

THE ROLES OF TRADITION AND VERNACULAR IN POST-COLONIAL ELITE DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE OF CEYLON (SRI LANKA)

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Following a brief stint of independent-rule from 1948 under a class of post-colonial third culture, a political breakthrough came in 1956, when a faction of local-elite with a strong nationalist agenda came into power in Ceylon. Within this politically-induced backdrop, several nascent Ceylonese architects felt the urgency for a new architectural identity for the nation. The domestic architectural rubric they derived on behalf of the country's newly-defined elite stratum is referred to as Modern regional architecture in the tropics (MRAT), which in another sense could be postulated as Designed-vernacular. MRAT was based on Architectural Modernism, and epitomized in its making the essence of the country's proverbial indigenous architectural tradition of Kandyan vernacular. Furthermore, the selective-traditions of colonial-Dutch and colonial-British of hybrid parentage were incorporated to the formula. This *modus operandi* was further-enhanced through traits obtained from the local arts and crafts movement by the rubric's proponents such as Geoffrey Bawa. This rubric gradually culminated as an immense success over the years, to become the flagship elite domestic-style of the island. Moreover, it became the ideal manifestation of the immutable position of country's core-oriented elites while

securing its posterity. Conversely, a lone contemporary counterpart challenged this position by embracing a socialist agenda and attempted to realize it through an expressionist modernism, with the emphasis on the international-style technology. By the exclusion from his designs, the elements of tradition and vernacular- which by that time had become a quintessential part of the representational repertoire of elite domestic architecture- Valentine Gunasekara strived to disseminate the notion of a more equitable society, perhaps somewhat less-successfully. The paper attempts to adduce the triumph of the cross-fertilized MRAT, as against its relegated modern expressionist counterpart, in order to discern the respective roles played *'f by tradition and vernacular in the scenario.*

Keywords:

Tradition, Vernacular, Postcolonial, Elite domestic architecture

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