

# Cannes title *All We Imagine As Light* is a poignant tale of loneliness



**GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN**

**P**ayal Kapadia's Malayalam language movie, *All We Imagine As Light*, has bright prospects of being nominated by India for the coming Oscars. Though it was shortlisted by France (as it has a French producer) the film did not make the cut. But, well, it still has a chance as an Indian contender for the 2025 Academy Awards.

The first work from India in 30 years to play at the Cannes Film Festival Competition last May, it is Kapadia's labour of love. Almost poetic in the way Kapadia has treated the movie, it talks about the lives of two nurses who work and live in Mumbai. Prabha (Kani Kusruti) is hardworking, and in one of the first scenes we see her in a suburban train. She stands at the door enjoying the cool evening breeze, hoping that it would help her tired eyes.

She works in a shabby hospital, and although dumped with complicated cases, she is caring and considerate: A modern-day Florence Nightingale, I would think. Her life is tragic. Her young husband left for Germany soon after marriage to try and find work, but never returned. His frequent mails stopped coming after a while. Maybe he found another life and wife!

Prabha's only source of comfort and consolation is her flatmate, another nurse, younger and prettier. She is Anu (Divya Prabha), who is in a hush-hush relationship with a Muslim boy, Shiaz (Hridu Haroon). Anu is not the best of friends with Prabha. In fact, both dislike each other, till Prabha begins to play a good samaritan warning the younger woman of the consequences

she could face if she were to carry on with Shiaz. A bond begins to form between them, and the chasm gets narrower.

As one writer pointed out, the two were like the sisters in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. Yes, indeed. What I found even more charming was the dedication of the nurses to their profession and patients. Prabha makes sure that the hospital linen does not get wet in Bombay's downpour so that her patients could have a change of bedsheets. When a woman runs out of contraceptives because she just does not have the money for them, Anu slips in a few pills for free.

Mundane events keep the two women close to each other. Anu brings a pregnant cat home, and Prabha loves it. Her husband sends her a pressure cooker, and it looks ill suited for their kitchen. The two women have a hearty laugh. The film, which clinched the Grand Prix at Cannes, overflows with little anecdotes that are not only revelatory but also charmingly rich, giving us an insight into the lives of these two nurses. *All We Imagine As Light* is poignantly romantic. Each frame establishes a yearning for love. Love for partners, love for better living conditions and so on. The feeling of displacement that the two women feel is intense. In a strong surreal way, Kapadia underlines the loneliness of those who live away from their families.

*All We Imagine As Light* now opens in Kerala theatres, and one hopes that it would soon be screened elsewhere. Maybe an OTT platform could give it the widest possible reach.

A work worth watching.

The writer is a senior movie critic and author