

The House of Mutubanda

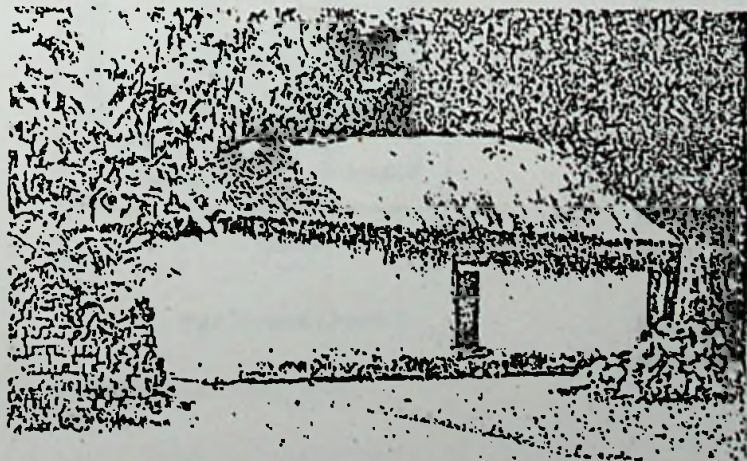
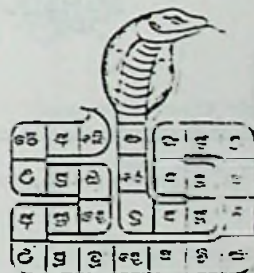
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We were walking along a foot path by the side of stream. To our left, were vast stretches of paddy fields, as far as the eye could see—to the right there was a profusion of vegetation comprising various trees such as Jak, Kumbuk, Coconut etc. The temperature was fairly high and the environment, hot and humid.

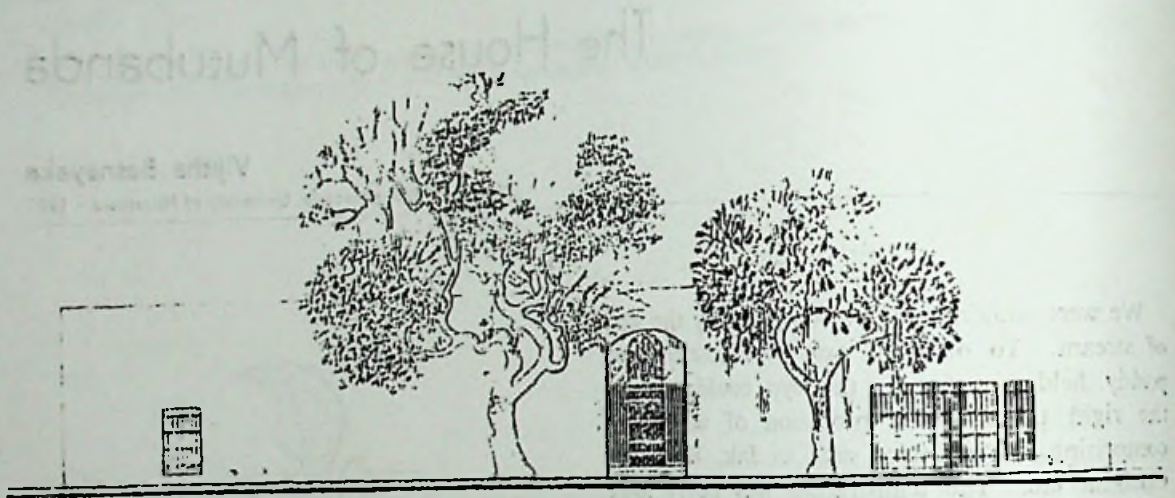
The aim of our journey was to find a Central courtyard house of a typical Kandyan Yeoman. A villager we met along the main road told us there was such a house about half a mile along the stream.

Suddenly we came to an open space to the right of the stream, and for the first time we saw the thatch-roofed, blank walled, elevated House of Muthubanda.



A. elevation Muthubanda's house.

The External appearance of the house was some what similar to houses in Colombo designed by Architects who were sensitive to climate and urban problems, although in a completely different environment and social context.



B elevation de Saram's house colombo. architect Geoffry Bawa (2)

In an urban building, where people look for privacy, security and the exclusion of dust and noise from the street, houses were built with blank walls. In the Yeoman's house too the designer sought security, but from different sources such as wild animals, rain and wind.

We met the chief occupant of the house in the compound. He greeted us with a disarming smile. When apprised of the purpose of our visit he was greatly surprised, that an old and dilapidated house should provoke our interest.

According to Muthubanda this house was built by his great grandfather about 150 years ago using a style of building suitable for a farmer.

