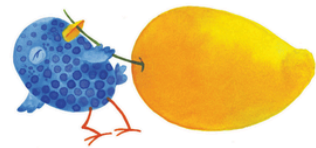


A vibrant illustration of a young girl with dark hair, a bindi, and large black earrings. She is wearing a purple dress and blue flip-flops. She is holding a large, ripe mango with a green stem and leaf. The mango is the central focus, with the title text overlaid on it. The background is a bright yellow with a repeating pattern of stylized mango leaves.

# THE SWEETEST MANGO

STORY Malavika Shetty PICTURES Ajanta Guhathakurta

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Wordbird Books feature traditional and contemporary stories emphasising the similarities and differences in this, our one world. Unfamiliar words and ideas are explained with the help of Wordbirds that streak across the pages, giving readers access to a multicultural, multilingual vocabulary.



It had become hotter, and the fresh green leaves on the mango trees around Suma's house were turning a deeper green. Golden mango blossoms burst through the leaves in pretty bunches.



For Aditi and Abhinav - MS

**The Sweetest Mango (English)**

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© text Malavika Shetty  
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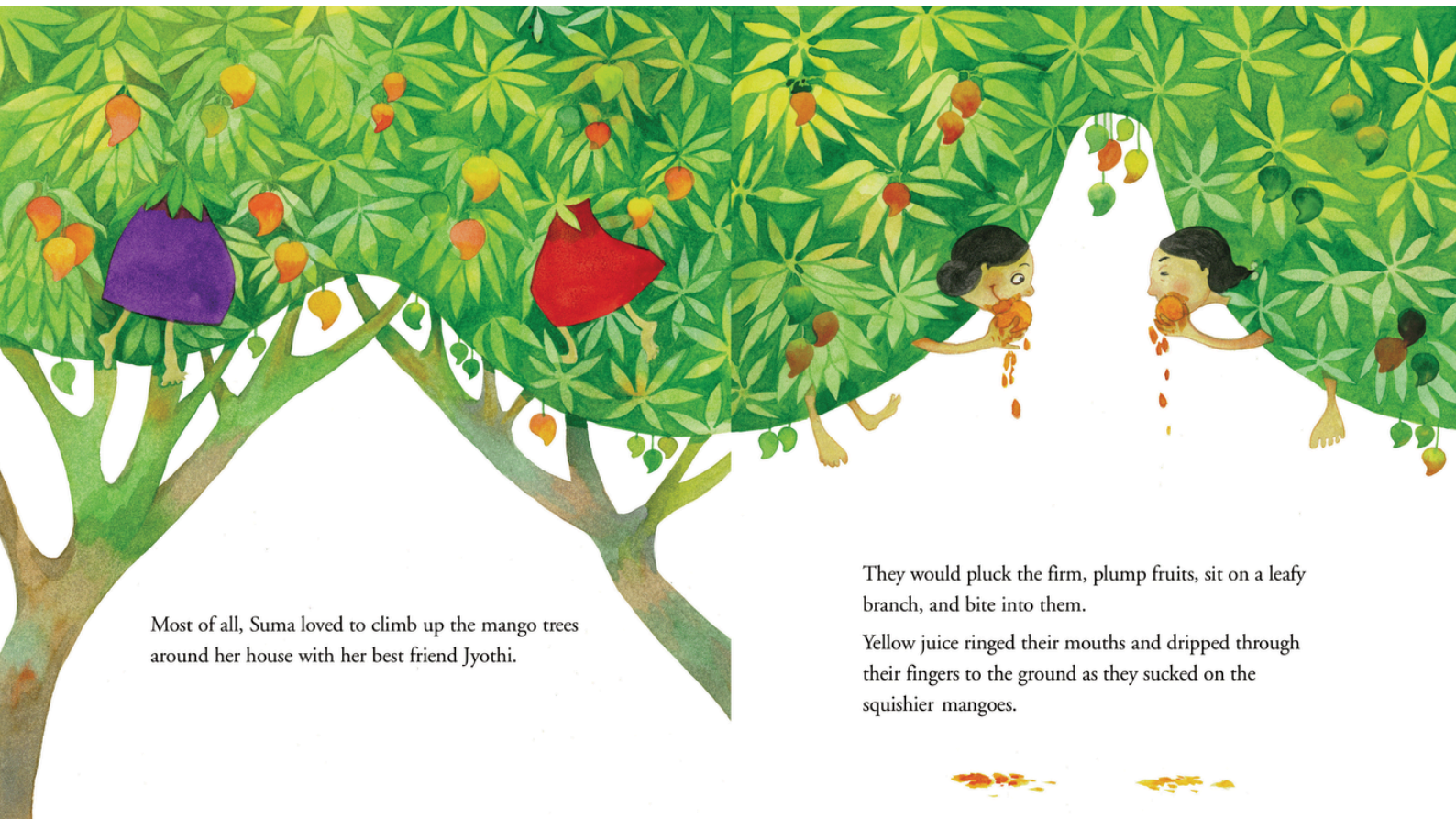
In Tulu, Dodda means grandmother, and Aija is grandfather.

