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COAL / KAALA PATTHAR (1979)

Yash Chopra

Hindi language

film link: https://www.amazon.com/Kaala-Patthar/dp/B095HX1CXK





OVERVIEW

Director Yash Chopra (1932-2012) was one of the most iconic and influential Indian film-makers who worked in the Bollywood film industry based in Mumbai. Chopra initially worked with his elder brother, B.R. Chopra, making hits such as *Dhool Ka Phool* (*Flowers of the Dust*, 1959) and *Waqt* (*Time,* 1965). In 1973, he launched his own production company, Yash Raj Films, which went on to become one of Bollywood's most powerful production houses, with over 80 films to date. Chopra is considered a "King-maker" of Bollywood cinema, having introduced and nurtured the two biggest stars of the industry, Amitabh Bacchhan and Shah Rukh Khan. His most impactful films include romances such as *Kabhi Kabhie* (*Sometimes,* 1976), *Silsila* (*The Affair,* 1981), *Chandni* (*Moonlight,* 1989) and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (*The Brave-Hearted Wins the Bride*, 1995) and action-packed thrillers such as *Deewaar* (*Wall*, 1975) and *Darr* (*Fear*, 1993). Chopra's work is also memorable for featuring visually stunning imagery shot in diverse and exotic locales, such as Switzerland and Kashmir. He is the only filmmaker to have won the Indian National Film Award for best popular film five times— four times as director and once as producer. He also received a number of Filmfare Awards (given by *Filmfare* magazine), including 12 nominations and 4 wins for best director and 15 nominations and 4 wins for best film. The government of India honoured him with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for lifetime achievement in cinema in 2001, and in 2005 he received one of India's highest civilian honours, the Padma Bhushan.

Film *Kaala Patthar* ('Black Stone' or 'Coal', 1979) is an action thriller directed and produced by Yash Chopra under the Yash Raj Films banner. The film again stars a stellar ensemble cast of Amitabh Bachchan, Shashi Kapoor, Shatrughan Sinha, Raakhee, Parveen Babi, Neetu Singh, and Prem Chopra, with the screenplay written by Salim–Javed. The film marked the fourth collaboration between Chopra and both Bachchan and Kapoor, following *Deewaar* (1975), *Kabhie* (1976) and *Trishul* (1978). The musical score was composed by Salil Chowdhury, while the songs were composed by Rajesh Roshan, with lyrics by Sahir Ludhianvi. This was the last film Yash made with Salim-Javed (writers); their partnership ended in 1981. It was also the last film Chopra made with Gulshan Rai, perhaps because he felt able to produce all his own films after the success of Yash Raj Films' *Noorie* (Manmohan Krishna, 1979). *Kaala Patthar*, *Deewaar* and *Trishul* form a trilogy of sorts, focused around Amitabh Bachchan as Vijay, the industrial hero. Inspired by the 1975 Chasnala mining disaster, India's worst mining disaster that killed 375 miners, the narrative follows the lives of workers in a coal mine facing exploitation, unsafe conditions, and personal redemption.

Background *Kaala Patthar* emerged as a commercial success, ranking as the fifth highest-grossing Hindi film of the year, and was praised for its performances, direction, and socially relevant themes. At the 27th Filmfare Awards, the film received eight nominations (but no awards), including Best Film, Best Director (Chopra), Best Actor (Bachchan), Best Supporting Actor (Sinha), and Best Supporting

Actress (Neetu Singh). This film was not as great a hit as Chopra's earlier films, perhaps because its emotional side was weaker. Vijay's anger lacked the epic feel that it had in those earlier films. Chopra also blamed its short life at the box-office on video piracy: "When *Kaala Patthar* was released the distributors said that they were giving a high price considering the drop in the audience. This was caused by video piracy. Shashi was on holiday in the UK, so Amitabh and I went there and the three of us did appearances in Leicester and Manchester. This increased the audience."

Historical Context In the 1960's and 70s, two major coal mining disasters occurred near Dhanbad in the state of Bihar: the 1965 Dhori colliery tragedy, leading to the death of 268 miners and the 1975 Chasnala accident, which was India's deadliest mining accident, with a death toll of 375. The climactic event of *Kaala Patthar* is loosely based on the Chasnala disaster; the film repeatedly invokes this number as the number of miners likely to be affected if the mine floods. The Chasnala disaster was caused by an explosion that weakened the wall between the mine pit and an abandoned mine above it that was full of water. By one estimate at the time, around 110 million imperial gallons of water flooded in. The miners were killed by debris, drowning, and the force of the flood. By the time bodies could be recovered, they were typically identifiable only by the number on their lamp helmets. In the film, however, there is no explosion, only a weakening of the walls by repeated drilling. And with the exception of Mangal and Rana, no other named characters are shown to die in the flood, as our three heroes lead them to safety at great danger to themselves. Both historical mining accidents were caused by gross negligence on part of the companies that owned the mines; similarly, in the film, we see the private owner Dhanraj's greed trumping any concern for safety.

Kaala Patthar drew the Indian audience's attention to this then-contemporary tragedy. Given the popularity of the Hollywood 'disaster' movies of the 1970s such as *The Towering Inferno*, one expects this film to be of the same genre, yet the final disaster forms a small, although key part of the film, the major focus being less the spectacle of the disaster than its role in Vijay's story. Perhaps the greatest link here is to a film on which the young Yash Chopra worked as a second assistant, B.R. Chopra's *Naya Daur* (1957), which also condemned industrial man's greed and willingness to exploit the more vulnerable members of society. This emphasis on a specific area of social concern was a hallmark of B.R.'s films and is seen occasionally in Yash's films, the last being *Mashaal* (1984), until he moved entirely to his trademark plush romances.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Ravi Malhotra	coal mine Engineer (Shashi Kapoor)
Vijay Pal Singh	ex-Merchant Navy captain/ Coal mine worker (Amitabh Bachchan)
Sudha Sen	mining colony doctor (Raakhee)
Mangal Singh	runaway prisoner and coal mine worker (Shatrughan Sinha)
Anita	press reporter/photographer (Parveen Babi)
Chhanno	bangle-seller (Neetu Singh)
Dhanraj Puri	coal mine owner (Prem Chopra)
Maneklal Saxena	chief Engineer (Yunus Parvez)
Jagga	truck driver (Parikshit Sahni)
Doctor Mathur	mining colony doctor (Sanjeev Kumar, Guest appearance)
Raghunath	an old miner
Poonam Dhillon	Raghunath's daughter (Guest appearance)
Rana	a gambler at the mining colony
Dhanna	a gangster and Vijay's enemy



