–156). All the same, as with other topics, the children went well beyond these models in describing their neighbourhoods. Unlike the topic of illness, that of neighbourhood did not tend to impose a narrative structure on what they wrote: rather, what they produced were discursive descriptions.

The name of my *tol* is Wana Bahal. In my *tol* there is another courtyard. In that courtyard there are a lot of Jyapus [Maharjans]. And in Wana Bahal there are many very very nice houses (*thik thikko gharharū*) and a very tall house. In that very tall house there is a gold and silver shop. In my *tol* there are three big dogs and other small dogs. On the right and left sides there are two tall flowerpots. In

↗ which was followed by a very large number of studies by Gutschow (see especially Gutschow 1982) and others (e.g. Herdick 1988). One very attractive study of the Newar town of Panauti, which did make use of children's drawings to establish that it was not just adults who perceived their town in terms of sacred markers, was Barré *et al.* (1981: 37, 91). Stoddard (1979), a geographer, attempted a quantitative survey to test perceptions of the Kathmandu Valley as a mandala. His short article established that there is no Valley-wide agreement among ordinary lay adults on the members of sets of Ganesh and Narayan (Vishnu) shrines. This finding is hardly surprising since these lists of divinities are priestly constructs that play no role in ordinary people's lives.

front of one of the flowerpots there are two seats. One seat is broken and the other is not broken. Flowers have been planted in the two flowerpots. One of the flowers is a creeper and the other is small. In my *ṭol* there is a big temple to Lord Buddha. And on the right side of Lord Buddha is a Ganesh and to the left a small temple to Kumar. Near the big Lord Buddha there is a place for singing hymns. In front of a well there is a waterspout. There is a lady I have to call grandmother who always gets up in the morning and cleans my locality. Since we thought that she should not be the only one to take this trouble, it was decided that on Saturday each house should send one person to clean (the locality). Some sweep, some clean up. Sometimes they come to take the dirt (*phohar*) from our *ṭol*. They clean up and put all the dirt in one place. The people whose job it is to throw away the dirt (*dhulo*), take it all away.

(Vajracharya girl, age 13, A5, N)

A similar but shorter essay ran as follows:

The name of my *ṭol* is Ila Nani. This *ṭol* is big and also good. There is a temple there. This temple is called the 'Golden Temple'. There is a park (*caur*) in this *ṭol* and there are four trees in this park. There are also many dogs. There are many very big houses. People of Bajracharya, Shakya, and many other castes (*jāt*) live there. There is also a well there and everyone comes to take water from that well. Water for offering to the god is also taken from that same well. By the god's blessing (*jñapti*) the water never dries up in that well.

(Napat girl, age 12, A5, N)

A simple account ran as follows:

- (1) My house is in Chakupat.
- (2) My mother and father are in our house.
- (3) There are gods in our house.
- (4) There are Shrestha caste people in our neighbourhood.
- (5) Near my house many people come to perform *pūjā* on a Saturday.
- (6) There are many temples in my neighbourhood.
- (7) There are many people in our neighbourhood.
- (8) In our neighbourhood there are many ricefields.
- (9) Near our house there is a pipal tree.
- (10) Near our house there are ricefields.
- (11) There are also dogs in our house.

(Tandukar girl, age c.9, A3, N)

An essay by a girl in class 5 (see Figure 16) used the same technique without the numbers:

My *ṭol* is good.