Ganji is rice cooked soft and watery.



Suma's mouth watered at the thought of the pickles Dodda would make out of raw, green, crunchy mangoes at the beginning of the season.

Suma would eat fresh mango pickle every day with steaming ganji when she came home from school.



Most of all, Suma loved to climb up the mango trees around her house with her best friend Jyothi.

They would pluck the firm, plump fruits, sit on a leafy branch, and bite into them.

Yellow juice ringed their mouths and dripped through their fingers to the ground as they sucked on the squishier mangoes.



Then, when the mangoes ripened to become golden, juicy and fibrous, Amma would make mango curries. Sweet, fleshy mangoes floating in spicy coconut curry, served with hot rice. Suma's favourite meal!

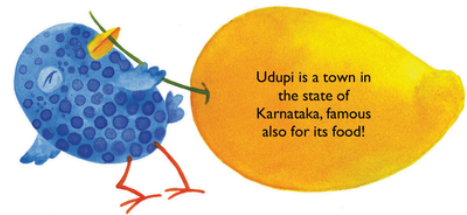




Suma and Jyothi lived next door to each other, in a village full of coconut and mango trees, near the temple town of Udupi.

This year, it looked as if there were more mangoes than ever before. Green, red, golden...they hung heavily from the branches.

Suma could smell their sweetness in the hot summer breeze. Mmmm!



Monkeys and birds chattered and twittered in the trees as they feasted on the fruit.

Suma and Jyothi liked to play a game as they walked to school and back – guessing the number of mangoes on each tree they passed.