SYNOPSIS

At a coal mine, life goes on as usual, with exploitation and unsafe conditions running rife. The owner, Dhanraj Puri, has no qualms prioritizing the profit margin over miners' lives. Vijay, a reticent miner with a mysterious past and a penchant for self-harm, has made a name for himself as someone not to be messed with. One by one, the central characters gather at the coal mine: Chhanno, a trinket seller; Sudha, a lady doctor; Ravi, a newly appointed engineer; Mangal, an escaped convict and Anita, a reporter/photographer. Ravi befriends Vijay and saves him when he gets in a mining accident. Mangal promptly gets on Vijay's bad side. Anita earns Dhanraj's ire when she suggests that the mines be nationalized. The police come around, looking for Mangal and offering a cash prize. Several miners are killed in a handful of accidents, but they continue to work under hazardous conditions. Romances bloom between Ravi and Anita, Mangal and Chhanno and Vijay and Sudha. We learn that Vijay, a former Merchant Navy captain, lives with the guilt and disgrace of having abandoned a sinking ship; disowned by family and ostracized by society, he is working as miner to escape his past. Mangal causes trouble among the miners, but when he is seriously injured trying to save Anita, Vijay donates blood to save his life. This leads to reconciliation, and the two become allies. Dhanraj wants a new tunnel dug to get to millions of rupees worth of coal, but it would have to be near a waterlogged tunnel, with a high probability of the walls breaking and flooding the mines. Ravi warns Dhanraj repeatedly of this disaster but is dismissed. In the climactic sequence, when the mine floods, trapping many workers underground, Vijay, Ravi and Mangal launch a rescue mission. Vijay and Ravi manage to save most of the miners, but Mangal sacrifices his life during the operation, and Ravi sustains a serious injury. Dhanraj is arrested, and a new dawn illuminates the mines.

SCENES



Opening scene Opening credits roll on a busy coal mine at dawn. The miners pull trolleys, carry baskets and line up for their roll call. We see Vijay returning to his little room, filthy with coal smudge, and collapsing on his cot. He falls into an uneasy sleep, where he dreams of his past, with a crowd clamouring "Coward! Kill him!!" He is startled awake, then realizes that the miners are shouting outside and running. He joins them.

Vijay rescues a colleague from the mines The mass of people reaches the mine, where there has been an accident. Vijay rushes down on the elevator, and keeps running and calling his friend Raghunath's name. Raghunath is injured and stuck under a collapsed section of the mine. Vijay is able to clear up a small area and somehow pulls Raghunath out. All the miners cheer him when they emerge. The scene segues into a similar scene where Vijay is dressed as a naval officer. In his room, Vijay smashes a mirror, yelling, "Yes, I'm a coward!"

Dhanraj arrives The mine owner, Dhanraj Puri, arrives on his private jet. He complains about the poor air quality to his right-hand man, Maneklal Saxena, while riding in an air-conditioned car. Dhanraj says he wants to close down or sell the coal mines but has to keep them going for business. Saxena informs Dhanraj that he has hired an engineer, Ravi Malhotra, in an open position.



Ravi arrives Ravi comes riding on his bike and singing a song about how change is key to life, "*Ek Raasta Hai Zindagi*" ("Life is a road"). He meets a group of comely village damsels bathing, carrying water, swinging from a bough and dancing in a woodland, and then a large group of school kids, many women cyclists and so on, giving the impression that he thinks his job will be dreamlike and heavenly. He reaches his office and meets Saxena, who is brusque, and joins his job.

Dhanraj prefers profits over miners' lives Saxena tells Dhanraj that they cannot dig any further in one particular mine shaft as there is a water tunnel nearby which will cause an accident. At least 350- 400 miners work in the tunnels at any given time. Dhanraj asks what his loss will be and Saxena replies 40,00,000 rupees. Dhanraj coldly replies that his calculation is faulty as 40,00,000 rupees is much more than 400. Dhanraj orders Saxena to keep quiet about it and continue digging shafts and he'll handle it if there is any accident.

Dhanraj is wary of Vijay Dhanraj discusses the mining map with his employees. Saxena says that they can dig near the waterlogged tunnel but Ravi advises them not to. Dhanraj dismisses Ravi for his lack of experience and insulting Saxena's expert opinion. Another employee praises Vijay for saving Raghunath who was trapped in the mine and proposes that he should be rewarded. Dhanraj

rebukes him, saying that the worker who can risk his life can also dare to rebel against him (the owner). His ideal miner is one who struggles, is barely alive and keeps his head down.

Vijay chats with Chhanno Vijay dejectedly gets some tea at a *dhaba* (roadside restaurant). Nearby, Chhanno, a voluptuous and fast-talking street vendor, gathers a crowd to sell special magical rings. Chhanno and Vijay are old friends. Chhanno asks Vijay why he never buys a wish-fulfilling ring and he replies that he doesn't have anything to wish for. The *dhaba* owner says that Chhanno is a canny businesswoman, selling her little trinkets and bangles for good profit. Vijay tells him that the miners' wives buy pretty glass bangles not to wear them, but to break them when they are inevitably widowed.

Jagga meets up with Vijay and Chhanno The long-haul truck driver, Jagga, arrives in his truck, in singing a folk-based song, then runs into Vijay and Chhanno at the *dhaba*. He has some wares for Chhanno, who happily goes to get them. Jagga shares some snacks with Vijay, nags him about not eating well and tells him to get treated by the new lady doctor, Dr. Sudha Sen, who has arrived to replace the current doctor, Dr. Mathur, who's leaving.

