Subtle Addressing of Caste in the Elite Domestic Architecture of Geoffrey Bawa

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Introduction
Elitism in the Western Sense

The elites in society are an “organized-minority”, which tends to dominate the “unorganized masses” in terms of an array of practices (Mosca, 1939: 53). These could be attributed to their superior intellectual and physical qualities possessed by nature, to inherited or acquired powers, essentially in economic and political spheres (Bottomore, 1993: 102). Through these superior qualities, elites tend to stay at society’s forefront manifesting their prestige, leading way for the masses to follow, while striving to further-widen the existing gulf between the two strata (Bottomore, 1993). Prior to the spawning of Modernity, apex-status of the Western elites was manifested through their royal, noble, cleric, aristocratic or bourgeois positions in society, and in the 20th century they have prevailed as intellectuals, managers of industry or bureaucrats; making these positions in

ABSTRACT
At the epicenter of ambivalent postcolonial decades, reverting back to once-subverted indigenous traditions with the explicit patronage of elites was instigated by nascent architects of Ceylon. The most celebrated domestic architectural rubric of the nation’s post-colonial period is commonly considered as Neo-Regionalism of Geoffrey Bawa. This particular rubric has over the years, been fiercely-defended by numerous academic polemics, labeling it as the most apposite and valid to the contexts of its spawning; and thus, to the nation as a whole.

Then again, it is widely acknowledged that Bawa’s clientele had always been drawn from the country’s elites; of which the bulk being Sinhalese in ethnicity. Sinhalese, the majority population of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) is heterogeneous in nature, which has primordially been assembled of numerous caste-based sub-cultures; operating within the framework of one dominant culture. In a Sri Lankan context where caste is a factor which constantly finds academic inveigling to circumvent inter-caste strife, the paper attempts to divulge what underpins a number of elite domestic projects by Bawa, for Sinhalese elite of Govigama as well as Karava castes. It aims to constitute the respective roles of cultural strands of these groups to have survived, and unravel how they were articulated in Bawa’s domestic architecture.
society the real determiners of most life aspects of masses (Bottomore, 1993: 404). The elite facilitate new political and economic changes in society, or alternatively, these changes take place because of them and their self-centered actions. On the other hand, Pareto’s economic dimension (in Bottomore, 1993: 2) postulates that, economics is a vital aspect that constitutes elitism. The elites epitomize their political power to achieve the economic edge over masses or alternatively, the reverse takes effect, as Mandel (1982: 18-25) points out as it happened through human history. Policies of the so-called “governing or political elites” as Pareto (1960: 1423-1424) refers to them, always strive to reinforce the best interests of its allied-elites of “close coalition”, as Bottomore (1993: 277) suggests. This is achieved through a concretization of an inequitable system that in turn makes and sustains them, with the intension of assuring its posterity.

With dawn of the 20th century, it could be perceived that, merely the elites possessing some combined degree of economic as well as political edge, and occasionally the intellectual edge, became particularly capable of social influence. These abilities consigned them at the elite-apex as the ‘political’ or “governing” elite, along with their immediate circle. The bureaucrats, managers and intellectual elites who merely possessed what their given names suggest, were relegated to immediate lower elite stratum. However, coalition between the apex and this stratum is what kept the system in tact. The sub-elite stratum (the middle class) that formed the liaison between the ensemble of elites and masses is a different and less-influential group altogether (Bottomore, 1993:5). This Western-derived structure of elitism was subsequently imparted on the Ceylonese context via five epochs of Western colonialism. The quasi elite structure that sprung up by deliberate-intermingling of Eastern and Western counterparts during Portuguese and Dutch rules was jettisoned in the late 19th century. This was achieved via a Ceylonese appropriation of a fully-fledged British elite structure analogous to the one above. Roberts (2005: 147-148) affirms this point through his discourse of the late 19th and early 20th century British Ceylon’s newly-acquired western-type liberal occupations (such as lawyers and civil servants etc.), which began to be addressed as “genteel professions”. This ideology in fact, survived though the postcolonial period to the present day in its hybrid forms.

Elite formation in Ceylon:

