

SPIRITS FROM HISTORY

My Friend, The Emperor
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Illustration
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Beloved Spirits
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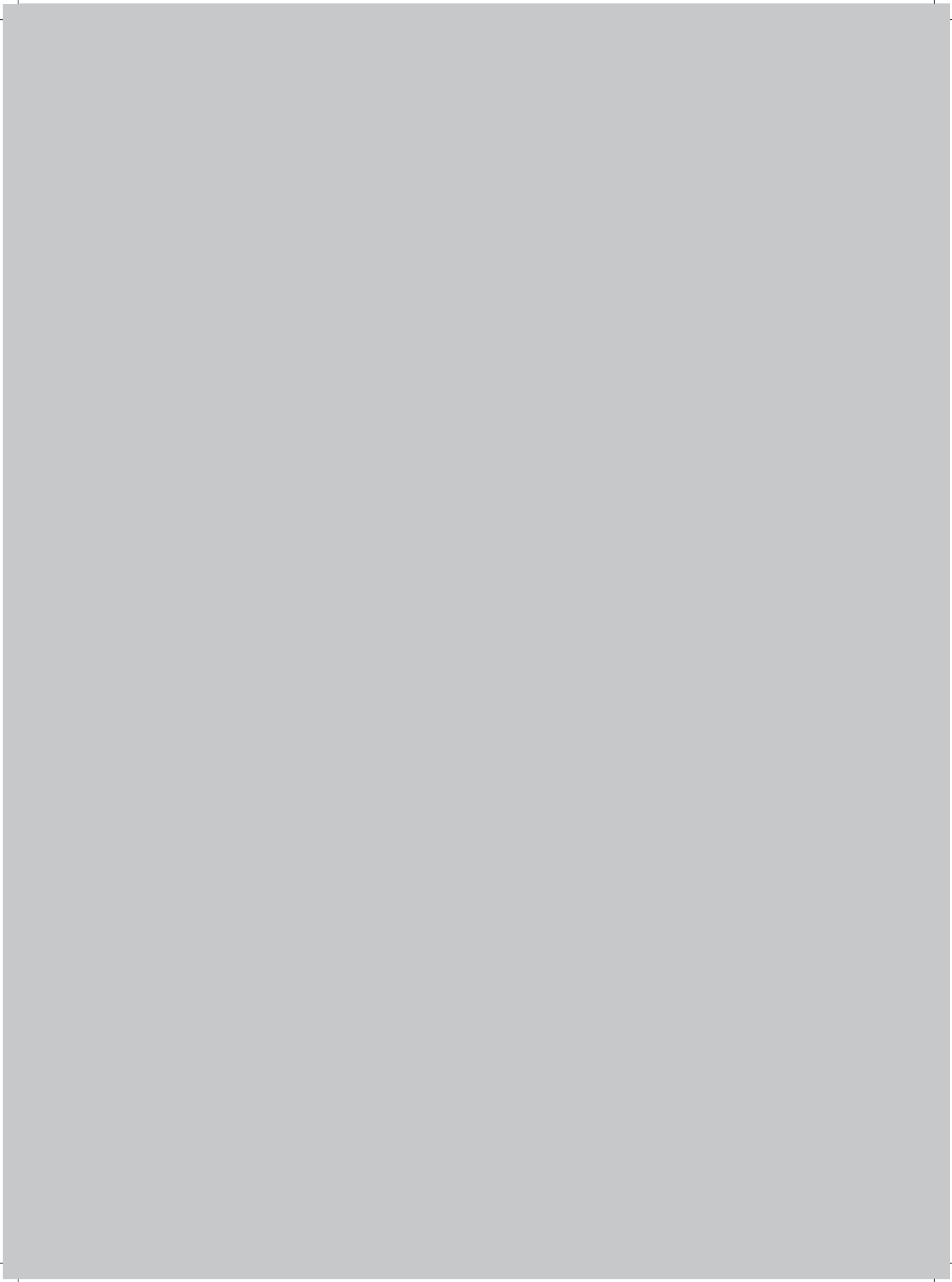
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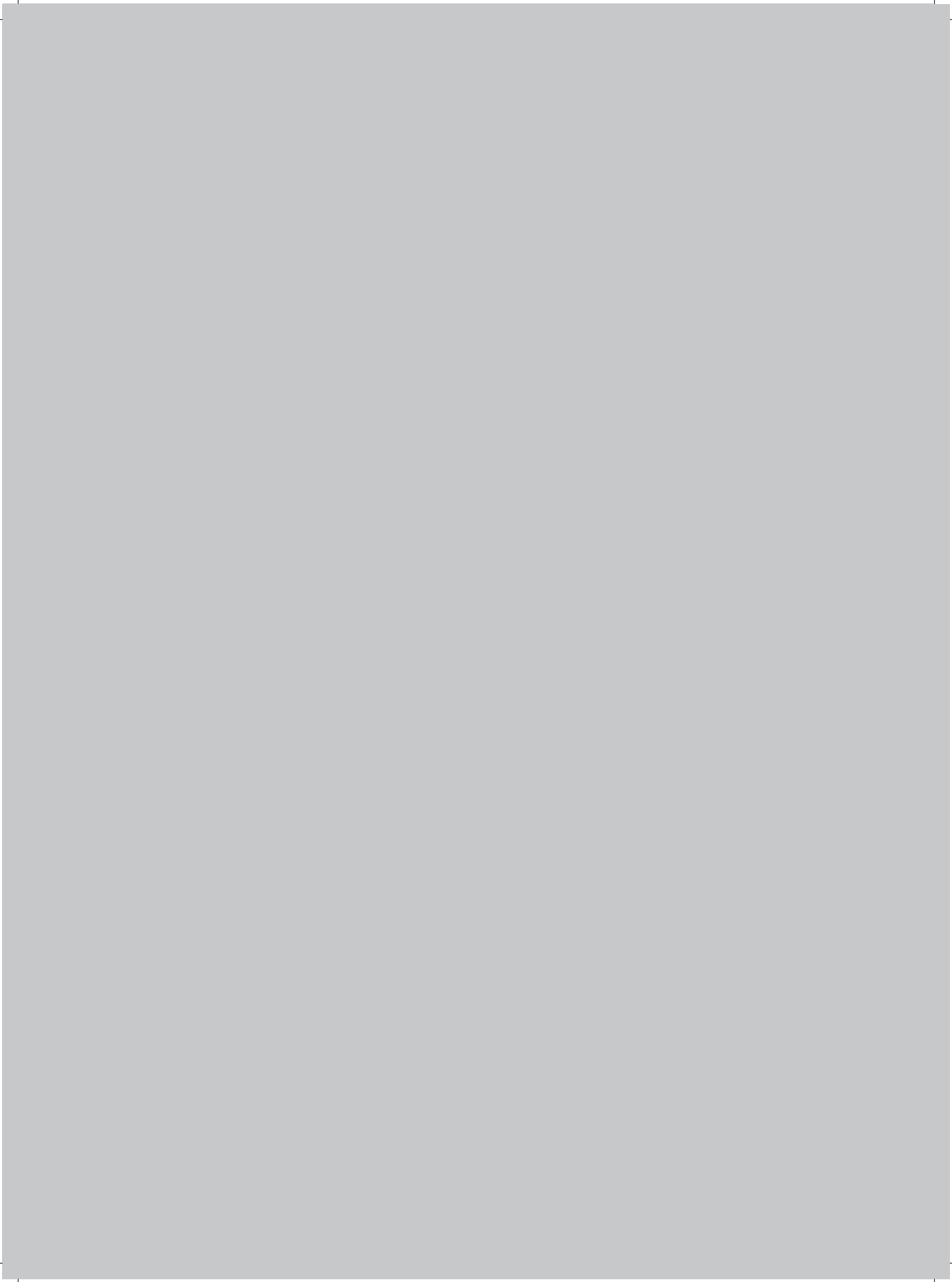
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Series Editor
Deepa Sreenivas






