

Library
Architectura
NC
552
.C77

TEACHING OF DRAWING

IN

CEYLON

By ANANDA K. ^{entish}COOMARASWAMY, 1877 -
D.Sc. (LOND.,) F.L.S., F.G.S.



REPRINTED FROM THE CEYLON NATIONAL REVIEW
No. 3, P.P. 302—312.

COLOMBO APOTHECARIES CO., LTD., DECEMBER, 1906.

Crintaria

Arch.

8-1-1923

Arch.



May 2, 1924 E.M.

TEACHING OF DRAWING IN CEYLON.

DRAWING both was and still is systematically taught by the superior Sinhalese craftsmen to their apprentices. The first object of this paper is to describe the traditional system of technical training, and the second to make some suggestions regarding the general teaching of drawing in Ceylon subjects as an educational subject.

A regular system of apprenticeship prevailed amongst all the Sinhalese craftsmen, but the teaching of drawing and design was confined to the superior division of the artificer's caste, the division from which were drawn the craftsmen working in the four royal workshops (*pattal-hatara*). The work done by these men included architecture, painting, ivory and wood carving, jewellery, and the gold and silver mounting of swords and knives. They also laid out work for the lower craftsmen (founders, stone-carvers, etc.) much as a modern architect may design the accessories of a building for which he is responsible; I do not mean to imply that they always designed everything for them, but they did so in important cases. Observe that each man learnt and practised several kinds of work, though he might excel and specialise in one or two.

As architects, painters and designers, a good knowledge of drawing was essential to these men, and we find a systematic course of instruction in use for the education of apprentices. These were usually the sons of master craftsmen; but the sons of relations and even of outsiders were also received. A man of the proper caste, wishing to apprentice his son to a renowned craftsman, would first find a fortunate hour (*nekat balanawā*), and then proceed to the craftsman's house with his son of about six years old, and one or more servants carrying presents of food and betel leaves on a yoke. The boy is first set to learn drawing; he is given a *yatiporuwa*, or wooden drawing-board covered with a preparation known as *wadi*. *Wadi* is made by grinding together tamarind seed (two palams), coconut charcoal (one palam), iron slag (two palams), and indigo (ten manjaris) with the juice of *kikirindi* leaves (*Eclipta erecta*, L.). This is according to practice; but the mnemonic verse in which particulars are given implies the use of only one palam of the iron slag:

" Neralukaṭu gurut yadaḷut sunkara	na
Potuhēra siyabala eṭa tuṅpalaṅ ge	na
Dasatak pamaṇa mada nil gena abarami	na
Madarada paṭ yusiṅ nimakara gā sonḍi	na"

The ingredients are ground together and mixed with finely powdered quartz (*tiruwānagala*) and smoothly spread on the board and allowed to dry. Upon the board so prepared the pupil learns to draw, using for his pencil the spine of a sea-urchin (*ikiri kaṭuwa*) mounted in a bamboo handle; or failing that, a pointed style of *kumbuk* (*Terminalia glabra*, W. & A.) bark. Now-a-days, ordinary slates and slate-pencils are found to be more convenient.

The first copy is the *waka deka*, or double curve of Fig. 1; the boy has first to trace over again and again the teacher's copy on the *yaṭiporuwa*, very much as European children use transparent slates. After some control of the hand has thus been acquired and the form is deeply impressed on the pupil's mind, he has to draw the same from memory, particular care being taken that he shows the right feeling in drawing the rather subtle type of curve. When he has attained some proficiency, the figure is complicated by the addition of wings (*paturu*); then a 'flower' (*sina mala*) is added at one end (Fig. 2,) and finally the *waka deka* is by means of internal divisions and external additions, made into the designs known as *katuru mala*, *mottak karuppuwa*, and *tiringi talai** (Fig. 3). These are successive complications all based on the original *waka deka*. The ornament which the *tiringi talai* (Fig. 3) is built up is called *liya pata* or *liya pota*; it is constantly used in Sinhalese decorative art, and is of marvellous adaptability; any form or space

