

# Mother

**Kancha Ilaiah**

Illustration  
Lokesh Khodke & Shefalee Jain





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Kancha Ilaiah

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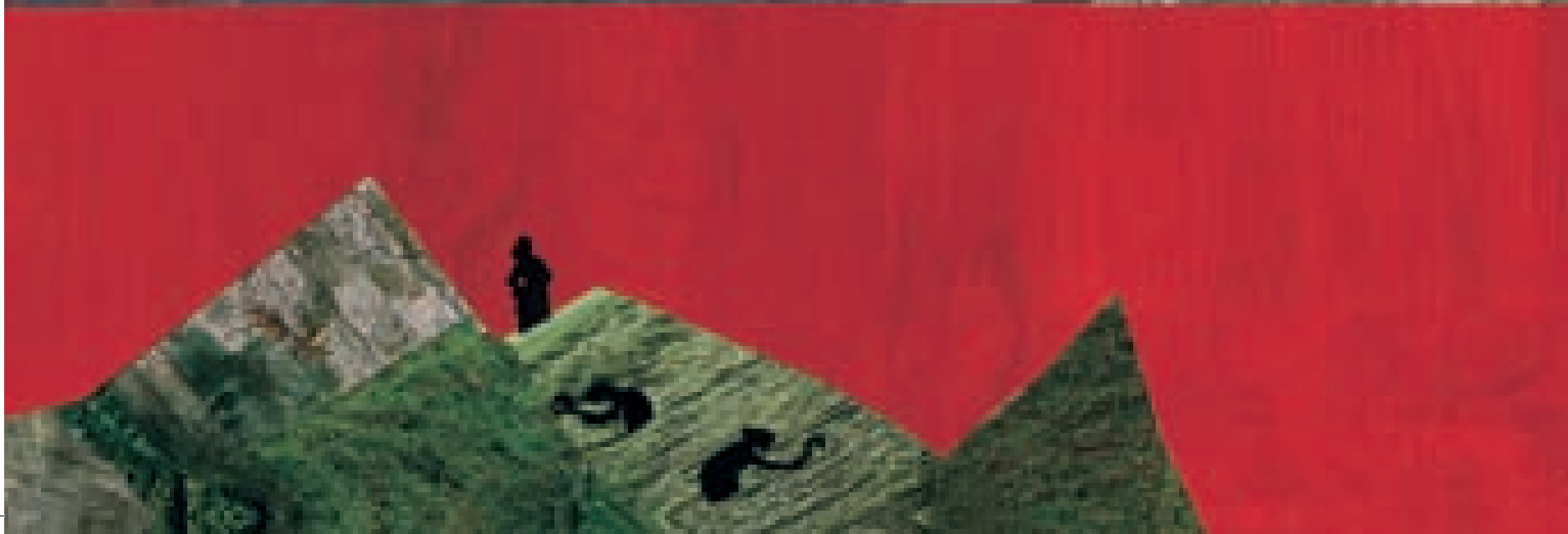
Translation from Telugu