In medieval Ceylon, Elitism was essentially a factor that had been empowered by feudalism, which in turn was backed by the caste-system. Ceylon had originally received the primordial fourfold Indian caste system with the waves of immigrations that occurred predominantly from Western, Eastern and South-Eastern parts of India, as far as the 9th century B.C. (de Silva, 2008). Dumont in Roberts (1995: 4) suggests that, Sinhalese caste was a “quasi-caste” export from India. He derived this conclusion based on the grounds that “Sinhalese state was ‘markedly bureaucratic’ in nature” and because there was “an extremely fully worked out liturgy’ centered upon the king”, so that the Sinhalese monarch was central to both the “group religion” and to “political and economic life”. With the advent during Anuradhapura period in the 3rd century B.C., of the philosophical doctrine of Buddhism that subverted the concept of caste, Sinhalese consequently developed their unique equivalent to the Indian counterpart. The Royal family, essentially of warrior (Kshatriya) stock (directly traceable to Northern Indian Aryan Royal bloodlines in most occasions), and aristocrats (close relatives of king who were appointed as highest officials), made the uppermost echelons of Anuradhapura period, while the majority of the populace was engaged in paddy cultivation as their main means of livelihood. Even the artisans and service personnel that immigrated with prince Vijaya, and the ones to have done afterwards, were placed at the same level in the social strata as the farmers. Documented evidence such as Mahavamsa – the comprehensive and continuous historical inscription from the 2nd Ct. B.C., of the Buddhist monastery of Maha Vihara of Anuradhapura – makes references to the feeble class distinction between aristocrats and
masses in the historic city, in periods of great prosperity, which saw the culmination of Buddhism. The strong social and economic structures that were ensued during Anuradhapura period perpetuated for a millennia, until Southern Indian invasions prompted the Sinhalese seat of power to shift via Pollonnaruwa, Dambadeniya, Yapahuwa, Gampola, Kurunegala and Kotte, respectively, until Kandy became the concluding destination. Schumpeter’s propagation that, “Social structures, types and attitudes are coins that do not readily melt. Once they are formed they persist, possibly for centuries…,” (Shumpeter, 1942: 12-13), which indeed is affirmative with relation to ancient Ceylon. The essence (the basic structures) of immutable social and economic systems that developed during Anuradhapura was sustained down into the Kandyan period; having survived continuous South Indian and European interventions for centuries. However, the overwhelming South Indian fervor that has always persisted in the backdrop, owing to cultural and trading ties, gradually penetrated this structure. This revived to a substantial extent the once-subverted caste system, by the time the Kandyan Kingdom was formed. Owing to the fact that the Kandyan kingdom remaining independent and discrete from significant outside intervention as late as 1815, studying its social and administrative structures is possibly the best means to conceive the heart of Sinhalese caste system.

Kandyan Elitism

Kandyan social and administrative structures have been addressed by numerous Westerners who sojourned the kingdom during the course of 18th and 19th centuries. Their well-documented yet discursive affairs manifest the socio-cultural, economic and administrative structures as well as architectural practices of the Kandyan provinces before 1796. It is pertinent to mention here that as Kandyan Kingdom was a landlocked and oblivious entity, the only apparent alien influences it received was possibly from the Southern Indian states, South-East Asia, as well as from the Moor (Muslim) traders who freely moved from the coast to the interiors. The maritime regions conversely, were experiencing a rigorous level of globalization in comparison; through Western colonial practices. However, Roberts (1995: 85) affirm that, a very few low caste Sinhalese from the maritime also infiltrated these regions as far as the 18th century as traders. Hence, the possible maritime influence via them is deductively negligible.

When kingdom of Kandy was enjoying a spell of economic and military successes in the mid 17th century, its political, economic and administrative structures were also at their heights. In Kandyan social structure, the cultivator caste majority was seconded only to the Royal caste, to which the King and the immediate family circle belonged. The cultivators, referred to as ‘Govigamas’ that relegated all service castes and artisans to the peripheries of society, was then sub-divided into ‘Radala’ (chiefs), ‘Sitanos’ (nobles) and ordinary peasants (Perera, 1991:57). A faction of cultivators was given high administrative positions on King’s preference as chieftains, in addition to his close relatives, while petty officials or headmen were also drawn from them. It was the highest ranks of administrative and social fields that made Govigamas either Radalas or Sitanos respectively. With relation to the administrative structure, king was considered the supreme ruler of the kingdom who had to assure the protection of Sinhalese culture and state religion Buddhism. Hence, the appropriation of Lord Buddha’s tooth relic symbolized the patronage of the Sangha (the Buddhist clergy), and thus, acceptance of the populace for legitimacy. The administrative machinery functioned on a primordial land tenure system referred to as ‘Raja Kariya’, where all the officials of high and low ranks as well as the cultivator caste peasants were provided with portions of land; to make their livelihoods from paddy cultivation as the “staple food of the people” as John Davy (1969: 207), a British ambassador to the late 18th century Kandyan court, discerned. The sizes of these land allocations were proportional to administrative ranks. The peasants worked these lands and also the ones of their respective overlords’ while “….a fixed share of their produce had to be yielded to their feudal over-lord- generally a land owning chieftain or a Buddhist
On the other hand, certain service castes and artisans in Kandyan Ceylon are believed to have been settled by the Sinhalese kings in the 15th and 16th centuries. Roberts (1995: 32) suggests, for example, that certain Navandanna (smiths) families in the Kandyan provinces are known to have descended from "Pandiyan and other Indian craftsmen". Ralph Peiris (in Roberts, 1995: 48-49) claims that several service castes in the Kandyan provinces had "duel functions". Firstly, they rendered services to economic activities of their specializations and also engaged in agriculture. They were allocated lands to live on and cultivate, persisting as communities in villages; specialized in the manufacturing of different goods and services.viii Secondly, they fulfilled ritualistic roles, which was represented annually at the function of Perahara procession (associated with Esala full moon day - Lord Buddha’s preaching of his first sermon); which is regarded as "a microcosmic representation of all the salient features of Kandyan society", and further, was "a pre eminent representation of the caste system" which acted as "...a validation of the existing hierarchical order" (Roberts, 1995: 6-7). In the eyes of certain Westerners such as Cave (1894: 53-54), such a Govigama-dominated structure facilitated "...the worst excesses of unscrupulous tyrants..." to flourish over masses, operating on "harsh laws of the Sinhalese kings". With relation to the Kandyan system, all such positions that had direct affinity to political and economic means, which allowed the exercising of substantial levels of social influence, could hence be conceived as the ones of Kandyan elites; in the Western sense. All positions below these ranks, yet above the one of cultivator peasants, rationally are of sub-elites; the equivalent of the 20th century middle-class.

