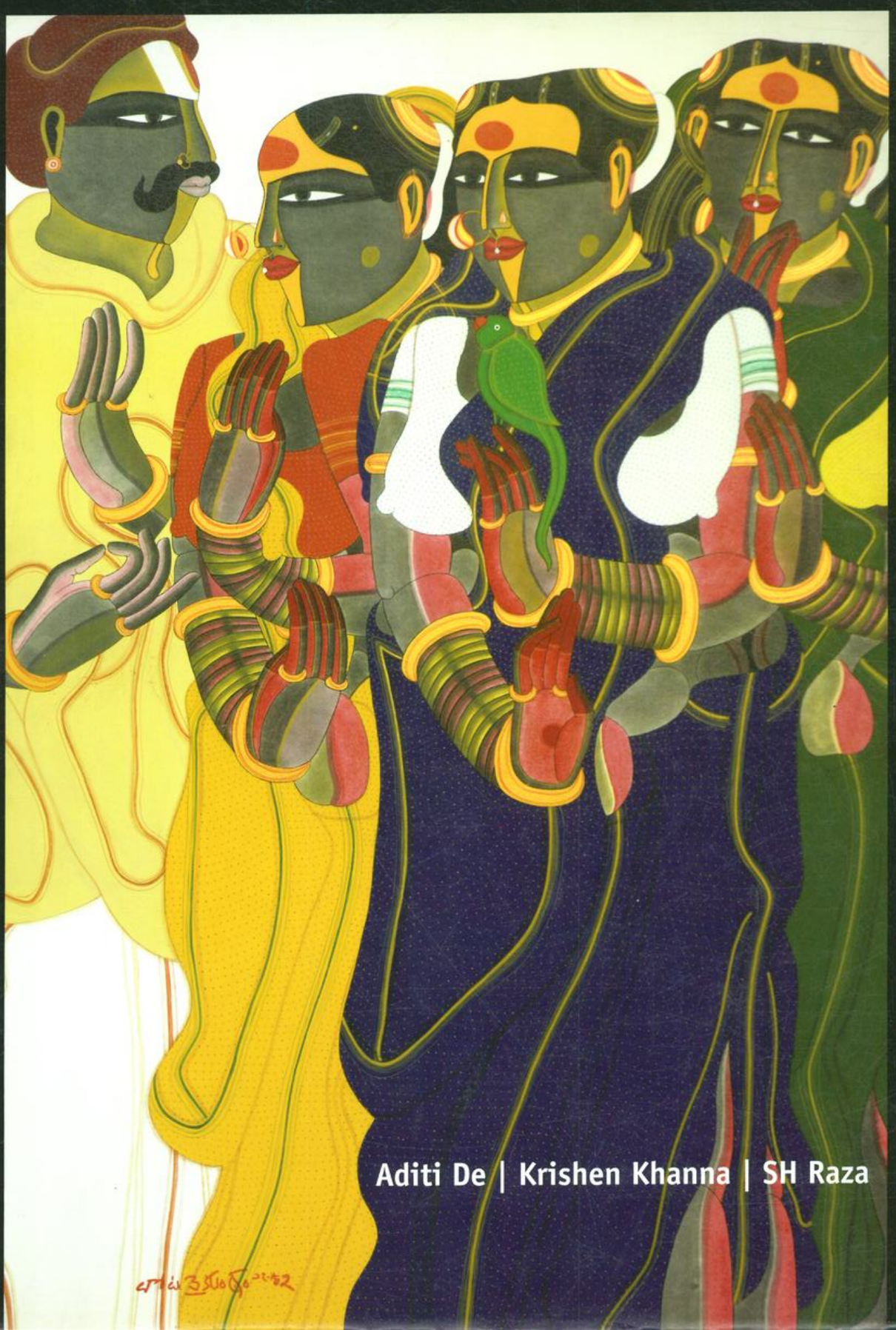
Rustic Ragas

INNER MELODIES OF THOTA VAIKUNTAM



Aditi De | Krishen Khanna | SH Raza



ISBN-10: 81-89497-15-4
ISBN-13: 978-81-894971-5-5

Rustic Ragas

INNER MELODIES OF THOTA VAIKUNTAM

I've taken from my people in Telangana. I draw them. I take my colours from them. I've taken details from their everyday lives, stylized them, and made them look grand. That's my intention.

– Thota Vaikuntam

This book presents fifteen new dramatic paintings by Hyderabad-based artist Vaikuntam. The artist grew up in a village called Boorugupalli in the Karimnagar district within the Telangana heartland of Andhra Pradesh. The people of his village have often been depicted in his work, especially his portrayals of women – they could be his mother, an entertainer, a neighbour, a labourer, a gaze encountered in the teeming bazaar, even a family friend from his childhood. Vaikuntam's Telangana folk meld the memory of his eyes and his fingers. They embody a unique world, of daily rites of life couched within an imaginative terrain.

The monumentality of Vaikuntam's figures in rich primary colours of the earth assume a mythical dimension, enhanced by the solidity of their execution in acrylic. They seem like demigods, not village folk – looming, tantalizing, almost unapproachable.

Vaikuntam voices the collective yearning for a separate Telangana identity, beyond politics, beyond couched cultures. His rich palette and easily recognizable faces and figures have given his work acceptability; paintings that are strikingly modern without any allegiance to anything usually associated with modernity. In these huge canvases, Vaikuntam immortalizes his earthy icons for all time.

Jacket
Front: See page 49.
Back: See page 90-91.

Aditi De is a writer, columnist and editor. She is the author of *Articulations: Voices from Contemporary Indian Visual Art* (2004) and co-author of *Lines from an Artistic Life: The Drawings of Adimoolam* (2007) and *Manu Parekh: Banaras, Eternity Watches Time* (2007).

Krishen Khanna is one of India's most distinguished contemporary artists. He was a member of the Progressive Artists' Group and has been honoured by the President of India with a Padma Shri in 1996. He has held many successful solo shows and been part of group exhibitions in both India and internationally.

SH Raza is an eminent Indian artist who has lived and worked in France since 1950. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1981, and is a Fellow of the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. He is also the recipient of the Kalidas Samman from the Madhya Pradesh State Government in 1996.

Rustic Ragas



Rustic Ragas

INNER MELODIES OF THOTA VAIKUNTAM

TIMELESS BOOKS
AbMaa Publishing

First published in 2008 in India by

Timeless Books
46, Housing Society
South Extension Part-I
New Delhi-110 049 (India)
Tel.: 2469 0513
E-mail: sales@tbidelhi.com,
Website : www.timelessartbookstudio.com

and

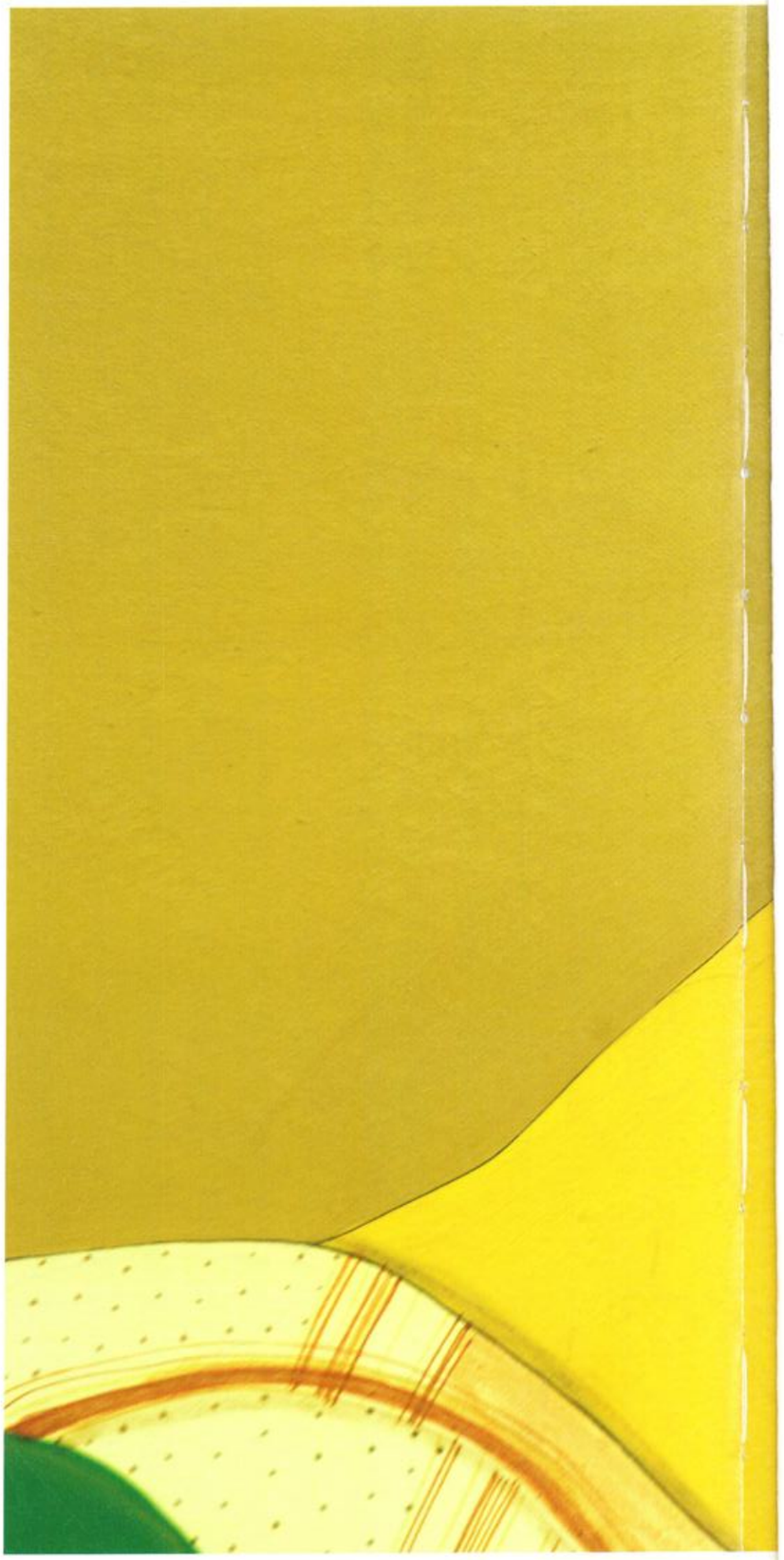
AbMaa Publishing
102, First Floor, Rectangle One Mall
District Center 4, Saket,
New Delhi-110 017
E-mail: info@abmaa.com
Website: www.abmaa.com

Text © Aditi De, Krishen Khanna, SH Raza
Illustrations © Thota Vaikuntam

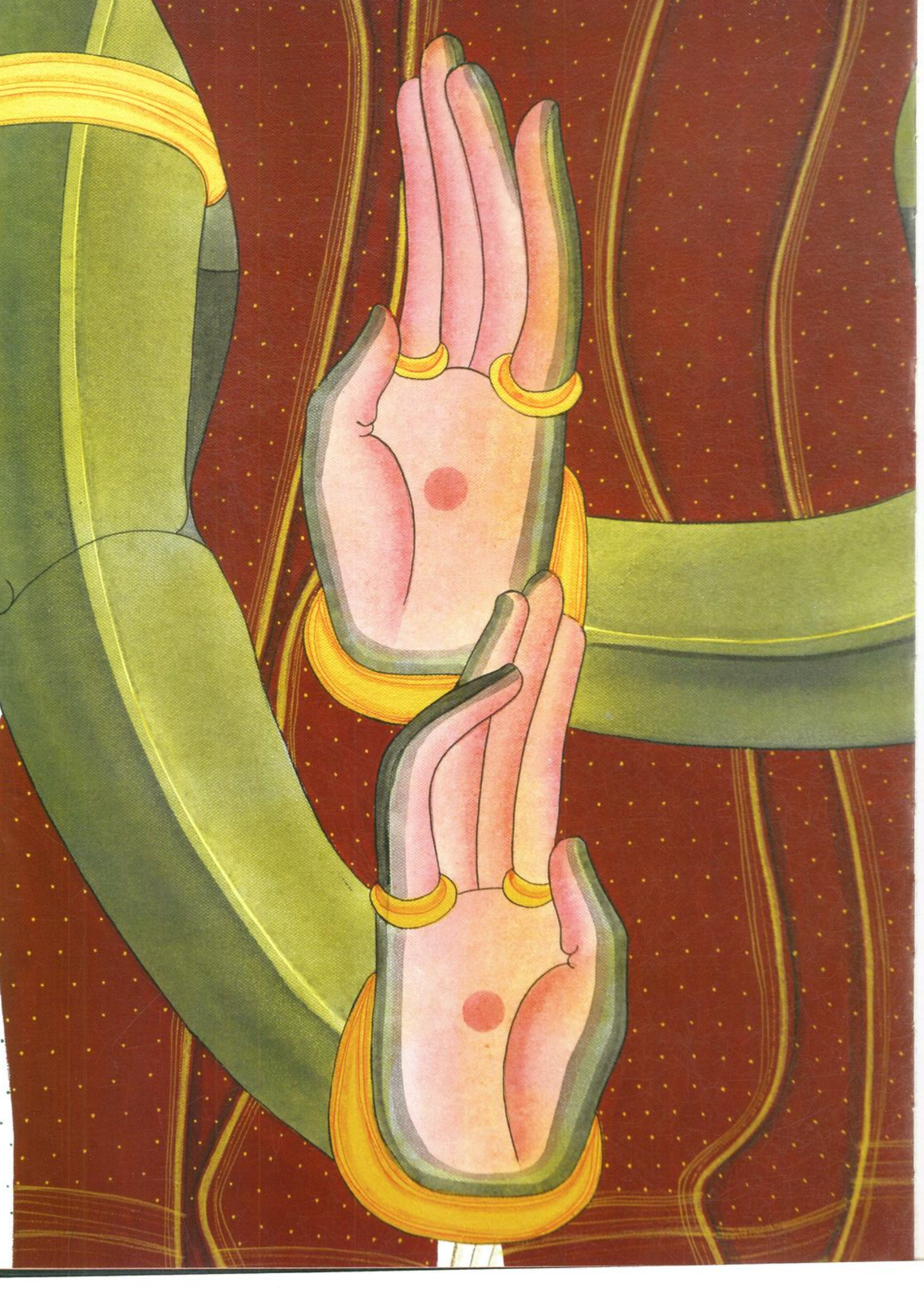
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electrical, mechanical or otherwise, without first seeking the permission of the copyright owners and the publishers.

ISBN 10 : 81-89497-15-4
ISBN 13 : 978-81-89497-15-6

Designed by Amit Kharsani
Edited by Diana Romany
Printed at Ajanta Offset and Packagings Ltd., New Delhi

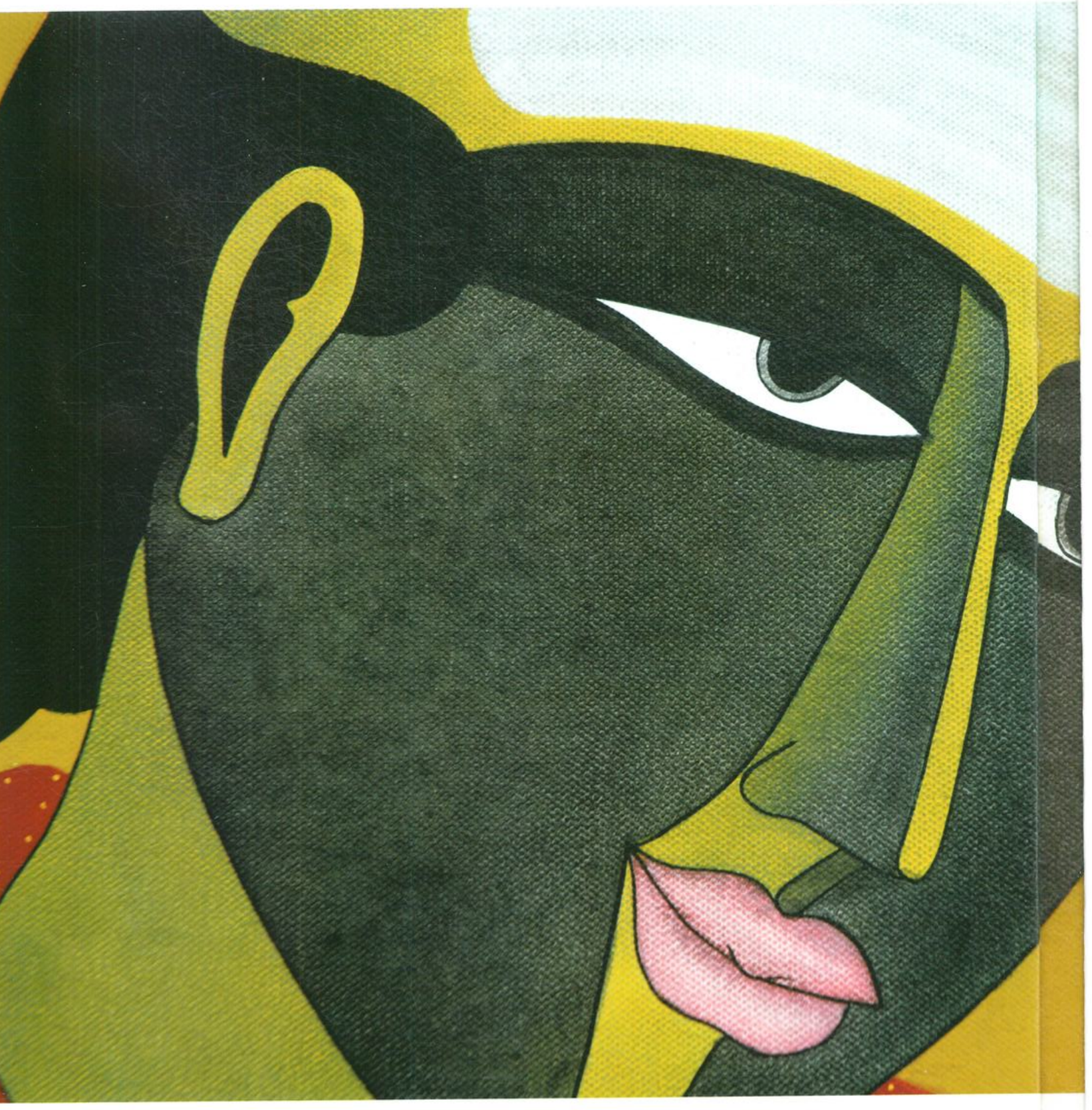








Dedicated to my mother





Foreword

Vaikuntam is one of the most uncomplicated people that we have known. Even though he lives in a metro he remains largely untouched by urban life; one gets the feeling that he is from a small town or a village. Unprecedented success has not affected his clarity of thought and he remains with both feet firmly on the ground.

This book presents a body of work on a scale that has not been attempted by Vaikuntam in his career before. It was challenging for him to create these life-size canvases as most of his earlier work used the small format.

The focal point of his creations is women; the deep rooted influence of his mother plainly shows through in his paintings. Various motifs – red kumkum or turmeric on the forehead, the depth in the eyes of the women, dotted sarees, the abundance of bangles and the presence of a parrot on occasion – Vaikuntam's work is made instantly recognizable by his style, subject matter and colour pallete. An exceptional merging of the traditional and contemporary, his works revel in a warm appreciation of life and gentle humour.

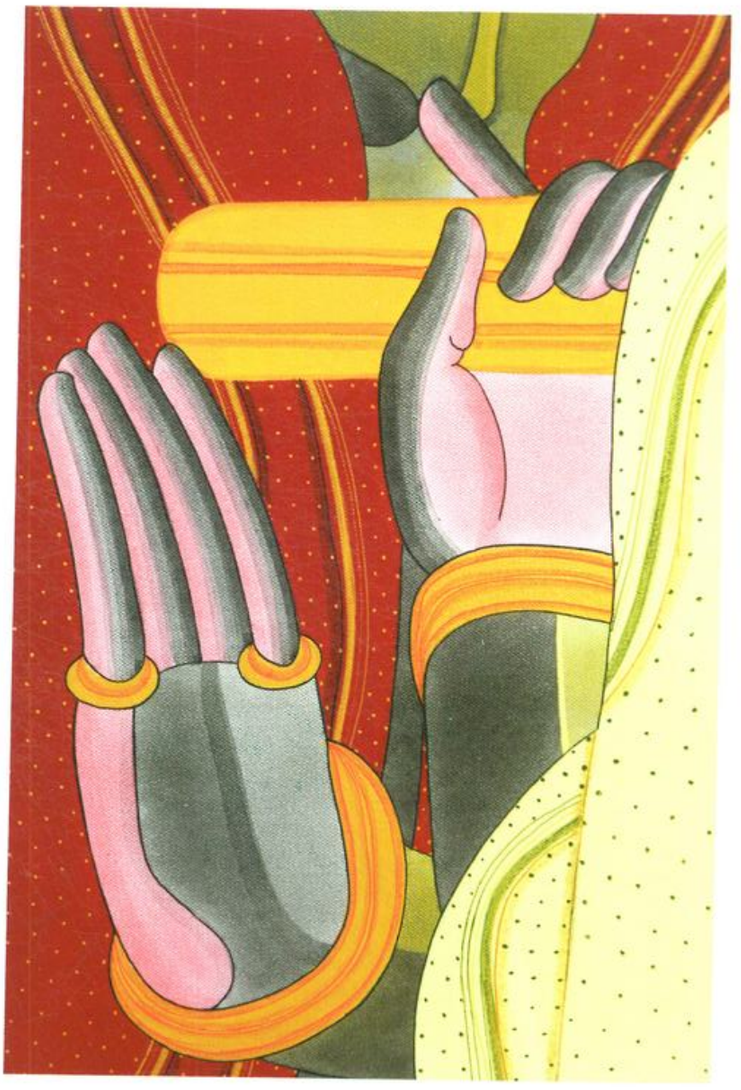
This book is a tribute to Vaikuntam and the spirit of Telengana, chronicles of a people in tune with their culture.

Tanuj Berry & Saman Malik
New Delhi
January 2008



The Village within the City

Aditi De



You are your own creator.
You can't base yourself on others.
It has to come from deep within you.

– Thota Vaikuntam, Hyderabad, October 2006

Rustic *ragas* from Boorugupalli

Within an individual lies an untapped creative universe. A world of depths and eddies, concentric crosscurrents and stasis. The upsurge from this universe as it is moulded, altered, then challenged repeatedly by circumstances, impacts latent talent, imprinted forever on the eye of the engaged viewer – often with astounding results.

As through these fifteen dramatic and individualistic canvases in acrylic, painted between 2004 and 2007 by Hyderabad-based Thota Vaikuntam. For within this personable artist lies a secret world. Of a beloved village called Boorugupalli in the Karimnagar district within the Telangana heartland of Andhra Pradesh. Of his mother Satyamma, a never-say-die woman. Of a goddess named Bhatukamma, the deity of life, celebrated annually with flowers and song in a rite specific to the region. Can inspiration be more essentially distilled? What are Vaikuntam's canvases distilled of?

Primarily, strong women. Mother figures moulded in the tradition of Bhoomi, Prakriya, Shakti, Bhoodevi, Durga and other earth deities who take the battle of life head-on.

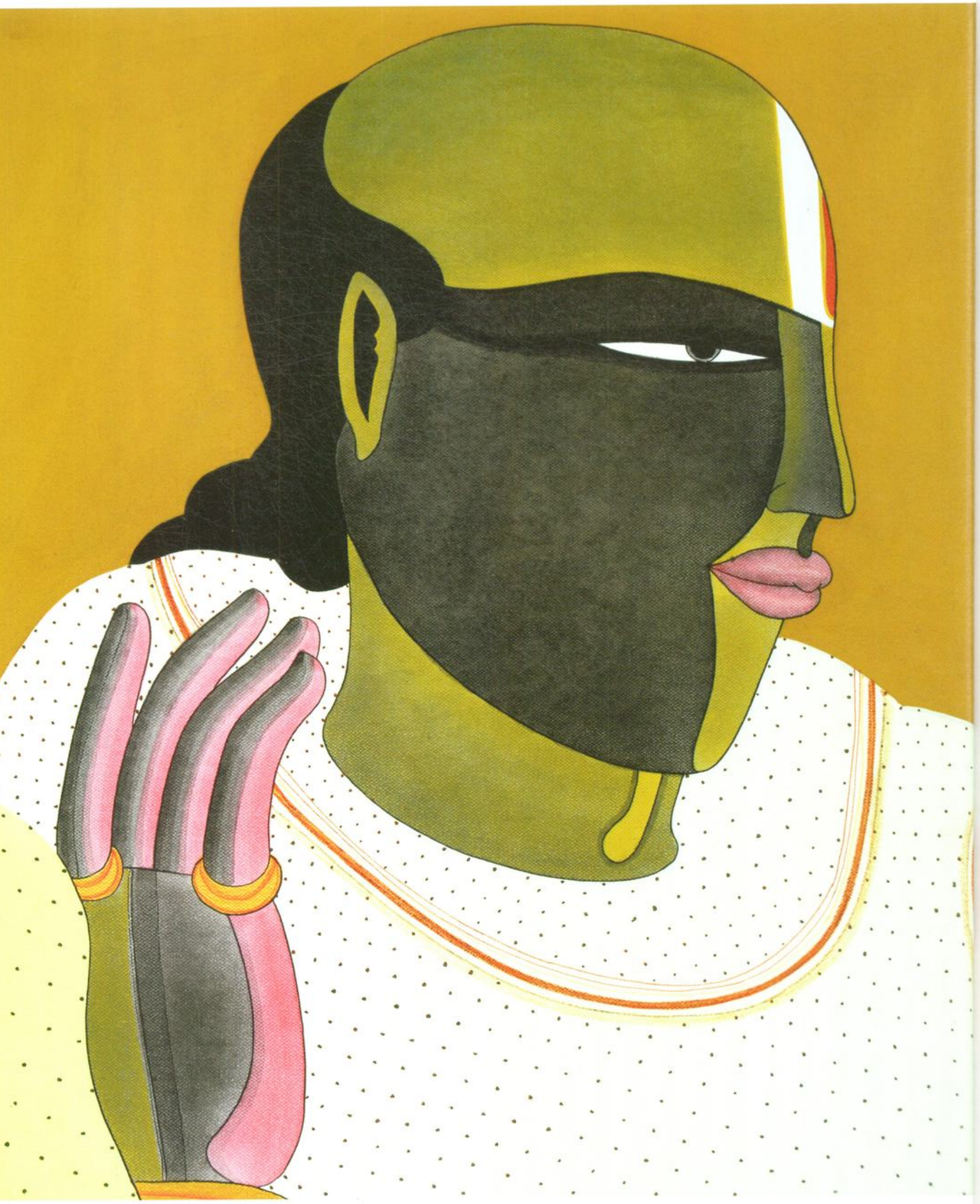
Women who are rugged of posture and build, dusky of complexion, with *haldi* or turmeric-enhanced visages, their foreheads dotted with bright red *kumkum* of powdered turmeric and slaked lime, clad in bright cotton saris. Figures of the soil, reared to till the fields, spin fine cotton, and be caregivers to the world. To share every last hearty *jowar roti* or sorghum bread, every glass of strong tea, with anyone who chanced upon their threshold, no matter at what the time of day or night, amidst idylls of a shared rural past in the Telangana *bhasha*, a language which melds Telugu with Urdu.

It is this earth-bound quality of those he immortalizes in paint that Vaikuntam cherishes the most. Their innate warmth and nurturing is indelibly imprinted on him, the pulse that imbues both his dreams and his memories, built on the subsoil that he evokes in a single word: innocence.

An experience from his equally innocent childhood, dating back to five or six years after his birth in 1942, constantly surfaces through the tumult of memory. He recalls lying ill, the stillness of days flashing by in heat, sweat and smallpox. And Satyamma by his side, nursing him, her youngest child of three, unheeding of seconds, minutes, hours or days – with gruel, with caresses, with prayers, with the healing touch that only a mother can give.



Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72", 2007.

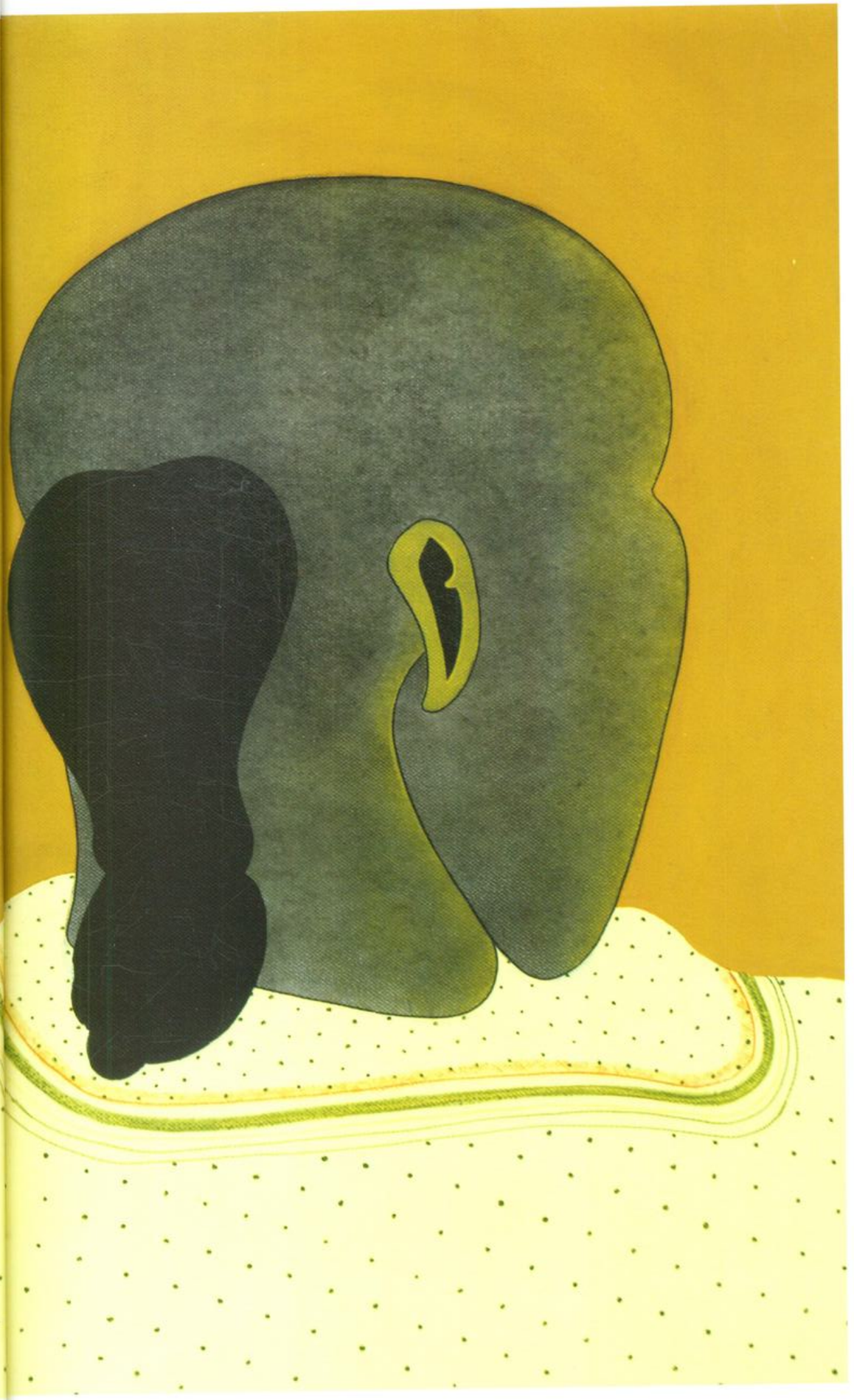


Once Vaikuntam had recovered, Satyamma took him to the local shrine to Pochamma, the deity of smallpox. She is revered by the villagers, along with other pantheistic deities like Mallamma and Yellamma. The boy prostrated himself in a *namaskara*, a ritual obeisance to Pochamma. The washerman was asked to bring some toddy, which was sprinkled in a propitiatory ritual.

