The Notion of Nation: Protagonist Behind the Post-Colonial Elite Domestic Architecture of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)

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Abstract

It is widely considered that the post-colonial period is undoubtedly one of the most seminal eras in the trajectory of Sri Lankan architecture. On the other hand, the houses of the island's elite remain to this day, a subject that has not been sufficiently tackled. Although literature at times suggests certain causal factors of the topic in question and also discusses its implications on wider architectural realm of Sri Lanka, a scientific exploration has so far been eluded. In such a backdrop, this paper attempt to examine the underlying factors of the post-colonial period domestic architectural realm of Ceylon's elite stratum to ultimately determine the most seminal of all.

The case study methodology employed uses extant literature and empirical work to collect information and places the primary and secondary case studies in question against their respective political, economic and socio-cultural milieu as analysis, while dwelling on phenomenology for interpretation.

The ultimate goal is to illustrate that the newly-formed modern notion of the nation that was inculcated on the ruling elite of newly-independent Ceylon was the most seminal underlying factor that molded the period's elite domestic architecture that eventually trickled down to the civic architectural realm with the auspice of the same stratum. The architects of the period representing the elite stratum–Geoffrey Bawa being one of the most influential–were instrumental as vessels for propagating this notion via their architectural projects, where the domestic realm became a spring board to elevate the more familiar hybrid style (which is an ensemble of many historic layers of island's architecture) established by them to the civic level for more laudability and acclaim.

Keywords: Elite, Domestic Architecture, Post-colonial Period, Nation

Introduction

The postcolonial architectural milieu in the former colonies is one shrouded by ambivalence. In such a context, the addressing of Ceylon's post-colonial period becomes indispensable. The situation is characterized by a reverting back to indigenous traditions with essential patronage of its elite stratum, which was carried out in an attempt to forge a unified national identity via architecture – with an undertone of a 19th century colonial sensibility. The most celebrated elite domestic architectural rubric of the island's post-colonial period is perceived to be *Neo-Regionalism (Vernacular regionalism),*[i] championed by Geoffrey Bawa, mostly on behalf of the country's sociopolitical and economic elite (Pieris, 2007:9).

Firstly, the paper will introduce the western-derived structure of elitism and tackle how it was firmly-imparted in colonial Ceylon. Then, how identity is articulated via tradition in architecture will be examined, to affirm how the elite and masses have come to envisage historically their respective domestic architectural identities. A due emphasis will be given here to the pre-colonial structures of Ceylon's domestic architectural traditions, leading the way to the revelation of its counterparts in colonial Ceylon. How colonial-made elite domestic architectures were contested by nascent Ceylonese architects as a means of unifying cultures and creating of a national identity will be addressed next. Finally, Neo-Regionalism will be identified as the point of culmination of this feat, and Geoffrey Bawa's architectural approach will be critically-examined to expose the underlying factors pertaining to its inception and success.

One of his renowned houses in the Sri Lankan capital (designed for an elite family) will be utilized as the primary case study, while using secondary case studies to support the main arguments framed. The pertinent information was secured from extant literature in the form of extracts, images and architectural drawings. Some of the photographs in fact contribute to the paper as original material. Other vital evidence not to be found in literature was obtained through semi-structured interviews with clients and architectural critics. The analysis carried out placed the discussed buildings against the political, economic and socio-cultural backdrops of periods in question and interpretation was tackled with a phenomenological base.

Further, it is pertinent to mention here that the postcolonial period addressed in the paper lies between independence in 1948 until 1977–the year generally acknowledged as the beginning of neo-liberal economic reforms.

A western elite structure imparted on Ceylon

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 stratums (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 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.[ii] 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.

At the dawn of the 20th century those elites possessing a combined degree of economic as well as political edge, and occasionally an intellectual edge, became particularly capable of social influence.

These abilities catapulted 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 stratums. 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.

