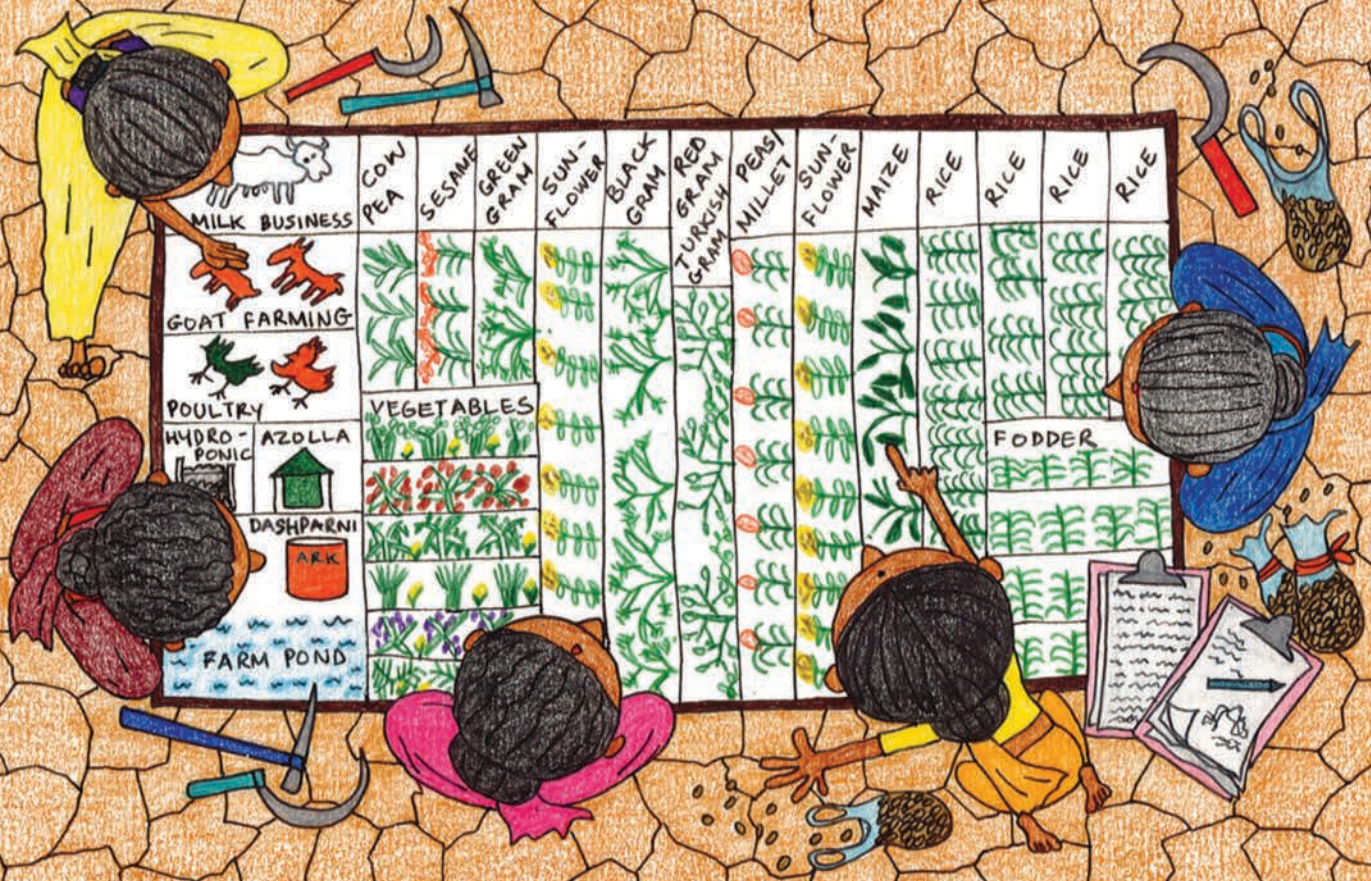


RAINDROP IN THE DROUGHT: GODAVARI DANCE



TEXT: REETIKA REVATHY SUBRAMANIAN
ILLUSTRATIONS: MAITRI DORE

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Proofreader: Gary Crabb

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The *Raindrop in the Drought: Godavari Dange* comic of Reetika Revathy Subramanian and Maitri Dore was developed as part of Movements and Moments – Feminist Generations, an initiative of Goethe-Institut. The project aims to make visible Indigenous feminist activism and protagonists from the Global South by relating their life stories in the highly accessible format of comics.



We would like to extend our gratitude to Godavari Dange for trusting us with her story and sharing her journey with us. Special thanks to Godavari *tai's* family, friends, and colleagues at Swayam Shikshan Prayog, Osmanabad for their time, patience, and unstinting hospitality.

Telling a story through comics is never easy, but conversations with Nacha Vollenweider and the Goethe-Institut Indonesien team helped us bring Godavari *tai's* journey to life, one panel at a time.

This book is dedicated to all the women farmers of Marathwada.

GLOSSARY

Aai: Mother

Aaku: Godavari Dange's name at home

Baba: Father

Bachat-gat: Small-savings group/ Self-help group

Bhakri: Flat round bread made of millets popular among rural communities in western India

Dada: Elder brother

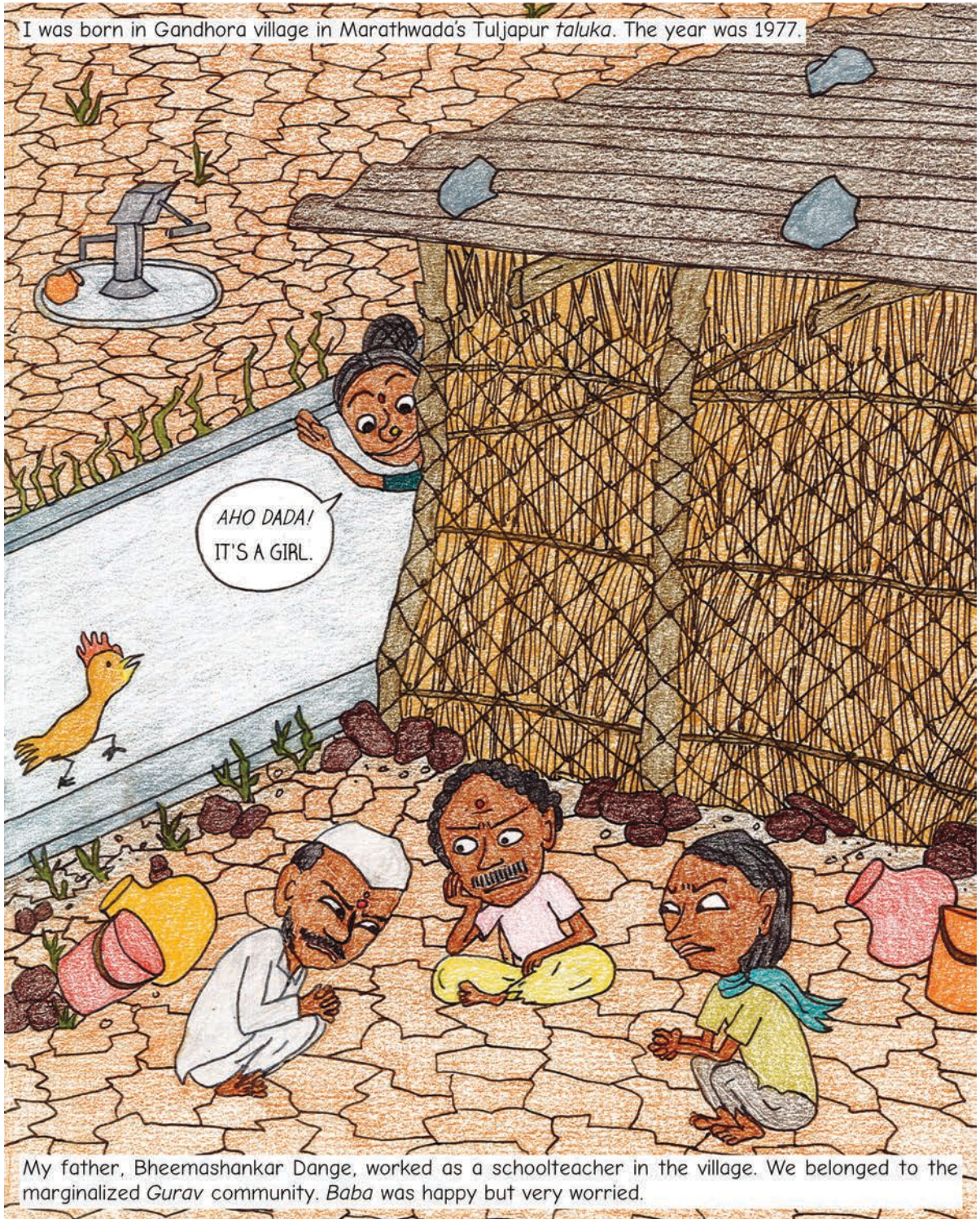
Guntha: Land parcel measuring approximately 1,000 square feet

Tai: Elder sister

Taluka: Sub-district

CHAPTER 1: THE BEGINNING

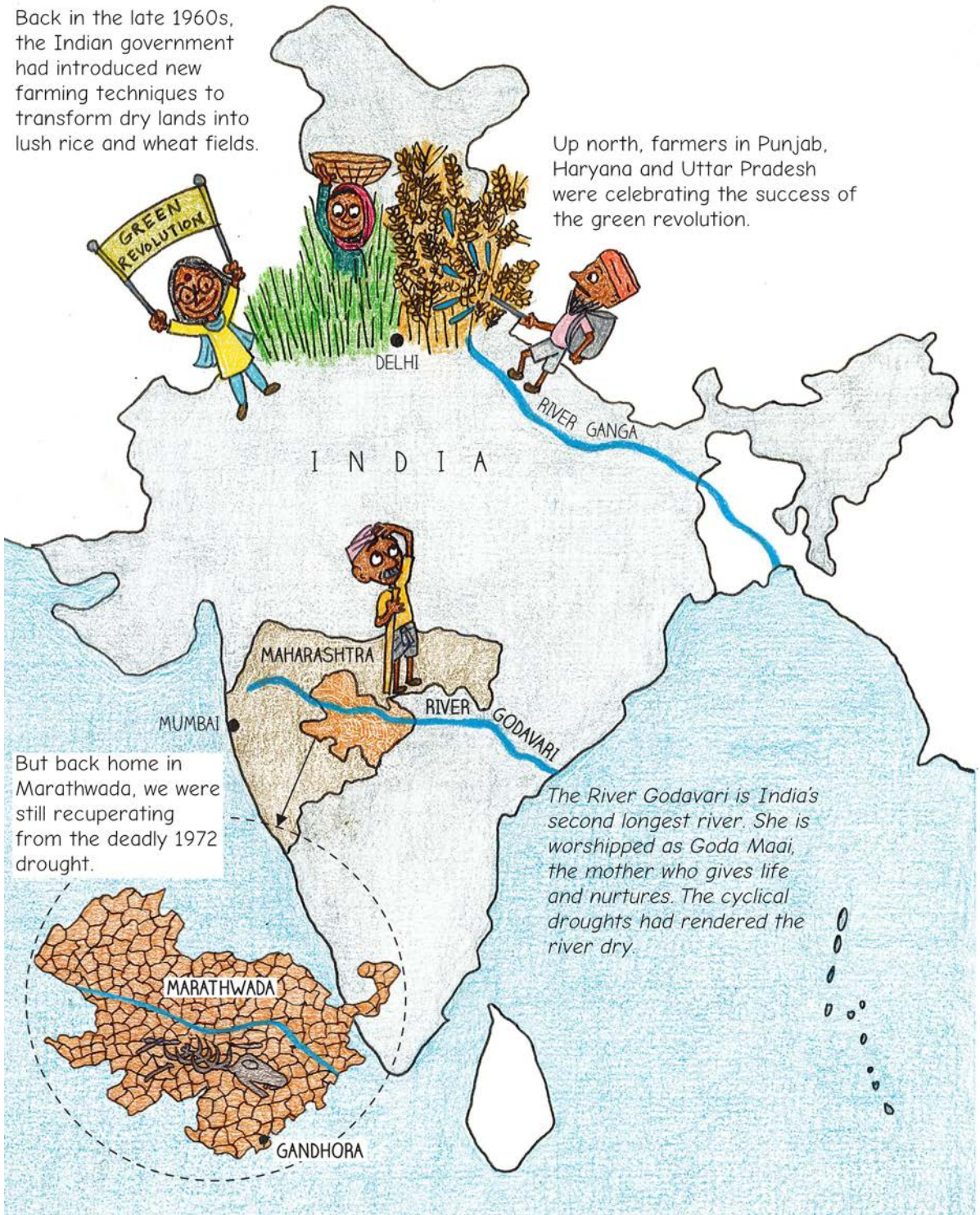
I was born in Gandhora village in Marathwada's Tuljapur taluka. The year was 1977.



