

Poetic Transposition and Uneven Freedom: Space, Materiality, and Imagination in *All We Imagine as Light*

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Abstract: Payal Kapadia's *All we imagine as light* moves from an observational encounter with Mumbai toward more character-bound forms of desire, memory, and imagination. This article defines that movement as “poetic transposition”: a social fact is carried into a new sensory or imaginative register while the constraint that organizes it remains legible. The opening produces a polyphonic urban address through the non-coincidence of migrant voices and city images; it is not yet free indirect form in the Pasolinian sense. Ordinary things then differentiate the women's positions: a rice cooker materializes marital absence, a burqa tactically regulates visibility, and missing documents make Parvati institutionally illegible. At the coast, Prabha and Anu gain room for emotional and erotic movement, while Parvati's return combines dispossession with renewed familiarity, pleasure, and social agency. The fisherman sequence finally gives Prabha's absent husband a provisional body and constitutes the film's clearest instance of character-bound free indirect perception. In dialogue with recent work on recognition and friendship, the article argues that the film offers a poetics of uneven freedom. Care and imagination create real forms of release, but their benefits remain differentiated by housing security, mobility, and access to interiority.

Keywords: Payal Kapadia; *All we imagine as light*; Contemporary Indian Cinema; Cinema of Poetry; Gendered Displacement; Urban and Coastal Space

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1. Introduction

All we imagine as light begins before its three principal women have become stable narrative centers. Moving views of Mumbai are accompanied by migrants recalling arrival, work, concealment, heartbreak, and their hesitation to call the city home ^[1]. Image and voice share an urban field without settling into illustrative pairs. The sequence therefore poses the film's formal problem at the outset: how can cinema register Mumbai as a concrete environment while preserving experiences that no panoramic account can master? The city is publicly visible as market, train, hospital, housing system, and climate, yet it is also dispersed across memories and expectations that remain only partially attached to bodies.

Kapadia's first fiction feature received the Grand Prix at the 77th Cannes Film Festival in 2024 ^[2]. The acclaim has encouraged descriptions of the film as poetic, dreamlike, realist, feminist, and attentive to everyday texture. Those terms are persuasive only if “poetry” names more than beautiful low light, patient pacing, or emotional delicacy. The relevant question is how the film produces lyricism from social conditions without reducing those conditions to atmosphere. A second question

follows: when imagination appears to loosen constraint, who receives that freedom, and under what material conditions?

The narrative links three women through work and friendship. Prabha is a nurse held in an arranged marriage whose intimate substance has almost disappeared after her husband leaves for Germany. Anu, a younger nurse and Prabha's roommate, pursues a relationship with Shiaz that cannot be inhabited openly across Hindu-Muslim difference. Parvati, a widowed hospital cook, loses her long-term Mumbai home because she cannot produce the papers that redevelopment recognizes as proof of tenure ^[1]. These pressures accumulate through routine rather than spectacular confrontation: clinical work, commuting, household objects, clothing, silence, and minor gestures of refusal. Kapadia has described the project as growing from small moments and characters and the completed film as retaining the fragility of collected gestures ^[3]. That statement does not determine interpretation, but it identifies the scale at which the film joins political structure to embodied experience. Scholarship on Kapadia's earlier *A Night of Knowing Nothing* helps situate this scale of attention. Debashree Mukherjee shows how that film binds intimate loss, fictional letters, archival traces, and collective struggle without stabilizing the boundary between personal and political history ^[4]. The fiction feature does not simply repeat that hybrid method, yet it continues Kapadia's interest in what happens when observational materials, invented address, and collective conditions exert pressure on one another. This continuity matters because the later film's oneiric passages are prepared by, rather than opposed to, its documentary attentiveness.