Vaikuntam observes, "These deities are usually under a tree, an extension of nature. Often, they could be represented by just a stone, worshipped with *haldi*, *kumkum* and flowers. Pochamma is a benign deity, a protector like my mother. I feel she guarded our village, warding off calamities. Even today, I have more affection for Pochamma than for more sophisticated (Hindu) deities like Vishnu or Shiva."

To him, Satyamma is the very *raga* that he has sung all his life, the fount of his creativity. In the throes of her last illness in the early Eighties, Vaikuntam was by her side for months, willing her to heal. All his boyhood, she would be at work around their home when he opened his eyes at dawn, still on her feet at chores when he lay down to sleep at night. She was energy, she was light, she was humanity incarnate to him. All encompassed in a single being.





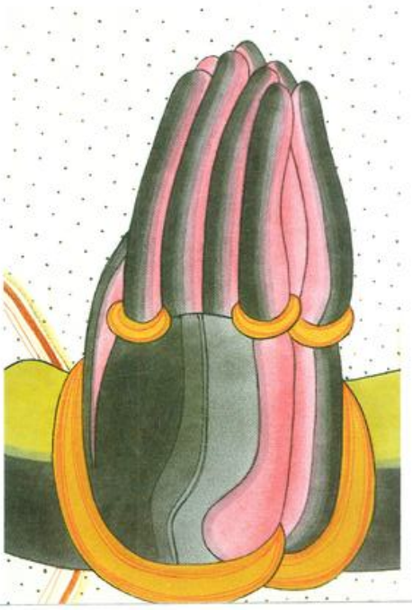


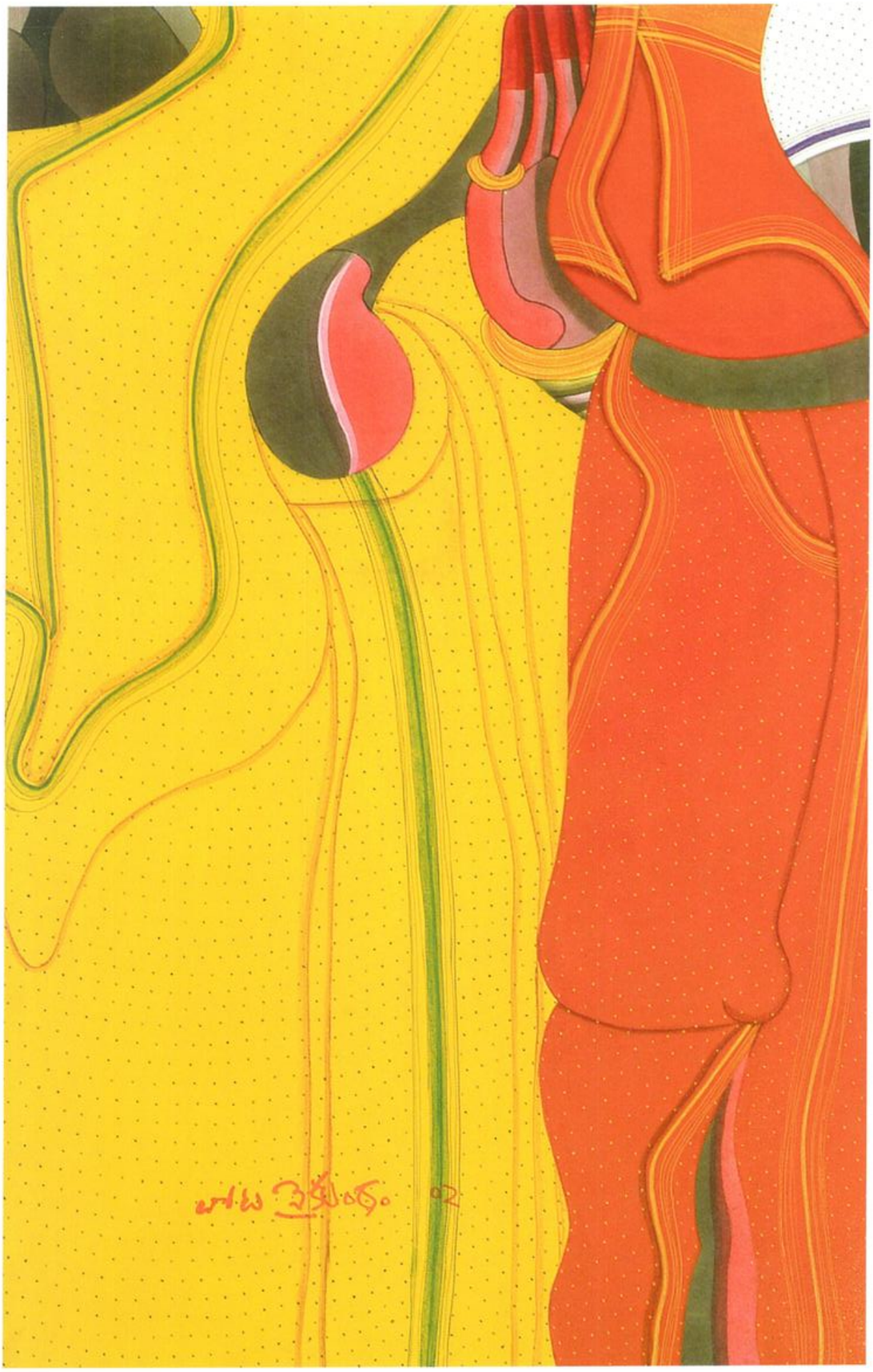
"Of course, she is my inspiration. Whenever I had problems, I thought: 'My mother is the only one who can help me.' It took me decades of struggle to gain recognition, to earn a living by my art, but very slowly people began to like my work. I know that, one hundred per cent, my mother is behind me. I may forget what happened yesterday, but I'll never forget how she took me to Pochamma," Vaikuntam recalls, with tears in his eyes, as he sips tea in his studio on an October 2006 morning in Hyderabad.

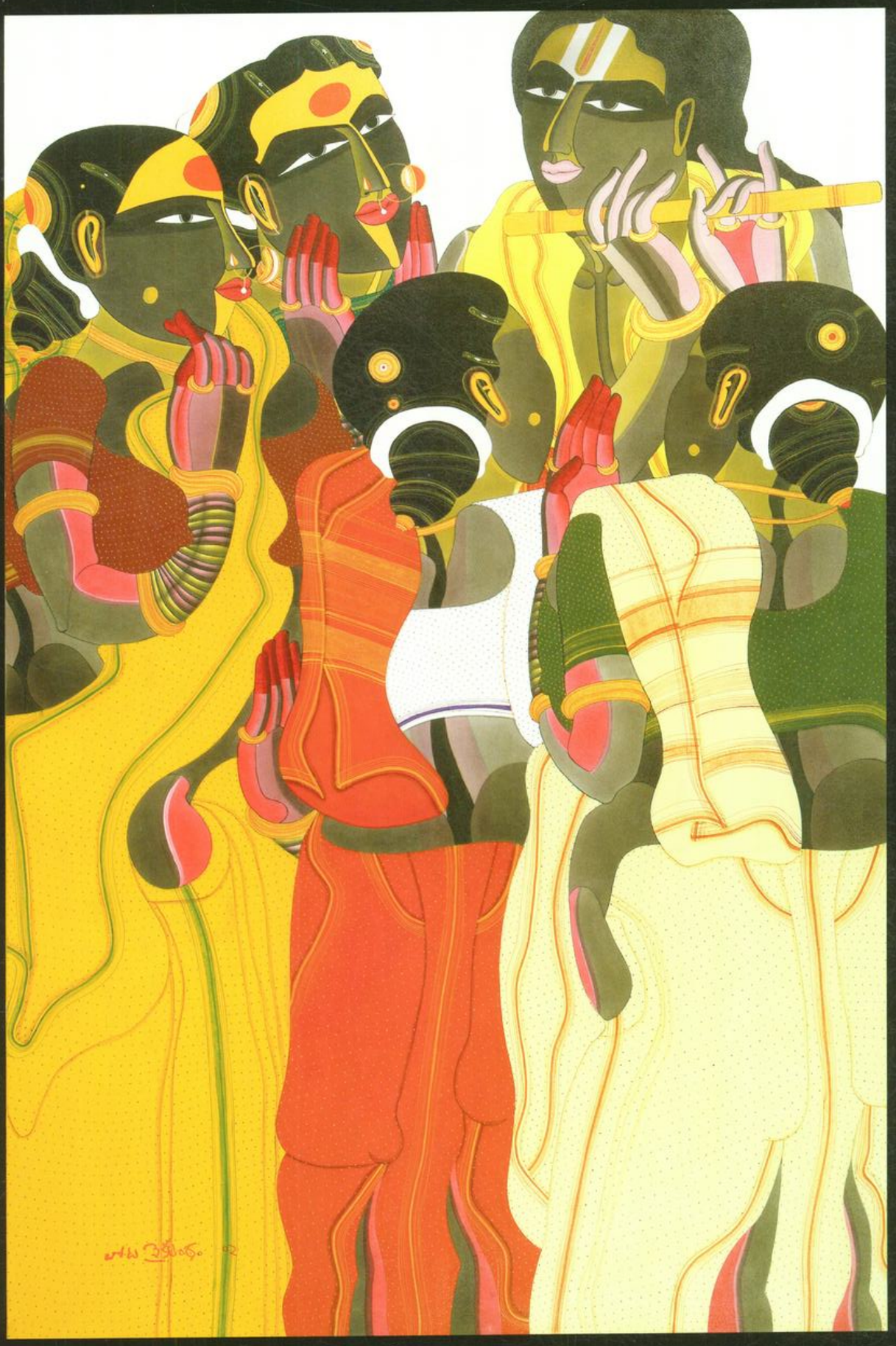
"Whenever I go to Boorugupalli, I think: 'They are my people. This is where I belong.' I have affection for these simple people," he stresses.

Whether casting himself as Krishna among the *gopi*s or female cowherds, or a worshipper before a benign mother figure, he is in awe of Shakti, the primal feminine principle, the origin of all life.

No wonder, then, Vaikuntam's canvases evoke a woman-centric universe.







Krishna with Flute and Gopis, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72", 2007.







I'm a villager, not a city man.
Maybe because my childhood memory
clings to my roots.
I've taken from my people in Telangana.
I draw them. I take my colours from them.
I've taken details from their everyday lives,
stylized them, and made them look grand.
That's my intention.

– Thota Vaikuntam, October 2006

A village within the city

His childhood was spent in the simple village of Boorugupalli, and within a radius of ten miles around it.

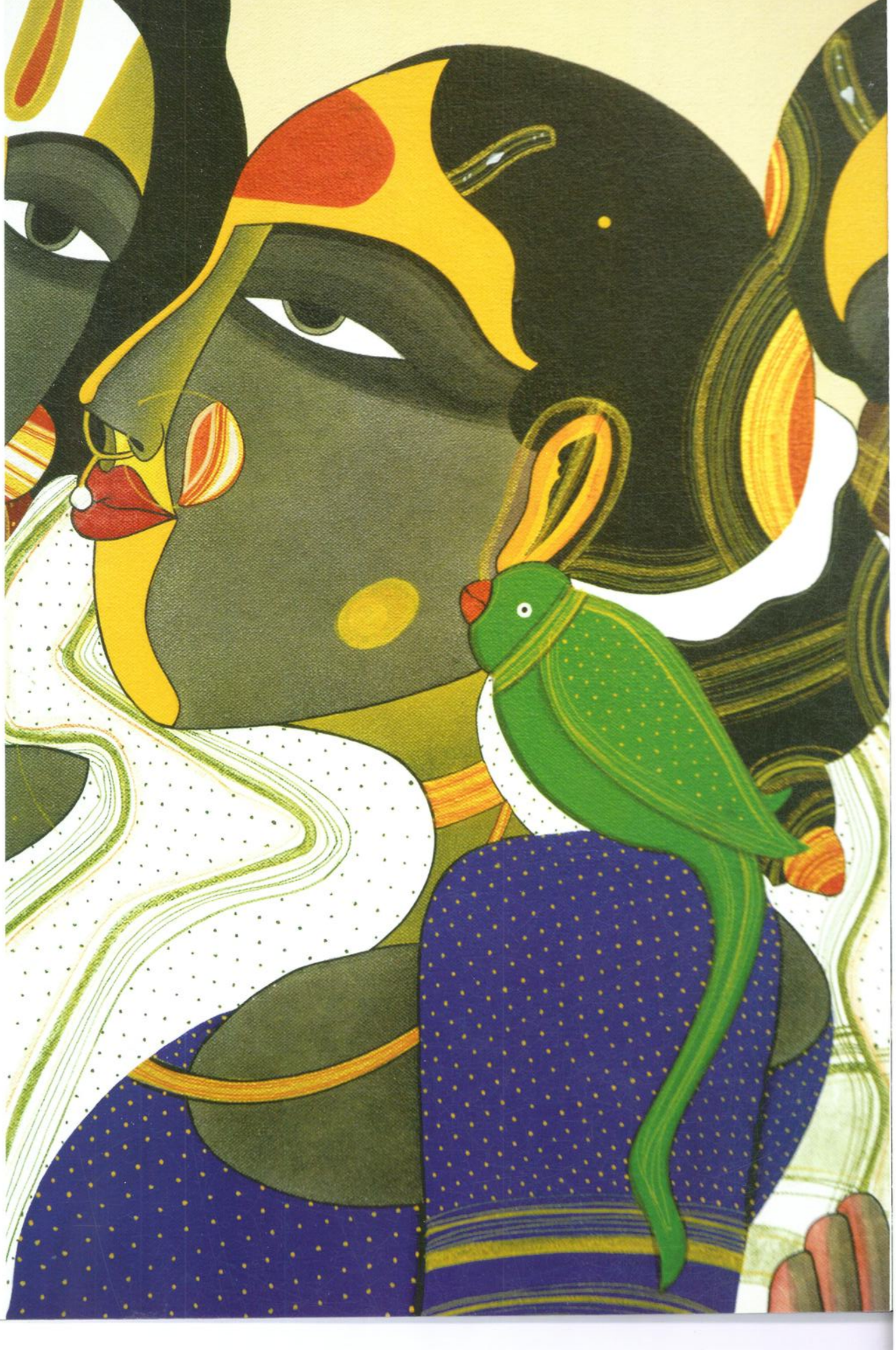
Telangana, to the media-savvy urban Indian today, connotes a plethora of connections. The northwestern areas of the Deccan in Andhra Pradesh, including the state capital city of Hyderabad. An area of Archean gneissic rocks, through which the Godavari and Cauvery rivers flow. The scene of a peasant revolt against the *zamindar*s or landlords and the Nizam of Hyderabad, from about 1946 to 1951.

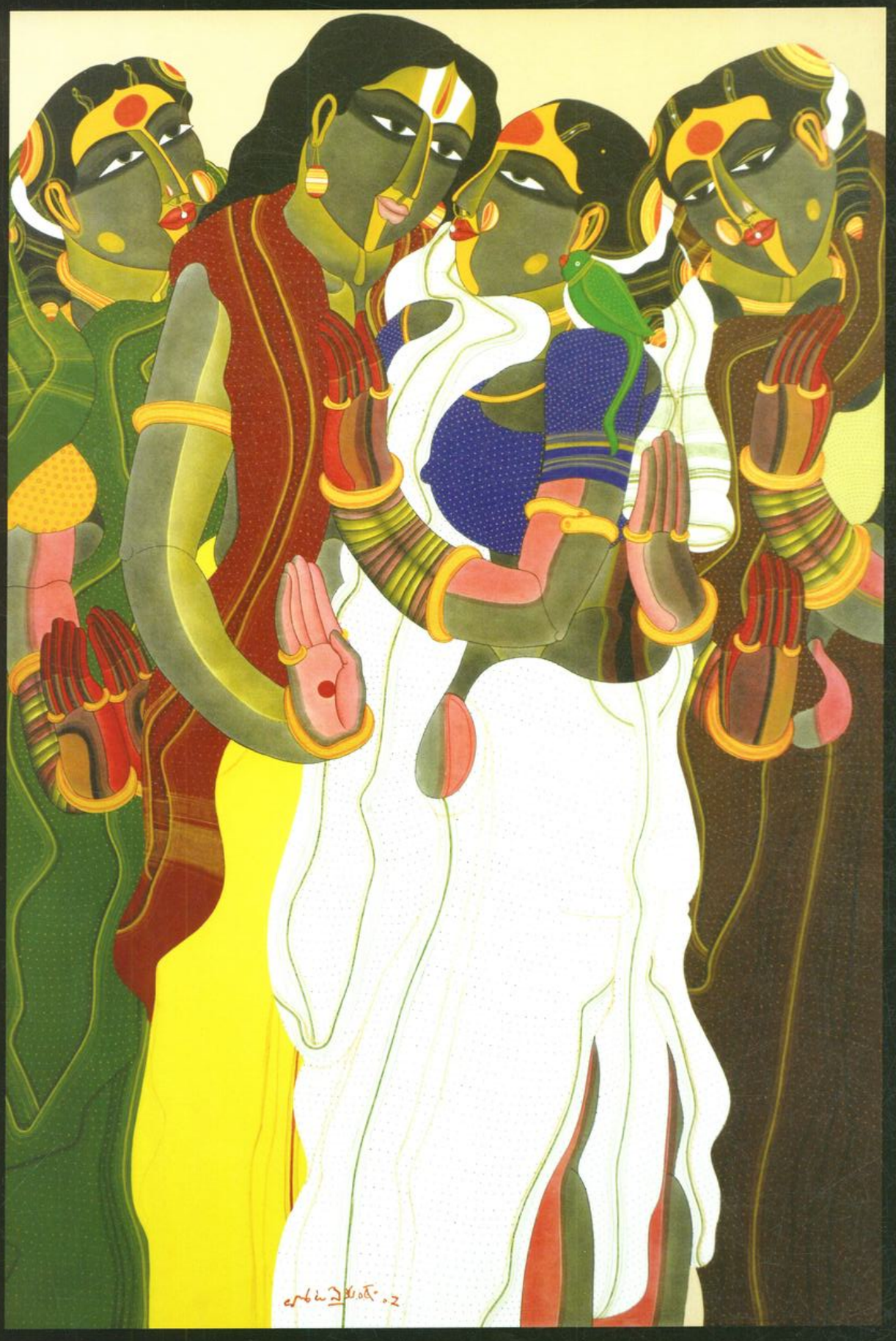
Even a half-century later, Vaikuntam voices the collective yearning for a separate Telangana identity, beyond politics, beyond couched cultures. His Boorugupalli is a perennial river that surges deep within him, even to Hyderabad, where he has lived since 1960. His village, resonant and vital, is alive within his city, especially when he travels to distant climes like New York, London or Singapore.

What ancient rural memories fuel his inspiration?

To Vaikuntam, the village – home to mainly weavers and farmers, a community of about 1000 people – is a source of unalloyed joy. A location where local womenfolk went into the surrounding fields to cull local wild blooms of the *gunugu poolu*, *thangedu poolu*, *beeru* and *katle poolu*. With these, the worshippers would create an impressive floral assemblage for the festival of Bhatukamma Panduga, representing the goddess Gowri, an incarnation of Parvati. A symbol of fertility and abundance, who participates in every woman's daily joys and sorrows. A daughter visiting her parental home, she is celebrated before being whisked away to Mount Kailasa as Lord Shiva's consort once more. Each day of the week-long festival, in the post-monsoon season of plenty, after the women dance around her and sing her praises, the Bhatukamma is immersed in the village pond. This agrarian celebration of nature's bounty is a festival exclusive to the Telangana region, bonding its people across castes and communities.

During the festival, Telangana residents return to Boorugupalli from Hyderabad or distant Mumbai, to test the roots of their belonging, their rustic identity, just as Telanganites celebrate this incarnation of Gowri with equal fervour in California and Toronto alike. Vaikuntam continues the celebration, both within himself and on his canvases.





Krishna and Gopika, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72", 2007.

"When I was younger, few in my village cared about politics or paid attention to political parties like the Congress or the Communists, the Telugu Desam or Rayalaseema," mulls Vaikuntam, pausing to think. "We cared little about caste or possessions. Even people from the scheduled castes would refer to me as if I was a member of their family. They called me *Mama* (maternal uncle), *Thatha* (grandfather) or even *Baba* (father). But now, politics has infiltrated even my village. Tomorrow, TV will come in and corrupt everything. Today, even the itinerant folk balladeers use English! We have to understand our own culture first. We have to be proud of it. But today, everybody only wants to make money!"

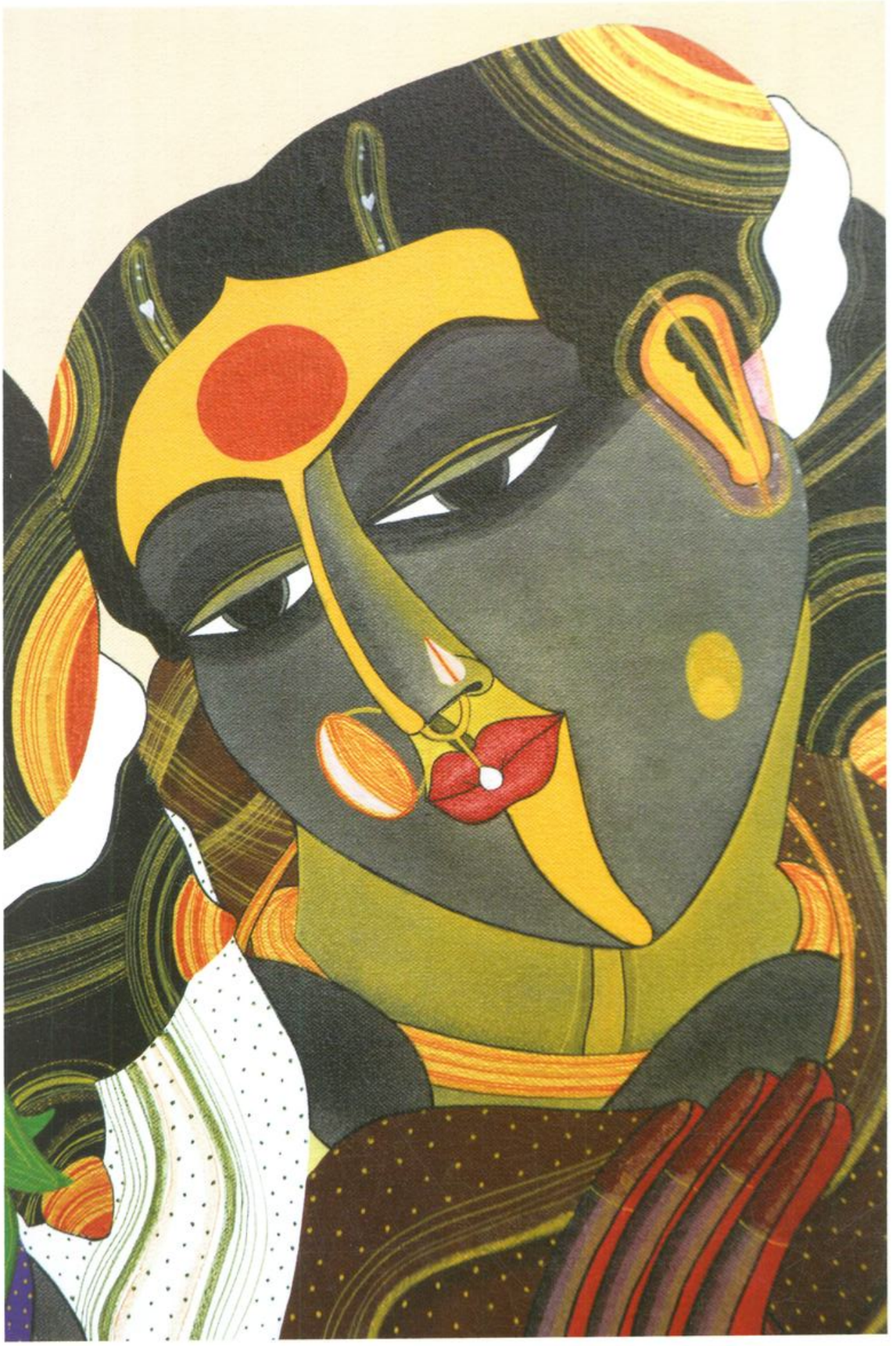
Money seemed a lesser priority to Vaikuntam as a boy from the Vaisya trader community. His father – a kind and generous man – ran a *kirana*, a petty provision shop in Boorugupalli, where villagers could buy a handful of rice, *dal* or lentils, oil or salt. "My father learnt only two things formally: how to write his own name, and how much someone gave him or what he owed another. That's all," recalls Vaikuntam.

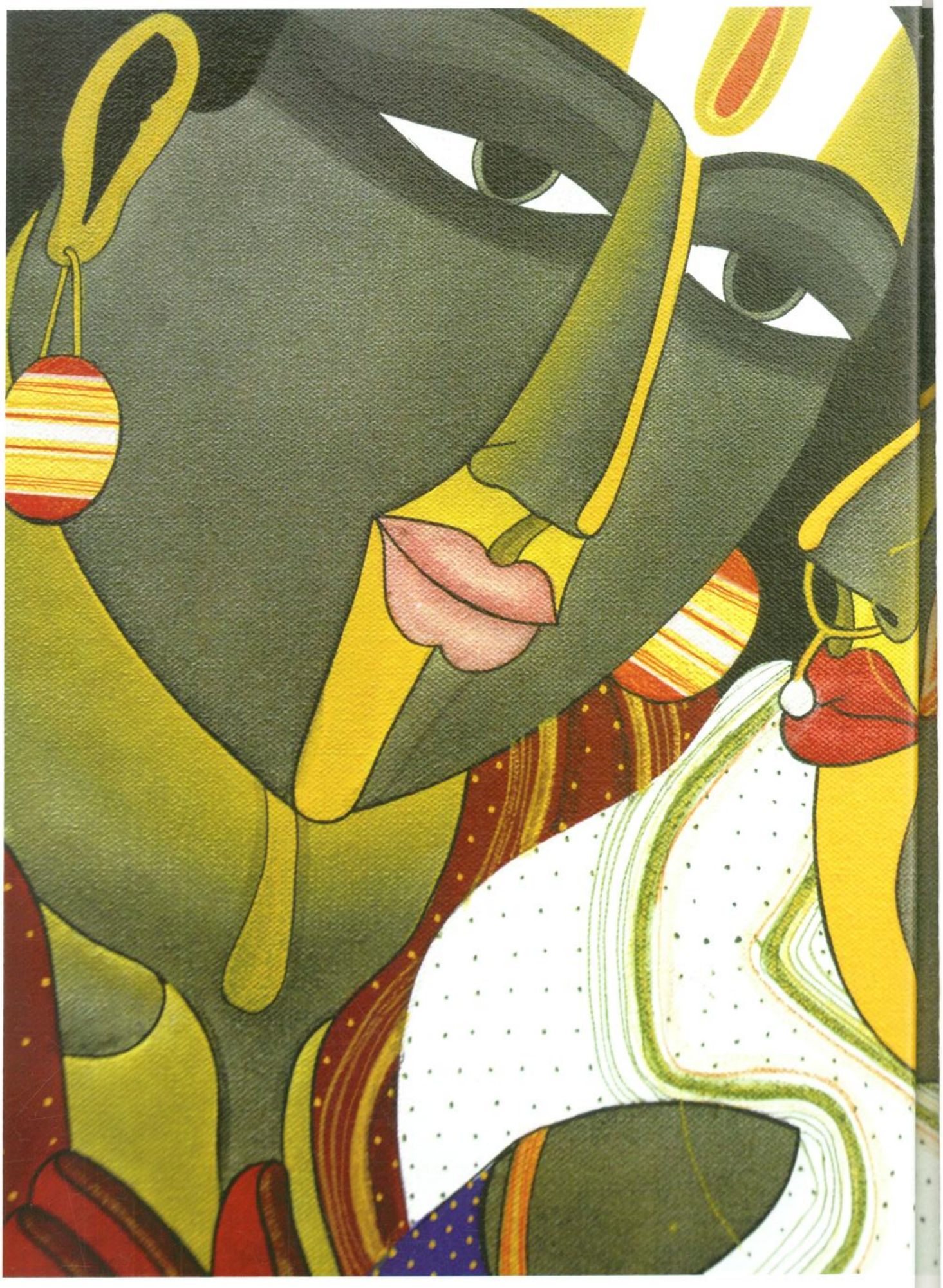
Neither education nor wealth formed the measure of worth in the village. What counted was the individual's ability to

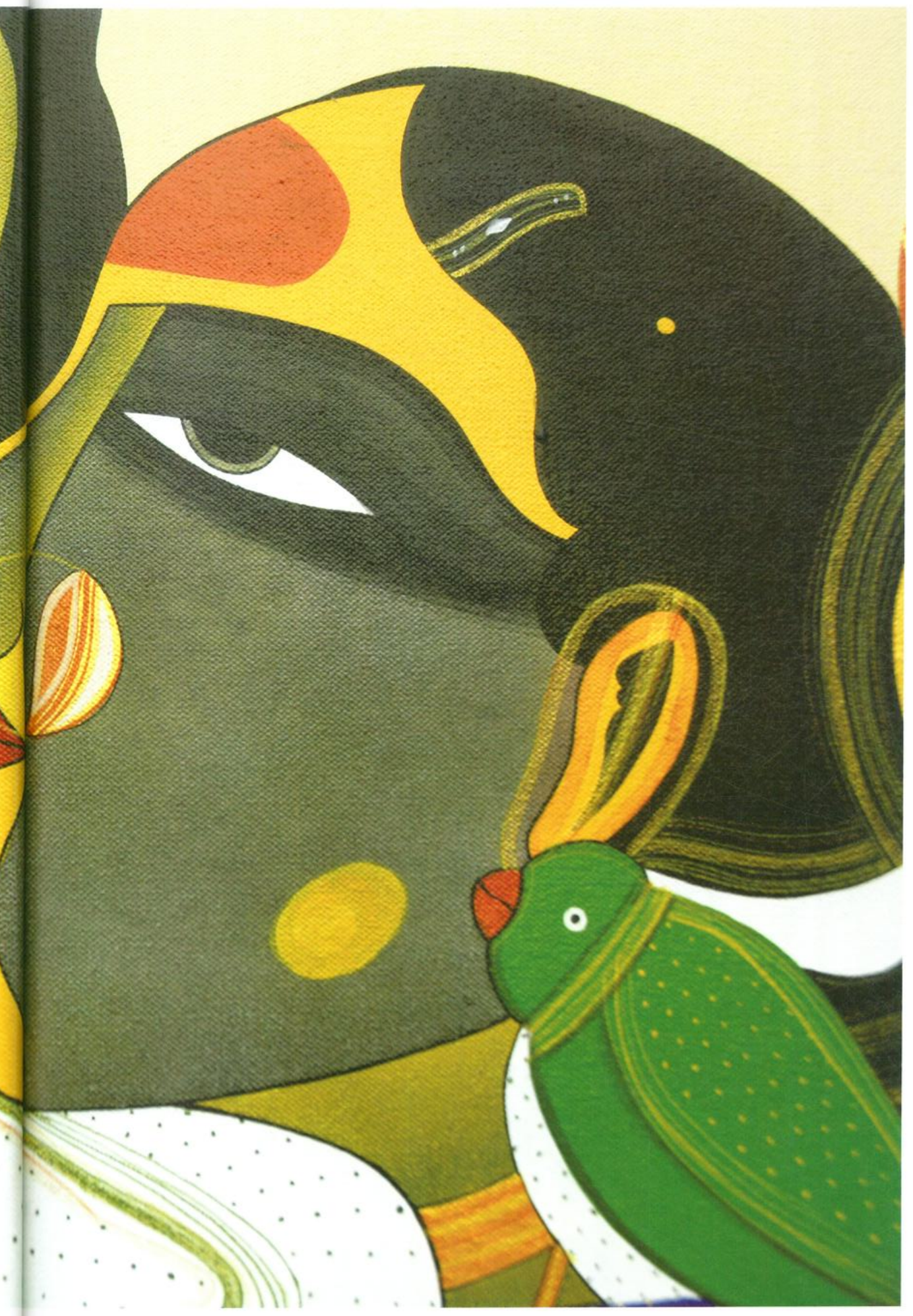
reach out to others. To be with them in celebration as in sickness, at death as at birth, at weddings as at debates on the scriptures with the *ayyagarlu*s or village priests. Couched among rituals and chants, these debates would be open to participation by all. As were the performances of the *Ramayana,* the *Mahabharata* or the *Markandeya purana* by itinerant folk balladeers who donned varied *vesha*s or roles. They would unfurl illustrated scrolls, 25 to 30 feet long, as they narrated these ancient tales all night long by lamplight, often accompanied by traditional leather puppets. Entranced, the village children would watch as make-up and costumes transformed these visitors into mythical beings by sleight of imagination.