Before building the house an appropriate land was selected by astrologer. The Mayamathaya³ outlines the bases of selection as follows.

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ඒ බිම ගේ තනු නියම නියම

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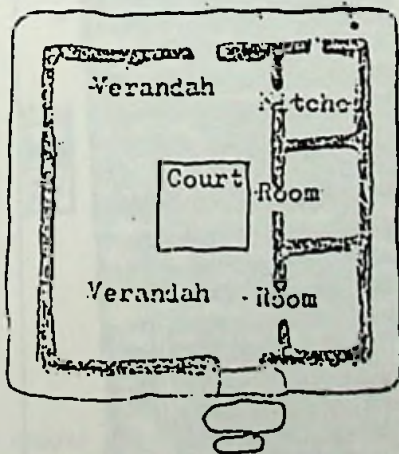
Herewith features are identified to select land suitable for building residences for royalty. Brahamins and Marchants to be used before constructing houses.

අධිතන පර්නික බිම ද
දිගට වටව කිංබයි නොව
මෙ සලකුණු ඇදින මිස
නොකරන ගෙය කිබුනොත් සැ

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(4)

Without any doubt, one has to identify rectangular and circular, refined, land hamed Ithana and Parnika, before constructing residences.

After selecting a suitable site in consultation with the astrologer, the builder sketches out a diagram of the plan on the ground. It was a house with a central courtyard.



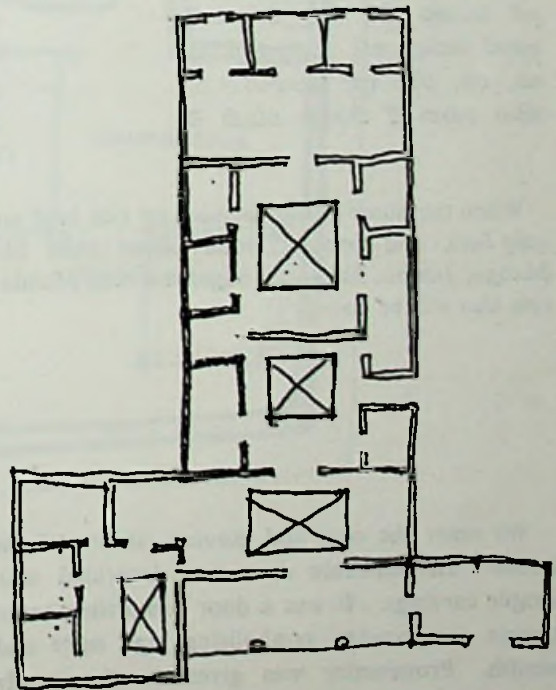
C. Plan Yeoman's house

According to the builder this was a form functionally related to farming life. It was also designed to improve the social status of the owner.

"The house of great persons only differed from those of lesser men by having more rooms and courtyards..." (5)

(6)

Tha Walauwa of the village was a house with several courtyards in which the principal family lived. Mutubanda's house was a scaled-down counterpart of the manor.



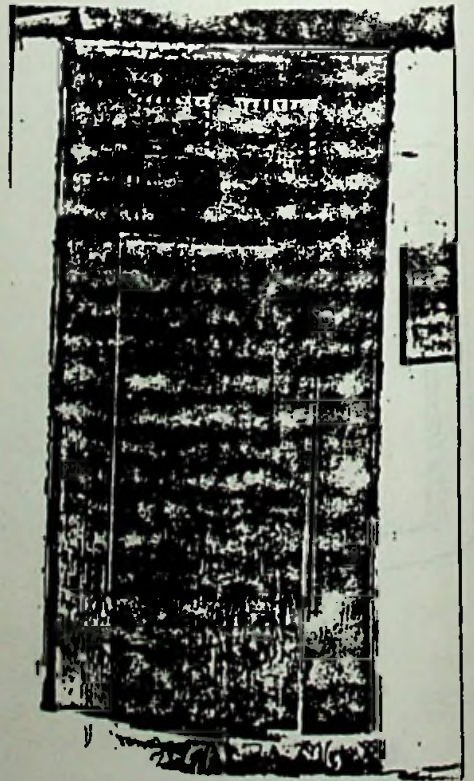
D. Plan walauiwa with several Courtyards.

As Muthubanda narrated the story which in turn had been related to him by his father, we walked around. It was a square house with blank external walls. Immediately surrounding the house was a sand paved yard, devoid of trees, commonly referred to as "valimidula". The main purpose of this area was to keep snakes and other reptiles away from the house. The "valimidula" was kept scrupulously tidy, and free of fallen leaves, by Muthubanda's wife, who swept it twice a day. At the edge of the sand compound various fruit and flowering trees cast profuse shade.