“So! This was the urgent homework that you had to finish!” Mohammad Ali Musaliyar exclaimed as he looked over his son’s shoulder.

Adil, completely lost in drawing in his History notebook, was so startled that he dropped the pencil. “Uppa! When did you come back? I even didn’t hear you! I started doing my homework, but then I was hungry, so I thought I would wait for you, and so . . . so I was just . . .”

“No, no, it’s alright; go on, complete it, it’s a very good sketch. If you don’t become a historian, at least you can become an artist!” laughed his father.



“Dinner is ready—I cooked before I left, so now we just have to heat it. By the way, who is this frightening man?” he looked again at the one-eyed man with the fierce moustache that Adil had been sketching with such concentration, just under a neatly written paragraph with the title underlined: “1526: The First Battle of Panipat.”

“That is Rana Sanga, Uppa. You know, the Rajput king.”

“How should I know? Is he a neighbour of ours? Or a friend of your Jessy Aunty’s?” teased his father.

“Jessy Teacher, Uppa, Jessy Teacher. She has told everyone to call her Teacher in school, and Aunty only at home. Even Aby has to call her Teacher; just yesterday he called her ‘Mummy’ by mistake, and all of us laughed at him. You should have seen it—his ears went bright red!” Adil chuckled at this memory of poor Aby’s ears. “But Uppa, you don’t know Rana Sanga? See, your history is also so bad. No wonder I get such bad marks in the tests!”

“Oho, so now it’s my fault, is it? What can I do, son, after all, I never had a teacher like your Jessy Aunty. And of course, I am the one who keeps drawing in my notebook when I am supposed to be doing homework!” Ali Musaliyar smiled mischievously at his son as he gave the now-hot *kozhi* curry one last stir.

Not knowing what to say to this, Adil let it go. Looking up from the food, the Musaliyar found his twelve-year-old deep in thought. He knew the look too well—the child played with his pencil while staring fixedly at something no one else could see. Adil was just five when Amina died, and ever since, his son had been his companion, friend and child, all rolled into one. No one knew his moods better, what he liked to eat, what stories he liked to hear, the colors that he loved and the games he liked to play.

“Uppa,” said Adil hesitantly, breaking into his father’s thoughts. “Is it okay if I don’t go to school next week?”

“Why? I thought you liked school?” said his father, a bit surprised by this question, and the sudden change of mood.

“I do, but then . . . I don’t know. This History . . .”

“Ah. That was just one test, son. Next time you will do better—you just have to prepare well.”

“No Uppa, I just don’t like History,” said Adil quite firmly. “I like Maths, Science, even English now. But not History.”

“Here, eat your dinner. But you keep saying Jessy Aunty is your favorite teacher, and she tells stories in class, so History is not as difficult as it was last year.”

“That’s true. She’s very nice, and she tells her stories so well too! You know, you feel you are right there, watching everything happening all those hundreds of years ago. But still, I don’t know, Uppa, what can she do? I am not good at History. Sometimes I feel that she . . . no, that’s not true, she is very good . . . but in class . . .” Adil searched for words, not knowing exactly what troubled him so.

And then he suddenly burst out, "Uppa, History doesn't like me!"

His father patted him lightly on the head. "Ayyo, that is a very big complaint against poor History. But see, the food's growing cold. Don't worry so much, child, it will be fine. You will learn History like you learnt English—remember how difficult that was? Now, what is next week's test on?"

"The coming of the Mughals—Babur. Uppa, why didn't Babur come to Kerala? Jessie Teacher said he didn't like North India. It was too hot and dusty, and there were no gardens."


