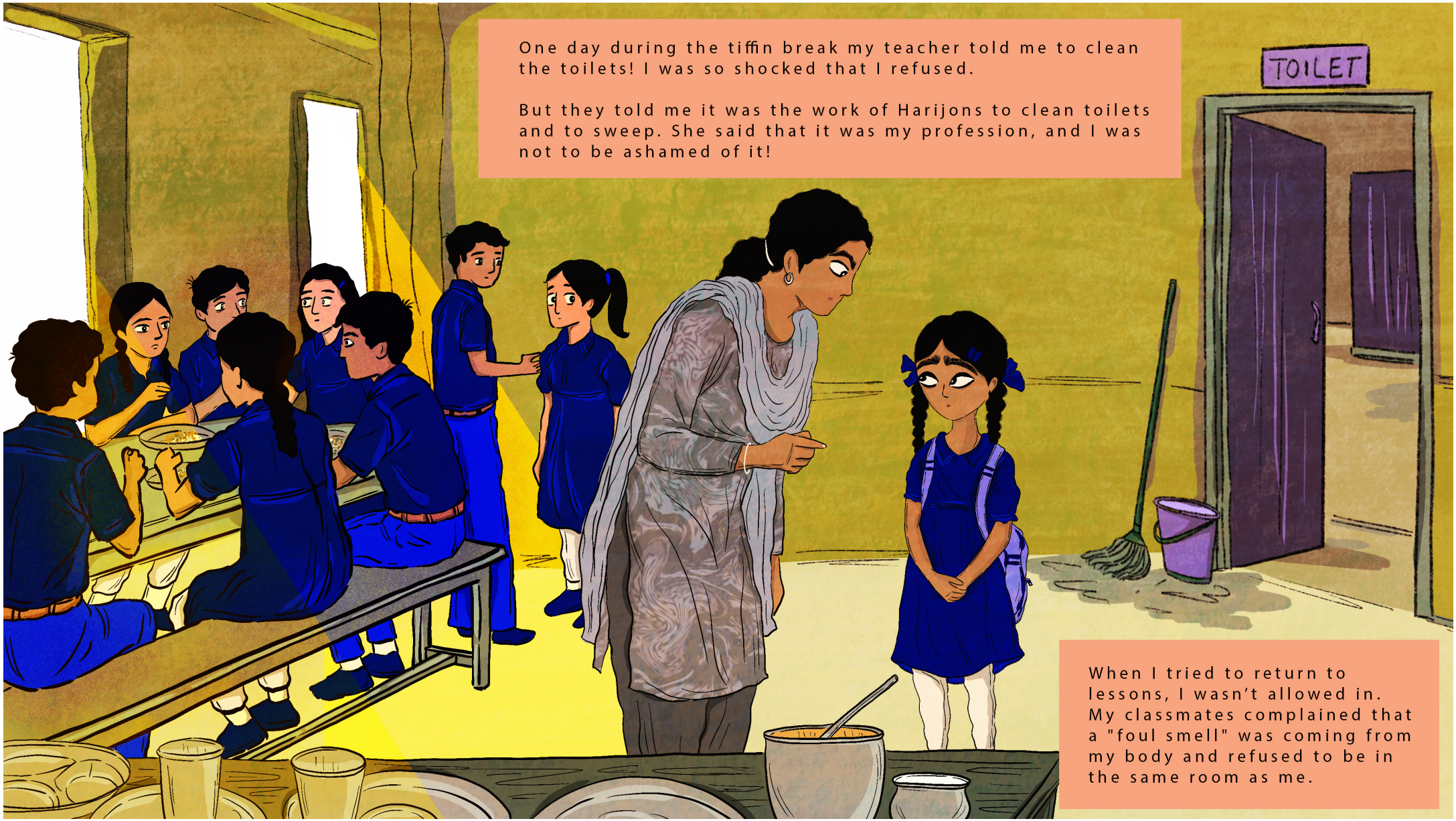
Sathi's Journey:
The Path to Resilience and Hope




Life has never been easy, for me, and everyone in the Harijon community.
Our day-to-day reality is difficult. I often find myself reflecting back on the past and the experiences I had to endure at school.

