

Gender in Architecture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Traditions and belief systems and built environments of different civilizations are interconnected and rooted in cultural structures of different historical contexts. The social usage and the applicability of the concept of gender in the context of indigenous domestic architecture in Sri Lanka could be explained only by the acquisition of a comprehensive understanding of the basic structures that governed the society in Sri Lanka in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The caste-based, feudal society predominantly engaged in agriculture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries promoted gender inequality. This naturally resulted in the unequal status of the woman in that society. The domestic architectural settings of the secular homes of the period bear silent testimony to the cardinal role played by the Kandyan woman.

Keywords: Gender, domestic architecture, Kandyan woman, cultural meaning

Introduction

Scope of the Study

As a field of scholarly inquiry, gender is inextricably linked to the disciplines of anthropology and ethnography. In recent times, the notion of gender has been applied to most studies of social and technical sciences which in turn serve to emphasize its wide applicability. The examples are numerous and apparent.¹ Thus, any discourse on architecture either contemporary or historical presumes an existing link between architecture and gender. The assumption is rooted in cultural structures such as traditions and beliefs systems and built environments of different civilizations and of different historical contexts.

This paper has two parts. In the first part the focus is on the political, economic and social milieu of the period under contemplation. The second part is an analysis of the architectural components of houses belonging to the period of

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which demonstrate the notion of gender as incorporated

into the domestic architecture as determined by contemporary socio-cultural practices.

Locating Gender in History

Gender refers to social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and, the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as relations among women and those among men. Gender as a notion has been interpreted and identified in different ways by scholars. Lorber (1994) argued that gender is an institution that is embedded in all the social processes of everyday life and social organizations. She further argues that gender difference is primarily a means to justify sexual stratification (Lorber, 1994: 11). Gender is so endemic because unless we see difference, we cannot justify inequality. Barbara J. Risman prefers to define gender as a social structure because it allows gender to be positioned on the same analytic plane as politics and economics, where the focus has long been on political and economic structures (Risman, 2004: 430-31). Another scholar of Feminist

¹ *Women and Social Transformation*, 2003, (with Elisabeth Beck-Grethen and Lidia Puigvert); *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990, (Judith Butler); *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, 1993, (Judith Butler).

Philosophy Judith Butler describes gender as being "traditionally perceived as the culturally constructed sexual identity as opposed to that which is biologically determined" (Butler, 1990:14). These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed. They are imbibed through the socialization process. They are contextual, time-specific and changeable. In most societies there are marked differences and inequalities between women and men. These cleavages are seen in the responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access permitted and control allowed over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. In any given context, the gender determined what was expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man.

The social usage and the applicability of the concept of gender in the context of indigenous domestic architecture in Sri Lanka could be explained only by the acquisition of a comprehensive understanding of the basic structures that governed the society in Sri Lanka in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The essentially occidental idea of men and women being qualitatively different did not exist in Sri Lanka until the nineteenth century when the bourgeois ideology that separated masculine and feminine spheres as a social norm.

The country during this period was under a monarchy. The Monarch owned the land as confirmed by the reference to the king as 'Bhupathy' - literally lord of the land. The economy was sustained by a social structure based on a caste system. It determined the hierarchical order of society as well as the occupational functions of the people as per the assigned economic activity of the various castes. The caste exclusivity was rigorously observed. While the monarch could reward a member of a lower caste with gifts and favours such a subject could not be raised to a higher social condition. The social recognition was fixed by the caste to which the person was born in to. Inter marriage among different castes was not permitted. A functioning system had to be preserved intact. Society was organized on the basis of village

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units. Communications were restricted. The roads that existed were no more than foot-paths through lush jungles. The surrounding jungle was a renewable economic resource. Most villages were generally self-sufficient and adequate to meet the day-to-day needs of the people. Cultivation was seldom motivated by trade. The most important items of trade remained a royal monopoly and subjected to royal prerogative. Commodities such as salt, fish and cloth were generally scarce and were not locally available. Such were obtained through a system of barter. In this socio-economic environment both man and woman shouldered the burdens and enjoyed the fruits of their labour equally. Life was harsh but was rewarding to both male and female in equal measure.