Among these fantastical characters who illuminated his childhood, there were two whom Vaikuntam revered above others. They were the heroic warrior Bhima (the second of the Pandava brothers in the *Mahabharata*) and Anjaneya (the mythical monkey celebrated in the *Ramayana* as Hanuman), both icons of might, courage and integrity.

The thread of memory leads him back to the Dussehra celebrations in Boorugupalli. "We learnt from our village elders to decorate ourselves and our surroundings during festivals. At Dussehra, unlike in the cities, we'd decorate

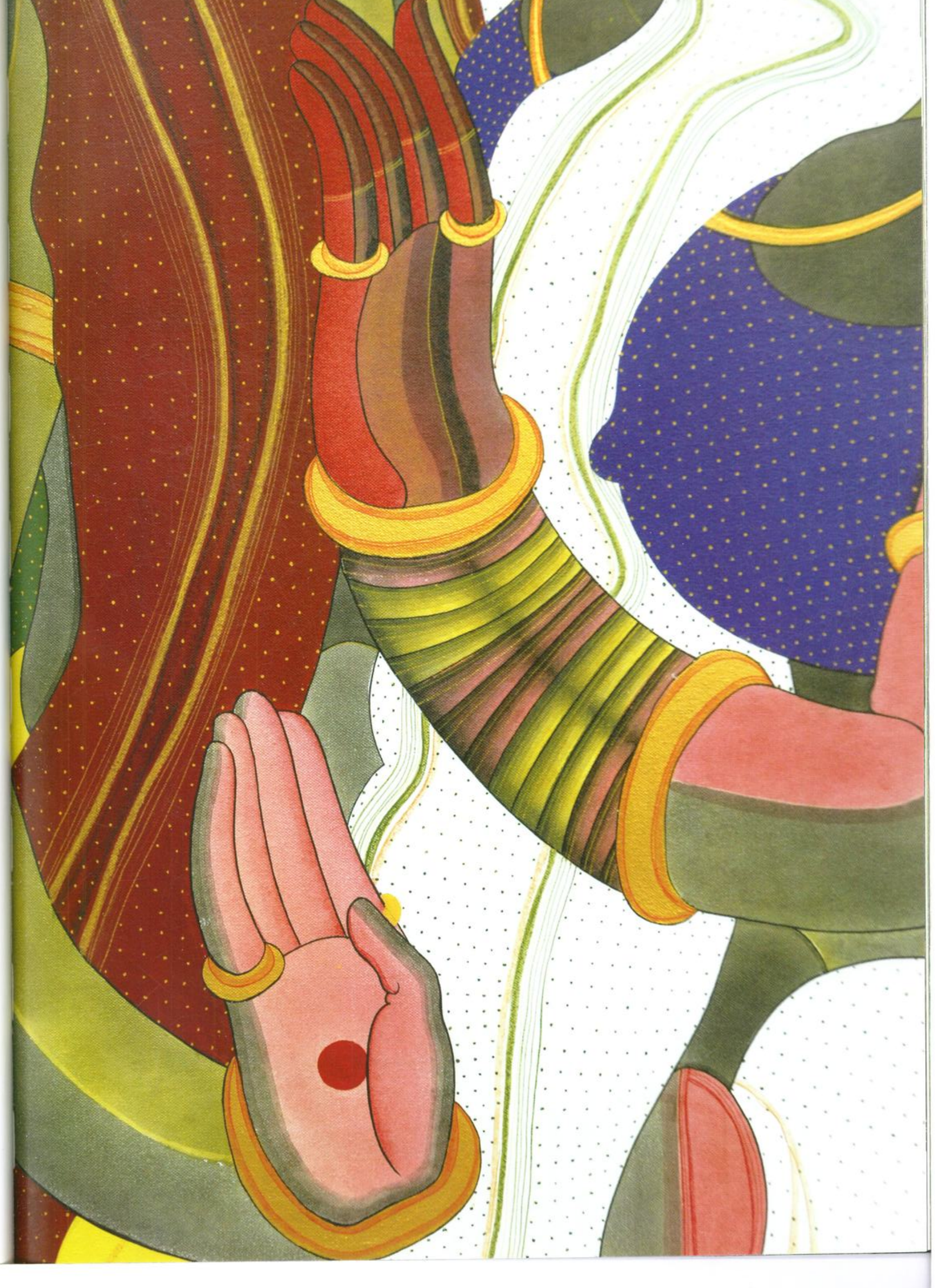




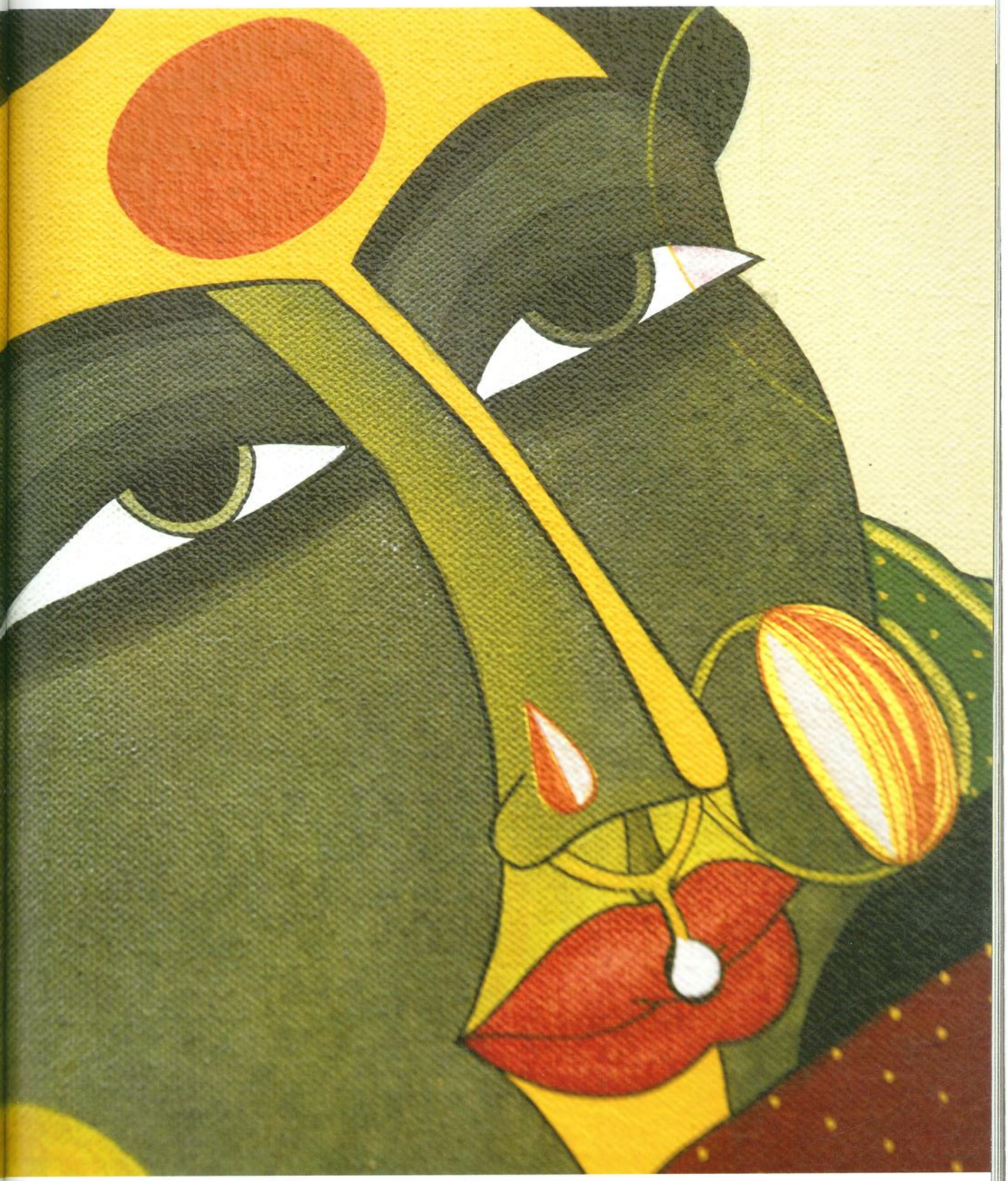


tall poles with corn and *jowar* or sorghum, collect fruits from the jungle, then join in a procession," Vaikuntam remembers. "It made us recall scenes from the "Aranya Parva" in the *Mahabharata*, when the Pandavas hid their weapons and fine clothes under the thorny *jambi* tree before they retreated into the forest. We had that tree in our village. Before dawn, the priest would do a *puja*. We'd take some sanctified leaves from him, and offer them to our grandparents. They'd bless us with the words, *'Vijay bhavatu!* May you be victorious and famous!' Within our rural cycle of life, we learnt to find our heroes within the myths. That's missing in urban life."

The urban-rural schism apart, not all of Vaikuntam's Boorugupalli memories are limned with positive thoughts, though. For instance, he is still haunted by a murder he witnessed as a child of six, at play with his friends. In the distance, they heard the rumble of a bullock cart that drew nearer. When it appeared in sight, it had no one at the helm. On it lay the corpse of a young man in his twenties, killed over a marriage dispute by his adoptive father, a landlord. It was a sight that haunted Vaikuntam as a child, and still lingers in his mind.





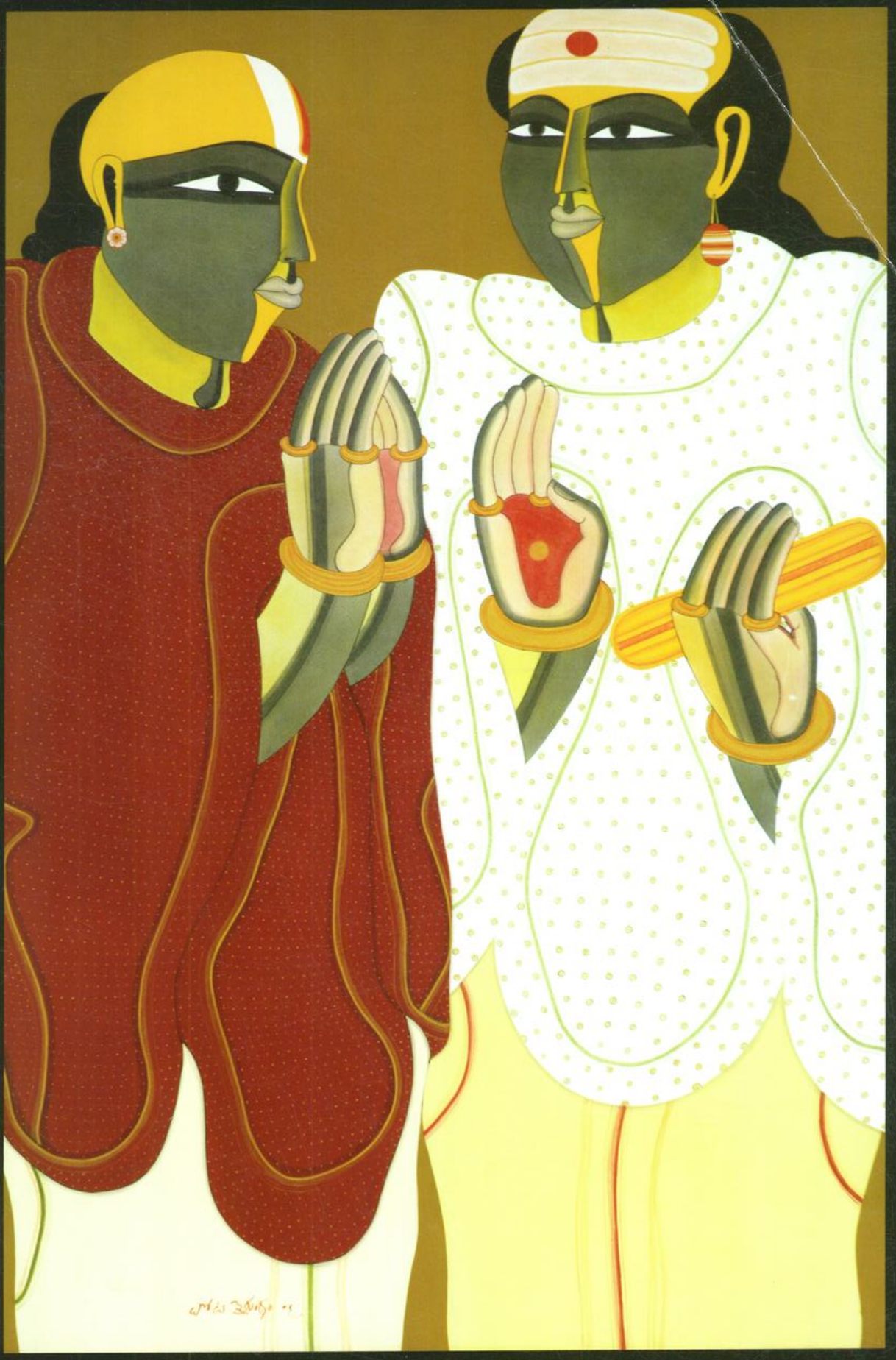


Vaikuntam was initially schooled at the village where his maternal grandparents lived, Shatarajpalli. A few years later, he shifted to the temple town of Vemulavada, close by, to continue with his education. His books were often cast aside for the enchantment of another world – of rituals, festivities, music and pulsating colour, amidst ponds and rivulets, ditches and lakes, beneath the comforting arc of the sky. He sang, he danced, he played to an inner music often unheard by others.

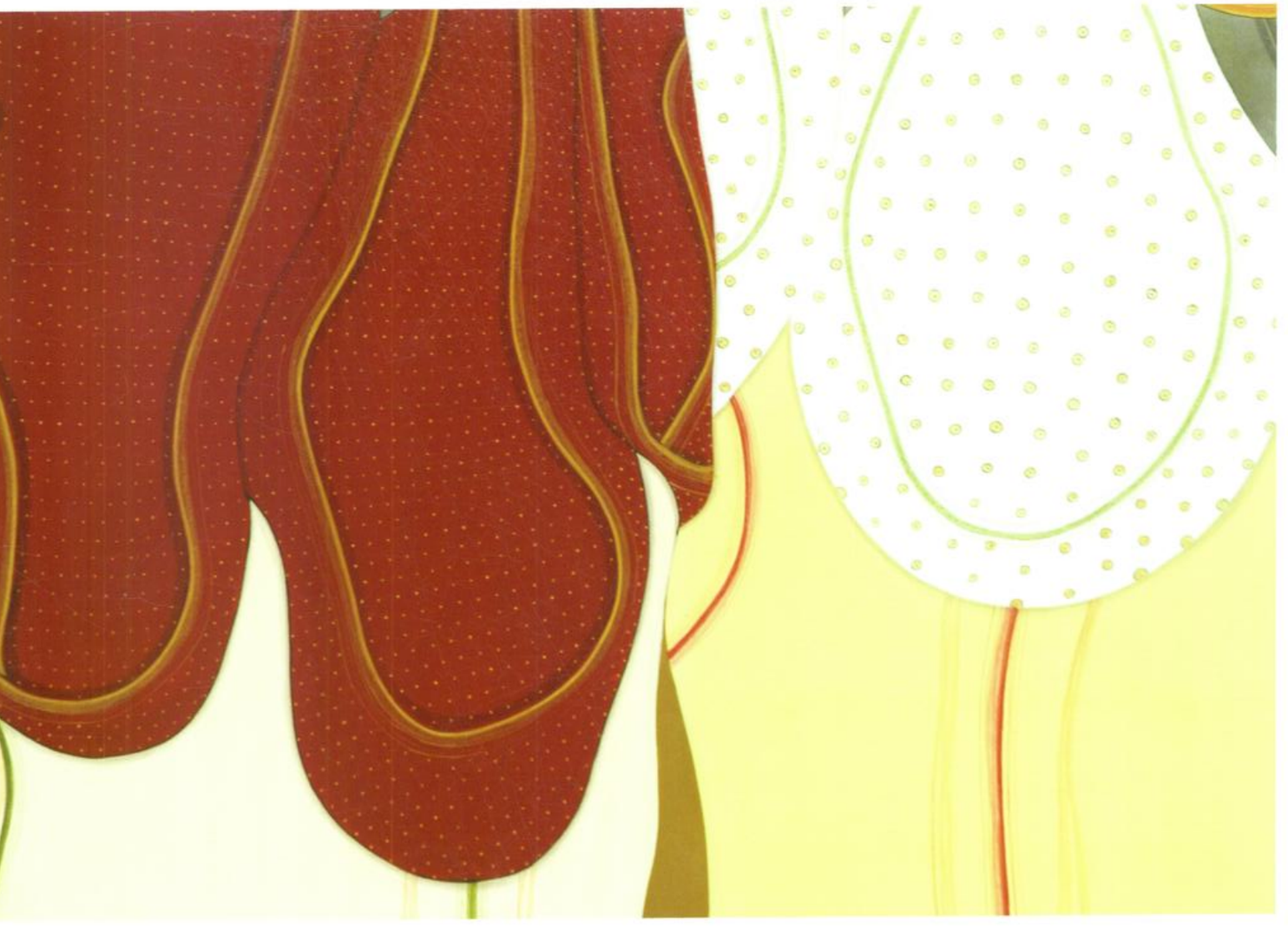
Next, at the Siricilla high school, Vaikuntam discovered a parallel world within himself. A world of the imagination, of creating scenes from the myths on paper with colour, of helping to make crowns of cardboard and shiny paper for performances, encouraged by his teacher in the Ninth Standard, Ramacharya. He still beams when he speaks of the first prize he won at the age of thirteen, for a copied painting!

Vaikuntam has not looked back since. Even at that tender age, his dreams were concentrated on a future as a musician, an actor or a painter.

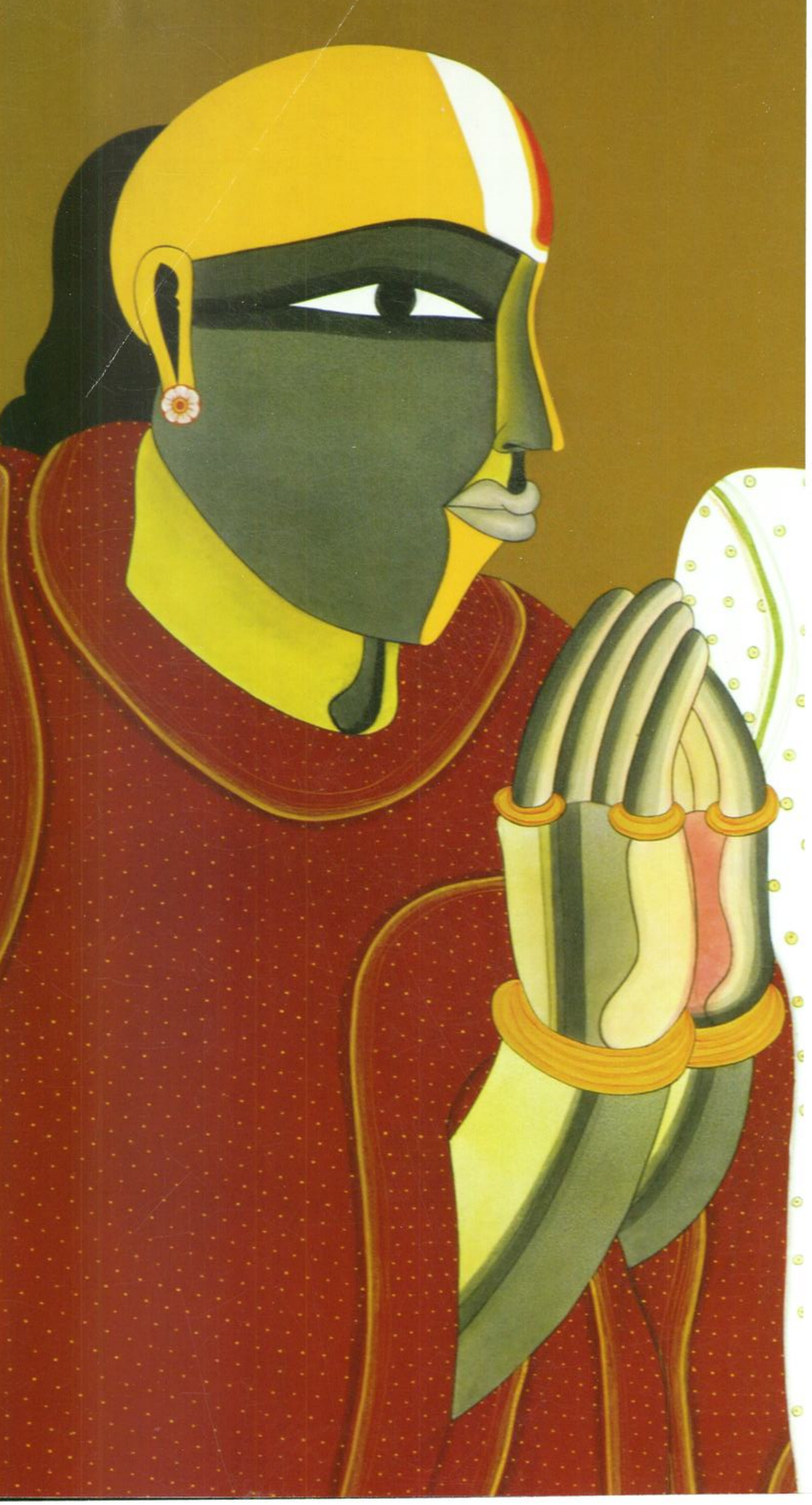
What of Vaikuntam's siblings? The eldest, Narsaiah, was a schoolteacher, who now lives in Karimnagar. The village respected him, despite his domineering personality. He often chided Vaikuntam for not contributing enough to the family.



Guru and Shishya, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72", 2006.







Nagamma, his sister, was married at ten, when Vaikuntam was just five. She became more dependent on her family over the years, when her husband gradually lost his sight. The young Vaikuntam was often sent to her with provisions.

"Boorugupalli gave me so much," he says, with tears in his eyes. "We all seemed like one family, without caste or profession as divides. The carpenter, the goldsmith, all of us came together to cook, pray, celebrate our weddings and festivals. We shared both our joys and sorrows, along with our food. Only once, when our crops failed, a few people died. But the local legislator soon arranged for enough food."

Extending this emotion, Vaikuntam stresses, "All my paintings are festive. I seldom show solitary figures. Even when I do, they seem to be gearing up for festivities amidst a riot of colour. My people are not rich, but they are a very happy people. They enjoy the small, beautiful things in life. Even money can't buy happiness. My paintings are an expression of these rural joys, of a connection with the soil and other human beings. I am part of what I paint."





When I joined the College of Fine Arts and
Architecture in Hyderabad in 1960,
I was in shock. Everyone around seemed so
sophisticated, so different from my village folk.
I was used to folk forms, to calendar art.
My experiences made me ask: "Can this be art?"

– Thota Vaikuntam, 2006

Transplanted to Hyderabad

Hyderabad. The capital of Andhra Pradesh since 1956. The metropolis that is the home of the Charminar, built in 1591, by the royal Muhammed Quli Qutb Shah to commemorate the eradication of the plague. A city of mosques, minarets, and teeming bazaars – and host to the legendary wealth of its Nizam. Today, it doubles as a hub of information technology and biotechnology.

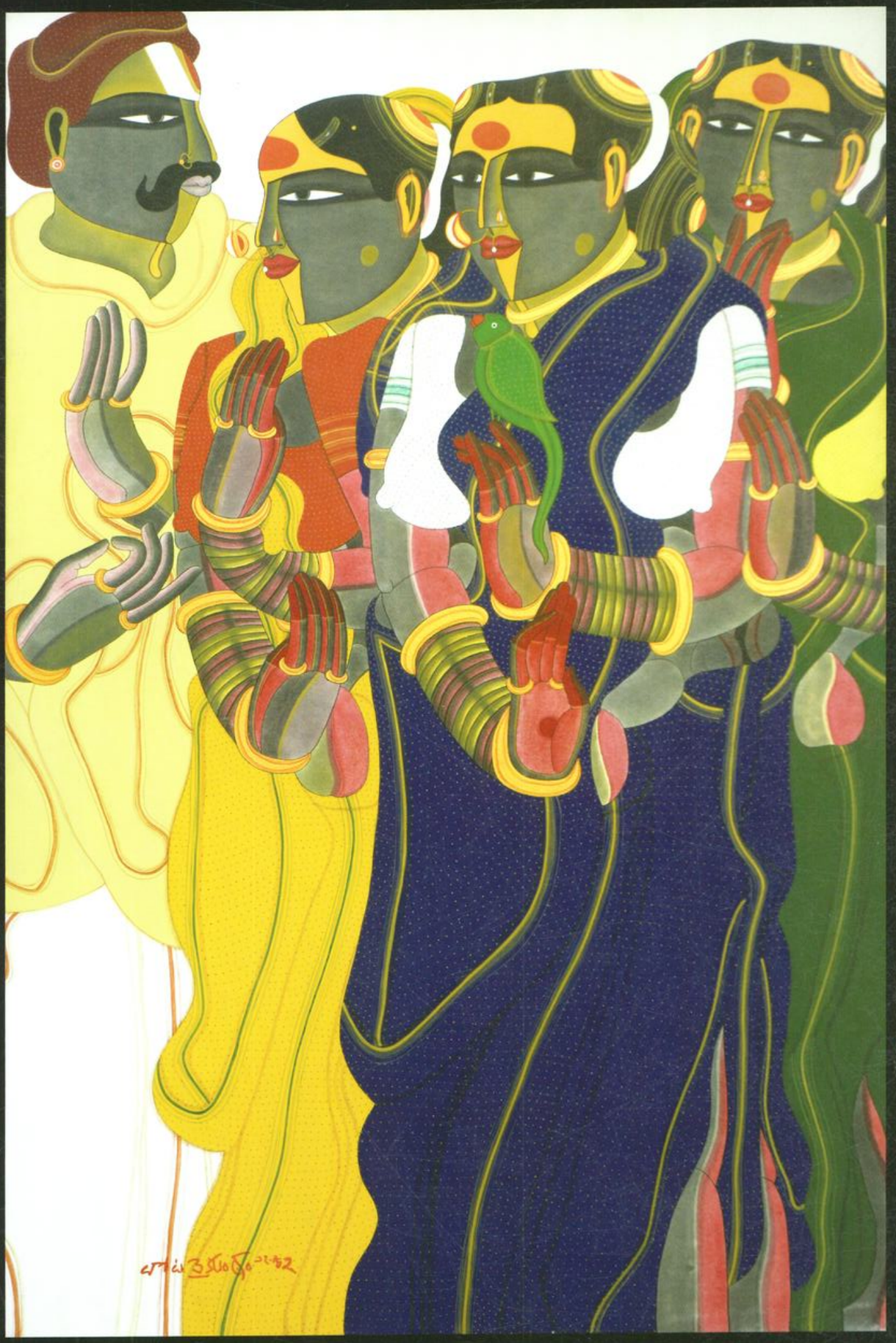
When Vaikuntam relocated to the burgeoning city in 1960, the culture shock rippled through his every pore. At the outset, he had few clues about where his next meal would come from, or whether he would have a roof over his head. But he was determined to earn a living by art, with his mother's blessings.

Transplanted from Boorugupalli, Vaikuntam's notions of art then were rustic: calendar art, mythological scenes on walls or folk scrolls, even cinema posters. At 18, faced with abstracts and still lifes within the classroom at the College of Fine Arts and Architecture, his innate response was: "This can't be art! What is this all about?"

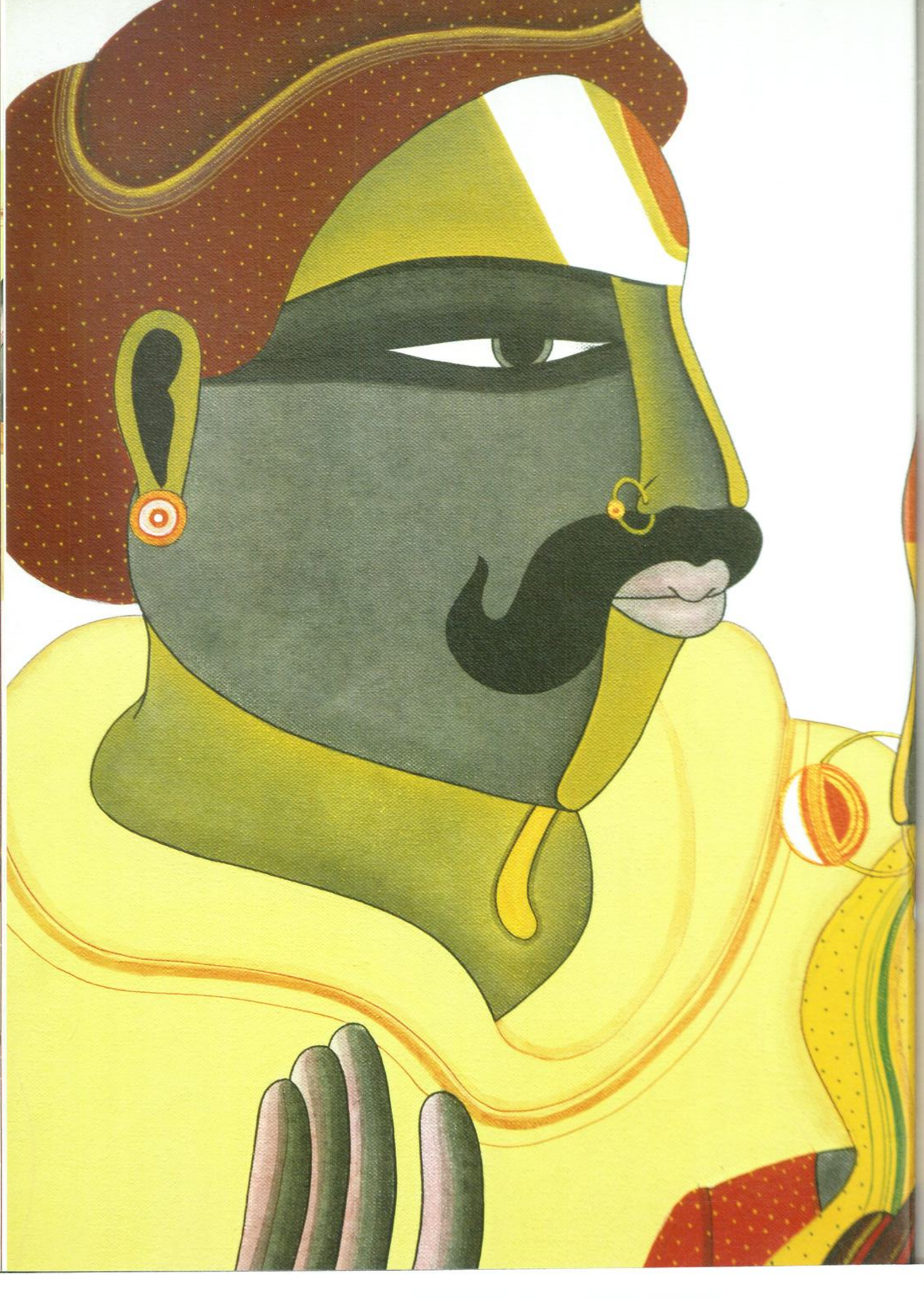
His impulse was to run back home. But a gentle artist named Satyanandan took Vaikuntam under his wing. They took part in night-long conversations at an Irani café, with like-minded artists like Suryaprakash, Brahmam, and Manmohan Dutt, often joined by the critic Sharif. They would puzzle over what made the European masters so individualistic – Paul Gauguin, Paul Cezanne, Pablo Picasso and Vincent Van Gogh, Camille Pissarro and Georges Braque among them. What made them soar above other artists? What distinguished the style of each? Where did they draw inspiration from?

