

The silent songs of the desert

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“**WILL THIS** film benefit us, you think?” [Mura Lala Fafal](#) asks his brother. “The world will see how little we have and how we embrace our life,” he answers, “if they understand”.

KP Jayasankar and [Anjali Monteiro](#)’s *Two Day Fair* is a chronicle of two days in the lives of Mura and his nephew Kanji — musicians, wage labourers and farmers of the Dalit community of Meghwals living along the Indo-Pak border in the Rann of Kutch.

Photo: [KP Jayasankar](#)

With any such film, the primary benefit is always to the audience who engages with a world so starkly different from theirs, interfaced by the filmmakers’ inherently limited interpretation of it. Monteiro and Jayasankar present the two lives as an aesthete’s portrait, casting the long, languid gaze of an outsider through their camera. The viewer enraptured by the landscape, music and innate beauty of the people, is agreeably not offered an easily palatable narrative of lament or pity. The subjects are poor, exploited, discarded by the democracy that was shaped by carving out a large section of their native land into an enemy state. But they also live outside its maladies — like Mura points out quietly — “We don’t have diseases here. We don’t consume what the TV tells us to consume. There are no goods here, no advertisements.” Woven with the camera’s unmistakable love for the landscape, these words tinge our understanding with a sense of longing and distance that is a necessary antidote to clichéd ways of looking across the rural-urban divide.

While Mura and Kanji talk about their passion for music, visuals of them toiling hard for a meagre wage grate in contrast. On cue, the [desert](#) fills in to lend the music an irreplaceable context. A perfect backdrop for what the film leaves out of its scope — the articulation of issues that confront folk singers. The art is endangered by a number of factors augmented by rapid changes in a modernising society that is not willing to compensate enough. If the culture is to survive, a sustainable model for preservation and growth has to be set up as a self-sufficient creative economy in their native lands. This case argues itself when you hear Mura explain the words of Sufi and Bhakti saints, his tattered garb transforming itself from a testimony of destitution to the pride of a minstrel. They have Kabir. We have his songs on a CD.