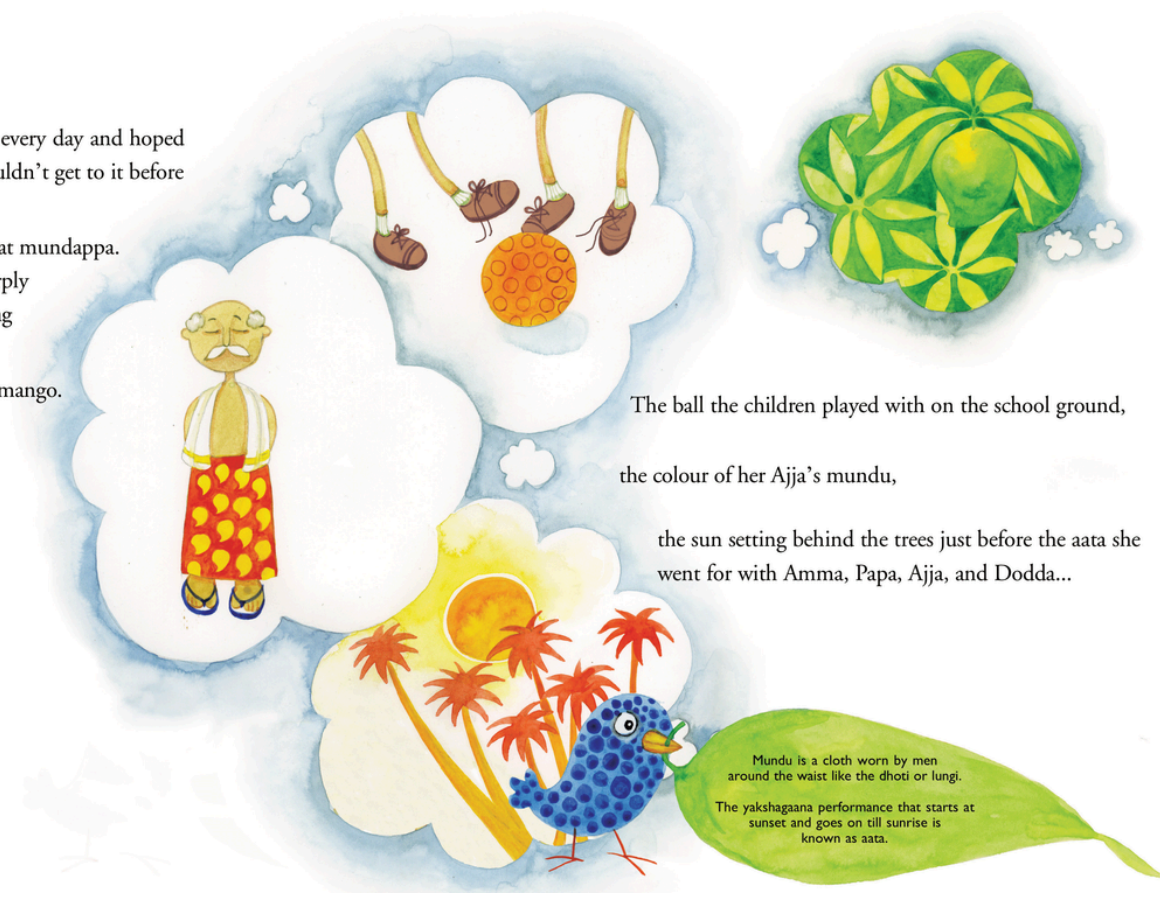
They picked up over-ripe mangoes that had fallen on the ground and gave them to the cows they met on the way. They laughed, watching the thick juice dribbling down the sides of the cows' mouths in grassy, sticky strands.



She kept a close eye on her mango every day and hoped that the monkeys and the birds wouldn't get to it before she did.

All day she thought about eating that mundappa. "Suma!" her teacher called out sharply when she caught Suma daydreaming in class.

Everything reminded Suma of her mango.



The ball the children played with on the school ground,  
the colour of her Ajja's mundu,  
the sun setting behind the trees just before the aata she  
went for with Amma, Papa, Ajja, and Dodda...

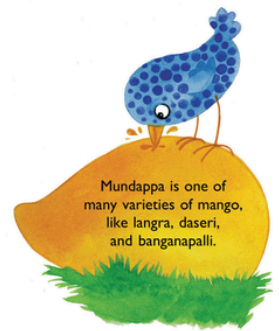
Mundu is a cloth worn by men  
around the waist like the dhoti or lungi.  
The yakshagaana performance that starts at  
sunset and goes on till sunrise is  
known as aata.



Suma's favourite mango was the mundappa that grew on a tree just behind her house. It was rounder, larger and fleshier than all the other mangoes.

One afternoon, she was sitting on a low, shady branch of the tree when she spotted it overhead – the biggest, roundest mundappa she had ever seen! It was even bigger than the coconuts on the trees nearby. But it was still raw, and it would be a few days before it ripened to sweetness.

Suma couldn't wait to eat it. "I won't tell Jyothi," she thought. "I'll eat it all by myself!"



Mundappa is one of many varieties of mango, like langra, daseri, and banganapalli.



