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An architect from a different school**Ranjit Ambastha and Meera Shah**

Ladwa is a remote village. Located on the periphery of the forest, it is accessible only by crossing 'Taral' river on foot. During the monsoon season one can reach the village only by wading through the neck-deep water under a villager's guidance or by swimming across it.

AKRSP first contacted the villagers of Ladwa in January 1991, when a general PRA was conducted in the village. Following this, development efforts were supported in the village in taking up afforestation and soil and water conservation activities. After one year it was decided to conduct an evaluation PRA in Ladwa to understand the impact, if any, of the programmes undertaken till then.

It was while an active debate was going on as to how the change in cropping pattern and crop productivity could be depicted pictorially (so that the illiterate could also participate) that Mansingh Dungarjee was spotted. He had been quietly watching the group discuss how to draw the difference between a '*desi*' (local) and hybrid variety of cotton. Towards the end of the discussion he was offered the pen and asked whether he would like to try, so as to involve him in the proceedings. He looked confused as he replied, "... *maybe, I don't know ... have never done it before...*" while he hesitatingly held the pen in his hand.

On being asked what he did for a living, he informed us that he designs homes for the villagers. All houses in this area are built around a basic wooden frame. Around the frame the mud and bamboo walls come up and a roof is placed which can be tiled or thatched. Mansingh creates the wooden frames for the people and hence acts as a designer cum

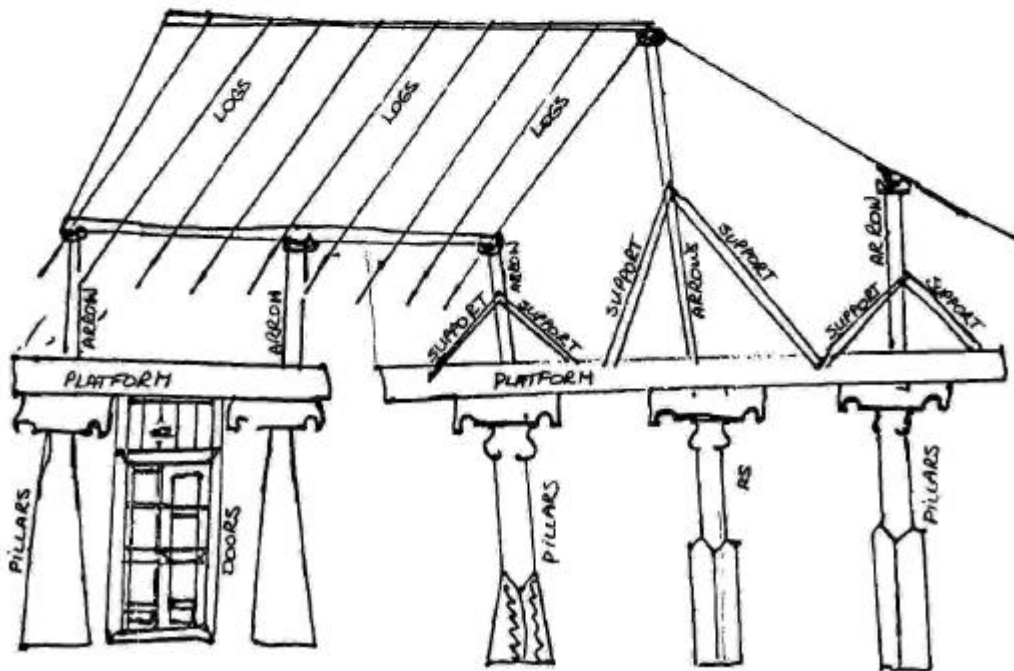
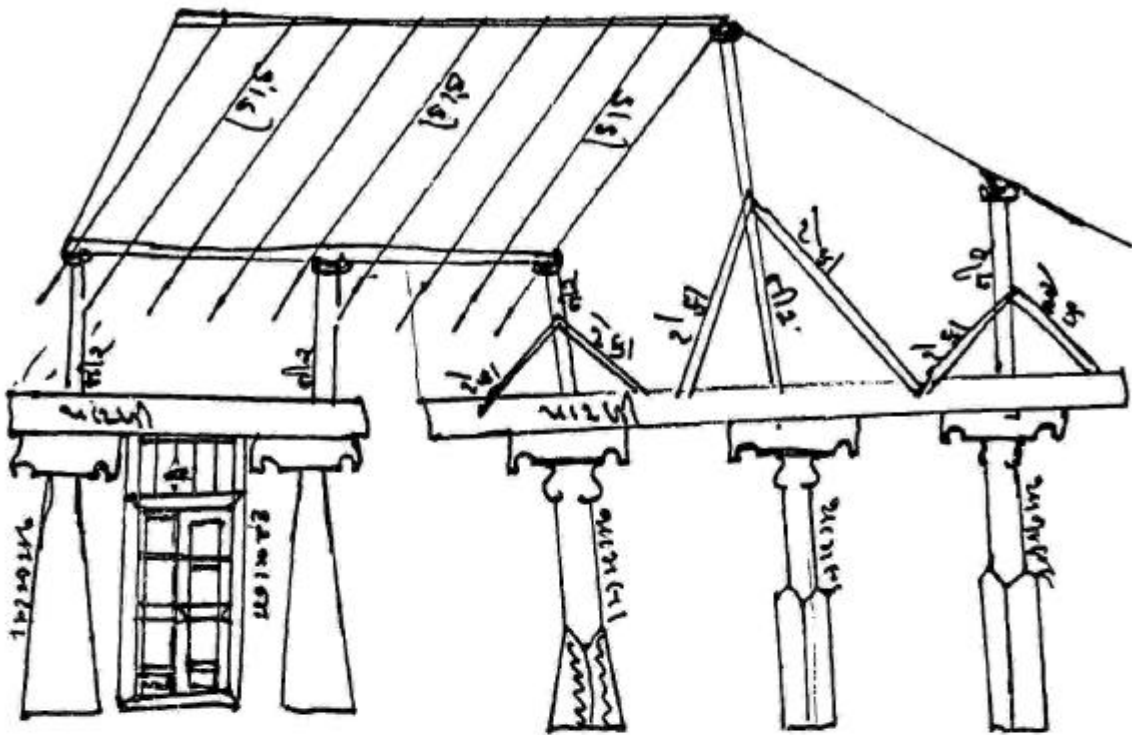
consultant for them. Not only does he decide the quality of wood to be used but he also does