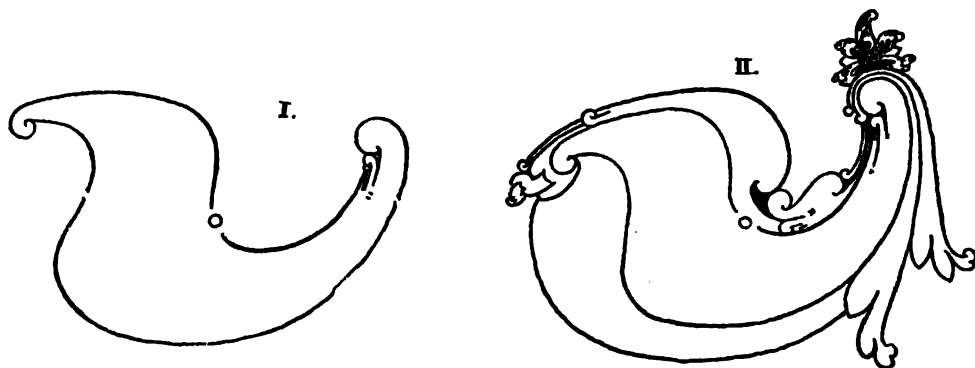


Fig. 1 *Waka deka*, Fig. 2 *Waka deka* with elaboration, (both $\times \frac{1}{2}$).
From a *padimakada pots* (modern).

* The words *mottakkaruppuwa* and *tiringi talai* are of interest as they are probably corruptions of Tamil *moddaik karukku* (blunt or round leaf edge), and *tiriku talai* (twisted blade); I have seen the latter word written *tirikii talai* on a Sinhalese drawing dating from about the end of the 18th century. It is, of course, well known that most or all of the craftsmen are of South Indian origin; this is proved by records of their immigration and settlement, some of their names, their family traditions, the use of technical terms of Tamil origin, and even of Tamil books (in Sinhalese characters), the reverence for and worship of Siva which is preserved in at least some families of craftsmen, and by the fact that the technical books are written in Sanskrit and not in Pali as would have been the case were they of local origin. There can be no doubt that the methods of teaching drawing are essentially Indian.



Fig. 3. *Tiringi talai* (x4).

can be filled with it, though it is typically seen in such places as the tails of birds and mythical animals, especially the tails of the makaras in *makara toran*. The *tiringi talai* itself is not a form used in decoration, but is rather a tour de force or test of skill; when the pupil is able to draw a good example (not from a copy, of course), he is considered to be proficient at this sort of work. A few specially good examples have been handed down in craftsmen's families from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; these, like some working drawings for royal jewellery which I have seen were executed on Dutch paper, which was also used for (the very rare) illuminated manuscripts, of which two good examples were exhibited at the exhibition of Kandyan art in January last. Pattern or copy books (*padimākaḍa pot*) are also used, and I have seen both a modern one, and an early one on Dutch paper, with a cover of paper of Sinhalese make. Old copies were often set also on loose sheets of Dutch or other paper, and not in regular books. The Sinhalese paper was coarse and ill adapted to fine work. Fig. 4 is an example from a modern *padimākaḍa pota*, the same from which Figs. 1 and 2 are taken. Fig. 3 is from an ancient example.



Fig. 4, *Hansa*, ($\times \frac{1}{2}$), from a *padimakada pata* (modern).

The pupil is also taught to draw repeating patterns with a geometrical construction (Fig. 5), and the different types of conventional floral ornament made use of in Sinhalese design. These by the way vary a little in different families, wherein they are traditionally transmitted from generation to generation. The types of *tiringi talai* also vary slightly. There is some opportunity for individuality here; it should not be supposed that the strictly traditional character of the arts makes it impossible to distinguish one man's work from another's.

