



NEW RELEASES

All We Imagine as Light

All We Imagine as Light

Directed by: Payal Kapadia
Executive Producers: Harshit Agarwal, K C Pranav Raj, Neil Chowdhury
Produced by: Thomas Hakim, Julien Graff
2nd Unit Director: Rutu Suthar
Associate Director: Robin Joy
1st Assistant Director: Ashish Verma
Script Supervisor: Naseem Azad
CASTING: Romil Modi, K C Pranav Raj, Romil Modi, Satchit Puranik
Written by: Payal Kapadia
Cinematography: Ranabir Das
BTS Photographers: Aboli Maharwade, Akshay Mahajan
Visual Effects: Héloïse Loichemol
Editing: Clément Pinteaux
Production Designers: Piyusa Chalke, Yashasvi Sabharwal, Shammim Khan
Set Decorator: Gaurav Moon
Costume Designer: Maxima Basu
Make-up & Hair: Sameer Ramesh Kadam
Titles & Credits: Héloïse Loichemol
Original Soundtrack Composed/Performed by: Topsyhe
Sound: Benjamin Silvestre, Olivier Voisin, Romain Ozanne
Cast:
Kani Kusruti (*Prabha*)
Divya Prabha (*Anu*)
Chhaya Kadam (*Parvaty*)
Hridhu Haroon (*Shiaz*)
Azees Nedumangad (*Dr Manoj*)
Lovleen Mishra (*Dr Supriya*)
Ardra K S (*nurse 1*)
Sisira Anil C K (*nurse 2*)
Aparna Ram (*nurse 3*)
Tintumol Joseph (*Nurse Shanet*)
Shweta Prajapati (*young woman*)
Kashish Singh (*young nurse*)
India-France-Luxembourg-Netherlands 2024
117 mins
Digital

A BFI release

The screening on Fri 29 Nov 18:10 features a Q&A with director Payal Kapadia

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

SIGHT AND SOUND

At the end of Jules Dassin's 1948 noir *The Naked City*, a voiceover announces: 'There are eight million stories in the naked city and this was one of them.' Dassin, shooting under the influence of Italian neorealism, often with hidden cameras, made the hot summer streets of New York and its oblivious inhabitants his supporting cast. The setting of Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine as Light*, which won the Grand Prix at Cannes in May, is Mumbai three quarters of a century later, but her camera is attuned to the same conviction that any of the so-called ordinary people in the film's background could be just as worthy of our attention. The film's remarkable opening sequence starts on a night jaunt through a busy street market, zipping past vendors while above the hum of the crowd and the brooding discordant beats of the Kolkata musician Topsyhe, anonymous migrants reflect on their experiences in the 'city of dreams'. A housekeeper confides that she is concealing her pregnancy from her employer. A docker recalls the overwhelming smell that was his first impression of the waterfront. A woman finds solace in the busy streets after heartbreak. 'I'm afraid to call it home,' reflects another disembodied voice. We meander through packed streets, platforms and train carriages, momentarily glimpsing stranger after stranger before they disappear out of the frame to be swallowed back into the city. Eventually, the camera alights on Prabha, a nurse on her way home – our one of Mumbai's 21 million stories – before the train hurtles into a blur.

Like Dassin, and the neorealists before him, Kapadia is an urban film poet. In *Sight and Sound* in 1950, chafing against the neorealist tag, Vittorio De Sica argued that his real goal in films such as *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) was not simply to capture reality but to 'transpose [it] into the poetical plane'. He did not see any future in neorealism unless it 'surmounted the barrier separating the documentary from drama and poetry'. What swept away the audiences who saw *All We Imagine as Light* in Cannes was precisely this lack of separation. The meditative and lyrical manner in which Kapadia films Prabha's story during Mumbai's monsoon season uncovers poetry in banal, everyday spaces and objects, from congested train carriages to hospitals to clothes on a rooftop washing line. The number of ways Kapadia finds to capture the colour blue alone demonstrates her remarkable talent, not to mention the way her film encompasses a plea for tolerance, a critique of rampant urban development and an ode to underappreciated labour while also savouring the delights of romance and friendship.

