

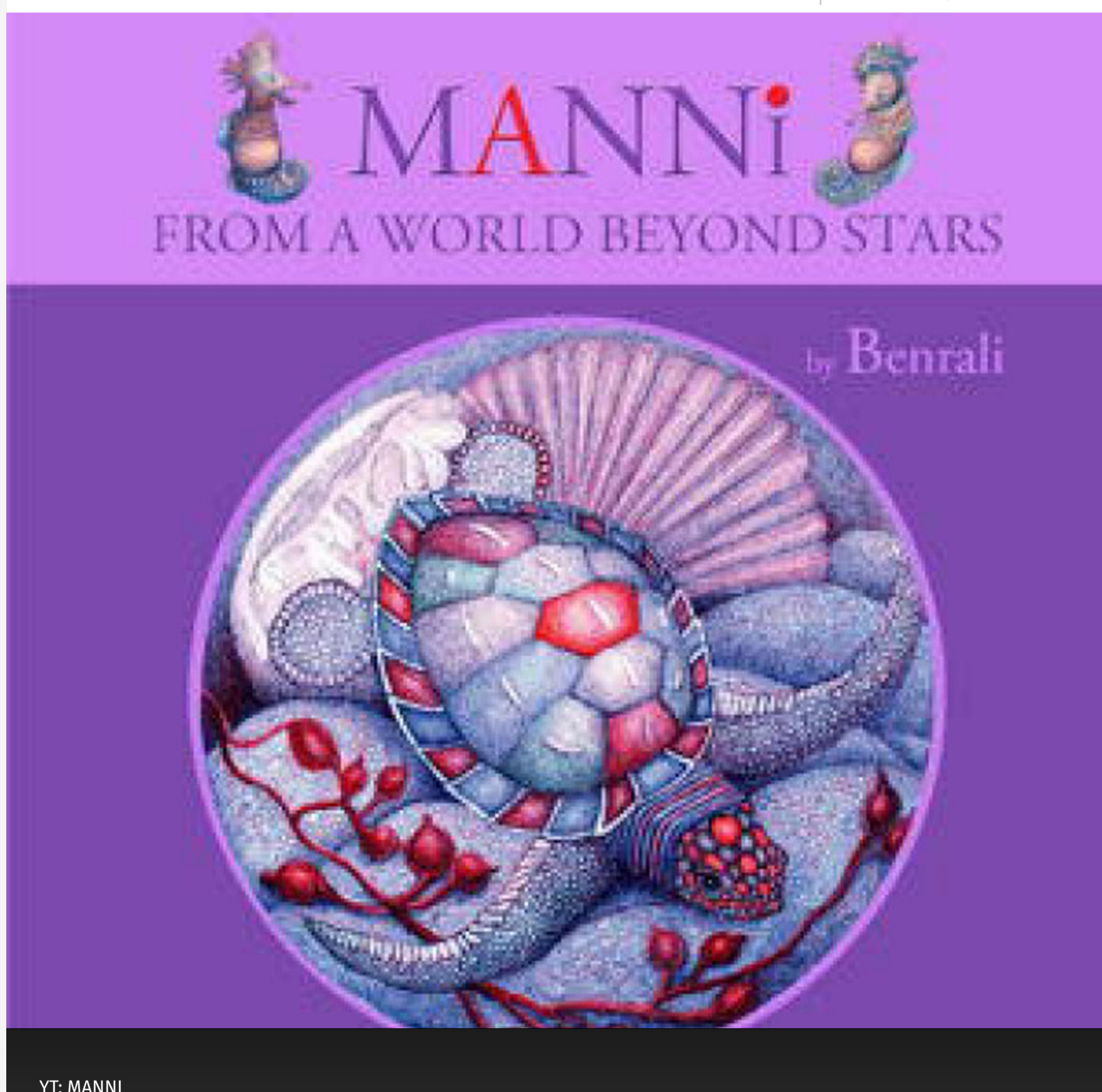
YOUNG WORLD

# Of turtles and dreams...

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YT: MANNI

Two of the loveliest books I've seen on wildlife have been drawn and written by the American-born Guyanese author-artist Benrali: *Manni: From a World Beyond Stars*, and *The Turtle's Dream and Keys*. Both are centred on turtles, the first inspired by a sea turtle beach in Guyana ... and the second by a turtle living with Benrali!

The first book tells the story of a baby sea turtle called Manni (named after the Sanskrit word *Mani*, meaning 'jewel', or 'money'), who, alone in a big sea full of dangers, is befriended by a coconut seed named Oonie. Together they have many adventures, including escaping from a crocodile and a hungry octopus, before being deposited back onto land. At this point Oonie reveals its true self, as a moon-gazer angel living in palm trees. Oonie then gently guides Manni back to the sea with advice on how to stay safe.

The second book revolves around an Eastern box turtle called Jupiter, and the patterns on his shell. The author delves into Jupiter's dreams, going back to prehistoric times (including the age of dinosaurs), from which turtles have evolved.

He imagines one of the patterns on Jupiter's back to be "a key to a place beyond time, a place where he can change from turtle to wings, from reptile to butterfly, from fossil energy to solar energy, a key to a place where anything can be changed".

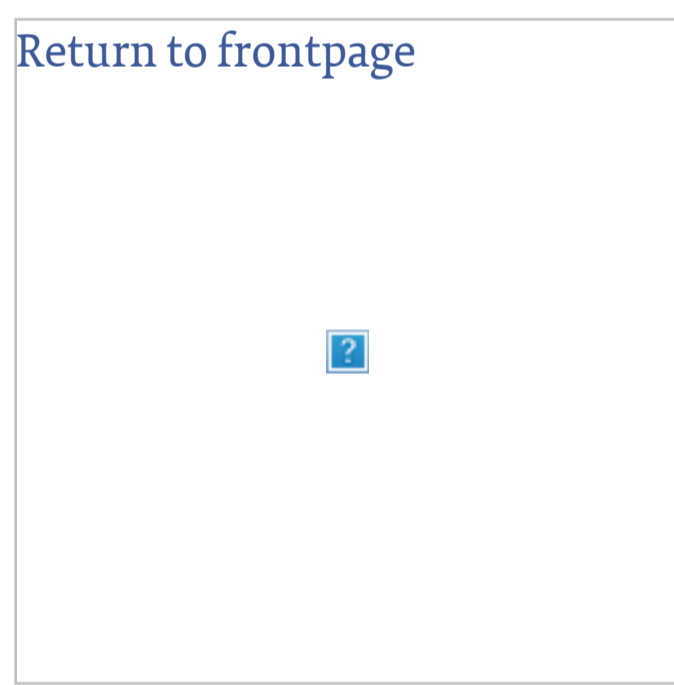
These books stand out for their exquisitely coloured artwork and poetic prose, and for reaching out to most age groups. It is not only nature that has been Benrali's inspiration. It is also ancient cultures.

*Manni* uses the *ghazal* form of rhyming couplets as a base (the author-artist credits this to India), and its story takes from folk tales of the Caribbean including the Arawak indigenous people. As conservationists around the world are realising, it is this combined power of nature and culture that we need to turn to if we are to heal our troubled planet. In their own gentle, visually stunning way, these books will help inspire both children and adults to search for ways to save wildlife, biodiversity, and human beings from being destroyed by greed and selfishness.

There are some spelling or grammatical mistakes, but these are minor irritants in the otherwise magical journey Benrali takes us on.

For more information on Benrali and the books, log on to <http://benrali.com>

*Ashish Kothari is with Kalpavriksh, Pune.*



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