

PATHA KI SHERNI

A film.

ABOUT THE FILM

(Working) TITLE

Patha Ki Sherni/Tigress of Patha

PRODUCTION COUNTRY

India

TYPE

Fiction Feature

RUNNING TIME

100 mins

LANGUAGE

Bundeli/Hindi

LOGLINE

Laali, a *Dalit* (lower-caste) woman once hailed as a hero for fighting armed *dacoits*, now lives under arduous conditions. Her dream of building a permanent home keeps getting interrupted by persistent injustices in her village. Amidst pursuing her dream, she confronts her disconnected family, redefining her identity as a "fallen hero" and discovering the new meaning of heroism.

TREATMENT

मैं जब पेड़ थी तब की यह बात है
जड़ें ज़मीन के गहरे भीतर
दबी हुई थीं — आश्वस्त-सी

*It's from the time I was a tree.
My roots were buried deep in the earth
Suppressed.. But hopeful.*

- Mallika Amar Sheikh

On a dark screen with barely any visibility, the sound of snoring and a table fan creates a pulse for the night. It continues for a while until a loud thud breaks the rhythm followed by the wailing of a dog. LAALI (30), wakes with the sound. SURAJKALI (28) sleeping beside her also wakes up and flashes her phone torch around.

The light from the torch reveals a makeshift one-room hut with mud flooring and a tin roof. An old woman is sitting by the door made out of weathered cloth. She is GULABDEVI, the mother of Laali and Surajkali. The snoring continues. Surajkali flashes the light on a teenage boy, BILLU, snoring away in glory. He's Laali's son. He just turns his face and continues to sleep.

The wailing of the dog intensifies. Gulabdevi gets hassled by the sound and asks Laali to bring Gulabdevi's son back into the house. "*The dacoits have trapped him, load the gun,*" Gulabdevi says, staring blankly into the darkness. Laali hesitates to get up.

Impatient, Gulabdevi gets up and steps out of the house; her silhouette is seen through the curtain. Surajkali instantly gets up and stops Gulabdevi from going out. She goes out, annoyed and taunting Laali for her fear of the dark.

The road gets lit by Surajkali's phone torch momentarily and then sinks into darkness as she leaves the frame. The rest of the scene is illustrated in sounds. Slowly the wailing of the dog stops and Billu's snoring remains. His sleep is unhindered by any noise or activity.

Laali slides back down on the mattress and closes her eyes. All of this continues in one wide frame inside the house - a long take that does not necessarily reveal the characters but establishes the mood, tone and pace of the film.

TITLE

In the morning, Laali is bandaging a dog sitting next to a ditch of half-completed electric pole work. Although 30, Laali looks older and beaten down. She has a dark complexion and rough skin. Always wrapped in a messy sari with hair tightly pulled back in an oily bun. She has a slender body but unusually strong arms and legs.

The dog rests its head on her lap and Laali pets it for some time. She takes a swig from the bottle of alcohol she has tucked in her *Sari*. Laali is a caring woman but she doesn't express herself vocally. She shows affection by taking care of her family's needs.

Laali goes about her morning routine in her broken, makeshift hut. She quietly cleans the photos of two men and one small boy hanging on the wall. Next to the photos hangs an old rusted gun. A spider quietly continues to build a cobweb on the gun. She cleans the house and cooks. Then changes into a new *sari*.

Billu is still lying down and watching videos on his phone. He is a 13-year-old boy living and studying in a government school near his village. He is visiting for the holidays. Gulabdevi is watching the reels with Billu.

A small mirror hangs on the pole in the middle of their home. Laali tries to take a peak but it's already occupied by Surajkali. Surajkali is much lighter in skin tone than Laali and is conventionally attractive.

Two journalists arrive at the door. They ask if this is the house of '*Patha Ki Sherni*' (*Tigress of Patha*). They assume it's Surajkali they are looking for until Laali says that she is the one they want to speak with. Laali asks Surajkali to get water for the guests but Surajkali ignores Laali and leaves the house, dragging Billu along with her. She taunts Laali as she exits "*Make sure you tell them how you fought even though it was a pitch-dark night.*"

The camera is set in the courtyard and Laali begins telling her story. She's under-confident, stammering her way through and stands slouching her shoulders.

