

The First Farmers

A Warli Folktale

Benita Sen
Rajiv Verma 'Banjara'



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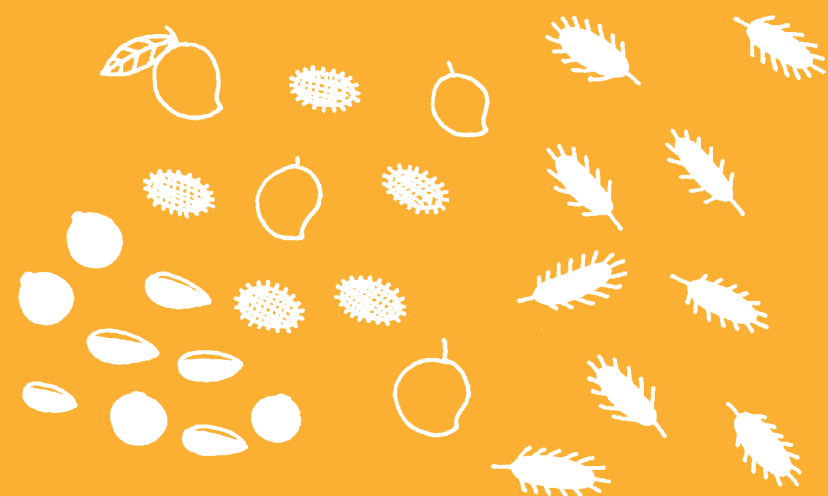
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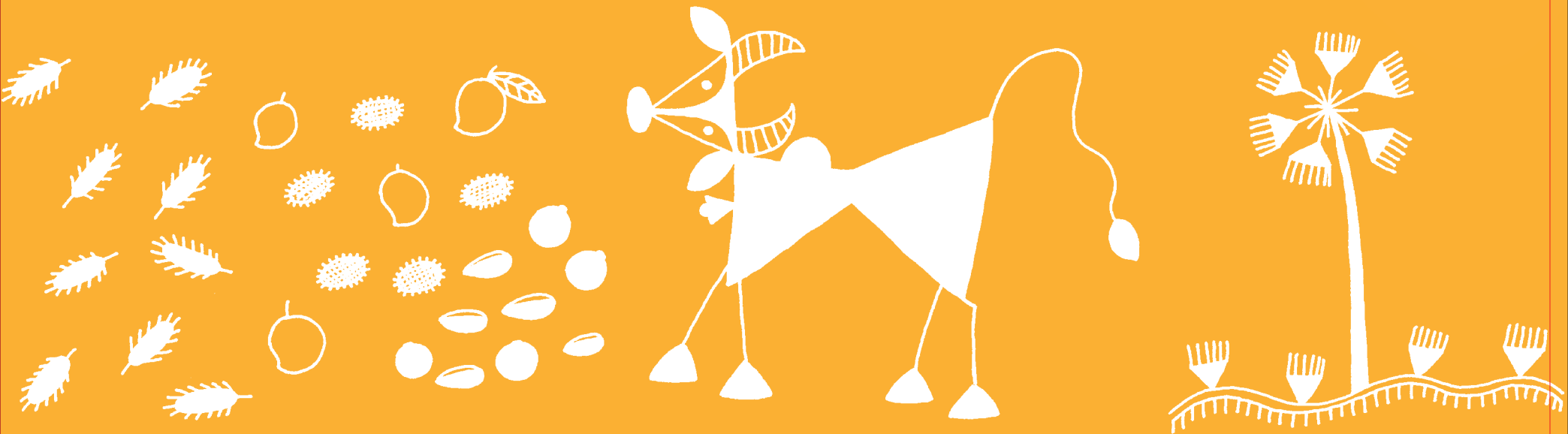


