

FUSION OF A DIFFERENT KIND

Review by Sunita Thapar in the Pioneer 11.01.'95

Fusion takes its name from the fusion of handicraft and technology that the new World Bank building in the Capital prides itself in; Commissioned by the World Bank, the film was made for prospective employees who may never have visited India. And consequently. It examines the architecture of the building and studies the entire process right from the design stage to its completion.

Directed by filmmaker Manu Rewal, this is his second film on architect-father Raj Rewal's work. Resonance, his first film made in '91, discussed six of Rewal's projects. Fusion on the other hand, deals only with one building.

It begins by introducing the Capital city, and giving its architectural context. Delhi's Suraj Kund, Lal Kila, Qutub Minar and Lutyen's New Delhi are discussed briefly to illustrate how red sandstone has been used extensively in all these buildings.

Then the film moves us to the architectural site located in Lodi Estate, just adjacent to the Lodi Gardens. The film discusses how the building is sensitive to its location. All offices areas have a view of the gardens and workstations look into a central court within the building which also encloses a sunken garden. Old trees on the site were carefully preserved during construction.

Symmetrical on its central axis, the building is crafted with beige sandstone. In discussing the materials used, it also justified the choices. For instance, the utilisation of sandstone. While it is cheap and locally available, craftsmen are familiar with it. A good insulator, it reduces air conditioning costs and also protects the underlying concrete.

Architect Raj Rewal explains his concept for the building using models. Says he "Conceptually, my designs are inspired by traditional Indian architecture, but built in a modern idiom. Natural materials like sandstone, bronze and wood form the basis

of my design, but I also use concrete and modern technology “. As in traditional Rajasthani havelis, there are jharokhas, but they are modern in form, and a big fountain carved out of a single piece of sandstone adorns the central court, as is the traditional convention but it has a more contemporary design. In the same spirit, a lot of art work – modern Indian paintings but also traditional textiles were specially commissioned for the building to decorate it in the inside. According to Manu Rewal “ some people romanticize the past and say that everything modern is bad and others pretend that the past is irrelevant. This building rejects both positions as extreme and shows how an intelligent and sensitive fusion of the two is possible.”

He adds that “Architectural documentaries are interesting because they touch on so many other issues. Architecture is a junction between a pure art like poetry, and science, for it is largely dependent on technology. The most difficult thing in making a film on architecture is to make it interesting. It is about a building – and you can not treat architecture just visually... Indian classical music as well as electronic music provide an apt backdrop to the film. The director almost makes you walk through the building. The film closes with interviews of people who use the building.

Very few films have been made documenting contemporary architecture. Fewer still leave an indelible impact on the mind. In bridging the hiatus that exists between the builder and user this film seeks to make a point. Perhaps it will be well taken.