My father, Bheemashankar Dange, worked as a schoolteacher in the village. We belonged to the marginalized Gurav community. Baba was happy but very worried.

Back in the late 1960s, the Indian government had introduced new farming techniques to transform dry lands into lush rice and wheat fields.

Up north, farmers in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh were celebrating the success of the green revolution.



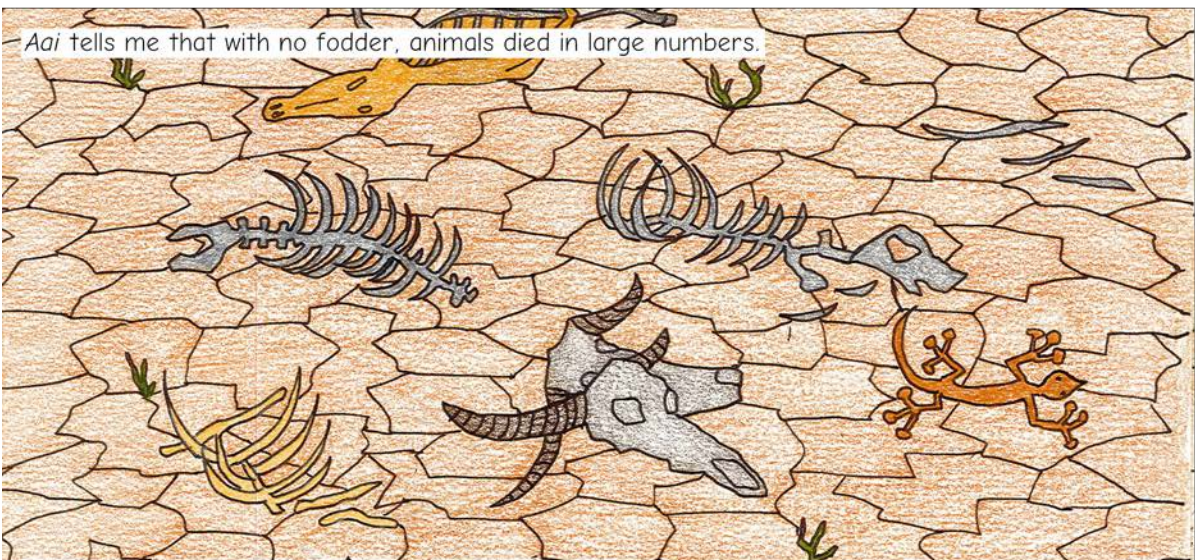
But back home in Marathwada, we were still recuperating from the deadly 1972 drought.

The River Godavari is India's second longest river. She is worshipped as Goda Mai, the mother who gives life and nurtures. The cyclical droughts had rendered the river dry.

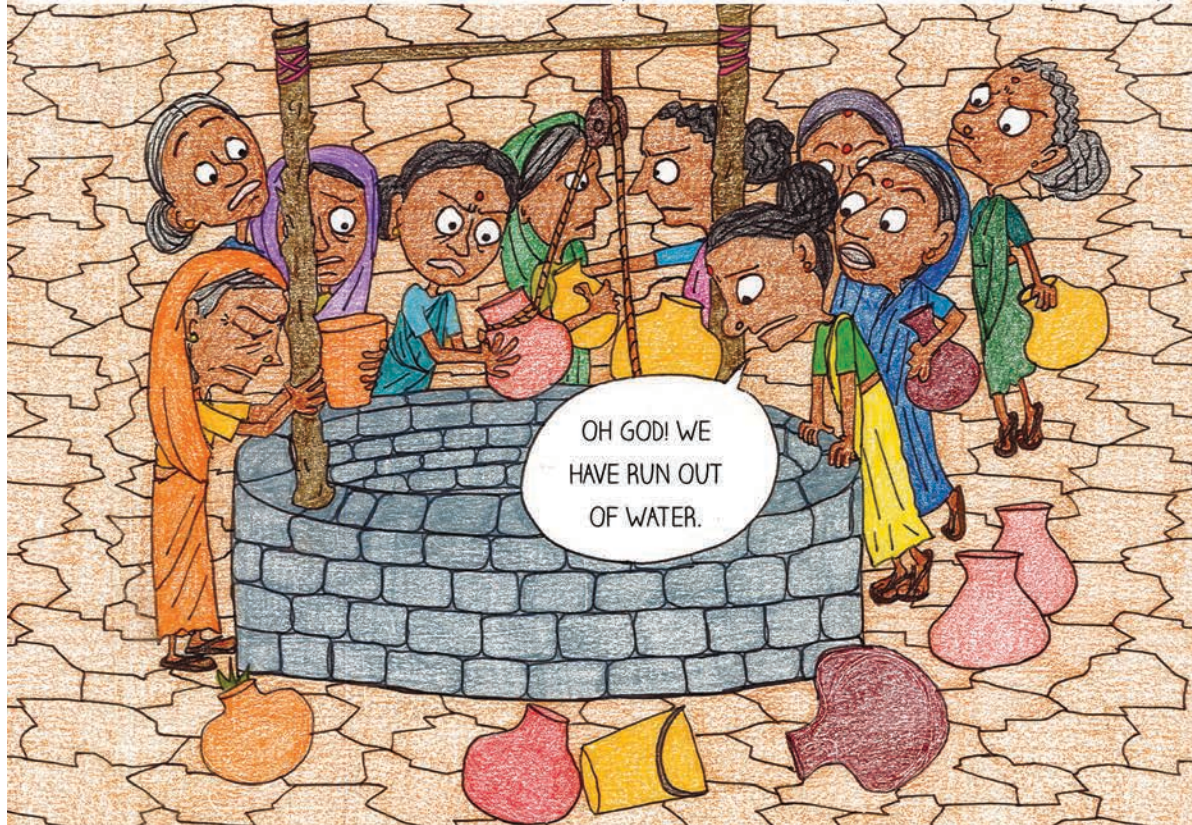
It was the worst drought that the people of Marathwada had experienced in nearly half a century.



Aai tells me that with no fodder, animals died in large numbers.



Several families went without food and water for days on end. Women quarreled for every last drop.

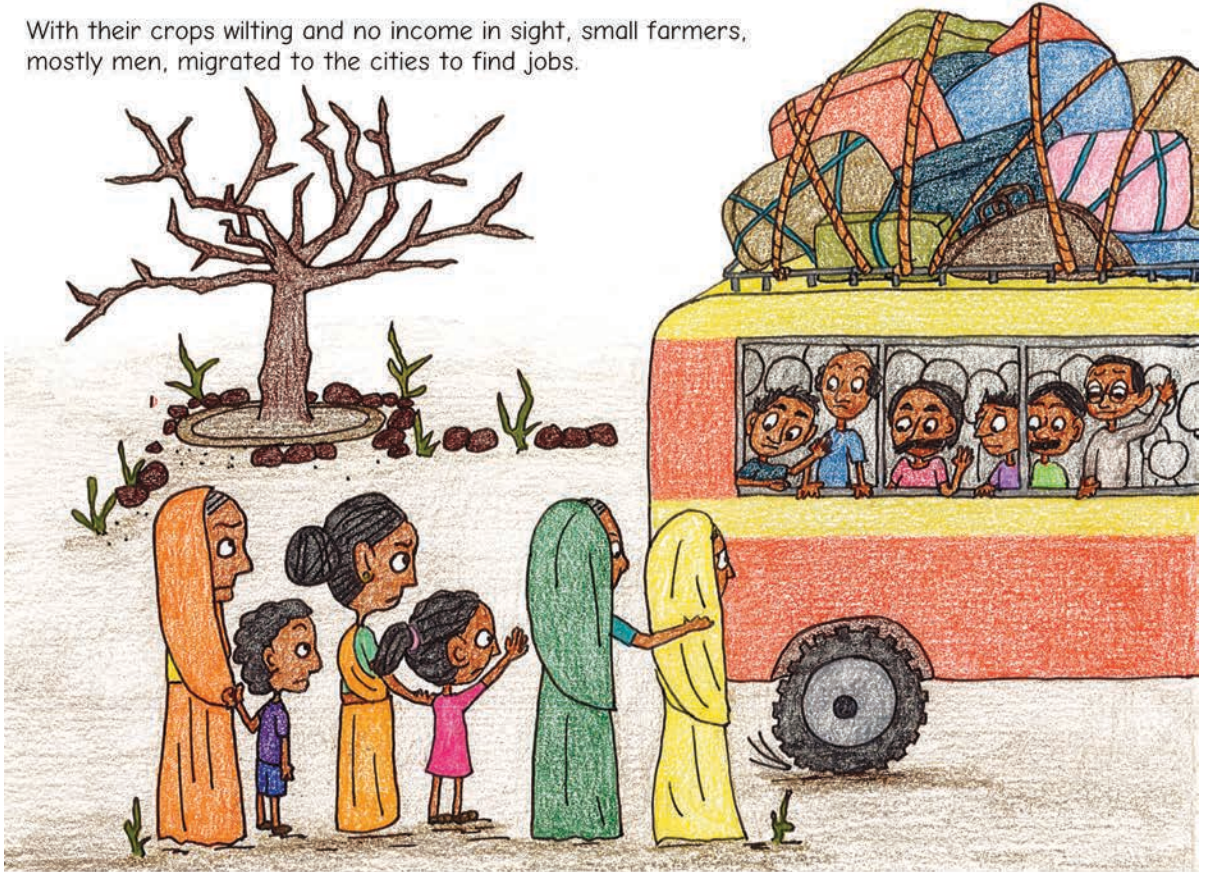


TULJAPUR GIRLS SCHOOL



Girls were forced to drop out of school and support their families.

With their crops wilting and no income in sight, small farmers, mostly men, migrated to the cities to find jobs.