D. Vasanta

Series Editor

Deepa Sreenivas







### **In that world**

There were thieves disguised as landlords

Lazy men who could swallow the sky and earth

There were farmers who produced food

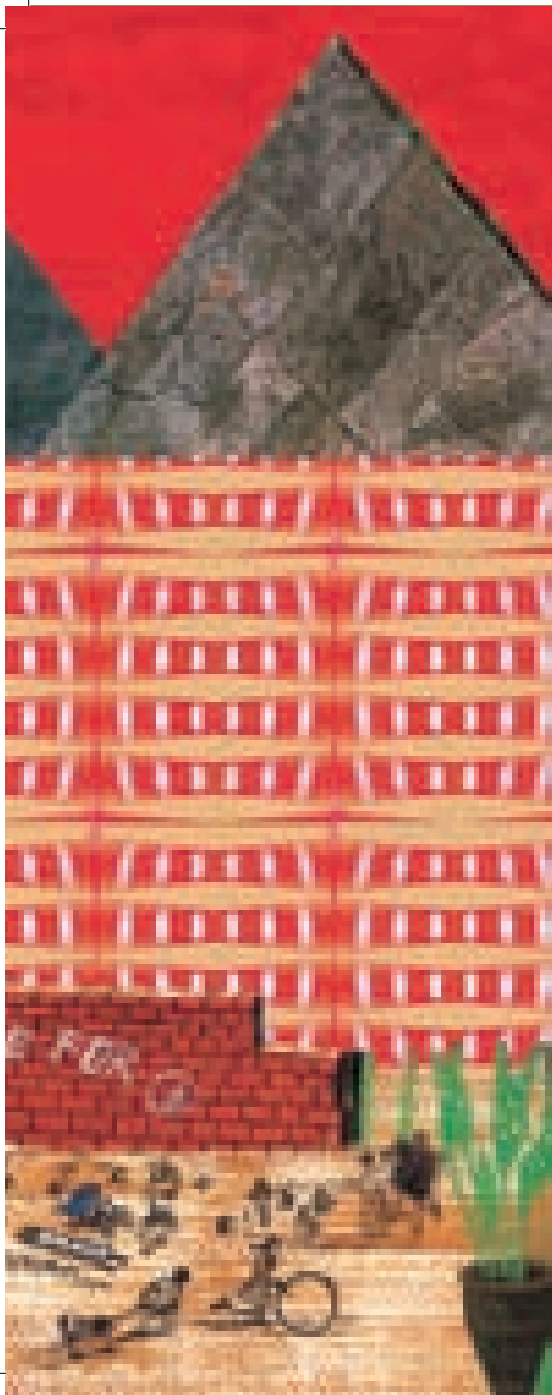
There were mountains and streams

There were canals and thick forests

Where forest guards and their henchmen kept a watch

That was the world of my mother





### **In Mother's world**

Baindlas would sing for all  
Mandichulas and soothsayers told stories of all  
The acrobatic Garadis performed, twisting their own bodies  
Gangireddulas made the bulls dance  
Sarthakandlu played community tunes  
Sonnayis played the flute  
Kaatipapalas danced around the burial grounds  
And Jangamayyas chanted mantras at death  
Singers and dancers  
Who played for the pleasure of Lord Beerappa

And there were Patels and Patwaris  
Mother knew everyone of them  
She swallowed their tricks and gimmicks  
For she knew how to handle them  
Mother could count their intestines if they yawned  
Mother had seen the feudal estates of Mahabub Reddy  
She knew the kingdom of Laxma Reddy







### **Mother knew**

How to separate thorns from sheep wool  
How to thrash the wool to make it smooth  
How to make woolen yarn and roll it into balls  
She cleared lands, spread seeds in furrows  
Planted saplings, plucked fruit and cut crops  
Amidst *modugu* trees whose brilliant flowers turned the sky red  
Amidst *tangedu* trees that scattered turmeric flowers all over the land  
Amidst thorny *pariki* bushes and *palleru* fruits  
Mother looked after the sheep that grazed in far off places  
She talked to peasants who hired the sheep for fertilizing their lands  
She bargained with traders who bought sheep and goat  
Resolved disputes among shepherds  
Kept a sharp eye on the mischief of the forest guards  
Knew how many goats were swallowed by the wolves