A recent journal discussion devoted directly to *All we imagine as light* is Saunak Sarkar's account of friendship as a reciprocal "Third" in which the women witness one another's injuries and build recognition ^[5]. Sarkar reads the beachside ending as the culmination of having seen and been seen by one another. The present article accepts that mutual recognition is formally and ethically central, but asks how it coexists with unequal material security and asymmetrical access to interiority. Parvati is not merely the loss that enables the others' release: she seeks legal aid, joins collective protest, initiates pleasure at the coast, and participates in the final social gathering. At the same time, recognition cannot restore her Mumbai home, and the film gives Prabha and Anu forms of erotic or oneiric interiority for which Parvati has no exact equivalent. The tension between reciprocity and asymmetry is therefore the object of analysis, not a reason to deny the women's solidarity.

"Poetic transposition" names the film's repeated transfer of a social relation into a different perceptual carrier while its organizing constraint persists. Migration is transposed into the disjunction between anonymous voice and urban image; marital abandonment into a domestic commodity and later a stranger's body; interfaith secrecy into clothing and spatial detour; dispossession into missing papers, forced movement, and an ambivalent return to the coast. Transposition is thus neither escape nor a general synonym for mediation. It can be identified when three elements remain in view: a material or institutional condition, the sensory form into which it is displaced, and the residual limit that prevents the new form from becoming resolution.

Pier Paolo Pasolini's cinema of poetry supplies a more specific concept for one part of this process. His "free indirect" procedure describes an authored image pressured by a character's situated perception without becoming a literal first-person shot or a transparent transcription of consciousness ^[6]. Thomas Allen's account of poetry in Pasolini likewise emphasizes its intervention in social perception rather than ornamental lyricism ^[7]. This article therefore uses free indirect perception only where three conditions are present: a character consciousness can be indexed; the image or event can be attributed simultaneously to the shared diegetic world and to that character's perceptual pressure; and the passage cannot be reduced either to an ordinary point-of-view construction or to a clearly bounded dream. The anonymous opening fails the first condition and is better understood as polyphonic urban address. The fisherman passage satisfies all three more closely because a visible stranger becomes inseparable from Prabha's suspended marriage without ceasing to occupy a shared narrative space. The argument proceeds through three linked formal mechanisms and one political conclusion. First, the opening makes Mumbai audible as a shared but unmastered city. Second, ordinary things allocate different kinds of recognition to Prabha, Anu, and Parvati. Third, the coast reorganizes movement and intimacy while revealing that return has different meanings for each woman. The later free indirect passage then gives Prabha's absence a body. Taken together, these movements show freedom as spatially and socially differentiated. The coast loosens metropolitan constraints, but Parvati's dispossession tests the equality of that release. Kapadia's feminism lies in forms of care and imagination whose effects are real, provisional, and

stratified by tenure, mobility, and narrative attention.

2. Polyphonic Address: Mumbai as a Shared but Unmastered City

The opening's observational force rests on detailed non-coincidence. A night movement through a crowded market gathers vendor calls, the hum of the street, and brooding music while anonymous speakers recall distinct experiences of the "city of dreams" ^[1]. One conceals a pregnancy from an employer; another remembers the waterfront first through smell; other voices associate crowded streets with heartbreak, solace, or an inability to name Mumbai as home. The images pass vendors, platforms, carriages, and strangers, but they do not identify which face belongs to which testimony. Sound and image are neither unrelated nor synchronized as evidence. They meet at the scale of the city while refusing ownership at the scale of the individual.

This arrangement does more than withhold biographical information. If every voice were attached immediately to a body, the passage could become a set of miniature profiles. If the city were shown without those voices, its density might function as atmosphere awaiting the "real" story. Their separation blocks both reductions. The city cannot absorb migrants into scenery, and no testimony can stand as Mumbai's representative truth. Public surfaces acquire unseen histories; private recollection remains exposed to a material environment shared with strangers. The sequence thus makes the gap between seeing and knowing productive.

