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Diary

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# Sacred Spaces

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**FILM:** *Indian Modernity: The Architecture of Raj Rewal—Part I & II*

**DIRECTED BY:** *Manu Rewal*  
**7 to 8 August 2023**

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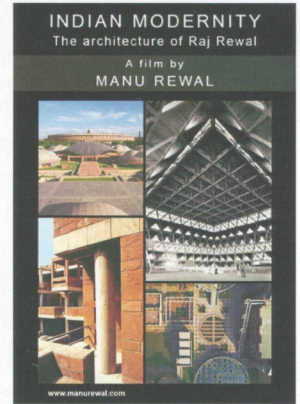
‘This building is ironic,’ Cyrus Jhabvala proclaimed. It was 1970, I was nine, and we were at the ‘Hall of Nations’ construction site. I dreamt of becoming an architect. Jhabvala would take me on architectural walks and hold forth, ‘Elsewhere they would build this with glass and steel. Raj Rewal is doing this in concrete, cast in situ.’ A large space frame concrete structure with spans of 144 feet was completely unheard of then.

Inside—the volume, the play of light and shadow, and the people building it by hand, was utterly cinematic. Raj Rewal was sculpting in time, and I was seeing a new world being created.

Democracy and secularism are the foundations of Raj Rewal’s practice. ‘The Hall of Nations’ was about inclusion, democracy and the idea of freedom. It was a testament to the times and to the nation we thought we were building. Raj Rewal took a strong ethical position, looking beyond dominant ideologies while conceiving this building. The Indian Constitution inspired the structure of his ‘Library for the Indian Parliament’. ‘Knowledge, education and enlightenment’ were what he sought to create in this space which exudes a different value system and spirit.

Raj Rewal is acutely sensitive to the local context. While light, space, structure and sustainability are central to his works, his quest is in ‘creating a sacred space with stone’.

Manu Rewal’s film takes on the challenge between the personal and the public.



Raj Rewal is his father, and the film-maker kept a revered distance, skirting the personal and focussing instead on the architect's oeuvre.

Divided into chapters, the film engages with sketches, drawings, excellent animation to reveal the architect's thoughts and spaces which have been filmed with great care and beauty. The 16mm celluloid evokes the subtle

tonal range, the colour palette of the buildings, and the changing natural light the architect engages with.

'Beauty in everyday life' 'buildings with form and poetry,' is how Raj Rewal would like his work seen. In this age, Raj Rewal's work is a voice that needs to be heard and Manu Rewal's a film that must be seen.

■ **DEV BENEGAL**

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