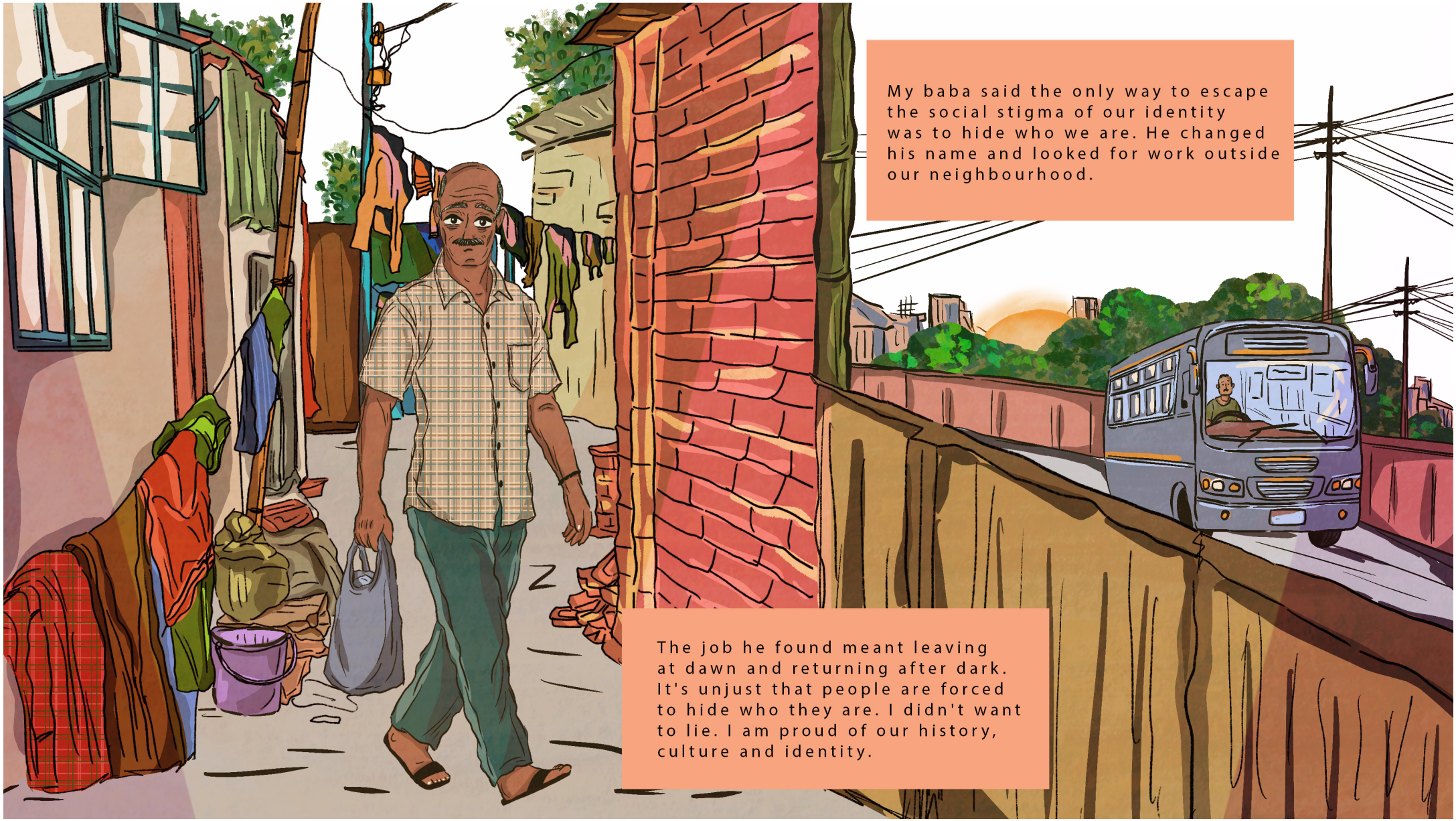

One day during the tiffin break my teacher told me to clean the toilets! I was so shocked that I refused.
But they told me it was the work of Harijons to clean toilets and to sweep. She said that it was my profession, and I was not to be ashamed of it!
TOILET
When I tried to return to lessons, I wasn't allowed in. My classmates complained that a "foul smell" was coming from my body and refused to be in the same room as me.

I was so upset. I went home and told my family that I can never go back to that school. How can I learn properly if I'm being treated so poorly? But not going to that school means ending my education, as there's nowhere else to go.