Tradition and architectural identity

"Tradition" originates from the Latin verb *"trado-transdo"*, which means is *"to pass on to another"*, or *"to transmit possession"*. Tradition is thus seen as a duel process of preservation as well as transmission (Beng, 1994: 21).[iii] Throughout history, even discontinuities in architectural traditions have been evident.[iv] In traditional societies, cultural processes and external forces take a long time to be considered as "established". Once this is completed, they sustain for extended periods of time (Lim and Beng, 1998: 55). Williams (1980: 39) however, disseminates that, what may pass-off as *"cultural traditions"* or the *"significant past"* is actually selective traditions.[v] Hence, it could be perceived that traditions are always contested, transformed, resisted and invented over time. It could be affirmed with a great number of adduced examples from around the world that, in traditional societies, age-old architectural forms have reached such a state of high sophistication. Albeit their slow denigration, they remain expressive and sympathetic to the aspirations of the people. The expressions of these surviving traditions attain vigor and conviction through their local craftsmen practices, which truly celebrate their devotion, contemplation and commemoration (Lim and Beng, 1998: 54).

On the other hand, Culture is generally conceived as *"the way of life"*. It can be best-defined through its specific characteristics; namely, "*the accepted way of doing things, the socially unacceptable ways"* and the *"implicit ideals"* (Rapoport, 1969: 47). It plays a salient role in the construction of society; which could either be culturally homogeneous or heterogeneous.[vi] Culture imbues various traditions relating to the assorted functions of human life. A given culture ensures that its citizens abide by numerous sets of rules imposed by tradition, with relation to performing of these respective functions. Such rules ensure with relation to each of these functions that whatever their underlying factors[vii] may be, they are preserved, and then transferred for posterity. Conversely, the notion of identity has always been intricately-related to traditions as lingering on to certain traditions is what gives a society its identity. Accordingly, within the repertoire that sustains human life, traditions pertaining to the process of dwelling play a seminal role as it is a fundamental necessity. Thus, a given set of building traditions ultimately mould a physical form that entails a unique architectural identity with relation to the relevant culture it represents.

Elites and masses: Competing Architectural Identities in Ceylon

Since political and economic arenas are the *raison d'être* behind elitism as affirmed earlier, they also make elites the most sensitive their periodic changes in

comparison to the masses. Domestic building on the other hand, is a basic human necessity, which articulates the lifestyle of its dwellers. Then again, life style is a reflection of various traditions imbued in a given culture. As Rapoport (1969: 46) elaborates, *"The house is an institution, not just a structure, created for a complex set of purposes. Because building a house is a cultural phenomenon, its form and organization are greatly influenced by the cultural milieu to which it belongs....".* Hence, changes in culture are expressed in behavior, and articulated in the physical form of buildings (Rapoport, 1969: 16). Accordingly, since elites are the most sensitive to the society's politico-economic spheres, it could be suggested that, a given society's politico-economic changes are best-manifested in the unique built traditions of its elites. This built tradition exposes itself best, though a degree of great intimacy in the physical form of elite dwelling, as it could be derived through the discourse of Rybczynski (1988) on the notion of *"home"*.[viii]

Moreover, every society essentially possesses a *"high"* culture that influences *"other levels"* of cultures (Bottomore, 1993: 116).[ix] Rapoport (1969:2) affirms with historical evidence from around the world that high culture of the elites chooses *grand design tradition"* whilst the masses belonging to the other levels are relegated to *folk design tradition.* Monument-buildings belong to grand design tradition, and are erected to impress either the populace in terms of the power of the patron, or to manifest to the peer-group of designers or cognoscenti, the cleverness of the designer and good taste of the patron as Rapoport correctly suggests. The folk tradition in contrast, is said to be the direct and unselfconscious translation into physical form of a culture; its needs and values as well as the desires, dreams and passions of a people. *"The folk tradition is much more closely related to the culture of the majority and life as it is really lived than the grand design*

tradition, which represents the culture of the elites" (Rapoport, 1969, p. 2).[x]

Hence, with relation to Ceylon's pre-colonial historical context, its folk design tradition is perceived to be its unique vernacular,[xi] which formed a vernacular identity for a majority's dwellings, while grand design tradition formed the domestic identity of minority elites. However, in Ceylon, grand design tradition had always been delimited to its elites. While being based on folk design vernacular, the allowed access to various traits of grand design tradition was an added-privilege. Conversely, vernacular was relegated to the masses as Lewcock, Sansony and Senanayake (2002: 1-41) affirm with affluent examples from around the island. Unlike in the European milieu where doors to grand design tradition was opened to the bourgeoisie following Modernity, grand design tradition was jealously-guarded by Ceylonese elites as late as the British conquest of the Kandyan provinces in 1815.[xii]

