This paper describes the traditional, religious, social and economic conditions present in the organization of the village of Embekke in Sri Lanka. It outlines the role of processions in the daily life of the village, and it shows how the most important procession of the year, the Perhera, has been of primary significance in shaping the village. Traditionally, the temple controlled the entire village and gave use of homes and fields in return for services to it, but today the temple's holdings have been greatly reduced, and few villagers assist in its operation. Nevertheless, the spatial organization of the village has remained intact, as has its aesthetic impact. Embekke today demonstrates a balance of religious, social and economic principles which is different from centuries past, but which is not less clear in expression. Embekke shows how coherent urban form can be based on both traditional and contemporary institutions.

The form of the village of Embekke in the central highlands of Sri Lanka demonstrates an organizing principle whose roots can be traced to at least the eighteenth century. Embekke presents a clear diagram of a religious, social and economic system, some aspects of which still exist. A study of Embekke can provide insight into the relationship between the built form of a village and a traditional way of life. An understanding of Embekke can contribute to an understanding of how urban form may be based on cultural values.
EMBEKKE'S RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

Embekke is known primarily for its temple, or devale. The first devale in Embekke was founded in 1371 by King Vikramabahu III, when the area around Embekke was ruled from Gompola. The first Embekke temple was dedicated to the Hindu god Kataragama in response to a miracle that was reputed to have happened on the site. Although the period of rule from Gompola was known for a richness of artistic expression, remnants of the original Embekke temple no longer exist. The present structure dates from the eighteenth century. During this period, Embekke was part of the Kingdom of Kanay. This kingdom was founded in 1592 and endured until it was overthrown by the British in 1815. Kandy today remains the cultural center of the Sinhalese majority in Sri Lanka. It is the site of the most holy relic of Buddhism, the tooth of the Buddha. This is housed in the Dalada Malagawa, the Temple of the Tooth.

Buddhism is the primary religion of the majority Sinhalese population of Sri Lanka, but Hindu temples are also common, associated with the minority Tamil population. The line between the two religions is often blurred. Hindu gods are found in many Buddhist temples, and Buddha images are found in many Hindu temples. Hindus often view the Buddha as an incarnation of Visnu, whereas Buddhists often view Hindu gods as protectors of the Buddha. This explains why the Embekke devale is dedicated to a Hindu deity but contains a Buddha image and a sacred Bo tree.

During the Kandyan period the arts of architecture, wood-carving, metal work and dance all flourished, supported by the rich surrounding countryside and the Kandyan kings. Because Embekke was one of the villages ruled from Kandy, it is not surprising that its temple took on the Kandyan style when it was rebuilt in the eighteenth century. The porch of the Embekke temple is similar to the king's audience hall in Kandy and was once used for the same purposes. Embekke was also a center for wood craftsmen, and the temple is famous for the extent and quality of its carved wooden elements.

The specific architecture of Embekke is not as important to this paper as is the organization of the village as a whole. Ananda Coomaraswamy has said that in Kandy of the eighteenth century, "... husbandmen and craftsmen of all sorts worked either for the King, a religious foundation, or a chieftain, as well as for themselves or their neighbors..." The village of Embekke was given to the temple by the king and was known as a devale village. The cultivation of rice was the basis of its economy, and the devale controlled the paddy fields that surrounded the village. Villagers were given rights to cultivate a portion of the fields and to build houses, which would become temple property. In this way farmers, craftsmen, musicians and dancers all owed goods and services to the temple in return for their livelihood. There was virtually no use for money. The traditional village economy was based on barter.

VILLAGE LIFE

In a traditional Sinhalese village like Embekke the rhythm of life is set by the temple. For example, offerings of food accompanied by music are made to the Buddha three times a day. Seasonally, the first rice harvest is brought to the temple, and once a year, the festival of Vesak commemorates events in the life of the Buddha. Other rituals occur at specific times of the year, and life-cycle events such as births, marriages and deaths are also recognized. In addition, people come to the temple for advice and guidance in their personal lives. Embekke devale is also visited by pilgrims from all parts of Sri Lanka.

In many villages with an important temple, the major festival of the year is Perahera, which takes place in the lunar month of Asala, which usually falls during July or August. The origins of Perahera, which means "procession," are very old and obscure. They substantially predate its first performance in Kandy in the eighteenth century. The historian Anuradha Seneviratna has proposed the following list of explanations for it. All of them probably have some basis.

1. The Asa festival celebrates the victory of the Sunas (Gods) over the Asuras (Demons).
2. The festival commemorates King Gajabahu's invasion of the Chola Country. Gajabahu (174-196
A.D.) invaded the Chola Country when he heard the Cholas had invaded Sri Lanka during his father’s reign and taken away twelve thousand Sinhalese captives. With Nila as his commander, Gajabahu brought all the Sinhalese captives back to Sri Lanka. He also seized twelve thousand Chola captives and made off with the Bowl Relic of the Buddha and the golden anklets of Goddess Pattini, the sacred utensils of the four Devales (deistic shrines).