Pooja Rangan's work on documentary listening is useful here because it treats another's voice as a mediated relation with limits rather than a transparent transfer of testimony ^[8]. Kapadia's passage borrows the attentiveness of documentary while declining the authority of an audit. The voices are intelligible, but their owners remain opaque; the city is concrete, but no image verifies a speaker's account. Listening therefore becomes an encounter with incompleteness. The spectator receives enough to recognize situated lives and too little to convert those lives into fully knowable cases.

Sarah Cooper's account of the imagined image clarifies the spectator's activity within this gap ^[9]. Voice and sound can solicit images beyond what is presently visible, making imagination part of perception rather than its opposite. Kapadia invites viewers to imagine offscreen lives, but the invitation is disciplined by missing information. We may connect a remembered smell, a concealed pregnancy, or a fear of belonging to the people who pass through the frame; we cannot confirm those attachments. The opening gives the city more experience than its surfaces can contain while preserving the ethical opacity of strangers.

This is why the sequence should not be described as free indirect perception. Pasolini's model requires a style contaminated by a character's identifiable consciousness ^[6]. Here, no single consciousness supplies the index. The moving camera, the anonymous testimonies, the music, and the market remain adjacent but not doubly attributable to one character. "Polyphonic address" names the form more precisely: several situated voices address the spectator through a shared environment, yet their plurality is not organized by an omniscient narrator or absorbed into a civic essence. The opening establishes the precondition for later free indirect form—a world already understood as more than the visible—but not that form itself.

The passage eventually finds Prabha on a train and shifts from anonymous migration to a character whose movements can be followed ^[1]. That transition narrows attention without canceling the opening's scale. At the hospital, Prabha and Anu perform clinical labor while Parvati cooks within the same institution. Their activities are differentiated by task and status, yet the hospital depends on all three. Character emerges through work rhythms: Prabha's controlled attention to others, Anu's restlessness within routine, and Parvati's practical presence in a support role. The film needs no external sociology to establish the contradiction. A woman can help sustain a major urban institution and still be unable to secure a room in the city that relies on her labor.

Mumbai's larger form intensifies this contradiction. Rain, crowded trains, narrow rooms, glass towers, and precarious dwellings organize movement as pressure rather than serving as a backdrop ^[1]. Priya Jaikumar's account of filmed space is relevant because it treats location as historically produced, affective, regulatory, and commodified ^[10]. Ranjani Mazumdar likewise shows how Bombay cinema's mapping impulse joins location, movement, verticality, and atmosphere ^[11]. Kapadia's city is produced through relations among commute and care, high-rise aspiration and insecure dwelling, anonymity and surveillance. Density permits friendship and chance encounter while withholding privacy and durable belonging.

Urban polyphony is therefore the film's first poetic transposition. Observable streets are reorganized by voices whose experience exceeds the visible frame, yet the city never dissolves into an interior metaphor. When the narrative turns to its three women, that distributed pressure becomes tangible through objects. Marriage arrives as a commodity from abroad, interfaith intimacy negotiates clothing and concealment, and long habitation depends on paper. The heard city becomes a city whose unequal rules can be touched.

3. Objects of Unequal Recognition: Gift, Garment, Document, and Stone

The film's objects do not form one symbolic code. They execute different relations. The rice cooker substitutes for reciprocity within marriage; the burqa tactically adjusts Anu's visibility; tenancy papers determine institutional personhood; the billboard projects capital's preferred urban future; and stones convert anger into a limited bodily intervention. Elizabeth Ezra's study of cinematic things is helpful because it asks how objects participate in consumption, desire, substitution, and personhood rather than treating them as inert props ^[12]. In Kapadia's film, their force lies in the distinct ways they position a body before an absent partner, a monitored neighborhood, or a legal regime.