Dr. Sudha Sen joins as the new mining colony doctor Dr. Mathur tiredly hands over the keys to Dr. Sudha Sen, a radiant young lady doctor. He complains that they are low on medication but they have an updated ledger. Dhanraj has assigned him only one staff member who does everything else. He has been there for a long time, he says, but that turns out to be merely 3 months. Sudha gently chastises him that it is every doctor's responsibility to serve in places where there are no doctors. Mathur tells her that he came there with those same altruistic intentions but couldn't do anything because his patients are on death's door, there are no medications, facilities or equipment and the management ignored his requests.



Anita, a journalist, arrives Dhanraj tells Ravi to get some work done with Saxena and receive his lady friend, who's flying in by private jet from Kolkata. The friend turns out to be the glamorous Anita and Ravi's college classmate. They are surprised to see each other. Anita is an award-winning journalist, visiting to research an article about coal-mines. Anita's father and Dhanraj are old friends. Anita teases Ravi about having a crush on her during their college days.

Mangal escapes from jail In a jail, the inmates are breaking rocks on a mountain while Mangal Singh takes a leisurely nap. Another inmate warns him that the jailor has come to check on them and Mangal should try and keep in his good graces, so that his life sentence may be reduced. Mangal says he can escape anytime as he's a master lock picker. The jailor comes and tells Mangal to set up some dynamite in the nearby mountain. Mangal keeps standing nearby while they blast the dynamite. After that, he starts running. He runs all the way to a river and jumps in. The police put out an APB for him.



Mangal arrives at the mine Mangal somehow rides on top of a coal train and reaches the mine. Then he signs up as a miner. He leisurely inspects the place and chats with a worker, who asks him if he's afraid of being buried in a mine. Mangal cockily relies that there isn't a place on earth that he can't escape from.

Ravi and Anita renew their acquaintance Anita asks Ravi some serious journalistic questions about the coal mining business, which he answers flippantly, but with a grain of truth, such as, "The people who are coal-selling agents get their hands dirty. So we don't shake hands with them but greet them from afar so that our hands too don't get dirty." Anita sarcastically thanks him for his useful remarks.



Mangal meets Chhanno Mangal plays cards with the gamblers at the mine. The top gambler, Rana, was cheating, but Mangal says that he's the third king in the hand, takes all the money and walks away. He then chats up Chhanno about marriage and engagement rings. Mangal is annoyed that he hasn't been told about her. Chhanno warns him not to get on Vijay's bad side but Mangal, in his characteristic matter, says Vijay will learn better.

Vijay intimidates his long-time enemy The *dhaba* owner tries to get back unpaid money from a group of gangsters led by Dhanna. The *dhaba* owner is disabled (walks with a crutch) and Dhanna pushes him to the ground. Vijay coincidentally arrives there and calmly takes the money from Dhanna's pocket. Dhanna takes out a knife, which Vijay grabs with his bare hand, and pulls it away while profusely bleeding. The gangsters decide they will kill Vijay inside the mines when no one's looking.

Vijay is trapped in the mines Ravi inspects the mines and assigns a particularly dangerous tunnel dig to Vijay. Vijay carefully digs in the assigned place but the gangsters stealthily remove the support beams holding up the entrance. There is a crash and Vijay is stuck inside. When Ravi comes to check on him, the gangsters say that he has already left.

Ravi rescues Vijay Ravi stays behind and in the now-silent mine, hears clanging from inside the tunnel. Vijay is pinned but frees himself. Both Vijay and Ravi break down a wall, hitting it from both sides, until Vijay is freed. Ravi brings Vijay out and sends him to the hospital. Then he asks another worker about Dhanna and learns of Vijay's long enmity with him.

Vijay meets Sudha Sudha offers a painkiller injection to Vijay before dealing with his badly wounded leg. Vijay refuses and surprisingly replies to her in English, "My pain is my destiny and I can't avoid it". She cleans up and bandages the wound while he silently bears the pain. But Vijay collapses immediately.

Ravi beats up the gangsters The gangsters are creating a ruckus asking for free food. Ravi comes there, whistling, and pours their drink on top of their snack. Then he upends the table and soundly trashes the gangsters. Ravi then warns them to not cause any more trouble and leaves, calmly whistling.



Sudha shares her past with Vijay Vijay comes for a check-up at the clinic. Sudha asks about his life and past and he answers vaguely that he doesn't remember and is from nowhere, "only a wasteful life that's going on". Sudha says that he must be very angry with himself, because he wants to hurt himself. Vijay says that as a young woman, she too must have had reasons for coming to this inhospitable place. Sudha reminisces how her father died without treatment because there were no hospitals nearby and she had to watch. That's why she became a doctor with the dream that she would help the helpless. Vijay replies that he's escaping from life. He says he probably won't return to meet her again. She tells him her name.

Ravi becomes a leader The miners stage a sit-in to protest their terrible working conditions. Ravi tells them that he will speak to Dhanraj on their behalf only if they do not create a ruckus. But Dhanraj dismisses Ravi, also admitting that he's cheating the miners out of two months of bonus pay. Ravi passionately argues the case, states that his integrity cannot be bought and indirectly threatens Dhanraj to pay the workers three months' bonus, or else. Dhanraj works off in a huff and faces the silent miners, telling them they will receive nothing. But then he goes in and tells Ravi that he will pay the bonus. Ravi leaves.



Dhanraj's cunning Saxena erupts, asking Dhanraj why he didn't fire the insubordinate Ravi right there. But Dhanraj replies that he was measuring the hold Ravi had on the miners, who remained silent even when he threatened them. If Ravi were fired now, the miners would rebel. He will definitely fire Ravi, but at the right time. Later, Saxena brings an invoice for machinery that Ravi had ordered for Dhanraj's signature. Dhanraj says there's no need for extra expenses next time. Anita notes this.

The workers celebrate At an outdoor celebration at night, there is song and dance, with Chhanno taking the centre stage. Mangal, Ravi and Anita join in dancing and singing, while Vijay and Sudha watch.

Ravi warns Vijay about an impending accident Ravi talks to Vijay and Anita about the dangers facing the miners. Vijay says that miners buy their burial shrouds with their first salary. Ravi explains to them about the waterlogged tunnel and how it could be a watery grave for 400 miners. Vijay promises Ravi that he will do what's needed when the time comes; "staying silent will be a sin and crime". Anita comments that Vijay is an odd person. Ravi replies that Vijay seems like a train full of coal, seething and burning for years, for some unknown reason.