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පඹ, දඹ, රඹ, උක් ජමනාරන් සැ	ම
රසික ලකුණ වී නිබෙයි එවැනි බි	ම
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When the house is surrounded by rich land not only Jack and coconut, other sweet trees like Mango, Jambu, Plantains, Sugercane and Mandarins also will be found.

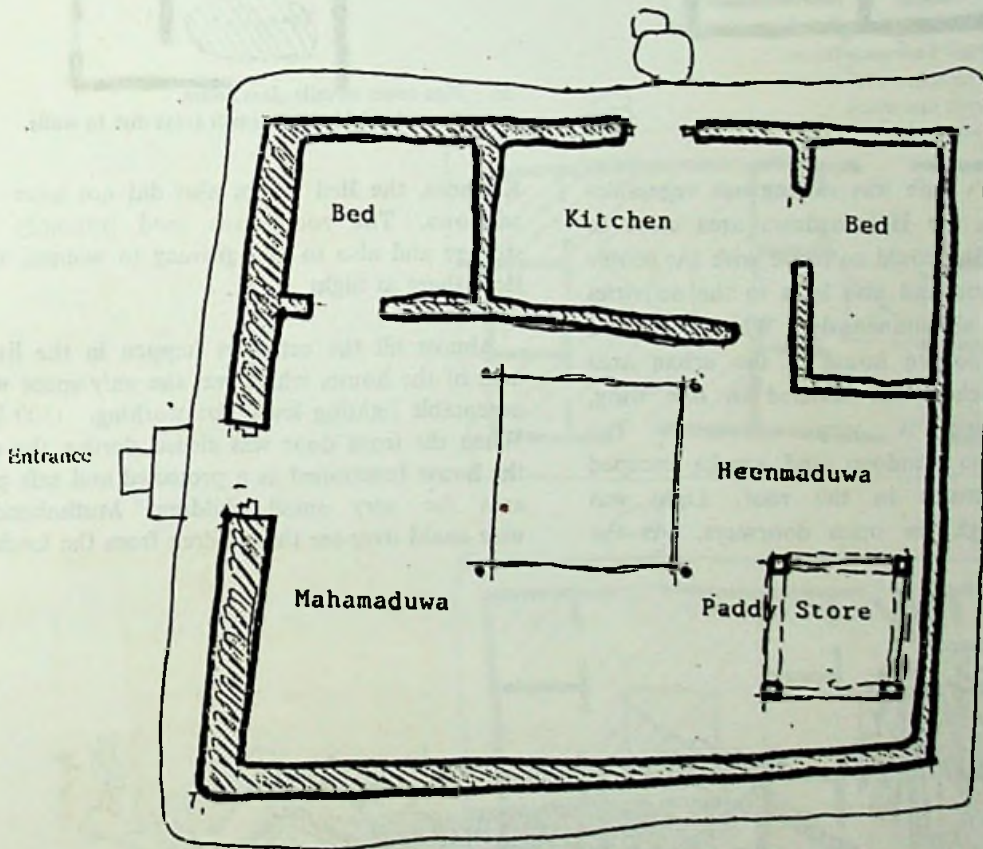
We enter the cool and gloomy interior of the house. The entrance door was decorated with simple carvings. It was a door comprising seven timber components, symbolising high caste and wealth. Prominence was given to the paddy storage box (Vee Atuwa) by placing it in line with the entrance door. The Atuwa displayed the same association of wealth and social status that the TV set or any other electrical appliance in an urban middle class house in Sri Lanka stood for.



E. elevation seven pieces door

The Mahamaduwa (living room) and the Heenmaduwa (Family area) of the house were completely bare, devoid of any item of furniture except for an old bed. People usually sat on mats, spread out on a floor finished with a mixture of cow-dung and clay.