When considering the man woman relations in the domain of family and home it is worth exploring family life in the hinterland as existed the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The position of the family as a unit was respected and considered as an important social unit. The household or family was identified as the basic social unit. All members of the household who lived in the family abode had a right to a share of the produce which was the result of their collective labour. The males living in the house were bound to perform services due to the king in return for land they held and used. John Davy writing in the early years of British rule observes that the family was the focus of all tender affections of a native (Davy, 1983: 11-16). Parents were generally treated with great respect and regard. Children usually displayed extraordinary affection to elders. "He is insistent with his observation that "family attachments are more strong and sincere" a characterization which he considered was "strengthened equally by their mode of life and religions" (Davy, 1983: 16). Close cooperation among males and females alike was evident particularly during the harvest season and religious and cultural festivals. These cultural traits further reaffirmed the good will and understanding among families. Social attitudes which determined the woman's position both in society and the household were moulded by a set of diverse social, religious and

cultural values that constituted a belief system that was current at the time.

Secular Architecture as a Mirror of Differentiation

The domestic architecture in the hinterland of Sri Lanka of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is replete with features salient of contemporary Kandyan society. They convey the individual ideas and attitudes towards its polity. Quite apart from this characterization, different perspectives of men and women in the Kandyan period are reflected through secular architecture, especially through individual house types. The construction, maintenance, internal spatial segregation of built environments together with the living patterns were encapsulated the social attitudes towards man-woman relations during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The gender differentiation in architecture of this period can be inferred and ascertained through three domains: the construction, spatial distribution, and rituals and beliefs.

The contribution of Kandyan women in terms of construction of dwellings need to be assessed and appreciated. Contemporary evidences gathered from foreign descriptions with regard to the Kandyan period unmistakably manifest the contribution of women who undoubtedly influenced the construction of their dwellings.

Applying a coat of cow dung mixture on floors of the houses was done by women. It was regarded as one of the principal duties of the woman of the household. She did it with dexterity and with an air of solemnity. She never considered it as drudgery, but would take pride in her hand work. The floor was well cared for by regular application of the cow dung mixture. According to Cordiner's observation, "every morning they spread cow/dung, mixed with water on the earthen floors and steps of the verandah, in the same manner as we lay on paint or whitening on a wall, but they used no other material than their hands" (Cordiner, 1983: 24). Furthermore, he mentions the physical quality of

cow-dung stating that, "it lays the dust, soon dries and gives greater firmness to the floor than any other materials which can easily be procured" (Ibid: 24). The spreading of cow dung on floors in the abodes of contemporary Tamil community was also done by women. However, this practice had been restricted in certain instances among the Hindu community. When a "Hindu woman was pregnant, she was not allowed to do any household work, including smearing the floor with cow dung and plugging holes in the wall or floor with clay" (Arumugam, 1917: 239). As pointed out by a modern Sociologist and Anthropologist, Nur Yalman "even in the present version, one of the Kandyan wife's obligations is to clean and keep the house, for instance spreading the cow-dung *goma gahante* on the floor" (Yalman, 1967: 107) with the object of getting rid of fleas and flies. The practice has a potent effect.

The Kandyan women's involvement in wall construction and thatching of the roof is sufficiently important to be stressed. Selecting the specific and appropriate clay from anthills and collecting cow dung by combing the village for droppings were done mostly by women. This was at the time a well planned exercise where the mother accompanied by daughters or young boys crept into woods, neighboring villages and fields. Apart from these chores, weaving coconut leaves and making piles of straw or dried vegetation such as *Māna* and *Illuk* (*Imperata cylindrica*) for roofing was by the women. Making of dried straw into bundles or making straw into bundles. After construction of the house, women took a prominent role in the traditional house warming ceremony called *geta gevadima*². It is now apparent that the participation of women in the construction of the family dwelling is not to be devalued or underestimated. Their role was both necessary and intrinsic to the process of acquiring the shelter for the family.