British Colonial Architectural Identities in Ceylon

After the Dutch-held maritime regions were handed-down to *British East India Company* in 1796, that was followed by the fall of the Kandyan kingdom in 1815 (Mills, 1964), the British colonial project formally commenced in Ceylon. Towards the end of 18th century, the Sinhalese-governed Kandyan kingdom in the central hill-country had been land-locked by the Dutch-held maritime administration. It is pertinent to stress here that the areas in North of the island with a Dravidian majority – previously governed by an *Arya Chakrawarthi* monarchy, which was subordinate to the Southern Sinhalese Kingdom – was annihilated by the Portuguese by the late 16th century, as De Silva (2006) suggests. Furthermore, it is generally-accepted that the Muslims (Moors) had never accounted for any form of provincial rule in Ceylon and had very little to do with the island's architecture (de Silva, 1998, 17).

Since the early 16th century to this point in time, Ceylon had merely remained one of the conspicuous penetration outposts in the Portuguese-Dutch created Seaborne Empire. The radical capitalist economic policies and gradual democratic reforms imposed by British colonists spawned a new peripheral status for Ceylon within the British Empire; with its hinterland centered upon London (Perera, 1994: 126-127). Consequently, Ceylon that had managed to sustain a modest level of globalization to this point in time suddenly started to feel its effects more rigorously. Despite a feeble launching termed *Phase-1* which epitomized architectural traditions of expelled Dutch predecessors, a unique British architectural identity in Ceylon perpetuated in mid 19th century as *phase-2*. *Phase-3* that came into being by the time Ceylon was granted its political independence in 1948 is perceived to be the one where British finally made their architectural mark by curtailing the hybrid Dutch influence (that combined Ceylon's own vernacular and Dutch colonial influences[xiii] of the prior eras to a meager level (Lewcock, Sansony and Senanayake, 2002: 249-301).

In the domestic architectural scene, this was largely realized through the burgeoning influence of the 19th century *colonial bungalow* the British had developed in the subcontinent to a point of culmination by their concluding years (King, 1984). Some scholars propagate that, the European Colonial projects affected new paradigm shifts throughout the whole of Asia, and the unequal socio-cultural as well as economic exchanges resulted in the emergence of *"re-invented"* traditions in hitherto unforeseen scales. Certain types of hybrid architectures which relegated local cultural identities emerged and eventually gained acceptance with time (Lim and Beng, 1998: 55). Hence, colonial bungalow could be adduced as an example of such. Phase-3 saw its finale by attempting to rationalize an ideally-functional and comfortable colonial domestic building for the tropics in the form of *Public Works Department's* bungalow-influenced

Tropical Colonial style (Pieris, 2007: 49-50).

Fig. 1: PWD designed tropical colonial bungalow presently occupied by the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology, Colombo, Sri Lanka (1930s-40s).

This almost paralleled with Modernist propagations of the *Tropical School* of *AA*, which perpetuated to derive a streamlined *Tropical Modernism* for the world's dry and humid zones (Fry and Drew, 1982); a further evolution of *CIAM 8'*s Modernist avant-garde.

Fig 2: Lionel Wendt Theatre by Maxwell Fry in line of tropical modernist style (1950s).

Alternatively, as *Hobsbawn* and *Ranger* postulate (in Lim and Beng, 1998: 55), colonial powers had to invent "tradition" in order to create a sense of historical legitimacy. The Ceylonese equivalents of the discourse emerged in the forms of *Indic styles*, and *pseudo architecture*, which were largely limited to monumental and civic buildings (Pieris, 2007: 2).

Fig 3: Victoria Eye Hospital at Town Hall, Colombo, in line of Indo Saracenic style – one of many Indic styles (1930s).