3. The month of Asala was chosen because it commemorates the birth of Visnu.

4. The Asala Festival is held annually to propitiate the Gods in order to assure timely rains for cultivation. This suggests that it is integral to the complex fertility cult prevalent among the peasants.3

Today, the Kandy Perahera is a spectacular and world-famous folk pageant. It involves a long procession of important personages, musicians, dancers and at least one hundred elephants. After several days it culminates in the display of the gold casket containing the tooth of the Buddha. Peraheras are also held in a number of other Sri Lankan villages, towns and cities on a smaller, more intimate scale. In a devale village such as Embekke, the Perahera is the major festival of the year.

**ORGANIZATION OF EMBEKKE**

At Embekke the need to accommodate processions is one of the most important determinants of overall village form. The plan and spatial character of the village clearly express the idea of procession and the particular social and economic patterns typical of a devale village. There are a number of devale villages in Sri Lanka, but Embekke provides the clearest example of this formal order because most of its traditional architectural elements are still in place.4

Embekke sits on a ridge bounded on three sides by paddy fields. The traditional approach to the village was from the fields. The remains of stone pillars from a rest house, which predated the temple and was built for the king, can still be found here. Ceremonial arrival at the village was preceded by arrival at the rest house. From here, the drama of arrival was enhanced by the short climb to the devale and the village.

The village is organized around a single main street, or vidiya, which is approximately 190 met-
ers long. Two pavilions relating axially to one another mark the ends of this street. At the west end is the wahalkada, the entry portal to the temple. At the east end is the rittage, the ceremonial reliquary (FIG. 1, 2). The street is flanked by the houses of the villagers. Each villager had a specific role in the operation of the temple.

The wahalkada marks the entry to the temple precinct. It aligns with the central structure, the maha devale. The principal feature of this main temple is its digge, or open porch. This was originally used as an audience hall for the king, but is now used primarily as a drumming hall where daily ceremonies are carried out. The extensive carving of wood pillars, brackets, beams and other architectural elements of the digge are among the finest in Sri Lanka. Behind the maha devale is a two-story inner sanctum where the image of Kataragama is enshrined. The image stands on a base in the form of a peacock, Kataragama’s traditional vehicle. Viharage, a temple of Buddha, is attached to the north end of the maha devale. A free-standing temple to the south is dedicated to the god Devatha Bandara, a minister to Kataragama. This last structure has a porch where ritual drumming and dancing takes place on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

There are two other buildings in the temple precinct. These are the atuwa, a two-chambered storage barn for rice, and the multhenge, or kitchen. The kitchen has two rooms. One is used to prepare the daily food offerings for Kataragama and Buddha. The other is only used on special occasions such as the twice-weekly ceremony to Devatha Bandara. In addition, there is a Bo tree shrine. A stone arch indicates the axis of the maha devale, which is also the axis of Kataragama’s view from the temple.

RI TUAL USE

Processions are a prominent feature of life in the village. Some examples will give a sense of how these events define the rhythm of days, weeks, months and years. Three times a day a procession with drummers and horn-players accompanies food from the kitchen to the gods and the Buddha. Twice a week a procession with dancers celebrates Devatha Bandara. Poya days mark the lunar months, and there are major processional celebrations four times a year. For example, at the cutting of the first rice in January, there is a procession to the paddy fields to celebrate a ceremonial cutting. This is followed by ceremonies of cooking and presentation. The Perahera is the most elaborate of these special yearly celebrations.

Processions also mark specific events unrelated to the yearly calendar. One example is the visit of Buddhist monks to a family or to the village as a whole. The monks come from outside the village with banners accompanied by drummers and other musicians. They carry umbrellas which protect them from the sun or rain and serve as ritual roofs. The saffron robes of the monks form a striking contrast to the lush green of the paddy fields and other vegetation (FIG. 3).

These examples illustrate how processions play an integral part in the life of a Sri Lankan village. They not only organize the life of the village but give meaning to the places in it. The relationship between the built form of the village and the idea of procession is best illustrated by a closer look at the Perahera celebration.

For the first five days of the Perahera, ceremonies take place only within the temple precinct. A principal feature of these celebrations is the circumambulation of the central temple. The precinct is large enough for this to occur (FIG. 4). After the sixth day, the festival moves to the vidiya, the main street. There the story of the temple is recited from the wahalkada, the entry porch. Ritual implements of gold, silver, brass and wood are loaded onto elephants from the wahalkada which is designed so these animals can stand on a lower level outside the temple precinct (FIG. 5). Steps in the wahalkada allow officials to mount the elephants.