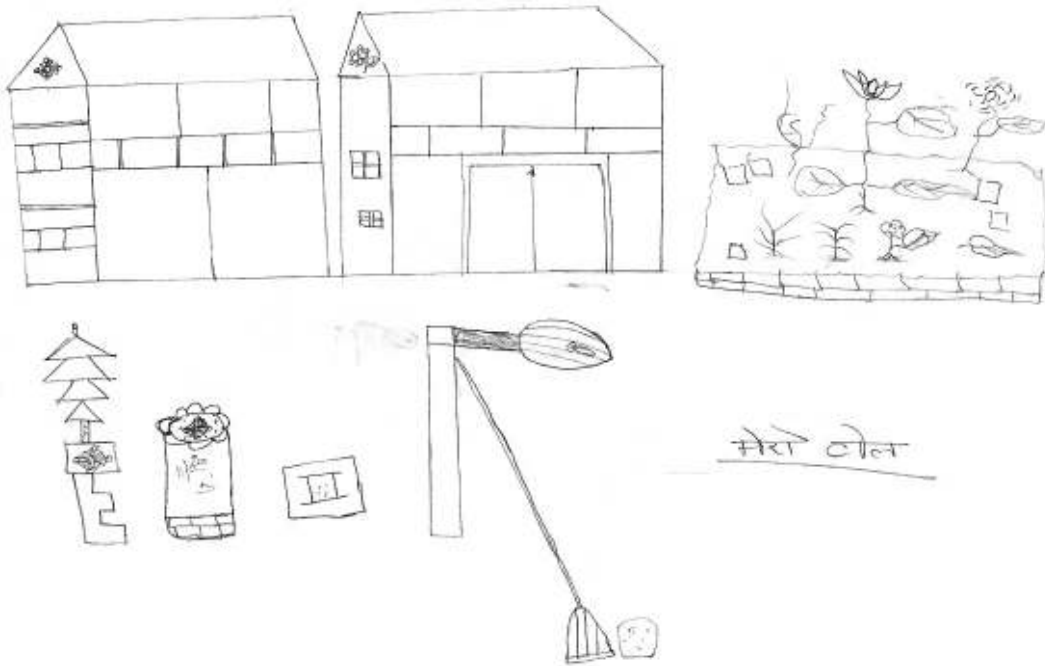


Figure 16. A picture of Kuti Bahal, labelled as 'my *tol*', showing symbols of gods in the foreground left, and a square pit for performing fire sacrifices. Foreground middle shows a street lamp, with houses behind (Shakya girl, age 11, A5).

In my *tol* there is a temple.

There are many kinds (*kisim*) of people in my *tol*.

There are Dhakhwas,³⁶ Bajracharyas, Shakyas etc. in my *tol*.

There is a park (*pārk*) near my *tol*.

Some of the people of my *tol* are good (*sajana*) and some are bad (*kharāb*).

There is a school (*pāṭhśālā*) near my *tol*.

The name of my *tol* is Kuti Bahal.

Because in the old days they used to flatten (*kutāune*) beaten rice here, it is called Kuti Bahal.

There is a garden in my *tol*.

In my *tol* there are various kinds of flowers.

There is a big house near my house.

You can see all around (lit. all places can be seen) from my house.

(Shakya girl, age 11, A5, N)

For those living in large courtyards, the recreation areas in the middle were often the most important thing to describe:

36) One rich and influential lineage of Shakyas in Nag Bahal uses its lineage name, Dhakhwa (literally 'drum face'), as a surname.

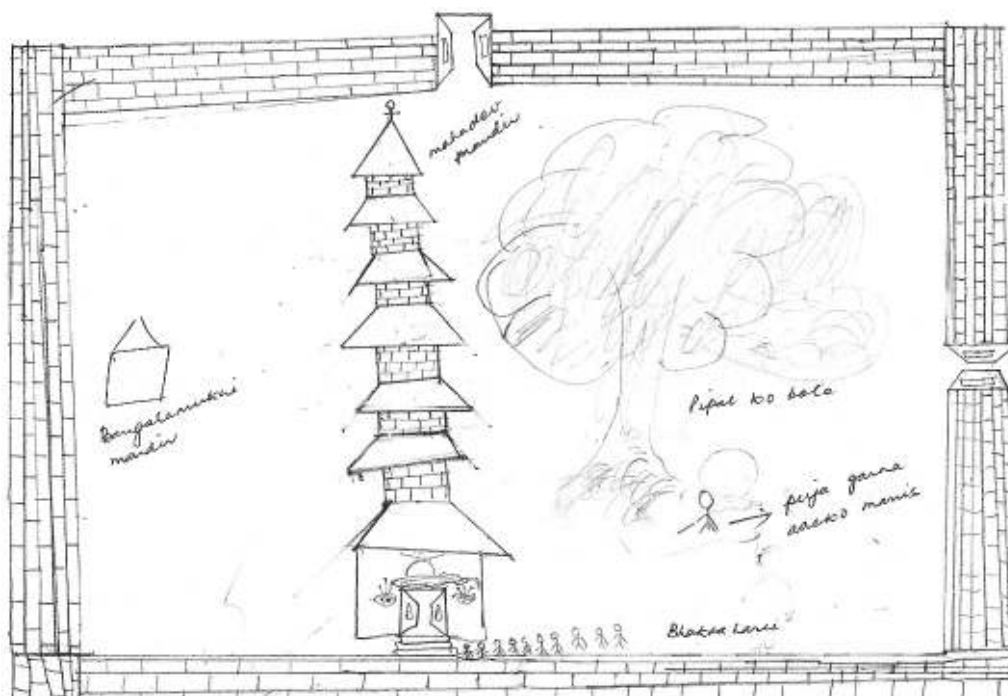


Figure 17. The sacred compound of Kumbheshwar Mahadev. A pipal tree is shown as are devotees entering the main temple. The position of the goddess Bagalamukhi's temple has been added in pen by my assistant, Saruna Shrestha (Maharjan boy, age 9, A3).

