

NOTES ON THE ETHICS OF STUDYING VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

Prem Chandavarkar >

Scholarship on vernacular architecture typically constructs the identity of the vernacular subject in terms of a stable and holistic culture, rooted in place and community. On the other hand, the scholar of vernacular architecture is modern, claiming the attendant freedom to individually aspire regarding profession, lifestyle, culture and location. This paradox, although pervasive, is rarely explicitly recognized. This failure results in ethical conflicts that occur even with the best intentions of the scholar.

The paper focuses on this ethical dilemma, and argues that if it is not acknowledged it pushes us towards the unacceptable situation of an "either/or" choice: either suppress the modernist aspirations of the vernacular subject, or accept that culture and built heritage have an unstable relationship that reduces heritage to the superficiality of a visual setting, within a hierarchy of power that pushes vernacular culture to the margins. The paper argues that the notions of "modernity" and "vernacular" have to be integrated into a framework that binds the scholar and vernacular subject into a common territory, without which it becomes difficult to ethically validate scholarly study of the vernacular. An outline of this framework is proposed.

Keywords:

Ethics, Conflicts, Vernacular, Modern