

WALKING WITH THE BIG CAT

What is it about a book titled *Scent of a Game* (Rupa; ₹395) with a cover resembling a tiger skin that hooks you, other than the plotline and its pace? Probably the author. You would think that with his bureaucratic credentials, Raghav Chandra is as nondescript as it gets. But that's where you get off on the wrong foot.

With his Robin William-esque demeanour, sitting in an office at one end of Krishi Bhawan in a room peppered with photographs of tigers in their habitat and cushions with tiger stick figures, Chandra is not your usual bureaucrat. This 1982-batch IAS officer began his career in Satna and Siroha. Having served around Madhya Pradesh helped

By Ashlin Mathew

Between the lines

Chandra map the territory for the setting in *Scent of a Game*.

Chandra began writing the book around 2006-07, when the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) came close to opening up the trade for sale of captive tiger parts. "Due to a lot of opposition, it didn't happen. But the Chinese

have been pushing for it. Around the same time, they reported the death toll was one tiger per day in Kanha and Panna National Parks," says Chandra. For two years he did nothing about it and then a chance meeting with Ravi Singh of Rupa in 2013 helped get the script noticed.

Writing is not new for Chandra, who occasionally writes on public administration for newspapers around the country. "But telling a story is different. I wanted to express myself and test my creative skills and the tiger makes for a great story," adds Chandra.

In order to weave a thriller around the tiger, Chandra creates Burree Maada, a famous Royal Bengal tigress, who goes missing mysteriously from the high-secu-

rity Kanha Tiger Reserve. The story takes you from Silicon Valley to the jungles of Kalimantan in Borneo to Kanha, Sariska, Panna, Katni, Kathmandu and Mandalay. A naive NRI, a debonair *maharajah*, a fastidious forest officer, a vivacious journalist Sherry and a supercilious *pardhi* tribal Jugnu are thrown together by vagaries of fate.

"Some of these characters have been drawn out of real life. There are officers who bring the spirit of sacrifice into their jobs. The sentiments and situations that the characters suffer are also identifiable in the life of many," he adds.

Having left a few ends loose in the book, Chandra says with a chuckle that he is eyeing a sequel or maybe a prequel.