Ceylon for centuries has been home to three main ethnicities; the majority Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.[xiv] Despite its small size, the island is geographically-subtle, and hence manifests striking regional variations. The Sinhalese and Tamils as well as Muslims (to a least extent) of the elite stratum in Ceylon, throughout the colonial period, had developed their very own domestic architectural identities regionally. Such styles were comprised of a base that articulated a synthesis between vernacular and grand design traditions, which pertained to their respective cultures. Then, the colonial architectural traditions of the Portuguese and Dutch respectively, were also incorporated. After 1796, the British influence was also imbued to this hybrid configuration. Hence, all forms of *Wallauwes* (manor houses) of the Sinhalese elites (both in up and low country areas), high caste *Brahmin* and *Vellala* houses of *Jaffna Tamils*, and Muslim elite homes all over their settlements within the island, which were built or modified after 1796, could be adduced to affirm this view. These have been astutely put into structures by scholars such as Robson (2009) and especially, Lewcock, Sansony and Senanayake (2002) in their seminal studies on the discourse.

A National Identity through Architecture?

West European powers via their colonial practices, produced a system *of "states and empires"* within a timeframe that began in the seventeenth century which lasted into the nineteenth (Perera, 1994: 235). Consequently, the 20th century saw the construction of most nation states out of pieces of various degrees of cultural difference and independence. Simultaneously, the concern about loss of the so-called *"long-entrenched identities"* with easy comfort of distinctions and judgment was created by colonial powers, which saw a culmination in the 19th century. Furthermore, they also developed a broad spectrum of representational devices to recognize how people perceive others and themselves. Cultural differences, which manifested themselves in appearance, habits or language, were mapped out and even artificially-created to support the new world-order and its epistemological taxonomies.[xv] The 19th century's characteristic historical obsession further articulates the structuring of these efforts. As Piotrowski (2009:1) correctly elaborates, *"....complex processes of establishing historical facts and their interconnections involved as much finding undeniable evidence of past events as eliminating other – less politically useful – pieces of information. In many cases, it was not the sequence of events, but historians and politicians who produced what we know as continuities in history".*

In this context, architecture became one of the best logical means for political construction, which could be elaborated in terms of John Ruskin's 19th century theoretical construction of identity in the built environment through *Seven Lamps*. As Piotrowsky (2009:1-2) point out, here Ruskin equates the sense of national identity with the memory and awareness of nation's glorious past and establishes that poetry and especially architecture provide the best mnemonic devices capable of embodying and preserving such symbolic signs. Ruskin further argues in the *'Lamp of Memory'* that designers need to actively shape and refine the sense of national identity, and especially, that the national style should be constructed like language, so it could be taught, internalized, and reproduced like rules of

grammar and vocabulary. The degree to which the style is invented or imported is less important than the way it facilitates control over conceptualization and the understanding of symbolically proper architecture. According to Ruskin (1989: 202), the national style is well established when *"no individual caprice dispense[s] with, or materiality vary[s], accepted types and customary decorations" and " every member and feature [is] as commonly current, as frankly accepted, as language or its coin"*. The national style, the embodiment of national identity, thus must not only be consistent and pure, it must provide a perfect didactic tool for eliminating vagueness and for disciplining common understanding of the structures of belonging.

Forging a new Nation through elite domestic architecture

Ceylon gained its political independence from British Empire in 1948. By this point of time, the peripheral position of the newly-independent nations had been concretized through neo-colonial practices of the central Western-core (Perera, 1994: 332). The attempted ideological impartations of architecture that followed could be conceived as one of such desperate measures to form a patronizing relationship between the core and the periphery. These tendencies prevailed in Ceylon after independence, under the auspices of a so-called *"post-colonial third culture"*. They, who had assumed political power from the British, resembled their foreign predecessors in every conceivable manner, while being sympathetic to neo-colonial needs (Perera, 1994: 257). However, a political breakthrough came in 1956 when a faction of local-elite under the banner of *Sri Lanka Freedom Party (S.L.F.P)* came into power in Ceylon having been equipped with a strong nationalist agenda. As a reactionary force against the bitter memories of colonialism, they adopted left-wing socialist slogans. Moreover, the newly-liberated diverse ethnicities of the island – who had been previously suppressed by the colonial heel – had to be unified under one national identity;

circumventing the propensity for future tension (Perera, 1994: 258). Within such a backdrop, several nascent Ceylonese architects felt the urgency for a new architectural identity for the nation.[xvi]