Vijay and Mangal at loggerheads At the mess hall, Mangal runs into Vijay and takes his cigarette light from him. But Vijay grabs it back and puts out his smoke. Ravi tells Vijay to oversee a new mining area. Vijay gets up on the back of the truck, but Mangal is already there, waiting. On the way, Mangal bullies the truck driver and takes the keys so that he can take a break at a roadside *dhaba*. Vijay gives Mangal a dirty look, opens up the engine and hot-wires the truck to start, then drives away, leaving Mangal behind. On the way back, Mangal stands in the middle of the road, forcing Vijay to stop and pick him up.



Ravi mediates between Mangal and Vijay At the mess hall, Vijay and Mangal argue over who will get the cup of tea first, threatening the poor server. Ravi walks in, takes the tea from the server, and tells Vijay to meet him with some papers.

Love in the air One stormy night, Vijay comes to Sudha at the clinic as Raghunath wasn't feeling well. Sudha does her part and Vijay walks her back to the clinic in the rain. Sudha complains she cannot see anything in the dark. Vijay says he's used to it. Mangal notices them walking under the same umbrella and seems to have an idea. The truck driver Jagga sings a romantic folk song at the *dhaba*, "Love and laughter can never be hidden", while Vijay and Sudha walk past, completely soaked.

Mangal insults Sudha Mangal skips the queue and barges in to the clinic. Sudha tells him to go to the back of the long queue as she doesn't treat people who don't wait their turn. Mangal breaks the glass pane on the medicine cabinet and grabs some medicine, telling Sudha that he's listening to her only as she's a woman. The clinic attendant tells Vijay what happened. The police inquire about Mangal on the highway and is pointed to the mines.





Vijay and Mangal have a showdown Vijay goes looking for Mangal at the *dhaba,* but the police arrive right then, so Mangal hides. The police officer asks Vijay if he has seen Mangal. Vijay says that the man doesn't live there. The *dhaba* owner wants to give Vijay some money, but he doesn't take it and walks away. Sudha tells Vijay to forget what happened but he replies that he has plans for Mangal. Chhanno also warns Mangal to stay away, but Mangal guffaws and says, "Mangal's blood is not a lemon soda with which riff raff like Vijay can quench their thirst". Vijay and Mangal finally fight in front of all the miners watching. Ravi comes after a long time and separates them.

Anita wants mines to be nationalized Police keep looking for Mangal and offer up a cash prize. There is an accident in the mines where Raghunath is killed. Dhanraj yells at Anita for publishing an article on the terrible state of his mines in the newspaper. She casually replies that private ownership is passé and all mines should be nationalized. She passionately argues that government mines have many facilities for the workers while the workers in his mines live like bugs. Dhanraj warns her and tells her to get out. She tells him that he, too, will be shown the door in the same way by the miners and the government soon enough.



Ravi and Anita get into a relationship Ravi praises Anita for her good work, but now she has no place to stay. He offers her his own apartment and she says that it might endanger his job. But Ravi doesn't care. They ride on his bike and kiss in a meadow, then sing a romantic song.



Vijay and Sudha get close Sudha buys green bangles from Chhanno, while Vijay waits there. Sudha comments on the variety of things Chhanno sells, but Vijay says she sells hope to the impoverished people here. Their life is a long dark coal tunnel, burning, so they buy the magical rings and dream that their lives will get better. Sudha asks him why he doesn't like to dream. Vijay replies that he doesn't believe in false hope and he's a mere miner. Sudha responds, stroking her bangles, that he is an educated, decent man. Vijay says he will buy a ring from Chhanno next time.

Mangal saves Chhanno from gangsters Jagga brings anther shipment of trinkets for Chhanno as usual, wrapped in a newspaper. A picture of Mangal was printed in there, with a 5000 rupees award. Chhanno asks Jagga for a ride to the police station but decides to rush there on foot (presumably to claim the award). But a group of gangsters led by Dhanna notice her and follow her through the forest, with nefarious intentions of course. She tries her best to run away and coincidentally bumps into Mangal. Mangal tells Dhanna that he will save the girl, but who will save

them? Mangal beats them up in spectacular *masala*-action hero fashion, even after they pin him down. Chhanno also beats them up as best as she can. They finally run away. Chhanno starts crying and Mangal consoles her. She almost tells him about the newspaper advertisement but later burns it.



Wedding At Raghunath's daughter's wedding, there is much song and dance, with all the miners participating.

Vijay threatens Dhanraj There is an accident at the mines. All the workers rush there. Some of the injured and dead workers are carried out. Vijay looks on angrily. Then he goes and confronts Dhanraj and tells that 5 more people had died and he doesn't care for their lives. For Dhanraj, workers are easily replaceable but the lives of their widows and orphans are forever ruined. His mines suck out every ounce of vitality from the miners without care. Dhanraj says that he isn't responsible. Vijay threatens Dhanraj that he will make sure Dhanraj is punished if any other workers die from negligence.

Sudha befriends Vijay again Sudha praises Vijay for what he did. Vijay says that he can hardly be a leader, as only the ones without sin can throw stones. Sudha asks him about the shadow, the burden that haunts him constantly. Vijay says that there is a locked room in his heart that even he fears to enter. On Sudha's repeated requests, Vijay tells her of his past.



Vijay's past We see a flashback of when Vijay was a ship's captain. One stormy night, the ship engine fails and a crew member reports that there is a 10-foot hole in the ship. Vijay tries to stop the sailors from trying to escape in the lifeboat, but abandons ship himself when there is no other way. They float around on the lifeboat for a long time before getting rescued. Immediately, he is tried for abandoning ship and his father, a retired senior officer, chews him out for his cowardice ("I'm ashamed of you") and disowns him. His mother also abandons him. He faces court martial, where he doesn't say anything in his defence. He is dishonourably discharged and barred from ever working in a shipping company. After emerging from the courthouse, he is mobbed by passengers and crew. He left that town and kept running, but was forever haunted by their voices. If a person ever falls in his own eyes, there's no depth he can't fall to, he says. The mine is therefore ideal for him. But he has never slept without those shouts ringing in his ears. Sudha gently holds him and they hug.