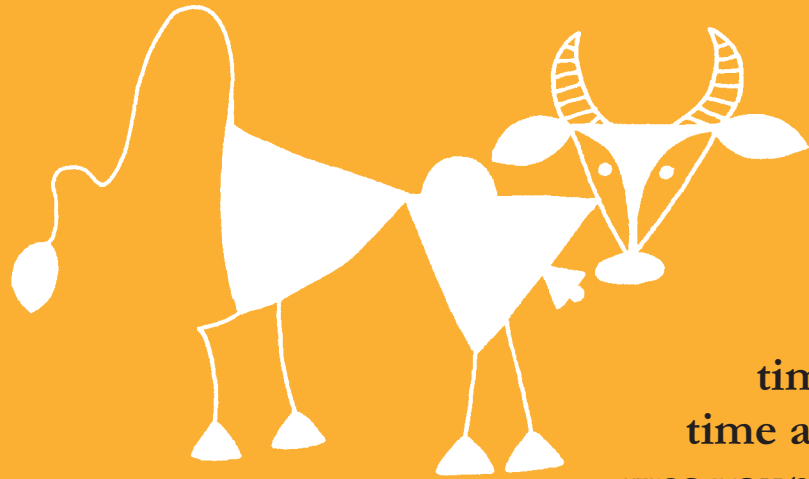
The First Farmers

A Warli Folk tale

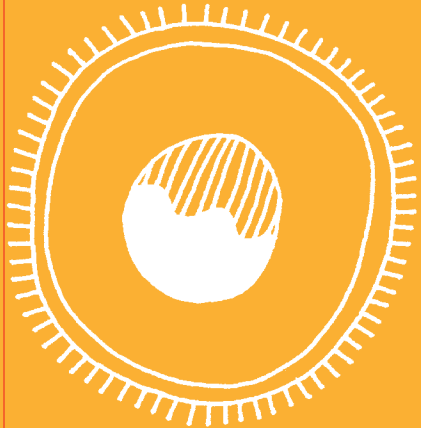
*Retold by
Benita Sen*

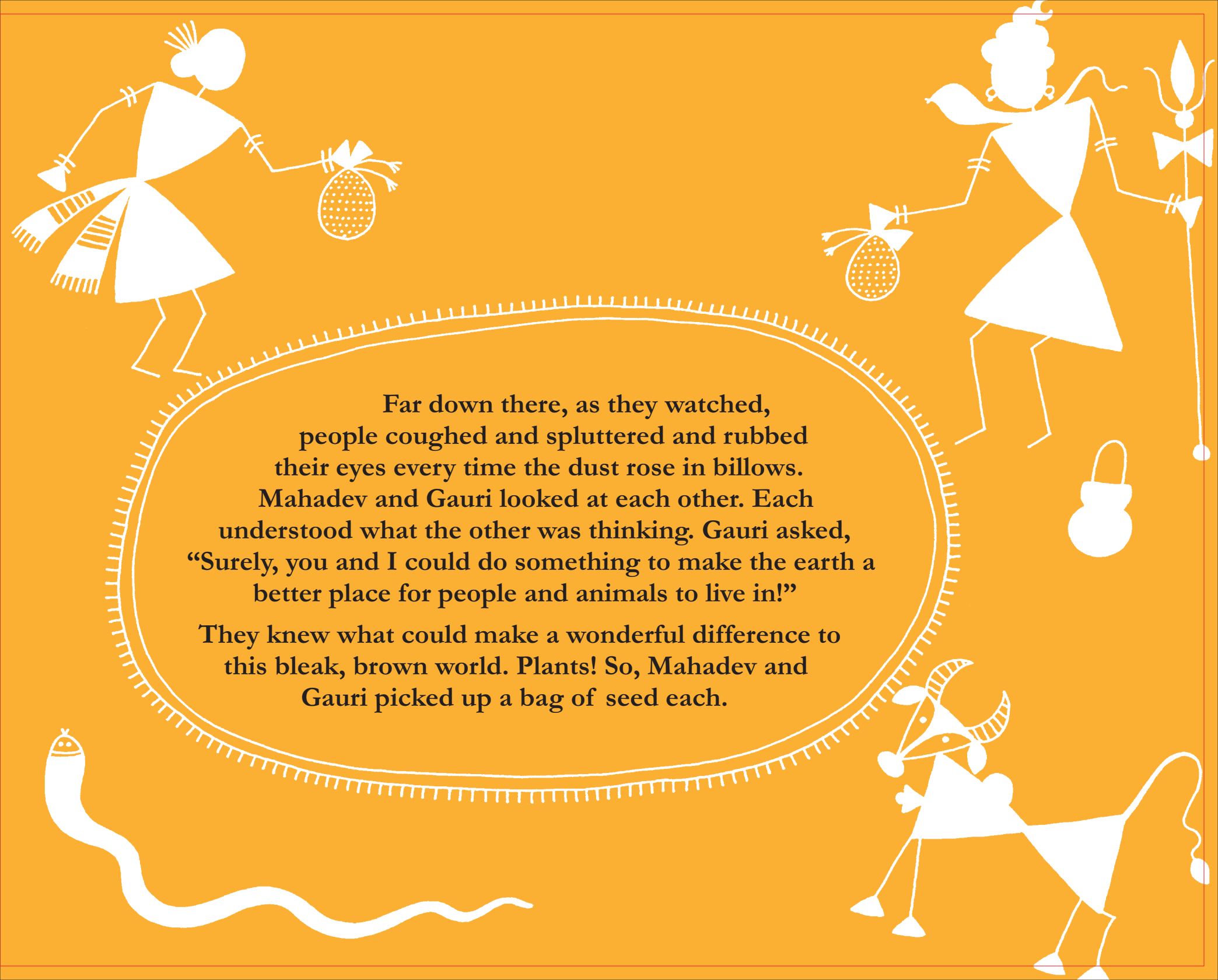
*Illustrated by
Rajiv Verma 'Banjara'*





Once upon a time, a very long time ago, our world was young. One day, after the earth had been created for a while, Mahadev and Gauri looked down from the heavens. They saw what looked like a rough, brown coconut. Since there were no trees and no shrubs and not even a blade of grass, there were no roots to hold the soil down. Every time the wind blew, huge clouds of dust huffed and puffed and blew into the little huts that people had put up.