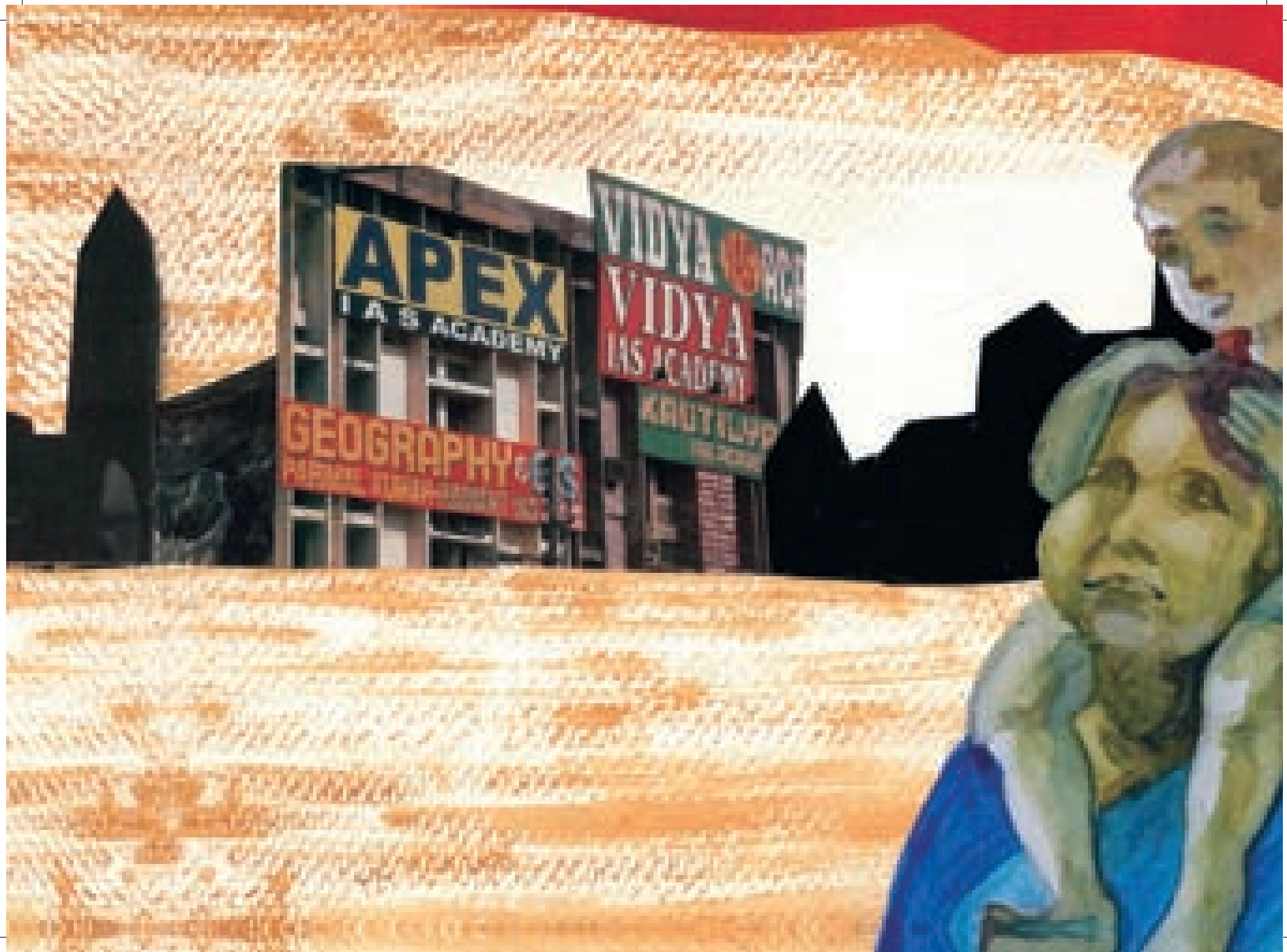


## When I was born

My mother thought  
She had birthed a champion shepherd.  
Little did she know  
I would swing across the Godavari  
By the goat's tail  
And end generations of illiteracy  
That was our lot.

'Are we Komatis or Bommans,'  
She asked, 'to go to school?'  
'Can you be a teacher wielding chalk?  
Or a writer to use pen on paper?'

But in the end,  
Vexed with the Patel, determined,  
She dragged me to school  
In the dhoti I stood,  
And told them,  
'Admit him.'

