

Perceptual Differentiation on the status of Man and Woman as reflected by Traditional Domestic Architecture in Sri Lanka with special emphasis on Kandyan areas

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Buildings are not just material objects, but as Anthony D. King says, “buildings indeed, the entire built environment, are essentially social and cultural products” (King, 1982:01). Generally buildings result in social needs and accommodate a variety of functions - economic, social, political, religion and cultural. In relation to domestic tectonics, they become very significant in portraying social norms and forms, ideas of the society and social taboos as well. This paper primarily focuses on how the general perception on male-female differentiation and divergent social positions are portrayed through a “Kandyan house”. The differentiation here discusses the male-female role in social interactions, family relations and domestic activities.

The Kandyan dwellings succeeded in characterizing salient features of the contemporary Kandyan society and individual attitudes towards them especially through personal abodes. Different perspectives and perceptions on man and woman that had been established during the Kandyan period were also to a certain extent reflected through domestic architecture. The internal layout of the house and the spatial demarcation thus reflected the fundamental structural division within the dwelling: the differentiation of sex.

The two main spaces within a traditional house in Kandyan provinces are the *heen maduwa* and the *maha maduwa*. The *Heen maduwa* represents the female area of the house whereas the *maha maduwa* denotes the male area. Literally, *heen* means thin or small. During the Kandyan period the Sinhalese word *heen* was used to denote the smallness. In contrary, *maha* means fat or large. This nomenclature somewhat depicts the idea of different gender identification between men and women. However, the *maha maduwa* and *heen maduwa* both represented non-demarcated spaces, but two different living areas. Daily activities of a house usually take place in the *heen maduwa* which is located necessarily at the rear side of the house. The subordinated role and backward position of traditional Kandyan women is represented by this architectural establishment. This setting also reveals certain traditions attached to the family life of Kandyans. The allocation of spaces such as the *heen maduwa* and *maha maduwa* denotes the nature of intimacy and the degree of sexual relationship between man and the woman. Location of *heen maduwa* and *maha maduwa* specifically exposed to view the difference among men and women within the Kandyan society, not only the identification but also its manner of positioning inside the house. The power relations between men and women within the house and society is as well illustrated through this architectural demarcation.

At the end, this paper tries to establish how the internal space segregation of the domestic setting reveals the social perception on gender and the role of man and woman in feudalistic Kandyan society.