The red rice cooker arriving from Germany is the most concentrated example ^[1]. Its delivery interrupts a marriage whose legal continuity contrasts with prolonged physical and communicative absence. The appliance belongs to everyday sustenance; its foreign package also indexes distance, migration, and a one-way form of contact. Saige Walton's analysis of the rice cooker in Claire Denis's *35 Shots of Rum* offers a precise comparator: an ordinary object becomes poetic through touch, rhythm, sound, and its place within relations of care, not through a fixed symbolic dictionary ^[13]. The comparison does not imply influence or identical meaning. It identifies how Kapadia's object can carry an intimate relation while exposing the failure of reciprocity within that relation.

Prabha's nocturnal embrace of the appliance stages this contradiction through contact. A body seeking acknowledgment holds a useful manufactured thing. The cooker can be touched where the husband cannot; it cannot return the touch. Its prominence gathers pleasure, resentment, bewilderment, domestic expectation, and longing into a single gesture. The package therefore positions Prabha as a recipient without addressing her as a partner entitled to explanation. It gives absence weight and surface but no answer.

Clothing mediates Anu's urban position differently. She buys and wears a burqa to enter the neighborhood where Shiaz lives and removes it when the clandestine meeting becomes impossible ^[1]. The scene does not present religious dress as an inherently oppressive object. In this action, the garment is tactical: it facilitates passage by changing how Anu can be read in a monitored social space. Yet the tactic registers the condition that makes it necessary. Cloth enables mobility by suspending the public legibility of her relationship.

Sneha Krishnan's study of the geopolitics of "love jihad" discourse helps specify the contemporary field in which Hindu women's relationships with Muslim men are subjected to familial and political surveillance ^[14]. Kapadia never turns Anu and Shiaz into an illustration of one legal case, and the film does not name that discourse. Its *mise-en-scène* nevertheless places secrecy within a modern politics of religion and gender: the lovers do not confront a timeless conflict between desire and tradition, but a field in which appearing together can attract unequal risk. The burqa is accordingly neither a simple prison nor a symbol of liberation. It is a mobile compromise between passage and recognition.

Parvati's crisis is organized by another kind of object: the documentary proof of tenancy or residence she cannot produce. More than two decades of residence, work, memory, cooking, and neighborhood relation do not count in the form demanded by redevelopment ^[1]. Her observation that papers determine whether a person appears real identifies institutional recognition as a material practice, not an abstract attitude. The law selects which traces of dwelling are legible and returns the burden of proof to the resident whom demolition threatens to displace.

Vandana Desai's research on widows in Mumbai's speculative housing markets shows how widowhood, family relations, insecure ownership, and redevelopment can converge in gendered dispossession ^[15]. Paroj Banerjee's work on making home from below further demonstrates that cooking, cleaning, care, and repeated occupation can sustain a durable social home in the absence of formal spatial security ^[16]. The film does not make Parvati representative of either study's participants.

These studies clarify the structural disjunction it renders: inhabiting a home as a long-term social reality is not the same as possessing the documentary evidence through which institutions agree that the reality exists.

The film also refuses to portray Parvati as passively defeated. Prabha accompanies her to seek legal assistance and sits beside her at a meeting of displaced workers; Sarkar correctly reads these acts as friendship's practice of witnessing and recognition ^[5]. The meeting places Parvati's apparently private tenancy problem within collective speech about workers who built the city. When Parvati and Prabha later throw stones at a luxury-development billboard, the bodily gesture grows from that enlarged frame of reference ^[1]. A legal demand had individualized Parvati's failure to produce paper; the meeting and shared act return the problem to redevelopment and class.

The billboard's declaration that class is reserved for the privileged makes exclusion unusually explicit ^[1]. Its polished surface projects a future city already addressed to wealth. The stones cannot stop demolition, and the scene does not counterfeit victory. They interrupt the image's visual command long enough to turn anger into shared action. This modest scale matters: the women cannot match the developer's institutional force, but they can refuse the advertisement's claim to speak uncontested for the neighborhood.