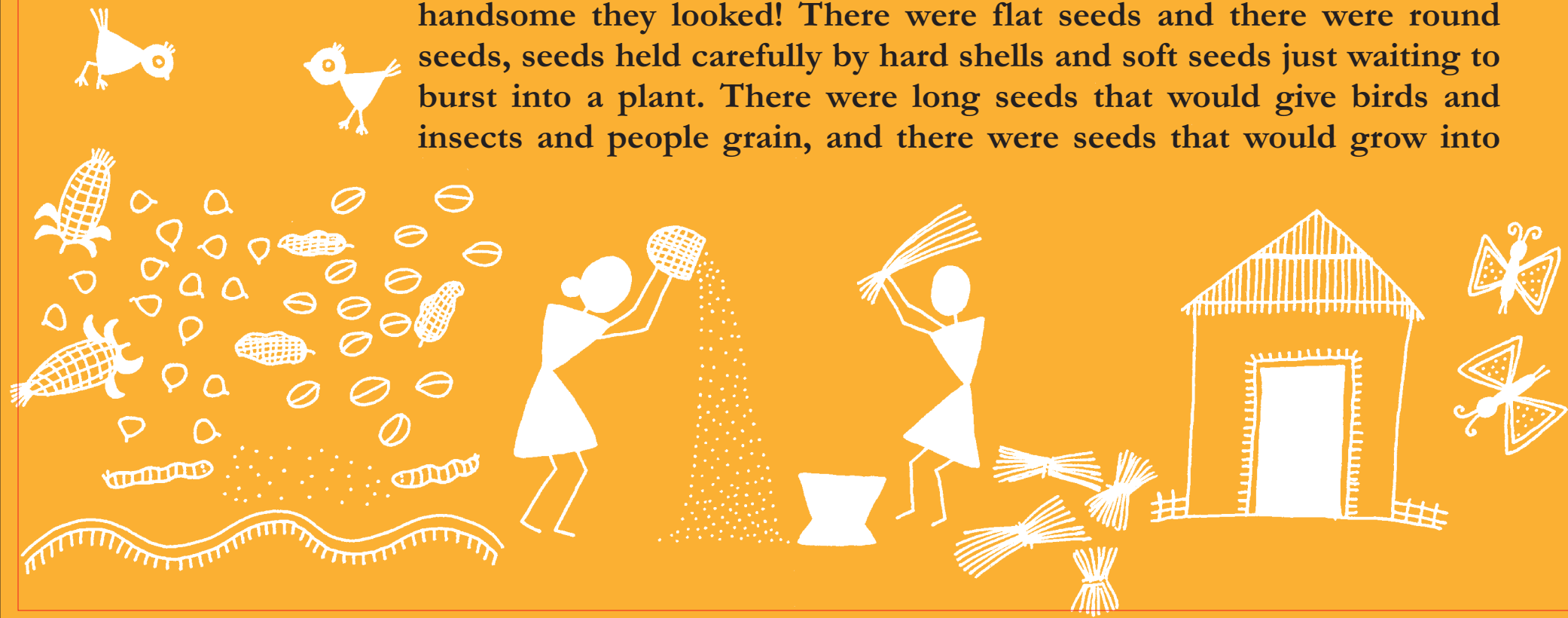




Far down there, as they watched,
people coughed and spluttered and rubbed
their eyes every time the dust rose in billows.
Mahadev and Gauri looked at each other. Each
understood what the other was thinking. Gauri asked,
“Surely, you and I could do something to make the earth a
better place for people and animals to live in!”
They knew what could make a wonderful difference to
this bleak, brown world. Plants! So, Mahadev and
Gauri picked up a bag of seed each.