the interiors for them. We were getting interested in what he had to say (though we were not there for this purpose) and he was asked whether he could draw the different types of houses he designs and constructs. Mansingh was not sure. He had never before drawn what he constructed on paper. Nor did he keep a blueprint in front of him. His creativity comes in a free flow matching his client's needs and the size of his pocket! However, Mansingh was willing to try. One sheet of chart paper and one sketch pen was left behind with him to draw out his designs.

One week later the secretary of the Ladwa Village Development Association turned up at the AKRSP office with the output. Drawn out neatly were 8 drawings of different types of houses he has designed. They had to be seen to be believed. Asked if he could do more of these, the answer was YES - but he had run out of paper! One more sheet of paper was sent to him which he again filled up with designs as seen from different elevations and from different angles. These could have been done by a trained professional.

Not only did Mansingh mention the quantity of wood required for the different designs but he also mentioned the approximate cost of each structure and the time it would take to get ready (in labour days). Also included were designs for interiors with beautifully carved pillars for those who could afford it.

We plan to give back a copy of these outputs in a folder to Mansingh so that his clients can choose from the different designs and Mansingh is able to show his clients what they could expect.



Only if people like Mansingh could be identified and tapped by agencies like the government which construct shelters for the weaker sections of society, could these programmes be developed to suit the requirements of the local people using local technology. Programmes like the INDIRA AWAS YOJNA have set up houses which are rarely used for the purpose they were built. Some villagers use these for cattle sheds or to store grass rather than stay there themselves. In other cases brick and concrete walls are knocked down to be replaced by the more familiar bamboo and mud walls which enable better ventilation and lighting. Would it not be better if these houses are designed by people like Mansingh rather than professionally trained architects who design these homes far away from the rural scene and have very different ideas about the user's requirements?

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