"Really? That's sensible!" Ali Musaliyar winked at his son and they both laughed; history and its problems slipped out of Adil's mind for a moment. "No, you are right, he would have liked it in Changanacherry. And this reminds me, I have a copy of the *Baburnama* in English. It's somewhere on that old bookshelf. I have never read it, but I know there are some very nice pictures in it. Now that you have this test, we could look at it together—I am sure you'll like it."

"Alright," said Adil rather doubtfully, dreading yet another big history book with more dates. So what if it had pictures? But his father went on, "I may not know much History, but do you know the most famous story about Babur? Did your Jessie Aunty—I don't have to call her teacher, do I?—did she tell you the story of his death?"

"No. We haven't reached there yet. How did he die?"

"His son Humayun fell ill, and all the medicines of the most accomplished doctors and the prayers of the greatest saints didn't seem to work. The prince kept getting worse, until everyone was sure he would die. Then one of the auliyas told the distraught emperor that he should offer to Allah his most valuable possession in return for his son's life. The Emperor accepted—he would do anything to save his beloved son. So everyone at court began to wonder what he would offer. Would it be the throne of Hindustan? The priceless diamond of Agra?"





“I’m sure it was the throne—the whole kingdom is much more valuable than a single diamond. Right, Uppa?” suggested Adil.

“You and I may think so, but not our Babur. He offered his own life to Allah, saying that he had nothing more valuable to offer.” Adil’s eyes widened in surprise. “So he walked around the prince’s bed thrice, praying to Allah to take his life instead of his son’s. They say that soon after that, the prince began to get better, and his father fell ill and died in some months.”

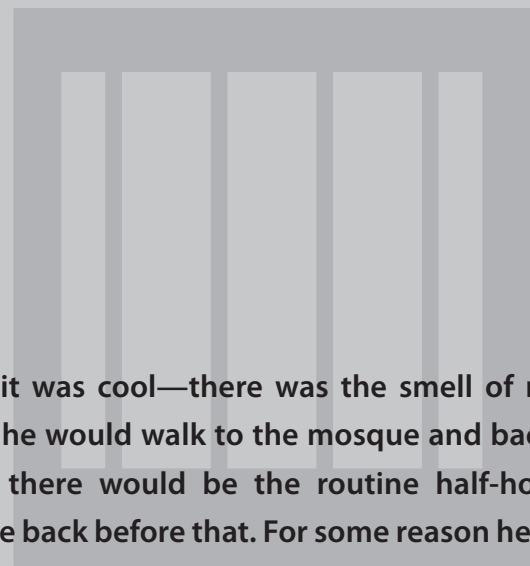

He could see his story had worked its magic on Adil, who had fallen quiet. But it was more than that, though he didn’t know it.

“Alright, enough stories for the day. Now finish the food quickly and do your homework.”

“I will. Uppa, if I don’t do well in this test also, you teach me History at home—you tell good stories too!” said Adil, eating the last of his chicken curry.

“So that you can draw sketches of me? Here, give me that plate. Why don’t you go to Aby’s house for a while? Or just for a walk? It’s very pleasant outside. Maybe you will feel like doing your homework when you get back.”





Outside it was cool—there was the smell of rain in the air. Adil thought he would walk to the mosque and back. In about twenty minutes there would be the routine half-hour power cut—he should be back before that. For some reason he decided to take his notebook and pencil with him. As he walked he thought about his History lesson.

Yesterday was one of Jessy Teacher's best classes. How she had told the story of the battle at Khanua, going from student to student, walking from one end of the class to another, raising her voice sometimes, dropping it at others. The battle between the great Rana Sanga and Babur had taken place right in the classroom! The way she had told that story, each one of them had wanted the old Rajput king to win. There was such excitement in class.

But why had she kept looking at him like that? She always looked at everyone while telling stories, but this was different. Her look would rest on him, wander off, and then come back to rest on him again. The more exciting the story got, the more the look seemed to rest on him. It had seemed to seek him out, from every corner of the room, until he was forced not to look at Jessy Teacher. That had been the end of it for him—the story and the lesson. Babur had won, with a far smaller army than the Rana's, but it was clear who the hero of the story was. But that is not what he remembered from the class—he remembered the look. He could not understand it, but it made him want to stay away from class, even from school.