Ravi and Dhanraj argue again about digging the dangerous tunnel In the mines, Ravi shows Anita some drilling action to check the integrity of the tunnel. But water splatters out and Ravi tells the team to stop. Back at the office, Dhanraj yells at Ravi for stopping work against his orders and they argue. Ravi warns Dhanraj that he will send the report to the government and the newspapers. Ravi warns him that if he leaves, all the miners will leave with him. Afterwards, Dhanraj tells Saxena that when dogs go mad, they are shot dead. Dhanraj tells him to start the work again and asks to meet Vijay.

Dhanraj tries to buy Vijay's loyalty Dhanraj turns on his honeyed words and offers Vijay the welfare officer position with a good salary. In exchange, Vijay would have to get rid of Ravi. Vijay asks how he would get rid of Ravi and Dhanraj suggests that he should have an accident and Dhanraj will cover it up. Vijay obviously rejects the offer, saying that Dhanraj is not even a human but a cannibal who drinks the blood of miners and eats their flesh.

Dhanraj contracts Dhanna to kill Ravi Dhanna ambushes Ravi in the faulty tunnel, throws coal in his eyes and beats him mercilessly. Vijay (coincidentally) arrives there alone and warns Dhanna that he's dead, this time. An exciting fight sequence ensures, after which Dhanna and his gangsters run off. But water has started leaking already!

Vijay saves Mangal's life Outside, Mangal stops Vijay from getting a shovel by stepping on it. They stare at each other for a while. Suddenly, an overhead storage breaks and some coal almost falls on where Anita was standing and taking photographs. Mangal pushes her away and is caught in the coal. Vijay pulls him out, carries him in his arms to Sudha, then gives him blood. Later, Chhanno comes to visit Mangal and tells him everything Vijay had done to save him. But the police suddenly come and arrest Mangal.

The mine is flooded In the mines, Ravi notices the leaking water and again tells Dhanraj to stop work. Dhanraj refuses, so Ravi himself rushes back and tries to emergency evacuate the miners. But he is too late. The weak walls burst and thousands of gallons of water rush into the mines. All the

miners rush to the elevator to find out how many people have been trapped but the list of miners gets tossed around and torn up.

Vijay thrashes Dhanraj Dhanraj tells Saxena to tell the reporters only 30-40 people were in the mines, instead of 400 people. Vijay comes and gives Dhanraj a sound thrashing, telling him the names of some of the people stuck there. Vijay wants to drag Dhanraj into the mines but leaves him for jail. Later, Dhanraj arrives at the mine entrance and the miners attack him. The police arrive there and take him into custody.



Mangal and Vijay go into the mines to rescue the miners Mangal escapes his confinement and runs to the mines. Vijay goes into the mines, telling the miners' families gathered there that he wants to live without cowardice. Mangal joins him on the elevator down. Mangal finally praises Vijay and accepts him as his friend. They split up and look for the miners, whom Ravi is leading towards the elevator. Dhanna argues with Ravi and splits up the workers to go a different way. Ravi leads his group to safety but Dhanna and his men get trapped in the flooding waters.



Vijay, Mangal and Ravi help the miners Vijay meets up with a group of miners and they get stuck. A miner has a panic attack. Vijay checks the walls and says that there was only one way they could escape, by breaking open a path for the water. He breaks a hole into a weak wall, and the water gushes out and opens up a pathway. Vijay gets everyone out. Elsewhere, Mangal helps an injured miner, who cannot swim, to escape to safety by pulling him by the hair! Ravi and the miners with him also get caught in the deluge and are washed away, but Ravi pulls them to safety. Vijay's group arrives at the elevator and sends up four miners at a time. But the rope breaks! Jagga the truck driver has an idea and uses ropes from the truck to tie the elevator and manually lift it by towing with the truck.

Mangal dies Ravi is caught under some falling debris and pinned down. He tells the two men with him to leave and bring help. On their way out Mangal notices a leaking wall and stops the leaks with his body, letting the others escape. But the wall bursts and Mangal is washed away deeper into the mines, and drowns. The gambler Rana stays behind and lets four others escape on the elevator. But the water suddenly rushes in and drowns him, too.

Vijay saves Ravi Vijay comes to Ravi and tells him he must save his own soul today, even when Ravi tells him to leave. After some struggling, Ravi is pulled free and Vijay helps him to the elevator. But Jagga's engines are sputtering and there is too much water in the mines, trapping our heroes in the elevator. Jagga prays to Waheguruji (common term to refer to God in modern Sikhism) and the truck miraculously starts working again, pulling them up to safety.



Closing sequence Chhanno looks for Mangal and Vijay tells her he is dead. She breaks down crying and breaks her own glass bangles. Sudha and Vijay reunite. Vijay's parents have come, too, and they reunite as well. The closing sequence is a helicopter shot of the entire area, ending with the message, "Dawn of a new era and the new beginning", at a revamped mining site.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Vijay Amitabh Bachchan plays Vijay, a taciturn man with a mysterious past that doesn't quite line up with his current life as a miner. He is afraid to engage too deeply and is unapologetically reckless in his search of redemption.

Disturbed From the opening scene, Vijay's past haunts him. From his dreams, with a crowd clamouring to kill him, to him explosively smashing a mirror ("Yes, I'm a coward") right after he rescued Raghunath from an accident in the mines, we see Vijay barely holding on to sanity, weighed down by his guilt.

Hopeless This past has made Vijay almost entirely devoid of hope; as he tells Chhanno and Sudha at different points, he doesn't believe that he deserves anything good or wholesome. For him, it's just going through the motions of living before death claims him and providing some small amount of social justice where he's able. He never even smiles throughout the film, except in a couple of instances with Sudha!

Self-harming This intense feeling of guilt also makes Vijay actively seek out situations that endanger his life- as if that will redeem his guilt. Vijay volunteers in every dangerous situation that arises, with an uncaring recklessness; from going to the mines repeatedly to help trapped miners to grabbing Dhanna's knife blade with his bare hand to stop him to needlessly engaging in a rivalry with Mangal, Vijay cares very little for his own self or safety.