My *tol* is Nag Bahal. Nag Bahal is near Patan Dhoka. There is a park (*pārḱ*) in Nag Bahal. In the park many-coloured flowers are growing. Our elders (*bāje*) don't let us pick those flowers. Because those flowers were put there to make it look good (*sajāunako lāgi*). If those colourful flowers were not there, it wouldn't be beautiful (*rāmro*). If it wasn't good, people coming from outside would make fun [of us]. There are also gods in that park. And there are also trees. In that park there is also a pond. In that pond there are colourful fish. In my *tol* many people in many different ways have fun and play.

(Shrestha girl, age 12, A5, N)

In some cases the local sacred site was so overwhelming that it dominated the child's narrative. In the next case it is the impressive five-roofed temple of Kumbheshwar (Shiva-Mahadev), one of the oldest temples in the Kathmandu Valley, and its sacred compound:

My neighbourhood is Kumbheshwar. In my Kumbheshwar there are many gods. In our Kumbheshwar there are many Maharjans. In my neighbourhood many people come, usually on a Thursday, with coconuts, rice, incense, red powder, and so on, to worship (the goddess) Bagalamukhi. Before many people used to come

on a Saturday. Now the crowds come on a Thursday. In my neighbourhood I have many friends. Many come to play in my Kumbheshwar. I also go to offer *pūjā* to Kumbheshwar. It is fun to play in my Kumbheshwar *ṭol*. In my Kumbheshwar there is a pond filled with water which has come down from Gosainkund.³⁷⁾ People drink this holy water that has flowed down from Gosainkund. Near this holy water there are also gods. I also drink this water. And I take a little of this holy water back to my house. It is not allowed to bring cycles and motor-cycles inside Kumbheshwar. There are also stone water spouts in Kumbheshwar. There is a garden. There is a 'club' [meeting house] there. People come to hold feasts in that 'club'. In Kumbheshwar there is also a 'kailash'.³⁸⁾ In 'kailash' there is a Mahadev (statue). There are also nettles next to that Mahadev. It is slippery on (the steps to) Kumbheshwar's stone spouts. People offer money to Kumbheshwar and other people collect it. There are many people in Kumbheshwar.

(Maharjan boy, age 9, A3, N)

The picture which accompanies this account is dominated by the temple (given seven roofs instead of its actual five) and its brickwalled compound (see Figure 17).

Other accounts also sometimes gave a large place to gods, even if not all in a single site (see Figure 18):

The name of my *ṭol* is Ikhache. In my *ṭol* there are many people who speak Nepal Bhasha (*newā bhō hālipi yakwa du*). In my *ṭol* there are not a lot of dogs. There is a *ṭol* committee in my *ṭol*. My *ṭol* is also called Alko Hiti. There are Ananda Baha, a *bahi*, and a *bācā*.³⁹⁾ In Ananda Baha there is a temple. In the *bācā* there is a statue of Namasangiti. In the water spout area [Alko Hiti] there is [a temple of] Ganesh. There are also (statues of) Sarasvati, Lord Buddha, and Mankamana. There are never fights in our *ṭol*.

(Vajracharya girl, age 12, A5, NBh)

The account of another girl from the same *ṭol*, while agreeing with the general description of gods, contradicted this last sentence:

My *ṭol* is called Ikhache. There are many temples in my *ṭol*. There are also many gardens. In our *ṭol* there is a lot of shouting/fights (*hahallā*). In front of the *ṭol* there is also a *bahi* [spelt *bai*]. In this *bahi* there is a temple to Gautam Buddha. One day the Gautam Buddha statue was stolen from this temple. Now a statue of Gautam Buddha has been placed there again. In the *bahi* in our *ṭol* there are many

37) This is a reference to the local belief that the spring which wells up inside the Kumbheshwar temple compound comes directly from the lake, Gosainkund, a pilgrimage site holy to Lord Shiva, which is high in the Himalayas to the north of Kathmandu.

38) This is the name of a flat grassy area behind the meeting house. 'Kailash' is the name of Shiva's heaven and is identified with the holy mountain of the same name in Tibet.

39) These refer to different Newar Buddhist courtyards in the neighbourhood (see Locke 1995: 50, 207–8).

