



ALL THAT BREATHES

Directed by Shaunak Sen

88 mins, India / USA / UK

A Kiterabbit Films and Rise Films production

In collaboration with HHMI Tangled Bank Studios

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LOGLINE

Against the darkening backdrop of New Delhi's apocalyptic air and escalating violence, two brothers devote their lives to protecting one casualty of the turbulent times: the bird known as the black kite.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In one of the world's most populated cities, cows, rats, monkeys, frogs, and hogs jostle cheek-by-jowl with people. Here, two brothers fall in love with a bird – the black kite. From their makeshift bird hospital in their tiny basement, the "kite brothers" care for thousands of these mesmerizing creatures that drop daily from New Delhi's smog-choked skies. As environmental toxicity and civil unrest escalate, the relationship between this Muslim family and the neglected kite forms a poetic chronicle of the city's collapsing ecology and rising social tensions.

BACKGROUND

If you stare long enough at the grey monotone skies in certain parts of North Delhi, at some point you'll see a bird fall out of the sky. The sheer opacity of New Delhi's toxic air ensures that bigger birds, especially raptors, regularly collide into buildings or get entangled in wires.

Nadeem and Saud grew up in a working-class Muslim neighborhood with narrow, dingy lanes. The act of looking up – by their own admission – provided a kind of release into an open, liberating expanse. At a very early age, they fell in love with things that flew. They fell in love, in particular, with the black kite.

As children, they lay on their terrace, gazing up as the elders in their family tossed raw meat skyward. They watched as hundreds of kites appeared and maneuvered through the air with great agility to catch the meat. 'Meat tossing' continues to be a popular activity in Muslim areas of Delhi. Muslims believe that the act of feeding birds-of-prey washes away the sins of the meat-tosser.

When a black kite first fell to the ground in front of them, the brothers took it to a bird hospital. The hospital, however, refused to treat it – because it was a "non-vegetarian" bird. At the time, the teenage Nadeem and Saud were training to be professional bodybuilders. They used their informal knowledge of muscles and tendons to care for the bird on their own. Since then, they have operated on and rehabilitated more than 20,000 birds in their tiny garage-basement, while dreaming of someday building a proper wildlife hospital.

Today the brothers are unique philosophers of the urban. In 2017, Delhi's air was 12 times worse than the second most polluted city in the world, Beijing. Such an extreme environment prompts unprecedented changes in nonhuman life. The brothers are expert witnesses to these remarkable ecological changes.

In recent years, the brothers have received invitations from around the world to share their unique knowledge of kite surgery, and to discuss how cities can be understood by looking up at the movements in their skies. In February 2020, the New York Times ran a feature on them that raised their profile globally.

India has recently witnessed increasing social unrest. Things reached a crescendo when the government introduced a citizenship bill that, some argue, potentially discriminates against the 182 million Muslim citizens in the country. Widespread protests against this bill rocked the country.

After two months of unabating street protests, things took a shocking turn. North Delhi was enveloped in deadly violence. Mobs killed more than 50 people and hundreds of houses were set on fire. With the violence threatening to hit their neighborhood as well, the brothers spent many nights patrolling the front of their house in fear of oncoming mobs.

Alongside this violence was the alarming rise in mysterious kite injuries. Delhi has the highest density of these raptors in the world – a growth that, stunningly, corresponds with the city's rising pollution levels. Yet, more injured kites arrive at the brothers' each day with inexplicable cases of blindness and neural deformities. With funding for their hospital finally coming through, and opportunities for further training from academic institutions in the U.S. beckoning to Nadeem, the two brothers look to secure the future of their Wildlife Rescue, while wrestling with how they will continue to face the pressures of the environmental and political climates that increasingly assail them.

The combined stories of this human-kite ensemble paint an untold picture of life in the world's most hazardous urban environment. It tells the story of toxicity - in the air and among people – and shines a light on a remarkable family that chooses to battle on against the backdrop of both.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My first feature-length documentary, *Cities of Sleep*, explored New Delhi through the lens of sleep. By focusing on the 'sleep mafia' of Delhi (these are people who control who sleeps where, for how long and what quality of sleep – for the homeless), I leveraged sleep as a political, philosophical and aesthetic prism through which to consider the city. As a method, I am deeply interested in looking at everyday banal phenomena that usually occupy the fringes of our vision, as objects of rigorous study. Through this film, I want to harness the enchantment of the sky. I want audiences to leave theatres and instinctively look up – to think of the sky and the birds in it as novel, wonderfully alien things.