K Laxma Goud, two years his senior at the college, shared insights with Vaikuntam. Into how drawing could be rendered with a difference. Into urban ways of seeing and painting. Into newer perspectives of art, beyond the mythological paintings and images of Mahatma Gandhi that had been Vaikuntam's mainstay till then.

"I realized that art was much more difficult than I had imagined. I was lucky to have these friends around, to listen to their enlightening dialogue," reminisces Vaikuntam of the early days when he struggled to stay on at the Hyderabad Boys' Hostel. "It made me realize how important it was to study ourselves, instead of always looking to the West.



Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72", 2007.



We have to take inspiration from our own surroundings. While people all over the world are doing copies of Picasso and Matisse, I have to look back to my village."

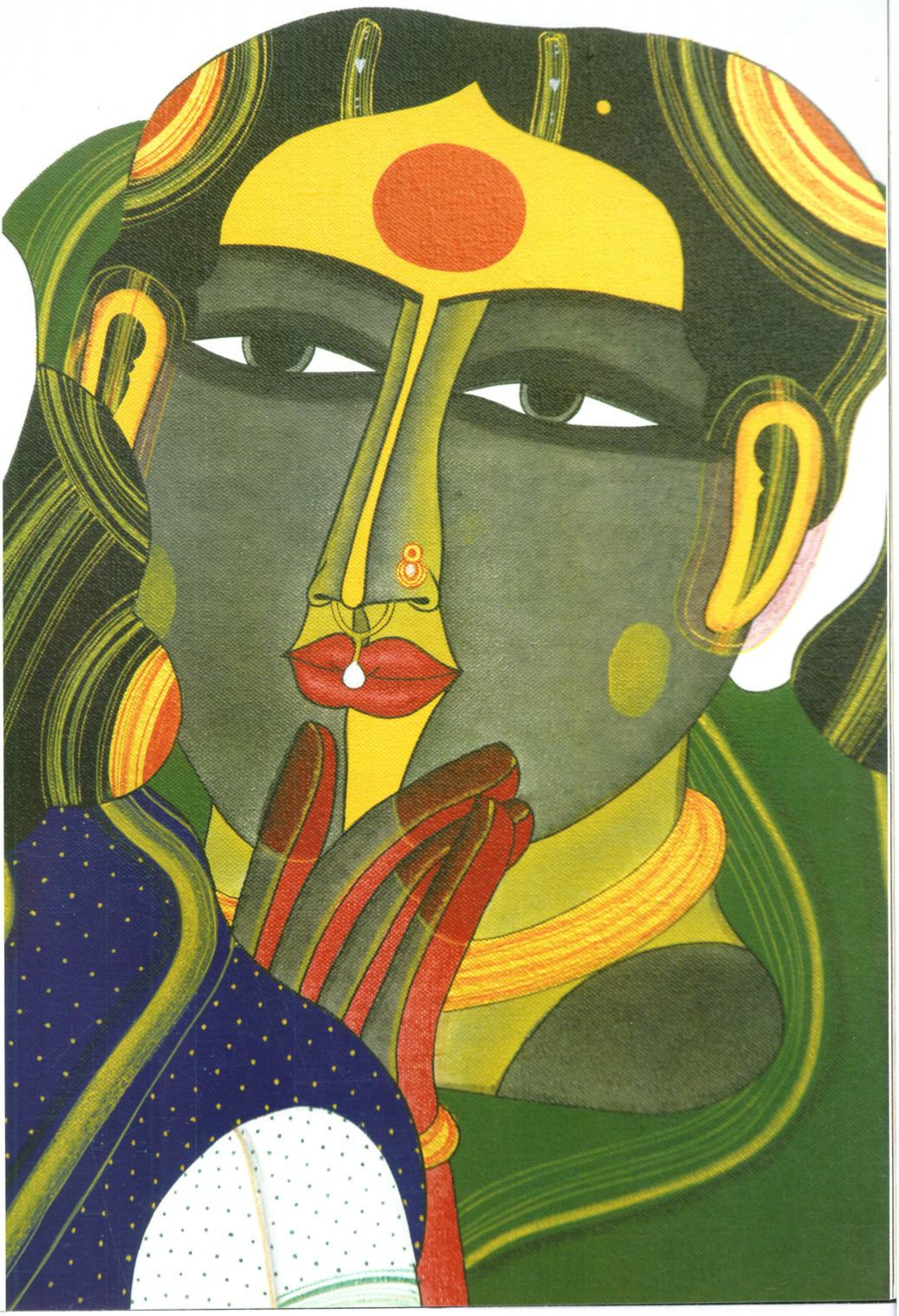
At college, unable to afford canvas or expensive paints, Vaikuntam's contemporaries recall that the muse within drove him to use the reverse of bills or discarded works on paper by his seniors, occasionally even empty cigarette packets or newspaper. Impoverished by circumstance, he produced charcoal or pen and ink drawings instead.

What else did the arts college contribute to his life? Smiling, Vaikuntam says, "When I was a first year student, the Carnatic vocalist Balamuralikrishna came to Hyderabad. One of my juniors, who used to play the flute, took me to listen to him. There were just forty of us in a small room, seated on straw mats. It was such an intimate audience! It was as if he was singing just for me, especially the *bhakti geet* or devotional music, or folk melodies! After that, I couldn't stop going to concerts. I've listened to legends of classical Indian music like Gangubai Hangal, Kumar Gandharva, Bala Gandharva, even Bismillah Khan on his *shehnai*. In 1970, you could attend a whole music festival for just Rs 40!"

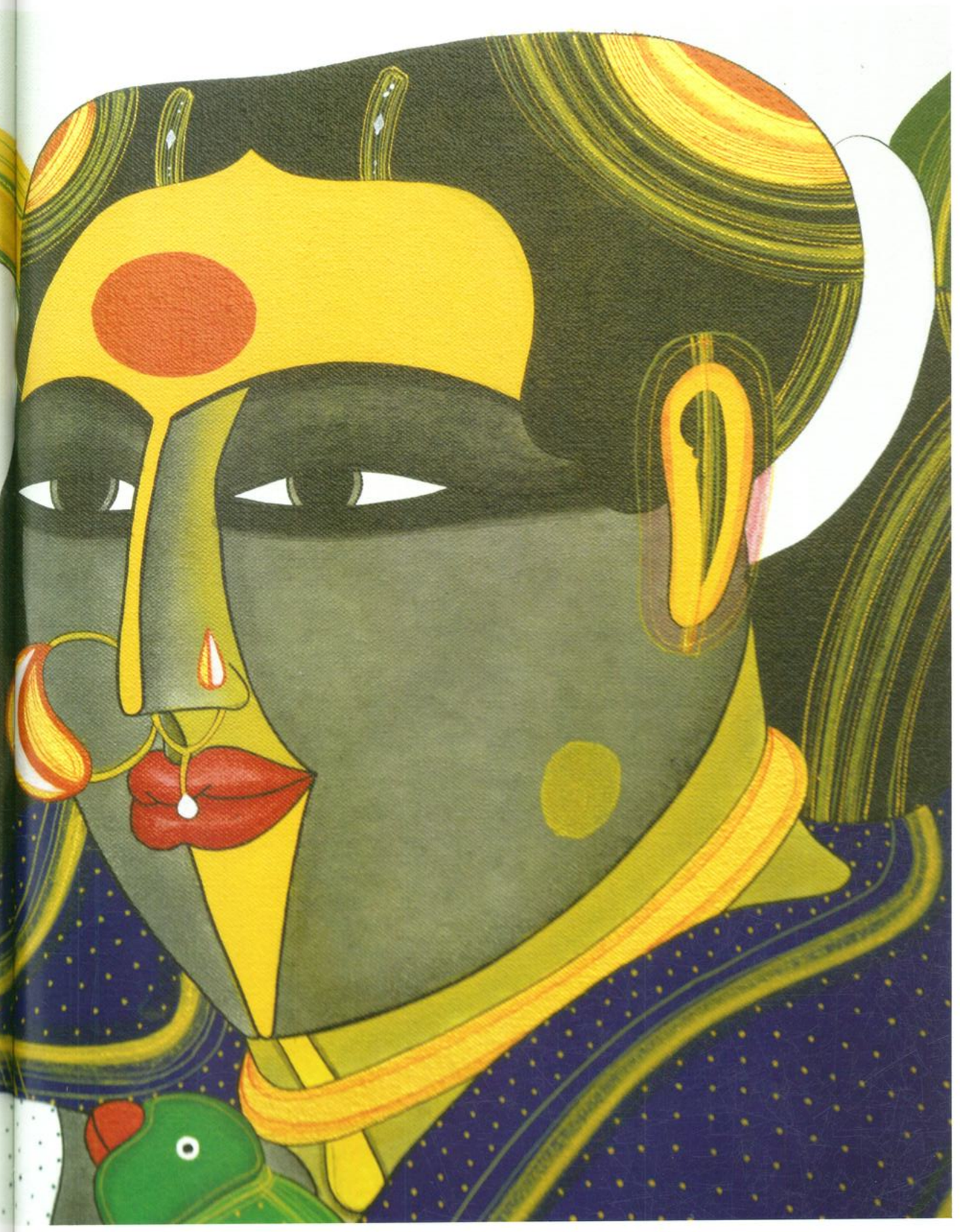
Over the next ten years, odd jobs kept him afloat till Vaikuntam received a diploma in painting in 1970. Between 1964 and 1969, the Telangana separatist agitation interrupted his art studies, as he shuttled between the city and the village. He returned to Devarakonda to take his Matriculation exam, enabling him to appear for the Art Diploma examination. For a while, in 1969, he even taught art at a Boorugapalli school. In the interim, his parents found him a bride in 1966. Suguna, then just 15, was the daughter of a noted actor.

But life wasn't easy for the unpretentious young Vaikuntam, propelled by fire in his belly, and a dream that would not die. For over two decades, he remained in constant pursuit of a single-minded goal, to earn a living as an artist.

How did he eke out a living in those years of struggle, of transience? For 15 years, he taught art to children at Hyderabad's Bal Bhavan. Challenged by their unfettered imagination, their bold use of colour, he felt renewed by the experience.











"When I was teaching at Bal Bhavan, I thought to myself: a music teacher can take up the Indian classical notes of *Sa-Re-Ga-Ma*, while the dance teacher can go into the basic beats of *ta-thai-tatta-thai*. But what can I teach that is rooted in India? We have no Indian art language, unlike the philosophy and theory of the West. The frescoes at Ajanta and the sculptures at Ellora are wonderful, but we have studied so little about the composition or the inner qualities of our paintings," notes Vaikuntam. "Children don't know any isms or techniques. We have to learn from them. As adults, we tend to get caught up in too much thinking... Bal Bhavan was good for me. I had a chance to earn enough for myself. I could think and dream a little. It gave me a steady income, the freedom to work, and mental space."

This journey as a seeker took him to distant Vadodara, in 1971, on a fellowship from the Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Akademi, to study painting and printmaking under the brilliant artist-scholar KG Subramanyan (Mani-*da*, to his students). Vaikuntam recalls, "Mani-*da* offered each of us a lens. He taught us to ask questions. That's what made him a great teacher! He cited examples of perspective, from the Golconda paintings, from the Mughal miniatures, from the Dutch landscape artists. Each composition, we learnt, has its own principles. He taught us about individual perception.

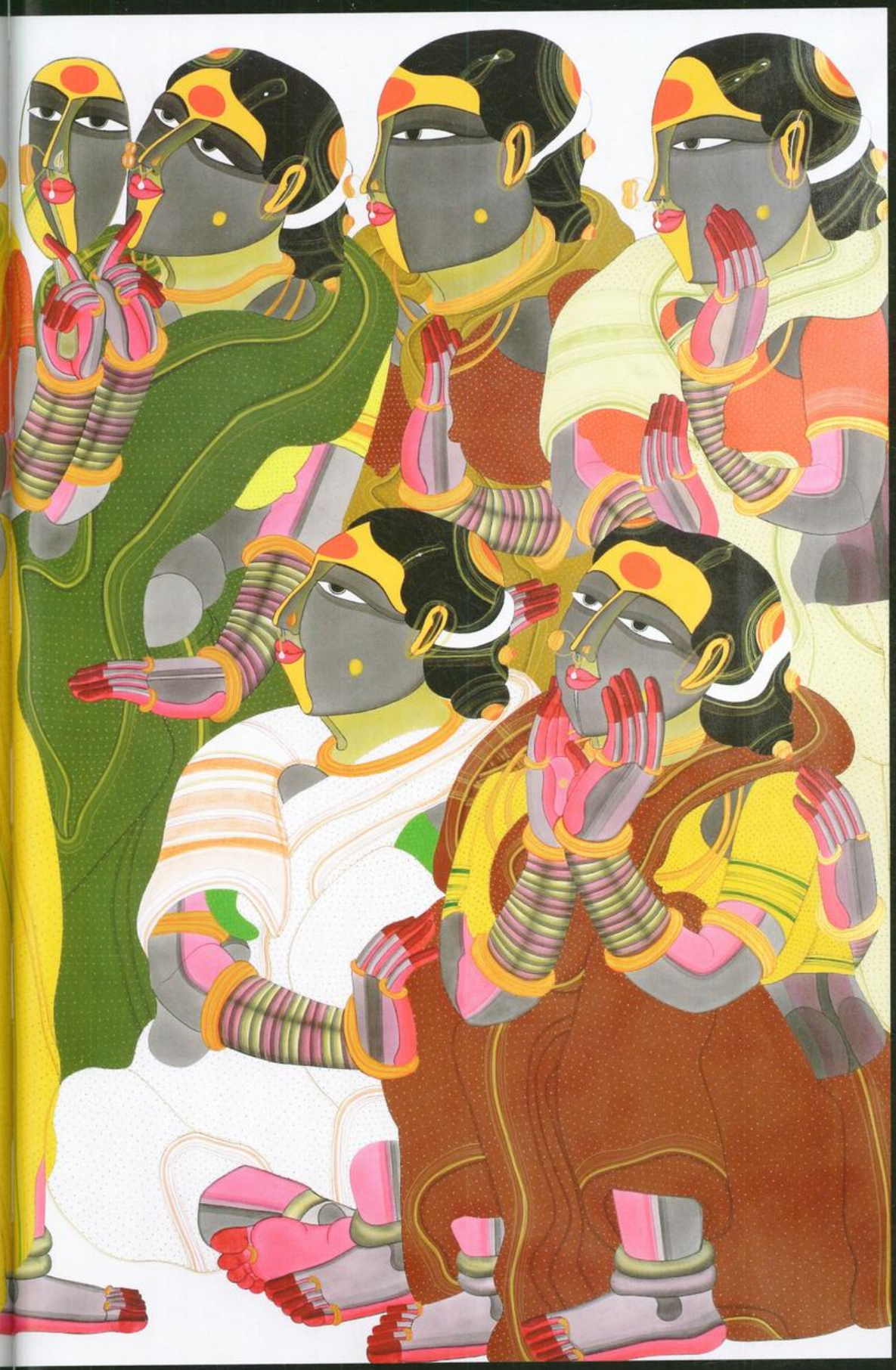
He told us: 'You are in a dark room. You don't know where the door is. You have to find your way out by sound and light. Remember, the struggle is as important as the destination. You have to be very clear that what you create comes from deep within you, not from anywhere else.' That's how I learnt to be different."

With his diploma in hand, Vaikuntam toyed with the idea of abstraction. But his friends in the art community advised him to explore more familiar terrain. Between 1979 and 1982, when he spent long stretches of time at Boorugupalli, nursing his ailing mother, he perfected his draughtsmanship, his keen eye for local detail, his finger on the rural pulse. He sketched the doors and details of their dwelling, the pots that Satyamma cooked in, as if enshrining them for posterity.

Crossing barriers of age and class, he immortalized the women of Boorugupalli. Who were they? Housewives. Workers around the village. Relatives. Or just rustic beauties. Usually in charcoal or pen and ink, with an occasional watercolour, these sketches soon came to encompass the priests, the teachers, the labourers, the farmers. Every shade of folk born of the soil. By 1985, Vaikuntam held a solo show of these drawings in



Shringaramu, acrylic on canvas, 96 x 72", 2006–7.



Hyderabad, with a meagre grant of Rs 150 from the Lalit Kala Akademi.

In the long journey since, still based in Hyderabad, dreaming of Boorugupalli, Vaikuntam now finds himself in the limelight, even internationally. His is a saga that began in a one-room portion of a single-storeyed house in lower-middle-class Chikkadapalli, which he shared with his wife, two sons and a daughter for over a decade. It was space that doubled as his studio.

It was from this dwelling that, in 1989, noted Hyderabad-based art connoisseur and collector Jagdish Mittal bought several of his works in charcoal, ink, pastel and watercolour, ranging from postcard-sized ones to others on photo-mounts. The previous year, a Vaikuntam painting had received an award at the Bharat Bhavan Biennale in Bhopal. Soon, Chester and Davida Herwitz added some of his work to their celebrated American collection. The Lalit Kala Akademi's National Award followed in 1993. Since then, Vaikuntam's exhibitions at Mumbai, New Delhi, London, Singapore and New York have been sold out. On a parallel track, his friend, the Telugu film director B Narsing Rao, known equally as a poet and artist, persuaded Vaikuntam to lend him a hand with art direction in the late Seventies.

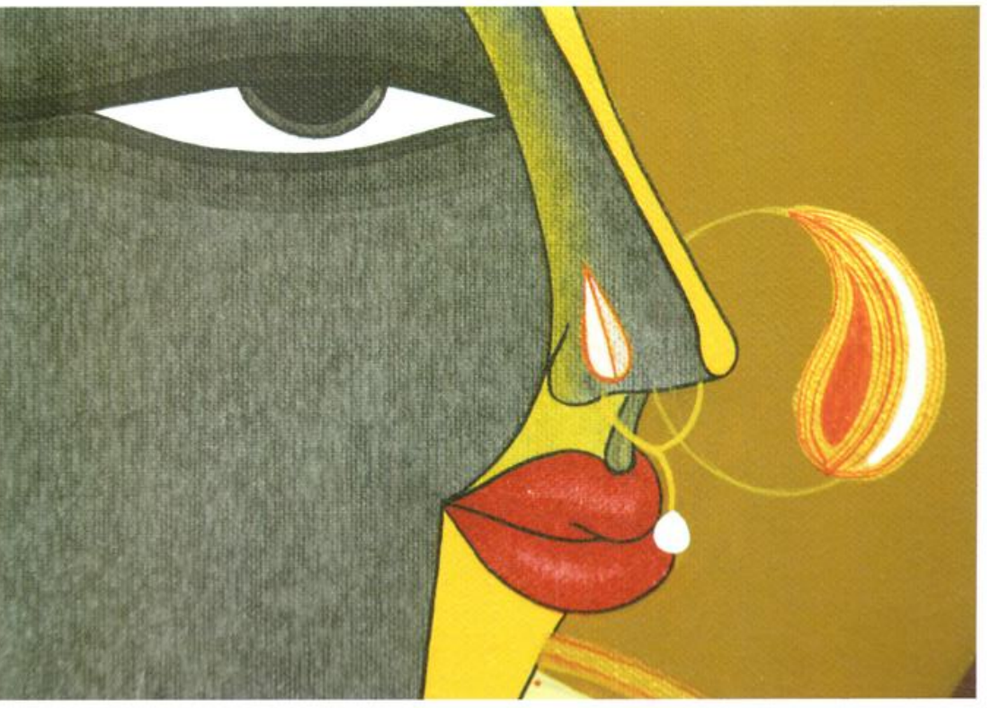




"Often, I was asked to go and look at villages as an art director. While working on Rao and Gautam Ghosh's *Ma Bhoomi*, I was with my ailing mother. I read an article about how our cinema looked so much like that from Hollywood. Many of us felt we needed to return to our roots, get local actors, perfect the details of *vesha* or guise, and *bhasha* or language. Think of films like Ritwick Ghatak's *Suvarnarekha*. That is art! Or the opening scene of Satyajit Ray's *Jalsaghar*. Oh, my god! That is poetry!"

In 1989, Vaikuntam received a National Award for his fine artistic evocation of rural India in Narsing Rao's film, *Dasi*. Plied with colours, brushes and photo-mounts by the film director, that's when Vaikuntam conjured up the earliest of his Telangana women as we know them today.





My women are really like goddesses to me. Like Bhatukamma, the goddess of life. Or my mother, who gave me what I wanted. Everything emerges from that. I'm happy doing this for now. But who knows about tomorrow?...
I remember a German writer who noted: "In India, thousands of years of history are in the faces." That's so true of Telangana. It shows in how clear, sometimes innocent, the women's eyes are.

– Thota Vaikuntam, October 2006

Worshipping women

What makes the women on Vaikuntam's canvases special? What sets them apart? Are they goddesses or mere mortals?

It is tempting to describe Vaikuntam as a fabulist in paint. For these Telangana women, who are identified as his métier today, have always been part of his days, in different avatars. As the Boorugupalli women who ceaselessly toiled at family rites and community festivities, at helping their neighbours and caring for their offspring, and at domestic chores. As the dusky, brightly-clad and seemingly glamorous performers from itinerant folk troupes, who played mythological heroines like Draupadi and Sita in all-night enactments, casting a spell on the youngster, who dreamt of sharing their romantic, nomadic lives. As the nubile young village maidens who seduced his dreams from a tender age, whom he yearned to touch. And through the hard-won bond with his wife Suguna, which took years to forge, now extended into the true-as-steel understanding with his daughter, Lakshmi.

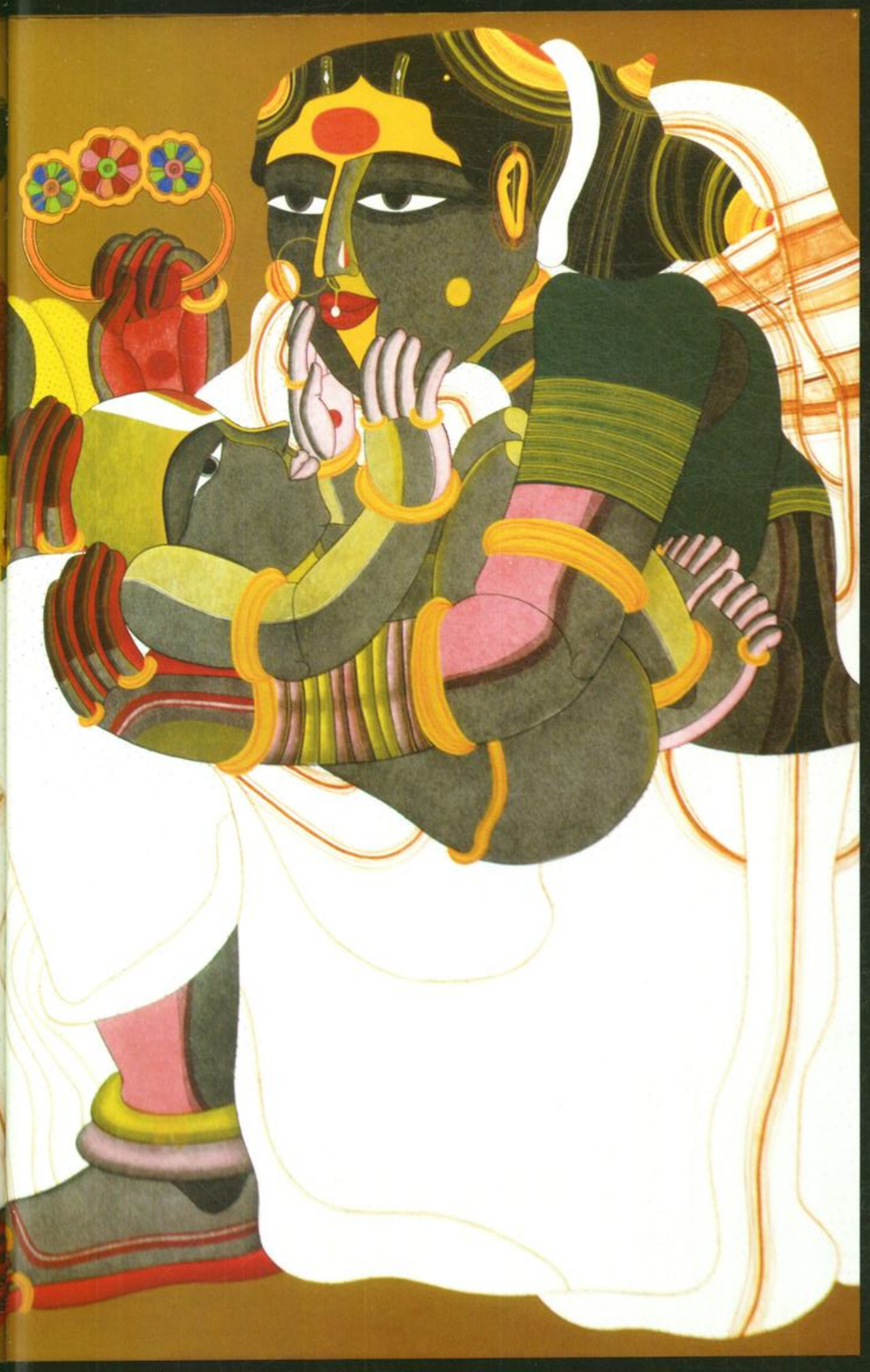
His women on canvas are no delicate beauties as rendered in the Mughal miniatures, or realistic entities with

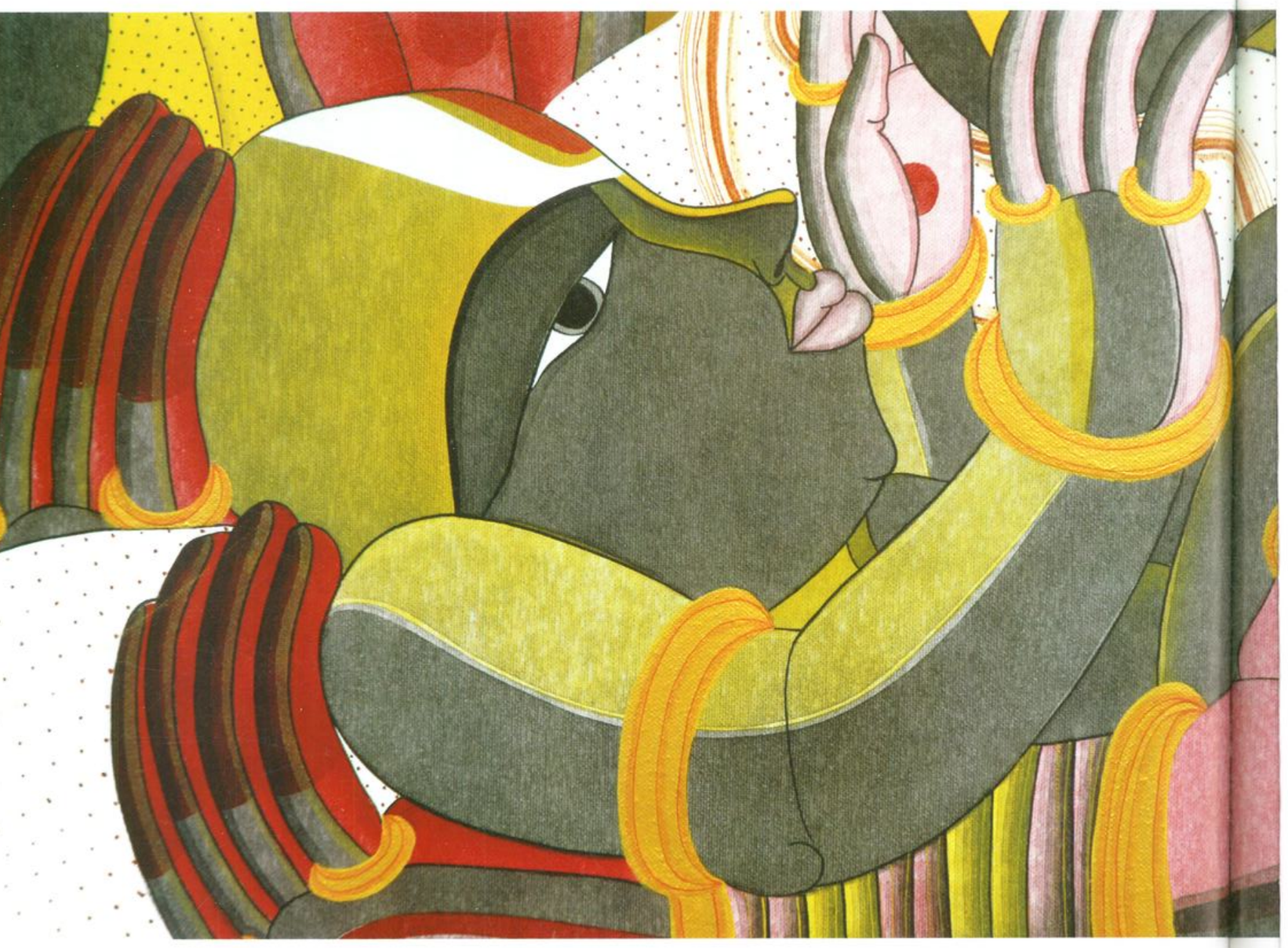






Women with Mother and Child, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48", 2006.



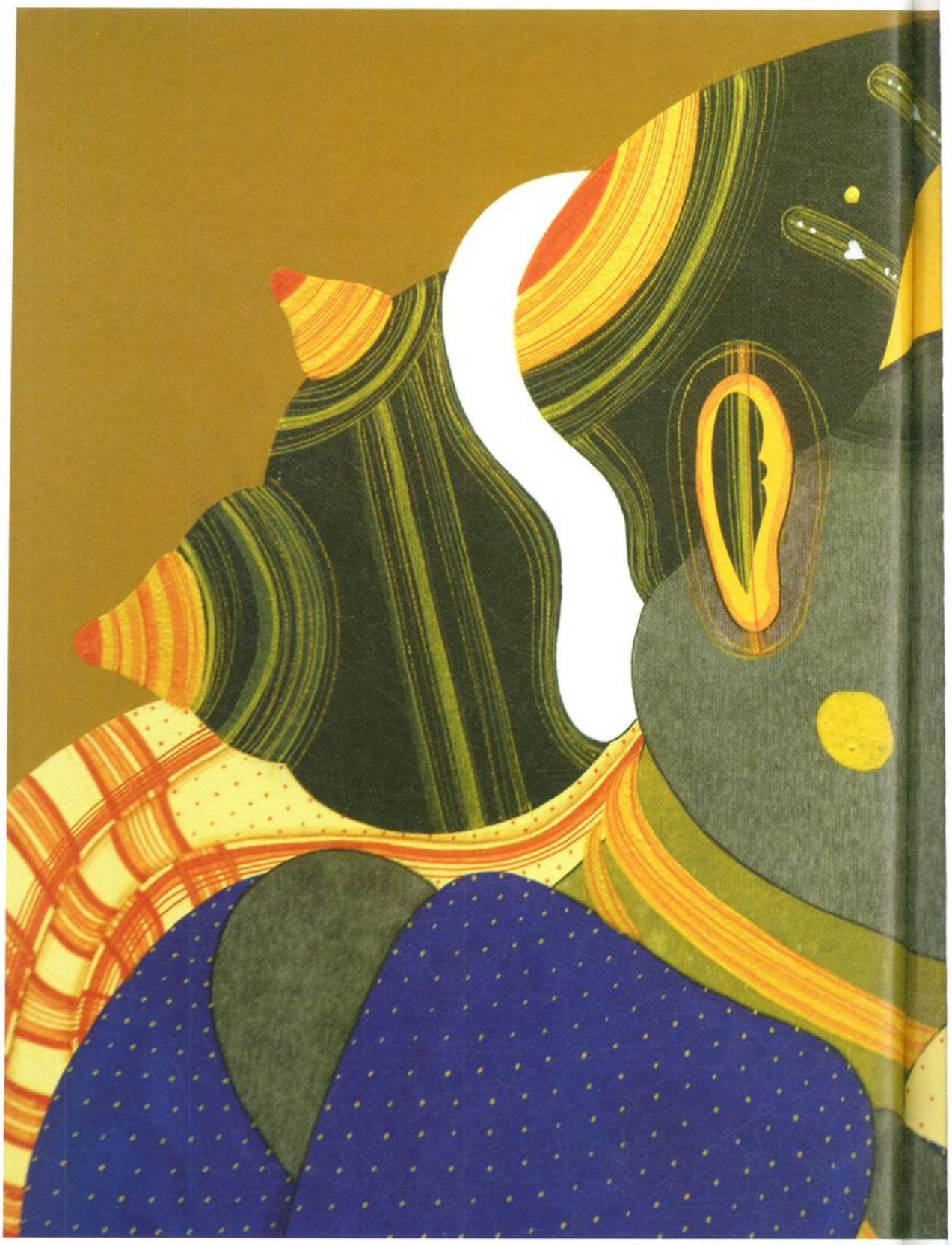




ornamentation as in Ravi Varma's oils on canvas. Nor are they the moulded mythical figures of the Tanjore or Mysore traditional paintings, neither the slim-limbed figures from Harappa, or the voluptuous, sculpted women enshrined at Khajuraho. They are clearly removed from the folk-centred images of a Jamini Roy or the *apsaras* or celestial nymphs on the walls of Ajanta. Nor are they drawn from the lineage of Amrita Sher Gil's village women or MF Husain's homage to Madhuri Dixit, Indira Gandhi or Mother Teresa.

