

# The Indigenous Architecture of CHITRAL, PAKISTAN

Text by **Iqbal Hassan.**

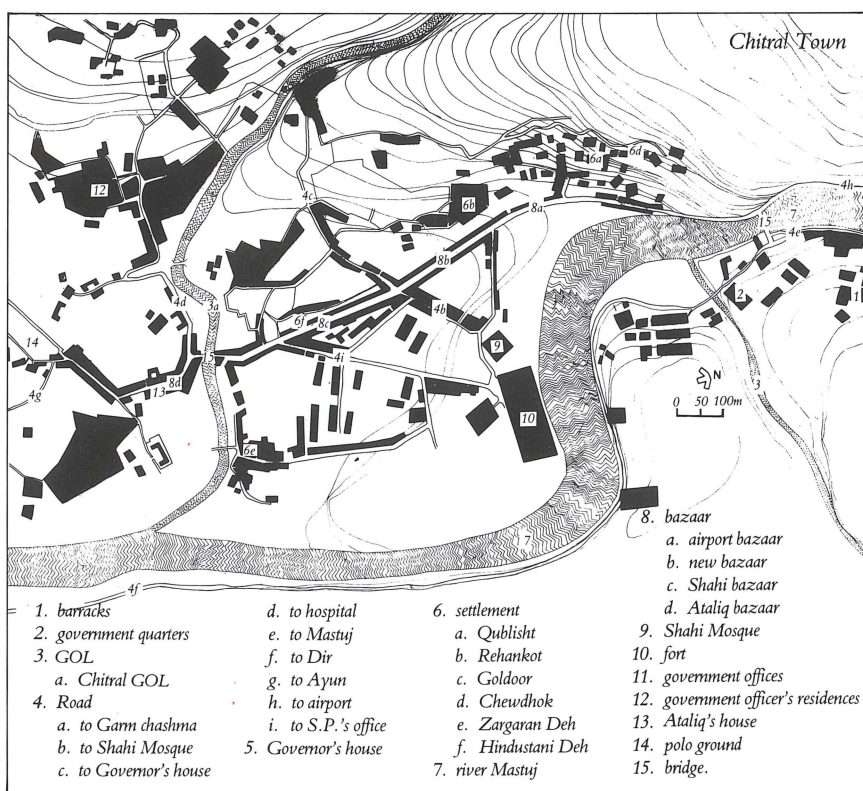
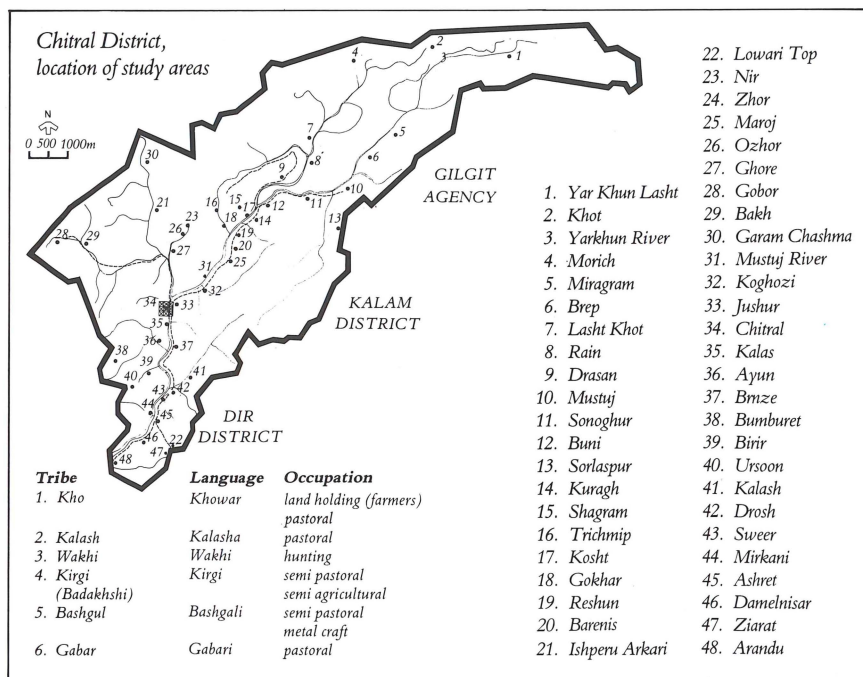
Illustrations by the professors and students of the National College of Arts, Lahore.



The students and professors at National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan undertook a survey of the indigenous architecture of the Chitral region in 1980 under a grant from the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. This article illustrates their study in terms of drawings done for an exhibition and a text used at a presentation of the work.