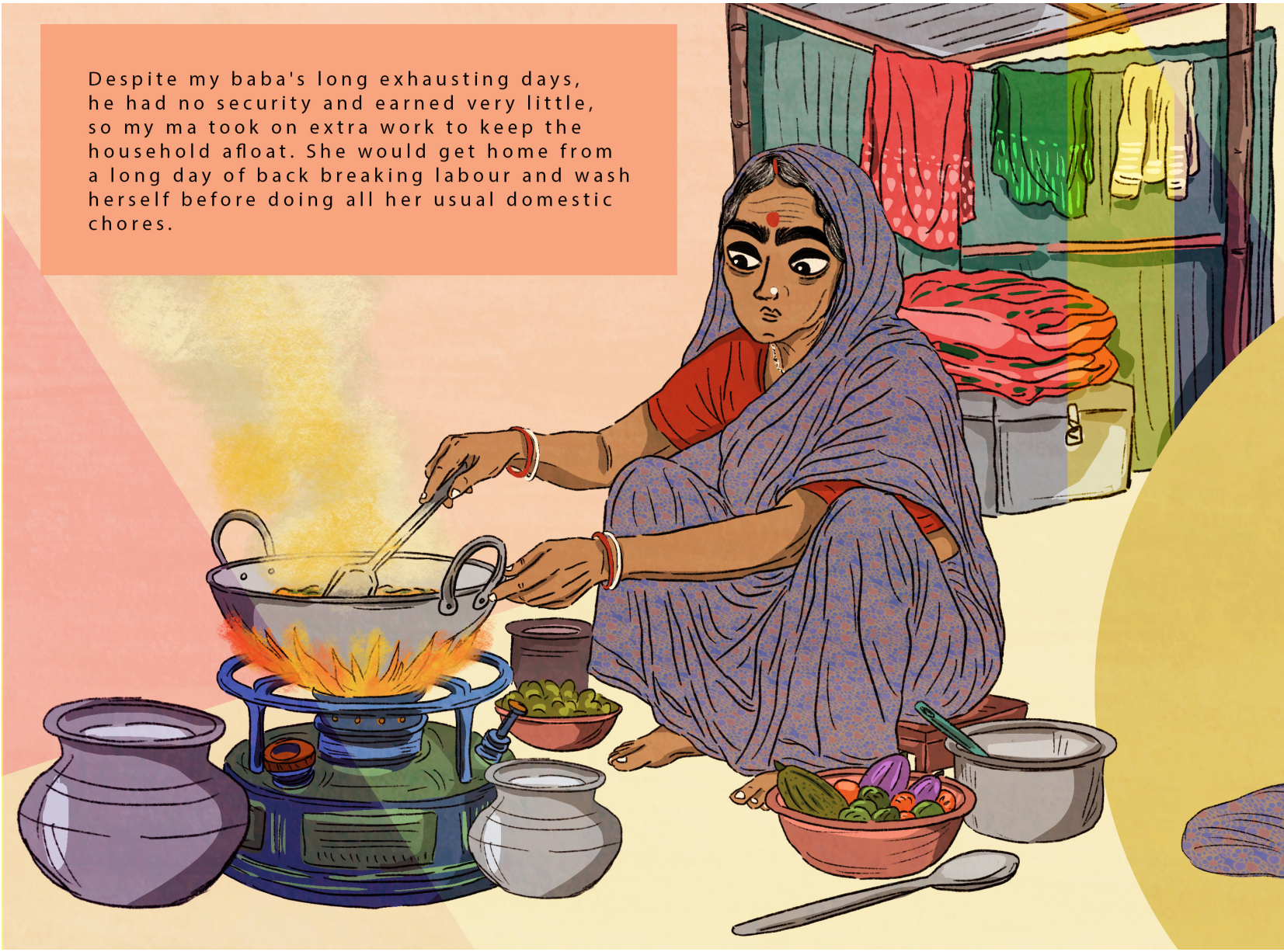





That night I was so worried about my future, I couldn't sleep. I had always dreamed of becoming well-educated so I could help to change the fate of my family and society. It felt so unfair. I didn't want to accept my situation and adjust to the limited horizons of my future.


My baba said the only way to escape the social stigma of our identity was to hide who we are. He changed his name and looked for work outside our neighbourhood.
The job he found meant leaving at dawn and returning after dark. It's unjust that people are forced to hide who they are. I didn't want to lie. I am proud of our history, culture and identity.

Despite my baba's long exhausting days, he had no security and earned very little, so my ma took on extra work to keep the household afloat. She would get home from a long day of back breaking labour and wash herself before doing all her usual domestic chores.