At the most nascent level, my interest in the 'more-than-human' (as it is called in geography terminology) began during a fellowship in Cambridge University in 2018, under a research project called 'Urban Ecologies.' I began developing a deep interest in the behavioral and evolutionary changes in animals in Delhi prompted by air pollution. Coupled with this was a sense of unease many of us felt towards the escalating social tension in India. Focusing closely on the figure of the black kite opened up not just the environmental but also the most pressing socio-political dramas of our times.

I am not interested in making either conventional 'nature-based' programming or a 'wildlife' documentary. My focus is neither limited to the life of the human protagonists nor the avian ones. The city itself – replete with the many human-animal ensembles in it – features in the film as a character.

In recent months, Nadeem and Saud have felt under siege from factors other than Delhi's ongoing environmental catastrophe. The family grapples with the seismic ecological and political changes taking place around them and their relationship with their work comes under severe stress.

The film experiences many of these macro-level changes through intimate details, as the family processes and deals with them. Sometimes through trepidation, sometimes through instinctive fear, sometimes with wry humour, occasionally with ugly in-fighting, but mostly – with quiet courage.

– Shaunak Sen

FEATURING

NADEEM SHEHZAD AND MOHAMMAD SAUD

Former bodybuilders from the Chawri Bazar area of New Delhi, Nadeem Shehzad and his younger brother Mohammad Saud started treating black kites in 2003. Since then, they have together treated more than 20,000 injured birds. Nadeem was recently appointed as an Honorary Wildlife Warden of Delhi, and in 2021 spent three months in the U.S. for training with bird rescue organizations. Today, Nadeem and Saud continue to work tirelessly to treat black kites and other birds of prey through the organization they set up in 2010: Wildlife Rescue.

SALIK REHMAN

Salik Rehman joined Wildlife Rescue in January 2017. He has been an active volunteer at Wildlife Rescue since 2010 and has become an integral part of the organization in its many rescue and rehabilitation activities.

FILM TEAM

SHAUNAK SEN - DIRECTOR

Shaunak Sen is a filmmaker and film scholar based in New Delhi, India. *Cities of Sleep* (2016), his first feature-length documentary, was shown at various major international film festivals (including DOK Leipzig, DMZ Docs and the Taiwan International Documentary Festival, among others) and won 6 international awards. Shaunak received the IDFA Bertha Fund (2019), the Sundance Documentary Grant (2019), the Catapult Film Fund (2020), the Charles Wallace Grant, the Sarai CSDS Digital Media fellowship (2014), and the Films Division of India fellowship (2013). He was also a visiting scholar at Cambridge University (2018) and has published academic articles in Bioscope, Widescreen and other journals.

AMAN MANN – PRODUCER

Aman Mann is a filmmaker and media researcher based in New Delhi, India. Aman was the associate director of *Cities of Sleep* (2016), which was screened in various international festivals and won 6 international documentary awards. Aman has produced various ad films, short documentaries and video installations. He is currently enrolled as a PhD candidate in Cinema Studies in Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi.

TEDDY LEIFER – PRODUCER

Since founding Rise Films in 2008, Teddy Leifer has produced or executive produced all of its films and television programs. His credits include 2018 Oscar® winner *Icarus* and 2013 Oscar® nominee *The Invisible War*. A three-time Emmy® winner, Peabody winner and BAFTA nominee,

his other producer and executive producer credits include *The Interrupters*, *Knuckle*, *Dreamcatcher*, *We Are Together*, *Rough Aunties* and *Who is Dayani Cristal?* starring Gael García Bernal.

Teddy has produced films and television programs for broadcasters and partners including BBC, Channel 4, ITV, Showtime, PBS, Hulu, Universal, Netflix, Film4 and HBO. Many of his productions have gone on to win at the Sundance Film Festival and other major international awards. He is the producer of ITV2's multi award-winning Roman sitcom, *Plebs*. The show is the channel's highest rating comedy ever.