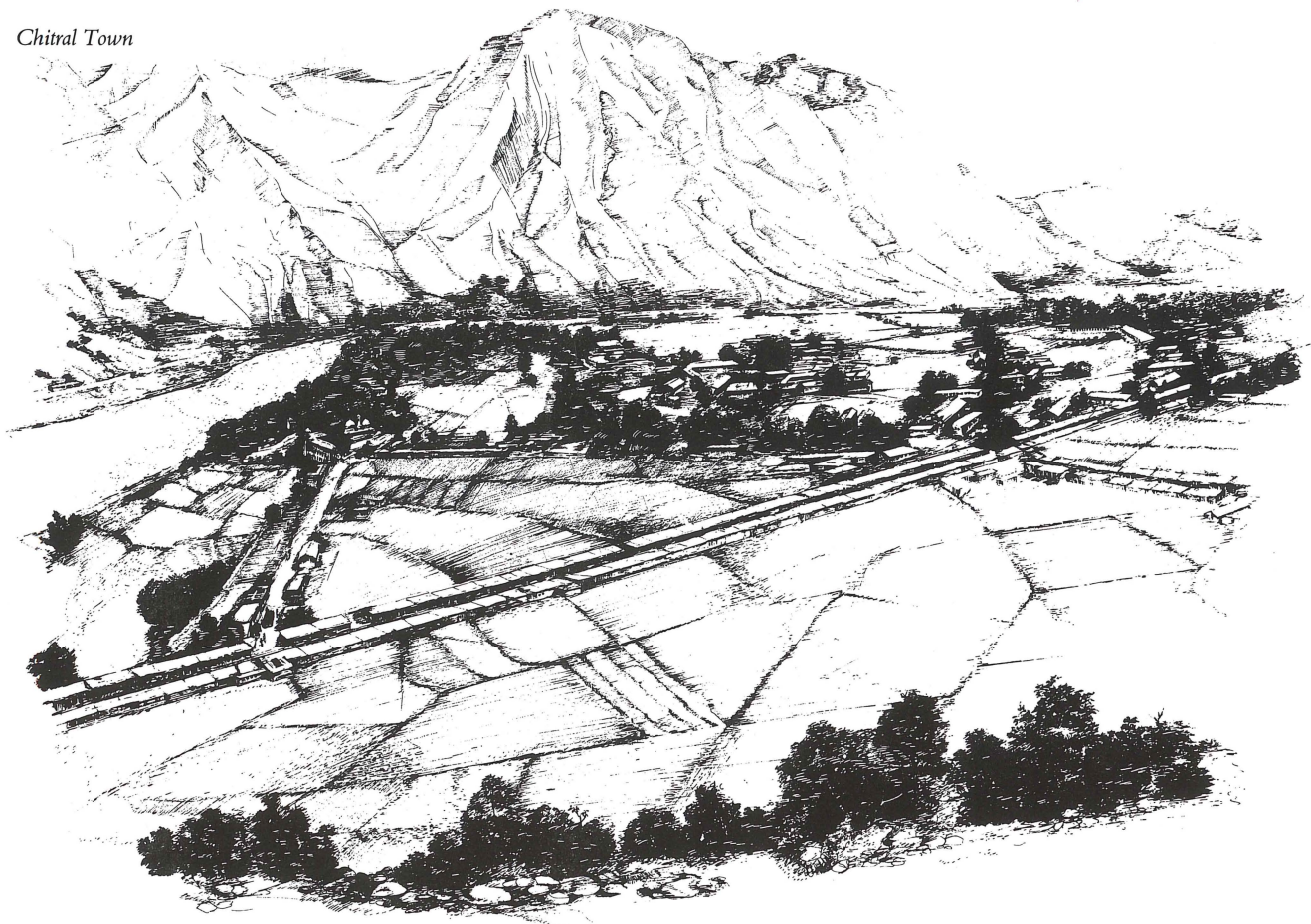
**T**he Chitral region consists of a number of interconnected valleys at an average altitude of 1500-2000 metres. These valleys are flanked by the higher peaks of the Hindu Kush range. The region is connected to the plains by an ancient carven route — now a direct road — through the Lowari pass, at an altitude of over 3000 metres which is snowbound during winter and thus Chitral is cut off from the rest of the country during this period. Internally, however, the various valleys remain interconnected, with Chitral town at the hub of the communication system. The area is sustained economically by its limited agriculture, fruit, sheep farming and timber.

The Chitral Bazaar is located on the ancient carven route and is about 2.5 kilometres long. It does not have a residential area around or near it, but is flanked by open cultivated fields. This peculiar configuration and location is the result of the limited flat land available





Chitral Town



which is suitable for agricultural purposes. Thus the local inhabitants have preferred to use the rocky hillsides for their housing needs, leaving the more arable valley floor for their crops.

The unusual character of the bazaar can be better understood in terms of its usage by the entire region rather than Chitral town alone. In this situation, it assumes the role of a trading post and an extended sundry market, where trade is a two-way activity, with the consumer and the shopkeeper becoming both the buyer and the seller. Since a part of the shop is used as a warehouse or in some cases as living quarters by those shopkeepers whose homes are in distant valleys, the shops are extended in depth. During the long winter when Chitral is isolated from the outside world, the local products are collected in the warehouse section of the shop for export to the plains when communications are resumed. During the summer the warehouse portion is used for stocking sufficient imported merchandise to be sold during the winter months.

The houses which are in clusters may be divided into three categories: *Bipush* or *Kho* houses; Plain Area houses; and Terraced Area houses. All the three

types have some common features like the nature of spaces i.e. a courtyard, verandah and rooms: materials of construction and structural system i.e. timber columns and beams with non-load bearing infill walls of stone and mud reinforced with timber logs horizontally placed in the wall 0.6 metre to 1 metre apart. The differences lie in the arrangement of spaces and interior detailing.

A *Bipush* or *Kho* house has a typical room called *Bipush* which incorporates all the activities of the family in winter. The space inside the room is subdivided in such a manner that each part has a defined function associated with it. The peripheral bays of the room have the normal roof of wooden beams, joists and planks but the central area has a diamond-shaped wooden ceiling stepped up on four levels by placing squares diagonally and culminating in the square smoke-hole which is the only source of light in the room, other than the entrance.

All the *Kho* houses whether they had been built a hundred years ago or are still under construction follow the same plan with some minor deviations e.g. providing a small window in a wall or changing the position of the bath room, etc. A *Kho* house, in addition to the *Bipush*

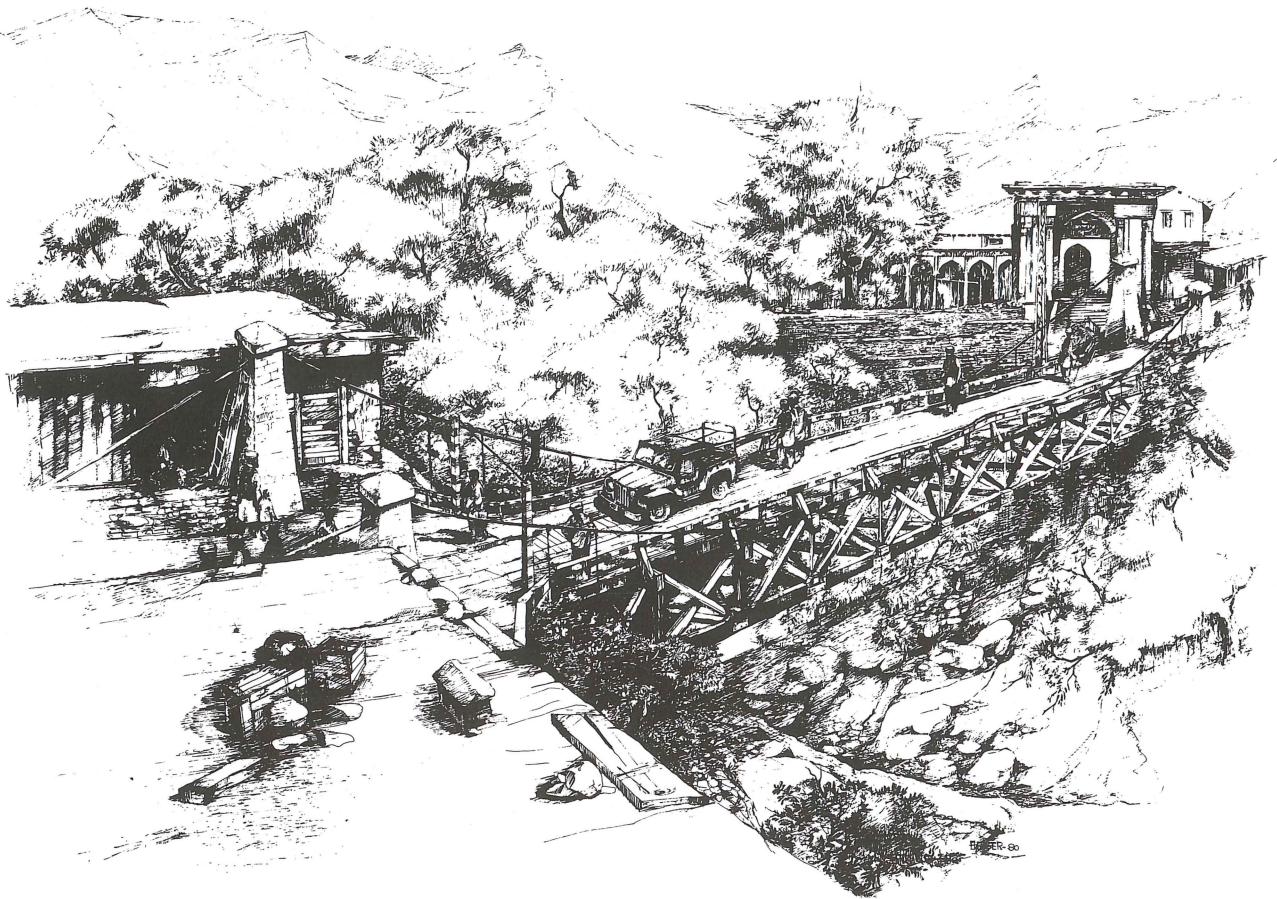
room normally has a store in its rear, an outside kitchen for summers in one corner of the verandah and sometimes separate room for guests.