By this time the boy begins to draw figure and animal subjects; the first of these is always a curious combination of a bull and an elephant, called *usamba-kunjara* (bull-elephant); next in order come the following designs—*chatur-nāri-palakkīya*, (four-women-palanquin), *pancha-nāri-geṭa* (five-women-knot), *sapta-nāri-turangē* (six-women-horse), *ṣat-nāri-torana* (seven-women-arch), *aṣṭa-nāri-rate* (eight-women-chariot), and *nava-nāri-kunjara* (nine-women-elephant). All of these are drawn on the *yaṭiporuwa*, from the teacher's copies; it should however not be forgotten that the object of instruction is not to enable the pupil to copy a design before him, but to enable him (1), to reproduce from memory certain well known designs and figure subjects, and (2), to make use of the traditional elements of design in the decoration of whatsoever varied forms and surfaces he may be called upon to decorate. Of these forms, the five-women-knot is the only one ordinarily used in decoration; the others are, with rare exceptions used only for teaching.

Meanwhile the apprentice learns by heart the Sanskrit *Rūpāvalīya*, containing instructions for the drawing of images of gods and mythical animals; *Sāriputra*, containing instruction for making images of Buddha; and *Vaijayantaya*, a compendium of instruction in the arts, containing for example a detailed description of the 64 kinds of jewels suitable

for gods, kings, and men, the design and quantity of gold required for each; measurements of swords, thrones, dagobas, etc.

Mention must now be made of brush-work. The master painter has complete command of his brush (*teli kūra*) which he uses for laying on flat colour, or as a pencil or pen as required. Brushes for drawing fine lines are made of the awns of *teli taṇa* grass (*Aristida adscensionis*) and are admirably adapted to their purpose. The painter keeps a supply of grasses by him and makes fresh brushes when required. Brushes for laying on flat colour are made of squirrels' or cats' hair, and larger ones of the ærial roots of *weṭakiya* (*Pandanus*), frayed out at one end. These brushes, like the colours, and everything connected with their work, are made by the painters themselves. This control of all his tools is a great advantage to the painter, and it would tend to self-reliance and independence if children in schools could in the same way be taught to make some of the tools required for their work; these home made appliances are not only cheap, but good; for I suppose no sort of brush is more excellent of its kind than one made from *teli taṇa*. In filling a given space, the decorative forms are first drawn in yellow with a brush of medium size, and then outlined in red or black with a fine stiff brush. Now-a-days a light preliminary sketch in pencil is often made, but a good painter relies mainly on his brush, and in vihara work entirely so.

The apprentice learns to use the brush by practising on unimportant work and in filling in details and completing work laid down (*lakunu karanawā*) by the master. If the master is engaged on the decoration of a vihara there will be no lack of minor work which can be executed by pupils while he himself is busy with the most important and difficult parts. The pupil, like the pupils of the painters of Mediæval Europe, thus gets his hand in by completing the easier parts of real work in progress, instead of on the one hand attempting too early to execute individual work of the most difficult sort, or on the other of perpetually working at uninteresting copies of no permanent value.

So much for a matter of fact account of the methods of technical instruction actually in use amongst Sinhalese craftsmen.

It should be pointed out that in the case of such pupils as we are considering, a general education is imparted at the same time, similar to the education given in pansala schools. Reading, writing and arithmetic are thus taught; the latter is essential for the purpose of the astrological calculations required to determine favourable times for the commencement of important works, and for the understanding of the measurements given in the technical books referred to. The rules for drawing figures necessitate the construction and use of scales. A good deal of geometry of a practical character is also learnt in connection with the geometrical constructions of repeating patterns. The master craftsman has thus a

small school where technical instruction is given in addition to an ordinary education.