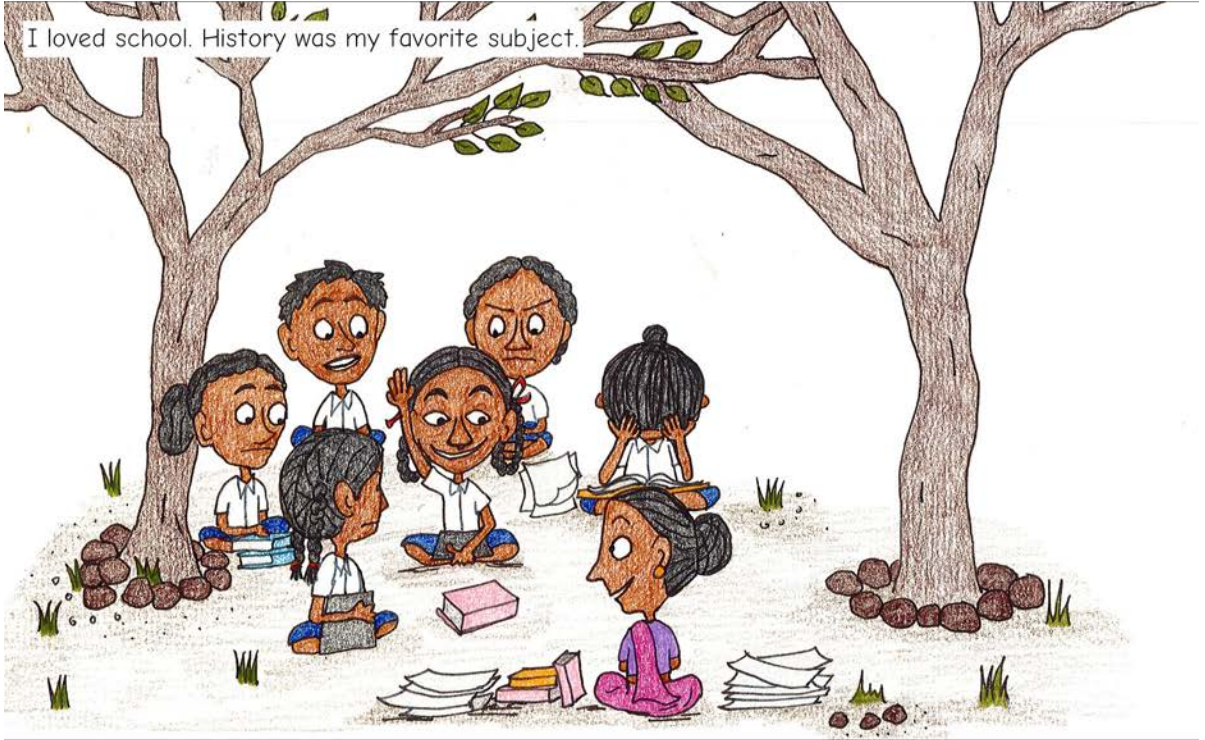


When I was born, even we had no land of our own. But my father stayed back in Gandhara and tried to rejuvenate the dying river.

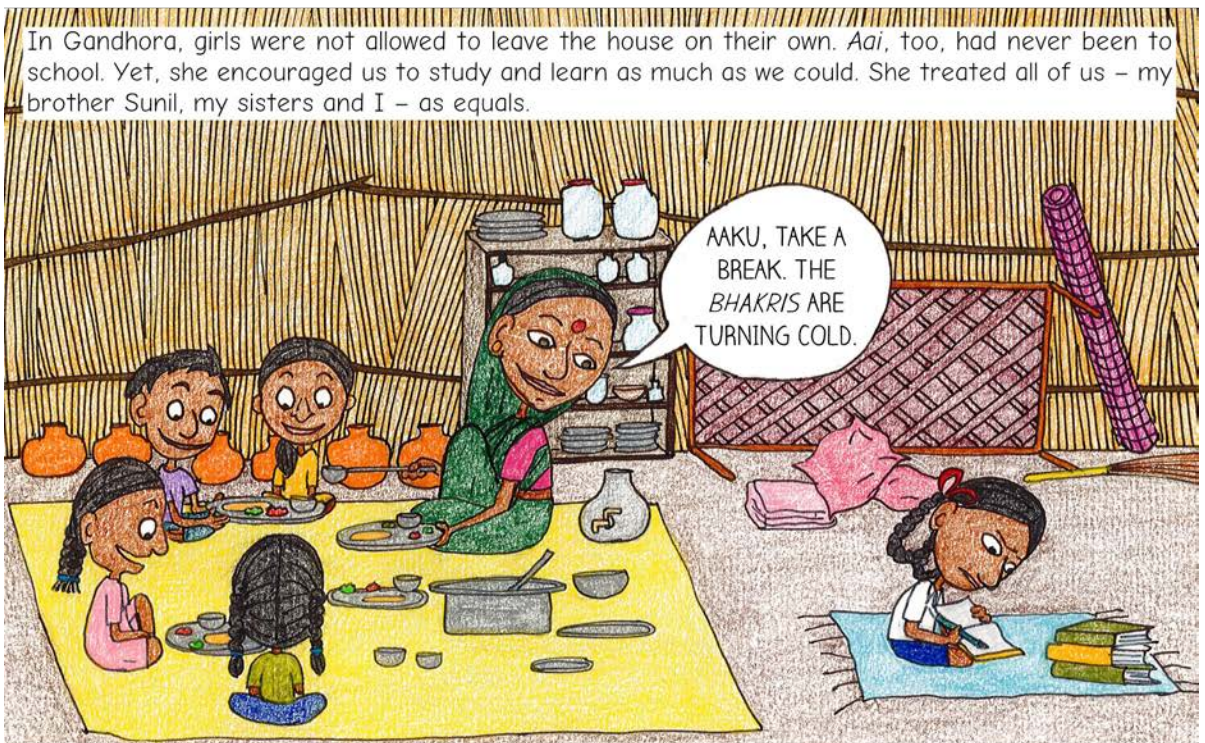


CHAPTER 2: THE EARLY DAYS

I loved school. History was my favorite subject.



In Gandhora, girls were not allowed to leave the house on their own. Aai, too, had never been to school. Yet, she encouraged us to study and learn as much as we could. She treated all of us – my brother Sunil, my sisters and I – as equals.



After school, Archana and I would explore Gandhora together. She was my best friend.

COME!
LET'S
CLIMB TO
THE VERY
TOP.

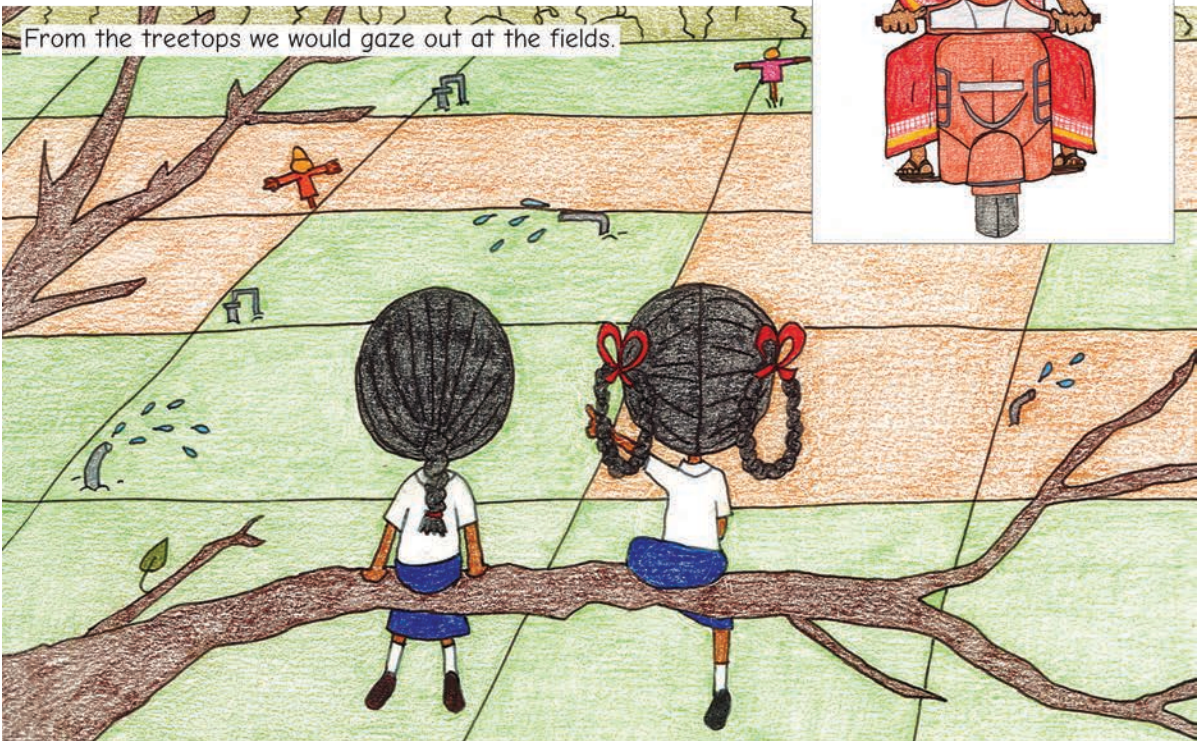
She needed some convincing at times...

... but eventually gave in to my adventurous spirit. We made a good team.

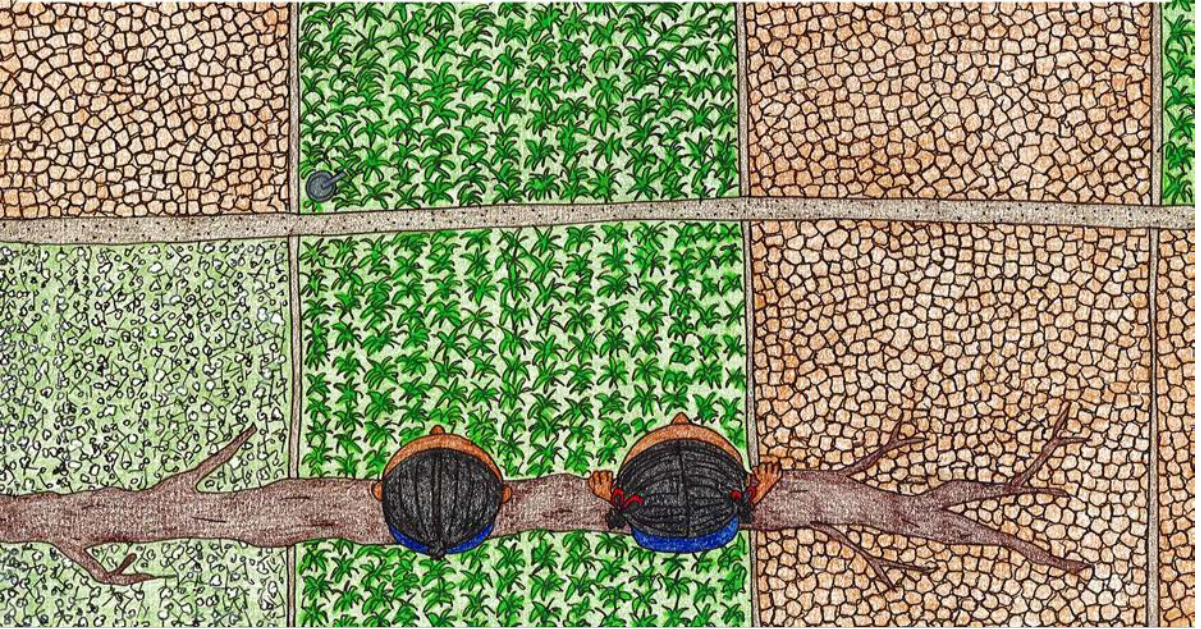
ALMOST
THERE!

Today she is Tuljapur's first woman postmaster.

From the treetops we would gaze out at the fields.