Plain Area houses are on narrow, but deep plots with a row of rooms, verandah and then a courtyard in which grow fruit trees.

Terraced Area houses, like the houses in Rehankot being a hilly terraced area do not have deep plots, therefore they have a lateral arrangement of courtyard with verandah and rooms unlike Plain Area houses. One entrance from the street may serve as many as seven houses, being one on top of the other.

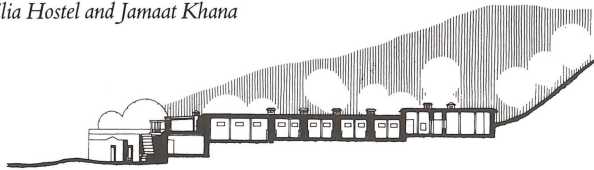
This paper cannot and should not describe in detail the finer points of the indigenous architecture which have been recorded. The drawings illustrate these points better than words can express. However I shall try to highlight the broad underlying concepts, which have developed over many hundreds of years, influenced primarily by climatic conditions and the changing socio-economic patterns of the regions. From the humblest dwelling to the most ornate mansion, these principles have served to determine the organisation of different spaces in public and private buildings.





Chitral Bazaar, Ismailia Hostel and Jamaat Khana

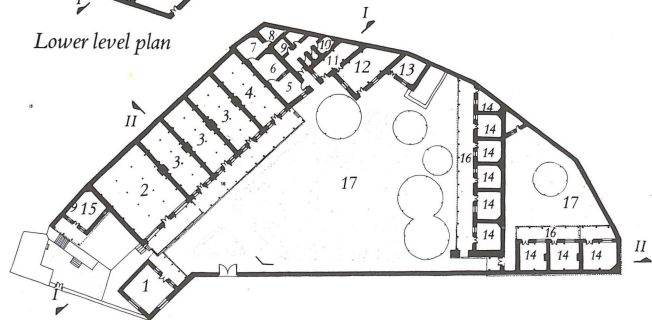
Section I



Section II



Lower level plan



Upper level plan

N  
0 2 4m

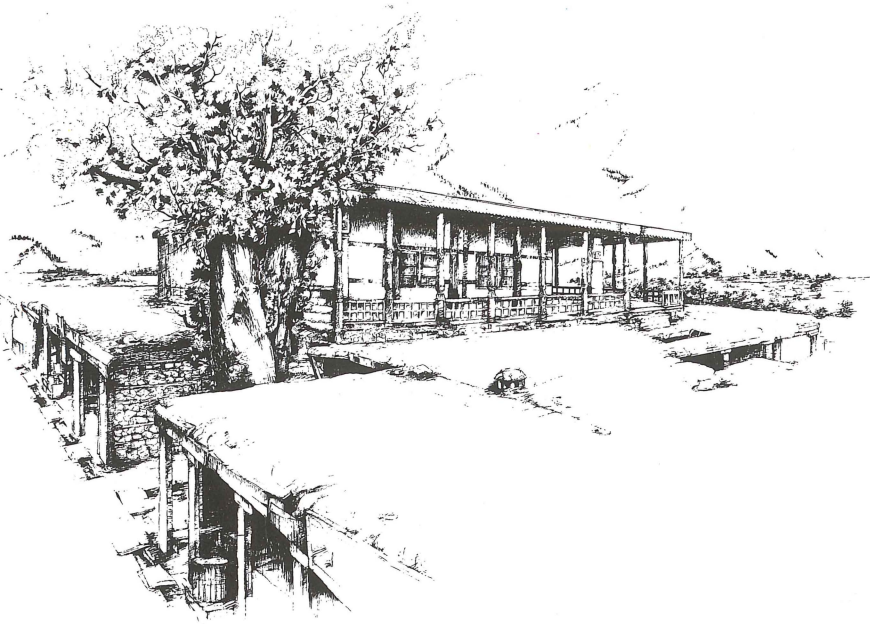
1. library
2. Jamaat Khana
3. dormitory
4. dining hall
5. superintendent's office
6. superintendent's room
7. store
8. toilet
9. bath room
10. W.C. unit
11. cook's residence
12. kitchen
13. Tandoor oven
14. cubicle
15. office
16. verandah
17. courtyard

They may be broadly categorised as the concept of delineation and the concepts of open space, semi-enclosed space and enclosed space. Whether in the rural areas where the dwellings have a horizontal spread and are usually at one level, or in the urban areas where land is at a premium and dwellings have spread vertically giving rise to multi-storey buildings, these concepts are equally applicable.

The boundary wall is the architectural manifestation of the concept of delineation. It serves to define the extent of the building, establish and emphasise ownership and separate the dwelling from other public and private properties. In addition it provides the inmates with privacy and security. This acquires greater significance particularly in the North West Frontier Province where social conditions dictate high boundary walls, watch towers, parapets, battlements and gun slits. In the Punjab, the boundary wall is much lower and in many cases may consist only of a *baar* of dried thorny bushes.