Teddy recently produced *The Human Factor*, Dror Moreh's follow-up to his Oscar® nominated *The Gatekeepers* which Sony Pictures Classics acquired after its world premiere at Telluride and *The Art of Political Murder*, a feature documentary for HBO executive produced by George Clooney. He also executive produced David Osit's award-winning film, *Mayor*, following the life and work of Musa Hadid, the mayor of Ramallah.

He is currently producing a two-part documentary for HBO about the comedian George Carlin, directed by Judd Apatow, as well as a six-part series for Sky Documentaries and NBCU.

Teddy was recently listed in the "100 most innovative and influential people in British creative and media industries" by the Guardian newspaper. He is a member of the Producers Guild of America and BAFTA.

FLORRIE PRIEST – CO-PRODUCER

Florrie Priest joined Rise Films in 2018 after graduating with a degree in history from Cambridge University. Since then she has worked on productions including *The Art of Political Murder* (HBO), *The Human Factor* (Sony Pictures Classics), *Plebs* (ITV), and David Osit's multi-award winning *Mayor*. She is currently working in development and production on a number of documentary and scripted projects, including a two-part documentary for HBO on the comedian George Carlin, directed by Judd Apatow, and *Thank You & Goodbye*, a drama series on the News International phone hacking scandal written by Luke Neal and directed by Saul Dibb.

DAVID GUY ELISCO – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

David Elisco manages the development and production of a portfolio of films for HHMI Tangled Bank Studios, focusing on feature-length documentaries. In his work, he is drawn to dramatic stories that touch the heart, inspire wonder, and provide insight into life on Earth. Most recently, Elisco served as executive producer on the Peabody Award-winning film *Inventing Tomorrow*, the Emmy Award-winning film *The Serengeti Rules*, and the critically acclaimed film *Oliver Sacks: His Own Life*. His current slate includes *Super Bugs* with Amos Pictures for HBO and the BBC and *Wilding* with Passion Pictures.

SEAN B. CARROLL – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

As Head of Studio, Sean B. Carroll directs HHMI Tangled Bank Studios' mission, strategy, and editorial focus, and oversees both the documentary and dramatic film slates. An internationally recognized scientist, award-winning author, and Emmy Award-winning executive producer, Sean is the architect of HHMI's filmmaking initiative to bring great stories about science and scientists to broad audiences. He has served as executive producer on a wide variety of feature documentary, IMAX, and short films. As leader of HHMI's Department of Science Education, he also oversees the largest portfolio of privately supported science education activities in the United States.

BENJAMIN BERNHARD – CINEMATOGRAPHER

Ben Bernhard graduated as a Bachelor of Arts (Camera) at the BHT Berlin before he started to study cinematography at the Deutsche Film-und Fernsehakademie Berlin (dfffb). Since then he has worked on various short and feature-length fiction and documentary films as Director of Photography. In 2014 he received a scholarship at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles.

Since 2009, Ben has been working with well-known director Victor Kossakovsky. Their film *Aquarela* had its world premiere as an official selection of the 2018 Venice Film Festival, the U.S. premiere at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival, won the Golden Star at the El Gouna International Film Festival, and was shortlisted for the 2020 Oscars.

Ben was nominated for Germany's main cinematography award, Deutscher Kamerapreis, in 2019 for his work on *Lost Reactor*. The project also won Best Cinematography at the Achtung Berlin Film Festival. He also received an award for his work on the film *Homework* (director: Annika Pinske) which won the German Short Film LOLA Award in 2016.

CHARLOTTE MUNCH BENGTSSEN – EDITOR

Charlotte Munch Bengtsen was a dancer and photographer before studying for a masters in film editing at NFTS, UK. She has edited several award-winning feature documentaries, including Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing*, Christy Garland's *The Bastard Sings the Sweetest Song*, Ada Soby's *American Losers*, Boris Bertram's *War Photographer* Lasse Lau's *The Raven & The Seagull* and Dweck & Kershaw's 2021 Oscar shortlisted *The Truffle Hunters*, for which she received a Critics Choice Award nomination for best editing. Charlotte's latest credits in 2021 are Robin Petre's *From the Wild Sea* and Ai Weiwei's *Rohingya*. Charlotte served as a juror for the IDA Documentary Awards 2021.

