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The
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**THE VOICE OF
FEMMIDA RIAZ**



This book is published as part of a project entitled 'Advancing Female Literacy and Empowerment in Pakistan and India through Life Writing'. It was led by Professor Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (University of Sheffield, U.K.) in collaboration with Dr Rukhsana Zia and Dr Nukhbah Taj Langah (Forman Christian College University, Lahore, Pakistan), Professor Claire Chambers (University of York, U.K.), Dr Nafhesa Ali (University of Manchester, U.K.) and Shaheen Attique-ur-Rahman (the Bunyad Foundation, Lahore, Pakistan). It was crafted by students at Forman Christian College University under the guidance of Sobia Zaidi, Haidar Shahbaz and Mussarat Shahid with the support of Saima Fayyaz from the Bunyad Foundation. The project was funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund in the United Kingdom.

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There she stood, in the land that belonged to no one.

Halfway between home and prison, she was suspended.

That girl was Fehmida Riaz and this is her story.





Ever since she was very little, Fehmida would climb the shelves of her parent's huge library, reaching up to all the big, bright, colorful books.

Fehmida recalled the Sunday afternoon, when she sat in the lawn while Amma jaan oiled her hair, when she had said,

"I want to write a book Amma jaan, but I don't know what to call it."

"Think about what you want to say."

"I want to tell the truth."

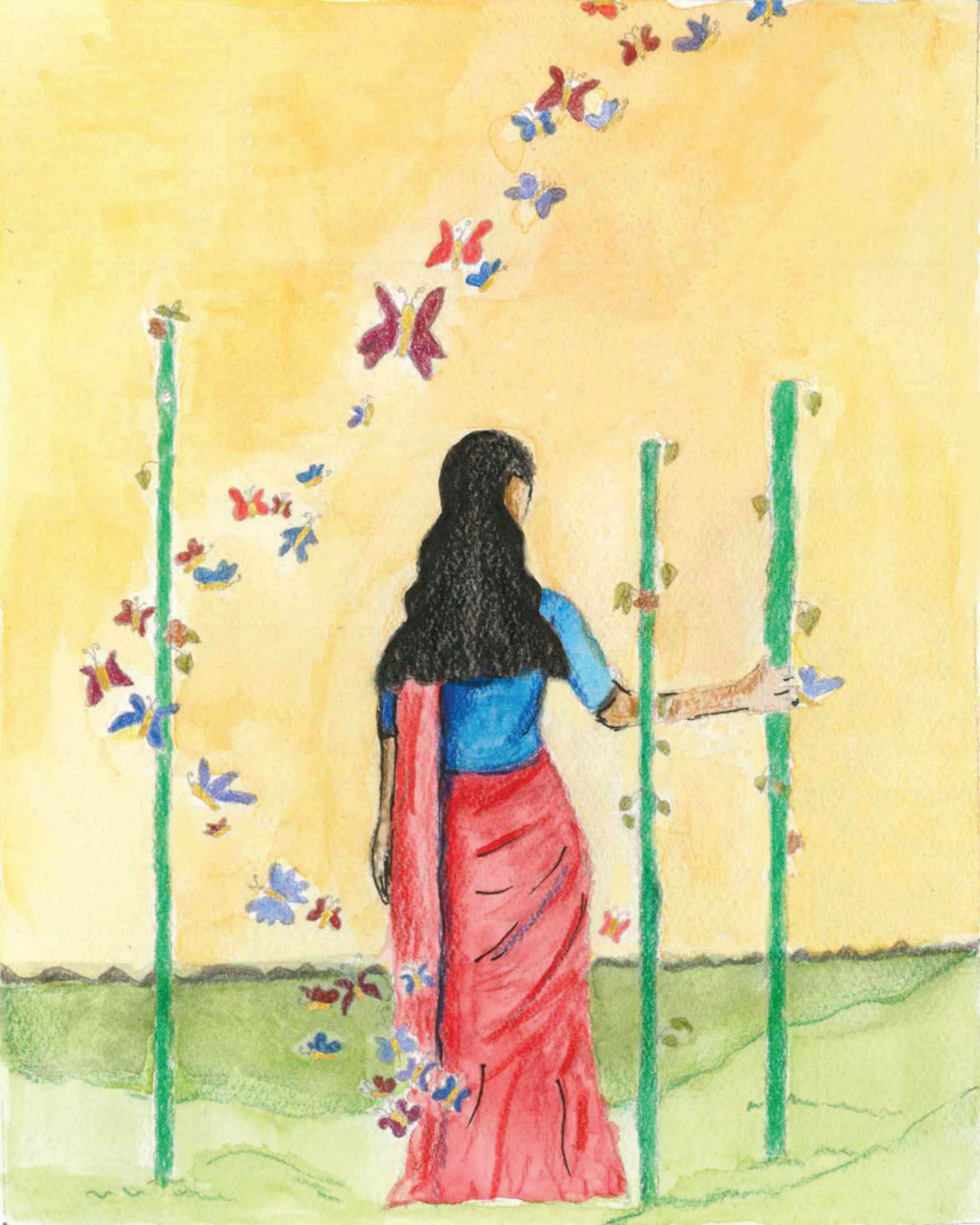
"Who's truth? Everyone has a different version of their truth."