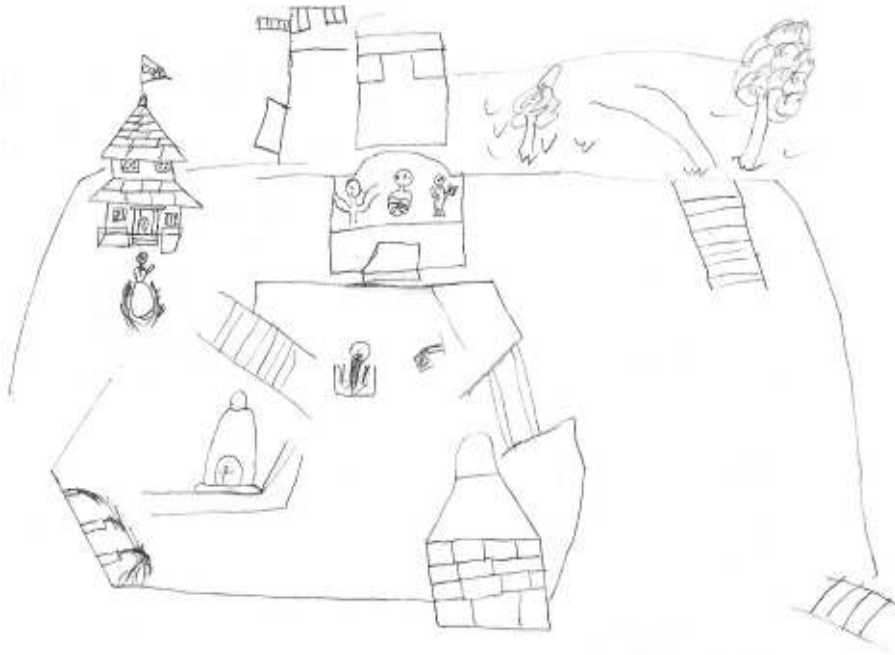


Figure 18. Alko Hiti, a famous water spout. The three main spouts can be seen bottom left, the Ganesh temple top left. At the back of the sunken area the three gods, Jogini, Buddha, and Sarasvati, can be seen from left to right (Vajracharya girl, age 12, A5).

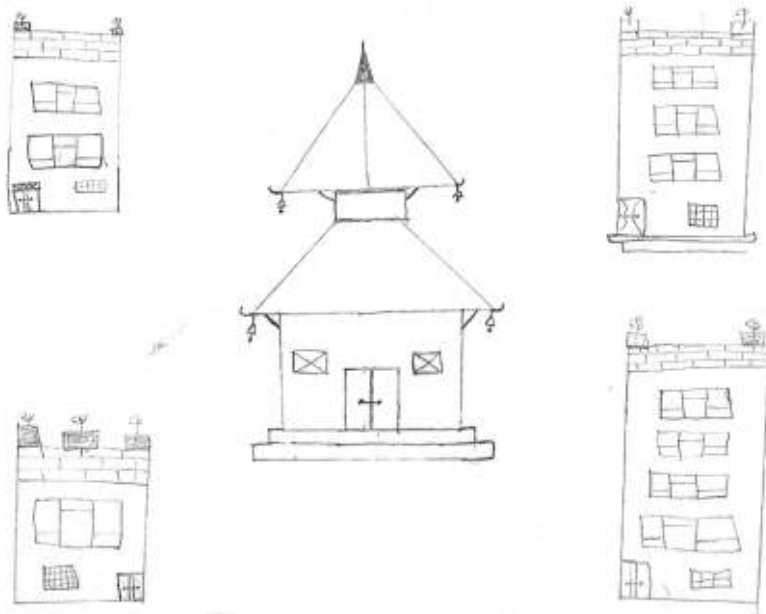


Figure 19. The Ganesh temple at Alko Hiti, with Newar-style houses (Shakya girl, age 13, A5).



Figure 20. Ananda Bahal, near Alko Hiti, showing the main temple [to the Buddha] and the terraced houses forming the courtyard (Vajracharya boy, age 12, A5).

different kinds of flower. In this *tol* people (gather to) play drums. In our *tol* there is a very big stone water spout [Alko Hiti]. Behind these spouts there is also a temple of Ganeshji. And it is necessary to worship this Shiva-Ganeshji first of all. Ganeshji is the most important ('biggest') (god) of all. In front of that Ganeshji's statue there is also a statue of Bhimsen.

(Tandukar girl, age 12, A5, N)

The fact that this girl singled out Ganesh as the most important god can be connected to her caste background. It is highly unlikely that any high-caste child would have considered Ganesh more important than Bhagavan Buddha or Shiva-Mahadeva.⁴⁰⁾

It may be possible to discern a middle-caste perspective on gods in the following essay also, which moved almost seamlessly from reproducing the normative message about neighbourhood cleanliness to considering the local gods, and then on to a distinctly unscientific rationale for worshipping them. The essay also remarkable for the fact that the student wrote entirely intuitively (i.e. by ear and evidently without previous training) in Nepal Bhasha:

40) Purna Shakya has pointed out to me the possibility that this girl could have been intending to say that Ganesh is the most important god *in Alko Hiti*, which all locals, whether Buddhist or not, would agree on.