² Literally tying up pillows

³ Literally entering the house or first entrance to the house by the living

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Further, it is to be noted that participation of the woman was not confined only to the construction of the house. Her social and economic engagement was essential. The woman was central to the process of production, preservation and preparation of food grains. In general these activities took place in the central courtyard or in the service area. Paddy drying was usually done in front compound of the house. According to Knox's observations, "the man takes care only to provide rice and salt in his house and, the woman provides the rest" (Knox, 1981: 250). It was her responsibility. Her duties in this regard were bound in tradition. The food was for both consumption and providing alms.

The internal layout and the spatial segregation of a Kandyan house reflected the power equation between the head of the household and the house wife – the basic man-woman division within the dwelling. This gender notion was a general phenomenon in the sixteenth and seventeenth century's society. Every Kandyan dwelling had two identified spaces called *heen maduwa* and *maha maduwa*. Literally, *heen* meant thin or little. The word denotes either being slim or young. Conversely *Maha* meant big or old. In the Kandyan period the Sinhalese word *heen* was used to denote what was small. The expression *heen hāmaduruwo* (Vimalananda, 1970: 145) conveys the idea of different gender identifications between men and women. Traditionally, men were always recognized as fat and large or, as *maha*. However, the general identification of women in the popular picture was thin and small or *heen*. The spatial segregation within the house form known as *maha maduwa* and *heen maduwa* were intended to divide the space between the male and the female and had little relevance to the exact space allocated for the two. The *Maha* or the big was identified as the Masculine space while the *heen* was assigned to the slim, slender and the Feminine. The *maha maduwa* and *heen maduwa* were not – two specifically demarcated areas (see Picture 1 & 2), but were two living areas for males and females imagined and remained mapped in mind.

The *maha maduwa*, was the area that consisted of the verandah space and was used by males. The *heen maduwa* was the place where 'domestic services' were provided by the women. Generally, *heen maduwa* was located in the service area. Sometimes it was used for storages as well. The fire place or the hearth was always in the *heen maduwa*. The wife, young children, and daughters slept together inside the dwelling or *gē athula* which was inevitably the *heen maduwa*. The head of the household – the man may have a separate room to himself which was the general practice among the higher castes and the affluent. Generally the dwelling consisted of a single room where he may have a bed in the verandah which was abuted by an extended short clay wall or *kottapila* which was used for seating and sleeping. In the absence of a bed a mat was the usual substitute in the verandah. Robert Knox, a contemporary European observer of the Kandyan kingdom³ describes this setting and the function of *heen maduwa* and *maha maduwa* accurately.

The master of the house was privileged only to have a bedstead, to sit or sleep on the verandah. The woman with the children always lied on the ground on mats by the fire side. For a pillow she lays a block or such like thing under her head, but the children have no pillows at all. (Knox, 1981: 244).

The area mentioned by Knox is close to the hearth and is the *heen maduwa*, where the service space was located. An amusing contemplation presented by Knox is that the commoners' houses consisted of one room where the children of any age always slept in other houses among their neighbours (Knox 1981: 245).

It is not possible to obtain more information from any other historical records of the Kandyan period. There are no other descriptions of the domestic behavioral patterns as intimately close

³ Robert Knox is considered by many to have been "the most sympathetic and perceptive observer of traditional Sinhalese society at a time when its structure and form were still alive and pulsating".

was seen by Knox the captive of the Kandyan King. Knox grasped and understood habits or practices that he saw in the village he resided². His chronicle is based on the information gathered from the *rodiya* people (an outcaste community) among whom he lived as a prisoner.