Fifteen years ago, Laali was given the title '*Patha Ki Sherni*' (*Tigress of Patha*) for fighting the *dacoits*. A young kid of a rich and upper caste politician was kidnapped by them. The boy managed to escape and knocked on Laali's door in the middle of the night. Within a few minutes, the *dacoits* surrounded the village. Laali, at night, had a face-off with them. She tricked them, got her hands on their gun and pointed it back at them. She rescued the kid from the *dacoits* and handed it over to his family. The politician honoured her 'manly' bravery by gifting her the gun. The story of a '*Dalit Woman Hero*' became front-page news for a while. Laali shows them the newspaper cuttings.

The journalists ask her for multiple re-takes. The session ends with them asking her to stand tall and pose with a gun like a hero. Laali follows the instructions.

While the reporters pack up, Laali asks them indirectly if they're going to pay her with shame in her voice. They dodge the question by telling her tall stories of how they're planning to make her hero story viral on social media on a 'women's day' occasion.

The journalists leave. Laali takes a brief pause to look at the untouched food and water she had served them. It's not new to her that most higher-caste people from her village never eat or drink water at her house.

Laali changes into her regular *sari* and walks out of her house. She walks alone through the scanty settlement reaching the main village square. She walks further to reach a construction site of something that looks like a lavish bungalow. The construction is in its advanced stage. PRATIBHA

(30), Laali's friend from work, waits for her. Laali marks her attendance and they get to work. She carries bricks on her head three floors up. She is quick and does rounds tirelessly. Her muscles are visible as she climbs with bricks on her head.

Surajkali and Billu walk together through the dry hills of Patha. Surajkali asks him about his school and his hostel. Billu seems well-settled away from home. They speak of the hostel life and we find out that Surajkali has also studied outside her village. Billu is happy that none of his classmates are from his village so he doesn't have to bring them to his hut. Surajkali tells him that she also used to lie a lot about her house. They bond over the terrible hostel food and she tells Billu that she is planning to leave the village soon. Billu teases her for always saying that but never acting on it. Laughing and chatting - they reach Surajkali's workplace.

Surajkali sits at a desk in an NGO office, trying to read the hoarding being put up outside the window. It's about creating awareness against the increasing suicides among the women in the village. Billu's voice plays as he reads it - "These are the ways women commit suicide- blue dye poisoning 36.6%, By hanging- 32.1% and 7.9%- other reasons" "Don't be alone- reach out" The hoarding is bland and unattractive. Even though almost illegible - the images of a blue ink bottle, a hanging rope and the face of a worried woman are visible. Billu is reading out from a pamphlet of the same campaign kept on Surajkali's desk - it seems to be a new and pressing venture for the NGO.

Surajkali has the job of taking down complaints from the women in the village and reporting them to her superiors who then take necessary steps to find solutions. Surajkali's job provides the perfect context for the state of women in the village.

A young woman sitting in front of Surajkali tells her an absurd complaint. She holds out her phone to show Surajkali a video of her husband teaching her kids A to Z with curses and bad words, associating 'A' with an asshole, B with Booze, 'C' with cigarettes etc. The video makes Surajkali chuckle a bit but the woman tearfully complains about wanting to leave her husband. He is a drunkard and a bad influence on her kids. Surajkali asks her if she went to the police. The woman replies that the police found the video amusing and not complaint-worthy. On top of that, her husband broke her arm when he found out that she went to the police. Surajkali types the woman's complaint on an old computer but her typing speed isn't matching the woman's frustration and angst.

It's late afternoon and harsh heat is just mellowing down. Surajkali closes the NGO door to leave. Billu who is studying in one corner of her office leaves with her. Billu and Surajkali pass by a ground near the village square. There is a big banner outside 'celebrating 10 years of mass surrender.' The banner has pictures of masked *dacoits* and a red cross over it.