The construction material for the boundary wall is normally that which is easily available in the immediate vicinity. Generally it is clay, but where stone is available in abundance as for example, in the Frontier Province, and parts of Pothohar, the boundary wall is of stone with clay mortar. In places where burrowing areas are scarce, or in the poorer





dwelling, the boundary wall may consist of a *baar* or dense thorny bushes.

At a selected point is the entrance, which is a break in the continuity of the wall. This break may be fitted with a wooden or metal gate, closed off by placing thorny bushes or left open.

The height of the wall, the construction material used for the wall, the gate and the quality of workmanship are an indication of the economic and social status of the owner.

In dwellings which have been developed along the vertical axis, the boundary wall is represented by the outer walls of the building itself. This is primarily, in urban areas where land use determines the maximum utility of land. In such dwellings the courtyard is elevated to the top floor, a portion of which may be a semi-enclosed space. The ground floor in such cases may be used for storage or as animal shelter.

In some urban more elaborate dwellings (determined by the socio-economic status of the owner) a light well runs through all floors, which are built around this covered, enclosed courtyard.

The extreme climatic conditions with extensive variations in temperature and humidity between the different seasons, and between night and day during the same season has created the need for an open space. The architectural translation of this is in the form of the courtyard.

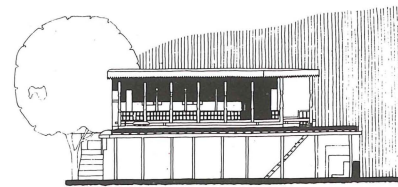
In the horizontally spread dwellings the entrance in the boundary wall opens directly into the courtyard while in the vertically developed buildings the courtyard moves to the open roof with a staircase leading up to it from within. Usually the entrance leads directly into the courtyard with the main building

located further back. However, it is not uncommon, particularly in urban areas to have the main building surrounding the courtyard from all sides. The courtyard is an integral part of the total scheme and serves as the main living of the house where the inhabitants carry out most of their activities. These activities are determined by the seasons and time of day. In the summer months during the day it may be used as a playing area for children, a corner can be earmarked for washing facilities and preparation of the evening meal. During the long summer evenings it is used as an area to entertain visitors and for other social activities. Later, beds are placed in the courtyard which then acts as the sleeping area. In winter, the afternoon meal is prepared in the cooking area and any visitors during the day are entertained here. All washing and other domestic chores such as making of butter, *lassi*, etc. are also carried out in the courtyard — a portion may be set aside to act as a stockade for cattle which are also fed and milked in this area. For dwellings with in-house toilet facilities, the courtyard serves to separate the toilet from the main dwelling.

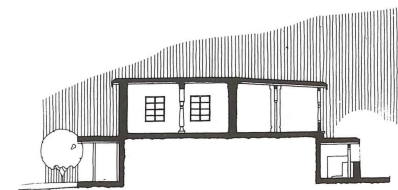
The size of the courtyard, its quality and decor serve as a status symbol. In general, the higher the status, the more elaborate the courtyard which may in cases be paved with brick or marble tiles. Thus the courtyard may vary from a simple open space in a village to the highly elaborate and ornately decorated courtyard of the Shish Mahal in the Lahore Fort.

The semi-enclosed space, popularly referred to as the verandah or *dalaan* is the intermediate or transition zone be-