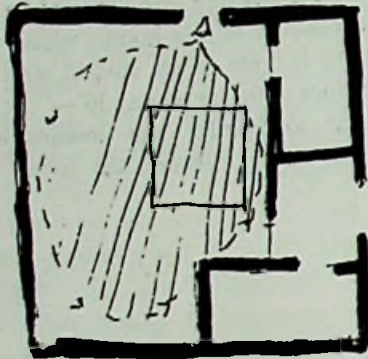
The courtyard was very skilfully used to extend the spatial qualities in this house, which looked very spacious in spite of its modest size. (The total dimensions of the house was 36'-0" x 36'-0" including the courtyard). The absence of any balustrade or railing between the living spaces



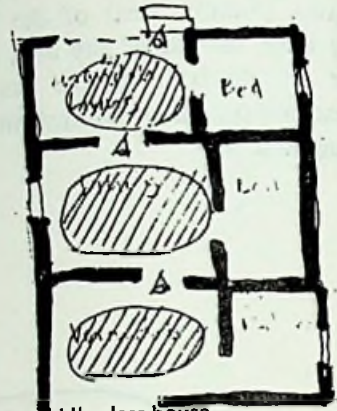
F. Plan Yeoman's house

The central courtyard was sand strewn and relatively small size (8'-0" x 8'-0") and also devoid of trees. This was the main source of light and ventilation to the interior. All other spaces were arranged around this courtyard.

and the court provided continuity between each other. By these means the space differed visually from that of a modern house of the same dimension.



G. Plan Yeoman's house.
The space eye can see
from one point

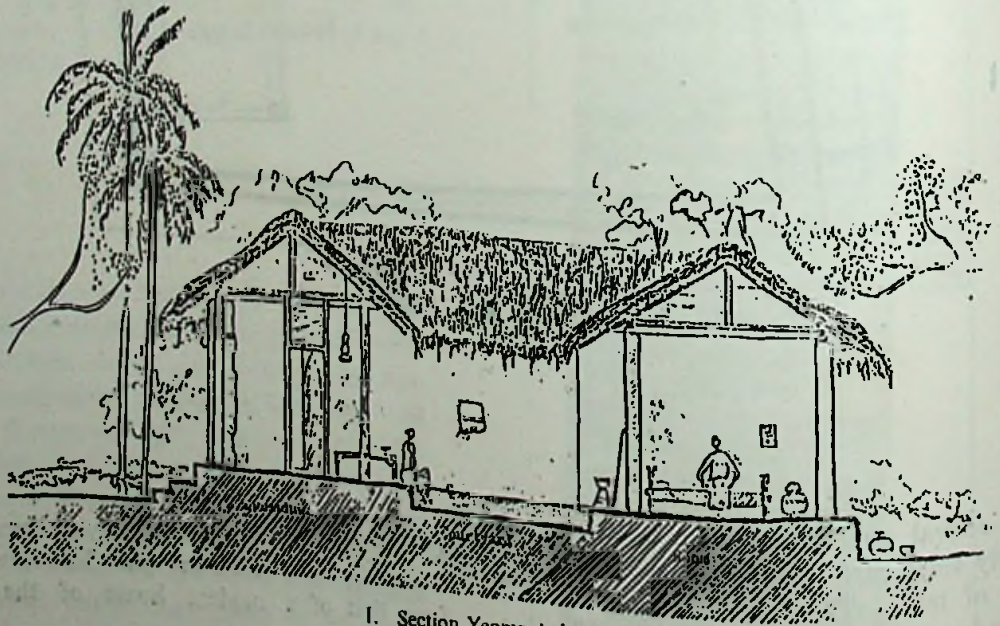


H. Plan lower middle class house.
Space is divided into small areas due to walls.

Muthubanda's wife was sorting out vegetables for cooking in the Heenmaduwa area close to the Kitchen. She could converse with the people in the living area and also look to the activities of the kitchen simultaneously. When compared to the usual modern house in the urban area where the Kitchen was isolated in one wing, this arrangement is very convenient. The Kitchen had no windows and smoke escaped through apperatures in the roof. Light was obtained through the open doorways. As the