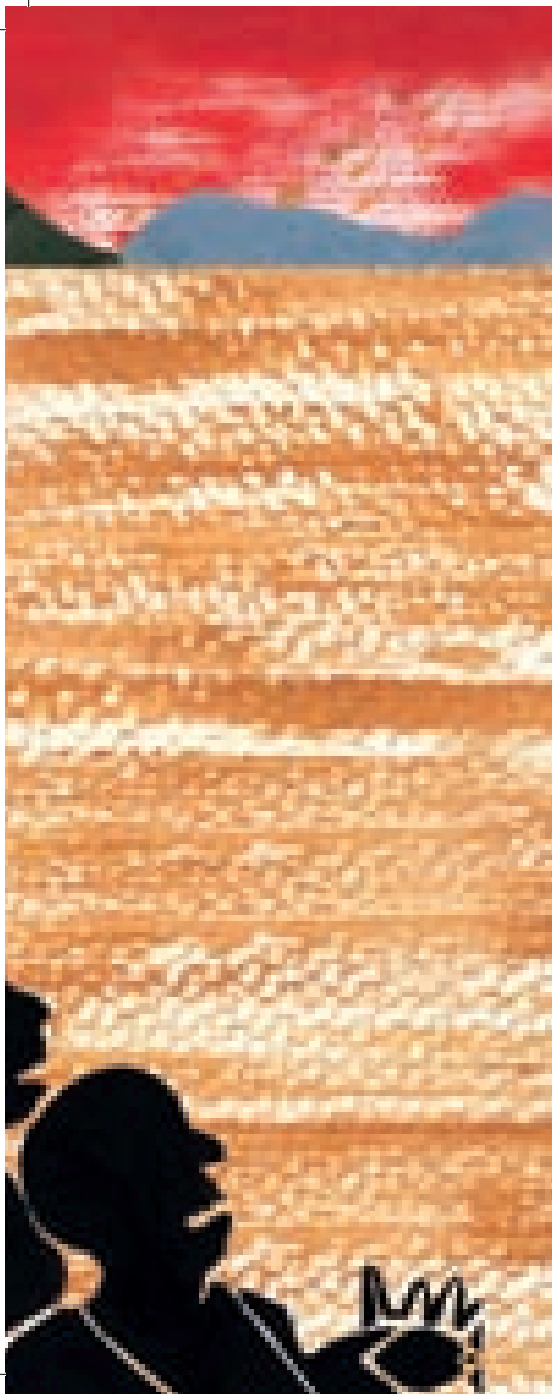




'When was he born?' they asked.  
'Three years before the great fire,  
The day I planted the seeds  
After the rains began  
And returned at dusk,  
I gave birth to him,' she said.

My mother who asked,  
Will you ever grasp a pen?  
Did not live to see  
That I would hold a pen to her own story





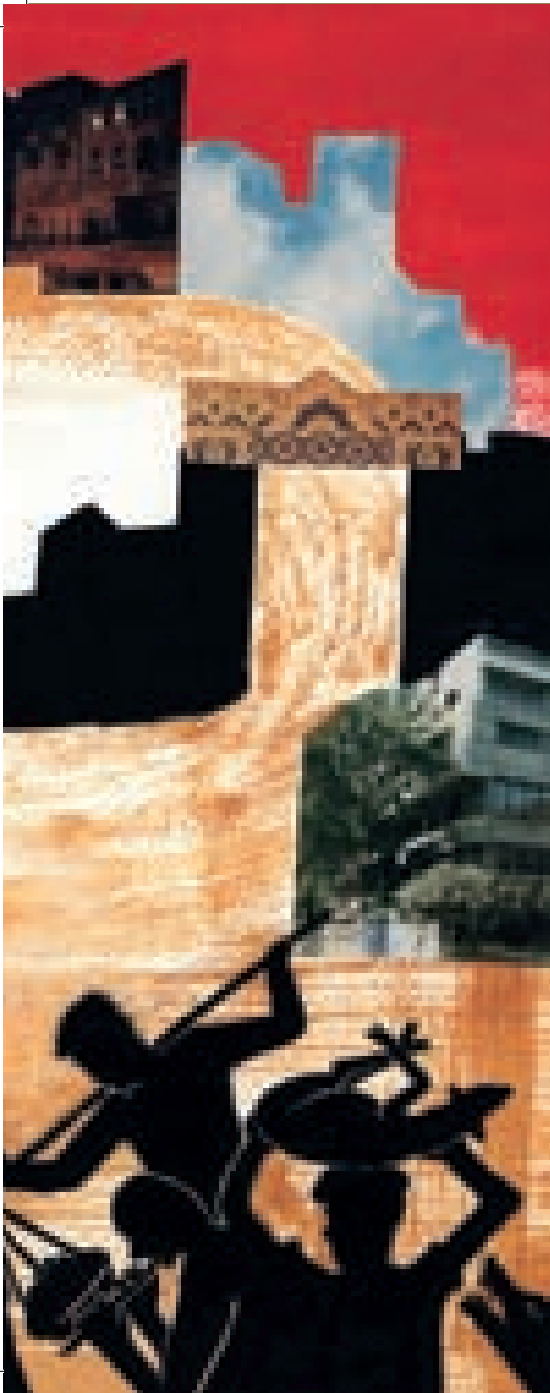
### **At the Bonalu festival**

Sacred vermilion dotted the Bonam pot,  
Milk was poured to payasam,  
Drum and cymbal called the community,  
Women decked,  
As the procession wound its way,  
At its head  
Mother claimed the right,  
To carry the Bonam.