The foreseen ethnic tensions did in-deed erupt when Mr. *S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike* who came into power in 1956 established *Sinhalese* (the language of majority) as the national language, which was deeply resented by the minority Tamils, and culminated with ethnic tensions of 1958. The situation deteriorated when Mrs. *Bandaranaike* (the widow of S.W.R.D Bandaranaike) elected to power in 1972 established Buddhism as the national religion, and replaced the colonial name Ceylon with 'Sri Lanka' (meaning resplendent island); the nation state (Robson, 2009: 14). The reason for these feats could be discerned as the fact that Sinhalese, as the majority of the island had not been at peace for centuries; experiencing destructive invasions firstly from Southern India as early as the 3rd Ct. B.C. according to Paranavitana (1999: 10),[xvii] and later, from European colonists since 16th century (Perera, 1994:41-47). These forces had undermined their cultural dominance for time immemorial. With the newly-won independence, minorities who received far wider privileges from colonial masters in comparison to the majority had suddenly lost the edge (de Silva, 2000). To add to their frustration, the country had now become the stage for burgeoning Sinhalese nationalism. In such a context, possibly one of the best means of cultural unification was rationally-identified to be via architecture. Piotrowski (2009: 2) compliments this statement by suggesting that, architecture has always (and everywhere) given form to culturally nascent thoughts. He believes that buildings have manifested shifts in sense-making since before words could contain and explain them, which he affirms through valid examples.[xviii] Accordingly, Ceylon's new generation of architects, strived to create the notion of a new nation through architecture. In a general architectural milieu still largely dominated by an underlying neo-colonial British

under-hand as Robson (2009:43-45) suggests, domestic architecture of the country's elites was logically the best means to inaugurate this task. Moreover, it was the most ideal means to make an everlasting impact on the nation, based on two rationale; firstly, dwelling being the most intimate to the populace in comparison to other built forms (such as institutional architecture, civic architecture etc.), and secondly, the nascent Ceylonese architects hailing from elite backgrounds themselves, could manipulate to their benefit the immutable position of country's elites over masses.

Geoffrey Bawa & Neo-regionalism

All of Ceylon's post-colonial architects were educated in the Western-core.[xix] As Perera (1994: 211, 310) suggests, it was a context where the core institutions had monopolized peripheral architectural education. Hence, the economic edge intrinsic in the elite repertoire was vital in going abroad to train as an architect. This fact could be affirmed by looking into family backgrounds of postcolonial Ceylonese architects such as *Minnette de Silva* (de Silva, 2008:39-58), and *Geoffrey Bawa* (Robson , 15-25). The former, an *AA* trainee, was the pioneer to adopt a synthesis between vernacular and the modernist avant-garde. Clearly depicting her stance, she coined the term *"modern regional architecture in the tropics",* as early as the 1950s (Tzonis and Lefaivre, 2001: 31).[xx] The latter who qualified a few years junior to Minnette from the *AA,* appropriated an analogous approach. Both started-off with Tropical Modernist ideology coupled with the referenced-vernacular building practices of British

Architectural practitioner predecessors (Scriver and Prakash, 2007: 33-37). Bawa drew inspiration from a range of regional architectural identities from Europe, Ceylon's own colonial past as well as its pre-colonial edifices (belonging to both grand and folk design traditions). Especially in his domestic projects for influential elites, vernacular recurred overtly. The type of vernacular he epitomized was largely from the *hybrid manor houses*[xxi] of the Kandyan elite apex as well as the generic forms of its sub-elites. Moreover, certain elements were also borrowed from vernacular-imbued Dutch colonial architecture of Maritime Ceylon. These borrowings gave an incongruous degree of familiarization to his architecture. However, many perceive that Bawa's architecture "*…has a western aesthetic sensibility and provided a utopian comfort zone for a [an elite] clientele facing the many disruptions of post-colonial change, of urban growth, and industrialization"* (Pieris, 2007: 9).

Eliot (in Beng, 1994: 10) disseminates that, *"The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past….the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show".* This is affirmed by Rykwert (1982: 31) who suggests that, *"….There is no humanity without memory and there is no architecture without historic reference".* Hence, elucidation of these disseminations reveals the logic behind Bawa's rhetorical architecture.