What makes Vaikuntam's Telangana women stand apart? Their presence, for one. They emerged, full blown, on his canvases around the Eighties. Dark-skinned and voluptuous, these mature women beckon the eye with their lustrous skin, their bright saris, their profiles almost turned away, rendered either as bust or in three-quarter length. Their jewellery is distinctive – rows of bangles, armbands, glittering nose-rings, and elaborate ear ornaments. Enhancing it all is the most graceful decoration for a rustic *sundari* or belle, flowers from the soil in perfectly-draped strands.

The belle's make-up draws from rural dressage. Turmeric to evoke the gold of sunburnt skin, smeared across her broad forehead, often down her nose, up to the chin. A huge crimson circle of *kumkum* to centre the eye and the soul.





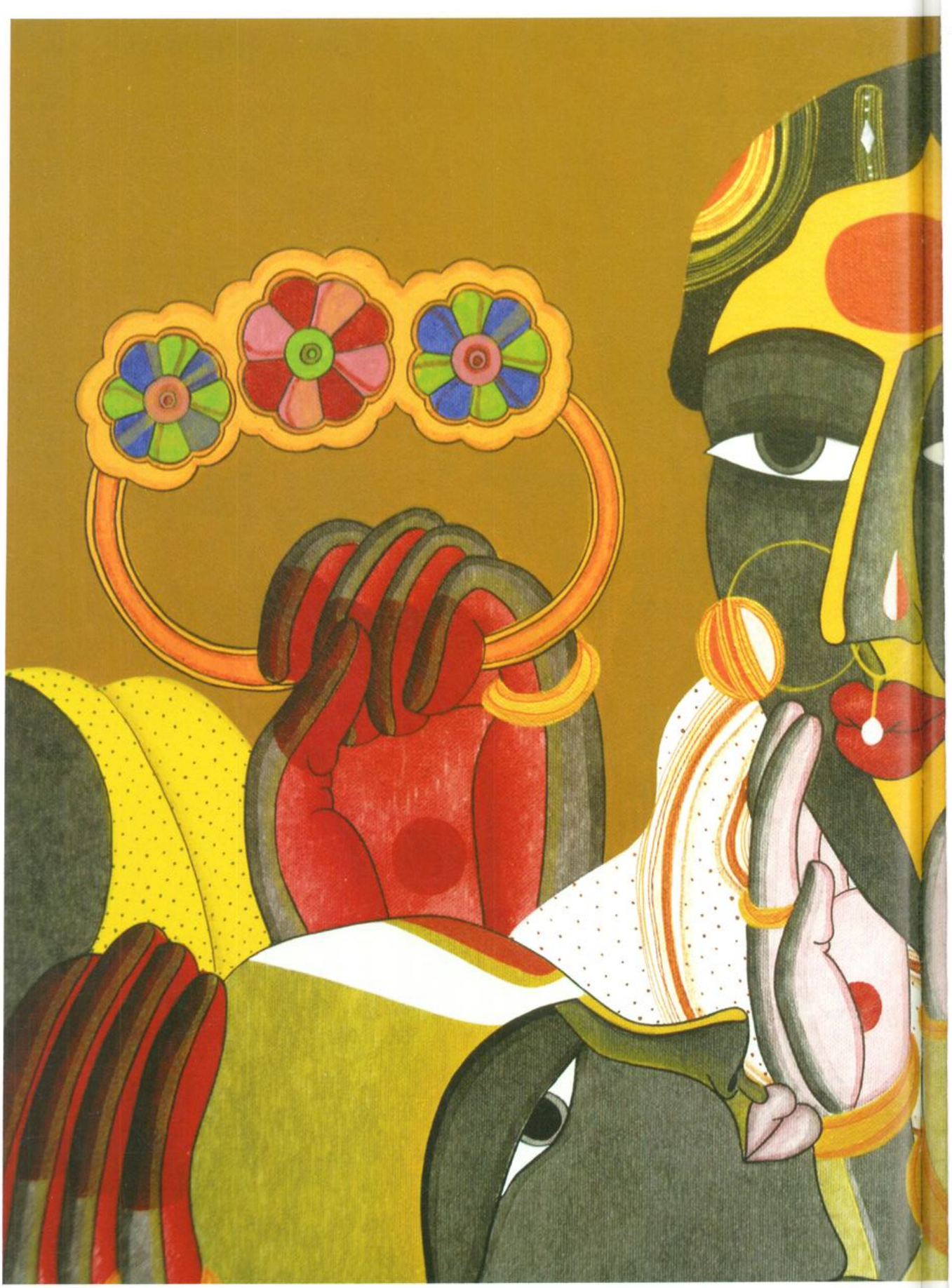


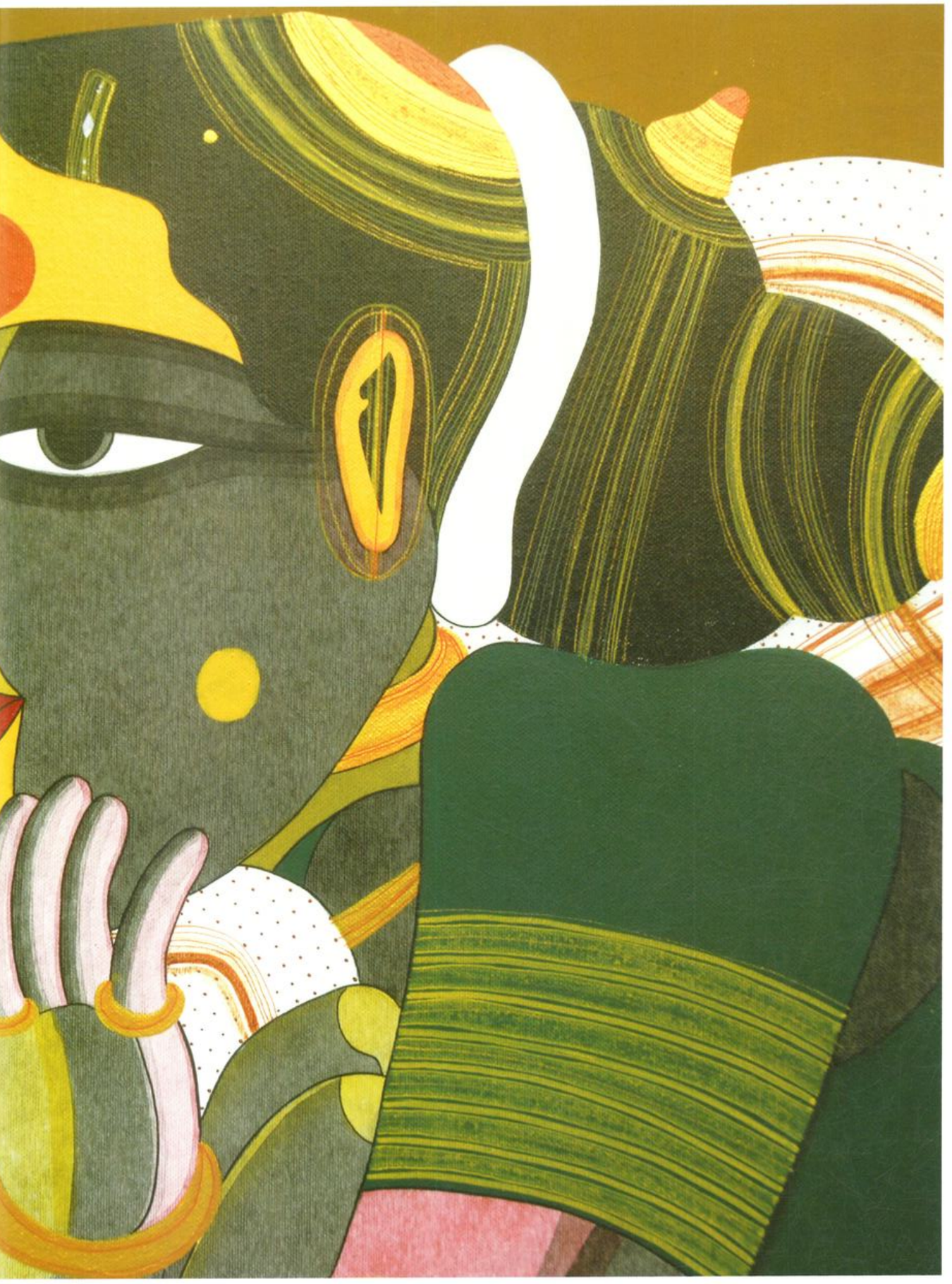
Bold eyes outlined with *kajal* or collyrium, a dark spot on the cheek to ward off the evil eye.

The body of his Telangana woman is sturdy yet seductive, in a fitted, abbreviated *choli* or blouse, worn with a draped sari with a narrow border, drawn from local weaves, whether in red, yellow, green, brown or white, usually with tiny *butas* or dots scattered over evenly, worn in the *kashta* fashion of farm labourers, tucked in at the rear, similar to the drape adopted by the fisherfolk of Maharashtra.

What features make these full-hipped women erotic icons, beyond Boorugupalli, beyond the fields they till or the crops they reap? Their full breasts and lips, the languor of their forms, the quiet certitude in their dark eyes. That's besides a typically Vaikuntam feature, the embellishment of their navels, an immediate call to touch. Their dark bodies seem to proclaim how closely they are in touch with themselves. With their robust physicality. Their sexuality. Their latent inner resources.

Vaikuntam's statuesque woman, with her weather-beaten profile, is not impacted by contemporary (read Indian urban) notions of catwalk glamour. Partial exposure lends her nuanced suggestiveness, more through masking than





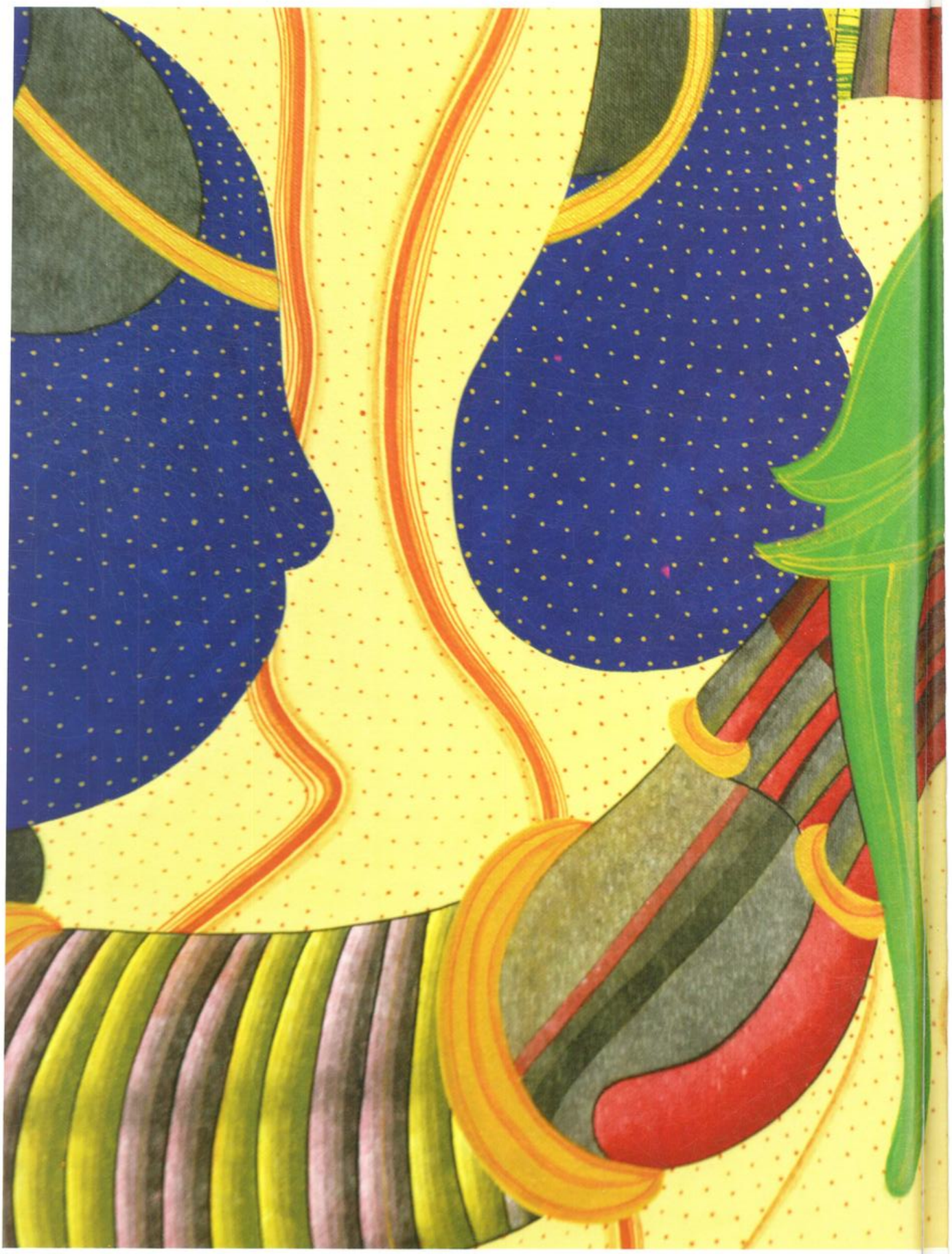
basking in the nude. Her stomach protrudes, her arms are rounded with toil, but her beauty glows from every pore. Because she is Mother Earth, the very essence of nature.

Whether named Yellamma, Rangamma, Mallamma, or Maisamma like the local mother deities, she stems from Vaikuntam's soil. She could be his mother. Or an entertainer, a neighbour, a labourer, a *daasi* or slave, a gaze encountered in the teeming bazaar, even a family friend from his childhood.

Vaikuntam's women are not young or slim-waisted, neither sirens nor fairy-like. They carry their middle years, rich with nurturing life, with pride. Their bodies speak of fertility, of abundance, of birth and life cycles, and essentially of the milk of human kindness. Of humble social origins, they have created their own spaces, their standalone personas.

In these huge canvases, Vaikuntam immortalizes his earthy icon for all time. As two Telangana *sundaris* listen to an *ayyagarlu* with a palm-leaf manuscript in his hand. Or a priest in animated debate with a villager. Perhaps about whether Lord Krishna's dalliances with the *gopis* were *sringara*, sensual love, or merely *bhakti* or worship. Or were they merely *maya* or illusion? Or villagers in conversation









during a gathering, the sorority of women accompanied by parrots that signify auspiciousness and love, sidelining the lone male villager, almost deliberately. Or five strong women, elaborately coiffed, creating a community, a festival, a celebration even within an everyday context.

Another canvas depicts a couple at close quarters, in a somewhat chaste embrace, as two women look on. Could it be Krishna, so central to Vaikuntam's mindscape, reaching out to Radha, whom he loved? Or the artist in a dream realization of a sensual fantasy? Another scene brings three rural *sundari*s to the door of a pundit, perhaps in search of wisdom. The mundane is elevated; it is sacrosanct, as we encounter a nursing mother, her face imbued with bliss. Her family and friends hold up a rattle playfully and observe the most eternal of human scenes, as all three figures squat in domestic complicity.

We encounter Krishna with his flute, playing the music of long-lost lovers, or eternal dreamers. Or is it the artist's eternal quest for fulfillment? A journey that has generated a very individual iconography. One that the global visual world today celebrates as uniquely Vaikuntam's.





Right from the beginning, I realized that with iconography, you have to reach a certain level, then let it be. When I was 42, I began to do these works. Before that, my work was entirely different. I realized as I grew older that I had to concentrate more on the humans than anything else.

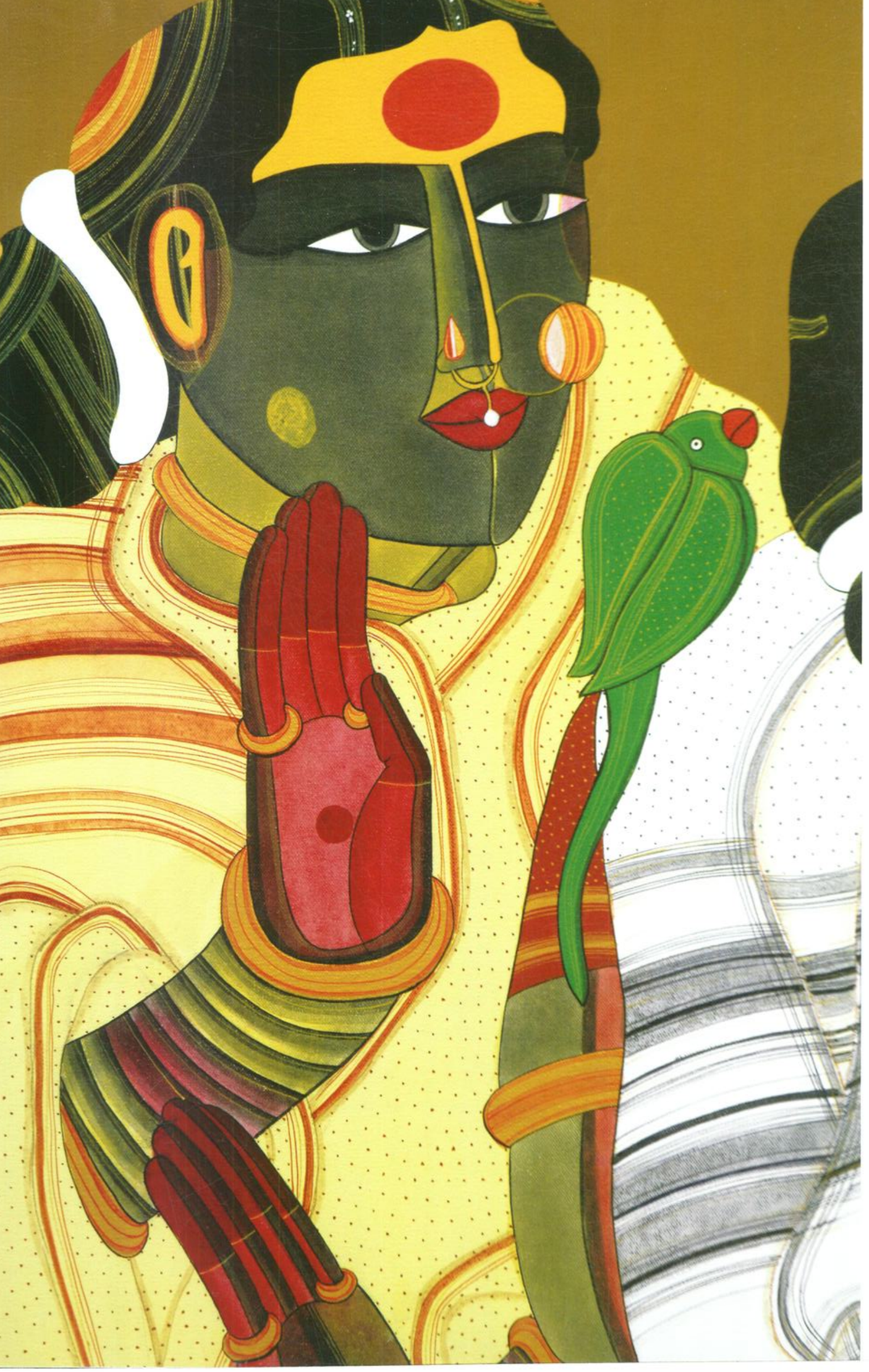
– Thota Vaikuntam, October 2006

Creating an icon

Vaikuntam's Telangana folk meld the memory of his eyes and his fingers. They embody a unique world, of daily rites of life couched within an imaginative terrain. Such as the swaying grain in the fields. Or the weaver at his simple loom, clothing rustic folk in colours of the earth, elevating the everyday with every movement of the shuttle. Perhaps even the intense hue and cry of a folk-style *Mahabharata* performance.

And yet, his canvases concentrate on outsize, teeming figures, as in this series, for instance. Neither trees nor hills, neither homes nor artefacts prop up the village folk Vaikuntam creates through his individual iconography. They are the protagonists, both individually and collectively. They are the landscape. They represent his entire narrative, both told and untold. They are the totality of his vision.

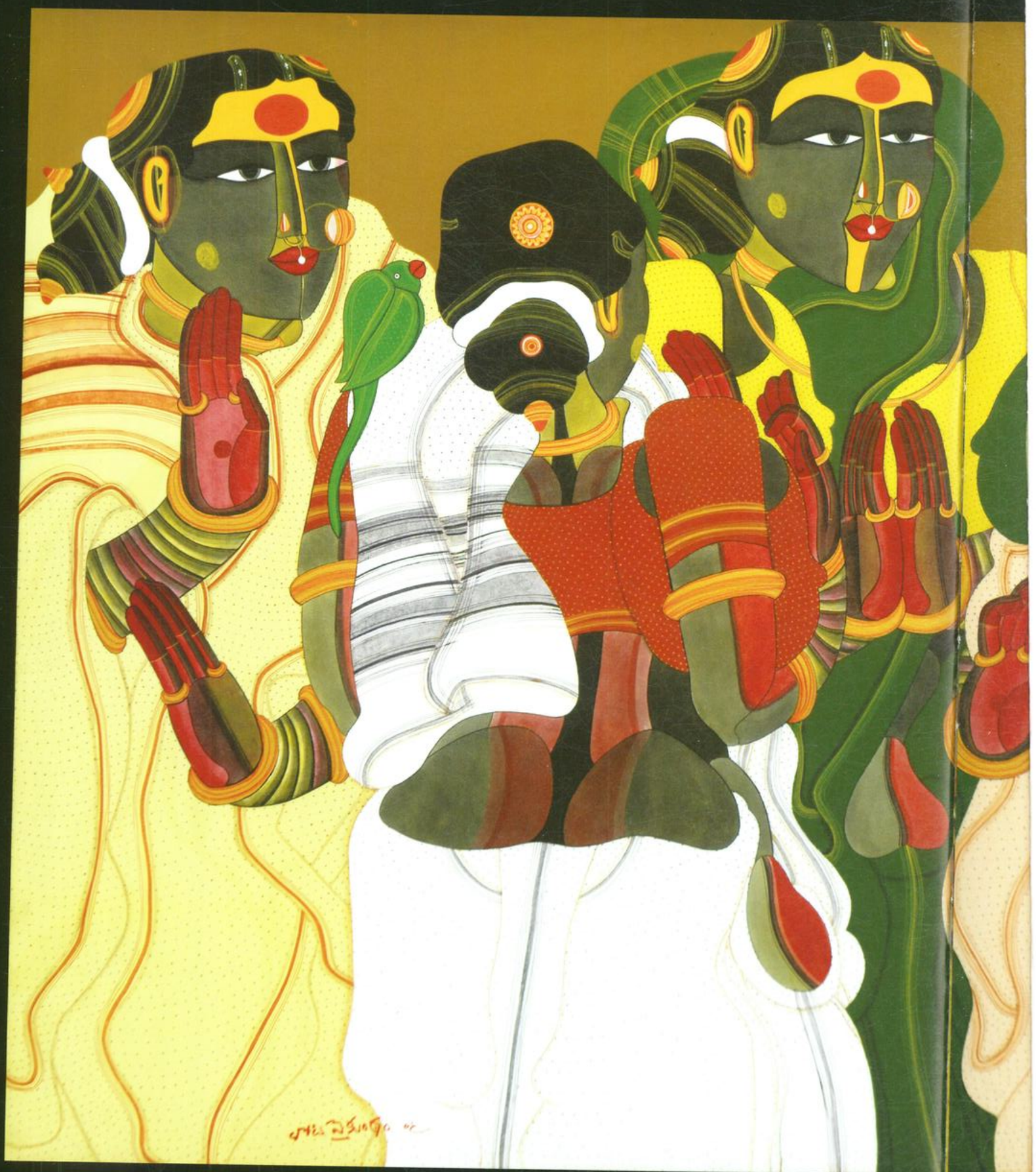
"In the beginning, I had problems with groups, so I painted only women. After that, I started including the man and so on. If I had put in too many things in the beginning, it could have been confusing. Even if I'm doing a landscape, it has to look like a Vaikuntam landscape.



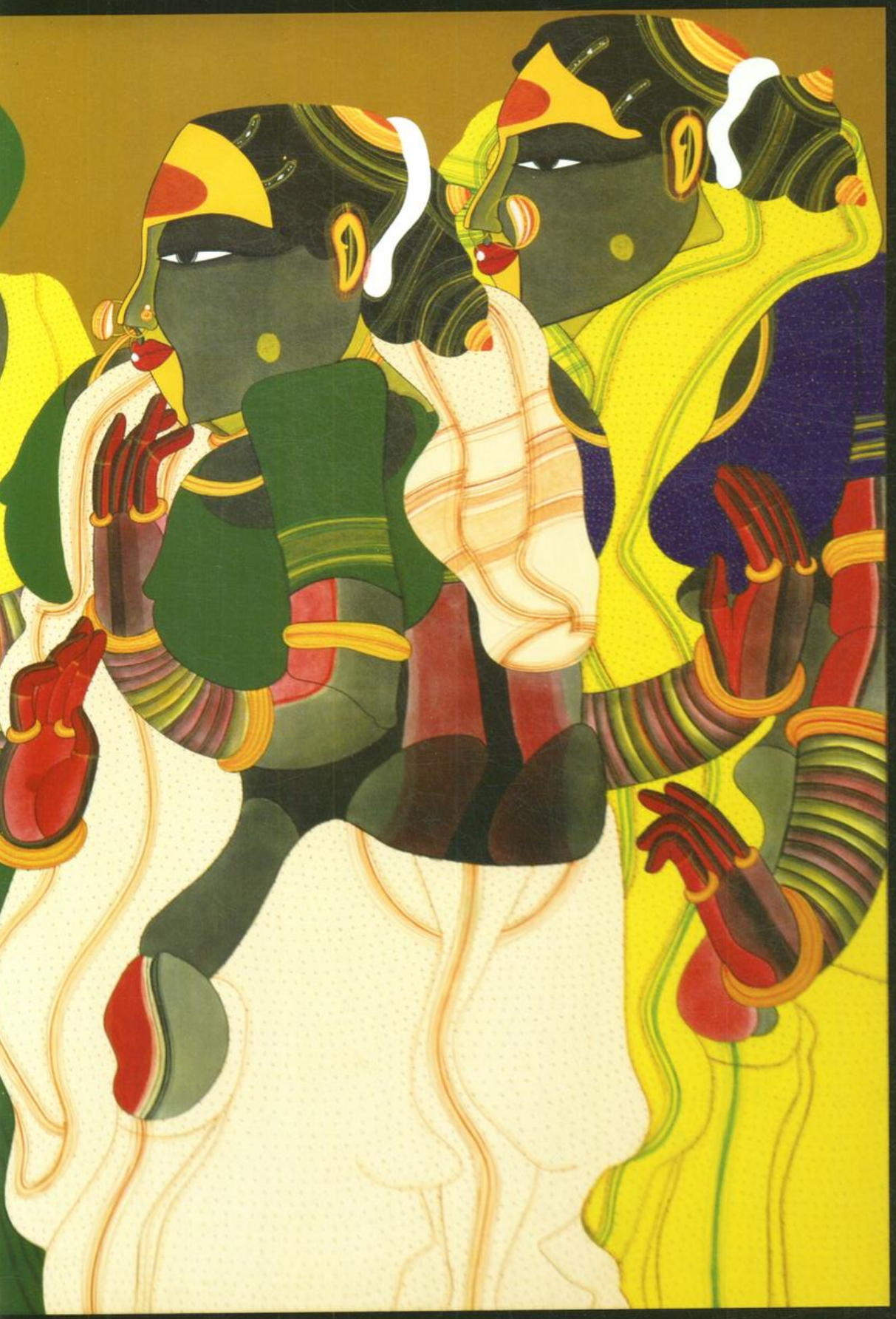
When that didn't happen, I decided to concentrate on humans, especially women," Vaikuntam explains.

One of his earliest collectors, Jagdish Mittal notes in his essay on the artist, "The Man and the Artist: Rooted in the Village": "What struck me was the distinct way the paintings were composed, completely filling the picture space. These works were in a style which I had not encountered in the work of any other artist – old or contemporary."

Does Vaikuntam's iconography stem from folk paintings? Mittal rebuts this: "Some art critics hold the view that Vaikuntam's work has been influenced by the 'folk pictorial art of Telangana', but this assumption has absolutely no basis. Folk paintings of any region have a definite purpose, style, content and iconography. Since centuries, folk paintings of Telangana have been produced in the form of scrolls, for narrating local legends. Using figures of gods and goddesses, their style is influenced by the southern courtly paintings of the 17th century Nayak period. In contrast, Vaikuntam uses images of women and men of Telangana, with no intent of storytelling. His women, groomed as if ready to participate in a festival, a ceremony, or a romantic rendezvous, stand tall, alone, and apart."



Muchatlu (Conversation), acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48", 2006.



These distinctive women, when they first appeared as charcoal or pen-and-ink sketches and drawings in the Eighties, tended to be solo figures, who held the viewer's gaze frontally. They broke away from his earlier nudes of the Seventies and his series on musicians, done in the early Eighties. Gradually, he began to render the Telengana women squatting, almost as if taking off from the doll-making skills that he then shared with the children of Bal Bhavan.

In the quarter century since, the iconic Telangana women have come to be distinguished by their cubist structure, their unique spatial arrangements and their brilliant, truly Indian, colours. Their skin tones are usually defined in shades of black and grey. Turmeric, *kumkum*, and sandalwood paste enhance their facial allure.

Working-class by birth, proud of their roots, these uninhibited women are distinguished by their contented gaze, the confidence of their mien, their engagement with the joys and turbulence of village life. They do not seem to aspire to sophistication or wealth, fame or worldly ways. Comfortable within the ample folds of their sun-brushed skin, their creased brows testify to tough lives in rural Telangana. Their silence speaks volumes, their languor seems timeless. Represented in non-realistic terms, the icon's profile often seems to represent her breast, or vice-versa. Her fecundity





allows for no futile embellishments. She fills the frame, holds the artist's gaze, as a waving crop in the breeze fills a fertile field or a woven sari enriches the loom.

When an occasional man enters Vaikuntam's frame, appearing much later than his native women, he presents a total contrast. Whether a priest, a farmer, an *ayyagarlu* or pundit like those who were his neighbours in Boorugupalli, they appear as ciphers by contrast, weaker in personality and accoutrement than the women, represented in more linear ways.

On a path dramatically different from the majority of urban Indian artists of his generation, Vaikuntam has chosen to celebrate rustic riches. Yoking together a traditional subject with contemporary artistic practice, he creates an *oeuvre* of his very own. He knows these folk from close encounters, from sharing *bidi*s and toddy as they chuckled over childhood escapades, from watching the legend of Bhatukamma grow with every passing year. For "bhatko", he asserts, means life!





These giant paintings of 6 by 4 feet, I feel, have a greater impact, though I've also done some earlier work in postcard size. This series is about physical possibilities, about challenging my reach. Looking at such a canvas, working on it, you become a part of it.