My *tol* is clean and well organized (*saphā sudhār*). In my *tol* there is a temple and that temple is of the Buddha. We do *pūjā* in that temple and our house is next to that temple. In my *tol* houses are next to each other. In my *tol* we have two or three houses with iron window grills (*viling*). My *tol*'s name is [...]. There are various gods (*jyopini* [sic]) in my *tol*. If we don't worship those gods, they will cause us afflictions (*punā haī*). That's why we have to worship them every day [...repeats].

(Maharjan boy, age 11, A5, NBh)

Many of the children did not mention different castes or ethnic groups, even in response to the prompt, 'What kind of people are there in your neighbourhood?' A few wrote that there were bad people who take things from children or that there were rich people and poor people. As Table 2, p.43 below, shows, proportionately more children from school B mentioned castes or ethnic groups than those of school A. It is possible that this is because the children of school B all live in highly diverse localities, whereas at least some of those at school A are Shakyas and Vajracharyas from the area around the school where their own caste is overwhelmingly the majority. However, the numbers involved in this study are so small, and the project design so simple, that the sensible conclusion would be to suspend such judgements, pending more sophisticated and detailed enquiry.

Among those who did mention castes or ethnic groups, most just listed them. Some made lists that included groups of different orders: "There are people of various *jāt*, for example Maharjan, Manandhar, Newa, Shirestha [Shrestha], Jyapu, etc." Normally all of these would be considered Newars (though it is possible that the student had picked up on the Sweepers' habit of taking 'Newa' as a surname), and 'Jyapu' is simply an alternative to 'Maharjan'. But in confounding groups of different levels, the children were doing no more than adults often do.

Some children in Lalitpur were certainly reproducing their parents' concerns about newly arrived outsiders living in rented accommodation in what not long ago were exclusively Newar quarters of the city:

In our *tol* there are many people who have come to live on rent. They are badly behaved (*baṭmās*). Our *tol*'s name is Chuko Bahal. The old people tell off (*gāli garnu*) the people who have to live on rent. In our *tol* there is a lot of dirt (*phohar*). There is a well in our *tol*. The water of that well is dirty (*phohar*). We do not drink the water from that well. Other people come to drink the water from that well. The level of that well water is going down.

(Vajracharya girl, age 11, A5, N)

Two other girls, one a Shakya, one a Maharjan, sitting on the same bench as this one, produced similar accounts, though about different neighbourhoods:

My *tol* is good. These days the roads have also become good. Our *tol* is Su Bahal. Many people have come to live on rent in our *tol*. Many people live outside.

These days there is a lot of trouble because of water. The people who have come to live on rent are very quarrelsome (*cak cake*). They are villagers. They bring dirt (*phohor*) into our *tol*. Near our house is a well. We have to take that water. Everyone, in every house, washes their clothes. Everyone sits outside in the sun and chats. There are also fine houses in our *tol*. Two or four of us get on together and play near our home. Day after day we study and then we play.

(Shakya girl, age 13, A5, N)

Nowadays the roads are good. Our *tol* is Talachen. In our *tol* many people have come to live on rent. They are extremely quarrelsome (*cak cake*). They make our *tol* dirty (*phohar*). They make it dirty in front of my house also. There is a well near our house. Anybody can come and use that well. We play with friends (*sāthibhai*) (there). The people living on rent also come take water and make a mess there (*phohor garera jāncha*). I play, study, and write with my friends. We study, write, and play every day.

(Maharjan girl, age 11, A5, N)

A Bahun girl, whose family had migrated from Bara in the Tarai, reversed these negative views of incomers and reproduced local high-caste stereotypes of the (local, indigenous) Maharjans (Jyapu, the Newar farming caste):

[...] Many people live in my neighbourhood. My *tol* is not dirty (*phohar*). Many Jyapus live in my *tol*. These Jyapus are extremely petty-minded (*chuccā*). Some of the Jyapus seem to understand how to behave (*kunai jyāpu sukhka duḥkha bujhne khālkā chan*) and some do not. Some Newars also live there. Bahuns also live in my *tol*. The Bahuns are extremely well behaved (*jāti*). My *tol* is a *tol* with a good, clean, and beautiful environment [...].

