How the Leopard became Waghoba

Written by Ramya Nair
Illustrated by Aaroolya Rajesh
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This book was written as part of a project by Ramya Nair and Dr. Vidya Athreya to understand human-leopard relations and traditions of the deity Waghoba in northwestern Maharashtra.
Uncle Raynal has invited all of them to Dahanu to teach them about animals he rescues.

Simmo has barely slept last night!

The day for the picnic with all her neighbourhood friends has finally arrived.

Uncle Raynal has invited all of them to Dahanu to teach them about animals he rescues.
“Welcome kids!”
“What are we going to do today, Uncle Raynal?”

“Can we see all the animals you rescue here?”

“Do you think there are leopards here?”
"Well kids, this is a rescue centre where we help and care for wild animals that may be injured or trapped in cages. We then work to send them back to their homes in the wild."
“The leopard is one of the animals we often rescue around here.”

“WOOOAH!!”

“Can we see them in the jungles outside?”
Leopards are known to be one of the most adaptable big cats.

“They can survive in various landscapes. Some are found in forests. Some on the mountains. Some in cities. Some even near farms.”
“Leopards are also very shy and avoid people whenever they can. They are also called wagh.”

“But isn’t the tiger called wagh?”

“That’s right, Raju. Both tigers and leopards are known locally as the wagh.”
“Come on Omi, this is our chance to see one!”
“Namaskar kaka.
Have you seen a wagh here. Can you show us one?”

“A wagh?”

“Yes, we came to see a wagh.”
“Umm... come, let me show you!”
“This... ...is Waghoba”

“WAGHOBA?!?”
“He is our village deity. He is a form of both the tiger...”

“...and leopard, making him Waghoba.”
“Legend says, years ago the wagh would come to the shrine and sit when we do the pooja of this deity;”

“WOAHHHHH”

“...or even just rest here, especially at the Chinchoti Waghoba.”

“WOAHHHHH”
“If you want to know more, you can go to the sarpanch.”
“Namaskar, sarpanch bai.”

“What are you two kids doing here?”
“We came to see a wagh but only saw the Waghoba.”

“Ahh, let me tell you about our Waghoba...”
“For hundreds of years our community lived in or close to forests. There was always a fear of coming across a wagh at that time.”

“We also had farms and animals which needed protection.”
“The wagh is the king of the jungle and so we decided to pray to it for protection and peace.”
“So that is why we made him our deity...

...and worship him every year, as a tradition.”
“There is the famous Chinchoti shrine where a wagh was once found resting.”

“Oh! We also heard that the wagh sometimes visits the shrine during this time.”
“Let's hurry, this may be our last chance to see the wagh!”
“Well, thank you sarpanch bai, we should get going.”
“This time we should…”

*Sshhh*

“Look!”

“Do you think that looks like a wagh?”
“We should move quietly as to not disturb the wagh.”
“What brings you here, children?”
“Kaka, we came looking for the wagh.”

“But all we saw was Waghoba.”
“Well, the Waghoba is there so that the wagh and us people can all live in harmony. He protects us and in turn we offer him our prayers.”
“Does that mean...

...we can't see one here?”
“The wagh is a very smart animal. It must have seen you much before you spot it.
Just because you may not see it, doesn’t mean it is not living here peacefully too.”
“Now don’t be sad Omi, I think we saw something even more fascinating than the wagh today.”
“You’re right, just the thought of being in a place where there is a wagh is the real thrill.”
“Yes, and we have got to tell everyone else about Waghoba too, they are going to love this story!”

“We should get going before we get into trouble.”
“...now that I have told you all about the leopards why don’t Simmo and Omi tell us about Waghoba!”
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