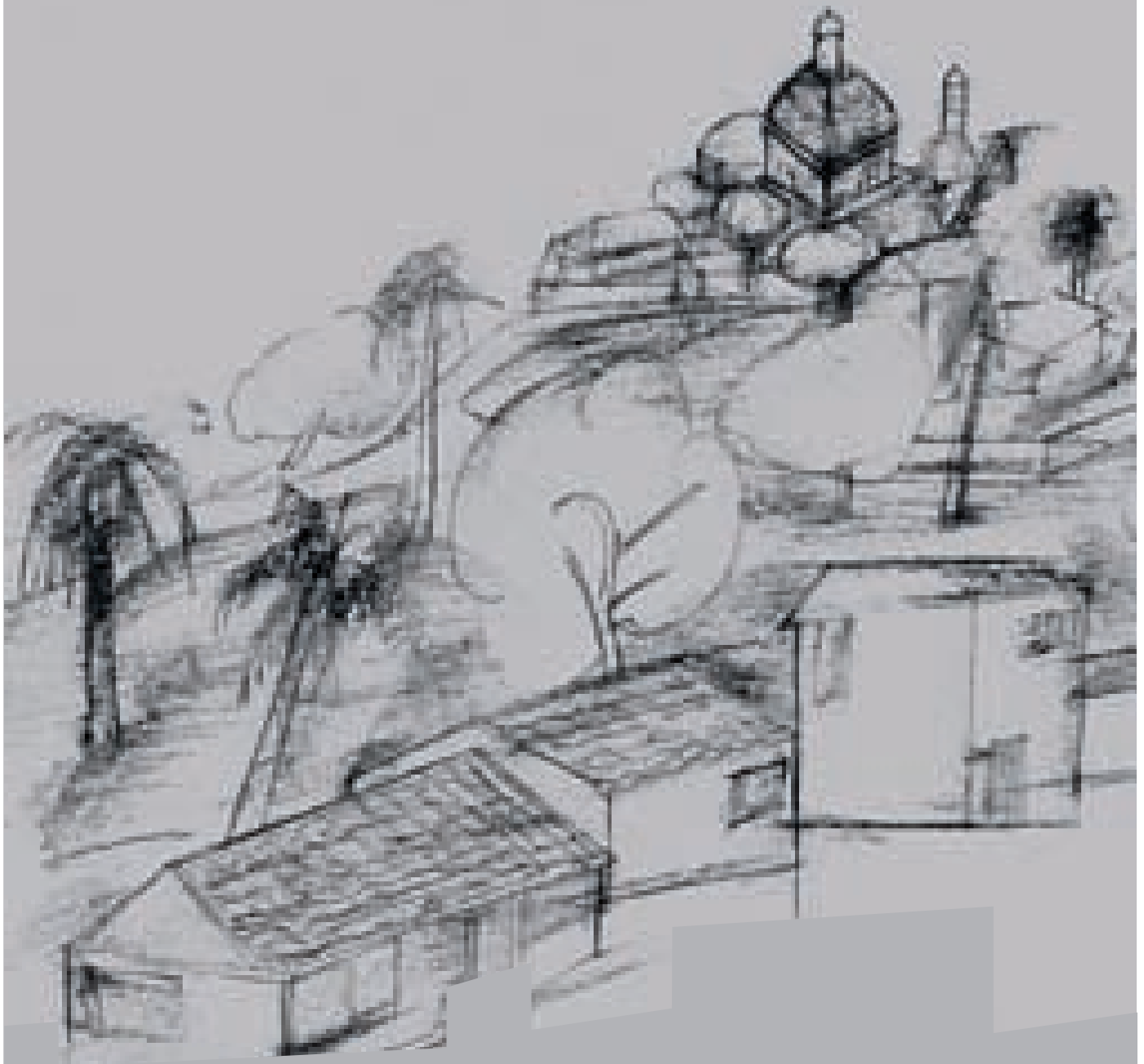
History, he knew, was not like English, but how could he explain this to Uppa? It seemed silly, and no one else had ever had such a problem. Most of his other friends went to the Government school, which was closer, and he didn't meet them so often. He had wanted to go to this one because Aby was his best friend. Besides, he never really had a problem, and he wasn't sure if this even counted as one. Uppa's story had made him feel slightly better—for a king, no, an emperor—to give up his life for his son, he had to be a very . . .

"Ahem . . . can you tell me if the mosque is far from here? I wanted some water to drink and wash with," came a deep voice from so close that Adil started. He gazed at the strange man standing in front of him.

He should have had a horse, Adil thought and then wondered why such an idea had come to him. The stranger looked like he was out of *The Arabian Nights*, or some old film. He wore a long, deep red silk robe like a kurta, a waistband and a beautiful, richly embroidered waistcoat over it. Not very tall, but he looked strong, fair, with a long nose, a small and droopy moustache and a thin beard—he was unlike anyone Adil had ever seen. He had small eyes that made him look like the pictures of Chinese people Adil had seen, but somehow he didn't quite look like them either. It was some time before he could speak, as the stranger looked at him with some amusement.







“No, it’s not very far. In fact, I’m going that way, so I can show you. But who are you, sir? You don’t look like you’re from around here. Are you from, you know, from *foreign*?” Adil asked hesitantly.

“From foreign? I suppose so. I have traveled quite a distance to get here. I’m from Hindustan. Do you know Agra?” the strange man said.



"Of course! That's where the Taj Mahal is!" exclaimed Adil, a bit annoyed by the response. "What do you mean you are from Hindustan? You are still in Hindustan!"

"Really?" said the stranger, looking genuinely surprised. "Well, it's not at all like Delhi and Agra. It's quite lovely. I wish it wouldn't rain so often, though. Where I was born, ah, now that was paradise! Quite the most beautiful place you'll ever see—mountains, all kinds of gardens, fruit, the best weather in the world. A bit cold, mind you, but lovely." He looked down at Adil's puzzled face and stopped. "Anyway, I'll tell you about that later. Watch it, there's a puddle there! Now tell me, what were you thinking about, standing over there? I waited so long for you to notice me; I thought you were in some kind of trance."

"Oh, I don't know, it's not very interesting. Just this History test . . ."

"No, tell me. I quite like history myself. It's very interesting, don't you think? And important too."


"Yes, well, it's all that, but . . ." and then for some reason that he could not really name, Adil poured out all his troubles to this strange person he had met only a few minutes ago.

"I know it's not a very big problem, maybe it's not a problem at all. . . ." Adil trailed off into miserable silence.



"It's not a big problem, certainly. I was eleven when my father died, and I became King. And then the battles began—I wrote all of it down, you know, otherwise people forget. And all the fights and bloodshed to claim what was rightfully mine—the beautiful Samarkand, my city, the city of the great Timur. Now those were problems!"

Adil could feel the tears coming, but was also a bit irritated with this ridiculously dressed man who was going on about his own troubles.



“King! No wonder you’re so full of yourself! I knew you wouldn’t understand anything. Why did I ever bother to tell you? For your information, fighting battles is one thing, but remembering details about them—now you do that and show me!” he challenged the stranger. The tears were really close, and he was going to cry any minute.