(Bahun girl, age 12, A5, N)

Accounts from school B tended to emphasize cooperation between different castes in the locality:

About my neighbourhood (*twāḥ*): My *twāḥ* is Chauni Malchatar. There are people of various castes living there. The people in our *twāḥ* are very good. If anything happens to anyone others will come and help. There are beautiful vistas (*sin*) to be seen in our *twāḥ*. You can see Swayambhu from our *twāḥ*. People of the Jyapu, Brahman (*barmu*), and Shirestha [Shrestha] castes live in our *twāḥ*. There are various houses in our *twāḥ*. There is a hospital in our *twāḥ* as well. Next to it there is also a barracks. People who are very ill are admitted to that hospital. The hospital is very big. In our *twāḥ* there is a barracks. Army (personnel) live there. Our *twāḥ* is a very beautiful place.

(Maharjan girl, age 13, B5, NBh)

Essays from school B also mentioned friends in the locality more often:

My *twāḥ* is good. Various types of people live in my *twāḥ*. Some are Maharjans, Shresthas, Vajracharyas, Prajapatis, and apart from them, there are others as well. The people who live in our *twāḥ* help us. If they need it, we also help them. I go to play with my friends who live in my *twāḥ*. My friends also come to play with me. If we have a feast in our house we invite the people who live in our *twāḥ* and give them food and drink. If they have a feast they do the same to us. The name of my *twāḥ* is Chagal.

(Maharjan girl, age 10, B3, NBh)

Another girl wrote:

In my *twāḥ* there are people of various kinds. In my *twāḥ* I have friend of various castes. In my *twāḥ* there are Parbatiyas (*khenī*), Newars, Magars, Gurungs, Sherpas (*serapā*). There are also gods in my *twāḥ*. There is also a maize shop in my *twāḥ*. In my *twāḥ* we play marbles and *cungī*.⁴¹⁾ People come to worship the gods in my *twāḥ*. There is also a potato shop in my *twāḥ*. There are also rich people (*dupī*) in my *twāḥ*. In my *twāḥ* there is a cloth shop. The name of my *twāḥ* is Janbal (Jana Bahal). In my *twāḥ* there is a shoe shop.

(Shrestha girl, age 10, B3, NBh)

One essay described people taking money from children:

My *ṭol* is good. Certain people in my *ṭol* using bullying behaviour (*dādā giri dekhāera*) to steal money from children. But there are not many bad people in my *ṭol*. People come from other *ṭols* to play in my *ṭol*. I have many friends in my *ṭol*. I have fun playing with my friends in my *ṭol*. I play ball and cricket in my *ṭol*. The name of my *ṭol* is Malchatar, Chagal, Chauni.

(Shrestha boy, age 13, B3, N)

A girl whose father was a goldsmith in the heart of old Kathmandu wrote as follows:

Tamangs (*lāmāta*), Newars, and Indians (*marsyāta*) live in my *twāḥ*. There are also lots of gods in my *twāḥ*. There is a bell. There are many dogs and many people in my *twāḥ*. In my *twāḥ* the Indians sell saris. In my *twāḥ* the Newars sell silver and gold. There are different kinds of houses in my *twāḥ*. There are motorcycles parked in my *twāḥ*. I have friends in my *twāḥ*. There are many children. There are photographers in my *twāḥ*. In my *twāḥ* there are different kinds of shop. The name of my *twāḥ* is Makhan Bahal.

(Shakya girl, age 10, B3, NBh)

41) *cungī* refers to a 'ball' made of strips of thin rubber, and the game, very popular with children in the Kathmandu Valley, consists in keeping it in the air with one's feet for as long as possible.

As can be seen from the above examples, in most cases caste and ethnicity either were not mentioned, or were mentioned in a baldly factual way, or, in a small minority of cases, were mentioned in combination with negative stereotypes. One exceptional account was produced by a 7-year-old boy, whose articulate comments on the family and illness have already been quoted above (pp. 16, 26–27). He evidently already had a detailed sociological view of his own society, such as one would expect from a knowledgeable adult:

My locality is called Sethu Ganesh. There are many Maharjans who live there. My locality is called Sethu Ganesh because the Sethu Ganesh temple is there. The old people of an area a little higher up than ours, Chyasal, tell us about the stories of the appearance of our Ganesh. [Before] there were not so many people here. There are many peasants who live here. There are not many rich people here. In this locality there is one MP [Member of Parliament] and one old leader called Asa Ram Shakya and one IGP [Inspector-General of Police]. The temples here usually have *pūjā* performed on a Tuesday. The Maharjan, Vyanjankar, and Tandukar castes (*jāt*) have their lineage deities (*kul devatā*) here. There is also a temple to Gorakhnath and an Akash Bhairav. At the Akash Bhairav a man of the Poda [Sweeper] caste sacrifices a wild pig every year. There are many rice paddies here. This temple is called Sethu Ganesh because at Indra Jatra a temple of white silver is brought. There is no priest at this temple. Because there is no [Brahman or other high-caste] priest, elders have appointed a Poda to be there at Dasain, and people come at Dasain and take blessings from this Poda. These Podes are [also] the priests at Sika Bahil [the goddess Chamunda].