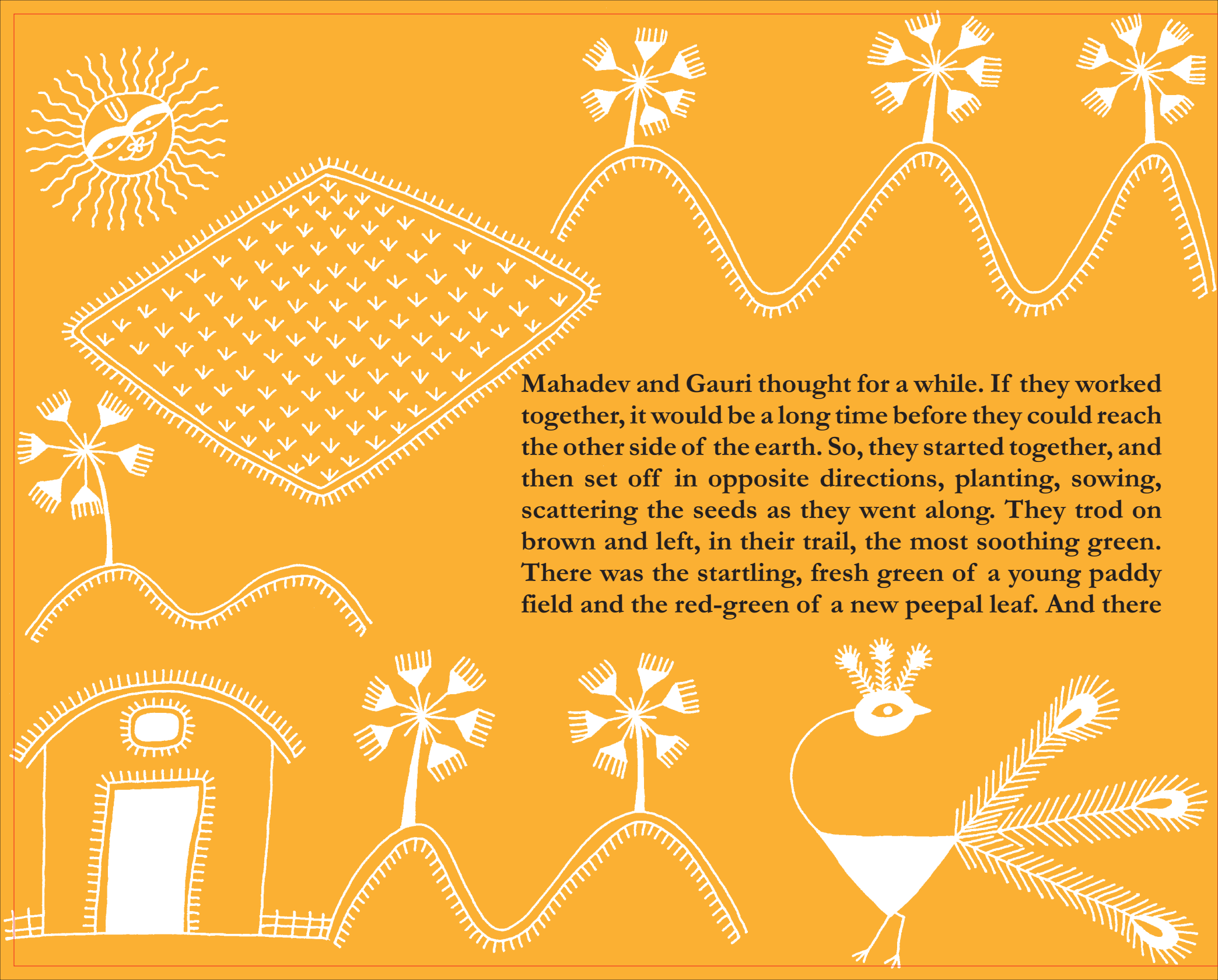


Before they set off, they looked into the bags. Aha! This looked promising. What a lot of seeds there were! There were tiny seeds for grass on which the dragonfly could rest. There were seeds as large as coconuts that would grow into swaying palm trees, bent over the stream to see how handsome they looked! There were flat seeds and there were round seeds, seeds held carefully by hard shells and soft seeds just waiting to burst into a plant. There were long seeds that would give birds and insects and people grain, and there were seeds that would grow into