– Thota Vaikuntam, October 2006

The challenge of size

These outsize canvases, peopled in the fullest sense, overwhelm the viewer at first encounter. The experience is that of being drawn into a bustling bazaar, the jostle of the journey to a sanctum sanctorum within a temple, the communal celebration of Holi or the spring rites of Sankranti immortalized through folklore and song, the splash of colours in the *pichkari* or sprinkler, the blessings of the goddess Lakshmi as she enters each humble dwelling, granting each prosperity.

Collectors have noted that Vaikuntam's earlier charcoal, ink, pastel and watercolour work covered a range of sizes, from mere postcard dimensions to charcoals done in a 15 by 22-inch size, ranging to work on 12 by 18-inch photo mounts.

On this 6 by 4-foot scale, the monumentality of Vaikuntam's figures in rich primary colours of the earth assume a mythical dimension, enhanced by the solidity of their execution in acrylic. They seem like demigods, not village folk – looming, tantalizing, almost unapproachable.

Is this how Vaikuntam views them? Not quite. "I did some large works earlier, around 1989," he confesses, "but I didn't show them to anybody. I did large canvases only when commissioned, including a 5 by 4-foot one for a friend. But, on this scale, selling became a problem. So was transport. I used to prefer a smaller scale."

He adds, "Earlier in my life, it was a matter of being practical. Since I wasn't rich, it was possible to carry the small canvases with me by train. Today, it's different. I can request transport for my work."

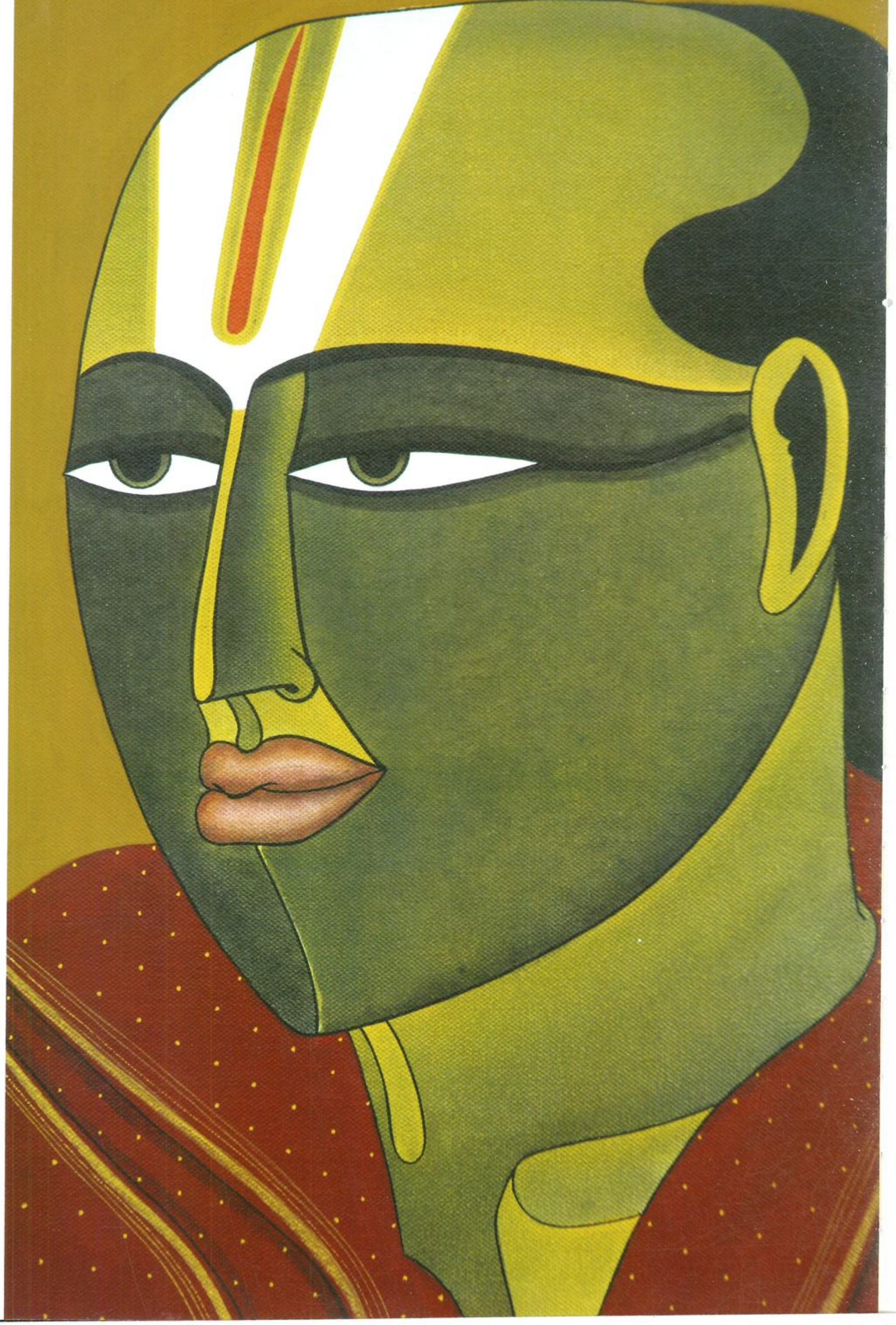
A few years ago, Delhi-based art collector Tanuj Berry coaxed Vaikuntam to consider rendering large canvases for him. This series of is the result.

At 65, Vaikuntam faces three large canvases in varied stages of completion at his middle-class Himayat Nagar studio flat, adjacent to the one he lives in with his family. Coping with spondilitis, he muses, "I'm becoming old. In the future, I may not be able to do large works. I have to challenge myself to do this while I have enough energy."

An entirely valid concern, considering that the artist has not executed, of late, any of the wooden panels and boxes



Guru and Shishulu, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72", 2007.



that he did in the Eighties and Nineties, each bustling with trademark Telangana figures, whether solo or coupled in completion.

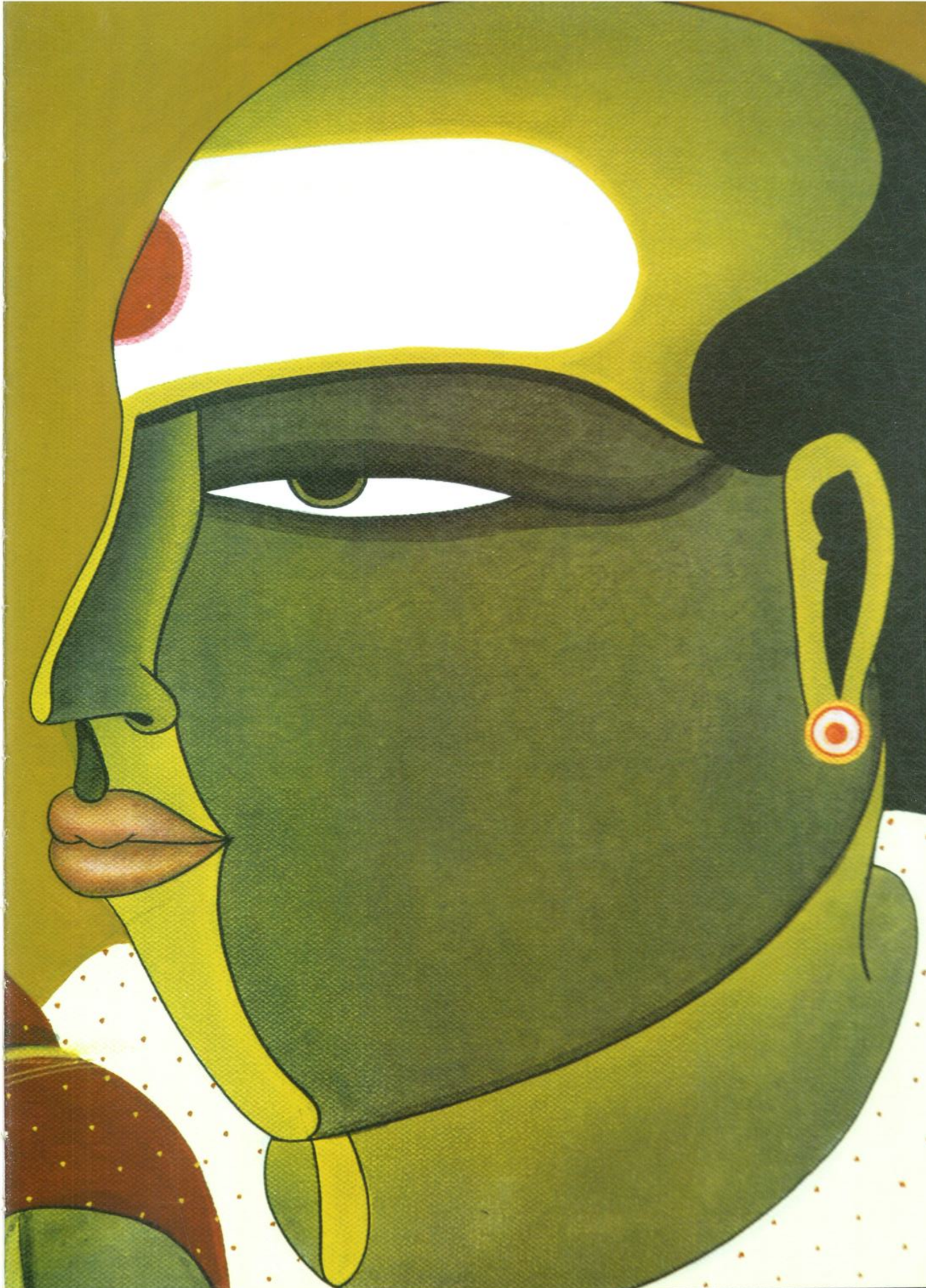
As Vaikuntam kneels to complete an anklet or redden the palm and fingertips of a figure that towers over his diminutive being, a fact looms large – that his method of execution is partly responsible for the scale of his works. He is most at ease holding his materials in hand – whether canvas, photo mount, paper, or board. With such access, he is able to paint over the surface time and again, until he achieves the shade, depth, tone or texture he is aiming at. At times, the shaded pink of an inner arm, at times, the even smoothness of a length of fabric, either a sari or an *angavastram* or upper cloth.

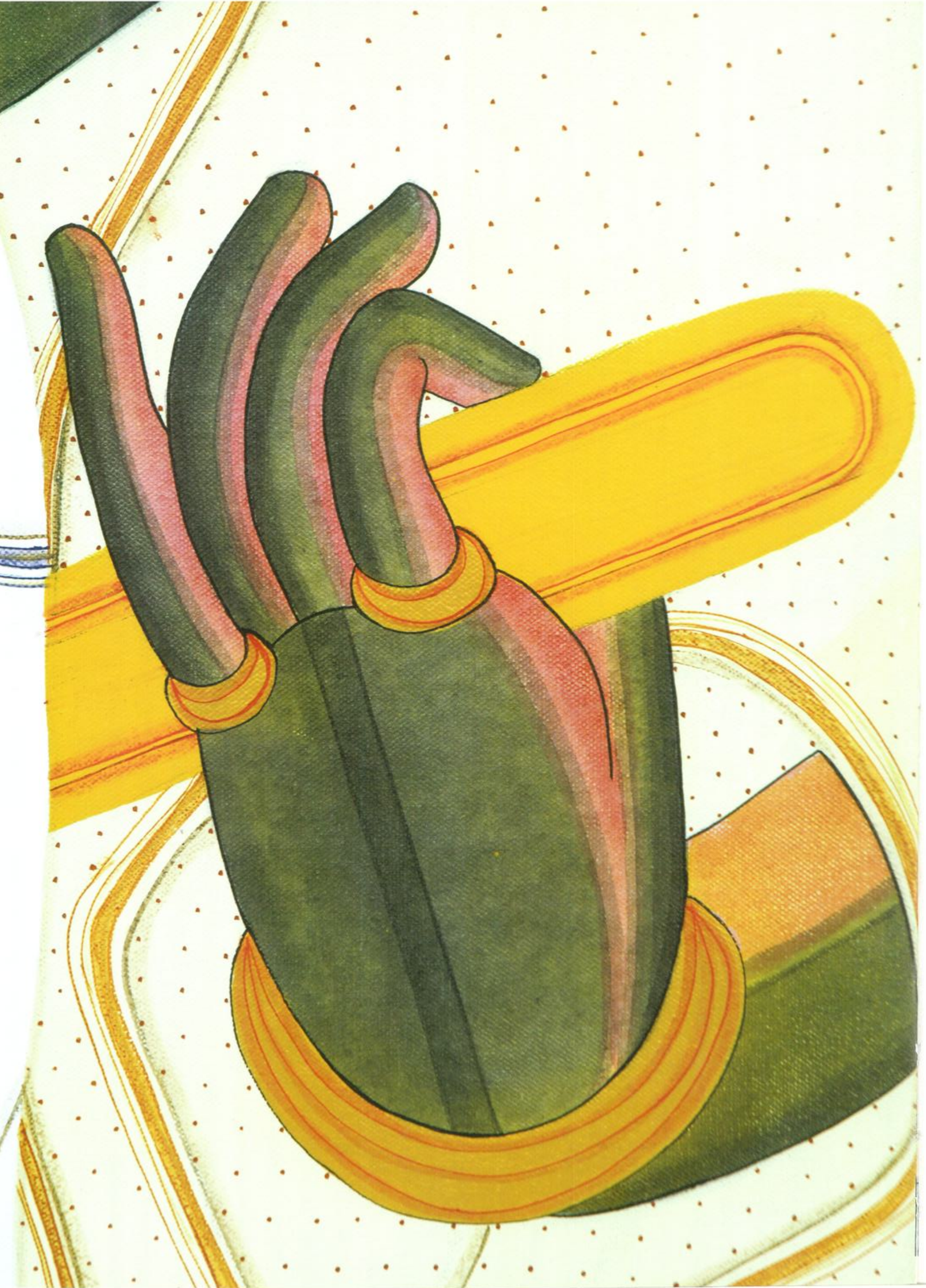
Vaikuntam explains that he needs to hold his material so close, either on his lap or on a table strewn with art materials, "to get a feel of it, both emotionally and physically." His engagements are always full-bodied, as loaded with intent as his brushes are with the reds, greens and lustrous hues of his world.

"I talk to my half-finished paintings at night, and return to them in the morning to complete my work," he says, gazing at his figures fondly.

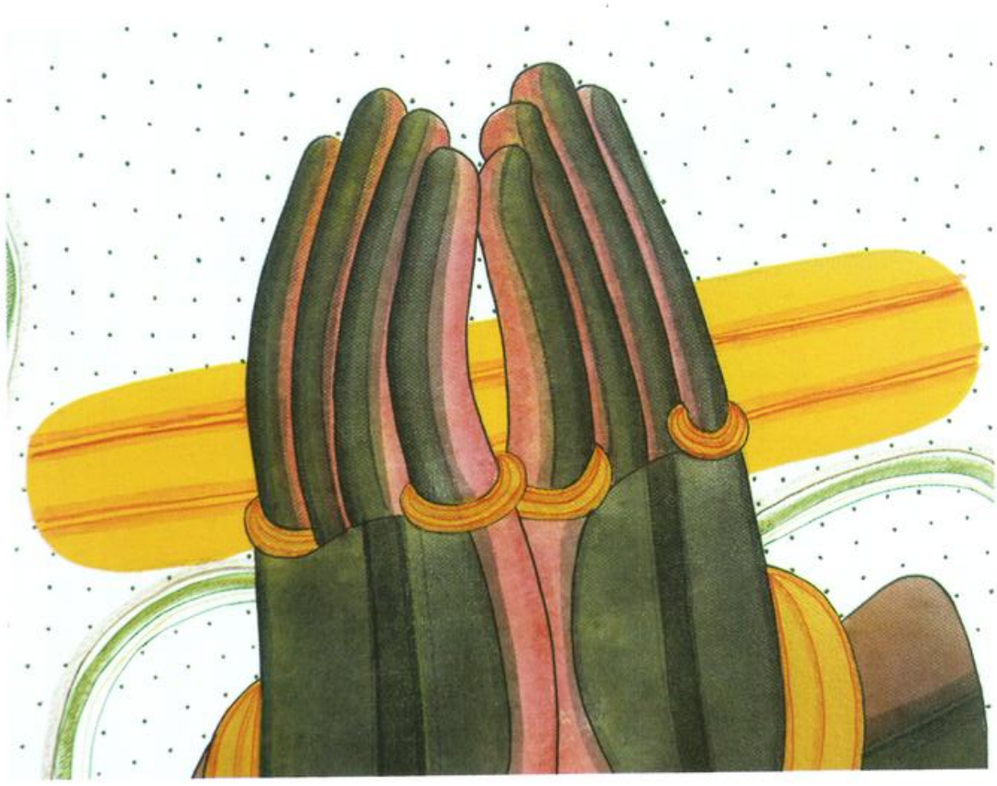
Though Vaikuntam has always enjoyed working with pencil or charcoal, these acrylic works find him energetically using his fingers, brushes of different thicknesses, even sticks, to achieve the precise renditions of these Telangana folk that are now the hallmark of his work. While the solidity of these looming figures engages the viewer head on, they appease our lust for beauty through an alternate lens, mingled with the musk of the earth, with the sweat of honest toil, with the intensity of engagement with the community and love alike.

His creations share the energy and vitality of Paul Gauguin's Tahitian women. They seem to look within with concentration, spinning the world around with their self-sufficiency, perhaps through the power of the symbolic *yoni* that unites with the lingam, an Indian counterpart to the yin-yang principle. Their *hasta mudras* or gestures, drawn from an inherited rustic vocabulary, are characteristically direct and significant, as engaging as a field of swaying *jowar* or mustard plants in bloom.





"My village is my theme again, even in these large canvases," reiterates Vaikuntam. "I've tried to create Krishna as part of the village, a leader who is yet part of the mainstream. That's besides all the splendours of the *guru-sishya parampara* or the generations-old system that bonds the teacher with the taught, where elders were respected for their received wisdom. And everything connected with love, life and celebration. You know, the village is totally different from the city. Maybe we'll all forget our roots one day. I think it's my duty to keep our roots alive, in whatever way I can."





Who is Vaikuntam?
Without painting, I am nothing.

– Thota Vaikuntam, October 2006

The boy from Boorugupalli

Who is the man behind the Telangana woman? How does he come across in real life, face-to-face encounters? What *mantra*s or mystic chants impregnate the spell he casts through his paintings?

At first encounter, Vaikuntam seems reticent, even shy. He looks with pride at his outsize canvases, then begins to share stories of his growing days. Of the wonders of Boorugupalli. Or the native wisdom of his mother. Of festivities and community exchanges that assured him that there is a place on earth where he belongs.

By the hour, he warms to the listener, though. Vaikuntam's eyes grow brighter as he talks of Bhatukamma and Pochamma, of how they hold him tight in their protective embrace, or how they bless him with their grace, much as Satyamma did. He brushes aside the long years of struggle, his battles with the bottle and the bohemian life, his reluctance to settle down to a family life with the gentle and self-effacing Suguna, an in-house muse for his artistic odyssey. At each pause en route to the grand finale, he stops to recall precious moments, sometimes with tears, sometimes with the sharp, short burst of laughter that is so characteristic of him.



Radha and Krishna, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48", 2006.





To Vaikuntam, the journey has been as rewarding as the destination, culminating in rich rewards when his paintings are snapped up by collectors in London and New Delhi, New York and Mumbai, almost more quickly than he can create them. His Telangana *sundari* today heralds his success at home and abroad. She is all women rolled into one, but an individual all the same – as the beloved, as the seductress, as the mother, as an earth goddess, as a homemaker, as a caregiver, but primarily, as his muse.

But it was not always so. For decades, Vaikuntam felt embattled, as he lived in a garage or an office room. When would his loneliness ease? When would the paintings and drawings that lit up his life begin to find a constant market? When would the smouldering flame within him be quenched? In the throes of rough times, he even painted billboards. He taught at Bal Bhavan in Hyderabad. For 18 months, he worked at a factory in Mumbai. What did he do there? He designed and produced colour schemes for plastic dolls.

Being the art director in a range of Narsing Rao's Telugu films from 1978 to 1990 did bring him joy during those troubled times. Though films such as *Maa Bhoomi* (with Gautam



Ghosh), *Rangula Kala, Daasi, Matti Manushulu, Sri Sri* and *Palleturu Pillagada* did not exactly set the screen and the box-office on fire, they did bring Vaikuntam some comfort. For, at least, his work was being communicated to the public.

These prolonged financial constraints initially came in the way of Vaikuntam's family life. Following his mother's demise in Boorugupalli in 1982, Vaikuntam went through a bohemian phase that took a toll on his health. That's when Suguna nursed him back to health.

Soon, she shifted to Hyderabad to join him in their tiny first home at Chikkadapalli. Spurred by the birth of their first son, Venkatesh, who is now an architect, the artist couched his joy in a series of *Mother and Child* canvases. Later, another son, Rajmanohar, was born. He is a mechanical engineer today. Lakshmi, the centre of her father's universe, is training to be a marketing executive.

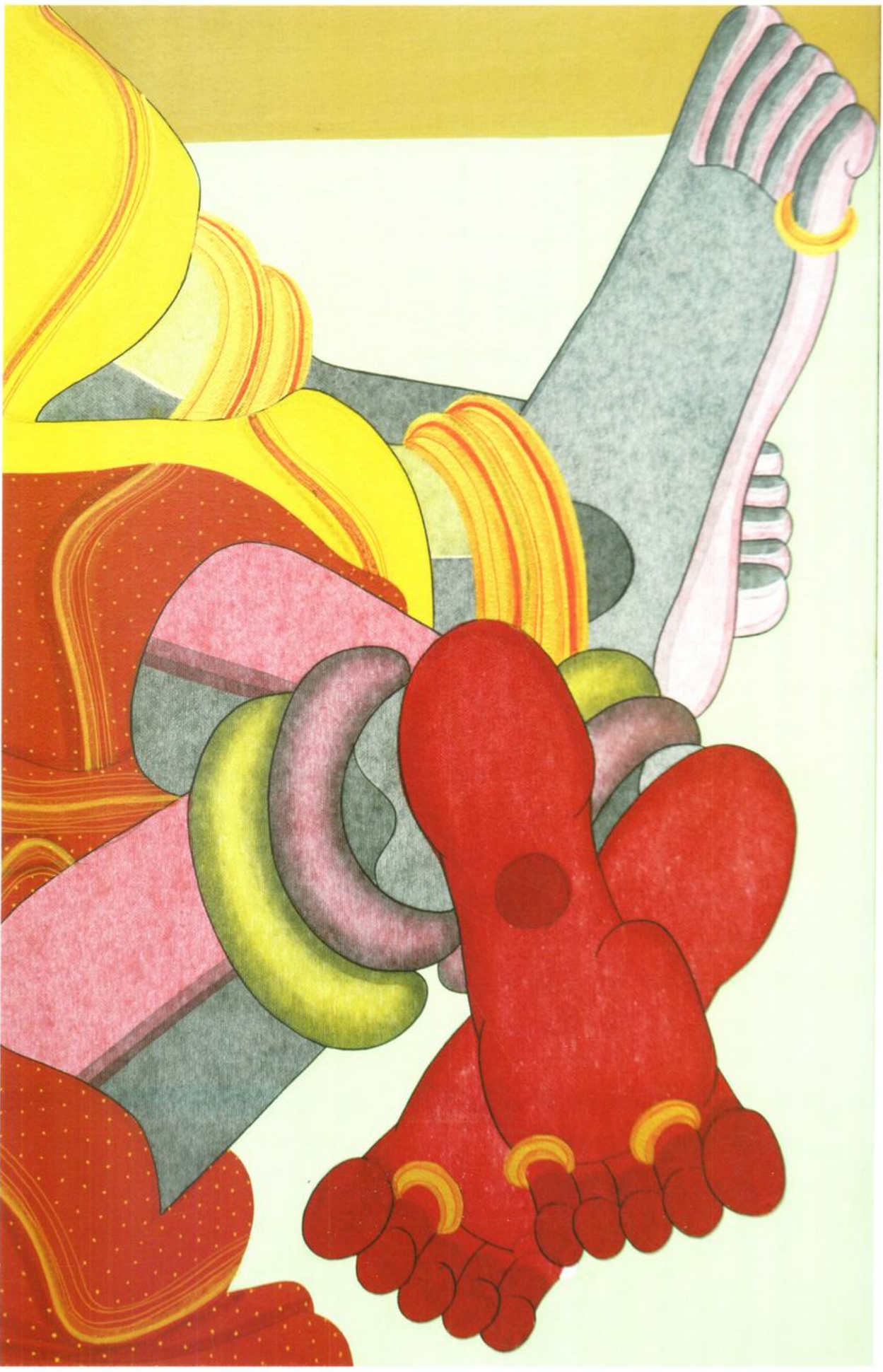
Vaikuntam's life today is work-centric. His schedule is rigorous. Following a daily session of yoga, Vaikuntam settles down to paint for a few hours between breakfast and a light lunch, followed by a siesta. Post-dinner, he tends to commune with his canvases once more, until he feels the need to rest. His evenings are usually quiet, apart

from an infrequent visit to the opening of an art show or a gathering with friends.

A man of simple joys, and down-to-earth expression, Vaikuntam couches his world view without hesitation, with the confidence of a farmer who reaps what he sows or a weaver who creates brilliant metres of colourful fabric on the simplest of looms.

Bypassing the Indian urban tongue of English, he muses in earthy Hindi, "My people have dark faces. That's why their eyes are more dominant. Jewellery shines against their skin. They work hard – in the fields, making roads, weaving, at home. They know how to give, unlike politicians and bureaucrats, who only grab. My people are not able to keep their money. They succumb if somebody threatens them: 'Give me so much money, or else I'll shoot you!' They may earn just Rs 30 for making *bidis*, half of which they drink away. Even with limited money, you can see the happiness in them. My people are simple people."

Reaffirming his allegiance to Boorugupalli, he says, "Unlike the city, not everything is linked to money in my village. Our rituals brought us comfort. We listened to our elders with respect. We revered the *ayyagarlu*s, took in their discourses on Krishna and Duryodhana, the eldest of the



Kauravas from the *Mahabharata*. This is what formed the connecting thread of our lives."

If the spoken word comes to him hesitantly, songs from Telangana stream from his lips in an easier flow. As naturally as a river in spate, or playful leaves rustling in the breeze, or even strokes of acrylic on canvas that conjure up a rustic garden in bloom. For "thota", in his native tongue, means a garden. The eternal garden within a creative individual from Boorugupalli, named Thota Vaikuntam, who sings in mellifluous Telugu:

Chinna chinna gudiselo puree gudiselo ooo na Gaurava
Mammu deevinchanga nuvu putinavvo ooo na Gaurava
Mamu kapadanga nuvu putinavvo ooo na Gaurava
Maaku neelu eevanga vachinavo ooo na Gaurava
Neenu pujimpaga vachinavo ooo na Gaurava...

Maa Gowri, you stay in small huts
Maa Gowri, you were born to bless us
Maa Gowri, you were born to protect us
Maa Gowri, you have come to give us water
Maa Gowri, you have come to accept our worship...

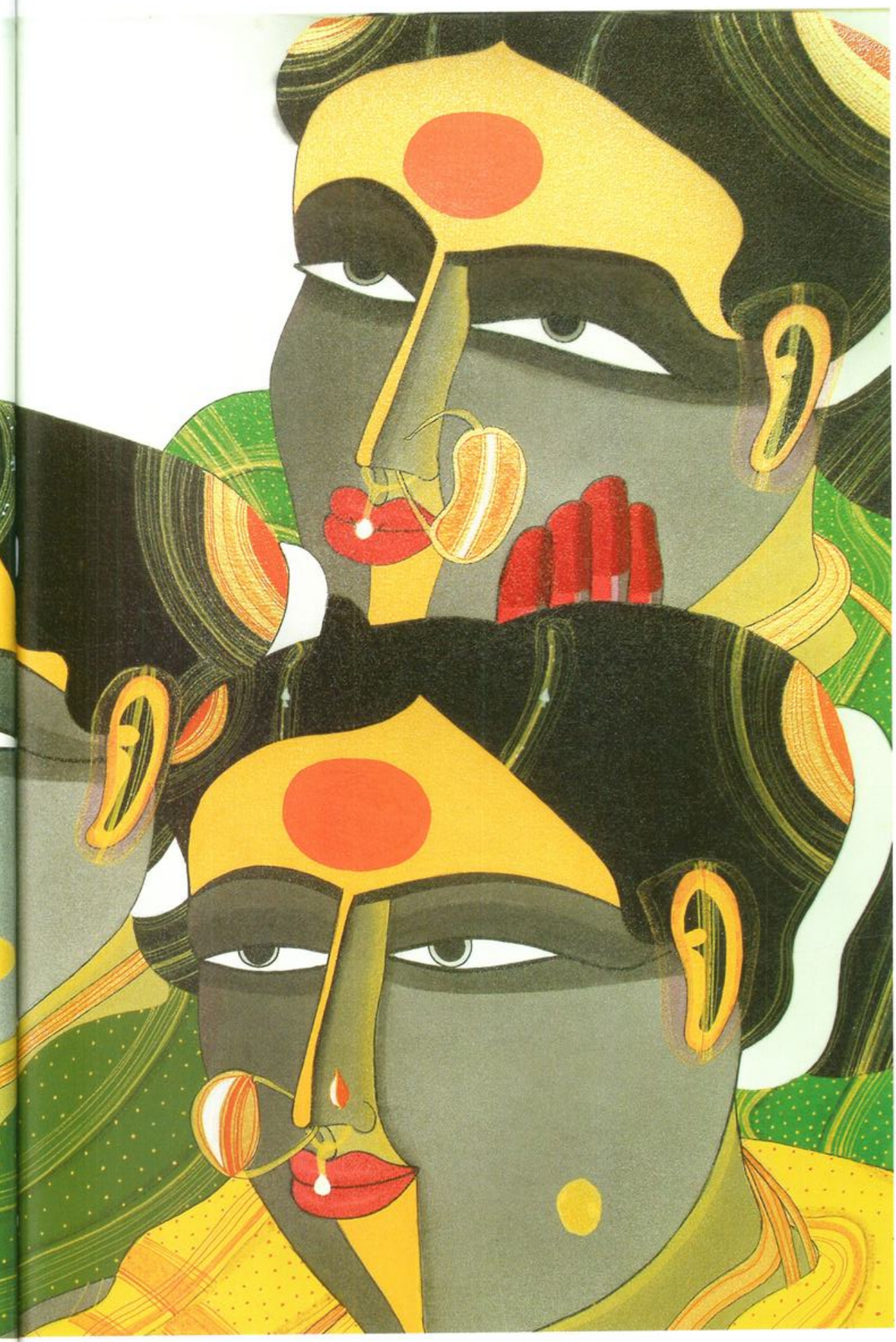
Select bibliography:
Sangeeta Devi K., "Art Sale or Steal," *The Hindu, Metro Plus*, Hyderabad, March 29, 2006.
Sidharth Bhatia. "A Return to Roots," *DNA, Salon*, Mumbai, March 2, 2007.
Sushma Bahl (ed). *Thota Vaikuntam*. New Delhi: Art Alive Masters Series, 2005.

