

THE INFLUENCE OF THE DUTCH ON THE SINHALA HOUSEHOLD

by

Helen Buddhini Ediriweera Wijesuriya

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The Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology
University of Kelaniya
Colombo

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TH 009

10973



ABSTRACT

This study was carried out with the intention to identify the typical Dutch characteristics that influenced the traditional Sinhalese life style. Besides, the rash transactions of trade in the island, the Dutch affected radical changes in the material, cultural and spiritual values within the Sinhala community. It will be shown that this was mainly due to a firm standpoint in order to curb the influence of the Portuguese, which was already prevalent in the island when the Dutch took over.

The settlers who formed the Dutch community of Sri Lanka, no doubt, expressed a way of life by following many heterogeneous social and cultural customs. The Sinhalese who were incorporated into the Dutch controlled territory, was prepared to absorb their way of living to some extent, whereby, a new set of values emerged that challenged the Sinhalese indigenous lifestyle. Consequently, the result was the creation of a hybrid Eastern and European cult within the Sinhala country.

One such phenomenon was in house construction. With the acceptance of the principles governing house construction as followed by the Dutch, the Sinhalese traditional way of life acquired a direct impact on the overall domestic lifestyle. Emphasizing the 'concept of privacy', the family grew to respect the individuality of each unit factor of living. Thus, the activities of the family were confined to a type of formatted indoor situation. This resulted in the building of large houses with expanded apartments and spacious rooms with multiple domestic requirements. This adapted

situation resulted in the Sinhalese to deviate from their traditional flexible way of life, which was distinctively simpler.

In this study, the two specific types of houses have been identified, namely, those that were built within the forts, and those that were outside, categorized as, 'confined city street houses' and the 'spacious garden villas', respectively. Both types expressed a distinct aesthetic language utilizing the architectural elements and such stylistic details, irrespective of their locations. These houses so built, reflected a sense of status, power, wealth, individuality, privacy and even security. The architectural units of these houses incorporated characteristics clearly reflective of such intensions.

The house is also a place where a certain social and cultural identity is clearly reflected. In this way, the Sinhalese were prepared to absorb a way of Dutch living. This situation gave an opportunity for the Dutch to make a substantial impact on Sinhalese social behaviour, such as religion, education and other occupational aspects of daily life. These social influences gradually brought about many changes within the community with time, that had a direct impact on the overall domestic life of the Sinhalese.

This study has shown that the influence of the Dutch on the material, cultural and spiritual values within the Sinhala community, were adapted with appreciation and were continued, not unwillingly, by the Sinhalese, with a deep-seated commitment towards a Dutch way of life of an Euro-Oriental character.