HARILAL YADAV, the village head, stands on a makeshift stage. Villagers sit on the thin mats on the floor. A few MEN walk on stage one by one and Harilal garlands them, gives them a flower bouquet and then clicks a picture with them. This is the event of surrendered dacoits. Harilal talks about how on this day fifty years ago 200 dacoits surrendered and Bundelkhand began seeing change. Today it's completely free of the dacoits. He proudly says that these rebels now work for many politicians like him, helping society become better.

Billu is watching all of this. Surajkali drags him by his hand. The sound of Harilal's speech plays over the visuals of Billu and Surajkali dropping off 'suicide-awareness' pamphlets at the doorsteps of every house on their way.

It's evening now. The construction site is emptying as the workers head home. Laali visits Harilal's office. A black SUV with tinted windows stands outside. She inquires about the status of the housing papers she submitted to the government scheme. These schemes are funded by the central government of India and are supposed to provide free houses to the lower caste and poor population. A printed banner of the scheme is lying in a corner of Harilal's office.

Harilal asks her to clean the office. The office is littered with empty beer bottles, chip packets, half-eaten food, peanut skins etc. Laali obliges. After cleaning, she asks Harilal again about the government scheme. Harilal asks Laali for eighty thousand rupees more as a bribe since there is a new government officer in the city and Harilal needs to pay him. Laali has previously paid the bribe amount and yet she is not shocked by this demand as everyone knows the bribe is an unavoidable part of the deal. She tries to negotiate the bribe but fails.

Laali walks home as fast as she can as it's getting dark. She goes from the wide road into narrow lanes and reaches the illegal alcohol shop. The small shop is flooded with men at this hour. She easily, without hesitating, walks through the crowd and goes in the front - cutting the line. The alcohol vendor hands her the regular bottle of the cheapest alcohol.

At home, Laali brings up the topic of the housing scheme to Surajkali. Surajkali gets angry at Laali and calls her stupid for agreeing to more bribe money. Surajkali refuses to help her as she doesn't believe that Harilal will keep his promise. Laali remains quiet. Billu, lying on the mattress with a biscuit on his chest, scrolls through his phone - he's unbothered. Gulabdevi enters. She is unusually happy and announces that her son is finally back home and that all the dacoits are dead. Laali checks on Gulabdevi's Alzheimer's medication and the bottle is empty.

Surajkali walks out and sits by the ditch with her feet dangling in, seeking some peace. She calls someone named Gopi on her phone. They are a hyper-romantic couple. Gopi reads out a poem to her. She says she doesn't understand a word but he has a beautiful voice. He asks her to recite something she knows but she says she doesn't know any - no one sang to her when she was a kid. She changes the topic and they talk about their plan of moving to the city. Gopi is looking for a job and Surajkali is saving up money.

It's a dry summer morning. In a similar fashion to Laali, now Gulabdevi tells a story to her ghostly son sitting on the porch. About five decades ago, Gulabdevi's firstborn, a son, was kidnapped by the dacoits. Gulabdevi went head-on with the dacoits. She got her hands on one of their guns and pointed it back at them. But she couldn't save her son. We understand that Laali was narrating the same story as her mother's with only one change - Gulabdevi's son dies in her story. Thinking her son is dead, Gulabdevi becomes confused and lost. Laali who is next to her checking the wound on the dog tries not to break Gulabdevi's illusion and assures her that the son is coming and she should cook his favourite sweets.

Laali rhythmically slams the cement on a brick wall at the construction site. Laali and Pratibha sit for lunch under a tree. After lunch, they both nap using a wooden log as a pillow.

A commotion at the site wakes them up. A woman has fainted. Everyone rushes to her help but she has already passed. As the woman is being taken away, Laali, for a fleeting moment, notices the woman's mouth is blue.

The contractor asks the labourers to get back to work. While they climb up the stairs with bricks, Pratibha asks Laali how much money do you think the woman's family will get. Their conversation reveals a common practice in the village called 'negotiations over a dead body.' If a woman dies working for someone or commits suicide due to harassment, the party at fault pays the family of the dead woman a hefty sum to keep out the police and court cases. Pratibha believes that the woman was planning it for a long time since her family was in debt. Laali doesn't respond to her.