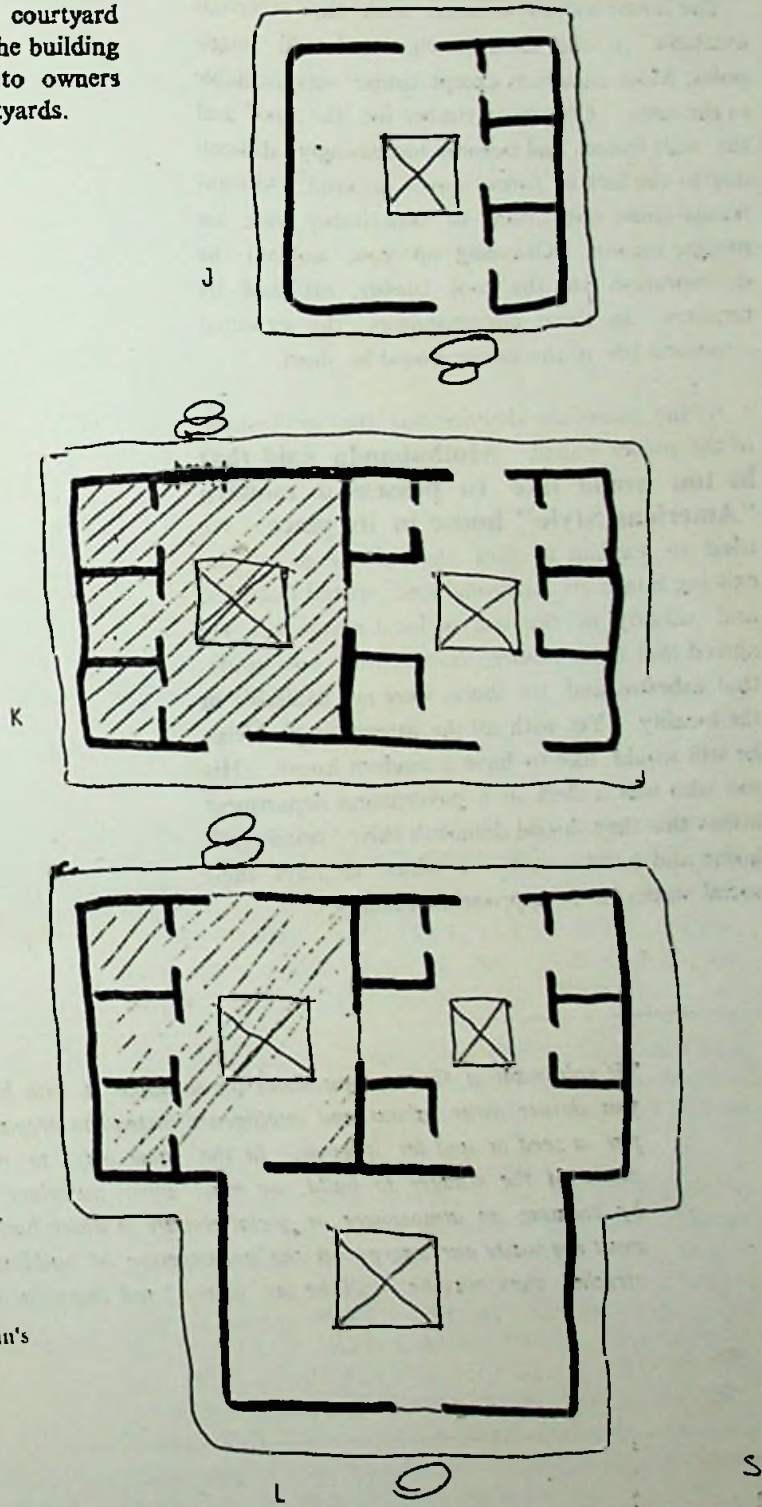
Kitchens, the Bed Room also did not have any windows. The room was used primarily for storage and also to give privacy to women, who slept there at night.

Almost all the activities happen in the living area of the house, which was the only space with acceptable lighting levels for working. (300 lux) When the front door was closed during the day the house functioned as a protected and safe play area for very small children. Muthubanda's wife could over-see the children from the kitchen.



I. Section Yeoman's house

One of the advantages of the central courtyard concept was the flexibility it offered. The building could be easily expanded according to owners requirements by adding more courtyards.



J.K.L.
development of the Yeoman's
house.

The house was constructed with the materials available in the neighbourhood, mud and jungle poles. Most materials except timber was available in the area. Obtaining timber for the roof and the wall frames had become increasingly difficult due to the lack of forest cover around. Muthubanda could not afford to buy timber with his meagre income. Glancing up you noticed the deterioration in the roof timber, attacked by termites. In these circumstances, the expected structural life of the house would be short.

As the materials deteriorated the enthusiasm of the owner waned. Muthubanda said that he too would like to possess a modern "American Style" house in its place. We tried to explain to him the advantage of the existing house, its functional and spatial qualities, and validity in the use of local materials. He agreed that most modern houses were hot inside, that asbestos and tin sheets were not available in the locality. Yet with all the attendant problems he still would like to have a modern house. His son who was a clerk in a government department insists that they should demolish their "primitive" home and build a new one which displays their social status in an appropriate manner.

"If you want a flower, you don't try to make it with bits of paper and glue, but you devote your labour and intelligence instead to preparing the ground, then you put a seed in and let it grow. In the same way, to make use of the natural desire of the villager to build, we must apply ourselves to preparing the ground by creating an atmosphere or social climate in which building will flourish, and we must not waste our energy on the construction of building which, however smart or striking they may be, will be as sterile and unproductive as artificial flowers."

Architecture for the Poor
by Hassan Fathy p. 119.