There was a plot then,  
Patel and Patwari conspired  
To trample her right.  
To shame and abuse her  
They turned her brother against her.



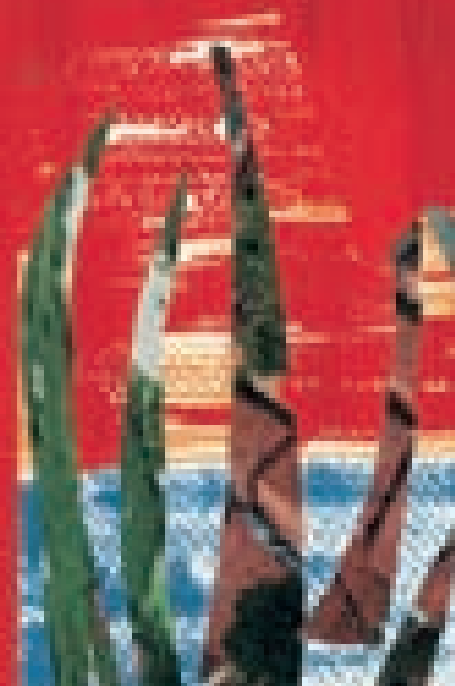


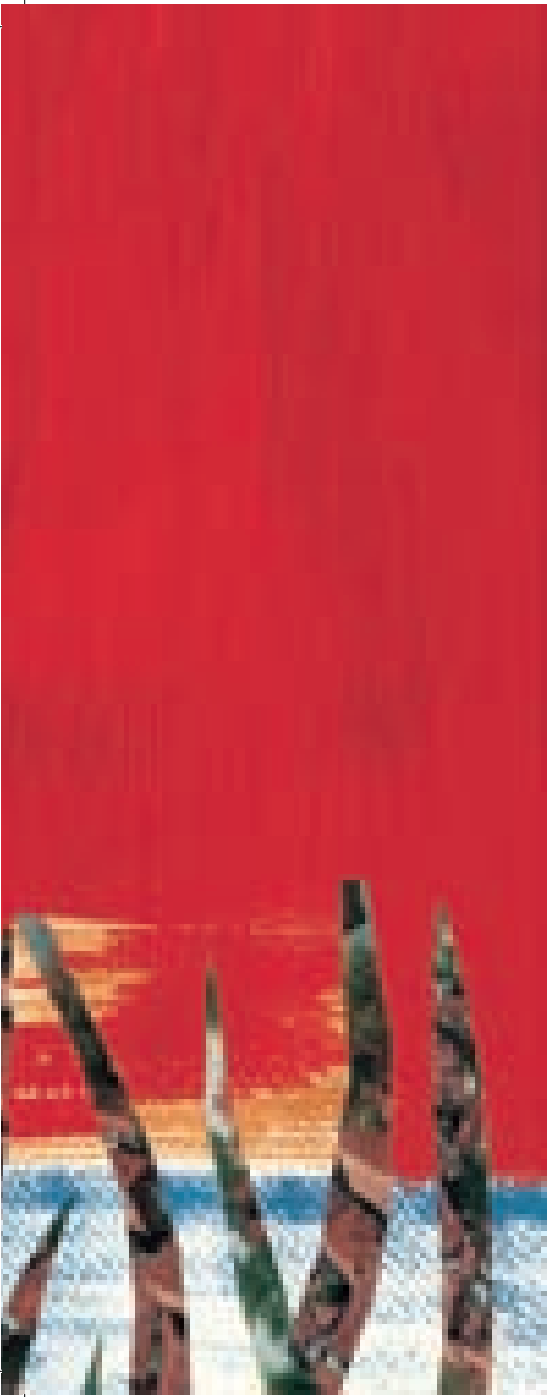


This brother, who had beaten the drum,  
Leapt across her path,  
Arms akimbo, said  
This red vermilion—the sacred Bonam Bottu  
Is not yours!