On her way back, Laali stops at a sweet shop and packs some sweets for Billu. Then she goes to the alcohol shop where the shopkeeper is watching her interview posted on YouTube. He comments on it laughing that she is such a good liar that he almost believed for a second that she's a real hero. He tells her that he has heard stories from his father about that night. His father was there when the entire village fought the dacoits. *"The child just happened to knock on your door. You let him in and closed the door. You didn't point the gun or anything!"* Unbothered by his accusations she smiles and leaves with her alcohol bottle.

When Laali reaches home she sees Billu, Surajkali and Gulabdevi watching the same video. A half-played game of Ludo with pistachio shells and a board drawn with chalk on the ground is in front of them.

Billu and Surajkali are laughing at Laali's stammering in the video. Billu says that the gun is so big that it looks like the gun is holding her. Without realising how Laali felt, they get back to their game.

Laali resigns into the kitchen, takes a couple of plates and puts out the sweets. She carries one plate outside for Billu. As Billu eats happily, Laali snaps angrily suddenly saying - *"I could fire a gun in my sleep and shoot any of them if I wanted to."* Billu is confused by her rare and sudden outrage but remains silent.

Billu wakes up in the morning and checks his phone as a habit. It's out of charge. He checks the charging portal and then looks at the still table fan with a sigh - there has been a power cut. He goes out and sees a few men standing around the ditch.

The men are here to fix the electric pole and have cut the power. Surajkali is asking them when the electricity will be back. The men have no idea which annoys Surajkali more. The men leave with unfinished work and promise to return the next day.

The construction site is complete now. Pratibha and Laali are shifted to a new job in highway-road construction outside Uttar Pradesh that begins soon. This job will require Laali and Pratibha to move away for the next two years.

The electricity is not back and Billu is unable to charge his phone. Bathing in a bathroom made with just hanging old *saris* as walls, constantly having to fix the cheap-quality tarpaulin of the house, and no separate bed to sleep in has always annoyed Billu but now starts getting on his nerves. Laali, who is home all day since she doesn't need to be on a construction site, notices Billu's evident

displacement profoundly.

Standing outside a tiny grocery store, Surajkali is incessantly calling Gopi. Gopi finally answers her call and tells her that he is at the store with his father. Surajkali blows her fuse because she is standing at his shop and he is evidently lying. From the way they are fighting - it's understood that they fight like this regularly. He hangs up on her saying they can't be together and they should break up. She tries to call back but he has blocked her.

The house is still in the dark. In the light of a single solar lamp, Laali is oiling Surajkali's hair- her way of massaging the scalp is rough and a bit violent but Surajkali likes it. Laali asks her to check the documents. Surajkali - already pissed refuses. Laali- under her breath taunts her sister. The fight begins. Surajkali is the one who is doing most of the talking- aggressively- Laali- mostly passive is trying to fend off Surajkali as much as possible. Laali tells Surajkali that she has bad taste in men. At this, Surajkali loses her cool and brings up long-buried issues between them. Years ago when Surajkali was being abused in her marriage, Laali was busy enjoying the fame that came with her new title '*Patha ki Sherni*' (*The Tigress of Patha*). ' She calls out Laali for stealing Gulabdevi's story. She adds if she was in Laali's place she would have fought the dacoits and become a real hero.

Billu is tired of women fighting. He comes out of the house and yells at them ordering them to be quiet. He calls this family crazy and how there is no single moment of peace. The sisters quiet down and quietly go back to oiling hair.

The morning is gloomy. Black clouds are gathering in the sky. The first rain of the season is about to soothe the heat. The pole work is left midway; the pole is only mounted but there is still no electricity. Surajkali leaves for work.

Laali wants to make sure to enrol her name in the housing scheme before her new job starts. As she leaves to visit Harilal carrying an old plastic bag with some money saved in it, Billu asks Laali if he should come with her. She says she has it under control. He hands her over the entire folder of documents- assembled. He has gone through all the documents that Harilal needs to start the process. Laali hides her tears and leaves.

Only Billu and Gulabdevi remain in the house. Gulabdevi suddenly begins pulling him by his hand. She thinks Billu is her son. Billu gets irritated with her.