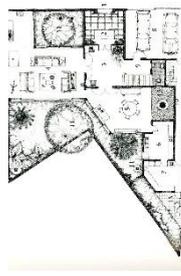**Jayakody House in Colombo, Sri Lanka by Geoffrey Bawa (1991-96).**

Fig. 4:   **Fig.** 5:   **Fig.** 6:   **Fig.** 7:

Fig 8   Fig 9   Fig 10

Fig. 4: The Exterior manifesting an affinity to nature through blending, achieved by the recurrence of plant troughs on the facade. The weathered façade articulates the notions of enabling nature to re-claim the built environment, and further, blurring of boundaries between built environment and nature. The entire composition could also be placed in contiguity to the Modernist avant-garde.

Fig. 5: Vernacular-inspired Ground Floor Plan illustrates a cellular quality, and openness to courtyards via large fenestrations invite nature in.

Fig. 6: Interior courtyard that recurres in the plan is an element picked-up from Vernacular. Closeness of building to the saved trees on site, conveys the message of natural contiguity.

Fig. 7: Roof terrace; Utilization of natural finishes (timber for columns) and the natural affinity of textured cement rendered and concrete surfaces portray architects intention. By letting materials weather, the point is further-affirmed.

Fig. 8: Entrance to the house; door rescued from a Dutch building, and flower pots aesthetically placed on the floor shows a strong colonial affinity. The granite on the forecourt, rough finishes evident in materiality and the earthy colour scheme illustrate a hint of indigenous vernacular.

Fig. 9: Portuguese pot placed in the living room gives a notion of admiration of a romantic colonial past.

Fig. 10: The openness and modern furniture utilization articulates a modern interior. The ancient statue (torso) in the background illustrates the successful synthesis of disparate time periods within the same space

Source: Powell, R. (1998) *The Urban Asian House: Living in Tropical Cities: Living in the Tropic*s, Thames & Hudson, London.

Working with the scarce resources available to him, and with no striking innovation, he had undoubtedly played the role of a bricoleur; in deed of a very clever one. As Correa (in Lim and Beng, 1998: 10) explains, it is possible in-deed, to seek synthesis of traditional and contemporary– appearing as binary oppositions –through Art. However, such a synthesis should not be of janus-faced nature with the schizophrenic coexistence of two opposing ideas, but one single gesture which should simultaneously be contemporary and timeless as well as "ethnic" and "modern". This resolution was indeed quintessential in Bawa's work. The lure of picturesque along with nostalgic propensity and romantic imagery of the period had undermined the full potential of technological innovations of architecture. It is perceived that, by recreating environments imbued with elite associations of indigenous and colonial familiarities, a concretization of the immutability of Ceylon's postcolonial elite stratum was achieved. The vernacular played a pivotal role in this feat to gain the degree of familiarization required for public acceptance. Hence, a potential restructuring of the country's postcolonial

social sphere was made feeble by this rubric as Pieris (2007: 10) suggests. The hybrid local identity it catered for, again, was favored by the country's Westernized and semi-westernized elites who themselves were products of colonial hybridity as Bhabha (1994) suggests. Other than its limitation to largely an elite clientele, the style was further-contained by the rigidity of the colonial structure as well the ever-prevailing ethno-religious nationalism. (Pieris, 2007: 10). Neo-Regionalism's public acceptance was exalted with the auspice of the state-implemented civic projects such as Sri Lanka's new Parliament in *Jayawardenapura* and *Ruhuna* University complex in *Matara* etc., with the ideological transformations they instigated. Consequently, Neo-Regionalism patronized by Bawa, by the 1970s, became the flagship architectural style of Sri Lanka, especially in the elite domestic architectural milieu. The rubric in fact, suffered a paradigm shift from Bawa's own facile objectives into a whole different plane; with revivalist, traditionalist and chauvinistic forms eventually made it conceivable to the masses. According to Peiris (2007: 11), it

was regionalism, backed by the political sphere, which heightened its focus on identity; not the neo-vernacular in its original form devised by its pioneers. Regionalism was then oriented towards an international audience for eventual laudability, and hence failed miserably in the attempt of much-needed decolonization.