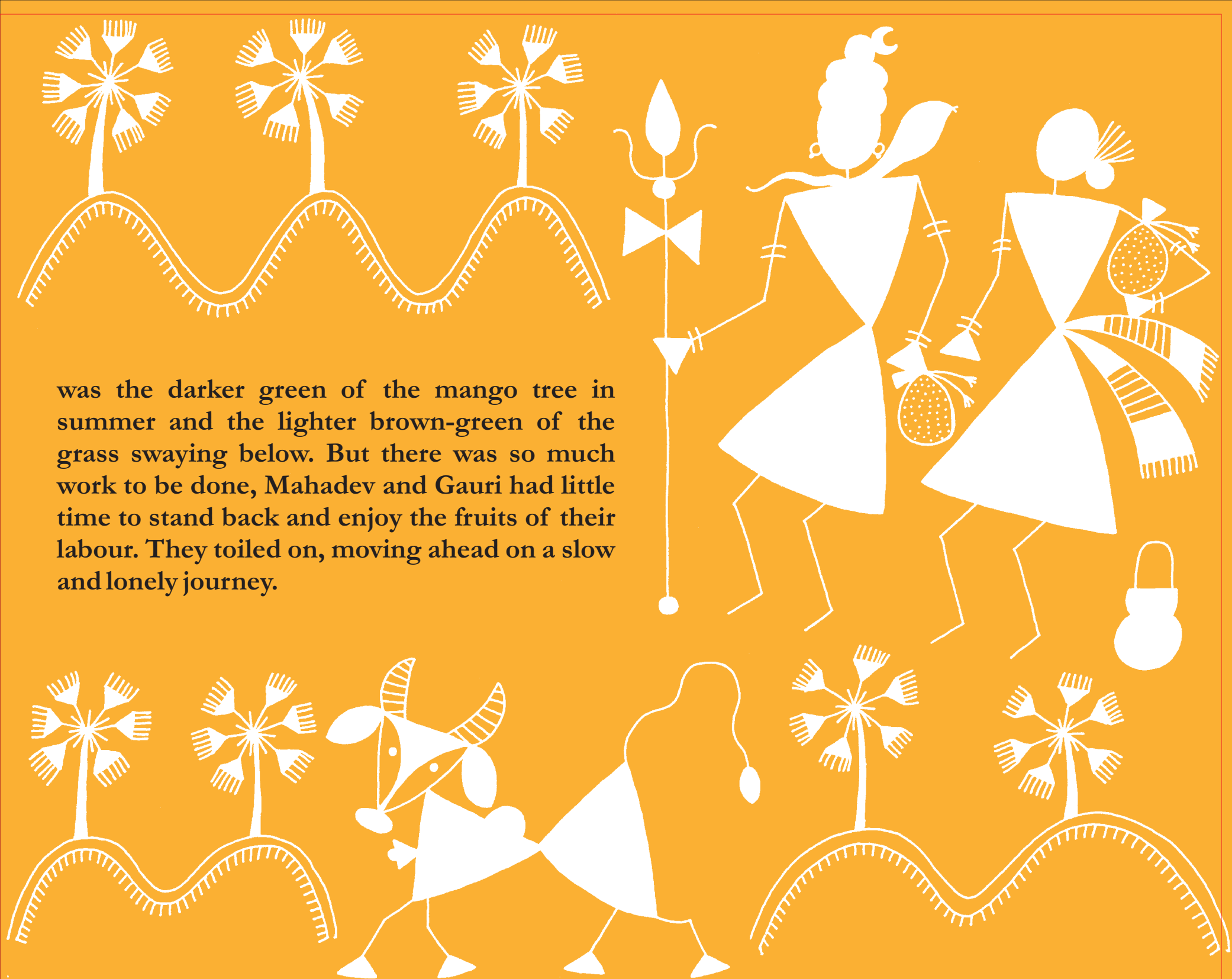
vegetables. Some seeds would give the butterfly flowers to sip from and there were still more seeds that would give the people peanuts to munch and corn to nibble. There were trees that would grow into fruit trees like the mango and the chikoo and the guava. And for the animals and the birds and insects, there were seeds that would grow into tall, strong trees that would stand together and cover the land with forests. If you ask me, that was the largest collection of seeds ever!