Outside the NGO, a new hoarding is up. This time it's about 'malnourishment in pregnant women' equally text-heavy and unattractive. A taxi with a driver is parked outside. Inside the NGO, women have gathered together for a purse-making workshop. Three urban looking and well-dressed women, sitting on chairs, are speaking to them about becoming sustainable and self-reliant by learning to stitch purses. One of the women says innocently that most of the women in the village don't need a purse since they are not allowed to go out without their husbands and are never the ones in charge of money.

Surajkali is sitting at the back of the class, distracted, as Gopi relentlessly calls her on her phone. She hits the reject button repeatedly and finally blocks him. The act gives her power over Gopi and her relationship, momentarily. Their relationship has a familiar Bollywood romantic tone, but there is a subtle irony. Their dreams of a life together feel distant even to them. At times they serve more as a form of distraction than serious aspirations.

Laali arrives at the NGO office. She wants Surajkali's help with the housing documents as she is about to give the first installment of the bribe to Harilal. Surajkali agrees to come meet her at Harilal's office later which surprises Laali.

Laali is cleaning the porch outside Harilal's office. A group of teenagers sitting in his office are playing video games. Surajkali can hear their ruckus. Harilal leaves the desk and asks Laali to wait to clean the office once his son and his classmates leave. Laali sits in a corner in his courtyard. The sounds from the game room intensify. Laali takes out a bottle of cheap alcohol tucked in her *sari* and takes a few sips. The sky is still gloomy and dark. Amidst the sounds, Laali has dozed off sitting in the corner. Surajkali never turns up.

Laali is packing Billu's bag with things. She packs his lunch for the way. Puts in a box of his favourite sweets, pens, notepads and new clothes in a small travel bag. Billu sits next to Laali. A moment of silence passes as she keeps packing his stuff. Billu fills up the silence by over-explaining to Laali out of guilt why he must go back to school early. Laali knows he is lying as his voice shakes and lacks conviction. She remains quiet. She understands why he is ashamed of his home and has gotten used to relatively better living conditions at the hostel. But Billu's education is her top priority and she's ready to endure any pain.

At night, Billu sleeps next to Laali with his hand resting on her stomach. Laali is wide awake, her eyes moist as she cries silently. It's begun raining outside. Water drops through weathered tarpaulin in the house. The moment marks Billu's departure.

The rain pours heavily for a week. The ground around the hut is all slushy with a few puddles. The dog now sleeps with the women inside the house. Surajkali and Laali buy a new sheet of tarpaulin and cover the roof of the hut with it.

Once the rain slows down - Laali and Surajkali take Gulabdevi to the hospital in the nearest city. Through them we witness the village scape turning into a cityscape. The fresh wind and the drops of rain from the bus window hit their faces. The brown and dry hills of Patha are getting a lush green layer.

They eat together at a cheap restaurant in the city. They stand in line at the hospital for the free medicines for Gulabdevi. The clerk at the hospital asks Gulabdevi's age but both the sisters have no idea. Surajkali makes up a number and tells him.

Laali is cleaning a gun. The gun hangs on the wall of Harilal's lavish house. The house is empty. Many guns are hanging in the living room of Harilal's house. She cleans them neatly. She wipes the floor and cleans his toilet. She goes outside the house, crosses the compound and goes to pee behind a bush. There have been multiple incidents in the village where the lower-caste people have endured physical punishments for using the toilet of the higher-caste community.

Laali is on call with Billu. He needs money to pay for the extra tuition next year and he has decided to stay back during the vacations and work. They discuss that he will probably meet her after two years once she is back. Billu is planning to work on the construction site of their school's new wing. It's only temporary, he assures his mother.

This is a breaking point for Laali who has always believed that education will ensure her son dismantling caste-based hierarchies and roles. It would ensure that his identity won't be branded by his caste. Even if seemingly temporary - the thought of him being on a construction site breaks her confidence for the first time. Laali's perspective flips as she realises that ensuring her son's dignity requires something more than just educating him. All she can do for him is to secure a piece of land; a place that no one can ask him to leave from. It doesn't matter if she can live on the piece of land herself but as long as he can, it's worth the effort.