Desperate Finally, the climactic mining accident gives Vijay a chance to put it all on the line. With Mangal, he descends into the seething waters of the deluge and braves turn after treacherous turn of the tunnels, leading the hapless miners behind him to safety. In the climactic moment, when Ravi is pinned and about to drown, Vijay tells him he must save his own soul today, even when Ravi tells him to leave.

Mangal Shatrughan Sinha plays the smooth-taking, overconfident escaped convict Mangal to perfection. Even though the role is spottily written, there is no "back-story" and Mangal's character is quite unlike the usual Yash Chopra heroes; the performance retains our interest long after the film is over.

Stereotypical Chopra perhaps felt the need to include a proletariat character in a major supporting role in film about coal-miners for "authenticity", but he draws on too many Bollywood stereotypes of such characters, such as their uncool bravado and rough speech. For instance, Mangal's consistent use of "*hum*" versus "*main*" ("I") firmly places him in a particular geo-linguistic category (i.e., hailing from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) that has been the butt of many a negative stereotype in Bollywood cinema.

Cunning Mangal shows a keen grasp of every situation he's placed in and somehow worms his way out. From his clever jailbreak by standing near a dynamite explosion, to beating Rana at cards by counting himself as a King card, to making Vijay stop for him on the way back by casually relaxing in the middle of the road- Mangal shies away from no gimmick.

Witty Mangal has a witty repartee no matter what the situation. He always addresses whomever he's speaking to with strangely appropriate but slightly insulting epithets in a different social register; for instance, when Chhanno nags him about being wary of Vijay, he addresses Chhanno as "*gulshan ke bulbul*" ("songbird in a flower-garden" for her nagging but beautiful voice?) and asserts, "Mangal's blood is not a (bottle of) lemon soda with which riff raff like Vijay can quench their thirst"! (a spin on "*main tera khoon pee jaunga*"/ "I will drink your blood", a popular dialogue from 1960's-80's Bollywood heroes.)

Egotistical It's unclear why Mangal, upon arriving at the mines, almost immediately decides to declare his rivalry towards Vijay, who mostly kept to himself. Perhaps he wanted to establish his dominance as a leader/ hero to the other miners without actually performing any leader-like responsibilities. Perhaps Vijay's mysterious aloofness clashed with Mangal's riding-by-the-seat-of-the-pants personality. Or perhaps, as a thrill-seeker, he just wanted some excitement in his life. In any case, both of them refuse to back down from the challenge and the enmity isn't resolved until an act of sacrifice on both their parts.

Courageous Mangal comes to us without a backstory; all we know is that he is an expert locksmith and escape artist. He arrives at the mines running from the police and somehow finds his place there among the dregs of society, also falling in love with Chhanno. We are never told what he is seeking redemption for, but his final act of courage, putting his own body in front of a rapidly leaking wall so that other miners can escape, more than atones for his previous crimes, whatever they may be.

Chhanno Neetu Singh plays a small but memorable part as the village belle Chhanno. She is fiercely independent and a canny businesswoman, but is also caring towards Vijay, Mangal and the other miners.

Independent We first meet Chhanno when she's loudly selling her magic rings that grant wishes for the men and pretty glass bangles for the women- while a crowd is gathered around her as if it's a performance. Chhanno's not inconsiderable sex appeal perhaps has something to do with the good amount of sales she always gets. As an itinerant merchant, she depends on the good-natured Jagga who always dutifully brings her wares from the city market (this is mentioned twice), but beyond that, she is fiercely independent in her comings and goings.

Canny Apart from her gift of the gab that always gets her good sales, even finagling a purchase

out of the taciturn Vijay (with Sudha's help), we see her good business sense elsewhere as well. When she sees the reward for Mangal's capture printed in the newspaper, she only hesitates a little before deciding to walk a half kilometre (2 furlongs) though a dense forest to give up the information of Mangal's whereabouts and claim the reward.

Resilient Chhanno is most likely an orphan; given her beauty and intelligence, how she survived in that rural community as an itinerant merchant to a ripe young age without being sexually assaulted or forced to marry remains a mystery. Chopra, of course, doesn't hesitate to use this as a plot point to shed light on a social evil *and* create a romance opportunity (this two-for-one is very common in Bollywood cinema). What does seem surprising is that Dhanna and his underlings, out of the blue, just choose one day to follow Chhanno with the clear intention to sexually assault/rape her- in a small community like that, where everyone knows everyone else and Chhanno is a popular face, that was a risky move. Chhanno didn't have a "protector", so perhaps Dhanna and gang decided that she was up for grabs. In any case, as plot-driven armour would have it, Mangal somehow coincidentally arrives there, gives the gangsters a good trashing (with Chhanno doing her part), and endears himself to her.

THEMES

RELATIONSHIP

Brotherhood Chopra again pits Shashi Kapoor's cheerful, extrovert Ravi as a foil to Amitabh Bachchan's taciturn, introvert Vijay and builds up their unlikely camaraderie. Their personalities are even more divergent here than in their previous films together (*Kabhi Kabhie*, *Trishul*, *Deewar)* not least because they are now placed in different social classes; Ravi is an engineer and Vijay a lowly miner, even though his "true" class identity is comfortably middle-class. Ravi, interestingly, never discovers Vijay's past, but they recognize in each other shared values of commitment to the greater good and protecting the weak and helpless. They forge a strong bond early on, when Ravi rescues Vijay after Dhanna and his underlings get him caught in an "accident"; Vijay returns the favour in the climactic scene when Ravi is about to drown in the waterlogged mine. More interesting, however, is the relationship between Vijay and Mangal, who's a completely unpredictable element, forever moving with pure self-interest and unabashed, egoistic confidence. While the audience knows (given Shatrughan Sinha's career playing heroic roles) that Mangal, despite his flippant manner, is actually a force of good, it is intriguing to see how the rivalry plays out. They face/off each other quite a few times and even resort to fighting, with the miners enjoying the spectacle. But Vijay recognizes his worth when Mangal sacrifices himself to save Anita, then does the heroic deed of giving Mangal his own blood to save his life in turn. This cements their bond and Mangal even escapes from prison to help Vijay rescue the miners in the climactic scene. In a film where events proceed at breakneck speed, it is commendable how Chopra creates these intense moments of heightened emotion between characters.