"I don't know, I just want to share what happens in people's real lives."

"How about 'Awaaz'? God knows you have a big voice. Who would my little Fehmida be without it?"

"Amma jaan, that's perfect! 'Awaaz.' Yes, I'll call it 'Awaaz'!"

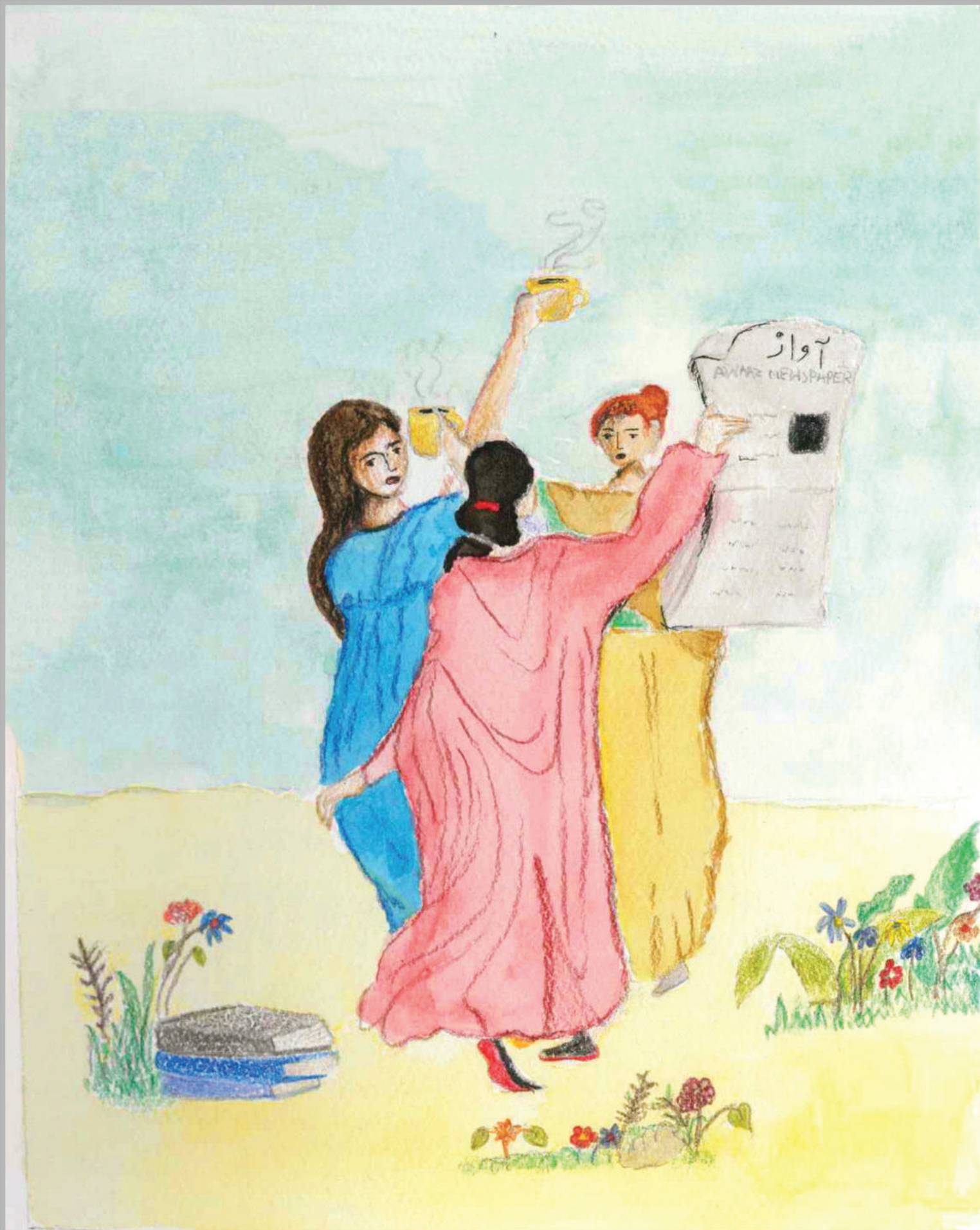




The idea had seemed impossible when she first dreamed of it.

Now years later, she was sure. Fehmida would start her own newspaper.