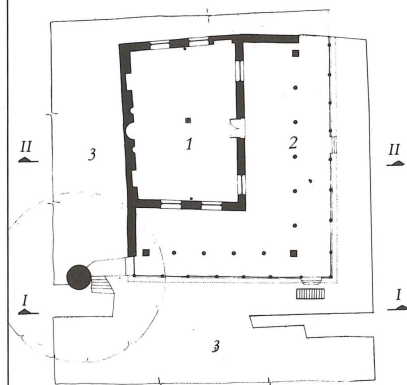
Chitral Bazaar, Mosque



Section I

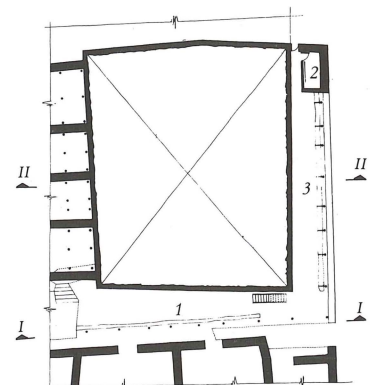


Section II



Upper level plan

1. praying hall
2. verandah
3. roof terrace



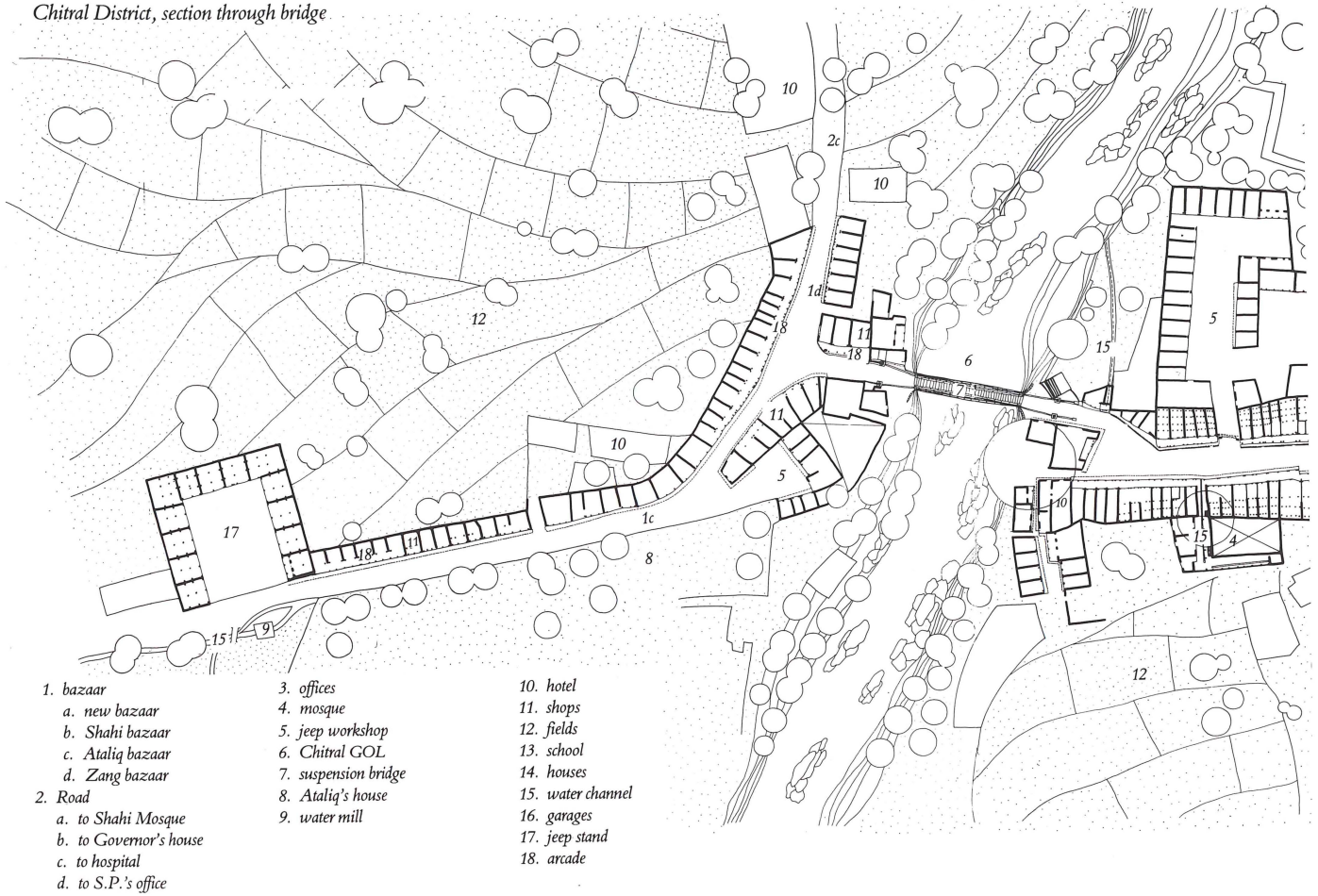