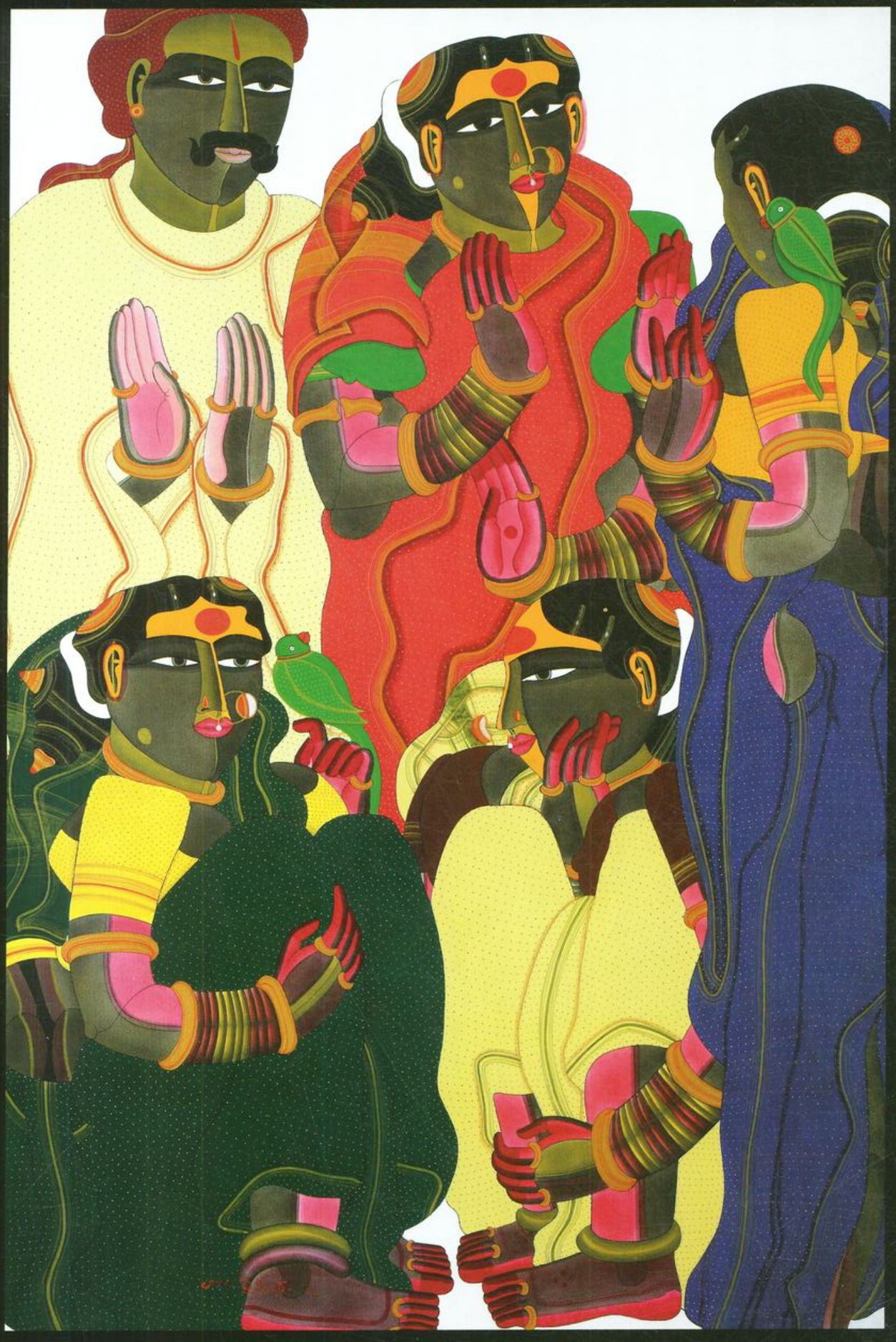


Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72", 2007.









Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72", 2006.

A Note on Vaikuntam

Krishen Khanna

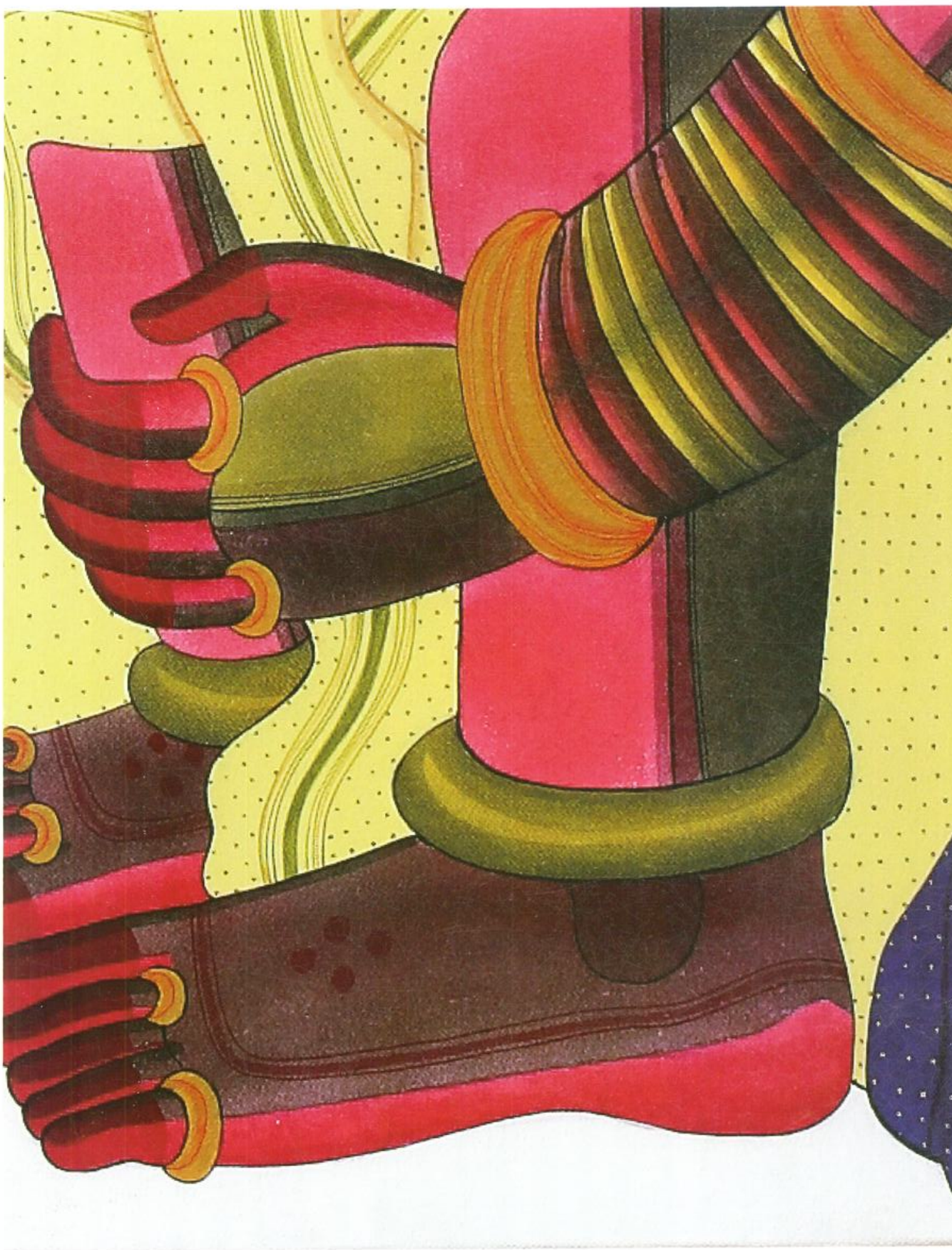
It has never been like this. A cloudburst of galleries. Art schools and faculties of fine arts pouring out a flood of young hopefuls in search of their souls...and , more importantly, for cash to enable the continuance of their pursuit. Never before was there so much promotional writing on art, packaged in expensively bound books and catalogues. It could be well a season for rejoicing, were it not for the monotonousness of the product. Instead of deliberating on the nature of art, nearly all are trying to resolve egocentric problems. It has become almost fashionable to be searching personal identities. In some cases, outraging public sentiment appears to be the accepted function. Art is an activity which is more than a field for personal catharsis. It involves a greater connection between the artist and the psyche of the community of which he is, if only partially, an unofficial spokesman.

With this as a background, there appears Vaikuntam. His rich palette and easily recognizable faces and figures have given his work acceptability. It is strikingly modern without any allegiance to anything we associate with modernity. This may seem as a contradiction in terms, it is not so.

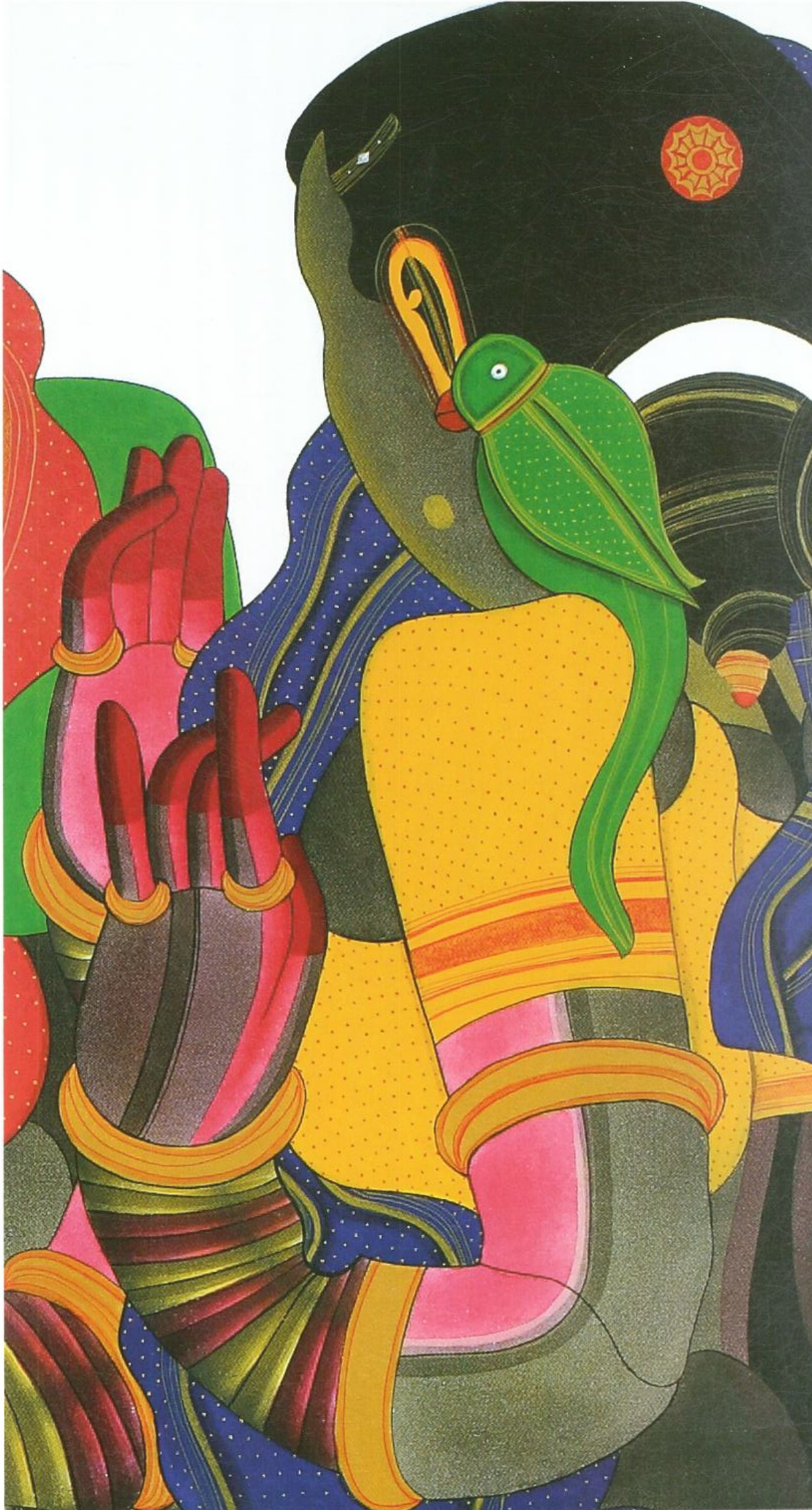
He divides his picture surface into a series of separate but cohesive planes. He does this without resorting to the various which Cubism took in Europe and which have found favour with several Indian artists. The planes which Vaikuntam creates are stylized facial or body parts. He has been developing a plastic language which engages the pictorial surface. At the same time, he has created prototypes which extends his work from the purely personal to the regional and finally to the universal.

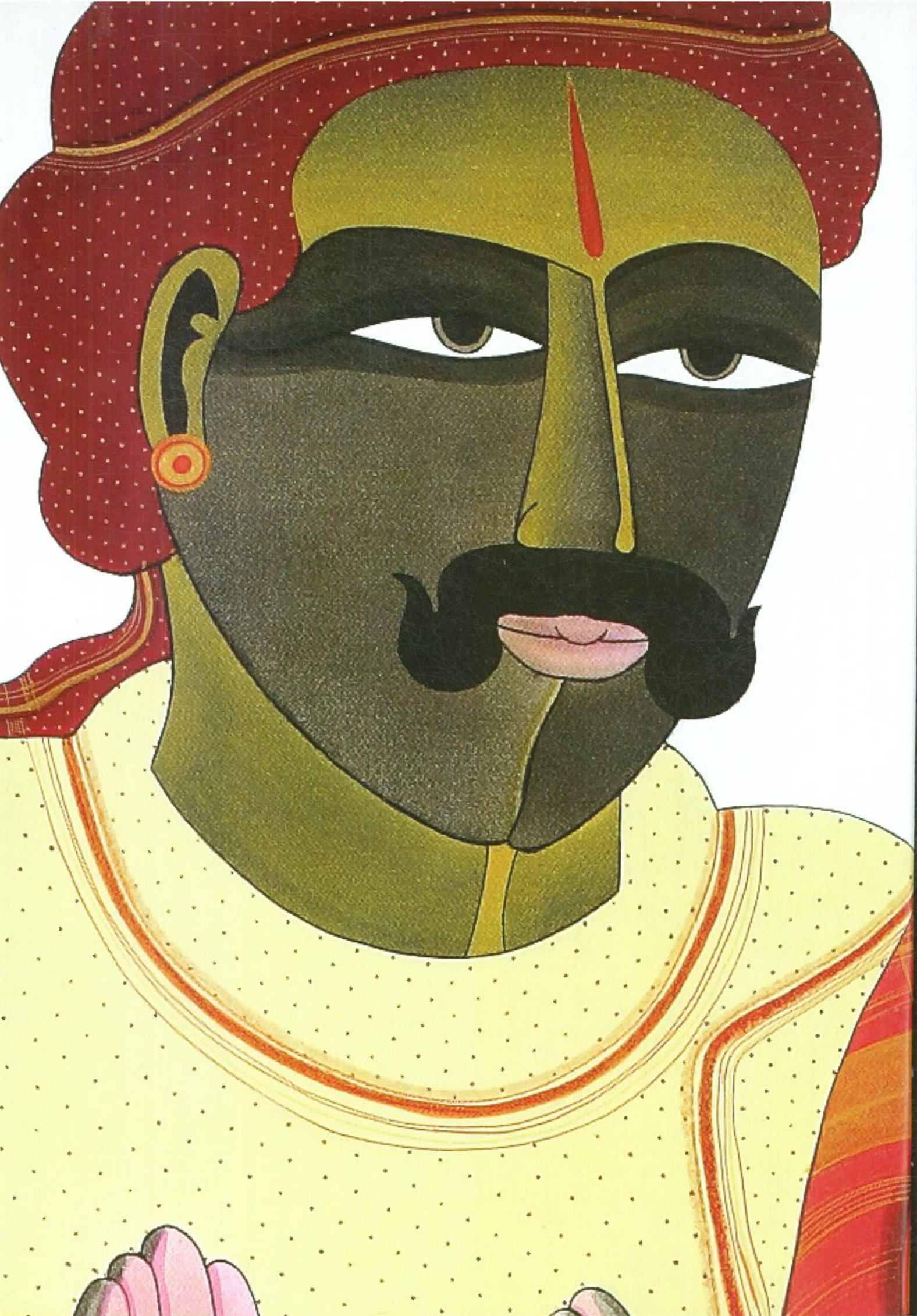
The forms Vaikuntam has developed are not subject to scale. He brings to mind the music of Bach, particularly the partitas which are not influenced by the instruments but can be performed as variations. The music maintains its own structure at all times. Similarly, I think that the forms which Vaikuntam has created could bear amplification and could very well form the matrix for much larger and more ambitious works.

We are watching a ripe scenario waiting to unfold.





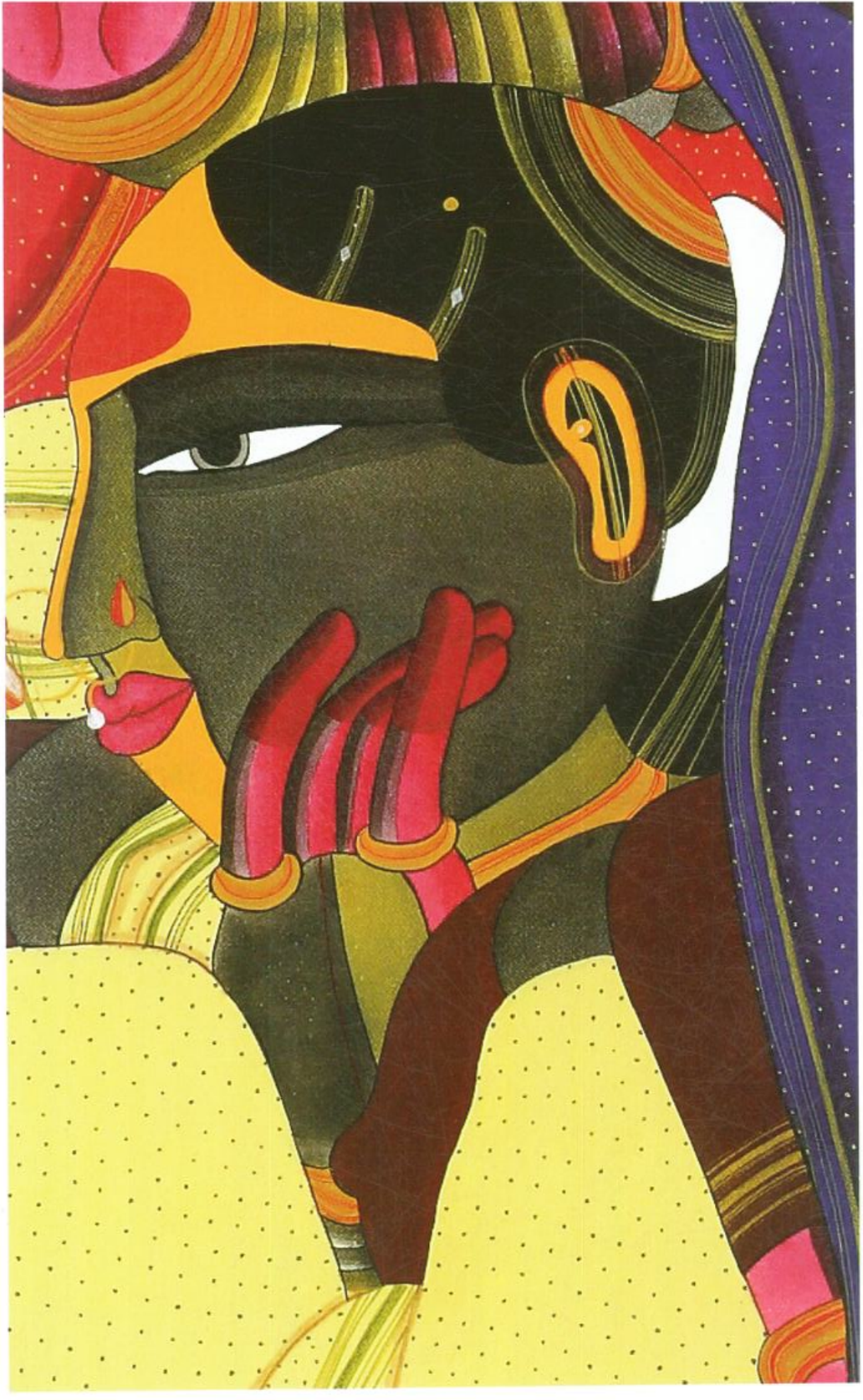


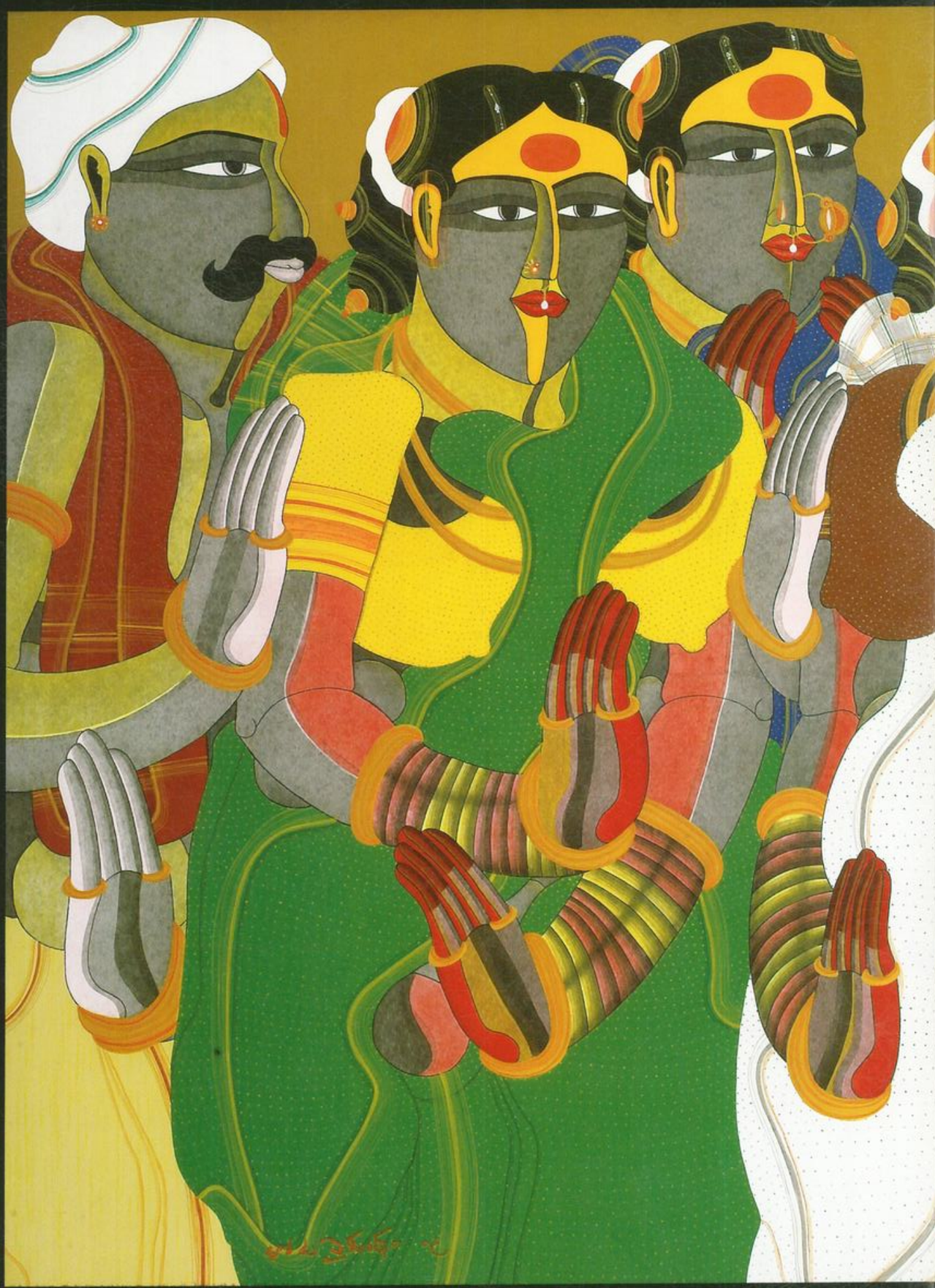


The paintings of Vaikuntam, are to my mind an original synthesis of traditional Indian concepts & demands of a formal logic of the international modern art. The inspiration emerges from every day Indian life, transformed, & reveals the richness of line, colour & form. The leaner expression & decantation of figures, faces, eyes & human bodies or clothes, reveal pure formal order & richness of imagination. In fact, as to Jamini Roy, his work is a new significant contribution to Contemporary Indian Art, without compromise & with fullness of imagination & extacy.

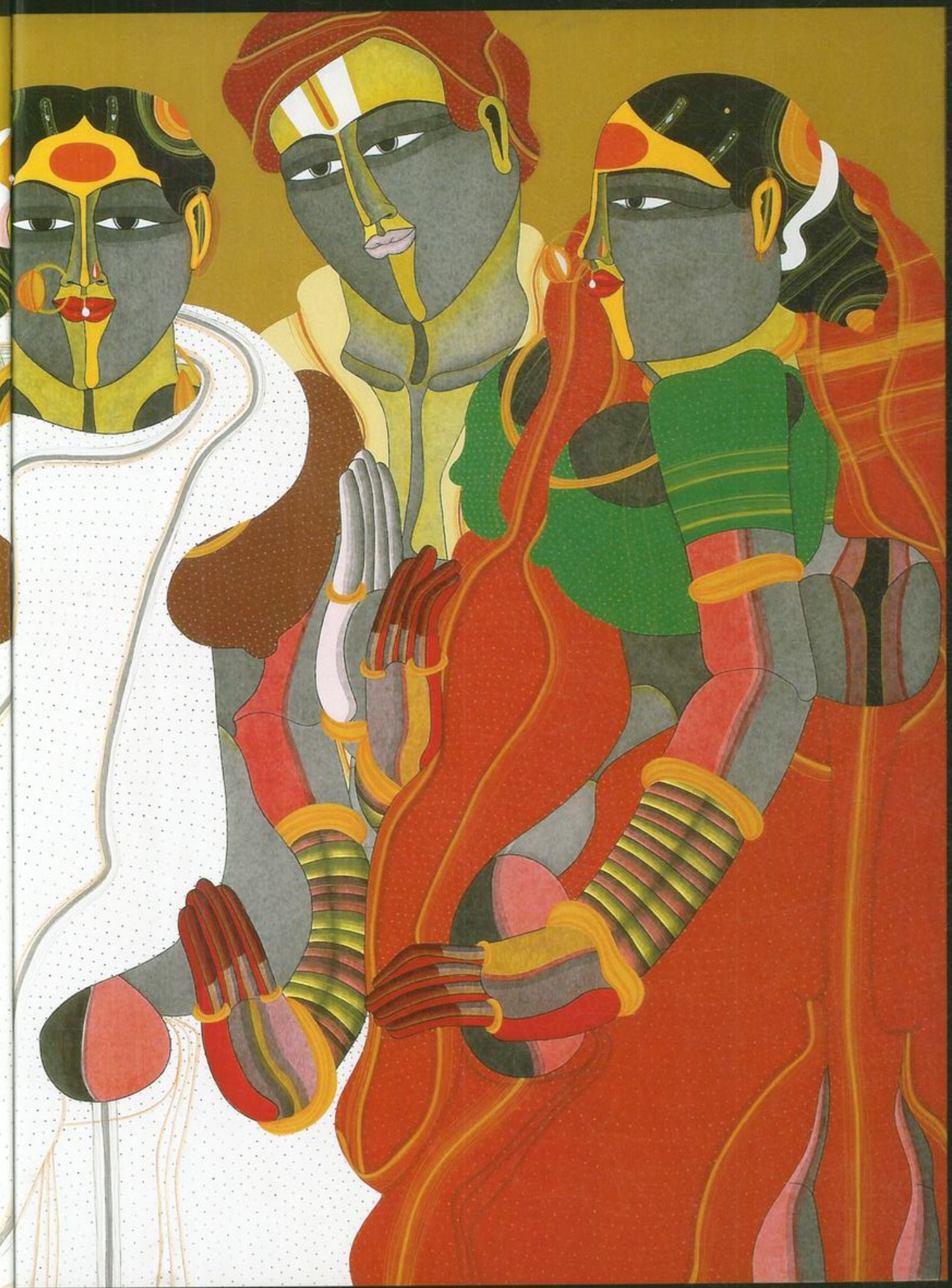
Paris, 27th December, '07.







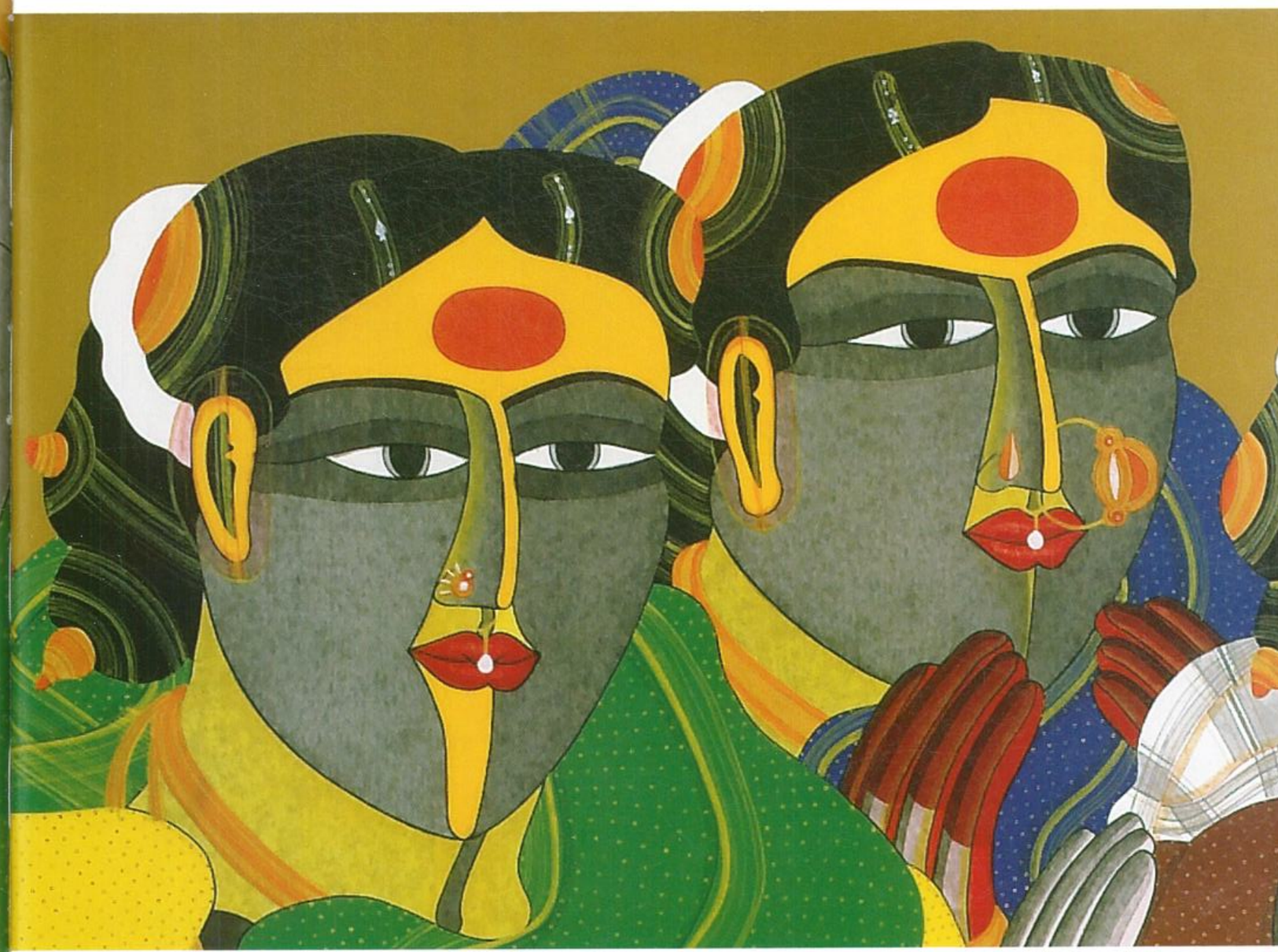
Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48", 2006.