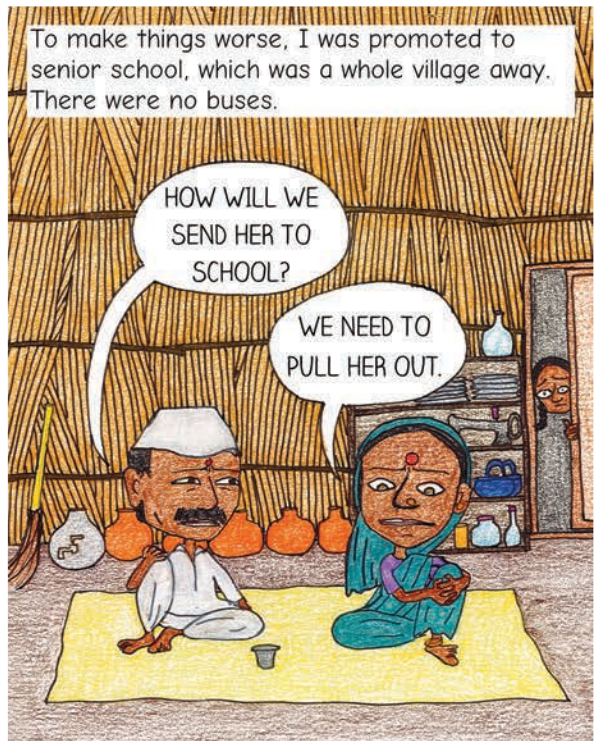
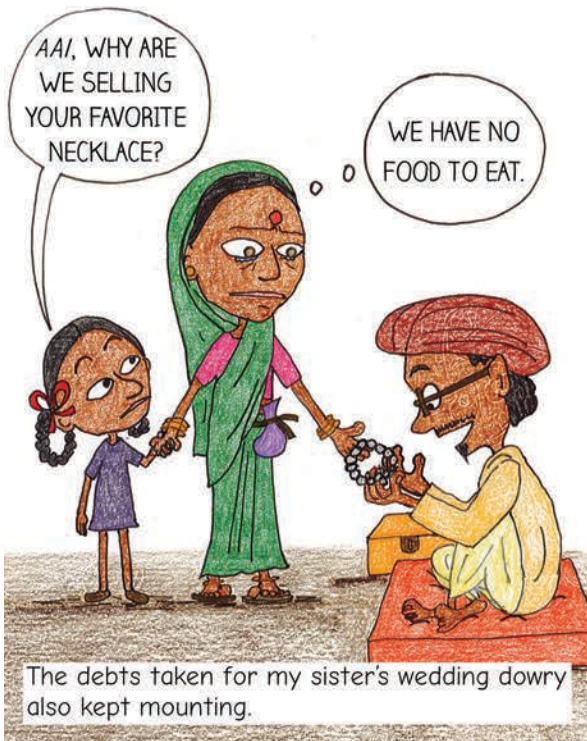
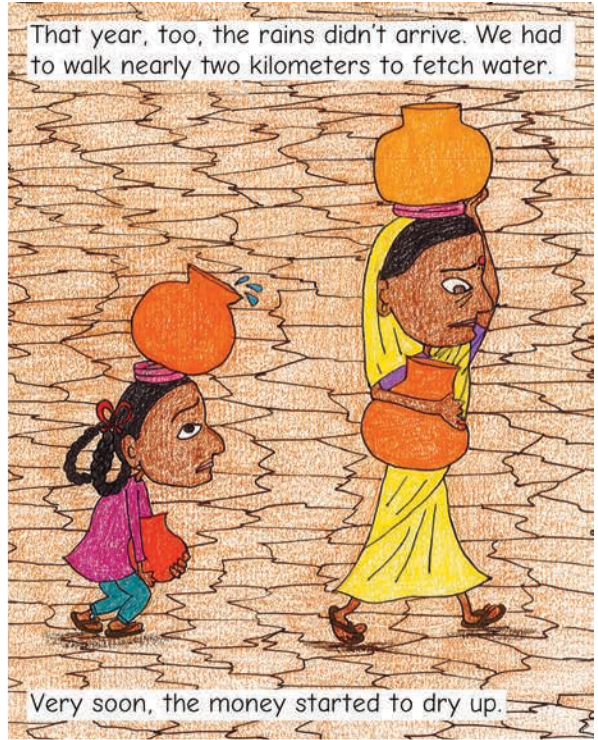


It wasn't hard to tell which fields belonged to the 'upper' caste families based on the green cover below. In the drought-prone parts of Marathwada, the rich farmers grew lots of sugarcane, one of the greatest water guzzlers imaginable.



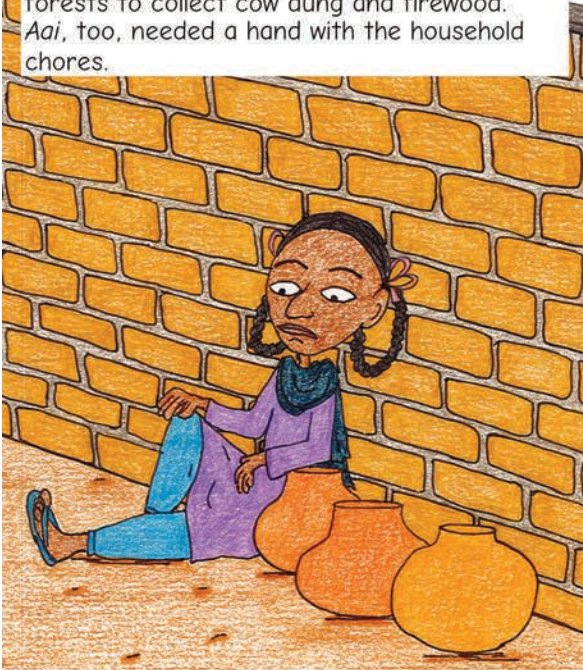
Meanwhile, the poor farmers, often from marginalized caste groups, owned very small pieces of arid land. They suffered from repeated cycles of failed monsoons, failed crops, bad debts, and desperation. They spent all their savings to sink new borewells.



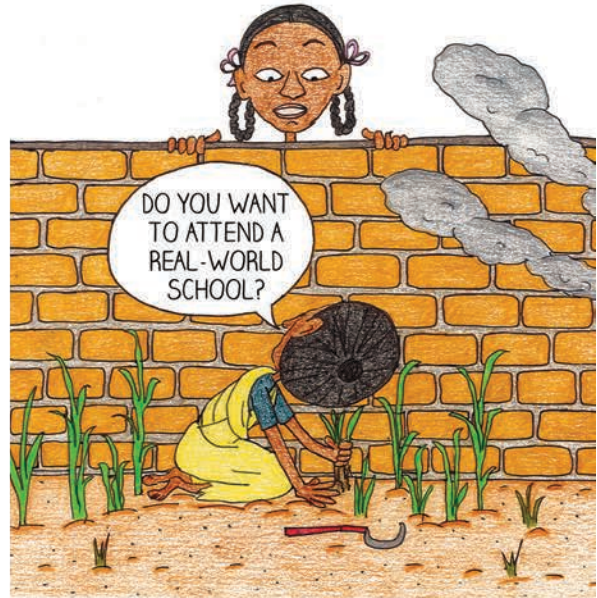


CHAPTER 3: BACK TO SCHOOL

Life out of school was very different. Every day I accompanied my sisters uphill to the forests to collect cow dung and firewood. *Aai*, too, needed a hand with the household chores.



I really wanted to keep learning and return to school, but I did not have any free time.



Anita Kulkarni lived next door. She belonged to the dominant *Brahmin* caste. Women of her community were not allowed to go out of the house for work. But she was different. She was a strong and independent woman. She drove a tractor, ploughed the fields, and did all the work on the farm.





Kulkarni *tai* practiced organic farming. While most big farmers in the village grew only cash crops like sugarcane and soyabean which they sold for profit, she taught me to grow lentils, millets, and leafy greens. She never used harmful pesticides and chemical fertilizers.



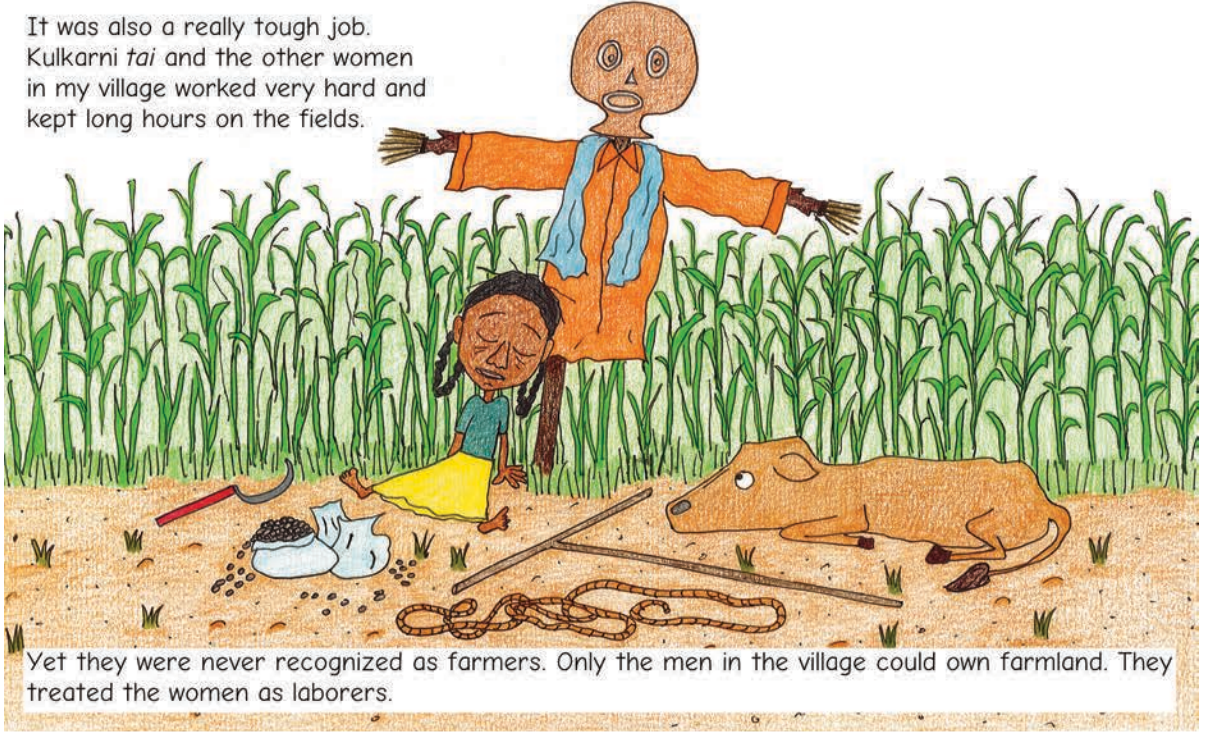
I spent hours with her on her farm learning every little technique of sowing, ploughing, and harvesting.



She paid me five rupees a day, and I learned how to grow food from scratch. It was so much fun!