Maritime Elitism

Iberian-Portugal from 1498, had gradually composed a vast seaborne Empire in the form of loosely-knit military and trading outposts over the Indian Ocean region, and formed Lisbon as their hierarchical centre. This could be envisaged as the pioneering instigation of Euro-centrism, which was brought to a point of culmination by the 19th century (Perera, 1994: 80). The Portuguese were shortly superseded by Dutch – a Western European capitalist force – that had consolidated to the Eastern colonial forefront by the mid 17th century. Although the Dutch V.O.C managed to completely oust Portuguese from Ceylon, to acquire their maritime possession, they failed miserably to penetrate the interior, owing to the persisting belligerence of the Kandyan Kingdom;ix as it was perched in the most hostile geographic region of the island in the central hill-country.

New additions to the multi-caste Sinhalese society were made between the 13th and 15th centuries, in the form of Karava, Salagama and Durava peoples from India, who were brought down for numerous reasons by various Sinhalese kings (Roberts, 1995: 3). They were eventually assimilated in to the periphery of low country’s Sinhalese social structure, and over the epochs, were relegated to occupations of fishing, cinnamon peeling and toddy tapping respectively.x The pertinent factor is that, all these new castes, were channeled into such occupations of social stigma that affirmed their low status, and not given ritual functions as their predecessor lower castes. It should also be stressed here that, the above occupations generally attributed to them did not apply to all respective caste members, but a majority (Roberts, 1995: 57-58). When the Kandyan Kingdom eventually fell in 1815, and when the entire island was voluntarily ceded to the British crown by a faction of Kandyan chieftains, its centuries of discrete existence was jettisoned. Following the failed Kandyan rebellion of 1818 – led by the auspice of the same group – the primordial privileges enjoyed by them (especially by the elite ranks) were abolished by the British, to relegate them to an oblivious state, which lasted till the 20th century as Roberts (1995: 102) discerns. Following the abolition of Rajakariya (land tenure system) by Colebrook and Cameron commission in 1833, the Kandyan regions of Ceylon, just as the maritime, were gradually absorbed into the world capitalist mechanism of the British Empire, especially through the
plantation industry soon to be introduced to the region. This finally opened up Kandyan regions to the onslaught of Globalization at a time it was experiencing a quantum leap via industrialization and the culmination of European colonialism. With the jettisoning of feudalism and land tenure system, the primordial Kandyan social structure saw a fleeting transformation. Seminally, after 1833, masses were given the franchise to engage in whatever profession they desired, irrespective of their caste. The process of caste manipulation to their benefit, by bending ‘Rajakariya’, had been commenced by Portuguese as well as Dutch in the Maritime Provinces they ruled as Roberts (1995: 51) affirms. This was exalted by British to unprecedented states by the acts of capitalism and consumerism, spawned by the British throughout the 19th century. The British-introduced administrative mechanism which relied on Western education, and especially, certain commercial franchises, enabled certain lower caste groups within the margins of low country Sinhalese society to undergo a fleeting social mobilization (Roberts, 1995: 101). Three castes in particular, Karava, Salagama and Durava (KSD) were responsible for this ascendance within Ceylon’s social hierarchy (Roberts, 1995: 3). By the time Ceylon was granted independence in 1948, the Karava especially, made up the disproportional bulk of 19-20th century Ceylonese bourgeoisie, and even threatened the Govigama political hegemony. These lower castes by this juncture had even infiltrated the sub elite middle-class to a substantial degree. During the postcolonial period, caste distinction was made even feeble by the social mobility instigated through pro-Socialist ideals of subsequent Ceylonese governments. By the time neo liberal economic reforms introduced to the island in 1977, the caste system among the Sinhalese had become a mere sub-cultural trace, perhaps a status symbol to some, which only pertained to alliances of marriage.

In this light as the foremost objective, the paper evaluates how the factor of caste is manifested in the designs by Geoffrey Bawa for the Sinhalese elite class. Another objective is to address how periodic changes (i.e. political, economic and socio-cultural) of the time in question reveal themselves via architecture. The aforesaid objectives are sought via a phenomenological analysis of the case studies in question. The main aim here is to determine whether phenomenology is a suitable theoretical approach to assess such architectural case studies to realize periodic changes reflected via architecture.

Research Methodology

In terms of its selected qualitative research methodology, the study dwells on three primary case studies. To collect information, it relies on collected drawings and photographs in its empirical approach. As an essential part of the aforesaid, a number of in-depth interviews are utilized to close gaps in extant literature. The analysis is carried out by placing the selected building against relevant political, economic and socio-cultural backgrounds of the time in consideration. In terms of interpretation, a phenomenological stance is utilized; similar to that of architectural phenomenologists/theorists.

Findings and Discussions

Sinhalese Elite Houses by Geoffrey Bawa: an Architectural Analysis

It has to be clarified that, all three domestic projects by Geoffrey Bawa addressed here, were commissioned by clients who conveniently fit under the category of postcolonial Sinhalese elite (i.e. governing / political elites) of Sri Lanka. Caste-wise, the first two cases belong to the Govigama caste, and the latter to Karava.