The size of the procession of elephants, dancers and musicians is a reflection of the wealth of the temple. At one time as many as seventeen elephants may have been involved; now only four are usually used. The procession moves along the vidiya to the rittage, the reliquary. Temporary arches or gateways with the profile of temple roofs are built over the vidiya to enhance its character as a processional
way (FIG. 6). The rittage consists of a two-story porch into which an elephant can enter and a second-story room with a porch oriented towards the temple. It has considerable presence despite its small size because it is perched on the highest point in the village and is located on axis with the vidiya and the devale. Historically, the ritual objects were deposited in the rittage for a period of time, and the king would view the events from the porch. Today the implements are only left in the rittage for about half an hour while chants are sung from the porch (FIG. 7). The procession also moves through the countryside to three nearby villages which share the Perahera, before returning to Embekke Devale.6

The vidiya is the setting for some of the most important ritual aspects of the Perahera. It is at once the main street of the town and the symbolic focus of the Perahera. The devale and the rittage are permanent reminders of this significance. While the ends of the vidiya are defined by ritual structures, its edges are defined by the houses of the village. An early photograph of Embekke shows simple rectangular houses of mud, timber and thatch (FIG 8). These were typical of rural houses throughout Sri Lanka. They existed in contrast to the more formal composition of the temple with its elegant carved structures and patterned tile roofs. Hierarchy of importance was expressed therefore not only by position, but by architectural elaboration. Symbolically and economically, the houses and their inhabitants supported the temple. Conversely, the temple presided paternalistically over the village, regulating its social, economic and spiritual life.

EMBEKKE TODAY

The early photograph reveals the beginnings of change in the design of the houses. This is con-
FIGURE 4. Music and dancing in the temple precinct. (Photo: Athula Bogoda.)

FIGURE 5. Officials and elephant at the walalkada. (Photo: Athula Bogoda.)
FIGURE 6. The procession on the vidīya. (Photo: Athula Bogoda.)

FIGURE 7. The procession at the rittage. (Photo: Athula Bogoda.)

FIGURE 8. A photograph of Embekke, early twentieth century. (Department of Archeology, Ministry of Culture, Sri Lanka.)
firmed by contemporary photographs of Embekke Vidiya (FIGS. 9, 10). The first houses to change were those near the temple. These began to acquire tile roofs, second floors and dormers. More importantly, they began to compete in scale with the temple. Today the street is paved and the houses show both British colonial influences and the influence of twentieth century styles. The temple no longer owns these houses, and in general its land holdings are greatly diminished. The people of Embekke are still farmers and craftsmen, but they also commute to jobs in nearby communities. Responsibilities for the temple are rotated among different people so that individual contributions are reduced. Revenues from the temple lands are substantially less than they once were. This is clearly evident in the unfortunate shabbiness of the temple precinct.7

Private ownership and a more democratic political and economic system have found architectural expression in the enhancement of the private homes in relation to the temple. As a processional way, however, Embekke Vidiya retains its importance as an organizing urban element. Despite the pattern of scattered growth in the rest of the village, it maintains its centrality as the focus of the community. The idea of a main street may be simple in terms of urban form, but here it embodies a profound meaning.

The village of Embekke today demonstrates a different balance of religious, social and economic principles than in centuries past. But the expression of these values is no less clear. The temple and its reliquary retain architectural dominance because religious ritual remains a significant aspect of village life. Furthermore, historic preservation, valued for cultural reasons and for reasons of tourist promotion, has assured a minimum level of maintenance. The vidiya also retains its formal dominance for the simple reason of local topography. The ridge upon which Embekke sits is small, and the paddy fields around it are too important to be used for building or for an expanded network of paths or streets.

FIGURE 9. Embekke Vidiya in 1987, looking west to the devale.
CONCLUSION: COHERENT URBAN FORM

The same forces that are changing Embekke are the ones that most often lead to indiscriminate building and the dissolution of community. Unrestricted growth directed by people without roots to a particular place, or by people whose roots are loosened by employment out of the community, can create social and architectural incoherence. Amos Rapoport has eloquently described this process:

_in the new townships the grid destroys both the intimate scale and the link with the land. The new visual elements no longer express the relation of the individual to the group and of the group to the land . . . . The new pattern makes the individual feel insignificant. Group unity is destroyed, and there is no clear relation of man to his surroundings through elements of increasing spatial scale and demarcation of domains of harmony with the land around._

True urbanism results in a clearly identifiable hierarchy of places which correspond to human institutions. Embekke demonstrates such a coherent urban form. Specifically, the idea of procession has been the generator of a symbolically and architecturally dominant main street. This street embodies social and religious values important in Sri Lankan society. These values are by no means static; they have evolved in response to contemporary needs. Insofar as processions create memories associated with special places, architectural celebration of these places can help define and give meaning to a community.

FIGURE 10. Embekke Vidiya in 1987, looking east to the rittage.
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7. From an interview with H. Bandara, Embekke village headman.