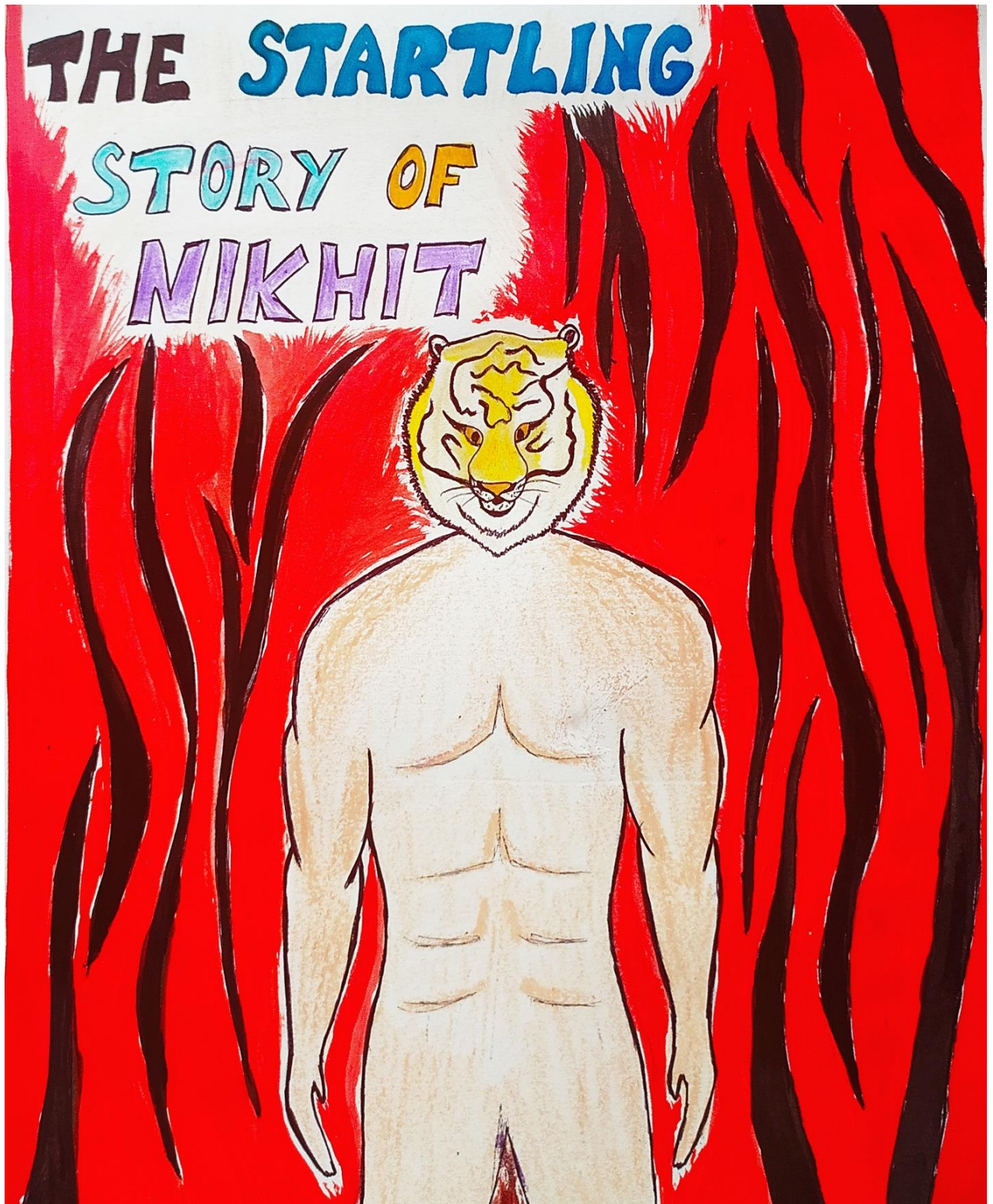


THE STARTLING STORY OF NIKHIT



Once upon a time there existed a village that was named 'Vichitra gao' (bizarre village). As the name itself indicates the people who lived there were very terrific. They had an amazing power to transform into tigers. And more interestingly whoever had the power to transform into tiger gets assigned to a unique license solely for that purpose. Generally warriors of a country or state are in the form of soldiers or police officials but here the warriors of the village are in the form of human tigers themselves. With the help of the license they could help fight out the enemies that wanted to occupy the village and help maintain law and order. From the beginning whoever had lived there considered such people as powerful. It was believed that they were chosen by God. Generation to generation the villagers had been worshipping them. At the age of 20-21 years people would start getting the signs and symptoms which symbolizes the fact that they are chosen by God and time has come to transform into tiger. And by the age of 25 years a God-chosen person would have the full potential to get his tiger form whenever he wishes to and gets abide by their duties and responsibilities. But they would live for only 10 years after that.



There lived a family at the end of the village, both the parents and two children. The older son's name was Nikhit and his sister's name was Pihu. Both were school going children. One day while playing football Nikhit got hurt in his left leg. He was injured and left the playground for home. He sat on his bed and opened his shoes. To his shock he noticed that his foot seemed somewhat unusual, had gotten enlarged in size and there was full of yellow and black hairs. He was in a shock as he was not able to understand what had happened to his leg. Before anyone could enter the room he quickly wore his shoes back and went out. He tried to act normal until something serious happened. The next day when he was getting a bath under the shower he felt something hairy on his back. He turned around in front of the mirror. What he saw was extremely very horrific. There was full of yellow and black stripes with hairs on it in his back just like the shade of a tiger skin. He was in fear. It didn't take much longer to realize what was actually happening.