The internal setting of the Kandyan dwellings reveals traditions of the family life of the period. The allocation of space as the *heen maduwa* and *maha maduwa* depicts the nature of the intimacy or the absence of it in the conjugal life of the Kandyan family. Generally, after having children the mother occupied the *heen maduwa* area. Mother and children constituted a dependent group within the family. They had an acknowledged commitment that blended with the social standing of the father. They accepted the father as a 'charisma leader'. The father considered the *maha maduwa* or the front area of the house, probably the *pila* as his preserve. Sleeping in the *pila* facilitating the mother and children to sleep peacefully inside the house, illustrates the father's role within the family as protector from external threats and disturbances.

Traditional Kandyan husband and wife did not usually sleep together in the same place. This practice was common to all including the royal palace, manorial residences and the abodes of the common folk. This is clearly manifested in the internal space allocation in royal palace and noble *walawwas*. The Queens Chamber was located outside the *Maha Wāsala*⁶ where the king resided, but in close proximity. In *walawwas* the noble lord and lady (*kumarihamy*) had distinctly different sleeping areas. The *Maduwanwala* *Walawwa* at Embilipitiya and *Pillapala* *Walawwa* at Mātale provide classic arrangements of this aspect of domestic arrangements. However, the wife was visited by the husband, and if a separate room was

² The story in Dandara Koswatta, a village in Sath Korate since his capture in 1661. Isolated Knox became very much familiar to his neighbours and lived a very pleasant and peaceful life having a simple and daub house with the assistance of the neighbours. There he took to rearing hogs and poultry and knitting caps for a living.
⁶ The King's Palace was denoted by the term *Maha Wāsala* and to the extent that word personifies a physical object – the palace.

available they would retire there. The place for the woman was located in the particular part of the dwelling that was exclusively reserved for females – the *heen maduwa*.

Further, the location of *heenmaduwa* (small hall) and *mahamaduwa* (large hall) helps us to figure out the different standing of men and women in Kandyan society. The terms used and the positioning of the two masculine and feminine quarters inside the dwelling is eloquent evidence of gender distinction. The *Mahamaduwa* consisted of the main portion of the frontal space of the house. This resulted in the greater part of the dwelling being reserved for the *mahamaduwa*. In contrast, the *heenmaduwa* was positioned in the rear section of the house. These attributes of the spatial composition of an abode provides us with a picture of the social recognition of man and woman and the norms and values that shaped the gender perception of the indigenous society of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

The common perception of men and women of the Kandyan period was that men were prominent in every facet of life and therefore commanded greater recognition or respect. The traditional Kandyan family was patrilineal. The father was the head of the family and the household. As the head of the family, his persona embodied the breadwinner, protector and the loyal subject of the king. His responsibilities limited the time spent indoors. The responsibility for the sustenance of home and family was bestowed upon the patriarch and was reflected in the quarters he occupied. Indeed, the *maha maduwa* reveals the prestige and the august nature of the position of the dominant male head of the house in its physical features.

In almost every society that reflect feudal characteristics, patriarchy is a tool used to manipulate the 'powerless' groups. The situation of the sixteenth and seventeenth century society in the central hills of Sri Lanka was no exception. As expounded by Walby, patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, in

which men dominate, oppress and exploit women (Walby, 1990: 198-201). Walby identifies six structures of patriarchy⁷ that together, captures the depth, the pervasiveness and the interconnectedness of women's subordination. Her theory of patriarchy also allows for change over historical time. The Kandyan model of man-woman relations within society and especially in the household exemplified the notion of 'private patriarchy' with its nucleus located in the family dwelling. It involved individual men exploiting the labour of individual women. Women were largely confined to the sphere of the household and had limited participation in public life (Walby, 1990: 201).