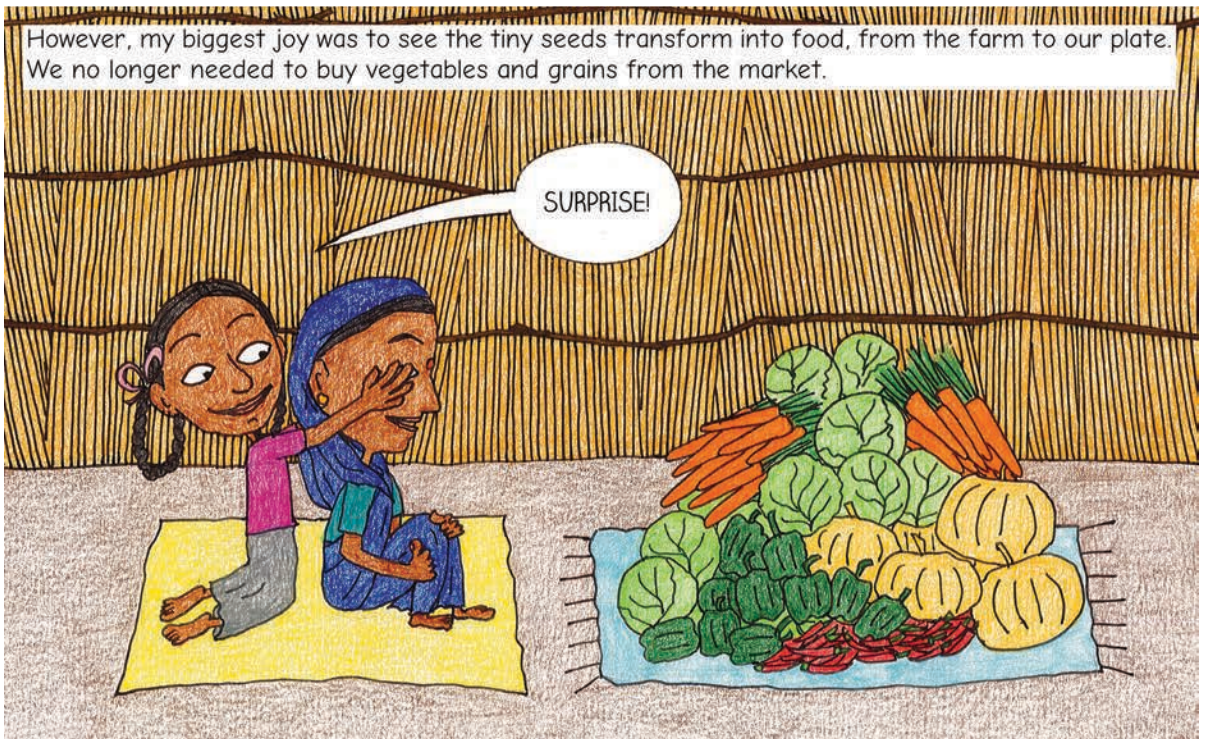


It was also a really tough job. Kulkarni *tai* and the other women in my village worked very hard and kept long hours on the fields.



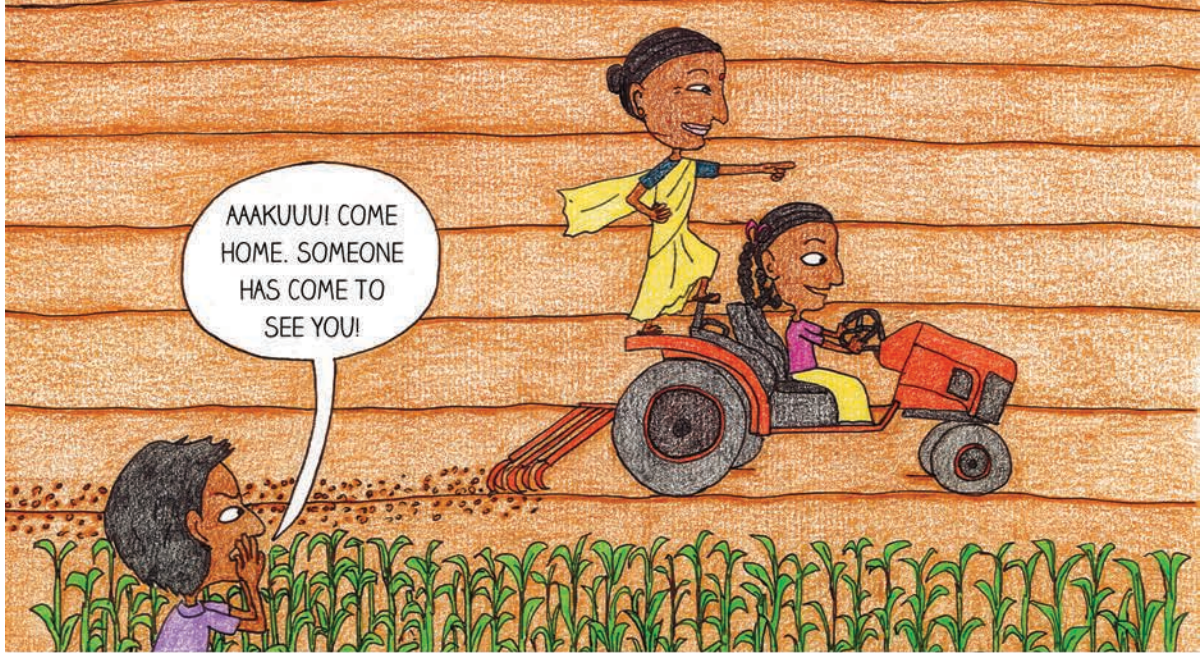
Yet they were never recognized as farmers. Only the men in the village could own farmland. They treated the women as laborers.

However, my biggest joy was to see the tiny seeds transform into food, from the farm to our plate. We no longer needed to buy vegetables and grains from the market.

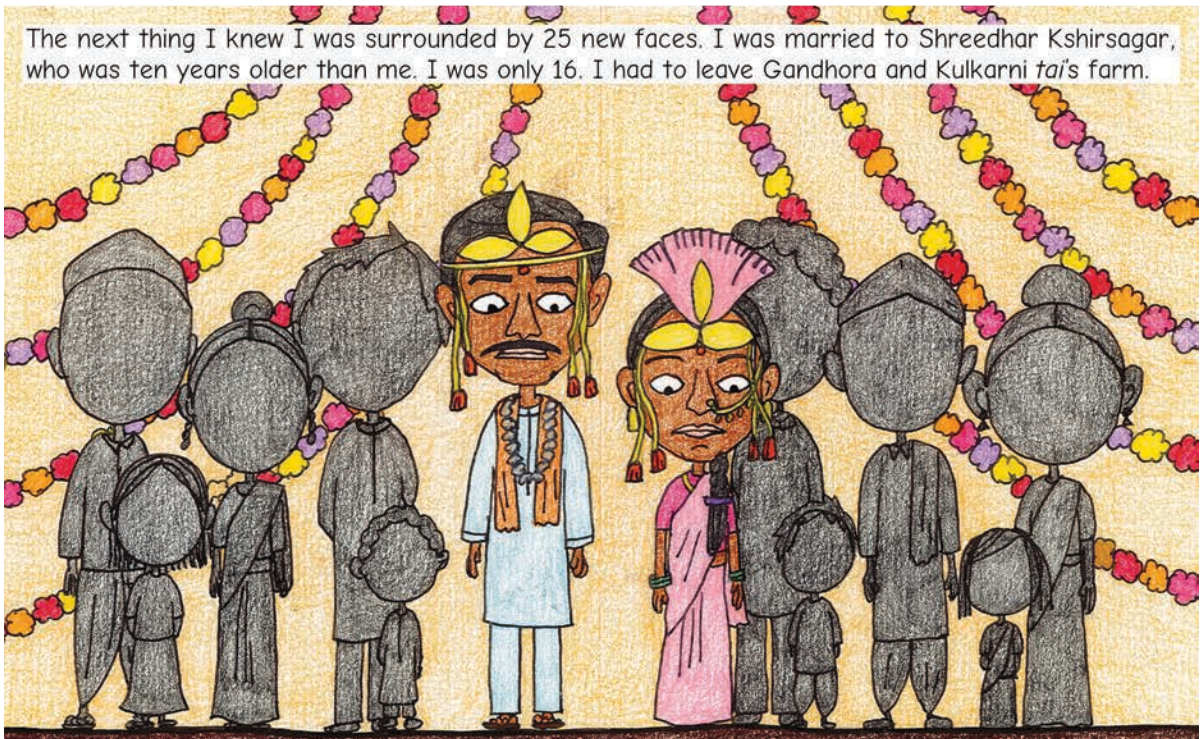


CHAPTER 4: A FAMILY OF MY OWN

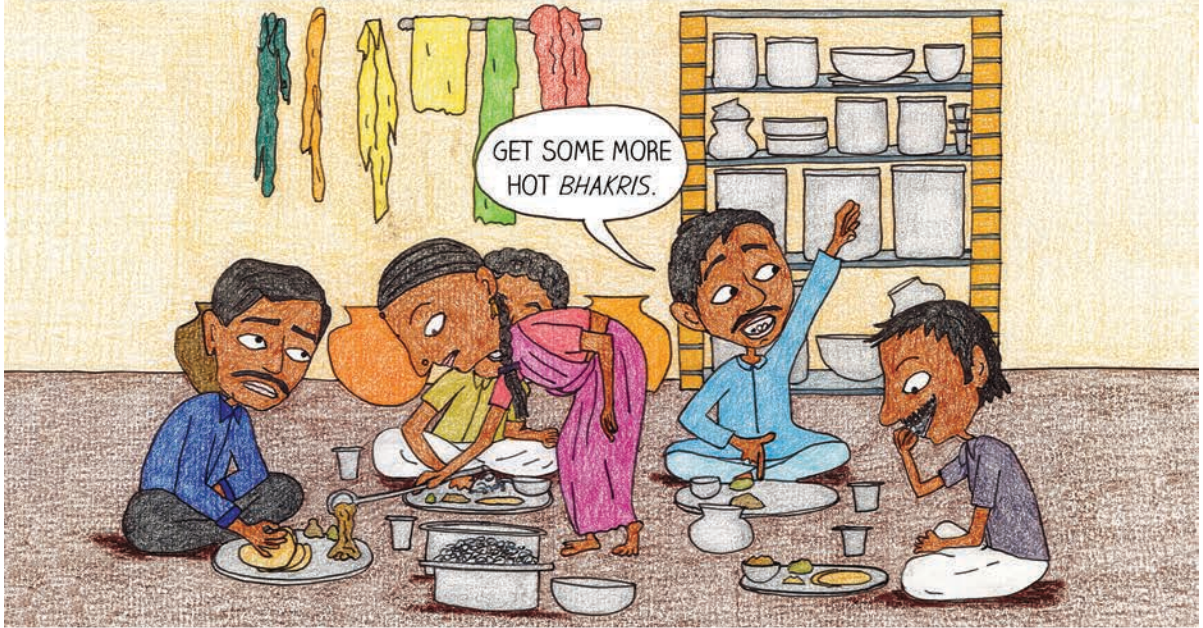
I spent the next three years working closely with Kulkarni *tai*. Until one day, in 1994, Sunil summoned me abruptly from the fields.