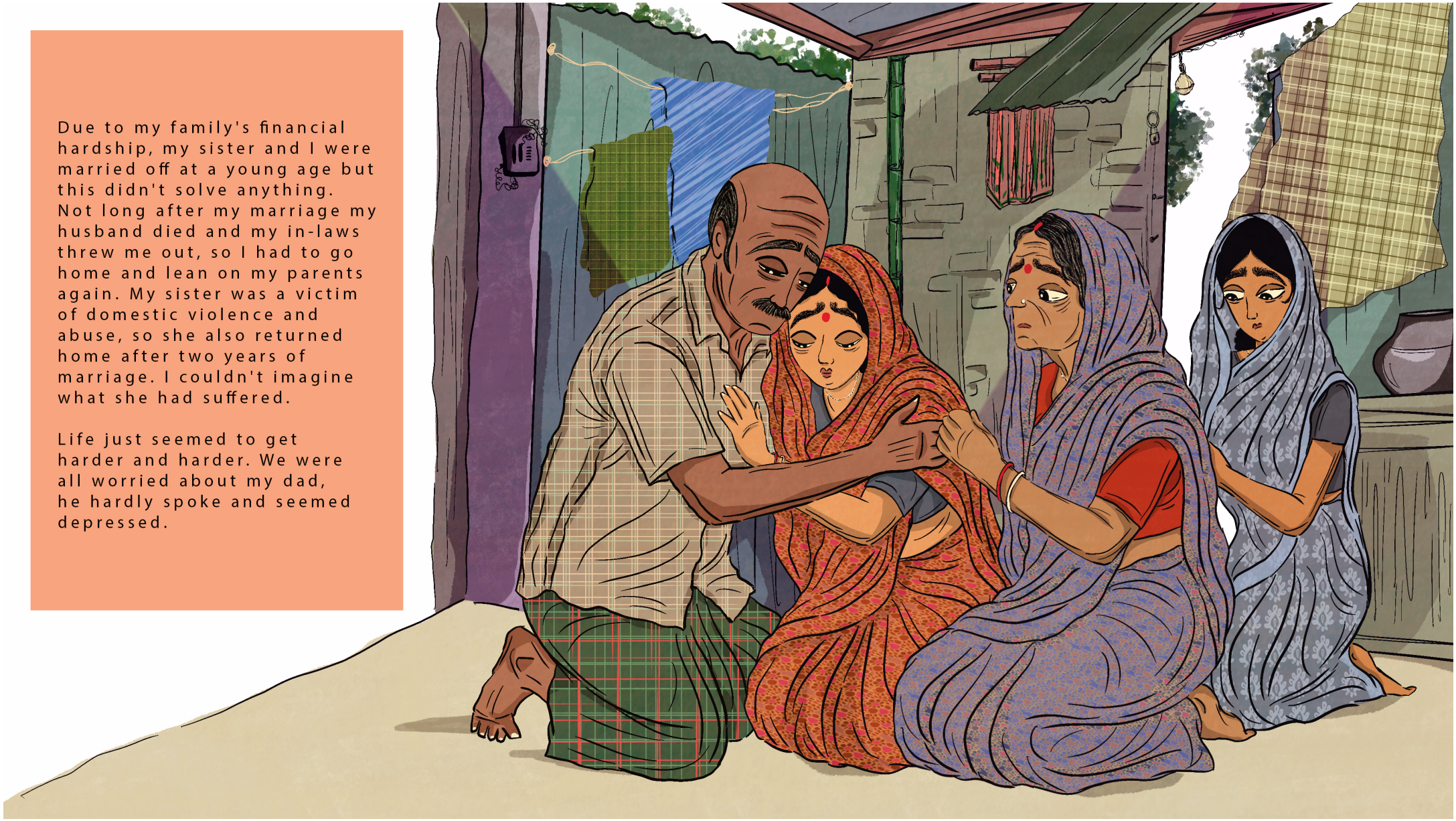


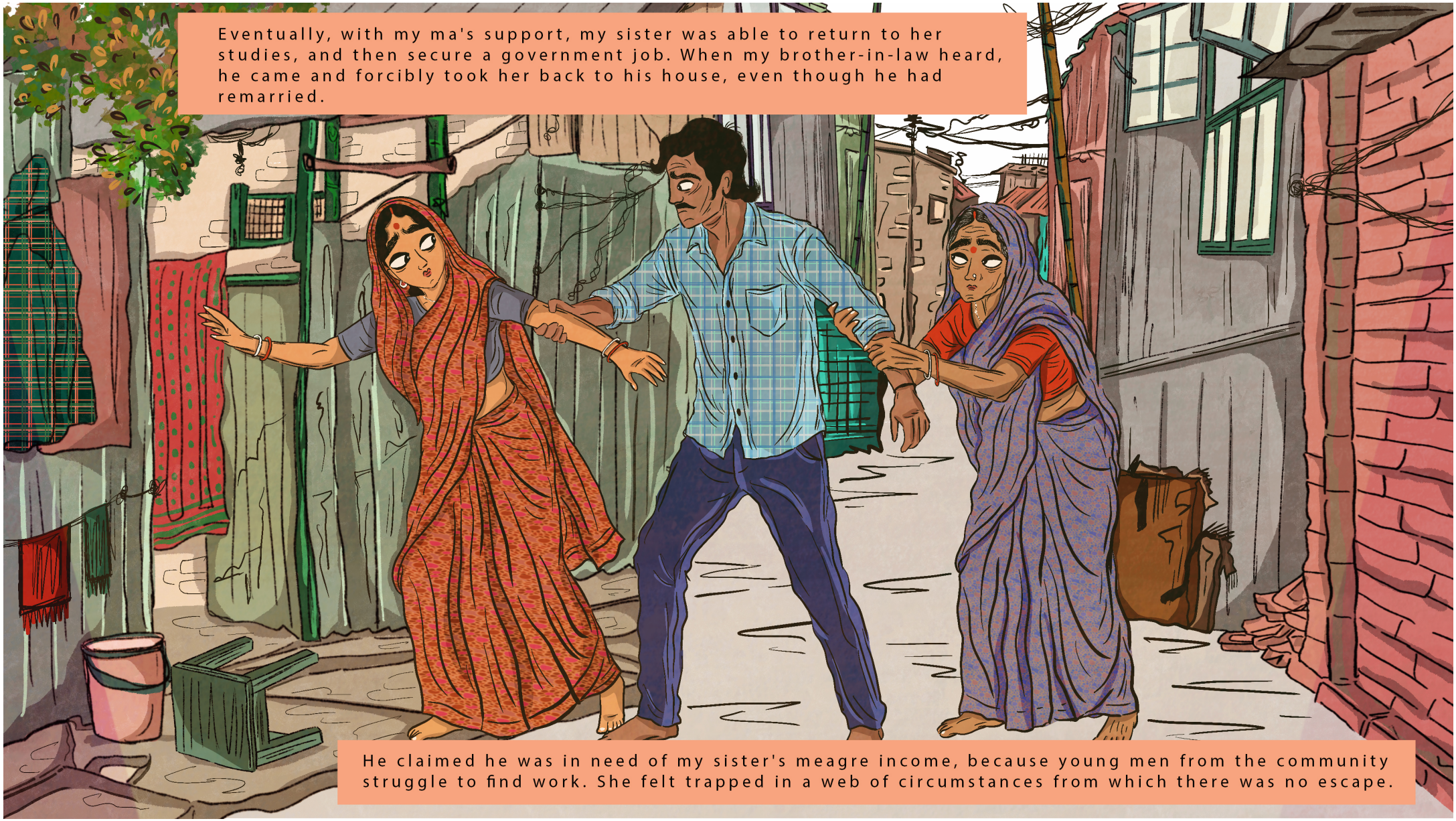
She always looked tired and dejected, and I worried about her health. I knew my fate as a Harijon girl would be no different.