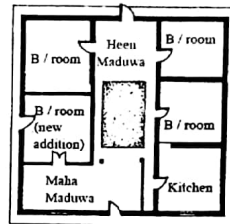
It is necessary to investigate the nomenclature of the terms of *maha maduwa* and *heen maduwa* in terms of functions and purpose. The term *maha maduwa* illustrates the central role of the father within the family despite its architecture confining it to a relatively small and limited space. While the *heen maduwa* as per its terminology denoted a small area, in physical terms it covered a considerable part of the entire internal space. This curious practice of a physically large space being terminologically referred to in a diminutive form demonstrates the paradox of the woman in sixteenth and seventeenth century Sri Lanka in the hill kingdom. The mother and wife had an exalted position within the confines of the home while the patriarch was the social face of the family. While the father was respected as the head of the family, the mother carried the burdens of household work. From the point of constructing the house to regular maintenance of the family abode, the role of the woman was not only important but found expression in the design and the spatial allocation. The *heen maduwa* which was associated with the women's quarters was always positioned in the rear verandah. It conveys the idea of the woman being in command of the house while being second to the man. The subservient and subordinate position

⁷ These are namely the household, sexuality, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality and culture.

of Kandyan women that has been observed by Valentijn in the seventeenth century wrote that "it is prohibited to the women to sit down upon chairs in her husband's presence. They sleep on straw mats and those of high rank on carpets." (Valentijn: 162).

In *walawwas* and yeoman houses these two spaces are separated from each other by a central courtyard. For example, a yeoman house situated at Mātale in the village of the same name which was popular among the folk as Kumburegedara, demonstrates very clearly the location of *heen maduwa* and *maha maduwa* (see Picture 1). These two spaces were located in the private area.

However, sometimes the location of the prototypes of *maha maduwa* and *heen maduwa* was changed. For instance, in the Kumburegedara house the kitchen is located on the left hand corner of the *maha maduwa* (see Picture 1). In a yeoman house called Eramudugollagedara at Mātale the paddy storage is located close to the *maha maduwa*, whereas the granary was usually positioned in the *heen maduwa* and close to the service area (see Picture 2). Usually the kitchen was positioned adjacent to the *heen maduwa*. Therefore, the area where the *heen maduwa* was located would be the service area. It was assumed that the place of the woman (or mother) was beside her cooking area. Here again the architectural nuance is on the women's duty to look after the family, providing food and affection, physical and mental security.

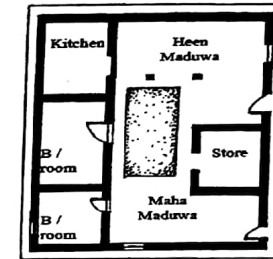


Picture 2: Eramudugolla Gedara (The House at Eramudugolla in Central Province)

The *heen maduwa* was generally positioned in the service area, facing the courtyard where the house had a courtyard. This particular courtyard was the one that separated the service area from the private or intermediate area as seen in the Ellepola Walawwa- Mātale. During the Kandyan era, women were commonly subject to some social restrictions. Their social behavior was mostly 'family centric'. The available location of the *heen maduwa* in the courtyard area is further evidence of the family centric role of the Kandyan female.

Although, they possessed certain land and matrimonial rights (Knox, 1981: 250), their social interactions were rather restrained by traditional norms and customs. However, it is necessary to note that this form of social barriers were mostly applicable to women of royal and noble lineage due to their presumed superiority of birth, wealth and power. The architecture of houses of the nobility that have survived has sufficient evidence to attest to the social restrictions that the noble ladies were subjected to.

The courtyards were positioned at the centre of the abode for the purpose of providing a natural environment and a relaxed atmosphere within the house. It was mostly used by the women of the house as a space for congregating. As noted before, the *heen maduwa* was the area used by Kandyan women for the greater part of the day. The central courtyards were mostly positioned within the *heen maduwa* area. Activities that were purely confined to the Kandyan women such as food processing, knitting and sewing, paddy drying were ordinarily conducted in this open area. Therefore, the *heen maduwa* and the courtyard located in front of it was larger in size and testified to the domestic role of Kandyan women. Consequently, in the gender context, it represented the 'female part' of the dwelling. The houses in general which had no courtyards also had these two significant areas within their 'unmarked' boundaries.