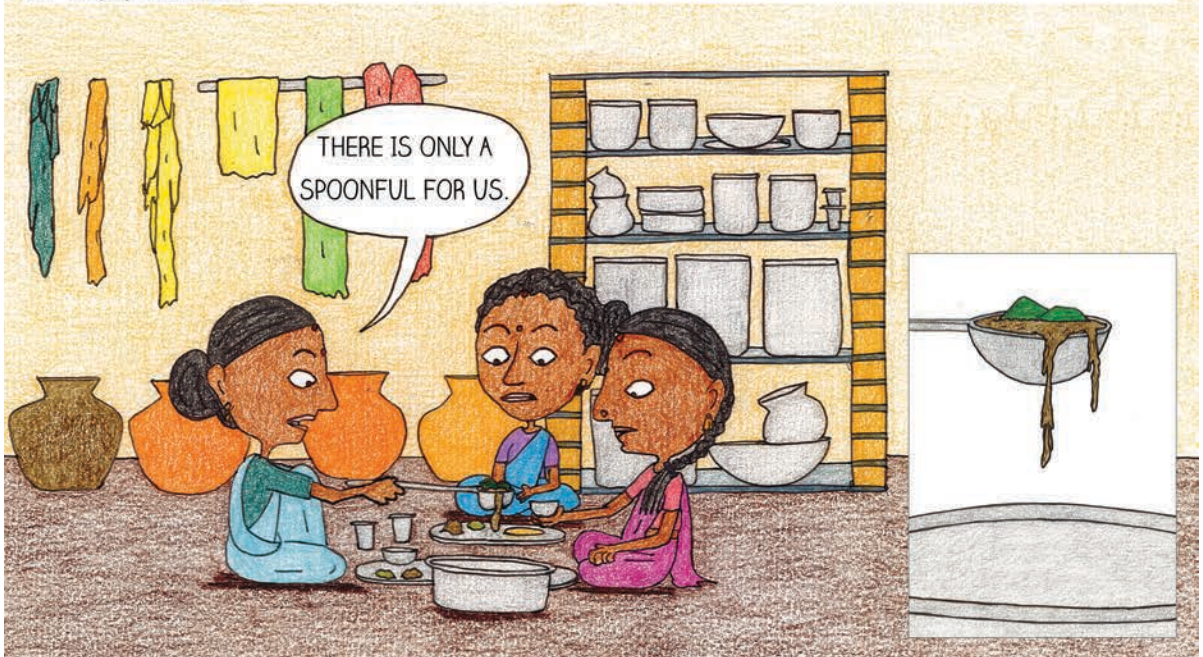
The next thing I knew I was surrounded by 25 new faces. I was married to Shreedhar Kshirsagar, who was ten years older than me. I was only 16. I had to leave Gandhora and Kulkarni *tai*'s farm.



Life in my new house was very different. My husband lived in a large joint family. My days began early and ended late. Back in Gandhora, *Aai* would make sure that we ate all our meals together. But here, the men and boys always ate first.



And the women had to make do with whatever was left behind. Often this meant having to sleep on an empty stomach.



But my husband was kind and loving.

In our four years together, we built a little world of our own. We had two sons, Shubham and Sushant.



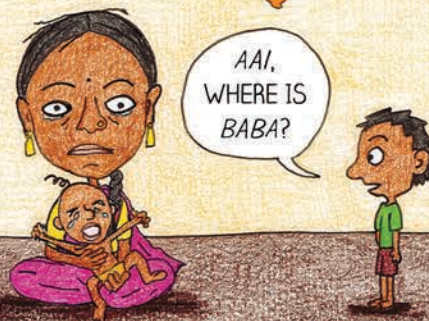
HERE, EAT THIS
EXTRA PIECE
OF BHAKRI.



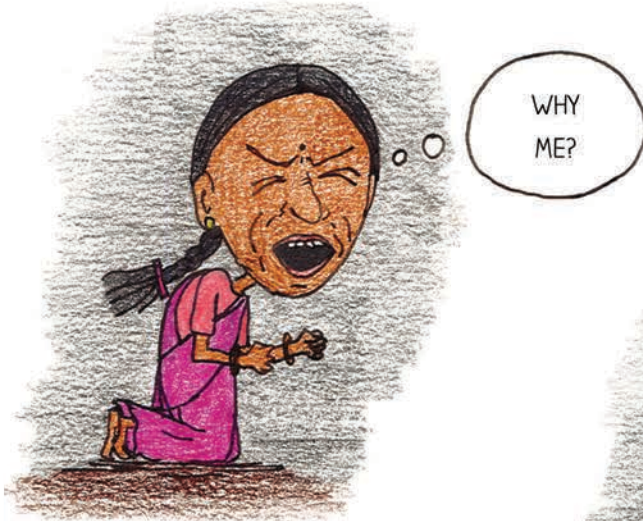
But very soon, my life came to a screeching halt. In 1998, Shreedhar died in a road accident.



AAI,
WHERE IS
BABA?



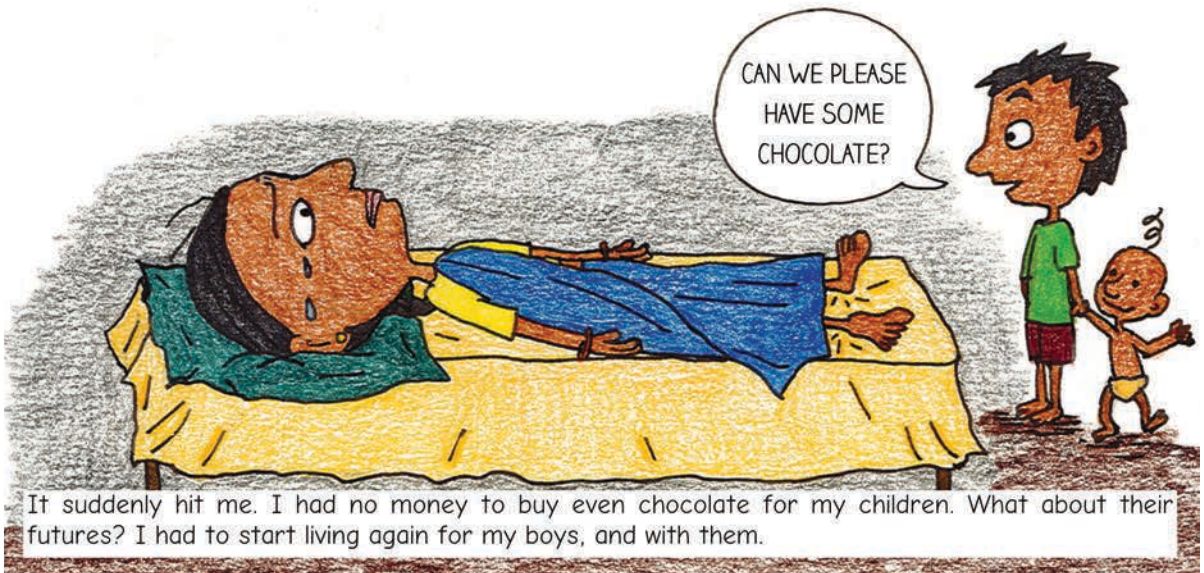
CHAPTER 5: BEGINNING AGAIN



I moved back to my mother's house in Gandhora.

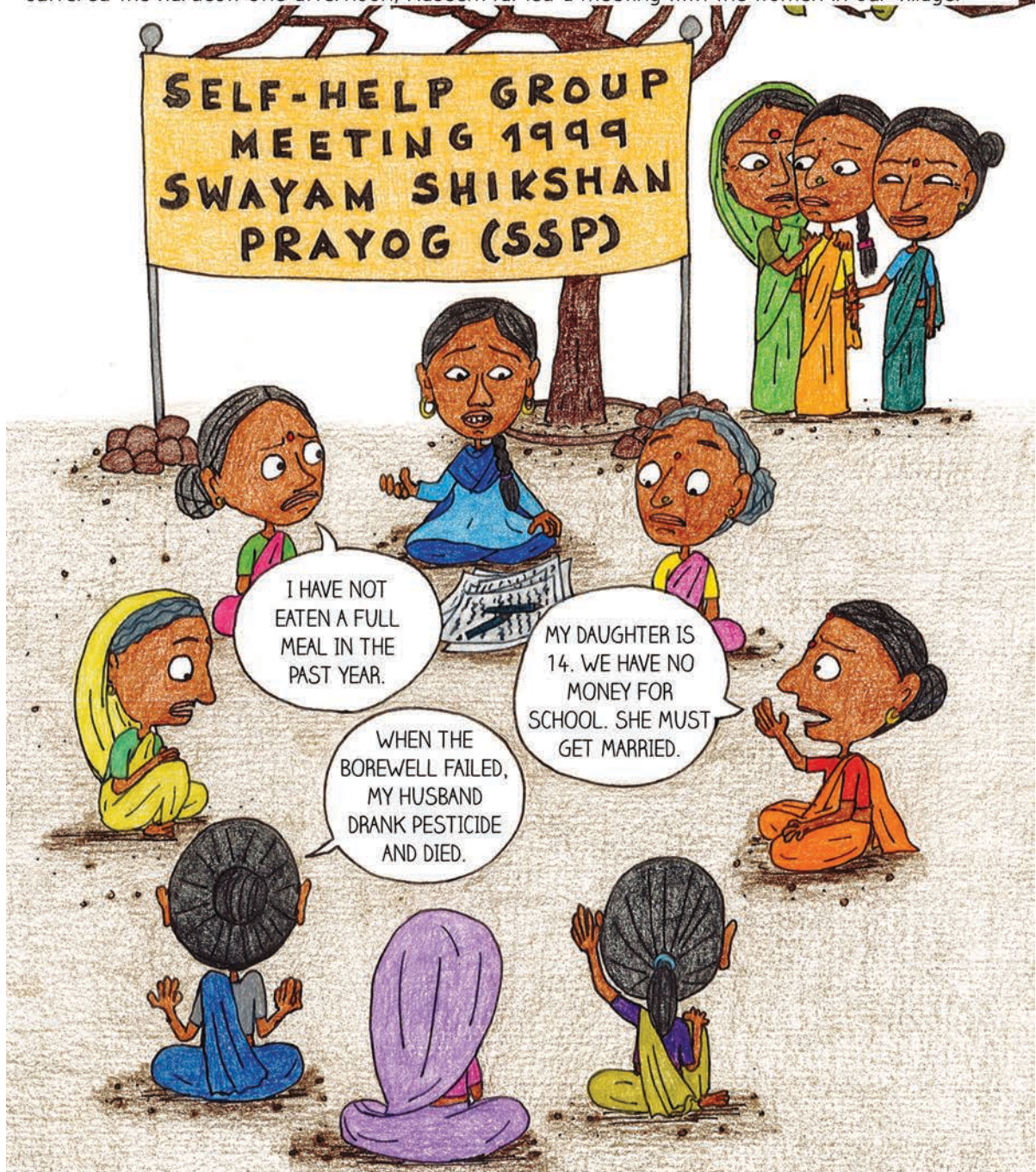


The next year went past like a blur. I was 21, a mother, and a young widow.



It suddenly hit me. I had no money to buy even chocolate for my children. What about their futures? I had to start living again for my boys, and with them.