Illustrative moment: Only a few sequences feature our three heroes together, but one sets the tone for their interactions for most of the film. Soon after Mangal arrives, he picks a disagreement with Vijay based purely off Vijay's reputation. At the mess hall, Vijay asks for a cup of tea; Mangal also walks in and does the same. They argue over who will get the cup of tea first, threatening the poor server who stands shaking like a leaf, one lonely cup of tea in hand. Ravi then nonchalantly walks in, takes the tea from the server, and tells Vijay to meet him with some papers, diffusing the tension.

PAST

Memories *Kaala Patthar* teases Vijay's mysterious past for almost the length of the film, keeping the audience guessing right from the first scene where he is shown in a white military-looking uniform in a flashback, that clashes sharply with his grimy, unkempt visage as a miner. It is clear his past has haunted him too long and almost sucked the life itself out of him, as we hear in his dispirited conversation with Chhanno and Jagga in the beginning. When he is injured and goes to Sudha for treatment, she is taken aback when he says to her in English, "My pain is my destiny and I can't avoid it". As is later revealed, he was guilty of was abandoning ship with passengers on it, which ultimately survived the storm. There is no mention of any passengers dying in the newspaper headlines that quickly flash by; in fact, the actual details of his past ignominy are remarkably vague and we do see a shot of an intact ship, that has not sunk, right before he is rescued from the lifeboat. Why the singular act of abandoning a sinking ship would earn Vijay a court martial, a permanent ban on working in the merchant navy and his family's disgust isn't very clear and seems a punishment too harsh for the

crime. His self-flagellation thus also seems overblown- there was no loss of life or limb or property that we know of, so ultimately this Vijay's angst doesn't reach the epic proportions of *Trishul* or *Deewar*.

Illustrative moment: On Sudha's repeated requests, Vijay tells her of his past, in one of the most touching sequences in the film. We see a flashback of when Vijay was a ship's captain. One stormy night, the ship engine fails and there is a 10-foot hole in the ship. He tried to stop the sailors from trying to escape in the lifeboat. But himself abandons ship when there is no other way. They float around on the lifeboat for a long time before getting rescued. Immediately, he is tried for abandoning ship and his father, a retired senior officer, chews him out for his cowardice, "I'm ashamed of you" and disowns him. His mother also abandons him. He faces court martial, where he declines to say anything in his defence. He is dishonourably discharged and barred from ever working in a shipping company. After emerging from the courthouse, he is mobbed by passengers and crew. He left that town and kept running, but was forever haunted by their voices. If a person ever falls in his own eyes, there's no depth he can't fall to, he says. The mine is therefore ideal for him. But he has never slept without those shouts ringing in his ears. Sudha gently holds him and they hug.

PSYCHOLOGY

Guilt / Redemption Vijay's stated aim of working in the mines, abandoning the comfort of his cushy job and middle-class life, is to punish himself and earn redemption for his unforgivable past (which does fall a little flat given lack of detail). This is clear to the miners even if they don't know what actually happened; at various points, this is mentioned in passing by the other characters who know him. Even Sudha, a relative newcomer, doesn't take long to guess that he has an enigmatic and painful past. The entire film is, in a sense, Vijay's redemption arc. While he does keep himself away from engaging deeply with the other miners and their lives lest he betray them, he does not stand silently by when major instances of oppression or negligence occur; as he tells Ravi, being silent at the crucial moment would be a sin and a crime. Mangal, too, is on a path to redemption, though his background and past crime is unclear; all we know about it is that Mangal is an expert lockpicker and escape artist. Perhaps he was sentenced to hard labour in jail because of a robbery or such, but his bravado and quick wit set him apart from the rest of the inmates and miners, and endears him to them. So much so that when he hears of the accident, he escapes police lock-up and rushes to rescue his newfound friends, ultimately performing the ultimate sacrifice with his life to save them. And finally, we have another unlikely character who also redeems himself by sacrificing his life- Rana, the gambler, who had forever cheated everyone at cards, pulls a final low card to stay behind as 4 of his colleagues ascend the rickety elevator to safety. A huge wave washes Rana away as the cards of the actual winning hand float on the dark water.

Illustrative moment: The underground floods recall the storm at sea and Vijay's cowardice on the ship is replaced by an almost reckless heroism, leading to him saving men's lives and his *prayashchitta* (atonement) by water. His parents await him as he exits the mine, welcoming him back into the family and he now feels worthy of accepting Sudha's love.

Romance None of this sounds like a "Yash Chopra movie", yet there are striking features in his unfolding of Salim-Javed's script. Rajesh Roshan's music provides hit songs, albeit fewer romantic numbers than one might expect, in the context of the gritty realism of the mine, the other songs being mostly traditional wedding songs and *qawwalis* and folk-based dances. The women are presented as totally glamorous and in three very different models of femininity: from the serious, caring doctor Sudha in her pristine and crisp white saris, to the spirited journalist Anita in western clothes or *salwaar kameez*, to the self-possessed, fast-talking itinerant Chhanno in her *kaccha-style* saris (when the sari is tied at the back to give the effect of trousers dividing the skirt). Note here that each of these women have flourishing, independent professional lives without the need for a husband's/ father's support- Chopra again doing his bit to advance the image of the modern Indian woman. Likewise, the three couples present three different types of love and romance. Ravi and Anita are the ideal image of the modern, professional couple, while Mangal and Chhanno represent the unsophisticated-yet-broadminded rural folk. Vijay and Sudha are the third couple, a serious, mature pair who want to right society through their own day to-day lives; the pattern of an angst-ridden Vijay supported by a sensitive and empathetic Sudha (even her name means "nectar") is similar to that in the previous films (*Kabhi Kabhie* and *Trishul*).

Illustrative moment: Again, Sashi Kapoor's Ravi and Parveen Babi's Anita steal the spotlight in being the most romantic couple, riding on his motorbike to pretty locations and even kissing in a field full of flowers. Their romance is purely coincidental, though, as they meet at the mines after years. And it's

not pure fluff, either, as both Ravi and Anita have an activist mindset; Anita even warns Ravi that taking her in will earn Dhanraj's ire, but Ravi doesn't care; jobs are a dime a dozen for him, but he won't compromise on morality.