(Shrestha boy, age 7, A3, N)

One girl, a Gurung from a Christian family which had migrated from the hills, produced a scathing critique of village life, quite different from anything any of the other children wrote. She was possibly influenced by radical political ideas and certainly by the general devaluation of 'backward' villages implied in the development rhetoric pushed by government, foreign donors, and political parties alike:

Our village: Around our village there is scarcity of many things. In our village and village house there is no electric light. Instead of electric light we use paraffin lamps (*tukī*). Thus there are fewer schools, and even if there are schools, they don't teach well. Village brothers and sisters pass their life in darkness. Our village brothers and sisters have to climb steeply up and down in order to eat twice a day. If they don't do this they can't even eat once a day. Here there is also an old custom that village sisters, if they have studied a lot, marry with low (lit. 'small') castes. In the villages (*gāūghartira*) some rich people are also in the habit of despising (*hepne*) those who are poorer than themselves. Also some moneylenders (*mukhyā*) in the villages, when they give help to peasant brothers (*kisān dājubhāī*), make the capital to be re-paid (*rakam*) greater than the money they have actually

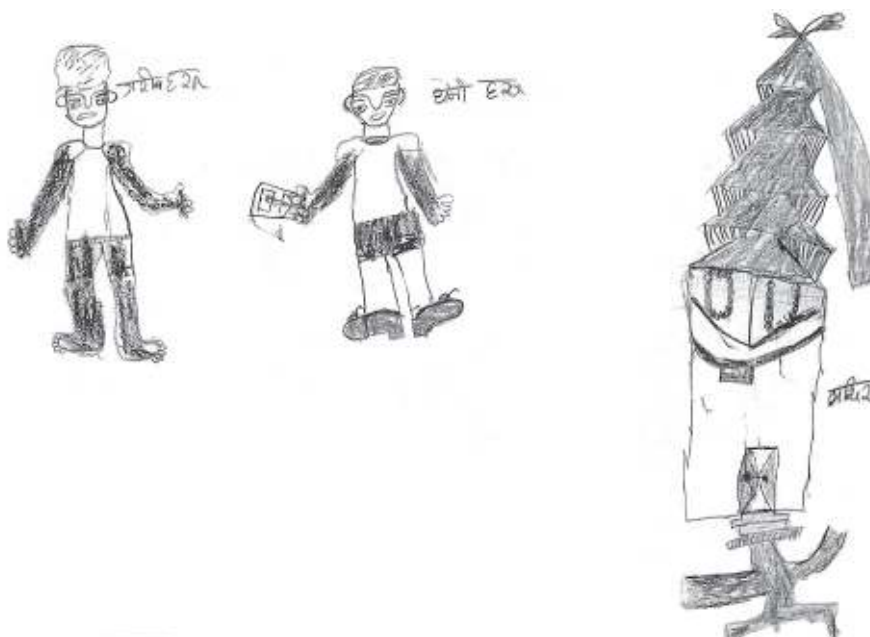


Figure 21. The poor and the rich and a local Ganesh temple. Note that the representative of the poor has no shoes and the rich boy holds some kind of electronic device in his hand (Maharjan boy, no age recorded, A3).

lent and when the village brothers cannot repay the money they have taken, those people kick them out of the village.

(Gurung girl, age 11, A5, N)

The only essay similar to this was a repetitive but clearly heartfelt account of rich and poor by a boy from a locality of Lalitpur known for its leftist sympathies:

In our locality there are poor people. In our locality many of the poor have no money. Because the poor don't have enough to eat, how much suffering they have. These poor people have to live without enough to eat. In our locality the dogs often bite the poor people. In our locality because the poor don't get to eat, they die [...]. We have to give money to the poor freely. Only after giving the poor money [should] the rich send the poor away. In our locality how many rich people with enough to eat there are!⁴²⁾

(Maharjan boy, age not recorded, A3, N)

This boy's picture of his neighbourhood showed the local Ganesh temple and two figures, one labelled as 'the rich', with shoes, and one as 'the poor', without shoes (see Figure 21).

42) Throughout this account the word *ghar* (house) is used, but I have translated it as 'locality' rather than 'house'.