Out of fear and terrible shock he immediately wore his t-shirt and came out of his bathroom. Without giving a second thought he ran out the house and gone far away. He had gone to the mountain which was at the other end of the village and reached the peak of the mountain where no one else could reach him. His legs got trembled and he shrieked out of fear. He had started to get the signs and symptoms which means he was chosen by God and soon would form into a whole tiger avatar.



He cried and cried and talked to himself, “This cannot happen to me. I am only 15 years old and this is totally impossible. Why has this happened to me at this early age? This is just against the tradition and custom of the village. What should I do now!?! I’ll definitely be thrown out of the village if they come to know the truth. What will happen to me now!?! Oh God! Please help me. I can’t go back home!” He had so many unanswered questions in his mind. He was totally broken into tears. Few minutes later he had fallen asleep. Next morning he felt all the changes in him. His hands, his legs, his body got the tiger form.

Nikhit was helpless and decided not to return home back ever and show up to anyone. So he walked and walked and reached another village which went through a forest. He saw an elephant passing by and got afraid of that huge animal. Although the changes in him was specifically visible but he had no physical energy and capability as that of a tiger to fight away anyone. In short he is just a powerless man-tiger now. So on seeing the elephant he quickly hid himself behind the bushes. After a while he came out and walked towards the village. Standing far away he gazed at the people of the village. He noticed everything. He saw the people were busy doing their work, some were farmers and some were selling things, the children were playing in the field, some were playing with their pets, women were carrying vegetable baskets on their head, some sat on the ground and was selling handicrafts, fruits and vegetables.



While gazing at them his eyes got caught on a cage where a tiger was captured inside. Moments later, the head of the village came and a meeting was held under the shade of a banyan tree. The head addressed the villagers and said, “Good morning my people. As we all know how this tiger has been causing trouble in the village and see we were successful yesterday in catching him with the help of our young boys. Now it is not safe to keep him here and that is why I have decided to call the higher forest officials to take him with them. In fact I have already