FLAWS

Greed */ Exploitation* Chopra (thankfully) spares us gruesome scenes of oppression and exploitation, such as workers being beaten up or going without food and medicine or living in hovels etc.; we mostly see grimy workers either milling about the mines or working there. Instead, what Chopra (again characteristically) focuses on are the moments of happiness in between, like the impromptu song-and-dances and the wedding that comes soon after Raghunath's death, or the miners just enjoying some time to relax at the *dhaba*. But what the film does present is no less compelling, especially when it's articulated poignantly by characters such as Ravi, Vijay and Dr. Mathur. Dhanraj and Saxena also make it very clear, on several occasions, that they have zero moral qualms about cheating the workers and treating them like disposable tools.

Illustrative moments: The most poignant symbols that embody this theme are the trinkets that Chhanno sells: glass bangles and "magic" wish-fulfilling rings. Early in the film, Chhanno asks Vijay why he has never bought a ring from her and he replies that he doesn't have anything to wish for. Then Vijay tells the *dhaba* owner that miners' wives buy pretty glass bangles not to wear them, but to break them when they are inevitably widowed. Hindu and Muslim widows are forbidden from wearing any coloured jewellery; in parts of India, one of the rituals marking widowhood is forcibly breaking any glass bangles the freshly widowed woman is wearing. Later, Sudha buys green bangles from Chhanno, while spending some time with Vijay. He tells her that Chhanno doesn't sell trinkets; she sells hope to the impoverished people here. Their life is a long dark coal tunnel, burning, so they buy the magical rings and dream that their lives will get better. Sudha responds, stroking her bangles, that he is an educated, decent man. Vijay says he will buy a ring from Chhanno next time. And in the final scene, when Chhanno looks for Mangal and Vijay tells her he died in the mines, she breaks down crying and breaks her own glass bangles.

Greed */ Deliberate negligence* Chopra is somewhat less nebulous in the forthright depiction of deliberate negligence on part of the owner Dhanraj, leading to unsafe working conditions in the mine, but as usual, we hear more about it than we see. For instance, Dr. Mathur, on the way out after serving for a mere three months, warns Sudha that they have barely any medications or facilities and the management denied all his requests; later, Sudha has to ask around for a volunteer to give Mangal blood as there weren't even any blood bags. Negligence is notable mostly in the absence of facilities: the miners are dressed only in (characteristic of Bollywood miners) grimy under-shirts and pants, with the occasional lighted helmet; no safety gear of any kind in sight. The equipment is also primitive, with shovels and picks used for most of the work, and only a single instance of heavy drilling equipment. When Ravi orders new, updated equipment, Dhanraj reluctantly signs the invoice but refuses to buy any other equipment. Even the elevator, which is the only means of travelling into and out of the mines, is a ramshackle setup with large, rickety manual pulleys and can carry only 4 workers at a time. It's very clear that no effort at all is expended on the upkeep of these facilities.

Illustrative moment: Of the many striking, yet small instances of negligence, the most poignant is perhaps when at the climax, just as the miners are coming out of the elevator, the old, frayed rope breaks. The miners are almost assured of a watery grave even while standing right by the point of egress. Jagga the truck driver has an idea and uses ropes from the truck to tie the elevator and manually lift it by towing with the truck. He does this many times, pulling up the miners 4 at a time, until the engine gives out. It sputters and stalls; in the meanwhile, there is too much water in the mines, trapping our heroes in the elevator. Jagga prays to Waheguruji (common term to refer to God in modern Sikhism) and the truck miraculously starts working again, pulling them up to safety. So the message here, if any, would be that the community, led by a few smart/ brave heroes working together, can overcome the worst of disasters and whatever malevolence the "villains" can throw at them.

Villainy Prem Chopra, Bollywood's favourite villain, again reprises the role of a greedy industrialist Dhanraj with élan, with Saxena playing his greasy underling perfectly. Dhanna and his followers make up the violent faction; they usually operate independently, but are not averse to getting paid to "take out" rivals and "troublemakers" like Ravi and Vijay. Unlike in other films like *Deewar* and *Trishul* where there were a few mitigating reasons to excuse the villains' nefarious behaviour, *Kaala Patthar*'s villains are completely and totally unapologetic. From the very beginning, Dhanraj's orders are absolute- not

one extra penny is to be spent on improving the lives of the miners, and not one word of his exploitative and oppressive regime should leak out to media. This obviously generates conflict with the protagonists who support the miners, like Ravi and Vijay, but also Anita, who wants the mines to be nationalized. Dhanraj is smarter and more cunning than Saxena, as he advises Saxena to strike at the right time and not prematurely. And finally, much of the *masala* quotient of these films hinges on the exciting fight sequences between the heroes and villains. In these sequences, muscular gangsters like Dhanna are the perfect match in physicality to our well-built heroes (as opposed to the pot-bellied, slightly oily, upper-class “main” villains who don’t do well in fight sequences). These exciting scenes, apart from being obvious crowd-pleasers, underscore the heroes’ physical prowess and mental acuity both.

Illustrative moment: Within the first few minutes of the film, *D*hanraj and Saxena’s villainy is unequivocally revealed. Saxena tells Dhanraj that they cannot dig any further in one particular mine shaft as there is a water tunnel nearby which will cause an accident. At least 350- 400 miners work in the tunnels at any given time, so their lives will be lost. Dhanraj asks what his loss will be and Saxena replies 40,000,000 rupees. Dhanraj coldly replies that Saxena’s calculation is faulty as 40,00,000 rupees is much more than 400. Dhanraj orders Saxena to keep quiet about it and continue digging shafts and he'll handle it if there is any accident.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) *Kaala Patthar* is an outlier in Chopra’s oeuvre given its setting and social commentary. Do the miners’ lives and struggles seem like stereotypes to you in some aspects? If so, why?

2) What do you think about Vijay’s past and his arc of redemption?

3) Discuss the rivalry, brotherhood and chemistry between the three male leads. What sets them against and for each other, and why?

4) The film has three strong female leads (Sudha, Chhanno, Anita), though their characters aren’t explored in depth. Whom do you identity with the most and why? Discuss with 2 examples.

5) Analyse any two villainous characters of your choice. What makes them effective villains? Use at least two scenes as examples to support your argument.