The relation between master and pupil remains to the last, one of affectionate reverence. It is customary for the pupil to offer whatever he may earn to his teacher, who unless specially asked, returns the greeting and the gift with the same grave courtesy with which it is offered. A friend of mine, now over 50, tells me that he always observes this custom with his father (now over 80), who was his teacher. The system is indeed mainly one of hereditary transmission; and though other pupils are admitted the master is loth to reveal his last secrets save to a son, or perhaps to a faithful pupil at the completion of his course. If the pupil has been an outsider, his father has from time to time made presents to the teacher, and at the conclusion of the period of instruction some more substantial gift such as a buffalo. As the pupil grows up however, he continues to work for and with his teacher, and thus the tradition is perfectly transmitted. It is indeed a strange thing for anyone used to the eclecticism of modern Europe to be brought face to face with strong living traditions in this way; for in Europe "whatever of art is left which is in any sense the result of continuous tradition is, and long has been, so degraded as to have lost any claim to be considered art at all"; while the only art existing in Ceylon, worthy the name of art, is strictly traditional.

It would be difficult to lay too much stress on the memory element in the above described technical training. The object of instruction is not to enable the artist to copy natural objects, but to enable him to decorate a given surface or object by making use of traditional decorative elements stored in his mind. These elements are, as it were, the parts of a puzzle which the artist is ever rearranging. Do not suppose that because nature is not *copied*, there is any lack of feeling for natural forms; the most conventional Sinhalese art is expressive of nature throughout. That is, the dependance of ornament (except purely geometrical ornament), on natural forms is never for a moment forgotten. Floral ornament is always logical and expressive of growth; the birds and squirrels drawn amongst the foliage also indicate an appreciation of natural beauty. We get indeed *more* nature than a mere *copy* of 'nature' would give us, because we are given human nature as well as wild nature. Natural forms have sunk into the national consciousness and are re-expressed in the traditional art.

Now it is time to enquire whether from these traditional methods can be gathered anything that will be of use for the teaching of drawing in Ceylon schools. In comparing the school methods with the traditional ones, it must be noted that the latter constitute a technical training for a special purpose, whereas drawing in schools is primarily an educational

subject. Thus the idea in teaching drawing in schools, is not to train up a generation of decorative artists, but to provide Everyman with some training of hand and eye, some practice in the habit of observation and in accurately remembering what has been observed, and last, but not least something of that part of 'culture' which we call 'taste.' At the same time it would not be possible to think highly of a course of instruction which should put the pupil out of touch with the fully developed decorative art of his own land, or which could not be made the basis of further and technical instruction for those who require it. It is thus apparent that while the traditional methods are not suited for wholesale adoption in schools, it is likely that useful hints can be gathered from a consideration of them; and it is certain that if they are completely ignored, the last-mentioned undesirable results are bound to follow.

The present drawing code is, of course, old-fashioned and unsatisfactory even from the European point of view; and it is certainly in no respect specially modified or adapted to local conditions. The monotonous drawing of straight lines and rectangular figures is alone enough to disgust an intelligent child, who very properly desires to use a ruler for this purpose; and as a matter of fact he should be taught to do so, as well as to use compasses, and to make very simple geometrical patterns with the aid of these tools. Paper ruled in large squares might also be used for a limited amount of drawing straight lines freehand, but this stage may be left long before anything like perfection is attained. The drawing of straight lines freehand is far from easy, and by no means interesting and is not in itself a particularly useful accomplishment.

At the same time children may be encouraged to draw from memory in their own way anything that has interested them; if they can be allowed to use one or two pure colours (not shades), so much the better.

Simple brushwork might also be introduced, that is flat tinting with colour—the fine outlining might be too difficult at this stage. An attempt to teach what is generally known as 'brushwork' in England would probably be less successful; I would suggest that 'brushwork' in Ceylon should be held to mean (1) flat tinting and (2) outlining or drawing with a fine brush (preferably home made), with a proviso that teachers able or anxious to teach what is more usually understood by 'brushwork' *i.e.* *blobs*, should be allowed to do so.