Table 2. Pictures and essays on 'my neighbourhood'

Class: Mention of:	A3: pictures (n=8)	A3: essays (n=8)	A5: pictures (n=23)	A5: essays (n=23)	B3: pictures (n=10)	B3: essays (n=10)	B5: pictures (n=3)	B5: essays (n=3)
temples	75%	88%	65%	87%	70%	60%	33%	
dogs		63%		39%		10%		
houses	63%	87.5%	91%	58%	100%	30%	67%	100%
wells/waterspouts	25%	50%	13%	43%		30%		
castes/ethnic groups		50% ^a		33% ^b		60% ^c		67%

A blank equals zero.

(a) two others mention rich and poor, and one 'different kinds of people'.

(b) three others complain about incomers (that they are dirty and quarrelsome).

(c) three others mention 'different kinds of people', one bad people who beat children and take away their money.

A summary of how many children mentioned which topics in their essays on their neighbourhood is given in Table 2. It clearly bears out the point made above about the continued salience of temples and sacred sites.

Conclusions

As noted at the outset, the anthropology of children's experience is an understudied field in Nepal. What is presented here, however, is only the smallest snapshot of a narrow range of topics. I have only thin and anecdotal material on children's reactions to TV programmes and to the wider world to which they have increasingly been introduced by them (several children mentioned that they had a TV in their descriptions of their house). As stressed at the outset, a major gap in our understanding of contemporary youth of Nepal still exists, a gap which can only partially be filled by impressionistic and journalistic accounts. Apart from Liechty's work, mentioned above, there is no ethnography of urban Nepali youth to compare to Marie Gillespie's *Television, Ethnicity, and Cultural Change*, which shows, among many other things, how intra-family relationships in the London suburb of Southall are negotiated by South Asian British youth using the plots of the Australian soap opera, *Neighbours*. On rural Nepali youth we are in a slightly better position, thanks to the work of Skinner (1990) and Ahearn (2003).

The material presented here shows, I would suggest, that most children are learning the normative messages about doctors and biomedicine that the school and its textbooks, as part of the larger process of 'development', are imparting.⁴³⁾ Even if

43) Much has been written about the effects of development discourses, which devalue village life (Pigg 1992). Skinner and Holland (1996) demonstrate that many schoolchildren have internalized the development messages which devalue the 'uneducated' and the 'backward', and ↗

some of the children's understandings are in tension with the pro-science and anti-superstition lessons of modernity that they receive at school, for the most part they appear to know that these are two antagonistic ways of understanding the world. The subject of illness is one that immediately engages them and almost of itself imposes a narrative structure on what they write. Within that framework many children were capable of relating what had happened to them and their families with considerable vividness.

Despite the general trend towards the secularization of Nepali life, as far as these urban children's experience of public space was concerned, it still appears to centre on sacred markers. This would seem to be almost as equally true of the children of school B, fewer of whom live in the religiously dense environment of one of the old cities of the Kathmandu Valley. The topic of the neighbourhood did not lend itself to narratives, but many of the children produced interesting and highly descriptive accounts none the less.

The fact that school B was founded and is run in accordance with the ethos of Newar cultural nationalism did not appear to make a big difference to the children at the school—at least not one that showed up in the limited purview of this research project. This suggests that it is the experience of being at school as such, not the particular kind of school or ideology that guides it, that is the most important determinant of the Nepali child's experience—though again this should be tested by further research comparing so-called 'English boarding' schools with government schools in Nepal. Despite this, school B is certainly succeeding in its aim of giving poor children a good education—better than they would otherwise get—and sending them on to other schools with an ability to write in Nepal Bhasa, their own mother tongue.

Finally, the children's accounts of their families—and indeed many of their stories about illness—reveal that they are deeply concerned with intra-household, as well as wider kin, relationships, and that they fully understand hierarchies based on age. Despite the fact that the expressions of love and relatedness were probably framed in terms derived from school textbooks, there is no reason to doubt that in most cases they were none the less heartfelt. Given the small size and limited age-range of the sample, as well as the relatively open and diffuse nature of the questions asked, it would not be possible on the basis of these data to construct a detailed account of how children acquire and experience hierarchy within and outside the family, such as Toren (1990) produced for Fiji. To study how Nepali children experience and comprehend social and familial hierarchy in a time of rapid change and radical uncertainty would indeed be an excellent project. If this article helps to encourage others to carry out further and more systematic research with children in Nepal along these or similar lines, I will consider it to have made a worthwhile contribution.

↗ which identify these states as what happens in villages. Ahearn (2003) is a recent and very full discussion of the issue.

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