“Full of myself?!” said the stranger, a bit taken aback. But before he could say anything else, Adil had burst into tears. “Don’t cry, boy—alright, alright, I’m sorry. Here now, don’t cry,” he said, putting his arm around the child. “It must be very bad, this History, for you to cry so much. I used to cry too—sometimes things were just terrible. This must be the mosque, then?”

Adil nodded, wiping the tears off his face. He felt a little better. They had arrived at the mosque. “Alright, here you are. That’s where you can wash your face. I’ll go home, then.” But he stood there, not wanting to leave yet.

The strange king patted him on the head and said, “What’s the hurry? I have a long way to go, so I won’t stop here for very long. Why don’t you sit for a while? I’ll just come back.” That was all that Adil needed. He sat down on the steps and opened his notebook to the sketch of the Rana he had done earlier.



"Why, if it isn't Rana Sangram Singh of Mewar!" exclaimed the stranger, coming up from behind him.

"You know!" said Adil, delighted that his sketch had been recognized. "You are good with History—Uppa couldn't tell who it was."

"It's a very good drawing—he would have been pleased, I think. What a way to run into old friends, though, and after all this time!" the stranger smiled, as if at a secret joke.


"Old friends?" thought Adil to himself. Maybe he had had trouble with History lessons as well, poor man. And then an idea came to him.

"May I draw a sketch of you? It won't take much time, really," he asked the king.

"Of course. But I don't have anything to give you for it."

"Oh, you don't have to. Just to show my friends, and Uppa, you know," replied Adil, beginning his sketch before the king changed his mind.





“So we were talking about your History test. What’s a test after all? You mustn’t worry so much. Everything is in Allah’s hands, He will take care of it. You must do your best, and have faith. Faith is a very strong thing, a boy like you may not know it, but you’ll learn.”

“I know, Uppa says that sometimes. But . . .” said Adil uncertainly, his hand stopping for a second as he looked up at the king. He smiled at the boy as he resumed his drawing.

“But it’s all there in history! Look at the Battle of Khanua now—an army of twenty thousand defeating a huge force of two lakhs. Who would have thought it possible?”

On Adil’s mind was a question he had wanted to ask all evening. But he had not known who to ask. He thought it was a silly question, but now, as he listened to the king, he felt he could ask him.

“Do you think Babur was braver than Rana Sanga?” he asked in a small voice, as if he knew the answer in advance.

“Braver! I don’t know—they were both brave!” laughed the King. “It doesn’t really matter, you know. On the day of battle, anything can happen—who was braver, more intelligent, all this comes after. Rana Sanga was not a great king for nothing, and Babur was no stranger to battle either! It was a tough and long battle. Everyone had known it would be.”

"Imagine, on the one side, Babur's men—an army of tired, homesick soldiers in a strange land, and on the other, an army ten times larger, of rested, efficient soldiers, under the best general in Hindustan. Oh the men on Babur's side were good soldiers, there was no doubt of it, and they had fought so many battles. But they were so tired, and so far away from home! Strategy, experience, bravery, courage—everything goes into fighting a battle. But who can tell what will happen? Or what will matter eventually? No one. No one but Allah. After you have done everything that is possible, you have to leave it to Him. There is no shame in that—but after you have done everything. You understand?" he looked down at Adil's rapt face and gently ran his hands through the boy's hair.

"You mustn't worry about who was braver. Why must one be braver, more courageous, better than the other? The best battles are those where you cannot answer that question! It's a stupid question, really. One side won, the other lost, and so many things happened after that. Hundreds of years, people, events—history! And still we ask, who was braver? We should ask—why does it matter?" said the king, so forcefully that Adil shrank from him a little.

But he suddenly felt much lighter, as if a load had been lifted off his shoulders. "You're right. Really, why do we worry about it?" he asked, just as he would have asked his Uppa. This man seemed to know so much, he reminded him of his father.

"How can I give you all the answers? Anyway, I have to go now, it's very late. I hope you've finished the drawing," he said, peering into Adil's forgotten notebook. The sketch was finished—Adil was quick at drawing. And what a good sketch it was! The king looked quite pleased.

“Hmm . . . I think you’ve made the eyes too small. And my beard is a bit too long,” he observed, looking at it closely, and then noticing Adil’s expression, hastily added “But it is very good! Really, I like it. Can I write my name under it?” he asked him, a little embarrassed by his own request.

“Yes! That would complete the sketch. Anyway you haven’t told me your name.”

The king took his pencil and wrote his name under the sketch. He could not hold the pencil properly, Adil noticed, and had some trouble writing with it. He examined his ‘work’, obviously not happy with it, but finally shut the notebook and gave it back to the boy.

“There now, that’s done. What is this strange thing you people write with?! It’s impossible to hold! Alright, I shall take your leave now. Do well in your test, then. And who knows, God willing, we’ll meet again some day.”

Suddenly the lights went out, and Adil knew he was late because the power-cut had started. There was a bright moon in the sky, but also some clouds. He would have to hurry back. The king had vanished, though! For a second it had been so dark it had been impossible to see anything, so he must have left then. Slowly Adil walked out of the compound and opened his notebook in the light of the moon. He could see some strange lettering under the sketch—it looked a bit like Arabic, but not quite; not Hindi or Malayalam, that was for sure, and certainly not English. What was it? He should go home and wait for the lights to come back on, so he could read it properly. He hoped his father was not worried. Maybe he would think he was at Aby’s.



Illustration: Kathyayini Dash



His mind still full of the king and everything he had said, Adil got home to find that the lights had indeed come back, and his father was sitting in his armchair, turning the pages of an old book.

“Ah, here you are. I was just going to call Jessy. So, feeling better?”

“Oh yes. And I have something to show you! You will not believe it, I know, but I met a king!” said Adil, starting on his story.