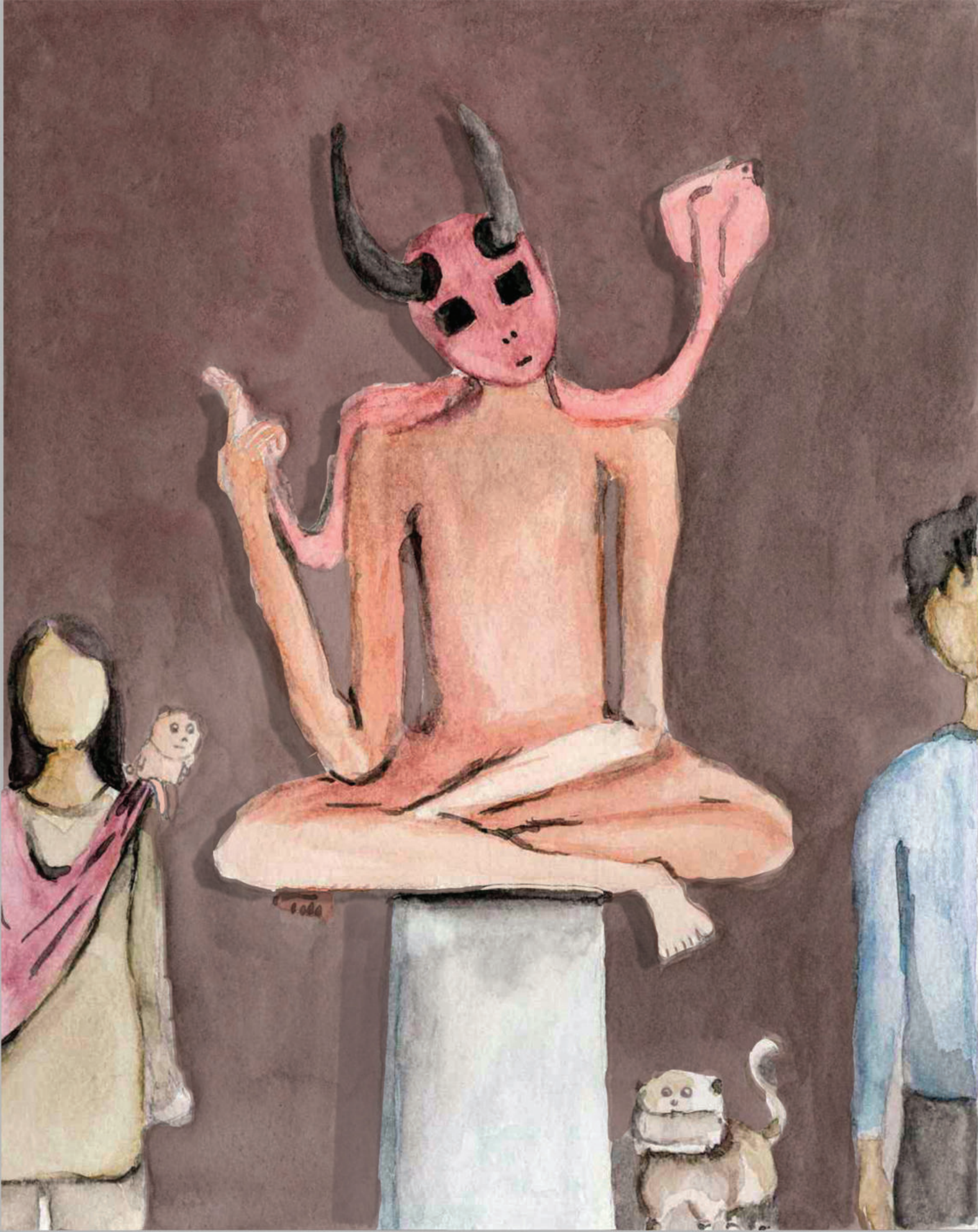




The first edition of 'Awaaz' was just as popular as its idea.

Fehmida and her colleagues had worked so hard and now celebrated its success.





Yet there were some who hated 'Awaaz', how it questioned things, and was not afraid to tell the truth.





They wanted to silence Fehmida and what she stood for. Her words were strong, her voice too. Of course, with bravery comes punishment too.





So they sent her away to India to keep her quiet.

Fehmida longed to return to her home.

India was familiar. India was happy to have her.

But India was not home.

Bravery can often mean resistance in the
quietest of ways.