Lower level plan

1. ablution space
2. toilet
3. space for Astanja

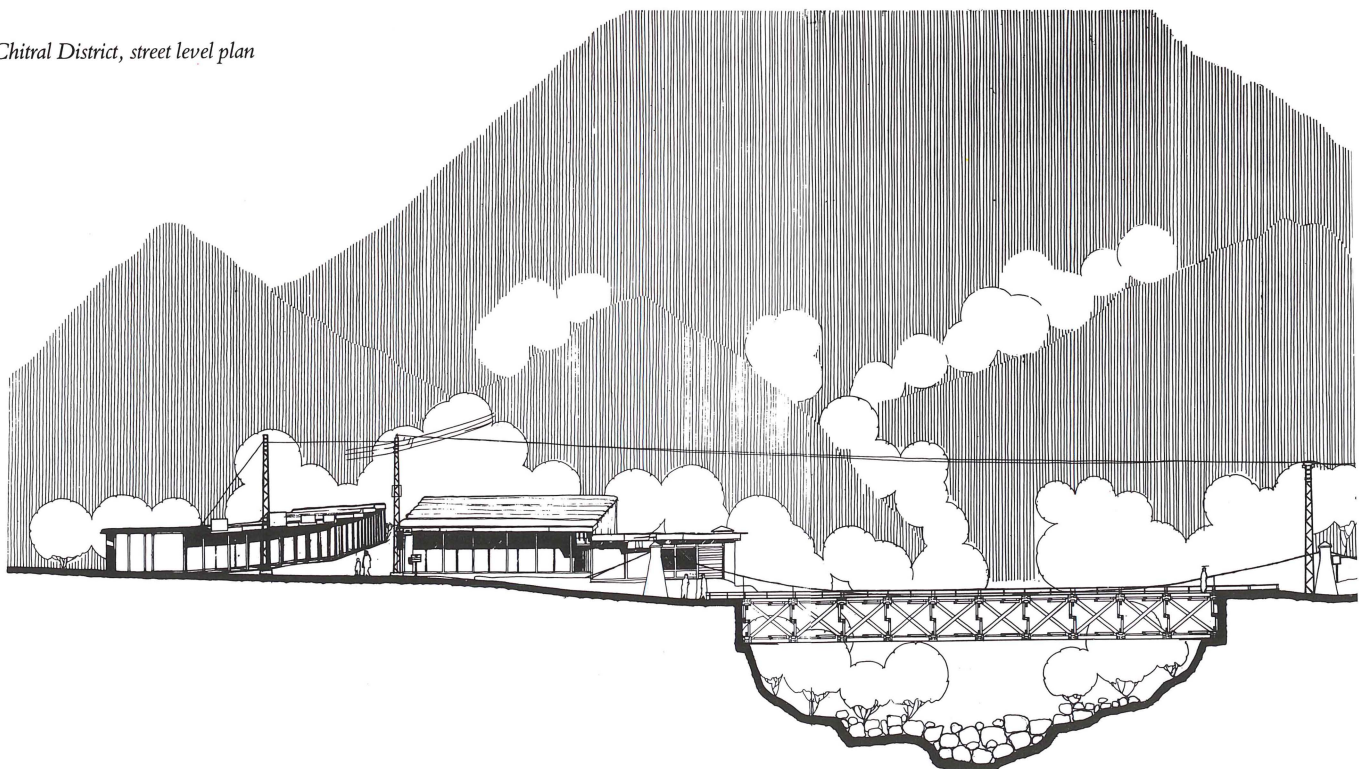




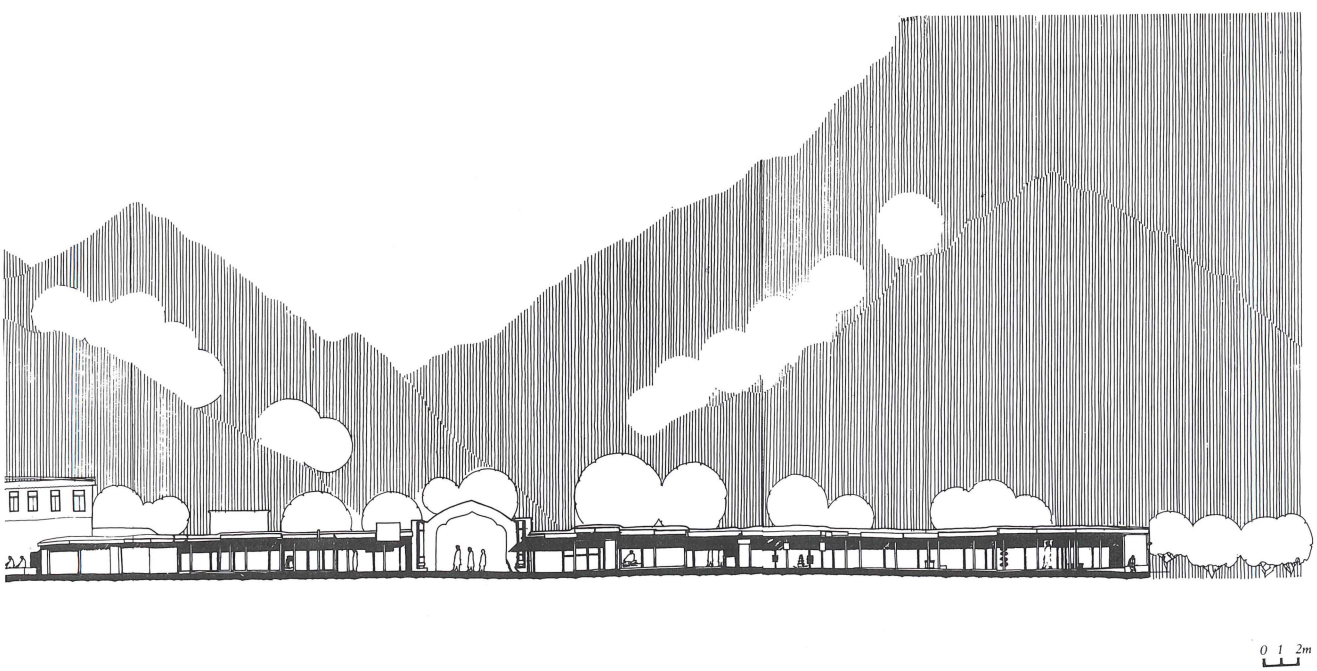
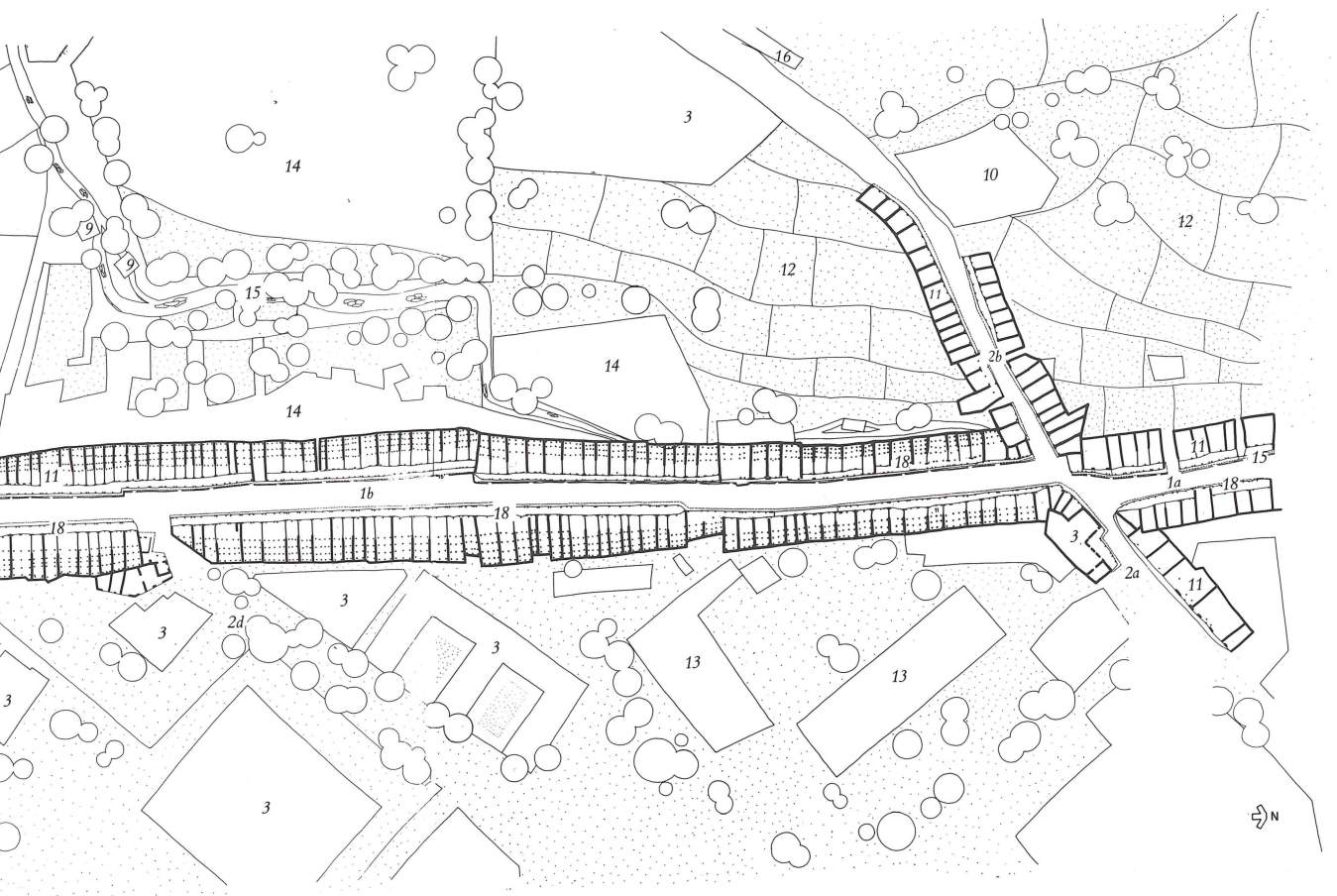
Chitral District, section through bridge