But the mango was gone!

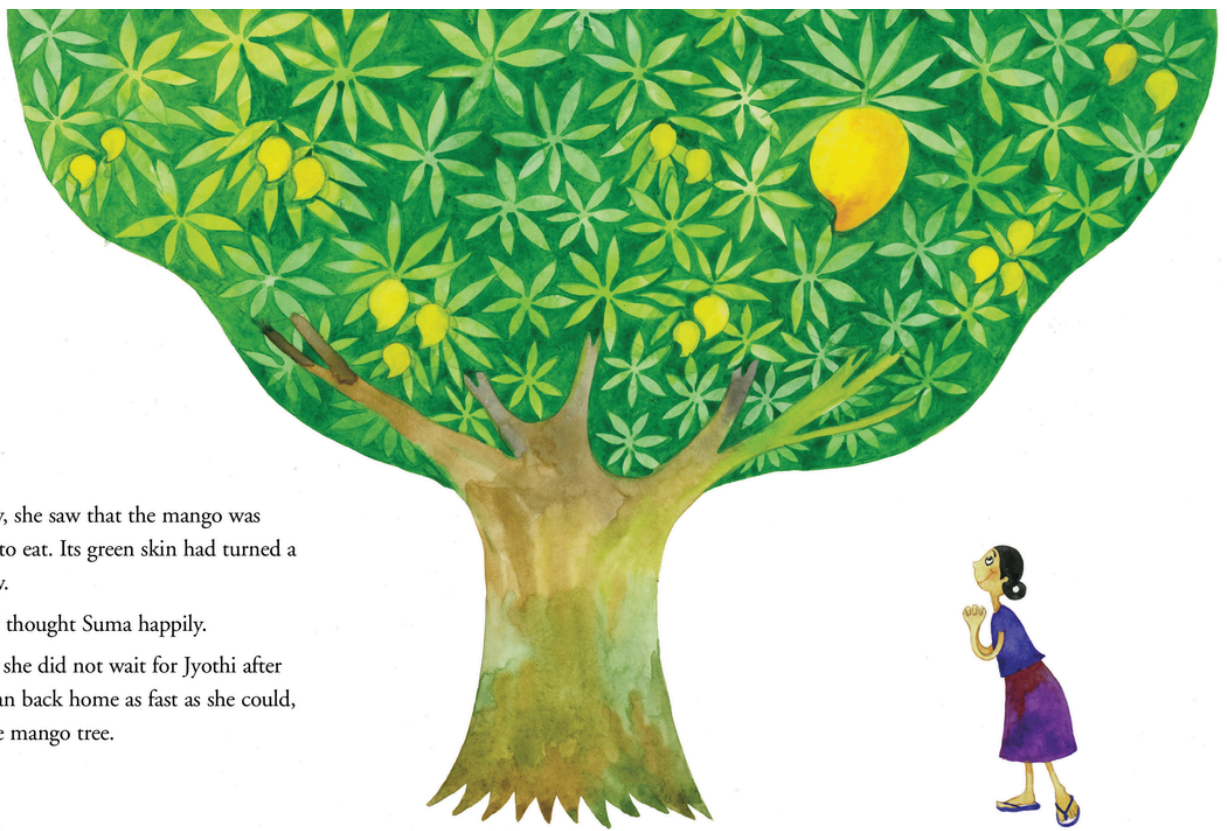
“Oh no!” cried Suma. “The monkeys have taken it already!”

She sat under the tree with tears running down her face. She couldn’t believe it. All she had wanted was to eat that beautiful mango, and now it was gone.

Then one day, she saw that the mango was almost ready to eat. Its green skin had turned a golden yellow.

“Tomorrow!” thought Suma happily.

The next day she did not wait for Jyothi after school. She ran back home as fast as she could, straight to the mango tree.