Picture 2: Eramudugolla Gedara (The House at Eramudugolla in Central Province)

In the public - private space specifications men occupied the public area of the home while the women used the private area. This signifies the limited and minimal opportunities for social interactions permitted to women. The Private area in general consisted of the kitchen, the sleeping quarters and storages. The major part of the activities of Kandyan women were confined to the *heen maduwa*, literally the small area of the house. This however does not imply that her work load was either limited or minimal. Her role within the family, dominated every aspect and function in the house. In fact the woman played a 'large' [*maha*] role in a space referred to as 'small' [*heen*] the diminutive term denoting the implied inferiority of the female.

Although the house is a physical structure, its architecture conveys the psychological component of the role of the woman who lived in it. Her role in the family and within the house could be understood, through the Sinhala expressions given to its components. They support the notion that the wife, for all intents and purposes embodied the family. Significantly, all the appellations used for the wife or mother are connected with the abode. In Sinhala folk usage, the wife is called *gedera ätto*, meaning the person at home or the person of the home. The *gedera ätto* is also an honorific noun which is plural in form but is singular in meaning. Sinhalese generally, used honorific nouns only for those whom they

honoured and respected. The Sinhalese folklore describes the mother as the *gedara budun* – literary Buddha of the home.

However, important the father was, it was the mother who silently passed on the religious and ethical values of the Sinhala culture to the children. In the traditional Kandyan family, the woman either as wife or mother played a crucial role surreptitiously and silently while the men depended on them but were reluctant to concede it. The role of the wife was so important that the Sinhala word for family "*Pavula*" is also used even today in folk speech as a synonym for wife.

Findings and Conclusion

This paper offers several conclusions in relation to gender and domestic architecture in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Sri Lanka. We could see two key issues that seem to have a pervasive impact on the creation of gender inequality as reflected in the architecture of that period. They are the norms of patriarchy and traditional beliefs which can be discovered in '*shilpa*' literature.

Male dominance and the converse inferiority of the female within the patriarchal system was an institutionalized feature of the Kandyan society. In establishing the origin of patriarchy as it is known today, researchers suggest that it was rooted in society, since the advent of the agrarian society. They argue that the status of women was relatively high in pre-agrarian societies, since both males and females shared in the production process (Lee and De Vore, 1968). Writing on women in pre-agrarian Egypt, Petrie (Petrie, 1923) concludes that women enjoyed considerable property rights. That their scope of activity went beyond child-bearing and caring for the house.

The incontrovertible idea of masculinity in an agrarian society was based on the argument that the agrarian society itself facilitated men to control the public and private spaces of that milieu. The patriarchal control in subsequent peasant societies is related to major structural

characteristics of agrarian production. With the introduction of the plough the fields were primarily cultivated by men. The family as the primary unit of production placed considerable authority on the male as he claimed the harvest. As his role became more valued, control over resources was put in his hands. As Goode (Goode, 1964) remarks, so long as patriarchy exists, no matter what the strictly male tasks in society are, they will be defined as more important than the woman's social function.

The subordinate role of the woman in general is reflected through the domestic architecture. In oriental civilizations, religion too endorsed the view that woman was secondary or subservient to man. The woman was considered inferior to man by the doctrine of 'Karma' and Rebirth. This fundamental tenant of Buddhism allows the subordination of women and makes it a religious sanction (Dewaraja, 1980: 10). The Hindu religious views of pollution encouraged the treatments of woman as unclean for biological reasons. On the other hand, the great value of the woman as a social being was also generally recognized.

The Buddhist teachings with its egalitarian outlook which emphasized the marital relationship as a reciprocal one with mutual rights and obligations" (Ibid, 10) acknowledged the woman's special position as wife and mother. As in all other social systems, her position was centered on her role as mother and home-maker. She assisted the husband in the fields, in his craft work and thus contributed to economic well being of the family. It is the woman who played a vital role in the construction of the family abode. Her functions as mother and home-maker did not require a formal education⁸ but remained well defined in tradition.

⁸ It was thought that the education she received at the hands of elders from childhood was sufficient. Hence, a female grew up in an atmosphere in which activities such as cooking, knitting, weaving, housekeeping and child-care were regarded as the natural lot of a woman. At the same time ideas such as reverence and obedience to the husband, responsibilities of motherhood and abstention from adultery were instilled in her.