Chitral District, street level plan



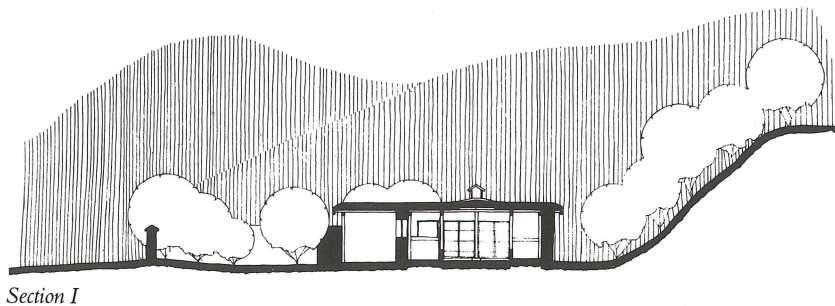




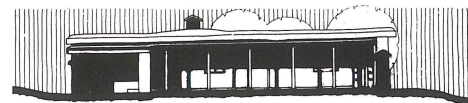


# **Bipush House 1**

House Of Mr Abdul Wahid, Goldoor Chitral



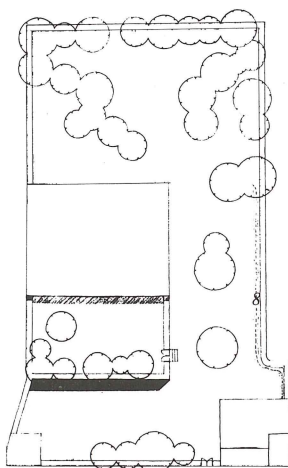
Section I



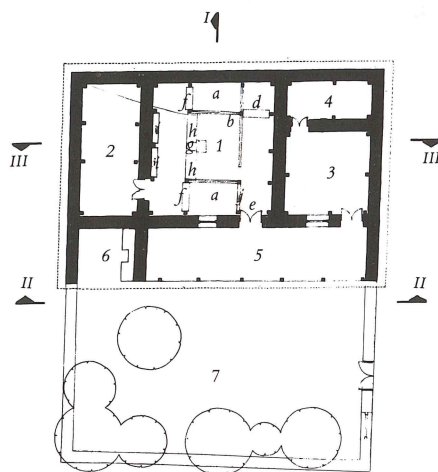
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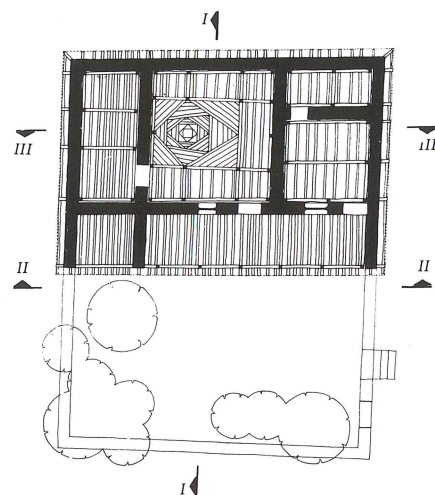
Section III



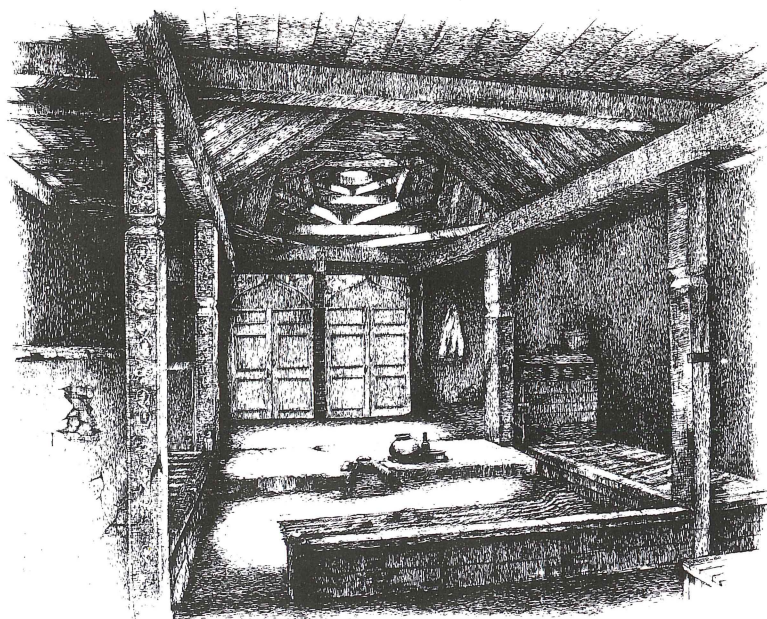
Site plan



Floor plan



Ceiling plan



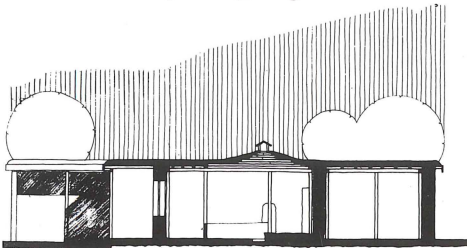
Interior

- |                  |                                   |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Bipush        | living room                       |
| a. Nakh          | sleeping area                     |
| b. Pharwanlasht  | sitting and dining space          |
| c. Nimejeni      | praying space                     |
| d. Shung         |                                   |
| e. Shom          | entrance lobby                    |
| f. Chom          | wooden box for storing grain etc. |
| g. Didang        | fire place                        |
| h. Dangotek      | sitting place                     |
| i. Pan           | almirahs                          |
| j. Shardagez     | wall between Nakh and Shom        |
| 2. Gonj          | store                             |
| 3. Angooti       | drawing room                      |
| 4. bath room     |                                   |
| 5. verandah      |                                   |
| 6. kitchen       |                                   |
| 7. courtyard     |                                   |
| 8. water channel |                                   |

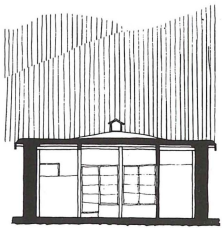


**Bipush House 2**

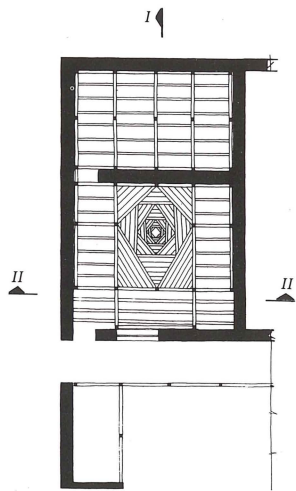
House Of Mr Taj, Zargaran Deh Chitral



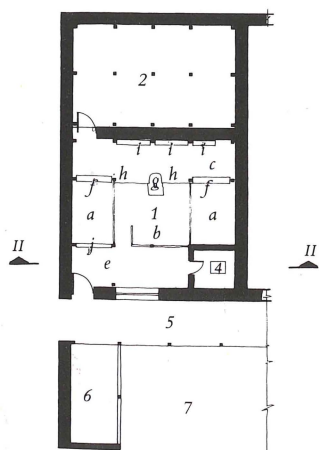
Section I



Section II



Ceiling plan

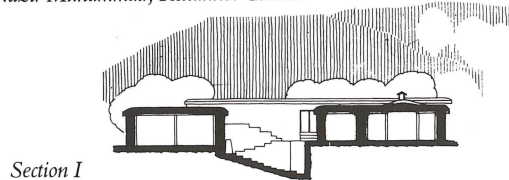


Floor plan

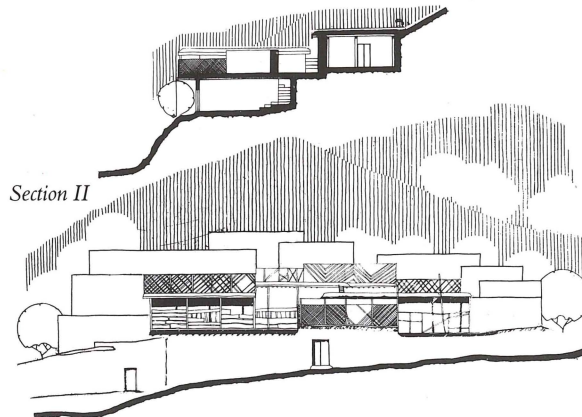


**Terraced Area Houses 1 2 3**

Houses Of Mr Muhammad Gul, Mr Abdul Karim and Mr Nazir Muhammad, Rehankot Chitral