Gift, garment, document, billboard, and stone thus distribute recognition differently. The cooker maintains marital address without mutuality. The burqa offers passage through strategic illegibility. Papers translate dwelling into a legal claim and can erase it when absent. The billboard recognizes only the imagined consumer of luxury, while the stone makes refusal briefly visible. Friendship crosses these relations without making them equivalent. Prabha can hold a parcel from abroad, Anu can modulate her appearance, and Parvati must relocate her body. The difference among their object relations prepares the coast's central question: what kind of freedom can emerge from a journey whose immediate occasion is dispossession?

4. Release for Whom? Dispossession, Recognition, and the Coast

The move from Mumbai to the coast reorganizes color, sound, movement, and social proximity ^[1]. Crowded trains, rain, artificial light, and compressed interiors give way to shoreline, forest, open sky, and the slower routines of a fishing settlement. The contrast produces relief, but it is not a passage from social city to innocent nature. As Jaikumar's account of filmed space suggests, locations enter cinema already formed by histories, regulation, affect, and mobility ^[10]. The coast is a workplace, a remembered home, and a site of return before it becomes a temporary refuge for visitors.

Parvati's move supplies the diegetic occasion for the journey; it should not be described as the causal production of Prabha's and Anu's freedom. That distinction corrects a risk in celebratory and critical readings alike. The friends accompany Parvati because she is leaving Mumbai, but her suffering does not mechanically generate their new possibilities. The film instead places different trajectories in the same space. Prabha's hospital routine is interrupted, allowing marital attachment to assume an oneiric form. Anu gains a location where intimacy with Shiaz can be sustained. Parvati returns to a familiar coast because metropolitan residence has been closed to her.

For Anu, spatial release is organized as a sequence of initiative and response. She has already navigated messages, concealment, failed meetings, and the absence of urban privacy. At the coast she moves toward Shiaz through forest and cave-like space, and their intimacy follows the path she has actively sought ^[1]. The scene's significance lies less in claiming an impossible freedom from all objectification than in the reciprocity and duration of the encounter. Desire becomes an action with spatial requirements: it must find a route, a protected interval, and a partner who responds. Maud Ceuterick's account of gender, space, mobility, and affect helps clarify how cinema can produce an affirmative embodied imaginary without implying that the structures constraining a character have vanished ^[17]. Here, proximity is achieved, while the religious and familial conditions that made secrecy necessary remain outside the interval.

Prabha's release is quieter and more resistant. The city has allowed her to work, care, commute, and wait without deciding the future of her marriage. At the coast, routine loosens. She initially holds back from the water and from the social exuberance around her; later she runs along the beach and acts decisively when a fisherman is pulled from the sea ^[1]. Movement and care do not solve abandonment, but they interrupt suspended endurance. The landscape does not heal her by itself. It makes another orientation to her attachment sensorially possible.

Parvati, however, cannot be reduced to the loss that transports the others. Her return is coerced by eviction, yet the coastal scenes give her familiarity, initiative, and pleasure. She walks into the sea in her sari and cries out as the waves reach her; she joins the women in drinking from an old bottle and in a burst of song and movement; she occupies the beachside shack as part of the group that later receives Shiaz ^[1]. These actions matter because they change the mode in which her body is seen and heard. In Mumbai she had repeatedly to answer institutions demanding evidence. At the coast she initiates contact with water, lends rhythm to collective leisure, and participates in the social recognition of Anu's relationship. Return therefore contains both forced displacement and a renewed capacity to inhabit a known place.

