



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
2024 OFFICIAL SELECTION  
COMPETITION

PETIT CHADS PRESENTS

# ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT

A FILM BY PAYAL KAPADIA

LUXBOX





**INTERNATIONAL TITRE :** വെളിച്ചമായ് സങ്കല്പിച്ചതെല്ലാം

**ORIGINAL TITLE :** ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT

**DIRECTOR :** PAYAL KAPADIA

**COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN :** FRANCE - INDIA - NETHERLANDS - LUXEMBOURG

**PRODUCTION YEAR :** 2024

**DURATION :** 115 MIN.

**LANGUAGE :** MALAYALAM, HINDI

**TECHNICAL INFORMATION :** RATIO 1:66 SOUND 5.1

## CAST

**KANI KUSRUTI** (PRABHA)

**DIVYA PRABHA** (ANU)

**CHHAYA KADAM** (PARVATY)

**HRIDHU HAROON** (SHIAZ)

**AZEES NEDUMANGAD** (DR MANOJ)

## SYNOPSIS

In Mumbai, Nurse Prabha's routine is troubled when she receives an unexpected gift from her estranged husband. Her younger roommate, Anu, tries in vain to find a spot in the city to be intimate with her boyfriend. A trip to a beach town allows them to find a space for their desires to manifest.



## CREW

**DIRECTOR & SCREENWRITER :** PAYAL KAPADIA

**DOP :** RANABIR DAS

**EDITORS :** CLÉMENT PINTEAUX

**COSTUME DESIGN :** MAXIMA BASU

**SOUND :** BENJAMIN SILVESTRE, ROMAIN OZANNE, OLIVIER VOISIN

**MUSIC :** DHRITIMAN DAS

**PRODUCTION DESIGN :** PIYUSHA CHALKE, YASHASVI SABHARWAL, SHAMIM KHAN

**PRODUCERS :** THOMAS HAKIM, JULIEN GRAFF

**PRODUCTION**

PETIT CHAOS

**COPRODUCTION**

CHALK AND CHEESE

ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA

BALDR FILM

ANOTHER BIRTH

LES FILMS FAUVES

PULPA FILM

**WORLD SALES**

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# INTERVIEW WITH PAYAL KAPADIA

**All We Imagine as Light, at least in its first part, is very deeply and wonderfully immersed in Mumbai's life : city lights, shops, small restaurants, trains, buses and subways, basements even... But also the rain, that always seems to be there and brings a lot to the general atmosphere of the film. Are you yourself originally from Mumbai?**

I am from Mumbai. I didn't always grow up here but it's the city that I am the most familiar with. Mumbai is quite cosmopolitan. People from all over the country come here to work. It is multicultural and diverse in that sense. It's also a place where it's a little bit easier for women to work as compared to many other places in the country. I wanted to make a film about women who leave their homes to go to work somewhere else. Mumbai was the right setting for it.

Another aspect of the city that interested me is how much it is in a state of flux. Parts of Mumbai are changing quickly as there is a real estate boom. Builders keep grabbing areas

where people have lived for years. Not everyone always has the right documentation to prove they have lived there which makes it easier for those who have the means to stake claim to the land.

One area that is featured in the film spans from Lower Parel to Dadar. It is the area that used to have large cotton mills until the 1980s when many of them started to shut down. Several people lost their jobs at the time. Much of this land had been given to the mill owners at heavily subsidised rates by the then government. So when the mills shut down, it was only fair that it was distributed amongst the families of the mill workers. But they were swindled out of this and the area become a space for massive gated luxury building complexes as well as high end shopping malls. Huge profits were made by the mill owners while those who worked there were left with nothing. If you drive past this road, the juxtaposition of the architecture alone tells you its socio political history.

**Just as you're showing the market, one can hear a man saying that, also he's been living in Mumbai for years, he wouldn't call it his home, because he knows that one day he might be leaving...**

A huge proportion of the men who come to work in Mumbai don't get their families with them and only see their wives and children once a year. So yes, there is always this feeling

of flux and uncertainty. Mumbai is probably the best financial opportunity many people can have, but it doesn't mean that it's an easy life.

**In terms of shooting, how did you manage to make a film that really seems to belong to the city?**

It's quite expensive to film in Mumbai because the whole Hindi film industry is there. What we did is that we shot with two cameras. The main one was used for the places we had permission to shoot. And the second – a small Cannon EOS C70 that worked very well – was used where we did not have permission. We would pretend that we were there for location scouting. The actors were really very cooperative as they have all worked on indie films before. This made it a really enriching process.