Mahadev and Gauri thought for a while. If they worked together, it would be a long time before they could reach the other side of the earth. So, they started together, and then set off in opposite directions, planting, sowing, scattering the seeds as they went along. They trod on brown and left, in their trail, the most soothing green. There was the startling, fresh green of a young paddy field and the red-green of a new peepal leaf. And there

was the darker green of the mango tree in summer and the lighter brown-green of the grass swaying below. But there was so much work to be done, Mahadev and Gauri had little time to stand back and enjoy the fruits of their labour. They toiled on, moving ahead on a slow and lonely journey.



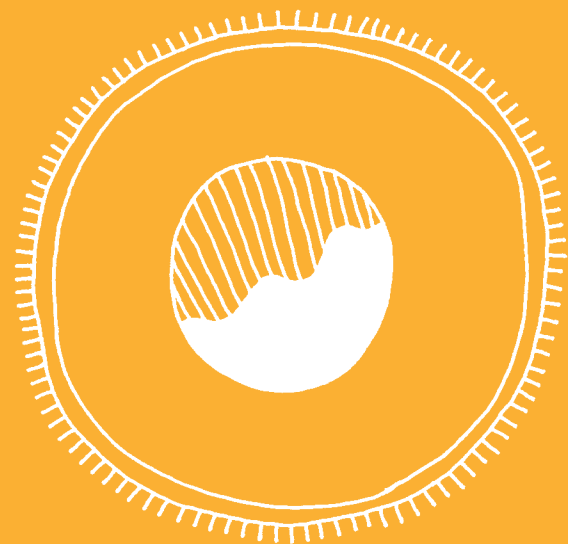


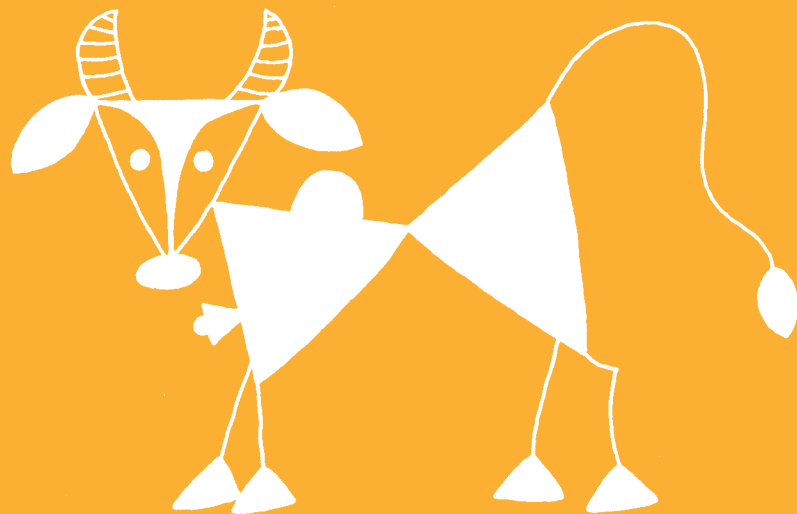
It was a very long time before they met again. By then, the years and the toil had taken their toll. Old and tired, the two did not recognise each other.

“Who are you?” he asked her.

“I am Gauri,” replied the old woman. Mahadev looked at her closely. Yes, of course! Somewhere beyond those tired furrows lay the face he had known as Gauri's. “And I am Mahadev,” he told her, even before she could ask.