Conclusion

Ceylon for centuries has been a nation of multiple ethnic cultures with their accompanying built traditions, which managed to survive down to colonial times. When different cultures compete within the same nation, in most occasions, one emerges dominant. Before the advent of colonialism in Ceylon, Sinhalese culture of the majority had always been hegemonic while it also made provisions to absorb certain vestiges of tradition from minority cultures. Such hegemony was hindered under the colonial heel, which was eventually reviewed after independence and also became a cause for postcolonial ethnic strife. After 16th century, colonial cultural infiltrations hybridized all of island's ethnic cultures as well as their respective built traditions, and 19th century British occupation of Ceylon saw its culmination. Prior to this juncture, dissimilar to Europe after Modernity, Ceylon's majority (especially in the Kandyan provinces), were relegated to vernacular built tradition. Although vernacular tradition of the majority is often regarded as the best means of propagating national architectural identity, the hybrid elite in Sri Lanka adopted a synthesis of vernacular and grand design traditions reflecting their privileged sociopolitical and economic status attuned to global trends.

In the 19th century, the British colonial masters ideologically-imparted on Ceylon the senses of *long-entrenched identities*, the *nation state* as well as the process of building national identity via architecture. All such ideologies were complacently embraced later on by Ceylon's nascent postcolonial architects.

The Sri Lankan elites of influence did not embrace the overtly vernacular-biased *Neo-Regionalism* due to their genuine belief of it as the architectural tradition that best-represented the majority's cultural identity, within the process of fulfilling their social responsibility as elites. The surviving feudal elites after independence, irrespective of their ethnicity, were obsessed with creating nostalgic niches of their own in a society of rapid social mobility. This intent was achieved through a rubric that not only revived the vernacular, but also the once-defunct design traditions from elite heydays in history; from medieval and colonial periods. The rubric also appealed to the elites who were the progeny of the country's latter social mobility, as it was conceived as the ideal means of artificially aligning themselves for public legitimacy with their old counterparts. Moreover, the colonial period elite housing types as structured by the academic rhetoric (pertaining to ethnic culture and region) were effectively replaced by Neo-Regionalism as it was embraced by the bulk of postcolonial Ceylonese elites. Elite domestic realm eventually became the stepping stone for the rubric to gain public acceptance as the stately architecture in the near future. Henceforth, the rubric that pioneered the notion of nation (pertaining to the 19th century western sense) in its making had ironically not represented vernacular design tradition, in the sense it is used by the masses. Instead, it was artificially epitomized to acquire a degree of familiarity, and incorporated into the Neo-regional equation various Indigenous grand design traditions, colonial architectural traditions and also the Modernist avant-garde. This astute representation by Bawa became successful and eventually circumvented the possibility of repudiation by the masses. Hailing from an elite background, his inherent understanding of the immutability of elitism may have guided him in this endeavor. Neo-Regionalism's effects by the 1960s and 70s eventually trickled down to the dwellings of masses as well as to the civic realm.

End Notes

i Neo-regionalism is the concluding form of *Modern Regional Architecture for the Tropics*, pioneered by Minnette de Silva in the early 1950s.

ii 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.

iii Tradition could be taken to mean *"... a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past"* (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1983: 1).

According to *T.S Eliot* (in Beng, 1994: 21), a true sense of tradition is a sense of the timeless and the temporal together. *"Tradition…cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves in the first place, a historical sense, which…involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence…"*. Although the definition of tradition is commonly perceived to be a set of fixed attributes, many repudiate this view and believe it to be a series of layers transformed over time (Lim and Beng, 1998: 54).