called them up and will be here soon after few minutes.” Hearing this Nikhit understood that it’s better not to enter into the village and instead live in the forest. Keeping his safety in mind he climbed up a tree and sat there without coming into notice of anybody around. The next day he woke up and felt very thirsty so he climbed down the tree and very quietly and gently went to a pond nearby. While he was drinking water from the pond he heard footsteps of two people. Immediately he hid behind the bushes there. Two old men came and sat beside the pond and started fishing. Minutes later suddenly one of them got slipped and fell into the pond. He tried to crawl to the side but was not able to get out of the water. His friend tried to bring him out with the help of a stick but couldn’t because the pond was a little deep. Seeing this Nikhit could not stop himself and jumped into the water. The other old man who was trying to save his mate was astonished to see a creature half human and half tiger. Nikhit said, “Hey! Please don’t shout. I will help your friend come out of the water. I will not do any harm to anybody here. Please trust me.” The old man did not utter a word but noticed silently in shock. Nikhit helped the man come out of the deep water. Both of them starred at him silently. The old man said, “Who are you? You look just like a tiger but can walk and talk just like us! We have not seen you here before. But you have saved me from drowning into the water.” Nikhit replied, “Yes! My name is Nikhit. And I look like a tiger and can walk and talk just like human beings. It’s a long story. Thank God! You are safe now. It’s getting late. Now I think I must go back from where I came.” To this both the old man urged him to wait and said, “Oh! Whatever may be, you have saved us today. And as such you are not an enemy. So please come with us to our place and have some fun in our village. You will love our village.” Nikhit got confused and he thought if he should go with them. One man said, “Hey! There is blood in your leg. I think you just got hurt in some sharp object inside the pond. And if you do not come with us then it might get infection.” Nikhit then agreed to go to their place.

They entered the village and all the people around was frightened to see him. But both the man explained everything to them and to the head of the village and assured them that there was no risk from his side. The village doctor was called and bandaged his injured leg. He was made comfortable and was thanked by the village head to have saved the man’s life. The children played with him. He felt happy to be what he actually was, a good heart inside the body of a tiger. He felt good as people there had accepted and treated him well just like a friend. That night there was a big celebration welcoming him in their village for his generous work.

He found himself on his own bed the next morning. Next to his bed was his sister's. He walked towards Pihu's bed and woke her up. She was excited to see her brother and shouted out saying, "Mom and dad come here fast! Nikhit has awakened! Oh, brother I am so happy to see you fine." Nikhit could not get anything what Pihu was saying. He asked her, "What? What are you saying? Why are you happy? What is happening here?" By saying this he turned to the mirror. The tiger form was gone. Their parents had just entered the room, hugged him and said, "Son, you have had been lying on bed since 5 days without consciousness. We tried every possible way we could to bring your conscious back but failed. Thank God! You are fine now." They left the room to bring healthy food for him. Nikhit was confused as to what his parents were saying as it totally contradicts his thoughts and memory because as far as he had remembered he was in another village the day before and was in the form of a tiger. It was all fresh in his mind what had happened to him right from the day he started getting symptoms, how he fled away from his village and reached another village.



He walked here and there in his room in confusion. He went out and asked Pihu, "Please tell me from which day I was on bed unconscious? I mean before that where was I or what was I doing?" Pihu replied, "You do not remember anything! We all were playing in the field and you got hurt in your foot and then you went home. That night only almighty knows what happened to

you and you never woke up until today.” His mind was full of bizarre thoughts. He tried to compare what his parents and Pihu said to what he had remembered everything that happened to him. Unable to get to the point he sat on his bed with legs up folded on the bed. All of a sudden his eyes went to a torn piece of bandage beside his pillow. He took that piece in his hand. It looked exactly the same as the one that was used to cover his injured leg to prevent infection. He then checked his leg and to his astonishment there was the injured sign in his leg at the same place. He was left with so many unanswered questions. His mind was full of questions. ‘Was it a dream? Are my parents lying? Is Pihu lying to me? If I have been on bed unconscious then from where this piece of bandage come and how did I get injured in my leg? As far as I know I noticed the signs and symptoms of tiger in my body. Have I gone mad? Who will tell me what actually the truth is?!’”