This fuller account also revises the claim that the film simply withholds subjectivity from Parvati. It gives her anger, humor, judgment, bodily pleasure, and the authority of familiarity. Before the journey, her indignation at Prabha's absent husband and her resolve over housing affect the others; during the journey, her homecoming provides more than logistical background. Yet formal differentiation remains. Anu receives a sustained scene organized around erotic desire, and Prabha receives a passage in which a shared event becomes permeable to private longing. Parvati's interiority is expressed mainly through speech, gesture, social action, and remembered place rather than through a comparable erotic or oneiric construction. This is not proof that the film ethically instrumentalizes her. It is evidence that class and tenure correspond to different modes of formal access. Sarkar's reading provides the strongest counterargument to an account centered only on unevenness. In the city, Prabha supports Parvati's search for legal help and joins her at the workers' meeting; Parvati, in turn, names the injury of Prabha's abandonment. At the final shack, the women have "seen and been seen" through accumulated acts of friendship ^[5]. Prabha's invitation for Anu to bring Shiaz into the group expands that recognition beyond the three women ^[1]. A previously secret relationship becomes, for a moment, socially received rather than merely concealed. The lights of the shack do not illuminate isolated escape; they frame a small public of acknowledgment.

Recognition is therefore genuine, but it is not distributive justice. The final gathering cannot retrospectively secure Parvati's tenure, equalize the women's mobility, or give them identical formal interiority. Its political value lies elsewhere: friendship creates a relation in which injury is witnessed and desire can be received without requiring that difference disappear. Parvati's presence prevents the ending from belonging only to the lovers or to Prabha's private closure. At the same time, her displacement prevents the group from becoming evidence of completed liberation.

Water condenses this double movement. Mumbai's monsoon saturates commuting bodies and complicates vision; at the coast, the sea offers Parvati pleasure, gives Prabha room to run, and produces the emergency of the drowning fisherman ^[1]. Water is not a stable symbol of freedom. It changes action: it immerses, obstructs, opens, and endangers. The coast becomes a threshold where embodied release, mortal vulnerability, care, and imagination converge. Its freedom is real because bodies move and relations change; it is uneven because the right to remain, return, or leave is not shared on the same terms.

The coast thus tests rather than resolves collectivity. It supports Sarkar's account of reciprocal recognition while exposing what recognition alone cannot repair. Parvati's return combines dispossession with agency; Prabha's and Anu's releases are neither stolen from her nor separable from the journey organized around her move. The sequence asks whether women can make a common space from unequal trajectories. Its answer is provisional: they can share care, pleasure, and acknowledgment, but they cannot yet share equal security.

5. Free Indirect Perception: Giving Absence a Body

The film's clearest oneiric passage begins with an external emergency. A fisherman is pulled from the sea, and Prabha uses her clinical knowledge to revive and tend to him ^[1]. Care precedes fantasy. The movement toward imagination therefore grows from actions consistent with her material life: attending to breath, touching a vulnerable body, and remaining beside a stranger. The sequence links her capacity to sustain others with an unmet need to be addressed herself.

The stranger becomes available to Prabha's marital story without a clean cut into a self-contained dream. His body remains the body rescued from the water, yet conversation repositions him as the husband who left for Germany ^[1]. He speaks of exhausting factory labor and darkness; apology and explanation become possible; Prabha can finally refuse the relation and say she does not want to see him again. The scene does not ask the spectator simply to decide whether the man "really is" her husband. It constructs a double apprehension in which fisherman and husband, rescue and reunion, stranger and intimate

remain perceptually active at once.

This double attribution satisfies the criteria for free indirect perception more closely than the opening. First, the perceptual pressure is indexed to Prabha and to the suspended marriage established throughout the film. Second, the encounter belongs both to a shared diegetic event and to her character-bound experience: other people can encounter the rescued man, but only Prabha's history makes him the husband. Third, the passage is neither a conventional point-of-view shot nor a dream bracketed by an unambiguous entrance and awakening. Pasolini's free indirect procedure is useful precisely because authorial form and situated consciousness contaminate one another while remaining distinguishable ^[6].

The rice cooker prepares this event. The package gave absence an object: it could be opened, used, and embraced but could not respond. The fisherman gives the same empty marital position a provisional body and voice. Commodity substitution becomes perceptual substitution. Neither carrier is identical to the absent husband; both make his structural place in Prabha's life sensorially present. Poetic transposition is especially visible here because the social fact of abandonment moves into touch and speech while remaining unresolved as fact.

