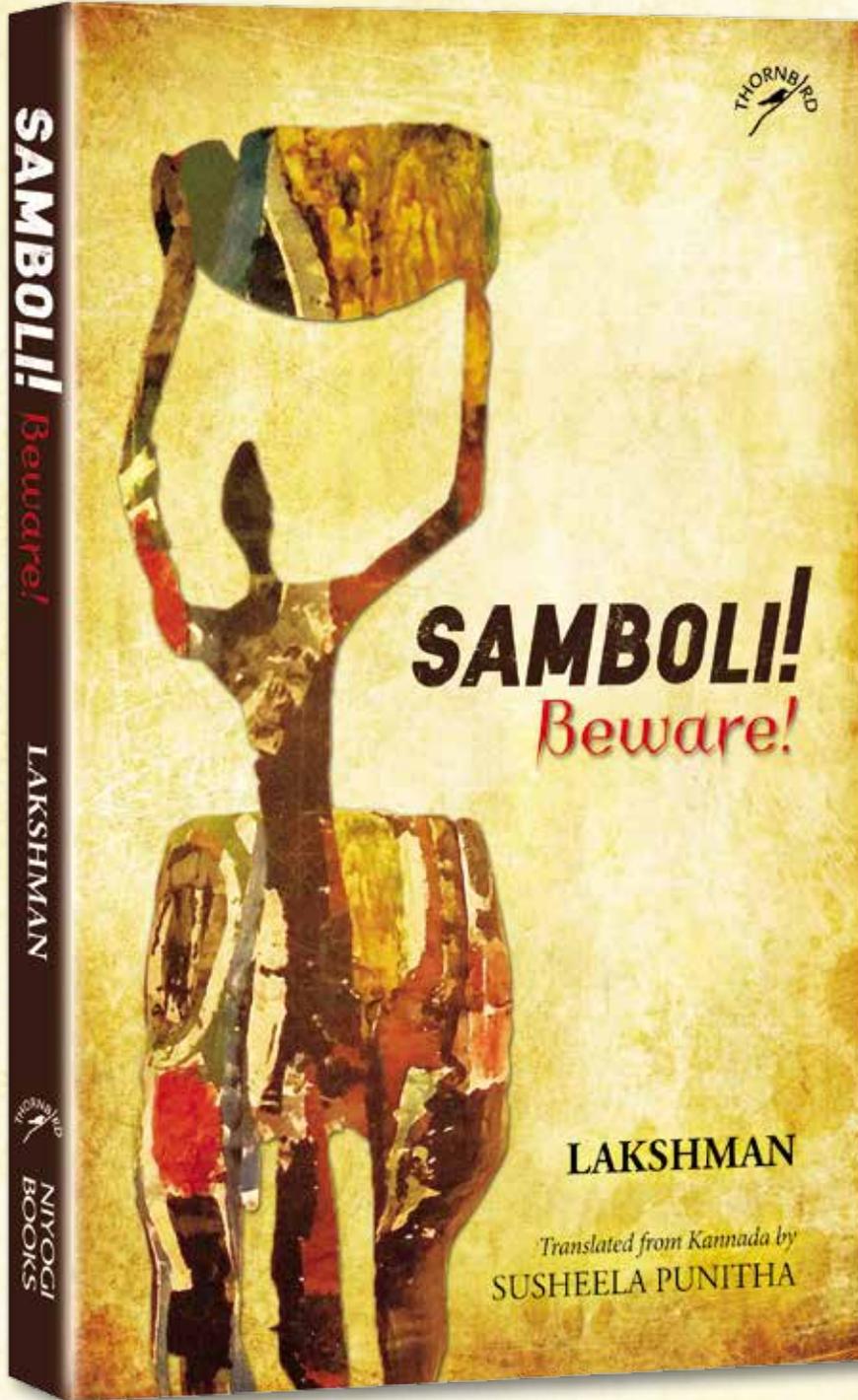


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SAMBOLI! *Beware!*

by
Lakshman
Translated by **Susheela Punitha**

TRANSLATION/FICTION

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Samboli! means echcharike in Kannada—‘Be careful!’

Samboli! This expression is not from yesterday or the day before; it is centuries old.

Manu, the ancient lawgiver, decreed that people belonging to any of the untouchable castes of this country had to hold a pole with jingling bells tied to one end and pound it on the ground at every step to make a sound—jal-jal. They had to call out, ‘Samboli! Samboli!’ This is the Samboli pole warning others of their presence. They were to walk only on conservancy lanes and not on the main streets and only around noon when their shadow was tucked under their feet and would not pollute people of the upper castes by falling on them.

Samboli, by extension, could imply ‘Beware!’ in the present context of Dalit uprisings. It could also be a clarion call for Dalits to fight for their humanity.



Lakshman (1957–2017) was from Kathriguppe, a village in South Bengaluru Taluk. His parents Muthappa and Venkatamma were daily-wage labourers. He was a second division clerk at HKED Veerendra Patil Pre-University College since 1980. As a social activist, he served as general secretary, Karnataka Dalit Sangarsha Samiti, founder member and national vice president of Karnataka Vimochana Ranga and founder president of Jaathi Vinaashaka Vedhike. As a writer, he has many collections of poems, short stories and two novels to his credit. Some of the awards he has received are: *Rashtrakavi Kuvempu Award* (2003), *Dr Ambedkar Fellowship National Award* (2006) and *Karnataka Keerthi Kalasa State Award* (2007).



Susheela Punitha has translated from Kannada to English, excerpts on theatre in Karnataka for *Regional Theatre Histories*, Institute of Economic Growth, University of Delhi.

Her translation on *Bharathipura*, a novel by U R Ananthamurthy (2010) was shortlisted for the Jaipur Literary Prize, 2012 for which she received the Sahitya Akademi Translation Award for English, 2015.

A story of an untouchable Dalit boy coming of age, and a reflection on the social conditions of the community which is struggling to find its dignity and social justice

Unlike other Dalit autobiographies set in remote villages with socially well-defined and self-contained spaces, the events narrated in Samboli are set in the outskirts of the city, making incursions to the city now and then.

Another addition to the growing body of Dalit autobiographies, which, in their content and form, have developed into a distinct genre of ‘self-writing’.