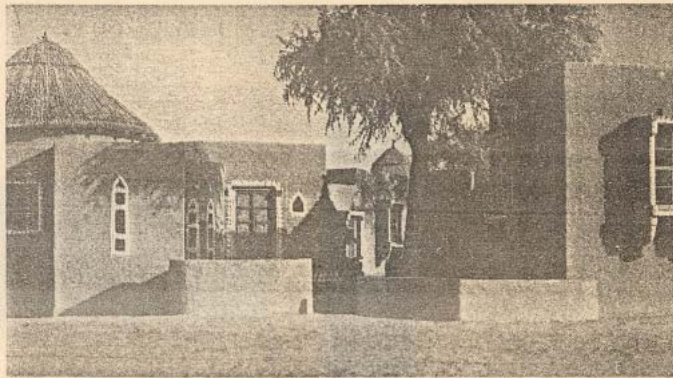


## Mud is Beautiful

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The built form has always emerged from the fusions of the environment into the common consciousness of the mind. True architecture, I believe, has never been a passing fancy of style or an object fabricated by an individual as something 'new' and imposed upon the environment. However, the architecture associated with the industrial age is based on 'innovation'. New materials, new methods of processing, new methods of construction, trendy new forms — all lead to the relegation of architecture into the realm of the trivial and fanciful. The built form is often treated as a mere 'machine to live in' and architecture no longer responds sensitively to the natural environment, or to the ecological systems.

The orgy of self-aggrandizement and the inevitable colonization of the earth's resources have alienated the human habitat from the natural systems. The mutation of these systems, as well as the negation of the collective human consciousness from being part of



the environment, has led to the virtual taking over of human creativity by the industrial network, and of erasing spontaneity and direct human interaction with the myriad cycles of nature. Architectural and environmental symbols, patterns and rhythms from the past that are an integral part of our psyche, are being constantly beleaguered and eroded by the new 'man-made' industrial order. The historical as well as the natural past are encapsulated into segments that are being preserved as

mere relics — reserved forests, sanctuaries and parks, resorts, historical monuments and conserved areas etc. These are exclusive, recreational spots, divorced from life's mainstream. They stand unintegrated into the new ecological, cultural fabric. At best, they help us to revere our roots and give us the freedom to pursue our colonization of the natural systems, promote our anti-ecological culture and increase the schism between production and consumption, work and home, past and

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present, man made and natural, and most critical of all, man and woman. Human endeavour is now increasingly fragmented and alienated from its instincts.

We must stop on our tracks NOW. We must endeavour to assimilate ecological systems into our culture and life styles. We must assimilate the past and metamorphose it into the living present — a present that creates a perfect harmony between the evolution of man and Nature. We need to reintegrate much of what we have lost in our race to change and invent rather than to evolve and create. 'Ecology' is instinctively one of man's most compelling motives, and building with earth and other unprocessed materials, is a natural, creative urge. Each time one builds, one scours the surroundings to gather material — stones, branches, grass, reeds, water and earth — and as one collects, one is conscious of what one does to the mountain, tree, the pond, lake, river or well — one is conscious of where one digs the earth from, using only what cannot be used by plants, and knowing fully well that even if one impinges on the ecosystem, it is only temporary. The stones removed from the mountain

side can be 'rearranged time and again by others. Each branch that is chopped will be replaced by a growing tree. The roots of the grass will grow afresh, soon after the rains.

The use of simple materials does not imply primitiveness or rusticity. These simple materials can be crafted, moulded and shaped by the human hand into sophisticated, architectural forms.

The hand crafting of buildings is specially relevant to the Indian situation, where labour is in abundance, and possesses the requisite skills for building with simple materials.

The average Indian architect has failed to utilize these skills, mainly due to a preoccupation in emulating the architecture of the industrialized West. Their elitism has led to the 'robotization' of skilled labour in the building trade, who are then used as mere 'machines to build'. The mason is called upon to build row upon row of undifferentiated plain brick walls or cast layer upon layer of horizontal concrete slabs, while the labourer is subjected to the physical discomfort of carrying loads of bricks and concrete everyday. Women labourers are reduced

to being beasts of burden, with scant hope of rising in the hierarchy, and little or none of being allowed to acquire any new skills or of utilizing them. Not for them the joy of being able to mould the earth into built form, of plastering and rendering the walls with clay relief work, wall paintings and drawings. Modern aesthetic materials, comprising plain, smooth, slick acrylic, or plastic emulsion, intimidates and prevents joyful, and spontaneous creativity on the walls of buildings.

Building with earth allows the architect to explore form with ease, divesting him of the computer, tee square and scale. The



hand and the mind are left free to create with fluidity. Mechanical precision and scaled dimensions are replaced by patterns and rhythms of human movement and repose. Images and memories related to housing that are latent in the subconscious, unfold with ease, and their reassimilation into physical reality through a continuous process of orchestrated decision making, allows the creative participation of the user, the archi-

tect, the builder and finisher.

Architecture is thus freed from the shackles of technological determinism, and design, building and environment are unified. Design is no longer an excruciating cerebral exercise of co-ordinating mismatched systems, generated by the numerous requirements of rigid, predetermined, architectural programmes.

The rationalist may dismiss my view points as being impracti-

cal and excessively romantic, calling it an alternative counterculture, and so on. But these decorated mud dwellings serve as visible symbols. They are not seductive images of the past, nor picture post-cards of the ethnic. They are a plea, a reminder to man, to think long and deep, to reconsider the many dimensions that have been ignored in the mad rush for development and the megalomania of concentrated wealth and power.