



**It's paradoxical that children's literature is so overlooked, given the crucial role it can play in shaping the world we want to live in. We need to give kids' lit the space it deserves in bookstores, in libraries, in festivals, in people's minds, in children's lives.**

I find that not only our kids, but even we as adults, end up interacting with those who have such similar backgrounds, education and outlooks, that, in my view, it saps originality and makes for very dull conversation!

As a family, we have lived in India, Africa and now in the UK and our daughters have interacted with children from completely diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and been the richer for it, I think.

The tribal boy in the book (Satya), is based on a little boy called Satto, the son of the lady who used to clean our house. Despite our best efforts, he refused to go to school. So I started seating him along my (then pre-school) children and keeping them occupied, while his mother did her work.

Satto never ceased to amaze me. He had spent his early years in the village where his grandfather was a carpenter, and could whittle a block of wood into almost any shape you named, whistling nonchalantly. He found the lot of us pretty unimpressive I'm sure, but the one thing that earned his unadulterated awe was the computer. He would watch it entranced by the unlimited possibilities it held!

**I believe all royalties from *Ambushed* go to Tiger Watch, a Ranthambhore NGO, for a school for the kids of Moghiya tribals. Helping poachers' kids and conserving tigers, some may find that at cross-purposes...**

It does sound that way at first, isn't it? But when one takes a slightly longer look, it becomes apparent that the only way to stop poaching is to rehabilitate poachers—by giving them a window to alternate livelihood. And this is what Tiger Watch is doing as well through their school for the kids of ex-poachers from the marginalized semi-nomadic tribal community of Moghiyas. Today, there are about 21 boys who are enrolled, but Dr Dharmendra Khandal, a conservation biologist who heads Tiger Watch, hopes to see this number not only swell but include Moghiya

girls as well. His wife Divya runs Dhonk, a craft collective where she provides free vocational training to Moghiya men and women to give them a sustainable means of income. On my visit to Ranthambhore while doing the research for my book, I had the chance to meet some of these Moghiya men, women and children who can now hold their heads up high thanks to Tiger Watch's support- and it was an unforgettable experience.

**And what is your take on the people vs parks conflicts? Especially in view of the rapidly shrinking habitats of our wildlife?** It is the crux of the problem. But it can be resolved, as we are seeing in Ranthambhore and in the Sunderbans for instance. The key is empowering the locals with the skills, equipment and, most importantly, the responsibility to protect both themselves and the tigers and forests that they, more often than not, revere. This is proving to be an excellent solution for both humans and wildlife. Once the villagers own the conservation, our problem is half solved right there.

**How can children help with this cause? Particularly, those in Rajasthan who are geographically closer to Ranthambhore?** Within the last century, the world has lost 97% of its wild tiger population. Experts say that the tiger will be extinct in 15 years. However, from all my school visits in India and London, I am so immensely heartened by the children's engagement with *Ambushed's* story and with tiger conservation; I just know that this generation of children will not let the tigers die out. So three quick tips to save the tiger would be:

- Spread the word about tiger conservation amongst your friends and family. By saving tigers, we are really saving the forests and the water cycle and ourselves; it's all inter-connected!
- Raise funds—arrange a bake sale/ a 'tiger' run/ a sponsored read/ let your imagination go 'wild' and support projects and NGOs like Tiger Watch who have dedicated their time here to help save our planet.



The tiger cubs found their way into *Ambushed*