‘You stand in the Bonam’s way  
And your bones will break!  
You stop me from the honor of the Bonam Bottu  
And I will rip your stomach out.’  
She said.

With the Bonam pot in her left hand  
Throwing a curse with her right,  
She demolished the Patel,  
Shooed the brother away,  
Pallu tied to the waist,  
She marched across the maize fields  
Ahead of all.

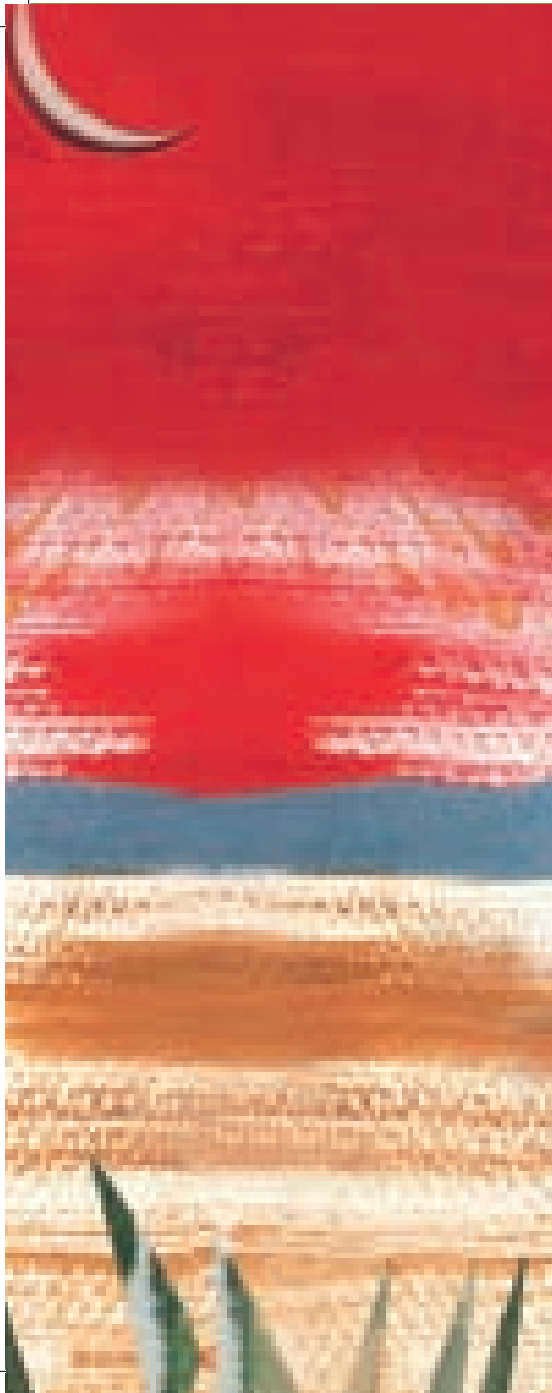




She lowered the Bonam  
At the Beeranna Shrine  
Long before others arrived,  
She swept the floor,  
Lit the lamp,  
The Bottu is yours, said some  
Not yours, said others.

She spread the mat of leaves  
Sprinkled the water  
They brought the lamb  
Poured water on its head  
And severed it  
The lamb shuddered.  
The first vermilion Bottu touched Mother's forehead,  
The first sacred thread was tied to Father's wrist.





They carved the lamb  
Piled the meat  
Drank their fill of toddy  
Ate their meal  
And then started the story of Lord Beeranna

Dillem, ballem, dillem, ballem,  
The drum sang out  
Tallum, ballum, tallum, ballum  
The cymbals rang out  
Telling the tale of Beeranna.

# *Anveshi*

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## List of Titles

### *English*

Head Curry  
Moon in the Pot  
Mother  
The Sackclothman  
Spirits from History  
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The Two Named Boy & Other Stories

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Awwa Poratam  
Gonesanchi Abbai  
Kalam Pampina Atidhulu  
Wadapillala Kadhalu  
Bhale Badipillalu  
Kotulu, Kalladdalu & Sinni

### *Malayalam*

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Uriyile Ambilimaaman  
Ente Amma  
Chaakkupranthan  
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Keezhala Kuttikal  
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Naattangalum Manangalum Mattu Kathakalum  
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&  
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