Osmund and Ena de Silva (Aluvihare) House

Ena de Silva’s (Aluvihare) father was Sir Richard Aluvihare, a notable member of Kandyan
Govigama aristocratic elite circle, who became the inspector general of police. They descend from a family line of Disawes and Muhandirams from Matale in the Kandyan provinces, whose documented history dates back to the 17th century. These positions in deed affirm their long prevalence as elites, even before British occupation. In 1938, at the age of sixteen, Ena created controversy by marrying Osmund de Silva of the Karave caste, who was her father's assistant (Robson, 2004: 266).

In late 1950s, the couple hired Geoffrey Bawa to design their Colombo residence. As Robson elaborates the inception of the project, ".... the de Silvas had one foot in the past and one in the future. Ena was conscious of the Aluvihara family traditions, though she hated the colonial-style bungalow that the architect Charles Gomez had built for her father at Aluvihara in 1956. She demanded a house that would incorporate traditional Kandyan features... but she also wanted a modern house..." (Robson, 2004: 74).

According to Robson, inspired by these demands, Bawa responded instinctively to the problem of the compact site: "I remember talking to Ena, seeing her surrounded by all the things she liked. All she wanted was brick walls and a roof. The plan came about largely because she, and consequently I, wanted a private compound that would not be overlooked by the neighbours."


All such accounts illustrating Ena’s desires, and Robson’s affirmation that “Ena took an active part in the design and building process”, manifest the dominance of her Kandyan heritage that apparently relegated the feebler counterpart of her spouse’s, and her desire to articulate it through her comparatively dominant involvement in the project. The evident backing down by Osmund in the whole process could possibly be attributed to his own acknowledgement of the rigour of primordial caste-structure in the country. The design that Bawa devised illustrates overtly, certain vestiges of Kandyan courtyard houses, medieval manor houses such as the Eknelligoda walaawe, Dutch town houses of the maritime and even Roman atrium houses; the most explicit influences arriving from the former two. The plan form is introspective, and forms a pattern of linked pavilions and courtyards disposed around a large central court (meda midula); all contained within a limiting perimeter wall. The ground floor employs a workspace, a living pavilion and a service tract. The net result illustrates something quite innovative: an inward-looking house on a restricted urban site in which spaces that modern elite life styles demand are all clearly defined and separated, but at the same time interconnected. Robson correctly affirms that, the main elements are arranged in layers of increasing privacy as they progress away from the street. The house originally contained a loggia, which was formed by huge timber columns supporting a cane screen, recalling the front porches of trellised early Dutch houses. Behind this, lies a high wall, broken only by openings for the main entrance and carport, which defines a long garden court in front of the first pavilion, serving as a buffer zone amidst the house and facing street. The front pavilion, where the office and studio, the garage and a guest suite are placed, looks onto a large central court occupying the heart of the plan. This is surrounded on four sides by an open loggia. Beyond the central court yard is the main living accommodation, which is a two-storey pavilion. The living and dining areas at the ground level are detached by a stair tower and shrine room, with bedrooms located above. Positioned on the side of the complex is the service tract: two long walls define the servants’ rooms and kitchens, each separated by small courts. The garage is placed at the intersection with the first pavilion. However, the highly articulated and open plan is quite modern in its effect, as it incorporates both traditional (i.e. shrine room) and modern Western functions (i.e. office room) that articulates the hybrid lifestyle of the elite in postcolonial Ceylon. The most conspicuous aspect of the plan is its omnipresent openness and especially, the flowing of space from inside to outside, which articulates an illusion of an infinite space (Robson, 2004:74-75).
The overpowering presence of a tiled roof consists of simple gables and deep overhangs resemble Kandyan and hybrid colonial edifices. All rooms are naturally-ventilated from two sides as Ena specifically insisted on a house without air-conditioning. It is also notable that no glass has been used for specially designed fenestrations that serenade light. The projecting bay windows boxed out with diagonal timber lattice, raised ventilating ridges formed by extended ‘crossover’ rafters, manifest Tropical-Modernist influence that Bawa may have acquired at the AA. In terms of materiality, the generally localized palette adds an overtly vernacular feel to the house. The courtyard is finished in a combination of cobbles and gravel, with four huge grinding stones placed at each corner, and is shaded by a large mango tree and a picturesque plumeria tree. The walls are semi rough cement rendered and finished in stark white, while the floors are covered with semi-rough terra cotta tiles in most places. Hence, the tectonic sense of the house is iconoclastic in comparison to houses of the day. Like all Bawa's early buildings, the house was built during a time of austerity, spawned by import restrictions of pro-socialist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) government. Glass and steel were expensive and modern fittings were almost impossible to obtain. The architect was prompted to epitomise locally-produced materials because these were all that were available but this restriction encouraged him to study how materials had been used traditionally, inspiring him to be innovative and inventive. Architectural features such as polished satinwood columns affirm this statement, and add on to the notion of being true to materials. Bawa also successfully persuaded local craftsmen to cooperate in reproducing or pirating standard designs of contemporary furniture and light fittings. Furthermore, rescued furniture pieces and secular day-to-day items obtained from the Kandyan and colonial eras enhances historic archaic of the house.