**Did you shoot inside a real hospital?**

I have a wonderful location scouter, Kishor Sawant, who is known for finding amazing locations in Mumbai. He has worked on several important art house films. He always finds places that really represent the city but that you haven't seen all that much on screen. He found this hospital that was going to be broken down in a few months. All the medical equipment was still inside. That worked out well. The same happened with the apartment. It was a building of affordable housing that was also going to be broken down. We made Prabha and Anu's apartment there.

**Quite surprisingly, the second part of All We Imagine as Light takes place outside of Mumbai, by the sea...**

The second part takes place in a village in the coastal district of Ratnagiri. For a long time, a lot of people from that region came to Mumbai to work in the cotton mills, which had an important role in shaping the area where the first part of the film is situated (Lower Parel and Dadar). When the cotton mills shut down, people had a very hard time getting back on their feet. That's when many women, whose husbands had been forced out of a livelihood, started supporting their family. Many of these women are from the regions of Raigad and Ratnagiri.

**Do the two nurses who share an apartment, Anu and Prabha, also come from the Ratnagiri region?**

Anu and Prabha come from the Southern State of Kerala, where many women working in Mumbai also come from. In Kerala, nursing is a profession well-looked upon, and women choosing this line of work are supported. A lot of women that come to work in Mumbai, are not be totally independent, even if their family is far away. However, the contradiction that arises is true for almost every woman in the country. In spite of the financial autonomy one could have, there are still strong ties that connect one to families back home. One's families still control social rules and personal choices of who you can marry or love.



***Prabha's husband lives in Germany and she doesn't seem to hear a lot from him. Is it a common situation?***

Many Indians do seek job opportunities abroad. Every state, especially one that has a coastline, has had historical migration of the workforce through centuries. It is the same for the husband of Prabha. There is certainly an aspiration to work abroad as the pay is a lot higher. Many people from Kerala commonly work in the Middle East. But it is not limited to this. Like it is the case with Mumbai, it is often the men who travel aboard, leaving behind their families.

***Are we meant to believe that Prabha's husband will eventually go back to her ?***

There was probably a promise at one point that one day he would come back or would try to find a job for her in Germany. But he seems to have vanished from Prabha's life and his intentions remain unclear to us. As a matter of fact, she does not really want to hear from him. When she gets the rice cooker, which one can interpret as a metaphor for family life, things seem to fall apart for her and she pushes the cooker away. Prabha is a complicated person. She obviously likes to be needed by people. She tries to help Parvati to keep her apartment, at the hospital she's nice to the older woman who has hallucinations, she pays Anu's part of the rent... She's a sort of an angel among her community but she's also a bit severe. She does not really think about her own desires.

***Does Anu also come from Kerala?***

Yes. Anu's from a conservative family. She's always been quite a rebel. She expresses herself and her sexuality much more than Prabha and even more than her boyfriend.

***The film is also about friendship between these women.***

The friendship between these three women is a complex one. Each of them have their flaws and are not always perfect. I was interested in looking at friendship, a relationship that has no really definition. As one grows older, our friends become a stronger support system to us, sometimes even more than our families. I feel this to be true when one lives away from home especially. This was a relationship I wanted to explore in the film.

***All three actresses are amazing, both strong and sweet... How did you cast them?***

Prabha was the first one that we cast. Her name is Kani Kusruti. She does a lot of arthouse cinema. I already had her in mind when writing the script. She has a background in theatre and is very versatile in her performances. We worked together on the scenes before the shooting, doing readings with the other actors, finding new ideas, even changing the lines... I speak Hindi and Marathi but Malayalam is not my language. It can be hard to direct in a language that you're not fluent in. You have to internalize a lot of gestures. Working with her, she contributed a lot to

the understanding of the character, the social milieu and the language. The actress who plays Anu is Divya Prabha. She is also from Kerala, where the independent film industry is really thriving now. She was the lead actress in *Ariyippu* that was selected in Locarno two years ago. Divya has a strong presence. She's really dedicated to her role. She is extremely hardworking and once she believes in the project, she gives it her all. Parvaty is played by Chhaya Kadam. She's a very seasoned actress who has been in independent as well as big commercial movies. She often plays roles of strong women. She herself comes from Ratnagiri and her own village is not far from where we shot. So she knew the milieu well, and she understood what it meant to make this journey to try to live in Mumbai and not always succeed. She knew the history.