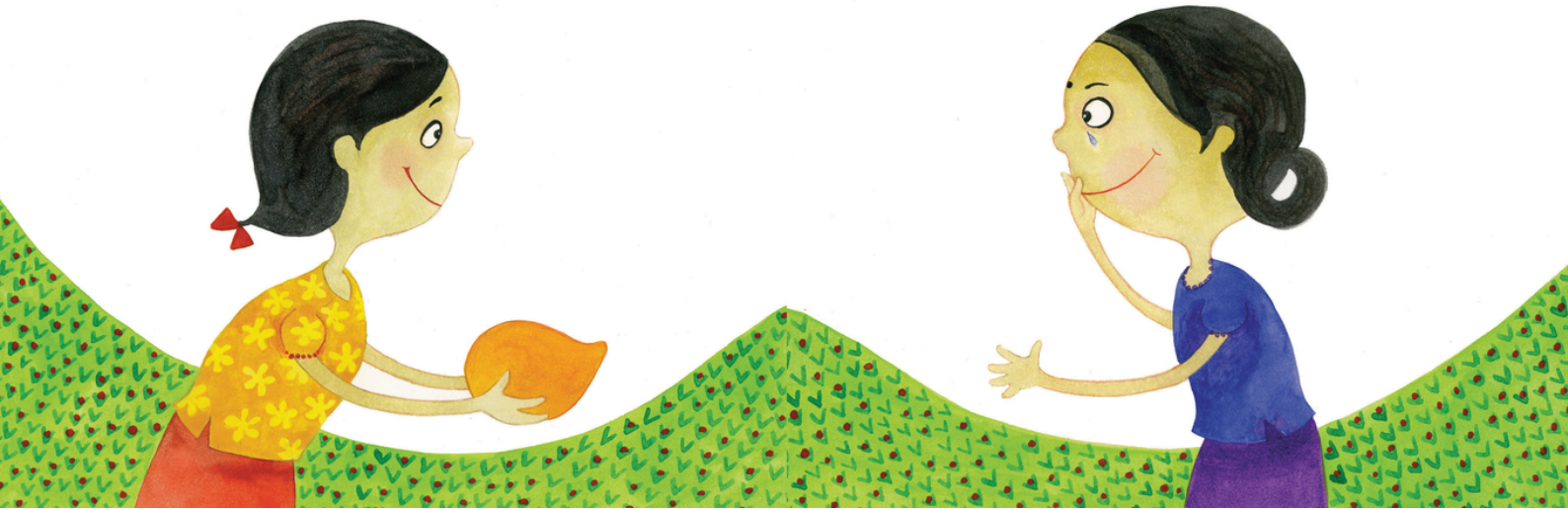




She saw Jyothi come running up to her.

“Suma!” Jyothi cried out. “I was looking for you in school. Why are you crying? Look, I have a surprise for you! I found the largest mango I have ever seen this morning. And look, it is just ripe enough for us to eat.”

In Jyothi’s hand was Suma’s mundappa!





The two friends sat on the branch of the mango tree and ate the large, juicy mango together. Suma wound one arm tightly around Jyothi. How could she have not wanted to share the mundappa with her!

As they licked the juice running down their fingers, Suma thought this was the sweetest mango she had ever eaten.

*Raw, green, sour and crunchy.  
Or ripe, golden, plump and soft.  
Summer time is mango time, a time children wait for  
– blazing sun, sticky mango juice ringing their  
mouths and dripping down their fingers.  
The sweet, simple story and luscious pictures evoke  
delicious flavours of hot days, warm friendships  
and the smell of mango in the air.*

Malavika Shetty teaches at Boston University, but she loves travelling every mango season with her family to Katapadi, her village near Udupi, to enjoy her favourite fruit.

This is her first children's book.

Ajanta Guhathakurta studied fine art at the College of Art, Delhi, and has illustrated and designed several books for children and adults.

She lives in Delhi where she also teaches painting to children.

Her other books with Tulika include *The 13<sup>th</sup> Riddle* and *Henna on my Hands*.



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