Source: archnet.org

This particular project by Bawa Repudiates Palasmaa's postulation that 20th century edifices are explicitly biased towards the retinal image over other relegated senses – due emphasis on the tectonic makes this point affirmative. This act revives perhaps, the essence of medieval Kandyan elite and sub-elite dwellings, which were by no means picturesque, but sensory. Just as any other vernacular from around the world, Kandyan edifices were essentially connected with the tacit wisdom of the body (Palasmaa 2005, 26-30). Dialectic has been devised by resolving disparate modern and traditional functions, as a means to equip the house for a postcolonial hybrid elite life style. The retrieval of once-subverted Kandyan vernacular and grand design traditions are pervasive in this edifice. A stroll around would in deed impart on one, a sense of solitude, creating much-needed distance with hustle and bustle of the surrounding landscape outside. The introvert quality
that once worked so well in the Kandyan houses – generally surrounded by lush green environments – had suddenly become applicable to modernizing concrete jungles of the city. It could also be postulated that, reverting to Kandyan built traditions was perhaps conceived as a means to recuperate Ena’s socially-dented Kandyan Govigama aristocratic identity. Alternatively, both the client and architect who felt the solidarity of their shared elitisms of two dissimilar kinds might have been seeking to create a romantic niche, in the rapidly urbanizing city. An unprecedented social mobility by this juncture, was curtailing pre-colonial and colonial elitisms.

**P. C. De Saram House**

De Saram family hails from the Southern Maritime regions of Sri Lanka, and is believed to possess a Dutch and Malay ancestry to have Sinhalised in the late 18th century. This had been achieved by posing as the representatives of masses and subsequently convincing the British rulers that they were from the majority Govigama caste with a formidable public backing (de saram, 2010).xii From a rather humble beginning as an interpreter to the maritime Dutch government that led an embassy of Kandyan kingdom in the 18th century, the De Saram family progressively gained social mobility by loyalty. By respectively collaborating with the Dutch and British rulers, the family succeeded in relegating the traditional belligerent ruling class of Kandyan Govigama elite. The commentators of some low country Sinhalese casts believe that the erroneous British notion of an inverted caste hierarchy in Ceylon is conveniently traceable to the documents on ‘local customs’ produced by this family on behalf of their colonial masters. Subsequently, the De Saram family was given increasing patronage and chiefly appointments and grew in power and influence, especially during the British period (Rootsweb, 2010).xiii

P.C de Saram, a businessman who had been brought up as Colombo bourgeoisie was a member of the Illangakoon family, for whom Bawa had designed his very first house. As Robson (2004: 227) suggests, government restrictions had brought private house building to a near standstill during the early 1970s, and Bawa’s only domestic commissions for the decade came from the de Saram family. In 1970, when de Saram asked him to design houses for his four children on a site on 5th Lane in Colpetty, Colombo 07, the architect proposed a line of four row houses. It is conspicuous that, each was conceived as a mini version of the Ena de Silva house, yet with strong references to the Dutch-Muslim tradition of urban courtyard houses of the Maritime, rather than relying on Kandyan archaic. Resembling houses as such are most common within the colonial forts of Galle and Colombo. Sited on rather small plots of about 20 perches by 1970s standards, each house is set back to create a parking bay with a small planting bed facing the street. The street walls of white plaster consists of fenestrations – entrance door and a large window on ground floor and four smaller windows arranged above them – for which, Corbusier-inspired primary colors were utilized; a different color for each house. In terms of plan form, each house is comprised of three transverse pavilions that are separated by courtyards, and linked by a spine corridor. The first pavilion contains a garage, office and entrance hall, with staff accommodation on the first floor; the second contains bedrooms and bathrooms; and the third contains the dining and sitting rooms. The internal courtyards are protected by parallel pre-cast concrete beams that break up the light, diffuse heavy rain and provide security against rooftop burglars. The modern demands have been addressed within a quintessential colonial plan form, in a laudable manner.

The interiors are cool and well-lit (naturally), offering a strong sense of space and privacy on a compact plot. The general openness owing to inside articulating outwards has been spectacularly achieved, yet again. The materiality and especially, the detailing, is considerably less-articulated than in the previous case, and kept to minimal finishes.
An analogy between the latter-stated tendencies could be made with relation to the centuries-old economical and modest colonial dwelling archetype of the Maritime, which were devised by the colonists and emulated by locals. The walls are semi-rough and white rendered while the floors are of inexpensive cement-cut finish. The black-colored rafters and crossed reapers make a simple pattern below the exposed white colored asbestos roofs, which are covered outside by half round clay tiles. The roofs of the pavilions are simple gables, and deep eves protect walls from rain and glare, overtly resembling colonial influence. A minimal modern fashion sense has been favored for furniture arrangement, which caters for functionality but appearance. In terms of the material pallet, this house too carries an overwhelming vernacular tendency to it. However, the equal entertaining of all senses is explicit in the overall composition. Perhaps, it illustrates a trace of transition from overtly indigenous construction from the haptic realm, as the previous case, into some form of control on vision – as a gentle loss of plasticity and intimacy and of the sense – of total fusion characteristic in settings of indigenous culture (Palasmaa, 2005: 26). The best affirmation to this point is the added emphasis given to the façade, unlike in the previous case.

