

Romancing the stones

Indian Modernity, a film on architect Raj Rewal's life, screened in Delhi, draws attention to his iconic projects

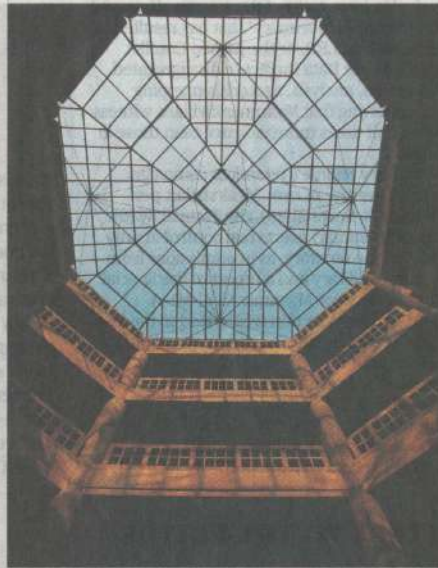
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Early in a beguilingly beautiful film, *Indian Modernity*, viewers get to hear famous architect Raj Rewal, talk about *rasa*, the spirit of life. The man who gave us signature buildings like the Parliament House Library, Hall of Nations at Pragati Maidan and the Asiad Village Complex, says, "there are eight to 10 *rasas* in the performing arts. In architecture, the vocabulary is limited, the buildings are either dynamic or strong....But it is important to find values which find a resonance with those who live in the building."

The 2017 film was screened to warm response at India International Centre, Delhi, earlier this week and brought alive the prominent landmarks of the city. For a building to be more than a brick and mortar structure, it has to have a soul and a distinct personality as one sees in two of Rewal's relatively recent works; the headquarters of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation in New Delhi and the Jang-e-Azadi Memorial Museum in Punjab.

Rewal studied Architecture in Delhi and London before he toured the country to understand the rhythm of buildings and life. His life was built brick by brick with each building he



Architectural delight The Parliament House Library designed by architect Raj Rewal. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

designed. "I went to the temples of the South to the stepwells of Gujarat and the cities of Rajasthan and the then upcoming city of Chandigarh, developed in the foothills of the Shivaliks by famous French architect Le Corbusier, and the Mughal city of Fatehpuri Sikri. Both left an imprint

on his mind, and works. Rewal, much like the Mughals, opted to use red sandstone in his buildings. "Concrete became shabbier with the monsoon, but buildings made of stone continued to look good even after 400 years," he says in the film directed by his filmmaker son, Manu

Rewal. The film moves slowly, gradually. Every frame exhibits a new shade of Rewal senior and the philosophy behind his every design.

If Rewal had his own challenges breathing life into stones, his son faced the challenges of proximity and familiarity when he began filming *Indian Modernity*, a 96-minute film in two parts. It opens a little window to the life and values of Raj Rewal, even as it opens the door to his works.

Says Manu, "A very private person, my father wanted me to keep the focus of the film on his work. I have, included some elements especially of his early life as they had a great impact on his work." These include his early interest in drawing and learning from a painter at the Birla Mandir in Delhi, his stint in London, meeting his Italian wife, and his association with Ram Gopal's dance company; besides his interest in abstract art. Rewal senior

soaked in all these influences. It was difficult for Manu to pick and choose from such varied tastes; what to shoot, what to retain. Even more difficult was to sift reason from emotion.

"I embraced a positive point of view and tried to highlight his contributions to architecture by getting recognised experts articulate what they saw in his works," says Manu. The film's images were shot in Paris at the Centre Pompidou where few interviews were conducted and in Delhi-NCR, Kolkata, Rohtak,



Lisbone, Portugal, where he built his buildings. I wanted the film to highlight his artistic intentions and convey the humane values that underlined his approach to create beauty. His architecture married modernity of the West, with traditional Indian wisdom and created an Indian modernity that combines the best of both worlds," Manu adds.