#### **When did you shoot?**

We shot the film in two parts. The first part, in Mumbai, was shot in June and July 2023, during the heavy Monsoon. The festival of Ganapati that comes in the middle of the film is the marker for the second part to begin. Then we took a break. The second part was shot in November. We had to wait for the season to change. There are not many seasons in the Western Coast of India, only Monsoon and not-monsoon. I wanted to have these two different feelings of the climate. As the second part is in Ratnagiri, the landscape completely changes after the Monsoon. The

lush green countryside becomes covered with dry grass and the red earth is exposed. The red soil is an integral part of the identity of Ratnagiri. I was keen for this shift to take place in order to feel the colours of the two spaces in two seasons.

#### **Did the editing process start during the break?**

Yes. We made a basic rough cut. I like to work like that. It has to do with the experience I have in documentary or non-fiction. When you make a non-fiction film, you can shoot, edit, see what's missing and then go shoot again. Even if it's not entirely possible for obvious reasons, I like to approach fiction in that way. Actors bring something new to the characters, locations also bring something new... For instance, during this initial editing process, I realized that there was a much stronger relationship between the three women than I thought. So I wanted more of that in the second part. I wanted Prabha, Anu and Parvaty to spend more time together. It was really nice to work with these women: when they were together it was like fire!

Although *All We Imagine as Light* is my first fiction feature, it's still very important to me that fiction and documentary can exist together. What I try to do is to approach fiction in a non-fiction way. I find the juxtaposition of the two very interesting and I strongly believe that it makes the non-fiction more fiction and the fiction more non-fiction.

***Your previous film, A Night of Knowing Nothing, which was both a love story and a depiction of a student revolt, was political in a very direct way. How would you describe this one in that perspective?***

*All We Imagine as Light* is surely not political in the same direct way. But I think everything is basically political. Love in India is extremely political. So I would not say that this film is not. Who you can marry is really a complex thing. There's the issue of caste, the issue of religion... And they all dictate a lot about who you can spend your life with, and the consequences that it can have. Impossible love, which is one main theme here, is a very political one.

***All We Imagine as Light has both a French and an Indian producer...***

My French producer is petit chaos. We've been working together for five or six years, so we already worked together for *A Night of Knowing Nothing*. We started developing *All We Imagine as Light* in 2019. Raising funds for a first feature takes a long time, it's like running a long run marathon, so in the meanwhile we made *A Night of Knowing Nothing*. The Indian producers Chalk and Cheese films are really familiar with shooting in Mumbai but just like myself, they had never done a feature film as a producer before. It was nice that we all were figuring out things together.

**How would you describe being a female director in India in 2024?**

I don't know if that really defines me... In India, gender is not the only lack of privilege one can have. There are other intersections. I am a woman but I belong to a dominant caste and to a privileged class. So there are a lot of things that come easier to me than to a man who doesn't have the same opportunities. It's hard for everybody to make films, especially independent films that try to get festival selections. There is no money in this kind of film. I am all the more grateful for the systems in Europe. To get back to your question, I don't really see myself as a female director who does not get opportunities because of my gender. I do get a lot of opportunities because of my other privileges.

PAYAL KAPADIA







## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Payal Kapadia is a Mumbai based filmmaker . She studied Film Direction at the Film & Television Institute of India. Her short films *Afternoon Clouds* and *And What Is The Summer Saying* premiered respectively at the Cinéfondation and the Berlinale. Her first feature film *A Night of Knowing Nothing* premiered at 2021 Director's Fortnight, where it won the Golden Eye for best documentary.

## DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

**2024 - *ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT***  
(feature film, fiction)  
Cannes Official Competition 2024

**2021 - *A NIGHT OF KNOWING NOTHING***  
(feature film, documentary)  
Cannes Director's Fortnight 2021  
Oeil d'Or for Best Documentary

**2018 - *AND WHAT IS THE SUMMER SAYING***  
(short, documentary)  
Berlinale Shorts 2018

**2017 - *AFTERNOON CLOUDS***  
(short, fiction)  
Cannes 2017 - Cinéfondation Selection

**2015 - *THE LAST MANGO BEFORE THE MONSOON***  
(short, fiction)  
Oberhausen - FIPRESCI prize and special jury mention



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