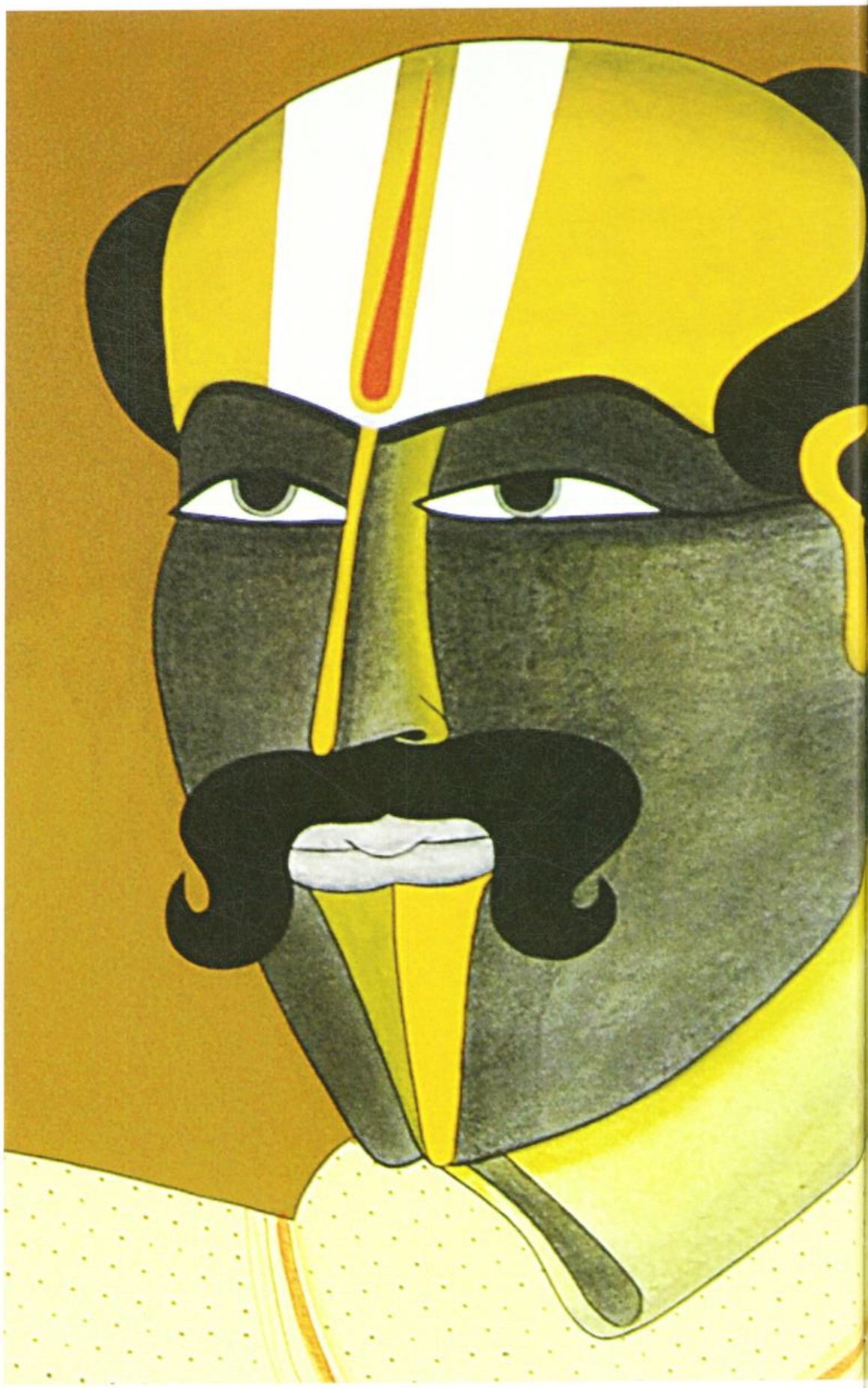




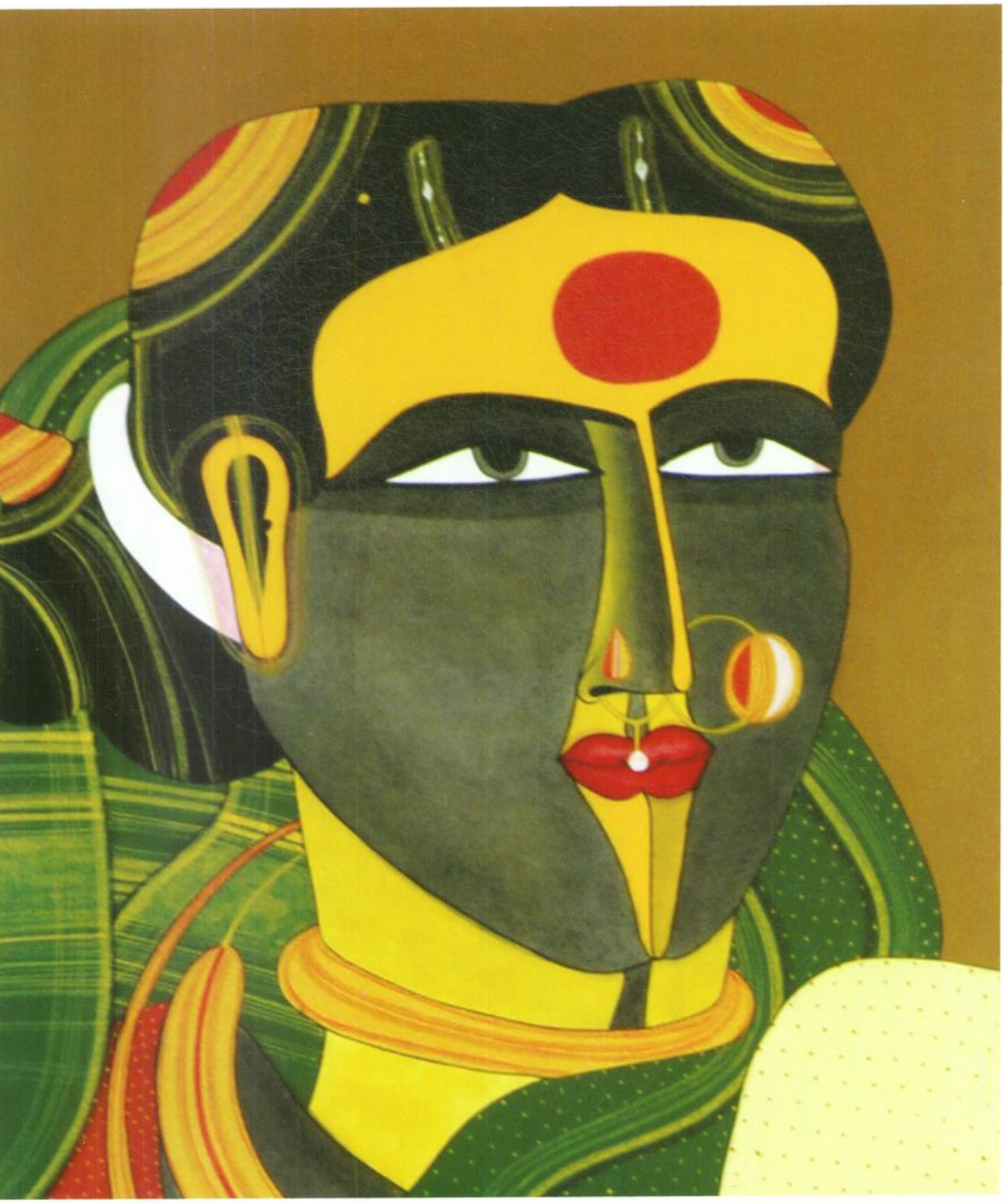


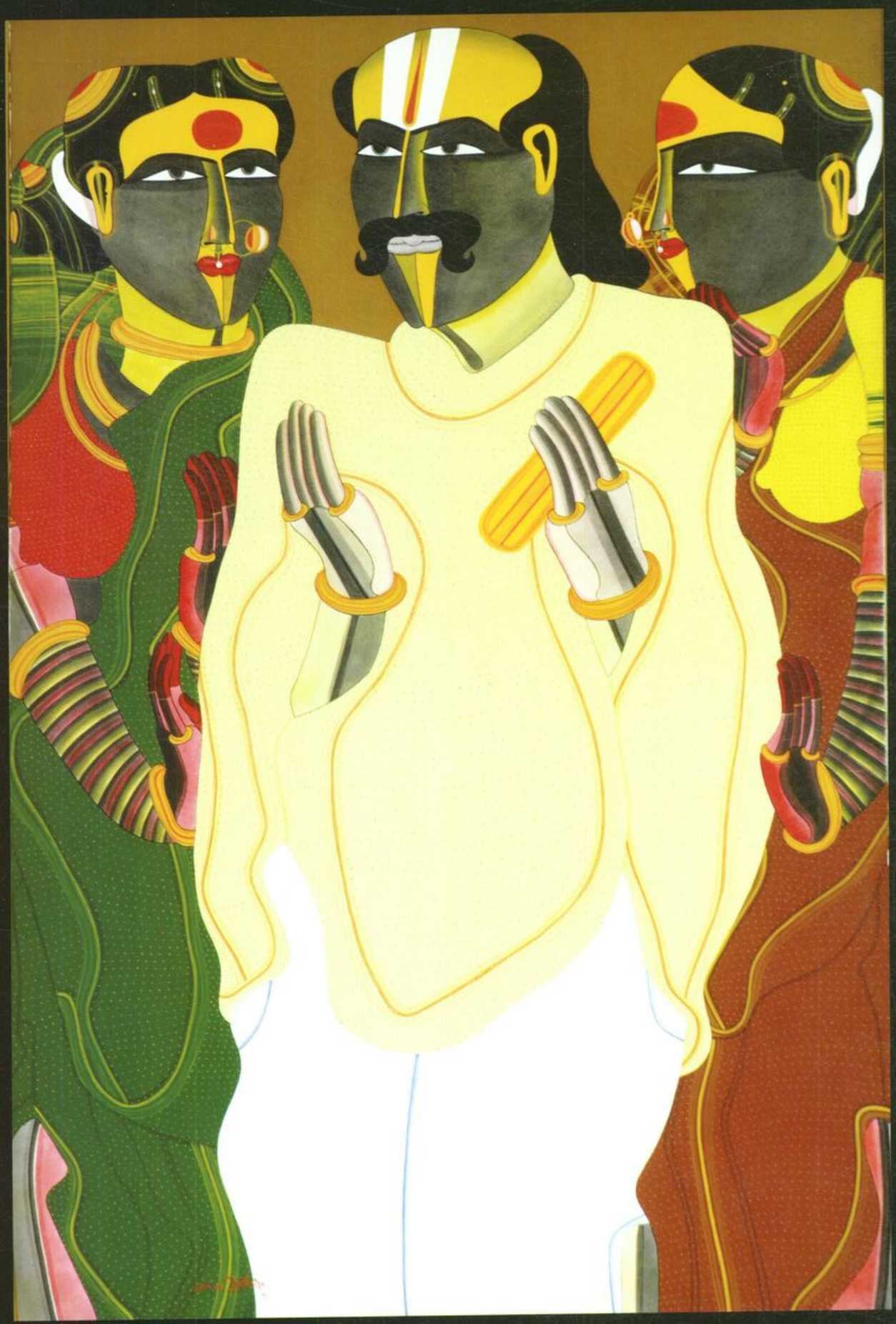




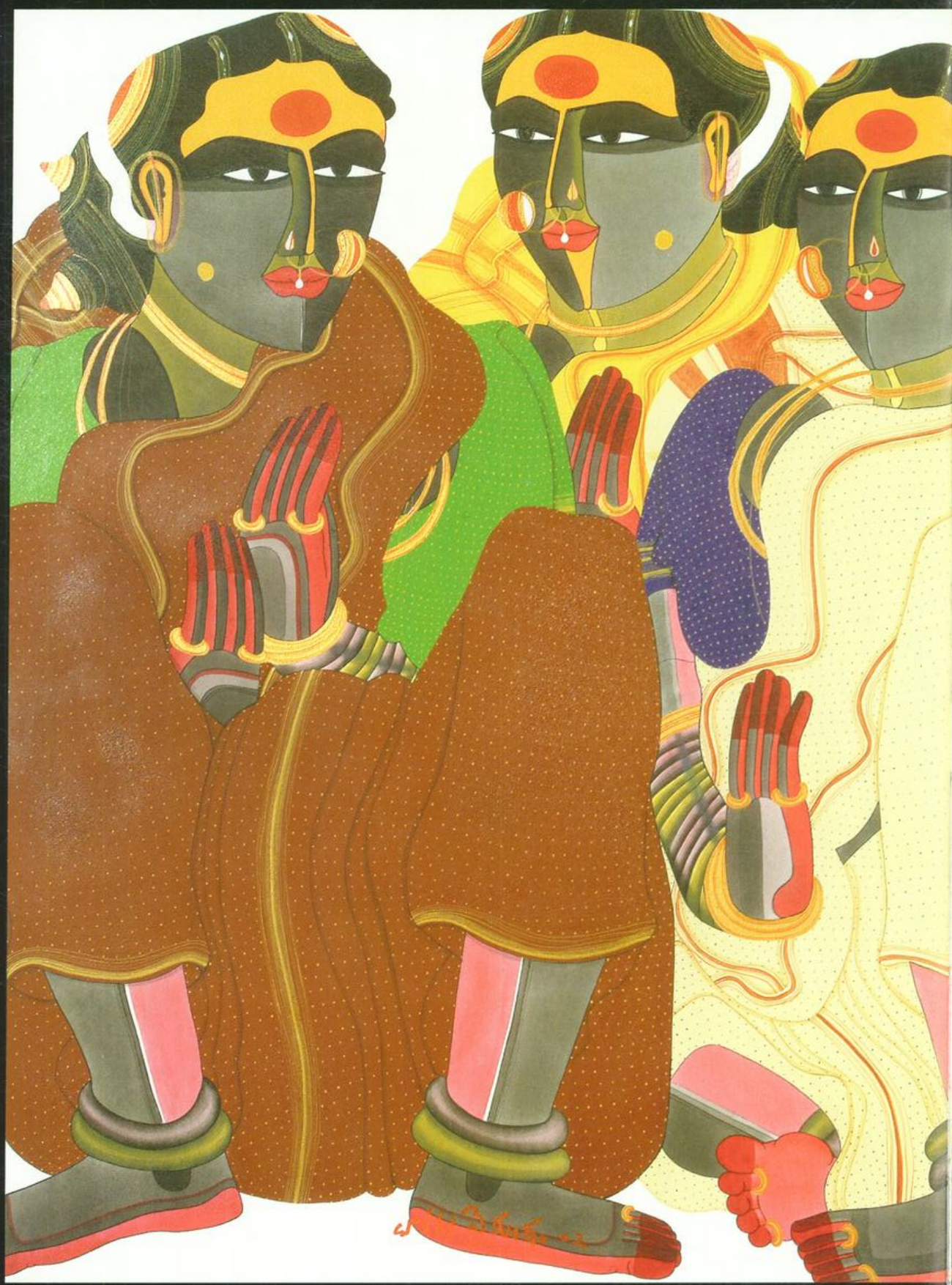






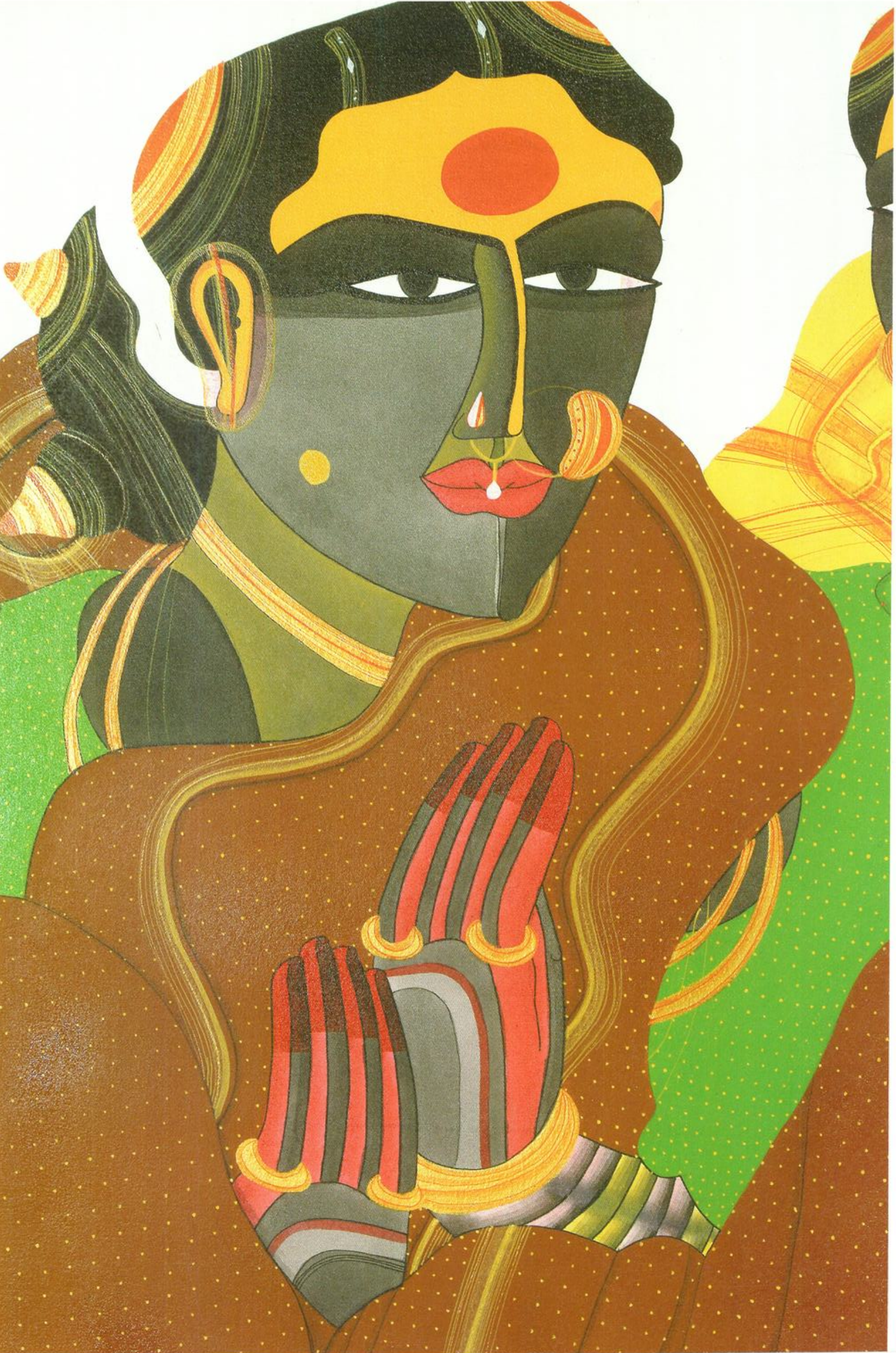


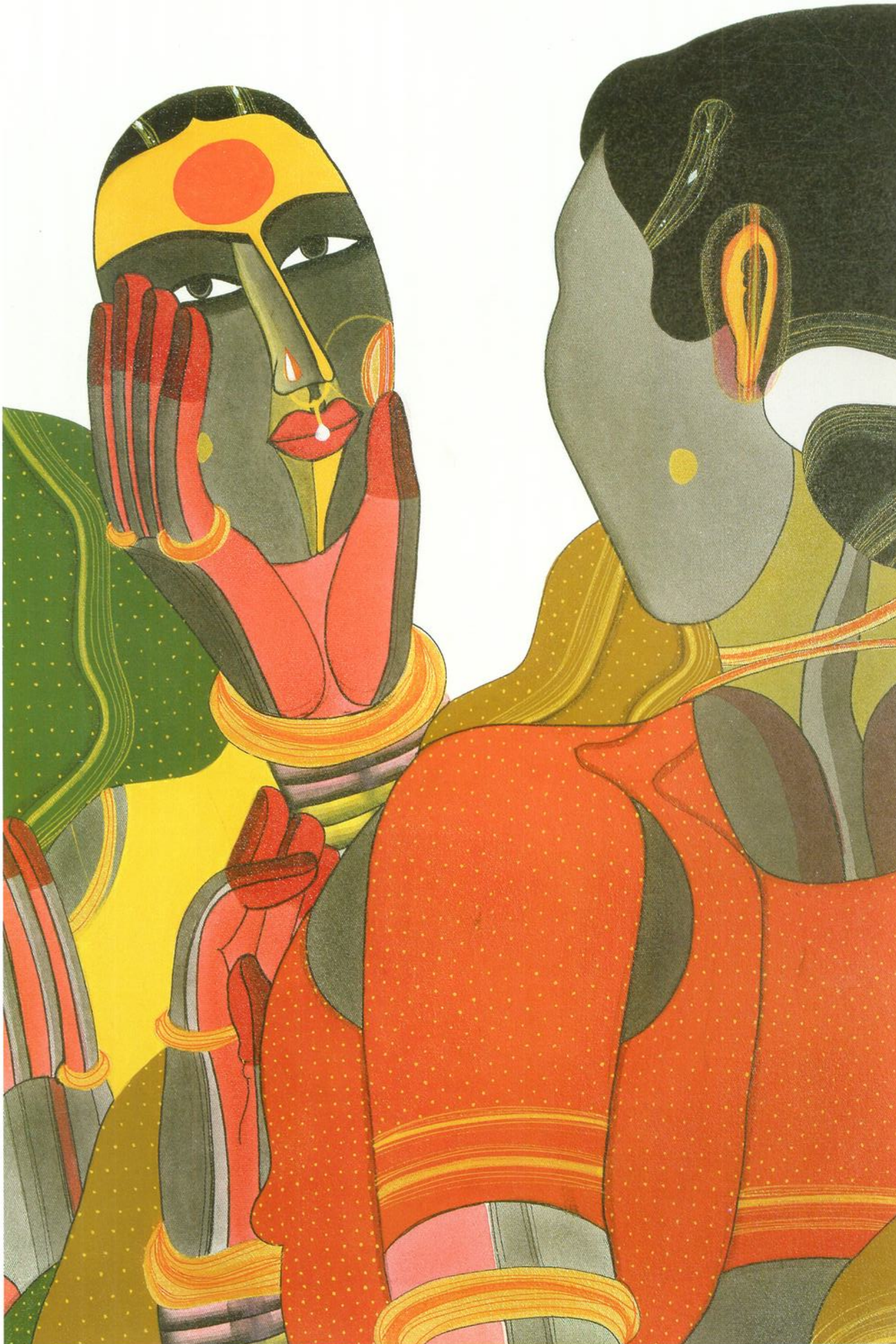
Pandit with Women, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72", 2006–7.

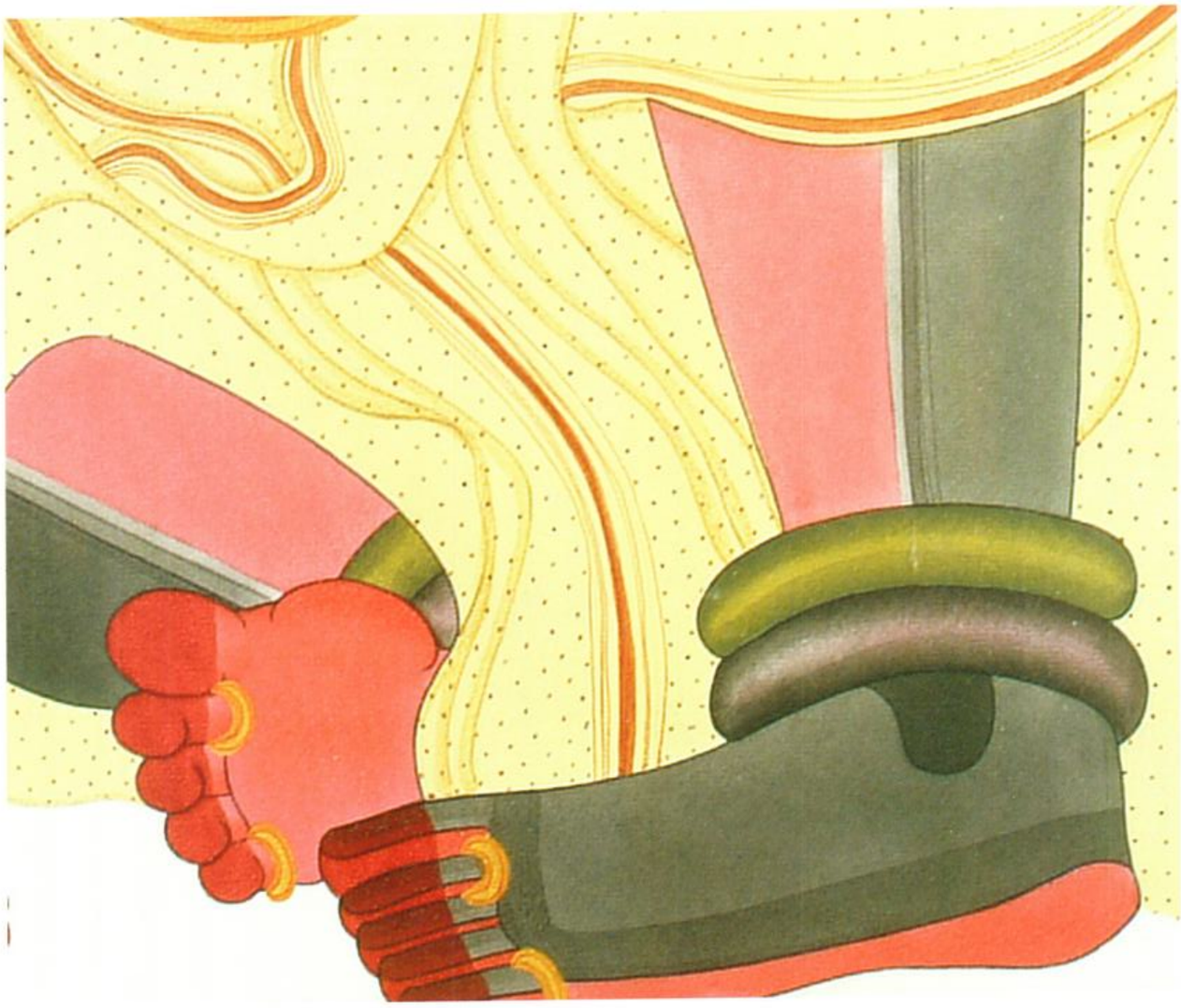


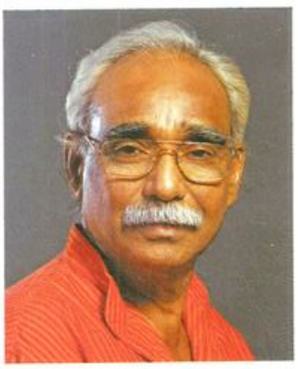
Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48", 2006–7.











Chronology

1942	Born in Boorugupalli, Karimnagar District, Andhra Pradesh
1970	Diploma in Painting, College of Fine Arts & Architecture, Hyderabad
1971–72	Fellowship,Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Akademi to study painting at MS University, Vadodara under Prof. KG Subramanyan

Awards

1993	National award for painting
1989	National award for art direction of the film *Dasi*
1988	Bharath Bhavan Biennale, Bhopal
1985	Hyderabad Art Society, Hyderabad
1983	Lalit Kala Akademi, Andhra Pradesh
1982	Hyderabad Art Society, Hyderabad
1979	Academy of Fine Arts, Hyderabad
	Mahakoshal Kala Samithi, Madhya Pradesh
	Chitra Kala Parishad, Bengaluru
1977	Hyderabad Art Society, Hyderabad
1973	Hyderabad Art Society, Hyderabad
	Lalit Kala Akademi, Andhra Pradesh

Solo Exhibitions

2007	*Yes, I am he*, India Fine Art, Mumbai
2006	*Mukham*, Sanskriti Art Gallery, Kolkata
2005	*Telangana Men and Women*, Arts India, California
	Nalupu Telupu, India Fine Art, Mumbai
	Retrospective shows at Art Alive, New Delhi and London
2004	Kuhu Art Gallery, London
2003	*Larger than Life – Vaikuntam's Women*, Arts India, New York.
	The Guild, Mumbai
2001	*Memories of Telengana*, Samaa, New Delhi
2000	*Mother*, The Guild, Mumbai
1999	Gallery 678, New York
	Threshold, Visakhapatnam
1998	*Vision & Response*, Renaissance, Bengaluru
	My Telengana Images, The Guild, Mumbai
1997	Gallery Espace, New Delhi
	Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai
1996	Surya Gallery, Hyderabad
1995	All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society, New Delhi
	Crimson Gallery, Bengaluru
1994	Galerie 88, Kolkata
1993	Spencer's Gallery, Bengaluru
	The Gallery, Chennai
1992	Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai
	Gallery Kufa, London
	The Gallery, Chennai
1991	Gallery Espace, New Delhi
	ANZ Grindlays Bank Gallery, Chennai
1990	Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai
1989	Paintings, Max Mueller, Hyderabad
	ANZ Grindlays Bank Gallery, Chennai
1985	Drawings, Kala Bhavan, Hyderabad
1983	Drawings and paintings, Hyderabad Art Society, Hyderabad
1982	Charcoal drawings, Kala Bhavan, Hyderabad
1980	Charcoal drawings on the Mother Series, Hyderabad
1978	Ink drawings, Kala Bhavan, Hyderabad
	Prints, Alliance Française, Bengaluru
1977	Ink drawings, Kala Bhavan, Hyderabad
1974	Small drawings, Hyderabad Arts Society, Hyderabad
1973	Kala Bhavan, Hyderabad

Group Shows

2007	Art Alive, London
2006	Opening show, India Fine Art, Mumbai
	6 Artists Show, 1X1, Dubai
	Opening show, Arts Pilgrim, London

2005 *Divine Inspiration*, India Fine Art, Mumbai

2004 *Confluence*, Arts India, California

2003 *Faces*, Art Alive, Delhi
Kuhu Art Gallery, London
Hyderabad with Love, India Fine Art at Hyderabad and Mumbai

2002 *Tradition & Change*, Arts India, New York

2001 *A Panorama of Indian Contemporary Art*, Art Circle (through The Guild)

2000 Creative 2000, Dubai
Menaz Art Gallery, Hyderabad
Faces, Design Art, Dubai
Ignition, Crimson, Mumbai

1999 *Mask*, Dhoomimal Gallery, Delhi
Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Mumbai Gallery Ganesh, New Delhi

1998 *Threshold*, Visakhapatnam
Tempra, Art Today, New Delhi
Gallery Ganesh, New Delhi
Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Mumbai

1997 Gallery Ganesh, New Delhi

1996 *Chamatkara – Myth and Magic Indian Art*, Whiteley's Art Gallery, London

1995 *Art for Cry*, Mumbai
Gallery Ganesh, New Delhi
Gallerie 88, Kolkata
Autumn exhibition, All India Fine Art & Crafts Society, New Delhi
Seventh anniversary exhibition, Gallery Ganesh, New Delhi
Second Anniversary exhibition, Surya Gallery, Hyderabad
Women, curated by The Gallery, Singapore & Hong Kong

1994 First Anniversary exhibition, Surya Gallery, Hyderabad
Art in miniature form, Renaissance, Bengaluru
Gallery Ganesha, New Delhi
Contemporary miniatures, CIMA Gallery, Kolkata
India Encounter II, Lee Arthur Studio, New York

1993 Anniversary exhibition, Gallery 88, Kolkata
Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata
Summer show, The Gallery, Chennai
Silver jubilee exhibition, Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata
Wide Angle, Sarala Art Center, Bengaluru

1992 Sanskriti Art Gallery, Kolkata
Summer show, Hyderabad
HelpAge India, Jehangir Art Gallery
Art Encounter, Kessel
Exhibition curated by Gallerie 88, Bengaluru
Shraddha Saharpan, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai

1991 *Images of Rural India*, Max Mueller Bhavan, Hyderabad
The Collector's Choice, Society for Promotion of Art, Hyderabad
VII International Triennial, New Delhi
Gallery Espace, New Delhi

1990 *Five Artists*, LV Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad
CCMB Science Institute, Hyderabad
Sarala Art Gallery, Bengaluru
The Gallery, Chennai

1989 Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad
Max Mueller Bhavan, Hyderabad

1988 Roopankar Biennale, Bharath Bhavan, Bhopal

Collections

Andhra Pradesh Police Academy, Hyderabad
Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad
Central Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi
Chester and David Herwitz Family Collection, USA
Glenbarra Art Museum, Japan
Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi
LV Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad
National Academy of Arts , New Delhi
National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
Regional Center, Chennai
Salar Jung Museum, New Delhi
State Contemporary Art Gallery, Hyderabad
State Lalit Kala Akademi, Andhra Pradesh