When he had finished, he showed his father the sketch and the name under it. He found he still couldn’t read the words—it was in some strange language. His father also looked puzzled.

“What is it, Uppa? Can you read it?” he asked eagerly. The Musaliyar was still frowning.

“Just a minute, give me the book I was reading.” Opening the *Baburnama*—that is what it was—to the first page, he looked at a painting and then back at his son. “Ah. Here, look at this. Someone you know?”

Adil stared. He didn’t know what to say—he looked at the richly colored painting of the Emperor Babur and then at his pencil-sketch in wonder. The red robe, the small eyes, the beard . . .

“This looks like Arabic, but it isn’t really. These letters are not familiar,” said his father, taking the notebook from him. “Ah, of course. It’s old Turkish, son. It must be!” Father and son looked at each other, and it was difficult to tell who was more excited.

Adil was so happy he could not sleep till late that night. He kept looking at his sketch and thinking about everything that had happened in the evening. He wouldn't tell his friends, he decided. It would be his secret; he would get another History notebook, and keep this one at home. With that he decided he should sleep, because he had to get up early for school. But try as he might, he just could not sleep. Then he remembered something else the Emperor had told him—he should write it all down, maybe. He went to the table next to the window, through which the bright light from a street lamp was streaming in. He opened the treasured notebook to a fresh page, took up the pencil and chewed on one end of it for a while, and then wrote on the top of the page, in big capital letters: MY FRIEND, THE EMPEROR.

Beloved Spirits

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It was Thursday. Mathai Appachan remembered that Thursdays were market days. Today, after sending the women-workers to the field, he would go to the market. This season he would have to buy both the bitter gourd and bean seeds from the market. He had carefully preserved the last season's vegetable seeds, treating them with ash and drying them in the sun, but the rats had eaten them. "Anna can take better care of such things now that the children don't allow her to work in the field anymore," he thought. "In the month of *Chingam* I turned seventy-five. She must be about as old as that too. The twists and turns of life! Earlier, Anna had to work so hard that she never returned from the field before seven in the evening! Anyway, I am glad we decided to educate the children. They have found jobs and that's why we have enough food and proper clothing now." Mathai walked on, turning all these things over in his mind.



He wondered whether the workers had already reached his field. All of them were Anna's friends and their children. When Mathai thought about his land, he felt a strange pull in the pit of his stomach. He had never experienced this kind of anxiety till now. All his life was spent working on watching over nearly fifty acres of land that belonged to different landlords. It was his job to look after the landlords and their children and take care of their lands.

He'd worked hard but had never been able to save anything for himself. "What is the good of such service? One labors day and night, but has nothing but left over grains to feast on!" Anna would say. Their youngest daughter would give a meaningful smile when she heard this. The few grains left behind in the fields or spilt on the sides of the threshing floor was the caretaker's due. He and his family collected this after the main harvest was over. The grains were mixed with sand and mud, and were not always the best.

Whatever it was, Mathai knew one thing for sure: without that work, he and his wife would have had to spend their life slaving for some *Mappila* landlords! Also, caretaking work had some dignity. And they were able to educate their children. It was because he was considered respectable that he could start the Ayyankali Forum in this place. An educated person who came to the Forum had encouraged him to send his children for studies. "That's why our boy can give us money to live with a little extra, for a tot of toddy for me and hymn books for Anna. Imagine! She now wears clothes made of *malmal*." Mathai's thoughts came to a halt as he neared the field.



Last week his field had been ploughed. Since there was no labor for hire, he had jumped in himself. A friend joined him. They ploughed and ploughed for four days, in knee-deep water. How they ploughed! Anna, who was straining the water from the rice in their kitchen some distance away could hear them: *tr-o-tra, tt-tro-ra tr-o!* And the buffaloes pushing forward in excitement . . .

Today his field needs to be prepared. The women would level, weed and make the ground ready for the seed. Mathai's son had bought the land for him two or three years after he got his job. Mathai's big dream was to own some land and grow things of his own choice there. It had not been easy to acquire the field. Even though he was the one paying for it, he had to beg and plead before the landlords allowed him to buy even these one and a half acres.

On the day the land was registered in his name, Mathai had wept the whole night, calling out to his ancestors, thanking them. "My great forefathers, you have blessed me; you have given me the chance to own a corner plot of these precious fields where my sweat has fallen! Year after year, I promise to make you offerings without fail."

The previous day the water had been drained from the fields. Mathai was returning from the burial place at the southern side after lighting oil lamps when Velumban reported that the Agriculture Committee had decided to open the dam and let the water back into the fields in a few days. He realized immediately that he had to have the seedlings transplanted before that. He quickly met the regular workers, discussed and fixed their wages, and made all other necessary arrangements.

But first the seeds that he had saved from last year's harvest had to be filled into sacks and sprouted for sowing. Various offerings were still to be made; toddy and chicken for the ancestors, a half-sack of seed to the Church, and a sacrifice to the community deity. When that was done, one could start sowing. Mathai was trembling when he soaked the seeds that night. Lightening bolts criss-crossed his body.

In a flash, he saw his father, mother and younger uncle. Also, his younger aunt who had lived across the fields. Was it Rahel or Ponnama who held on to her hand? Can't say. How could he, they had both drowned when they were ten and twelve. He was only three years old then. Their green and blue petticoats still floated up Mathai's mind.

Their land was truly blessed! Within three days, the seeds had sprouted. That night ancestral spirits stood by, whispering around their bed. Anna cursed someone in her sleep. With both their hands Mathai and Suku scattered the seed sprouts in the field that had been prepared by the women. In one corner of the field, the shoots gleamed in the shapes of the temple lamp, crescent moon and cross. He was determined to finish all the work before anyone else.