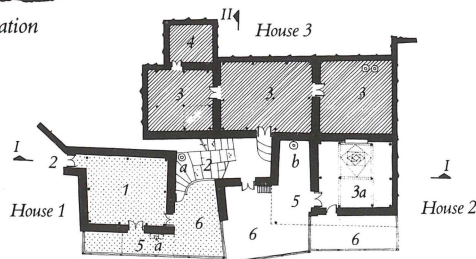


Section I

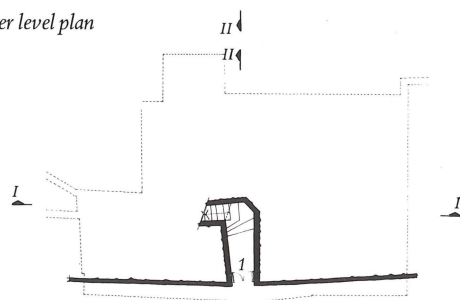


Section II

Elevation



Upper level plan



Lower level plan

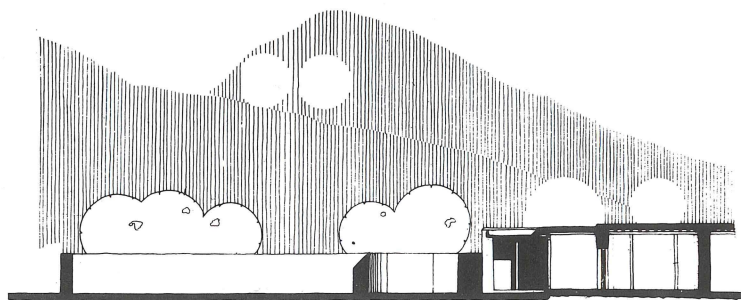
1. entrance
2. stairs
- a. Tandoor oven
3. room
- a. Bipush room
4. store
5. verandah
- a. cooking place
- b. Chakki Grinder
6. Terrace



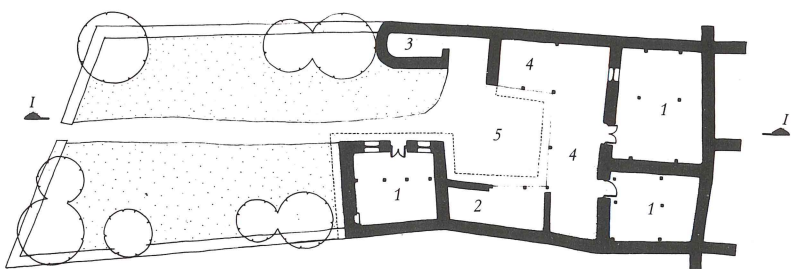


### Plain Area House 1

House of Mr Gul Shahzad, Hindustani Deh Chitral



Section I



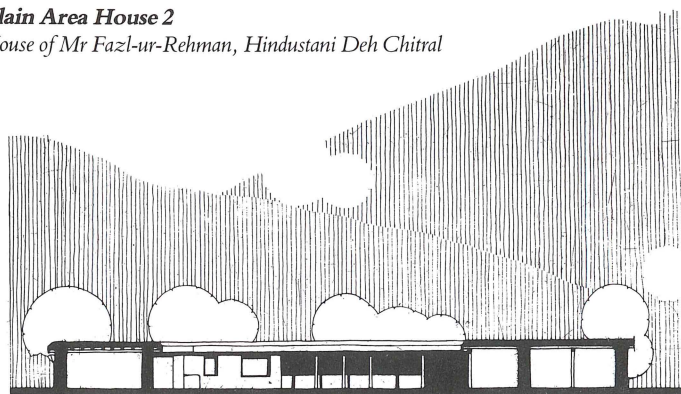
Plan

1. room
2. kitchen
3. bath
4. verandah
5. courtyard

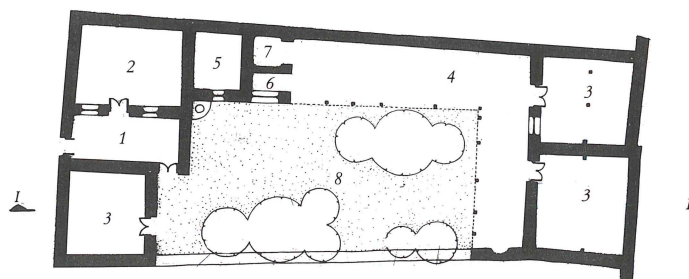


### Plain Area House 2

House of Mr Fazl-ur-Rehman, Hindustani Deh Chitral



Section I



Plan

1. entrance lobby
2. sitting room
3. room
4. verandah
5. store
6. bath room
7. W.C. unit
8. courtyard



tween the courtyard and the enclosed space. Depending on the situation and need, activities of the courtyard, or the enclosed space may be transferred to the semi-enclosed space. Thus, during the rainy season it is used for cooking and washing as well as for social activities. In summer when it may be too hot to cook in the courtyard the semi-enclosed space is used. In winter it is used for the preparation of the evening meal.

The semi-enclosed space serves as a storage area for household effects of common daily use like beds, cooking utensils, pots and pans, firewood, etc. Finally it serves to protect the main enclosed space from the extreme effects of weather, such as direct heat or rain during the summer and monsoon season.

The enclosed space consists of a number of interconnected rooms, the number and size depending on social and economic status as well as the size of the occupying family. This space is used mainly for the storage of precious and prestigious articles such as transistors, radios, televisions, jewellery, family heirlooms, wedding and dowry *Joras*, trunks, etc. In winter it is also used as the sleeping area or for entertaining intimate relatives and visitors in the evenings. It is important to note that these rooms are not normally designed for any specific purpose and can therefore be used to meet any need which may arise at any given time. Hence they have an inherent flexibility in their use.

To summarise, the concepts of division of space in the indigenous architecture of Pakistan may be classified by the concepts of delineation: open space, semi-enclosed space and enclosed space. These concepts may be clearly observed and defined in the traditional buildings both public and private, from the Baadshahi Mosque to the Diwaan-e-Aam and Diwaan-e-Khas in public buildings, and from poorest dwellings in the remotest village to the Shish Mahal of the Lahore Fort the same underlying principles may be seen at work. Developed over a period of centuries they provide the basis for the country's indigenous architecture, in keeping climatic and socio-economic conditions.

*The author, Iqbal Hassan, is an architect and at the time of the study on which this article is based was principal of the National College of Arts, Lahore. He was joined in this work by his colleagues and students at the College whose input is acknowledged.*