Laali asks Surajkali to deposit the little money she had saved for the bribe to Billu's account.

The night is unusually cold with mist floating in the air. Pratibha and Laali get drunk. They talk about their impending departure. Pratibha is worried as these road construction jobs are famous for road-kill incidences. Many labourers have died in such jobs. Laali, on the other hand, seems unbothered by Pratibha's fear. There is something else on her mind. She tells Pratibha stories of her when she was awarded the *"Patha ki Sherni."* *"People found out for the first time what my name was..."* She half speaks to Pratibha- half to herself.

Laali reminisces about her brother and how she knows him only through her mother's memory. Laali's brother was fair in color like Surajkali and the dacoits mistook him for the son of the rich factory owner and kidnapped him. Gulabdevi, who went to fight the dacoits, had to watch her son die in front of her. Since that day she has never been the same. *"At least in my story, the child lives. If the child dies then there is no hope left..."* Laali tells her.

Laali confesses to Harilal that she doesn't have the first payment for the bribe anymore and asks him if she can get an advance. Harilal calculates numbers and tells her that she will have to work as free labor on the new road construction for free for two years to pay it back. Laali doesn't answer. Harilal gets called outside the office. Only Laali remains in the office. She takes out the bottle tucked in her *sari*- this time it's a bottle of ink. She drinks it all and sits quietly for the effect to happen.

Laali opens her eyes, she finds herself in the hospital attached to a saline bottle. The nurse informs her that she only has a bad stomach. There is a tiffin and a glass of water next to her. Disoriented, she looks around and sees Surajkali talking to the doctor.

The doctor explains to Surajkali that Laali drank blue ink to kill herself but it's the 'blue indigo dye' that kills you and not the ink. The doctor has seen many women make the same mistake. Since it's a suicide case, they will have to register a complaint. Worried about the police charge, Surajkali suggests that her NGO can help Laali.

At the NGO, Laali sits in front of Surajkali while Surajkali types the complaint. Surajkali, holding back a quiver in her voice, tries to be as neutral as possible. This is the first time Laali is opening up to Surajkali about her inner turmoil.

After a long silence, Laali begins. Laali explains the practice of negotiations over a dead body and she was hoping that her death would give her family enough money for Billu's education and to build a permanent home. Laali goes on narrating almost matter-of-factly and Surajkali, for the first time breaks down. She stops typing and cries. Laali holds her close, consoling.

It's night. Surajkali, wrapped in a thick blanket to protect from cold, carries a wire and a hook to the nearest working electricity pole. There is a man standing there - we never see his face, only his back. This is Gopi. He hooks the electricity cable for her, stealing the electricity. They speak with one another but we don't hear them.

Laali comes back home and sees that Surajkali is taking care of the house. The electricity is back. Surajkali now sits oiling Laali's hair. She is quietly humming a song. Laali joins it but they get stuck as they don't remember the full song. The sisters share a laugh as they both remember a different version of it. It's the only song sisters know. They ask Gulabdevi as she's the one who used to sing this song to them when they were kids. Gulabdevi is clueless.

The day of the *Holi* arrives. *Mahua* trees (*a local tree whose flowers are used to make alcohol*) are blossoming all across Patha and the bright yellow of its flowers is a dominant colour on the hills. The markets too are flooded with baskets full of Mahua flowers. This marks the beginning of Indian summer.

The village is lit in colorful fairy lights and is more chaotic than usual. A local theatre troop is getting ready to perform the play about the legend of *Holi*. Usually, the Holi is known as a merry festival of colours but here, the way of celebration is led by a local legend.

The local legend has it that there was once a king by the name of *Hiranyakashyap* who won over the kingdom of Earth. He wanted everyone to worship him but Holika, the demoness refused. The king burnt the demoness alive, asserting his power. People enact the scene of '*Holika's burning to ashes*' every year to mark the victory of supposed good over evil. It is said that Holika was a lower-caste demoness.

Everyone in the house is getting ready for the celebrations. Laali gives Gulabdevi her medicines. She braids Surajkali's hair and then gets ready herself. She looks at herself in the mirror for the first time in a long time. She puts a small flower in her hair, stares at herself and removes the flower. She tucks in the bottle of alcohol in her new *sari*. Surajkali comes to her and gives all her savings to Laali to pay for the housing scheme.