Saliently, there are no records to affirm any sort of indigenously-biased insistence by the client rather than presenting to the architect a brief that articulates modern postcolonial lifestyle of hybridity. Perhaps, it could be postulated that, epochs of persistence in the lights of overwhelming colonial presence had largely subverted the indigenous vestiges from domestic architecture of the maritime elite. The only form of apparent indigenous reference persists in the house through hybrid Dutch traditions, which in deed imbued the country’s vernacular and European-Southeast Asian colonial dwelling influences. It is also noteworthy that, unlike in the previous case where spaces such as ‘shrine room’ were incorporated, the clients in this case, merely desired requirements that equipped the design for a modern living. Such anomalies may have been caused due to the reason of being exposed to the relentless forces of globalization, as a ruled population, centuries prior to their Kandyan counterparts. Hence, with the aid of common knowledge, it could be perceived that, their Sinhalese-ness was merely articulated in an array of cultural traditions, which essentially excluded the built counterpart. Perhaps, colonial emulation that Perera (1994;) points out, had become more seminal for them than historical continuity of their built environment, which was in any case, made feeble via five centuries of colonization. Conversely, the romantic niche in this case, had been conceived in association with the Colonial image, enlivening the heyday of low country Govigama elitism.
Cecil and Chloe de Soysa House

Both Cecil and Chloe’s genealogies run a few generations back to the 19th century British colonial rule, where de Soysas of the Karave caste are believed to have been subservient to the British colonial rule; even going to extents of taking colonial government’s side during the latter Kandyan rebellion of 1848, and also Sinhalese-Muslim riots in 1915. Warusahennedige Jeronis de Soysa who was given the title of Gate Mudaliyar by the British, and his son, the philanthropist, Charles Henry de Soyza of Moratuwa, were perhaps the most famous of Karave ancestors (Chloe’s side of the family in fact, descends from the famous Pieris clan of the Karave; her father’s father being Sir. James Pieris, the renowned politician and philanthropist). Such obedience directed towards the British, earned this family a share of 19th century colonial enterprise, which culminated during the progeny of the latter; as the most affluent and influential family in Ceylon (Roberts, 1995: 102-106).

Cecil and Chloe de Soysa were old friends of Bawa. Cecil had been chairman of the Ceylon Hotels Corporation when the Bentota Beach Resort was completed at the end of the 1960s, and had later turned a private hotel developer, while his wife Chloe ran a boutique and gallery on Wijerama Mawatha in Colombo (Robson, 2004: 176). Cecil’s occupational portfolio overtly affirms his governing elite background, which is on par with the affluent careers of his elite predecessors. The de Soysas owned an old house with a large garden that stretched between Wijerama Mawatha and Boyd Place, which was subdivided to create plots for the de Soysas’ daughters, and one final plot was earmarked for the parents. According to Chloe de Silva interviewed by the author (2010), the land was inherited (as the only child) by her, from her father. The land was originally the kitchen area of the mansion called ‘Rippleworth’ that her grand father had owned, which is long gone.

The project initiated in 1985, to build a house on this plot was delayed by Cecil’s sudden death, yet but was completed by Chloe in 1991. Robson (2004: 176) classifies the house as belonging to Bawa’s canon of “tower houses”; as he identifies as a latter development. The house consists of an office and services on the ground floor looking over the garden, which are expandable into the car port. The first floor consists of living, dining spaces while main bedroom on the second floor is surrounded and shaded by plants in a 3-foot-wide trough. A 7-foot-high cupboard separates sleeping from dressing in this room. The insistence of a modern house by the clients has been made pervasive here, with jettisoning of the vernacular courtyard to be replaced by the novel notion of living above; analogous to Tropical regionalism (TR). Instead, the architect has ingeniously relied on larger and more frequently occurring fenestrations for light and ventilation. The flat roof slab turn into pergolas in certain places, and is part-open to sky, offering view over the neighbouring trees. The main living room and bedroom are glazed on three sides using dark anodized aluminium sliding sashes.
The lack of adornment and bare minimal materiality convey a degree of austerity. The only form of historic reference is made evident through simple colonial antique furniture, which has been juxtaposed with minimalist modern pieces. The natural affinity has been attained through utilization of various avant-garde trends of Architectural Modernism, which places this project in contiguity to the works of Modern masters such as Corbusier and Alto (Menin and Samuel, 2003:103-161). The house is surrounded by tall trees as well as dense vegetation and the narrow window frames seem to melt into the background of branches and creepers. Further, the plants dangling from troughs conceal the white façade all around the building. Hence, the boundary between the inside and outside has been blurred, and provisions have been made for the nature to reclaim built environment. The omnipresent openness and careful placement of the plan between the existing trees on site are keys to achieving this natural agenda. Once again, the pleasing of the eye by making a statement via built form has been subverted; on behalf of nature, and all five senses. The experience of living in this house is enlivened equally across all senses, evoking the metaphysical. Robson (2002: 176)suggest that “This is a far cry from earlier, apparently more traditional, designs: the deceptively simple plans, the white walls and the contrasting frames represent a further move towards the minimalism to which Bawa was increasingly drawn”. The lack of historic acknowledgement, and desire to get-on with the modern-day, affirm the liminal state of the de Soysa family-line, which has been articulated by this house. Their lack of affinity with built tradition has been envisaged though a form of inveigling. Perhaps, the Soysa family and their caste as a whole, could not boast of an affluent built tradition owing to their relegated social position prior to colonial advents. Hence, it could be postulated that the historic tendency of the family’s upward social mobility resulted in built traditions, during different epochs, which were intended to be on par with the respective ones of their colonial masters; as a means of emulation. Hence, sustaining a fixed set of built strands was never in the agenda of de Soyza family.