Unequal access to economic, political and social opportunities between men and women was the fundamental reason and catalyst for gender inequality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This is also underscored by the popular behavioural patterns of sexuality, dictated by earlier societies. The house for example was a 'private domain' and was identified with females. The productive work outside the house was the 'public domain' and was identified with males⁹.

While the male was driven by the single objective of economic sustenance the female had the dual functions of being the mother and also an active collaborator in ensuring the family livelihood. In this context three factors have a significant bearing on the dual role of the female as reflected in architecture. They are (a) level of economic capacity and standard of living, (b) religio-cultural norms, (c) inherent attitudes. These three factors are not mutually exclusive and are generally acknowledged as possessing a sequential link. This interconnectedness is reflected by the dwelling culture and the established constructional norms and standards.

The woman contributed her labour and was also occupied with social, economic and domestic activities. She always followed the lead of the male and was subordinate to the male. The *maha maduwa* represented the man and *heen maduwa*, was identified with the woman. The implied concept was that 'bigger the man – smaller the woman, and greater the man – lesser the woman.' It was not physical but perceptual. However, the physical dimensions suggested the reverse with the female commanding the larger space and the male commanding the smaller space in architectural terms.

⁹ Educational activities conducted in temples were limited to higher caste males. As Cordiner notes in the early nineteenth century "The great part of the men can read and write but these accomplishments are not communicated to the women. All their instruction is received and their knowledge expressed viva-voce" (Cordiner, 1983:120).

¹⁰ However, it is becoming increasingly evident that more and more women in the contemporary world are seeking wage employment outside the domestic area.

The woman's position in the household appears to have been respected though she was treated as being secondary to her husband. As Savitri Goonesekere points out, the 'traditional Sinhalese law of family relations in Sri Lanka recognized man as the usual head of the family unit'. It also 'accorded a favourable status to women. The inequality of women was in not being accorded the same place as head of the family but did not result in inferiority in their legal status' (Goonesekere, 1980: 131). Since it was incumbent on the male to look after his family by earning a livelihood, he performed arduous and difficult tasks when necessary and, at times, left the home when engaged in *Rajakariya*¹⁰. Thus the roles of husband and wife were complementary.

The public-private spatial demarcation that comes in architectural language of this period is psychologically correlated with the gendered domestic architecture of sixteenth and seventeenth century Sri Lanka. The public-private dichotomy within gender studies arises from the association of masculinity with the public as opposed to femininity with the private. Historically, it is men who have acted within the public realm and moved freely between public and the private realms. Women (and children) were mostly confined to the private realm, and subjected to the authority of men within it. As explained by Davidoff, within contemporary society, the public and the private remains a concept with powerful material and experiential consequences. A basic part of the way our whole social and psychic worlds are ordered (Davidoff, 1998:165). However, the characteristic that is most noteworthy with respect to domestic architecture during the period under scrutiny is the notion of public-private spaces that is connoted by the *heen maduwa* and *maha maduwa* where the man-woman differences are highlighted within the abode.

Women operated within narrower confines than men and were mostly home-based. This was apparent in the spatial distribution of a house.

¹⁰ compulsory service to the king

The two main spaces of an abode, the public and private demonstrated the masculinity over femininity. Man is more like a 'public figure' in most instances engaged in social functions where he could maintain good relations with the neighbourhood and the community at large. The woman was actively involved in domestic activities and also some other village social functions again displaying the duality of her existence. In comparison to the domestic work assigned, her public life was limited.

The caste-based, feudal society predominantly engaged in agriculture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries promoted gender inequality. This naturally resulted in the unequal status of the woman in that society. The domestic architectural settings of the secular homes of the period bear silent testimony to the cardinal role played by the Kandyan woman. The enclosed quarters demonstrates her subordinate status. The comparatively larger space acknowledges her importance to the family. The spatial allocation and the nomenclature taken together allow secular architecture of the period to offer the gender narrative of the time.

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