Laali is still short of a complete amount. She takes off the gun hanging on the wall and tries to load it to see if it works. She doesn't know how to use it, and Gulabdevi loads it. The sisters watch their mother in awe. All three head to Harilal's office to pay off the bribe for the government housing scheme.

Harilal's office is decorated for the festival. Laali walks in with a gun, startling Harilal. She wants to sell the gun to him so she can have the full amount needed for the scheme. Harilal dismisses the value of the gun.

Just then Harilal's teenage son walks by the office- engrossed looking at his phone while playing the video game, he has stepped in dog poop on the porch and is annoyed by it. Harilal asks Laali to clean it. Ignoring him, Laali asks him to sign the house papers first as they have money and the papers. 'After cleaning' Harilal repeats. She persistently asks him to sign the house papers first and doesn't budge. Harilal is angry and perplexed by her. As he starts insulting her, Laali avoiding eye contact with him stands firm looking down, staring directly at the gun.

Gulabdevi is narrating a story. Same as we have seen before. *'NO! First she said it to herself. And then she looked up at him and yelled at him. "NO, I won't. Then, he charged towards my daughter. She instantly picked up the gun and pointed it at him. You should have seen how scared he got. He peed his pants.'* Gulabdevi in her delusional state narrates Laali's story to Laali while they wait at a government office in the city. Gulabdevi laughs and continues, *'my daughter threatened him saying that she wants her house right now. His hands were shivering while he signed. Then she, like a real hero, walked out holding a gun in one hand and the house papers in the other.'* Laali has a smile on her face as Gulabdevi calls her a hero. We don't know if this event happened or not but does that mean it's not real?

Laali's name is called out and she goes to the counter to submit the housing papers. The government officer checks the papers, gives Laali a receipt and then tosses their file in a tall dusty stack of pending housing applications.

Surajkali waits outside, talking to Gopi over the phone. She asks him how they will move to the city now that all her savings are gone. He answers that they will wait for him to get a job and then move to the city. She smiles warmly and they continue to dream about their future. While talking, she notices an advanced computer learning pamphlet stuck on the wall. She tears it and keeps it in her pocket.

Back at the village, the *Holi* procession begins in full swing. Speakers blast the local songs. The upper castes dance on one side, and the lower castes dance on the opposite side. No one is allowed to break that imaginary wall. People are drinking while dancing and the dancing is getting rougher and more absurd as the procession progresses. The procession enters the fairground. The effigy of *Holika* is mounted on a stack of wooden logs at the centre of the ground. The image gives a distressing feeling of public death by punishment. Then, using a lit arrow, he lights up the huge bonfire in the middle of the ground. The idol of *Holika* catches fire, with a blasting crackle. The crowd begins throwing cow dung into the fire and shouting obscenities at it as if at *Holika*.

As the family travels back home, the cityscape turns into a village. Gulabdevi is happy and humming a tune. It's the same song that the sisters were singing earlier but in the right order.

औरत ने ज़मीन खोदी
कुआँ खोदा
खोदा अपने आपको
हरी-भरी होती गई औरत !

*The woman dug the ground
Dug the well
Dug herself up
And she kept blossoming*

- Mallika Amar Sheikh

The main village ends and the settlement of mud houses begins. The family sees Harilal's car with his men pass them. The mud road becomes narrower. A loud crackle makes them abruptly halt.

The family sees that their hut is set on fire. The electric pole is destroyed forming the ditch again. No one says anything. People pass by quietly, without stopping. While the fire of the fair is all about the victory of good over evil, the fire at the house represents the exact opposite and a warning for the family.

The morning light hits the burnt ruins of the hut. Leaving behind Patha, the family is forced to relocate to a different village. The hills are dry again and trees are shading leaves. In a wide shot, we see women having tea, sitting under a tree in the middle of nowhere. The dog is travelling with them. They're talking about but the words are indistinct. An image that doesn't hide the sorrow of relocating but is tinged with a feeling of hope as the family remains united.