

Vernacular Architecture of Sri Lanka as a Means of Communication

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Abstract: Meeting the basic human need for shelter and protection is the primary purpose of built space. In addition to shelter, the spatial allocation in vernacular architecture is relied upon as a means of conveying ‘information’. The traditional dwelling in Sri Lanka contains several features that help the inhabitants to convey visual signals of socially vital messages to the neighbourhood community. These combine visual, audible and sensory intimations. In folk architecture, this communication is essentially nonverbal using structural, material and behavioural methods. The design of dwellings in the traditional Sri Lankan society had important components as conduits for relations between the elements and spiritual beliefs. Such shared notions were the means used by the dweller to convey ‘messages’ to the society at large. Sri Lankan people have used various methods and practices connected to their abode to convey messages to the wider society. Oral communication through different types of sound effects as well as traditional motifs and decorations using natural materials such as flowers, herbal leaves and plants, drawings and etchings were the most reliable and frequently used means of communication. The present study is an analytical survey of traditional communication methods which are effectively attached to the ‘house’. It attempts to explain how traditional dwellings were used to communicate specific messages. The hypothetical base of the study is that architecture is a kind of language which facilitates communication of messages. Information collected through field visits to different provinces of the country and cross referenced with written primary sources. Oral historiography was used in acquiring related information. The study suggest that vernacular architecture is a multifaceted resource that enables us to explore the socio cultural aspects of dwellers in contemporary society. It explores the built structures as a means of depicting shared symbolism of society and an implicit means of communication. The study proposes that the traditional dwelling is an effective instrument of social interaction.