Conclusion

The Modernity-instigated Western sense of elitism was imparted via their colonial projects on Eastern contexts, and Ceylon saw no exception. In Ceylon, the Occidental brand of elitism came in to being in the Maritime Provinces, while its Eastern counterpart prevailed unrivalled in the Kandyan provinces, till a full-scale British colonization took place in 1815. The Sinhalese society was a complex one, which had primordially been based on a quasi-form of caste system and land tenure. Such indigenous rules perceived to be tyrannical and unscrupulous were bended for political and economic gains by colonial rulers. This enabled a dawdling form of social mobility to the so-called lower castes. The process culminated in British-ruled Ceylon of 19th century, and enabled the exalting of some of these castes, placing them in contiguity with the so-called superior castes at the highest echelons of Sinhalese society.

Geoffrey Bawa’s postcolonial clientele was indeed drawn from the country’s elites. Sinhalese elite of caste heterogeneity largely commissioned his domestic projects. The house designed for Ena de Silva (Aluvihare) was underpinned by the lure of her high Kandyan Govigama aristocratic caste, which was articulated via recurring vestiges of vernacular and high cultural trends of Kandyan architecture. Perhaps, an extra effort was taken to manifest in her house, to recuperate the tarnished image of her caste position. The houses for de Sarams, illustrate their feeble reliance on domestic built environment to affirm their high caste heritage. The epochs of persistence within colonial rule in the Maritime and constant belligerence of upward-moving lower castes may have hindered their caste manifestation tendency via built form, in comparison to their Kandyan counterparts. Alternatively, they had directed their attention towards a process of emulation of colonial built traditions; to assure contiguity to their foreign rulers. De Soysa’s affinity to
hybrid colonial architecture hence becomes explicable; which was astutely conceived by the architect. They conversely, jettisoned their built traditional rhetoric; as a means of erasing a low caste genealogy. Henceforth, the built environment the architect devised for them was modernist; a downright rejection of historicism.

Iconoclastically, the three urban projects equally catered for all five senses by avoiding retinal imagery quintessential to 20th century edifices, and further contained a rigorous natural agenda. This agenda in the former two projects were realized via varying degrees of high cultural (both Oriental and Occidental) and vernacular design traditions, while the same discourse in the latter came through the natural reverence evident in the Modernist avant-garde.
References


Notes

i It has to be noted here that political changes may also occur due to social revolutions. In that case, it is referred to as ‘circulation of elites’, where a faction of elites within the political class itself, replaces the apex.

ii The most documented affair is believed to have taken place in the 5th century B.C., as the arrival of prince Vijaya of the Sinha (Lion) tribe, along with a contingent of five hundred.

iii “A related case is of more ominous significance. Consider the emergence of the feudal type of landlordism in the kingdom of the Franks during the sixth and seventh centuries. This was certainly a most important event that shaped the structure of society for many ages and also influenced conditions of production, wants and technology included. But its simplest explanation is to be found in the function of military leadership previously filled by the families and individuals who (retaining the function however) became feudal landlords after the definitive conquest of the new territory” (Shumpeter, 1942: 12-13). This is in deed what took place in the Lankan frontier, when Indians migrated from Northern parts of India two and a half millennia ago.

iv The majority of Muslims in Sri Lanka are believed to have migrated from Southern India. They were originally from the Middle East and were Arabs. Some also migrated to Ceylon from the Malayan peninsula in the present-day South-east Asia.

v It has to be noted here that even the cultivator (Govigama) caste itself, has other sub castes within it such as Radala, Mudali and Patti.

vi The administrative structure functioned Under the King, the first Adigar (the prime minister to the King) and also a second Adigar (the second minister in charge), both exercising great power and influence. As Perera elaborates (1991: 47-48), out of the twenty one Kandyan grand divisions, nine smaller provinces of the Kingdom’s interior were termed ‘Rata’s, and administered by chieftains called Rate Mahattayas, while twelve of the more extensive principal districts that surrounded Ratas, were referred to as ‘Disas’ or ‘Disavanes’; administered by Disavas; while both positions were parallel in the hierarchy. Muhandirams were appointed as heads of various departments in the King’s court and shared more or less the same privileges as Disavas and Rate Mahattayas. The Adigars in most occasions were genealogically connected to the Royal family while other high administrative positions of Disaves, Rate Mahattayas and Muhandiram were given to certain Radala groups of the cultivator caste.