ROGER GOULA – COMPOSER

Roger Goula is a London-based composer and multi-instrumentalist whose range of original works spans across albums, film scores, music for dance, TV, theatre, and art installation.

Roger has scored numerous award-winning films which have been presented at international festivals such as Venice Film Festival, Toronto, Sundance, Tribeca and BFI, amongst many others, and was featured in the prestigious ASCAP Composers Spotlight at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival.

His scores for renowned feature documentaries include the BIFA-nominated *Versus: The Life and Films of Ken Loach*; the BAFTA-nominated feature *The Hard Stop* from director George Amponsah; and the BIFA Winner *Next Goal Wins*. Roger's original scores for television include the BAFTA-winning BBC drama *Killed by My Debt*; the BAFTA-nominated BBC drama *Against the Law*, starring Daniel Mays; BAFTA-winning BBC docudrama *The Left Behind*, and the ITV/Netflix flagship series *The Ripper*.

RISE FILMS

Rise Films is an Oscar® and Emmy® winning production company. Its productions include *The Invisible War* (Oscar® nominee and Emmy® winner), *The Interrupters* (Emmy® winner), *Icarus* (Oscar® winner), *Knuckle*, *Dreamcatcher*, *We Are Together*, *Rough Aunties* and *Who is Dayani Cristal?* starring Gael García Bernal. Rise has produced films and television programs for broadcasters and partners including BBC, Channel 4, PBS, Showtime and HBO, which have gone on to win multiple awards at the Sundance Film Festival. Other clients and partners include Netflix, Hulu, ITV, Universal, the BFI and Film4.

Roman comedy *Plebs* became ITV2's highest rating comedy ever. The show is now in its fifth season and has won multiple awards including a Broadcast Award and a Royal Television Society Award, as well as receiving two BAFTA nominations. Rise is currently working on a U.S. remake of *Plebs* together with Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg's Point Grey Pictures and animated comedy series, *Dead Henry* at Fox.

The company recently produced *The Human Factor* (released by Sony Pictures Classics in 2021), Dror Moreh's follow-up to his Oscar® nominated, *The Gatekeepers*, as well as *The Art of Political Murder*, a feature documentary for HBO, executive produced by George Clooney. Rise also produced David Osit's multi-award winning, *Mayor*, following the life and work of Musa Hadid, the mayor of Ramallah.

Amongst other ongoing productions, Rise is currently making a two-part documentary for HBO about the comedian George Carlin directed by Judd Apatow, and a six-part series for Sky Documentaries and NBCU.

HHMI TANGLED BANK STUDIOS

HHMI Tangled Bank Studios is a mission-driven production company that crafts exceptional films about science and scientists for broadcast, theatrical and digital distribution. The studio, a vision of evolutionary biologist and acclaimed author Sean B. Carroll, was launched in 2011. As storytellers within the world class science organization HHMI, the studio is uniquely positioned to shine a light on some of the most significant scientific breakthroughs of our time – and explain why they matter. Recent films include Emmy-nominated *Nature's Fear Factor*; CNN/BBC's *Race for the Vaccine*, which followed leading scientists developing the Covid vaccine during the pandemic; *The Farthest – Voyager In Space*, which won an Emmy for best science documentary; *The Serengeti Rules*, which won an Emmy for outstanding nature documentary; Peabody Award-winning *Inventing Tomorrow*, which premiered at Sundance and aired on PBS/POV; and Ric Burns' *Oliver Sacks: His Own Life*, a New York Times 'Critic's Pick' which premiered at the Telluride Film Festival and aired on American Masters/PBS. For more information, please visit www.tangledbankstudios.org

CREDITS

Director

Shaunak Sen

Producers

Shaunak Sen

Aman Mann

Teddy Leifer

Executive Producers

David Guy Elisco

Sean B. Carroll

Co-Producer

Florrie Priest

Associate Producers

Sam Stanley

Guy Horlock

Editor

Charlotte Munch Bengtsen

Cinematography

Benjamin Bernhard

Riju Das

Saumyananda Sahi

Composer

Roger Goula

Sound Recordists

Niladri Shekhar Roy

Moinak Bose

First Assistant Director

Rohan Ranganathan

Co-Editor

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Assistant Director

Siraj Sharma

Additional Camera

Raju Biswas

Salim Khan

Sundarram Arjun