

# JAISALMER: A DESERT IN BLOOM

**Manu Rewal's documentary captures the essence of the historic city, says M C Raja Narayanan.**

“As you pick some sand, you have a fistful of history. Each grain singing you a mute song you have only to listen to” states the Rajasthan tourist brochure. Documentary film maker Manu Rewal's 45-minute film on the enchanting city of Jaisalmer opens with a close shot of golden sand that one feels like touching with the fingers. Rewal captures the essence of the city which is the jewel in the crown of Rajasthan. Rajasthan is a bewitching land, colorful with its many traditional festivals. The Rajasthani women wear brightly colored dresses and the men have equally bright headgears that not only convey their sense of color but mark out the class barriers too. The State has hardly any place or city without a fort or monument. Satyajit Ray's film Sonar Kella (Golden Fortress) which was shot in Jaisalmer has glorious shots of the citadel town in the Thar desert. It is quite apparent from the shots Ray composed that the filmmaker had fallen in love with the city of Jaisalmer .

One could see the same thing happening with young filmmaker Manu Rewal. He has always been fascinated with ancient cities of historical and architectural importance. Jaisalmer naturally arrests his attention with its captivating marvels. The havelis (mansions) of Jaisalmer are every architect's dream and every connoisseur's delight. This film has various shots of the most famous of all havelis – Patwon Ki Haveli. It has a mesmerising effect on the viewer. The intricately carved walls, jails, decorated doors and window with embossing and engraving stand as silent witnesses to a glorious past.

Manu Rewal's camera captures different features of the architecture of traditional dwellings. And the commentary aptly throws light on the legend and history behind this desert city made of yellow stones. It provides information on the city's past importance as a trading center and the forces that led to its decline.

It gives details and facts in a very interesting manner about the fort; its walls, the design and function of various buildings and enclosures. It also depicts the impact of

tourism and infrastructure development in this segment. There are shots of winding passages going up the hill from the entrance gate to the royal court through four portals. The contrast between architectural elements such as balconies with *jalis* and the massive walls are adeptly focused on. The film has excellent shots of the royal courtyard and the structures around it, its raised platform, the temples and the royal palace.

Apart from the monuments and the architectural splendor of the *havelis* and the fort the director focuses his attention on the life in and around the city, its streets throbbing with life. His film show the overall urban planning of the city, the lively thriving market during the day and night and the inevitable arrival of an industrial consumerist lifestyle.

Jaisalmer has its own distinct construction techniques that have been followed for centuries. Activity of the builder craftsmen cutting *Jalis* and doing carvings and designs are also shown in adequate measure to make it a well-balanced film in its presentation of historical contents and modern- day living. ..

This well-made documentary on one of the most popular tourist destinations of our country will be shown on Doordarshan as part of the series *Heritage of India*.

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