Under Disavas and Rate Mahattayas, were minor headmen such as Koralas (in charge of fairly large areas of Korales, consisting of a number of villages), Vidanes (in charge of cultivation and tax collection of a number of villages), and finally, Arachchis (the protectors of the village or traditional village chiefs). Vidanes were in charge of various service cadres belonging to a number of service castes while Arachchis were responsible for each service caste. Apart from such positions, there were Maha Mohottalas and Mohottalas respectively; free-yeomen with their very own land which they cultivated exempt from taxes payable to King’s treasury. As Nimal De Silva (2009) discerns, at times, they were also made Muhandirams by king.

vii If this is to be further-elaborated, the power over whole of Kandyan territory’s land was vested in the king, and its ownership was efficiently distributed as an ensemble of villages of varying sizes. Gabadagam- villages to supply all requirements of the palace, Viharagam- villages dedicated to Buddhist temples and monasteries, Devalagam- Villages belonging to temples dedicated to various deities, Nindagam- villages which were the property of granters or temporary chiefs, and finally, Vidanagam- Villages under the petty administrative position of Vidanes (Perera, 1991: 50). Hence, a periodic tax referred to as the ‘Agrabhagaya’ (the good portion) by Nimal De Silva (2009) was accumulated from all villages except for the first two categories, to be gifted to the Royal treasury.

viii They were allowed to trade their produce to obtain food stuffs to make a living, while the service- providing communities in villages belonging to temples were given sufficient rations for the services rendered.
Kandyan Kingdom had been formed by King Wimaladharmasooriya-I in 1692, as a revolt-territory that resisted Portuguese rule in the maritime. King Rajasinghe II, a latter ruler of the Kingdom, signed a treaty with the Dutch and collaborated to successfully annihilate the Portuguese from maritime Ceylon by 1658 (de Silva, 1981: 133-134). This treaty however, was circumvented by the shrewd Dutch administration later on, as they feared it favored Kandyans more. Consequently, the Dutch abhorrence that proliferated in the Kandyan kingdom eventually led to war, and hostilities prevailed in the form of occasional assaults on one another for decades. However, toward the closing years of Dutch occupation in Ceylon (by 1796), the Kandyans had lost all their maritime possessions to the V.O.C, and were land-locked in the central hill-country itself (pakeman, 1970: 68-69), leading to unprecedented austerity after centuries. The last time a Sinhalese monarchy may have faced such a condition was probably before 15th century, during Dravidian invasions from Southern India. The following written testament by a soldier of the British army (that took over the maritime regions from the Dutch), writing in 1803 (in perera, 1994: 147), articulates the solitary position of the Kingdom. “I have often heard persons, unacquainted with the interior of Ceylon, express their surprise that a tract of land in the heart of the island, cut off from all external supplies, and everywhere surrounded by European settlements, should so long have remained in the hands of a people neither strong nor warlike, in spite of repeated efforts to wrest it from them”. James Cordiner (1807:103), a Britisher who visited the kingdom shortly afterwards, best-describes in his descriptive writings, its modestly-globalized position. However, in 1796, at the point where British acquired Dutch-held maritime regions, Kandyan kingdom still possessed the bulk of island’s land mass, which had been sub-divided into twenty one grand divisions.

Albeit the wide acknowledgement in the academic rhetoric that these castes possess Southern Indian origins, some historical facts afford otherwise. Karava claim their North Indian Rajput Kshatriya (warrior) ancestry (Roberts, 1995: 19), while Durava find itself in ambivalence between Kshatriya and indigenous Naga ancestry (Hussein, 2001). Alternatively, another theory by Roberts suggests that they descend from Royal attendance brought down from Madurai to serve Pandyan princesses. Salagama conversely, is said to descend Pesakkarayo(weavers) from the Malabar coast (Robersts, 1995:24).

The discussion appropriates similar approaches to Evans (2003), Rykwert (1982), Temple (2007), Leatherbarrow (2002), Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow (1993), Menin and Samuel (2003), Bandyopadhyay (in Frascari, Hale and Starkkey eds., 2007), Bandyopadhyay and Garma-Montiel (in press), as well as Bandyopadhyay and Jackson (2007); all attempting to reveal the underlying factors of architectural works by scrutinizing their drawings and photography. The works of Pallasma (2005) on the other hand, helps the inquiry of sensory properties in buildings where appropriate, although his approach is not the main concern of this study. Moreover, the theoretical works of Corbusier (in Jenger, 1993), Vidler (1989) as well as Menin and Samuel (2003) are also considered. The theoretical discussions of Alexander (1977) on different architectural spaces and places are also important.

A wide scholarly belief persists that this had been the most convenient route to Sinhailisation as the peasant community was widely dispersed; still unstructured and without inter-community networks or conspicuous leadership.

The De Saram family eventually developed a strong and exclusive network of relatives as Mudaliyars by the late 19th century, and later, through marriage alliances, the network extended to the Obeysekere, Dias-Bandaranaike, Illangakoon, de Alwis, de Livera, Pieris, Sirwardena and Senanayake families. This so called “Govigama” network from the Anglican Christian faith expanded further with the preponderance of native headmen appointments by the British as Mudaliyars, Korales and Vidanes from notably, Buddhist Govigama section of the community.

The creation of the above Mudaliyar class by the British in the 19th century, its restriction only to the Govigama caste in the 1890s, production of spurious caste hierarchy lists by this group (See creation of the Govi Supremacy Myth) and changes to the land tenure system, resulted in all other Sri Lankan castes being classified as low castes during this period. The influential Mudaliyar class attempted to keep other Sri Lankan castes out of colonial appointments. The oppression by the Mudaliars and connected headmen extended to demanding subservience, service and even restrictions on the type of personal names that could be used by other castes.