So far I have had in mind the work of 'infants' preceding a stage which is comparable with that at which I have described the painter's apprentice as beginning. For this first stage an upward limit of 7 or 8 years might be fixed. A small grant should be given, otherwise nothing will be taught; if a larger grant is given for later stages teachers will not be tempted to keep back older children at this elementary work, in which perfection cannot legitimately be looked for.

In a more advanced stage, for children seven or eight years old, simple freehand drawing may be treated more systematically, and here I would suggest taking a hint from the local methods, and setting the child first to trace, and afterwards to draw from memory simple curved forms ; not merely mechanical curves, but perhaps the actual *waka deka* and its simpler developments. I would then proceed to the copying of simple decorative forms, the elements of Eastern, and, in Sinhalese schools, especially Sinhalese design, both geometrical and floral ; the child should learn the names of these forms and be able to reproduce them from memory ; an opportunity for 'dictation drawing' would be thus provided. The real meaning of *design* can also be taught, by the construction of simple geometrical forms and their combination with the floral forms already referred to.



Fig 5. *Tundan weda* : (hasty sketch for a brocade).

A special feature is made of this kind of work (*tundan weḍa*) by Kandyan craftsmen amongst whom any well trained man can at a moment's notice turn out such a perfect bit of design as that reproduced in Figure 5; no one working through the present code is likely even to appreciate, much less to be capable of work of this kind. True, the primary object of school teaching is not the production of finished decorative artists, nevertheless the education of taste must not be forgotten, and all educational subjects should be taught in such a way as to lay sound foundations for those who may afterwards need to specialise. There is probably no element of culture in which English educated Ceylonese are more lacking than in taste, and nothing can tend to remedy

this more effectually than an education in the appreciation of the elementary principles of design. "The man who hath here been educated as he ought, perceives in the quickest manner whatever workmanship is defective, and whatever execution is unhandsome, or whatever productions are of that kind; and being disgusted in a proper manner, he will praise what is beautiful, rejoicing in it and receiving it into his soul, be nourished by it, and become a worthy and good man." These words applied originally to the teaching of music but are equally true of drawing. I would also have the children shown examples and reproductions of good design and workmanship, chiefly Eastern, and taught to recognize good work when they see it. I would next proceed to more elaborate decorative designs, still mainly Sinhalese or Indian, with a few good examples from Mediæval European work. Classical forms may be omitted altogether with great advantage. The decorative forms now referred to, the pupil should be first required to copy, and then to draw from memory and finally to apply to some definite form differing from that of the original copy. The last is needful to secure full understanding of a pattern. Amongst the forms so taught should certainly be the Sinhalese *liyapota*,* which is used in the more complex developments of the *waka deka* and is thereafter applied to every kind of work. In examinations I would have the pupils required to reproduce these forms when asked for by name, and to show some (perhaps not very far developed) capacity in applying them. A further development of brush-work can here be introduced with advantage, viz., the drawing of decorative forms in flat tint, and subsequently outlining with red or black, using a fine stiff brush. The number of colours used should be limited.

It will be observed that I have so far made no mention of 'drawing from nature'; this is partly because I think it important that a child's taste should first be educated, *i.e.* he should understand how natural forms have been interpreted in past times, and learn to know good and bad workmanship when seen, and thus have within himself so much of the root of the matter as shall save him from admiring too much the first bright oleograph he sees, or despising good decorative work for the lack of that perspective which if present would be a serious fault. Another reason for postponing until a late stage any attempt at drawing direct from nature is this: we find from the history of art in civilization that there has been a progression from extremely conventionalized towards a naturalistic and realistic art, and that only in comparatively modern times have artists taken to the direct imitation of nature as now understood. The study of child psychology is teaching us that the history of

* Doubtless of Indian origin, and common to all countries which have received their decorative art from India; Siamese *kanaka*.