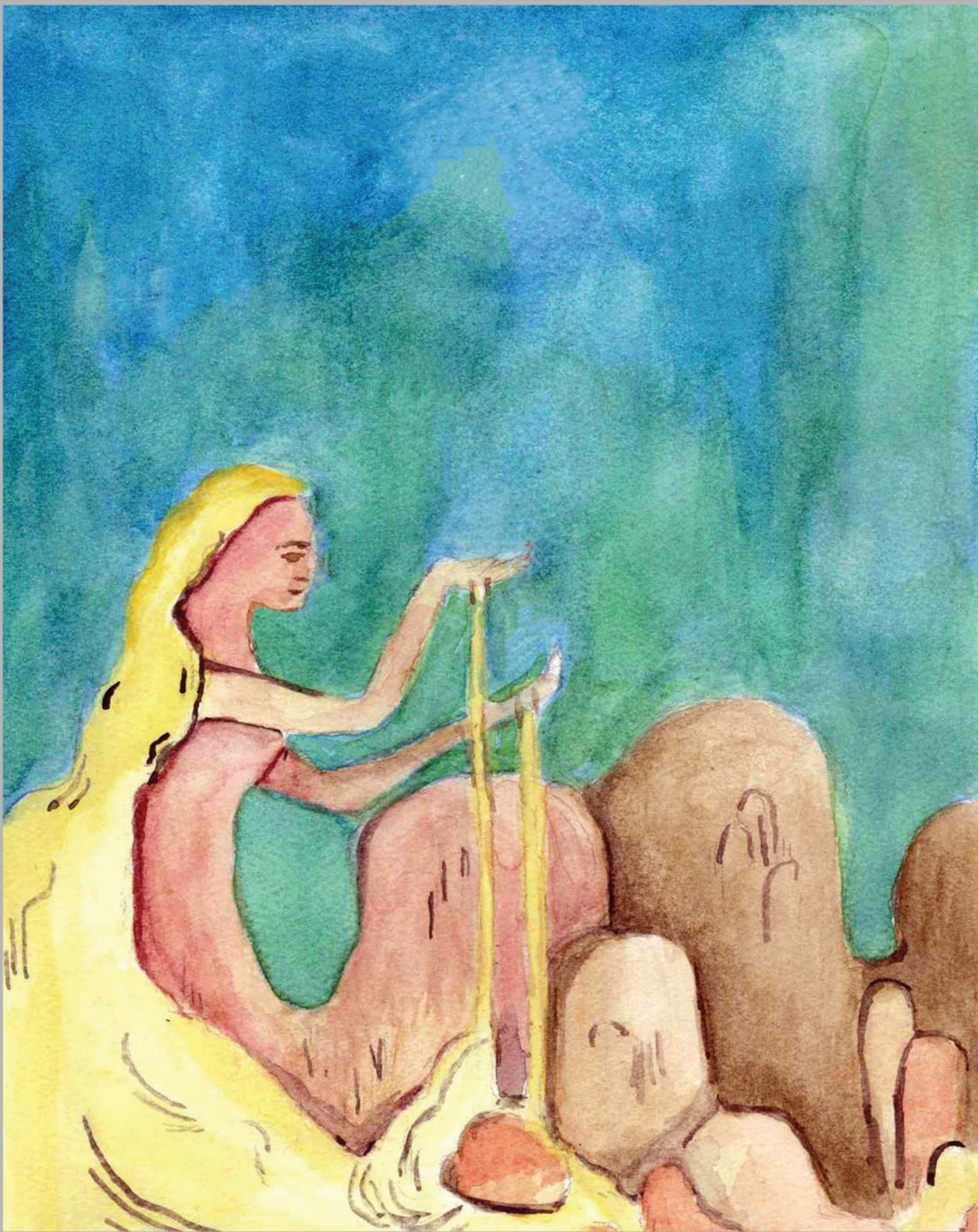
So Fehmida wrote and bid her time.





People in power do not always stay in power.
When the old leaders went, they were quickly
forgotten. People only cared to bring back what
they had taken away: their writers, their artists,
their freedom and their voices.





7 long years had passed, and Fehmida had received a letter. Her hands shook, her eyes welled. Pakistan was finally asking her to come back.

In the distance the Maghrib prayer sounded, signalling that it is time to return.





Amma jaan puts away her newspaper, when there is a knock on the door.

"Amma jaan?" a voice calls from the other side. "Fehmida, mera bacha, is that you?" she cries.

Amma jaan opens the door and embraces Fehmida, overjoyed to have her home at last.



We remember her now as Fehmida Riaz, the brilliant winner of the Pride of Performance Award and the little girl who just wanted to write big.





Guidelines for Teachers and Parents

We chose to tell the story of Fehmida Riaz to celebrate her unrecognised contribution as an activist, specifically through the means of literature. This story book is a semi-biographical depiction of Fehmida Riaz, illustrated as a hero answering her calling. We borrowed the narrative style of the illustration from fantastic tarot card symbols, and unfolded her life events like a tarot reading. She had many achievements in the literary world as a poetess and writer but for this book we decided to focus on her unacknowledged work in publishing the "Awaaz Newspaper".

Teachers and parents can encourage children to read the images as a separate story and engage with the symbols and their meanings. The words of the story present a simple personalized account of Fehmida's journey and her struggle.