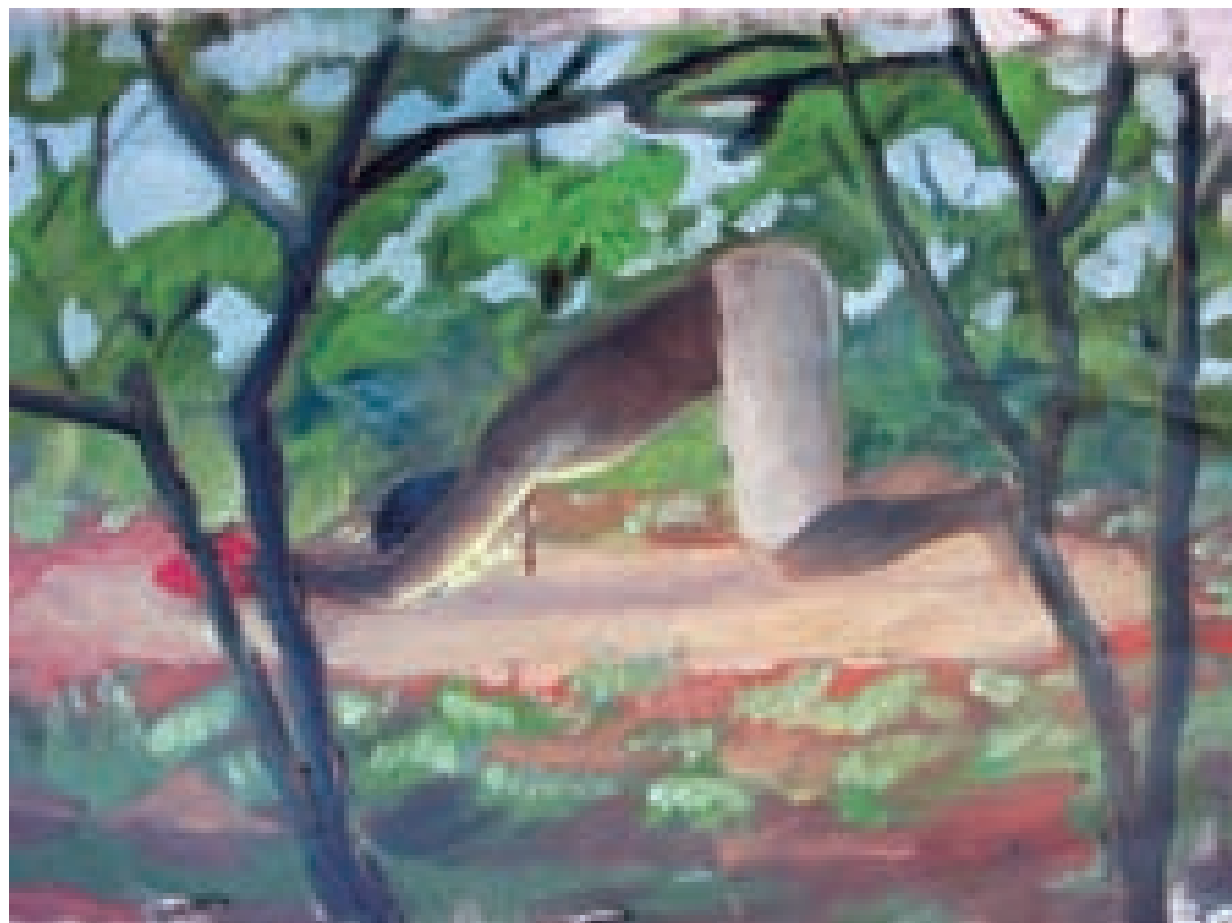
But the landlords around were already angry with him. Busy with his own field, he had given up guarding their fields, hadn't he? They threatened the women: "No work from us for anyone who touches that Pulaya's field." After such a warning, which of the women would dare turn up for work in his field? And that too when the field was so tiny. However, Mathai did not give in. "Let's see what happens," he thought.



Pigeons hovered about the field trying to feed off the growing seedlings. Mathai and his grandchildren sat there the whole day, chasing them off. When the birds came, they would strike the ground hard with coconut fronds: *ttappo! ttappo!* And the pigeons would fly away.

The sprouts have become seedlings now and are ready for transplanting. Anna is weak with fever. The anger of the landlords is increasing day by day. They harass Mathai for no reason. They make it difficult for him by pumping out all the water into their own land and blocking canals that bring water to Mathai's field.

In the end, Mathai was in such despair he thought even his friends had gone over to their side. He bent down, picked up a fistful of earth from his field and held it close against his chest: "Mother, don't forsake me. I have never wronged you. It is my blood that flows here. Hold me close and safeguard me at a time like this."



The paddy shoots in the other fields had been transplanted. Only in Mathai's field the saplings stood knee-high, overgrown. He could not get anyone to help him transplant them. The landlords had forbidden everyone to work for him. Who could he turn to? Mathai looked south towards the burial place and beat at his chest with his hands. The souls of his ancestors wandered in distress. "Dear God, remember it's my boy's money and my own field!" Mathai whispered, growing weak with anxiety. It was already late for transplantation. Who was there to help him? Even his son hadn't been able to visit for a while.

"Anna, get up Anna. Let's replant the saplings ourselves. Otherwise they will let water into our field and the seedlings will rot. My money, my dream, my soil! Father! Mother! Be the strength of my family. Flame of the burial place, stand by me," Mathai cried out, turning southwards.