Cooper's theory of cinematic imagination helps describe the spectator's work in sustaining the double image ^[9]. The film does not place a completed private fantasy behind Prabha's eyes and then reveal the objective truth. It asks viewers to layer incompatible but co-present apprehensions. A stranger can be cared for as a stranger and heard as the husband; an act of rescue can be an occasion for imagined address; a refusal can matter even though the person to whom it is addressed remains absent. Imagination reorganizes a present body without claiming to change its identity.

The passage is therefore better understood as character-bound free indirect perception than as hallucination, magical solution, or affective truth superior to fact. Its achievement is to make attachment intelligible in felt form. Prabha's husband is absent; the marriage has retained legal and emotional force; she has lacked an interlocutor through whom waiting could change. The scene provides that interlocutor provisionally. It does not bring the husband back, establish reciprocity, or determine the marriage's legal future. What changes is Prabha's relation to suspended time: longing becomes address, and address permits refusal.

The contrast with the opening now becomes precise. The opening distributes unseen lives across public images and preserves their anonymity; it asks spectators to imagine beyond the visible without granting access to one character's consciousness. The fisherman sequence concentrates an unseen relation within a visible body and makes that body legible through Prabha. Both forms expand what the image can contain, but only the latter is doubly attributable in the Pasolinian sense. The film moves from polyphonic urban address to character-bound free indirect perception rather than extending one concept across every stylistic register.

This concentration also returns us to uneven freedom. Prabha receives an imaginative encounter that changes her relation to abandonment. Anu receives embodied intimacy in a protected interval. Parvati receives collective recognition, pleasure, and renewed familiarity, but no equivalent scene of perceptual substitution. The difference does not negate friendship; it keeps the film's formal generosity from being mistaken for equality. Imagination gives absence a body, not dispossession a remedy.

The title's conjunction of "we," imagination, and light names this limited expansion. In the oneiric conversation, factory darkness and imagined light become part of the husband's possible explanation ^[1]. Light does not certify that darkness has ended. It makes an obscured relation momentarily perceptible and shareable. Poetic transposition names this change of register; uneven freedom names its political limit.

6. Conclusion

All we imagine as light organizes poetry through transfers that retain their residue. Migrant experience moves into a disjunction of voice and city image; marital absence into an appliance and a stranger's body; interfaith secrecy into clothing and spatial detour; dispossession into paper, forced movement, and ambivalent return. These transfers neither decorate social reality nor leave it behind. They make institutional relations available to sound, touch, movement, and imagination while keeping the conditions that produced them in view.

The distinction between polyphonic address and free indirect perception is central to that argument. The opening creates a shared urban field whose voices remain unmastered because no single character consciousness organizes them. The fisherman

passage, by contrast, makes a visible event doubly attributable to the diegetic world and to Prabha's suspended marriage. Restricting Pasolini's concept to the latter clarifies the film's formal development and avoids turning every gap between image and experience into free indirectness.

The revision of Parvati's role is equally important. Her dispossession is the occasion for the journey, but she is not simply its sacrificial function. Legal struggle, collective protest, anger, humor, immersion in the sea, song, and participation in the final shack all give her social and embodied agency. Sarkar is therefore right that friendship constructs a reciprocal space of recognition^[5]. Yet recognition cannot restore housing security or equalize formal access to desire and imagination. The ending holds those claims together: the women make a common space, and that space remains composed of unequal trajectories.

Poetic transposition and uneven freedom thus describe complementary aspects of Kapadia's feminism. Care, pleasure, and imagination alter what the women can acknowledge and share; housing security, religious surveillance, mobility, and abandonment continue to differentiate their possibilities. The film's light is valuable neither as consolation nor as proof of liberation, but as a provisional capacity to perceive relations that dominant institutions leave unseen. Its politics becomes most exact when criticism asks both what that perception enables and what it still cannot repair.

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