The film follows three female friends, all drawn to Mumbai from elsewhere: reserved, conscientious nurse Prabha (Kani Kusruti); her younger, more impetuous colleague and flatmate Anu (Divya Prabha), a fellow Keralan, who asks Prabha to cover her rent and dodges calls from her mother to meet her secret lover Shiaz (Hridhu Haroon); and the older widow Parvaty (Chhaya Kadam), the hospital cook, who is trying with Prabha's help to stop developers evicting her from the flat she owns but for which she has no paperwork.

Growing up, Kapadia's first direct experience of filmmaking came when her mother, the artist Nalini Malani, who was starting to experiment with video installation, brought home VHS rushes to watch and cut with an editor. Kapadia observed the two women crafting sound and images together: 'It was

NEW RELEASES

All We Imagine as Light

From Fri 29 Nov

A Night of Knowing Nothing

Sun 1 Dec 18:20; Mon 2 Dec 20:50;

Tue 3 Dec 18:20

Rumours

From Fri 13 Dec

RE-RELEASES

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg

Les parapluies de Cherbourg

From Fri 13 Dec

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

a very kitchen-table activity,' she says – a mode of working she cherishes and tries to replicate. Later, at an experimental film festival in Mumbai, seeing shorts by students at the government-funded Film and Television Institute of India in Pune inspired her to apply there, getting accepted on her second attempt in 2012.

The short films she made in her time at Pune contain many of the hallmarks of *All We Imagine as Light* – lyrical titles, vibrant soundscapes driving enigmatic, dream-filled narratives – but they are wilder, with paintings and animation inserted to create a collage effect. They caught the eye of programmers at Cannes and at Berlin, where she met the French producer Thomas Hakim, with whom she went on to collaborate on her first feature, *A Night of Knowing Nothing* (2021). A hybrid of fiction, essay film and documentary, it mixes intimate unsent letters between two intercaste lovers with footage of 2016 protests by students at Kapadia's film school against Indian prime minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist agenda and the sectarian violence it spawned. An experimental musing on protest in cinema history and a passionate but harrowing plea to a young Indian generation to rise up against injustice and police brutality, it is her most politically outspoken film to date. It won the best documentary prize at Cannes in 2021, and caught the attention of the French film industry, which would prove vital for funding *All We Imagine as Light*, given the difficulties of producing arthouse films in India.

For this next project, Kapadia decided she wanted to make a film that had 'all my political thought but in a way that might lure people to come and see it'. She already had an outline for the film and a title borrowed from one of her mother's paintings ('Light has a lot of impact on me and my emotions'). A few years before, after seeing *Kusruti* in a remarkable short by Shailaja Padindala about sexual awakening, *Memories of a Machine* (2016), she had approached her with the idea that she might play Anu. Uppermost in her mind was a film about friendship – specifically, 'the complex feelings you have towards your friends, which is a mix of jealousy and admiration. The film is about internalised patriarchy, which makes us as women sometimes behave with other women in a way that we don't know why we are doing it. I felt sometimes I did it too, and it really troubled me. It's what I'm so conditioned to do. People are really threatened by women who can be friends with each other, especially in South Asia. If you watch TV shows, women are horrible to each other and are plotting against each other... so I had a desire for something better.' But the film's motivations were not primarily ideological: 'Everyone asks me, "Is this a feminist manifesto?" No. It's just a film about people hanging out. You wouldn't ask the same thing about a film about a couple of guys.'

Mumbai was, for her, a natural location for this story – not because she was born there but because, having been to school in the south of India, she has always felt like an outsider in the city. Setting the film in the home of Bollywood also allowed her to offer a corrective to images of the city in most contemporary films – images she could never relate to. Kapadia was drawn, too, to the dual nature of the experiences of many of her female friends: the rush of freedom they experienced living away from their families, but also the crushing reality of existing on a meagre salary.

Isabel Stevens, *Sight and Sound*, December 2024