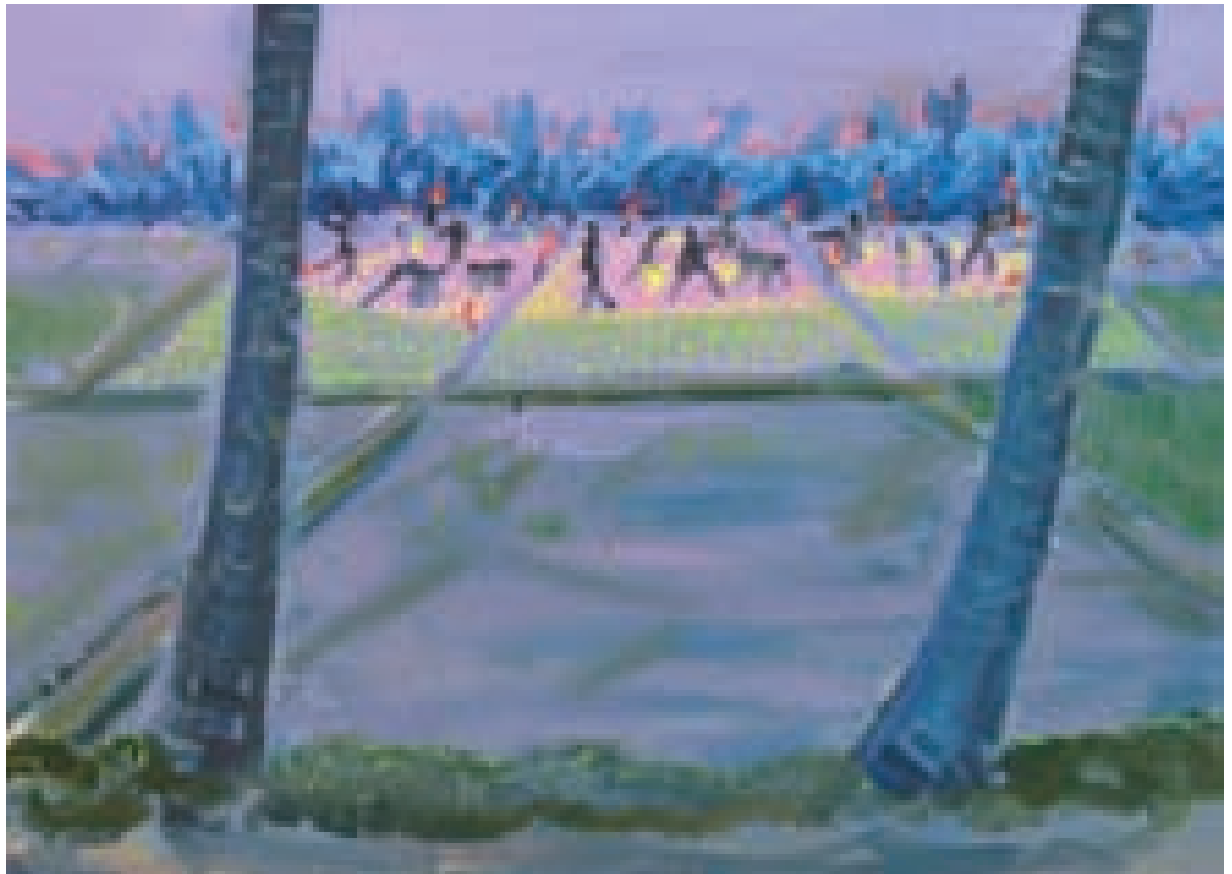
A fevered Anna dragged herself to the kitchen yard, held up a rooster, turned west toward the Arthungal Church and said, "I will make an offering of this at the Church this year! Please don't torment my man!"

Early next day, Anna went to work in the field for the first time in the last few years. Mathai firmed up the ridges of the paddy field. The little boy helped Anna. But even by late night, they could not finish the work. Anna collapsed in the field. "Anna! Pull yourself up Anna! We must finish the work." Mathai was torn apart with despair. A wasted crop, a withered dream . . .

Tomorrow they would open the water duct. The saplings would be destroyed. He paced up and down the courtyard, rubbing his chest. Anna said 'Hail Marys' inside and promised offerings of fluffed rice, flowers and jaggery to Muthan.

Mathai felt very angry. "This field was bought with my boy's hard-earned money. Even otherwise, this is my field. Others may have owned it earlier, but it was I who cultivated it with years of my hard labor. Oh ancestors, did you not all work and die at this very same place? Could you be testing me? If so, I won't make you any offerings from now on."

The oil-lamp at the burial ground hadn't yet died down.



Mathai couldn't sleep that night. Why not go and take one more look at the field, he thought. By tomorrow everything would be ruined. He set off towards his field without saying a word even to Anna. A mottled wood owl hooted thrice. Above his head a flock of birds circled. It would be daybreak soon. "What was that sound?" he wondered "A hushed murmur . . . like many people talking with each other." He quickened his pace, walking along the boundary ridges toward his field. He peered into the dark. The commotion was actually in his field. "Oh God! My field! Full, with enough people for a festival! And look! Most of them are women! Only one or two are men, and they are repairing the boundaries. God! Some of the women are in the ninth month, their bellies so large that they touch the earth as they bend over, transplanting the seedlings. What are these women doing in my field?"

"There are some children too . . . Whose children could they be? And some are very old women. They are all at work, transplanting the seedlings, row after row! As each row is done, exhausted they drag themselves painfully away . . . Oh my God! It is to the burial ground that they are going."

Mathai looked on: the last of them—women staggering, children frolicking, men coughing and spitting—walked away and disappeared into the burial ground. The transplanting was complete. Trembling all over, Mathai wheeled around and ran back home.

Calling out for Anna, he collapsed.

Anveshi

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DIFFERENT TALES

Different Tales unearths stories from regional languages: stories that talk about the life - worlds of children in communities that one rarely reads about in children's books. Many of the stories draw on the writers' own childhoods to depict different ways of growing up in an often hostile world, finding new relationships with peers, parents and other adults. They take us on enticing journeys as they speak of delicious cuisines, ingenious little games, unexpected lessons at school and heartwarming friendships.