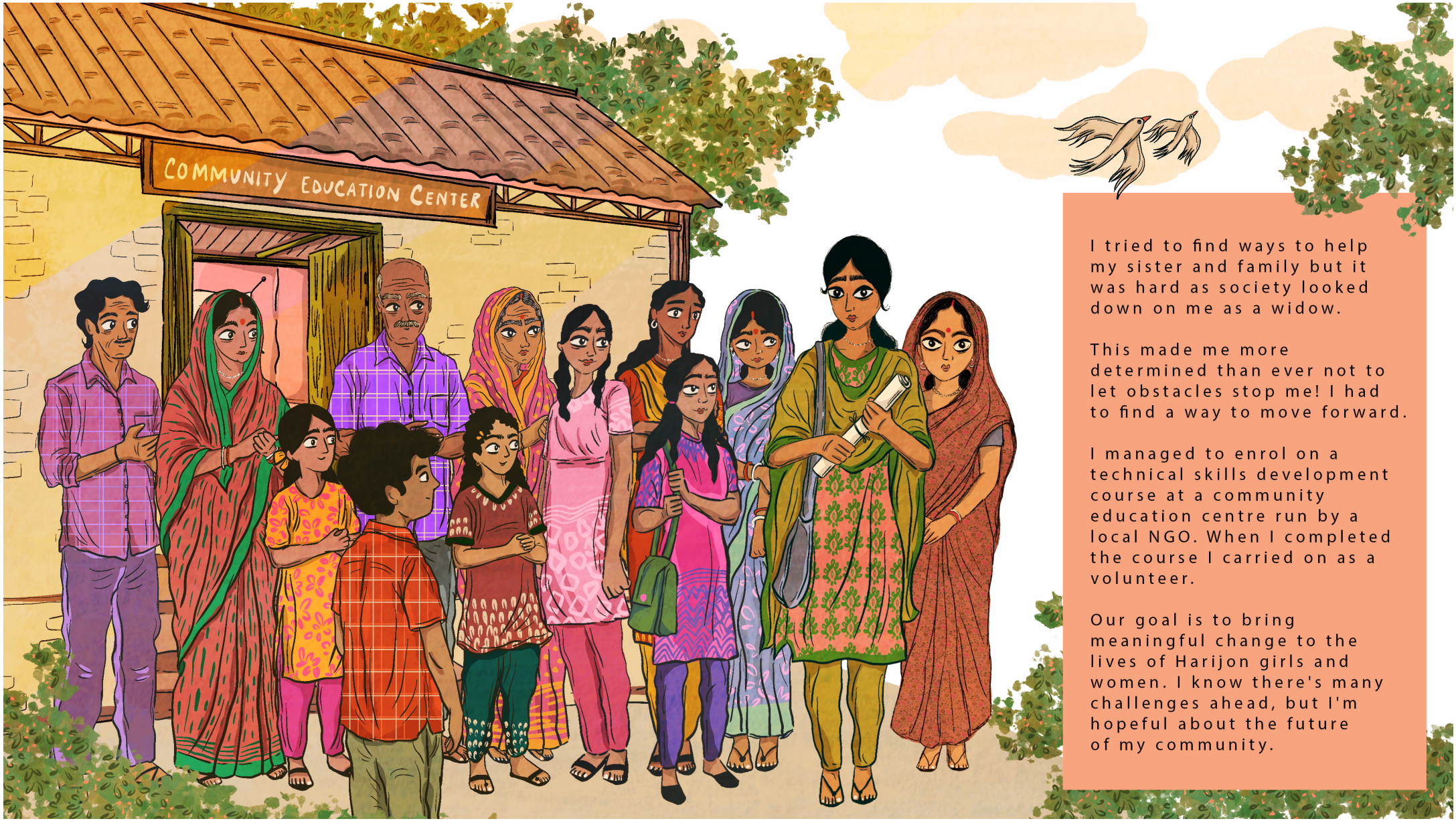


Due to my family's financial hardship, my sister and I were married off at a young age but this didn't solve anything. Not long after my marriage my husband died and my in-laws threw me out, so I had to go home and lean on my parents again. My sister was a victim of domestic violence and abuse, so she also returned home after two years of marriage. I couldn't imagine what she had suffered.

Life just seemed to get harder and harder. We were all worried about my dad, he hardly spoke and seemed depressed.




Eventually, with my ma's support, my sister was able to return to her studies, and then secure a government job. When my brother-in-law heard, he came and forcibly took her back to his house, even though he had remarried.
He claimed he was in need of my sister's meagre income, because young men from the community struggle to find work. She felt trapped in a web of circumstances from which there was no escape.



I tried to find ways to help my sister and family but it was hard as society looked down on me as a widow.

This made me more determined than ever not to let obstacles stop me! I had to find a way to move forward.

I managed to enrol on a technical skills development course at a community education centre run by a local NGO. When I completed the course I carried on as a volunteer.

Our goal is to bring meaningful change to the lives of Harijon girls and women. I know there's many challenges ahead, but I'm hopeful about the future of my community.

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সাথীর পথচলা: সহনশীলতা ও আশার নতুন দিগন্ত

This storyboard, designed with community researchers, represents a fictional character ('Sathi'), but all the storylines are based on real-life examples from our participatory field research with Harijon families in Bangladesh.

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