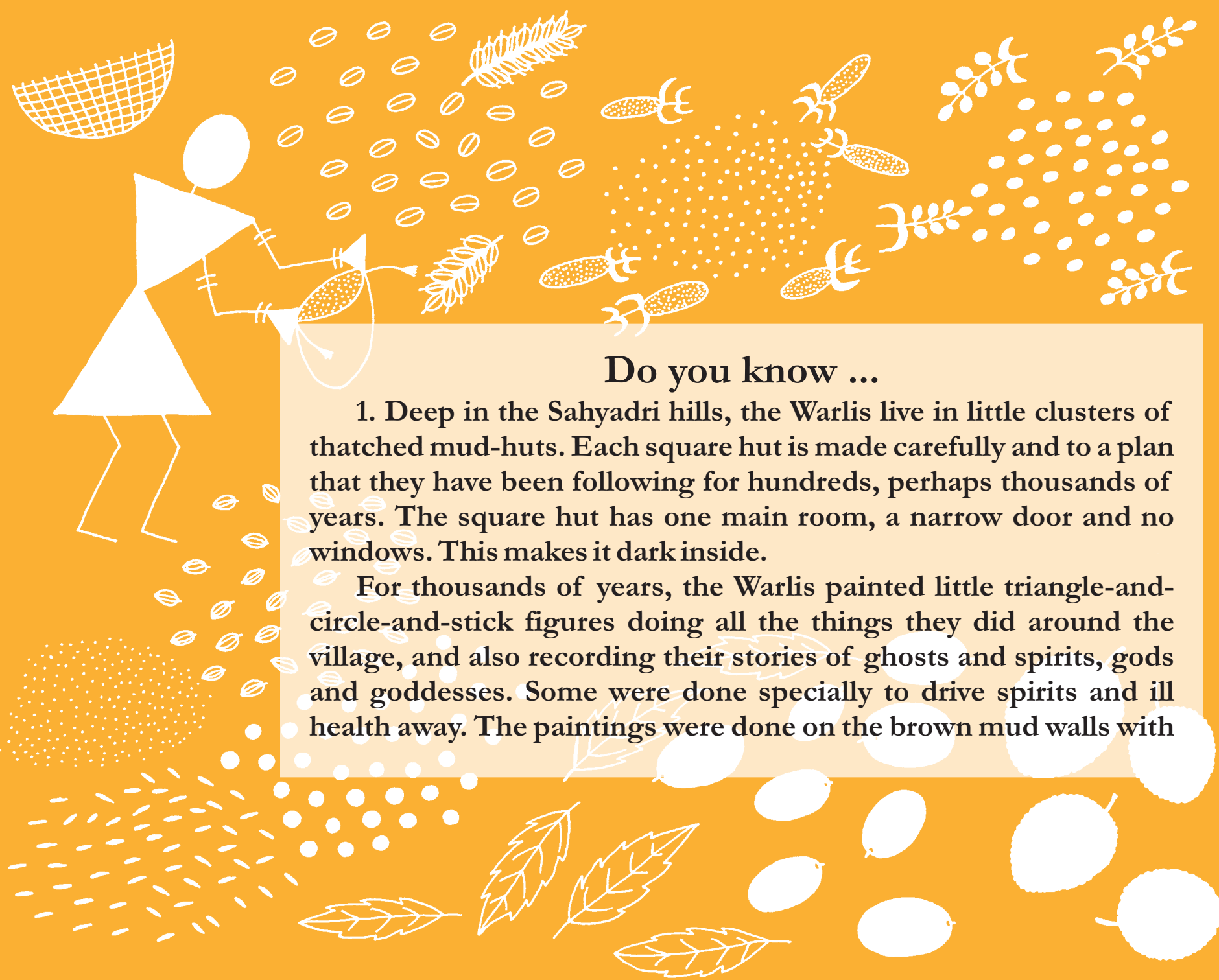
That day, they knew, the work they had begun so many years ago, was done. They turned around just





once to look at the fields and the woods they had left in their trail. A slow smile of contentment spread across each face. Wiping the dust off their gnarled and work-worn hands, they walked back home, from where they had started when the world was young and looked like a rough, brown coconut.