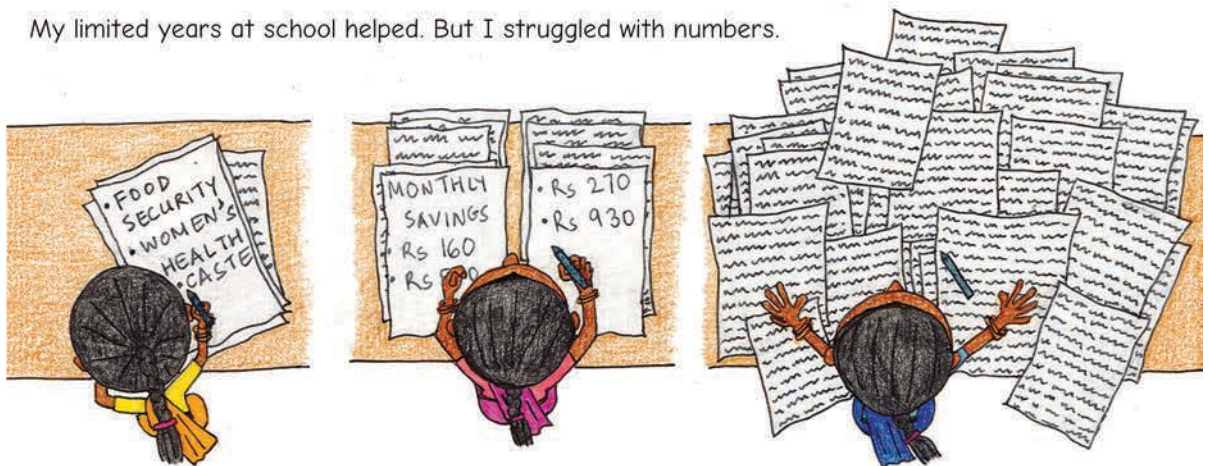
Aai was a member of the *bachat-gat*, a small-savings group for women in Gandhora. The group was created in the aftermath of the 1993 earthquake that killed nearly 10,000 people across Marathwada. Many more lost their homes and livelihoods. Coupled with the drought, the women suffered the hardest. One afternoon, Naseem *tai* led a meeting with the women in our village.



As I listened to the women speak, one thing became clear: I was not alone.



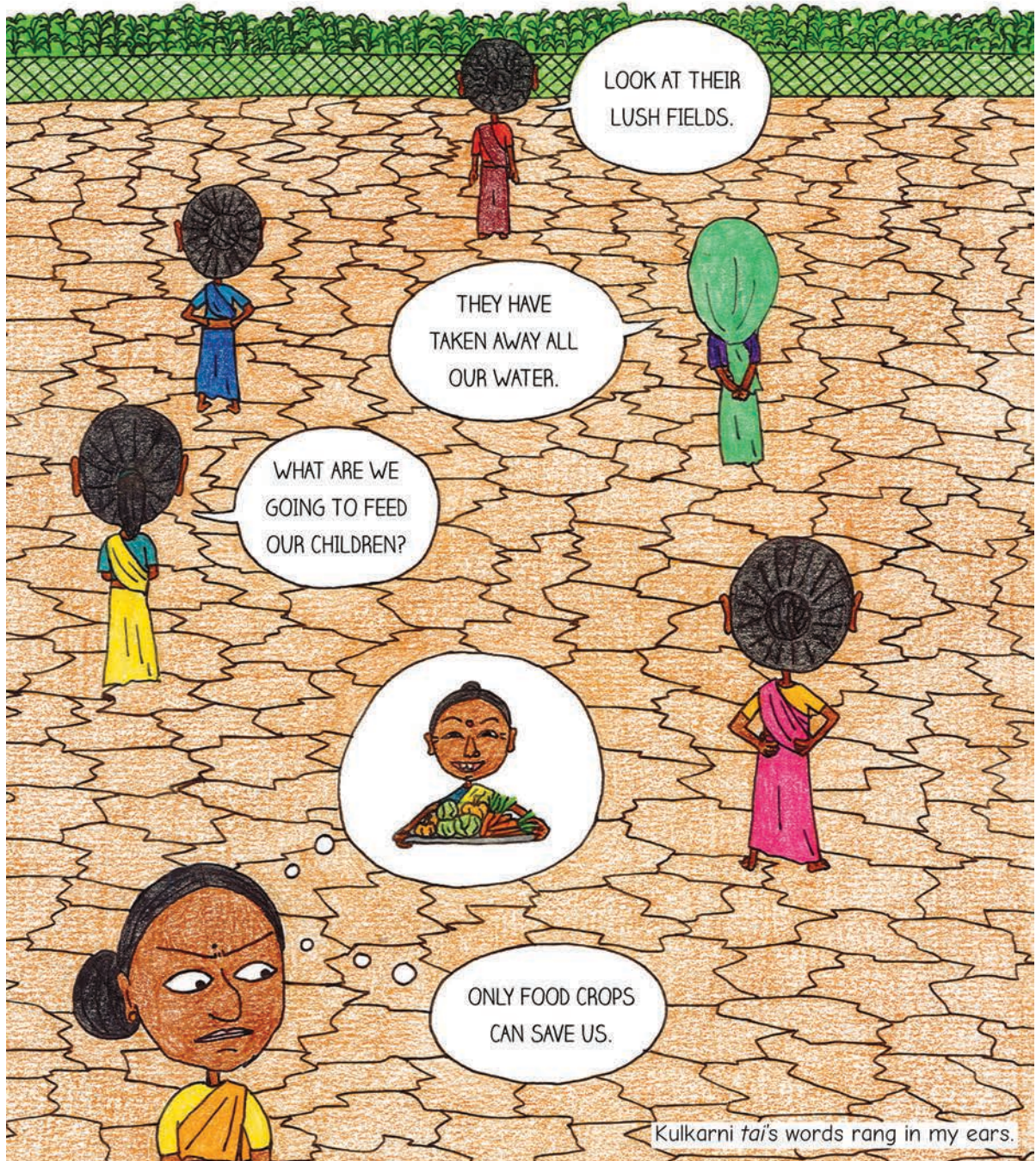
My limited years at school helped. But I struggled with numbers.



As time went by, I found my way with addition and subtraction. In listening and speaking to the other women, I began to rebuild my life and define its new purpose.

CHAPTER 6: FROM LAB TO LAND

In 2007, Marathwada was hit by another drought. There was little water for agriculture. The rich farmers began to sink even deeper borewells in desperate attempts to grow cash crops. The poorer women stared at another year of uncertainty, loss, and hunger.



It was difficult for me to convince the women to try food crops. Their husbands refused to spare even half an acre of land for them. I knew only one person would trust me without question – my dear friend Archana.



Archana began to grow a mixed set of crops including some millets, pulses, and leafy greens on her land. They grew well with comparatively little water.

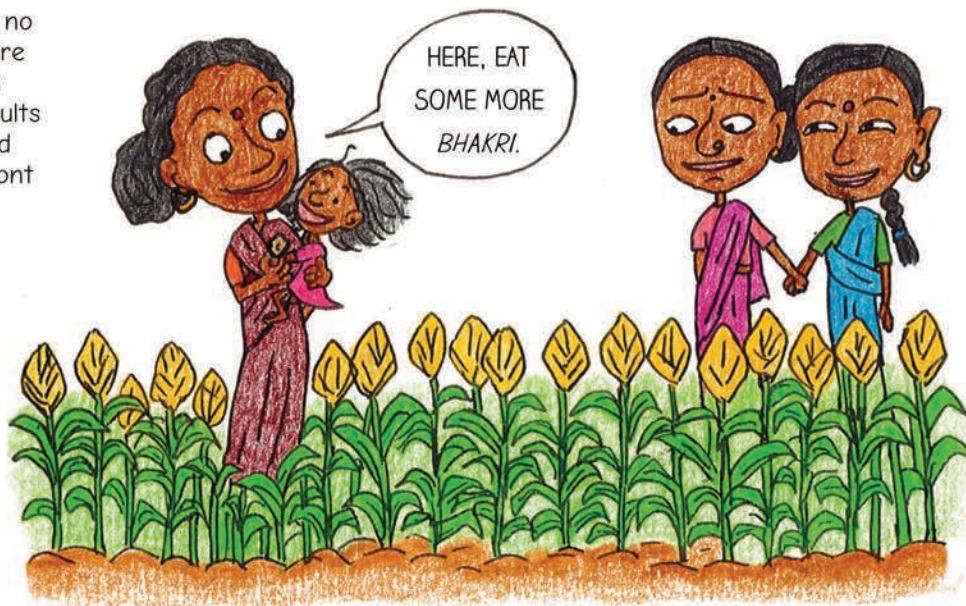
As the word spread, more and more women came forward with their little pockets of land.



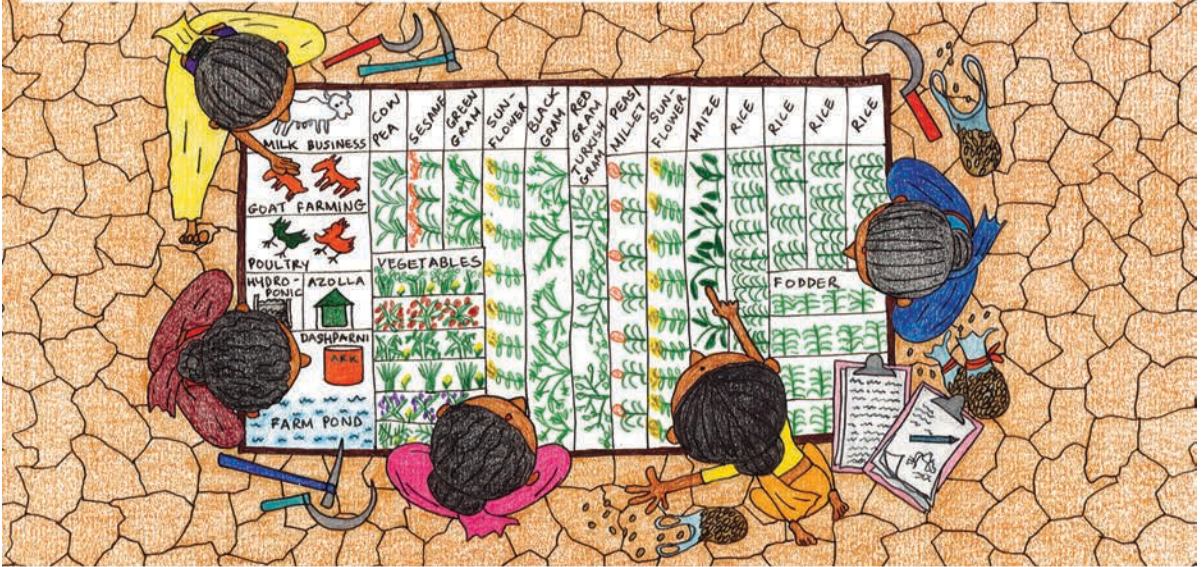
From time to time, we invited scientists from Krishi Vigyan Kendra, the government's farm science center, in Osmanabad. They advised on scientific farming techniques to conserve water and improve the overall yield. The farmers began to introduce hydroponics, drip irrigation and sprinklers on their small patches of land.



The drought was no longer a nightmare for these women farmers. The results of the lab-to-land model were in front of our eyes.



After years of trial and error, we finally built a model that combined the local climate patterns with the women's own social pressures. The one-acre model supported 36 varieties of drought-resistant and short-term crops – such as leafy vegetables, grains, and lentils – on half to one acre of land. Based on the season, we chose different varieties of seeds. Our goal was to ensure food for all, all year round.



But it wasn't easy for all the women. Many still had to deal with the 'upper' caste village headmen, unsupportive government authorities, and abusive husbands.



