

A Note From the Author

The *kathaa beej* or story seed that germinated into this book and gave life to the lullaby birds is a beautiful traditional handicraft from India—the cloth bird dangler. This folk art form has been practiced in the desert regions of western India for centuries. The birds are stitched by hand using scraps of bright and colorful fabric, and each bird is decorated with tiny mirrors, beads, and sequins. These birds are then strung together, with brass bells attached to the ends of the dangler. They are believed to bring prosperity and success when hung in a doorway or window.

I deeply admire practitioners of folk art and craft. I've had many opportunities to interact with artists from different regions of India, watch them work, and learn about their art and lives. Despite being highly skilled and having valuable knowledge, most artisans live a difficult life and struggle to earn a living. I believe their stories must be told to cultivate respect for their art and their experiences. These stories will allow all of us to be inspired by their tenacity to keep their craft alive.

Kesar and the Lullaby Birds is set in the Great Rann of Kutch, located close to where I grew up in Gujarat, India. The Great Rann of Kutch is one of the largest salt deserts in the world. This land exhibits extreme weather conditions and is prone to frequent droughts and high-intensity earthquakes. Some of the remote





Tree of Life Motif, © Aditi Oza, 2021

villages in this vast desert are still untouched by modern influences. Despite the harsh climate, the Rann of Kutch is a melting pot of cultures that has produced breathtaking folk art and architecture. These communities have given Kutch the reputation of creating some of the most beautiful handicrafts in the world.

Glimpses of their desert lifestyle are embedded in this book—Kesar and Kamal live in a unique house called a *bhunga*, which is both an engineering wonder as well as a work of art; their mother and grandmother earn a living creating intricate Kutchi embroidery; and the family uses a special mud paste and mirrors to decorate the walls of their house, an art form known locally as *lippan kaam*. If this book sparked an interest in the people of the Kutch region and their art, I recommend connecting with nonprofits working directly with artists, such as Shrujan and Kala Raksha. These organizations are creating sustainable livelihoods for the artisans while saving folk knowledge from being lost forever.

After you read this book, I would love for you to thread a needle, design a motif or two, and create your own fabric bird dangler. I hope you enjoyed the sleepover at Kesar's *bhunga*.