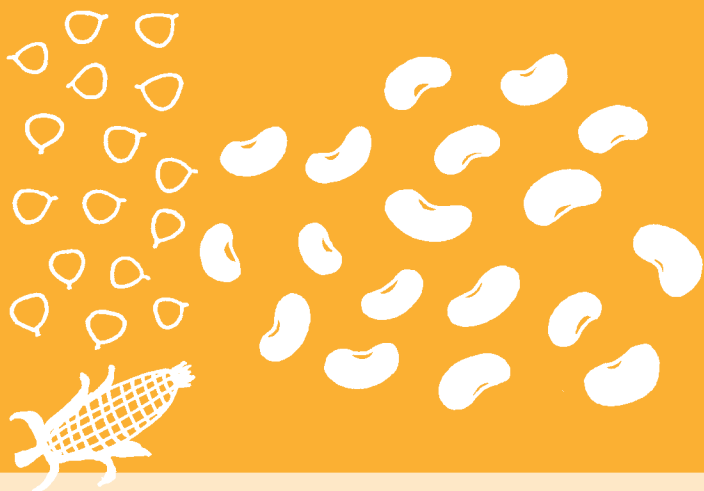




Do you know ...

1. Deep in the Sahyadri hills, the Warlis live in little clusters of thatched mud-huts. Each square hut is made carefully and to a plan that they have been following for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. The square hut has one main room, a narrow door and no windows. This makes it dark inside.

For thousands of years, the Warlis painted little triangle-and-circle-and-stick figures doing all the things they did around the village, and also recording their stories of ghosts and spirits, gods and goddesses. Some were done specially to drive spirits and ill health away. The paintings were done on the brown mud walls with



white rice flour that sparkled inside the dark room almost like magic!

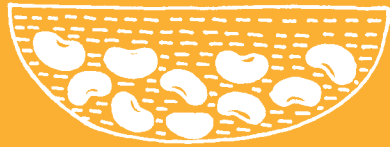
It was only as late as the 1970s that people outside their land understood how beautiful these simple paintings are! Someone gave them brown paper and white paint. And how they drew!

Now, of course, Warli paintings are to be seen almost everywhere, even on fabric.

Have you noticed the illustrations in this book? They are done in the Warli style. Think of the funniest thing that has ever happened to you and record your story in the Warli style! Go on, it's fun!



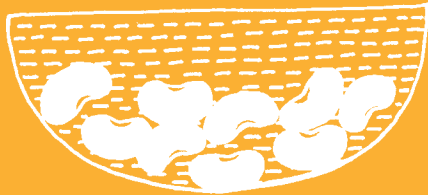
Fun with Seeds



1. Take a few rajma seeds (kidney beans) and soak them in water for 8-10 h.



2. Observe the seeds after this and compare them with the dry seeds.



3. Take some of the soaked seeds and put them in some salt water for a few hours.

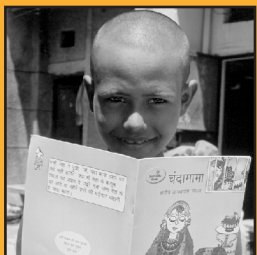
4. Observe the seeds at the end of this period.



Do you see any difference?

When the dry seeds are soaked in water, they swell up because water enters the seed through the skin of the seed.

When the soaked seeds are put in water containing salt, some of the water from inside the seed comes out and the skin of the seeds shrivels up.



Hi! I am Bobby. Don't you like my hairstyle? It keeps me so cool! I love reading and playing cricket. I go regularly to the Pratham library. I love the books they have. Sometimes, I read them myself. Sometimes, Didi reads to all of us.

Thank you for buying this book. My friends and I will get to read many more books in our library because you bought this book.



Benita Sen likes to write for children. She has worked with the children's magazine, 'Target' and edited the children's pages in Amrita Bazar Patrika. Her stories have appeared in a wide range of magazines, books and web portals. She also works as a journalist and has written for The Economic Times and Femina. Her other interests include environmental education.



Rajeev Verma 'Banjara' is a promising new artist. He is doing a course in tourism and has been a cartoonist with many newspapers. He is particularly interested in illustrating for children and in folk art.

When the earth was first created it was brown and dry. Mahadev and Gauri were the first farmers who took on the arduous task of greening it. Read this simple and beautiful Warli folktale and discover the community's deep reverence for nature. The distinctive illustrations will inspire you to artistic glory.

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