"Invented tradition" on the other hand, includes traditions that are actually invented, constructed and formally instituted tediously as well as the ones to emerge in a less easily-defined manner within a short time frame.

iv Architectural forms have not remained stagnant as a "pure" culture anywhere; as there have always been hybrids of indigenous and imported synthesis completing creative processes of cross-fertilizations. They have been diffused, hybridized, and in the process, synergized. Hence, each type in its form at a given time is a potential model for even more similar transformations.

v *"From a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded…..Some of these meanings and practices are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture"* (Williams, 1980: 39).

vi Both these situations could possibly find an enhanced degree of sophistication owing to the existence of sub-cultures within a given culture. This may be caused by factors such as cast.

vii such as religious, symbolic, biological and environmental etc.

viii The fact that the elites are pioneers to have historically developed a degree of intimacy with their houses than any other social stratum, further-contributes to the concretization of the above affirmation.

ix In every society which is complex, there is a number of *'levels of culture'* to be found, and it is utmost vital for the health of the society that these levels of culture inter-relate to each other. Yet, the manner and the taste of society as a whole should be influenced by the society's *'highest culture'* (Bottomore, 1993: 116).

From the ensemble of various types of elites in a given society, the governing elites tend to possess the greatest level of power, which places them at the centre of high cultural influence. Governing elites could either be an absolute monarchy, a certain form of collective government (democracy, socialism etc.) or any combination of varying degree of the two. The extent of high cultural access made available to the other elites, by the governing elites, varies in different contexts. In most Western contexts both before and after the Modern-era for example, high culture has not been a jealously-guarded condition. Conversely, in the East, it has always been delimited either to the royal family alone, or to the immediate circle of aristocrats surrounding the royals. Since grand design tradition is the building tradition of the elites who do have access to the high cultural discourse, it is inevitably epitomized by them for the most intimate building type of all; their houses.

x The authentic meaning behind folk tradition is that, *"It is the world view writs small, the "ideal" environment of a people expressed in buildings and settlements, with no designer, artist, or architect with an axe to grind (although to what extent the designer is really a form giver is a moot point)"* (Rapoport, 1969: 2)

xi *"Implicit in the term 'vernacular' is the notion of building as an organic process, involving society as a whole"* (Lim and Beng, 1998: 10). Correctly perceived as *"architecture without architects"* as suggested by Beng (1994: 19); edifices of vernacular are not merely perceived to be the brainchild of any individual architect, but the product of an entire community as a whole; working through its history (Lim and Beng, 1998: 10). Vernacular structures are invariably built by local craftsmen of anonymity with local techniques and materials, reflecting society's accumulated wisdom and collective images. They are imbued with cosmological and religious values, social and political structures, sensibility and attitude towards time and space. Moreover, their forms and proportions, craftsmanship and decorations manifest symbolic propensities and hence, are meaningful (Beng, 1994: 19).

"There is hardly any need or scope for "improvement" in the various vernacular languages of housing generated indigenously around the world…." (Lim and Beng, 1998: 11).

xii Prior to the British conquest in 1815, of indigenously-governed Kandyan provinces, the Maritime regions of Ceylon had been under Portuguese and Dutch colonial control since the 16th century.

xiii possibly brought from their colonial practices in South East Asia, as they conquered these parts before they did maritime Ceylon.

xiv The Sinhalese account for nearly three thirds of the country's population, Tamils, nearly a one fifth, and Muslims, approximately a one twentieth.

xv New branch of knowledge, such as ethnography, for example, was created to sanction these processes.

xvi Anoma Peiris postulates that, the task facing Ceylon's postcolonial architects was twofold. On one hand, the need for constructing a sense of geographic belonging against a former history of colonial expression, European Modernism (inculcated to them through their core-based architectural education), and nascent chauvinist nationalism of the region as a whole, was prevalent. On the other, they needed to reconcile their only training- the one in modernism- to the design of tropical environments (Pieris, 2007: 150-152).

xvii Sena and Guttika merchant mariners are believed to be Dravidians from the Sindhu region of Indian who first attempted to takeover the Sinhalese throne in the 3rd Century B.C., a few decades after King Devanampiya Tissa's death.

xviii Piotrowski particularly talks about the Holy Trinity Chapel at the Royal Castle in Lublin, Lithuania.

xix Owing to the fact that Ceylon could not boast of any architectural schools of its own at the time, all who desired an architectural education had to go to Western countries in the core.

xx Minnette's work overtly manifested the problems of post-coloniality, which was exposed as a *"precarious balance of Eastern and Western cultures than merely an aesthetic resolution"* (Pieris, 2007: 50).

xxi Mainly the vernacular of folk design tradition as well as certain aspects of grand design tradition are imbued in these houses.

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