CHAPTER 7: AND THE RIVER FLOWS ON

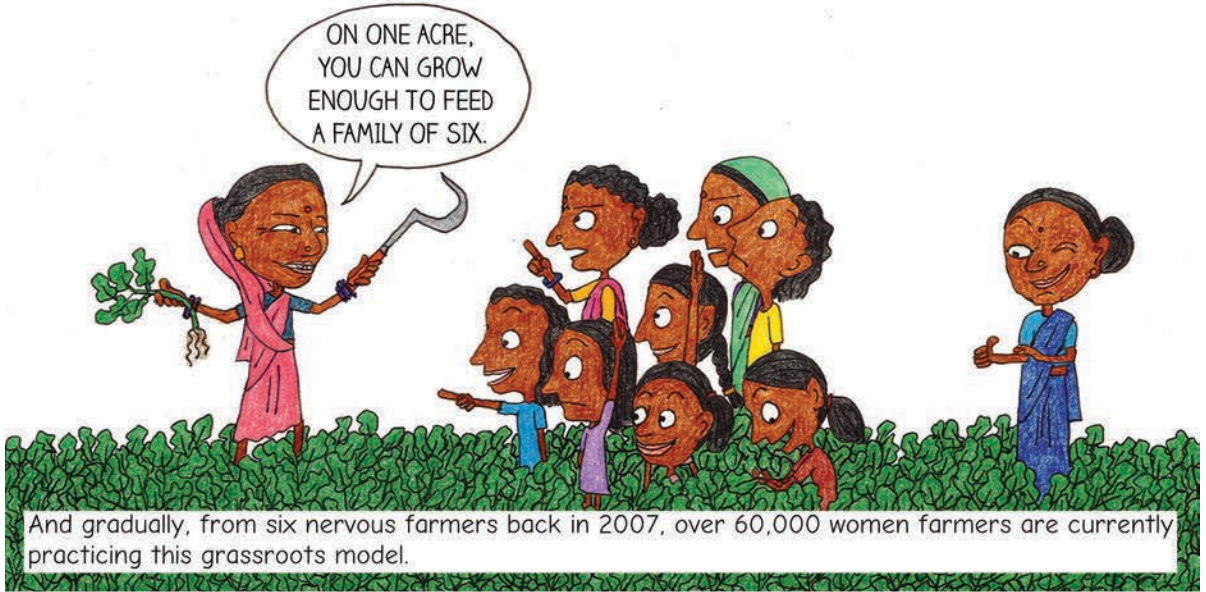
The one-acre model was put to the test in 2012. Marathwada experienced its worst drought in 40 years. There was not even a single drop of water to drink and farm. We had to rely on government tankers and private water sellers. Every day became a challenge.



Amidst this scarcity, the farmers cultivating cash crops failed miserably. Without water, the cane began to wilt and die. Driven by debt, thousands of farmers died by suicide. Our women farmers, however, stayed afloat.



To my joy, the women transformed into local leaders. They influenced many others to build their own one-acre models. Even the men realized the value of food crops during the drought years and began to support us. We linked the women to government schemes and subsidies, as well as the local markets. This gave them personal savings.



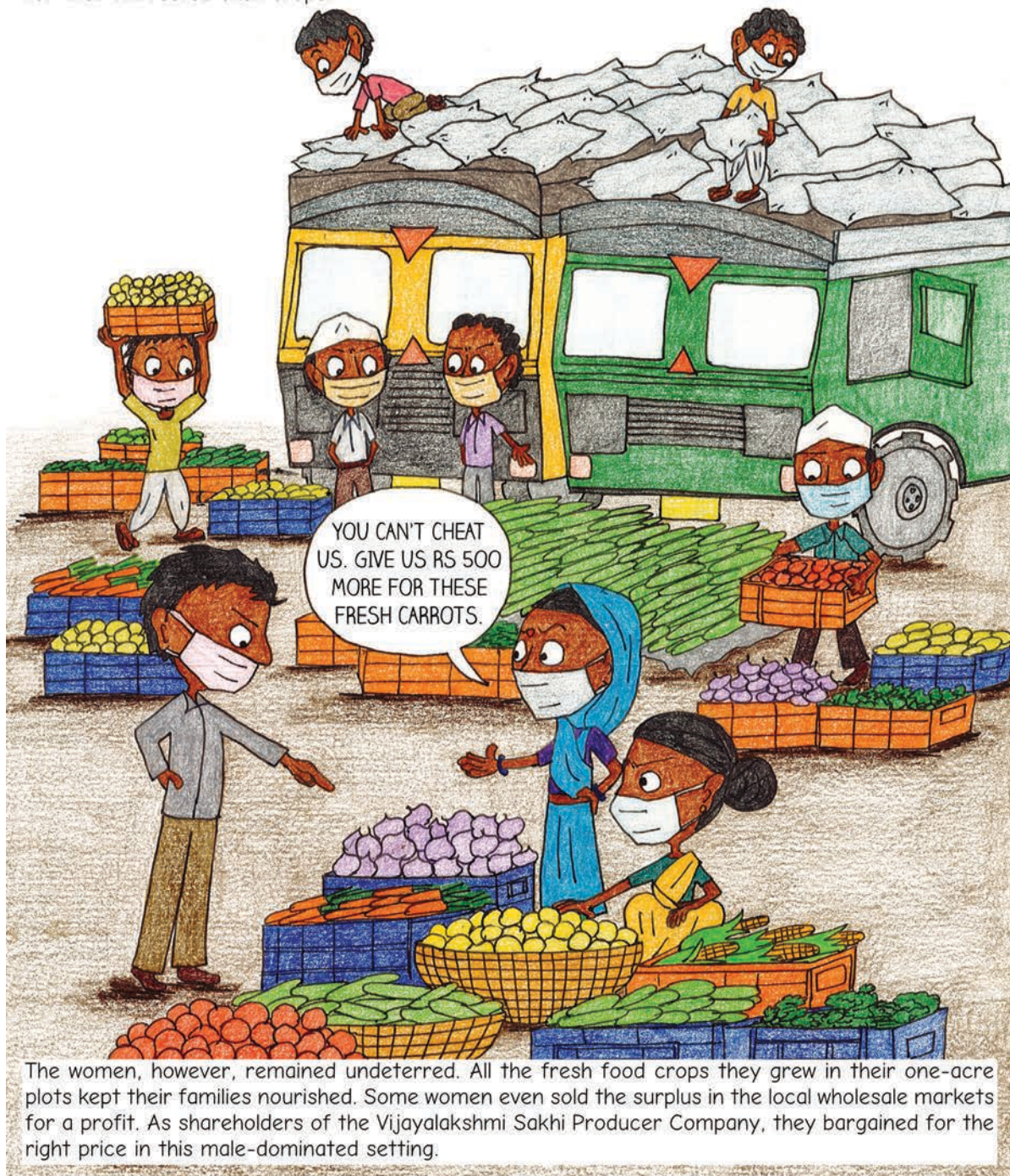
As the model began to achieve local success, I got the opportunity to share our experiences with activists, NGO leaders, and practitioners around the world. There has also been much to learn from the ways in which they are fighting climate change.



In the past ten years, I have travelled to 17 countries. Every time I am airborne, I try to look for the fields of Gandhora, now green, thanks to the strong fight put up by our women farmers.

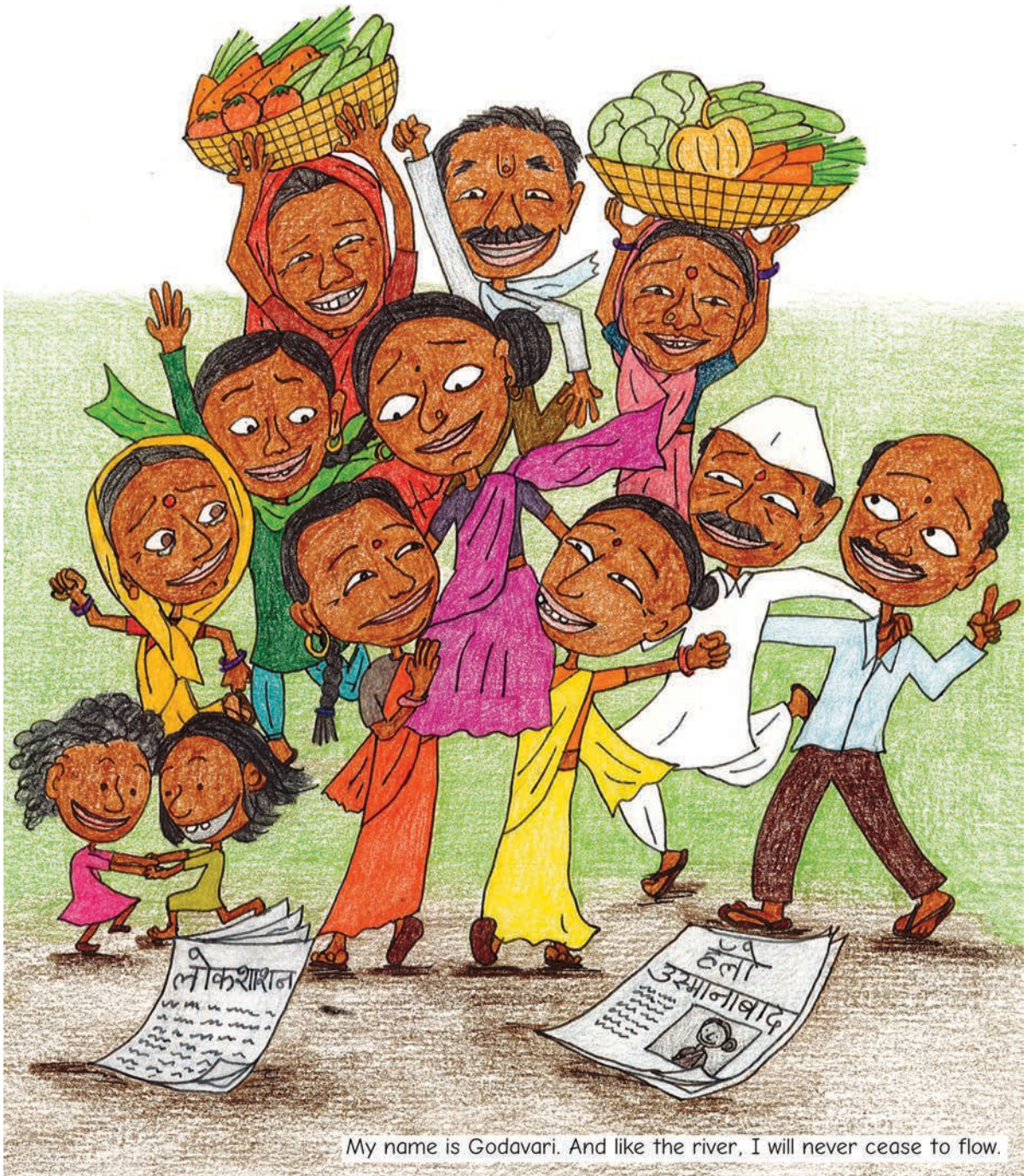


When the COVID-19 pandemic hit us, inter-state borders were sealed, markets were shut, hunger and distress began to mount. The large farmers incurred huge losses because there were no takers for their harvested cash crops.



The women, however, remained undeterred. All the fresh food crops they grew in their one-acre plots kept their families nourished. Some women even sold the surplus in the local wholesale markets for a profit. As shareholders of the Vijayalakshmi Sakhi Producer Company, they bargained for the right price in this male-dominated setting.

We have come a long way, but we still have many battles to win. The one-acre model should reach every village. Women from every household should be recognized as producers and landowners. They should be everywhere. Together, nothing is impossible.



My name is Godavari. And like the river, I will never cease to flow.



**REETIKA REVATHY
SUBRAMANIAN**

is a journalist and researcher from Mumbai, India. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Gender Studies as a Gates Cambridge Scholar at University of Cambridge, UK. Through her work that is anchored in intersectional feminist politics, she aims to reconcile collaborative storytelling with pressing marginalized realities.



MAITRI DORE

is an architect and freelance illustrator from Mumbai, India. Through her illustrations, she attempts to highlight the struggles of oppressed communities in India, focusing on gender, caste, and religion. She is currently pursuing a PhD in cultural heritage conservation at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.