

R. RAJ RAO

One day I locked my flat in soul city

Short Stories

112 pp.

Origin: India

ABOUT THE CONTENTS: An anthology of fifteen short stories about alternative sexual relationships and about the new morality values and rules, which are far from being conventional and rigid. Based in countries as different as India, Greece, Trinidad, Bangladesh, UK, and the US, these stories are as different from each other as their locations.

Confessions Of Boy Lover showcases the need and urge of a lover longing for someone who is not interested in him any more. Lust being the key word here. Rao tells the story through a series of letters between the two men. His description of the rejection, ridicule, threats of violence, and the overwhelming

hate against this non-conforming love is sensitive and vivid.

The Funeral Party traces the hidden emotions going on in the mind of Raja Ram whose grandmother has just died. He does not feel remorse till later when she is consigned to flames. The story goes deep into the mindset of a person, "What is this urbane life all about? Devoid of any emotions or any real values, this life, isn't it just a fake facade?"

Wish It Were A Nightmare tells the tale of a man who is convicted for eve teasing. He tries to speak the truth, pleading that he could never have done something like that because he's gay! What he suffers as a consequence of telling the police officers his truth is worth reading.

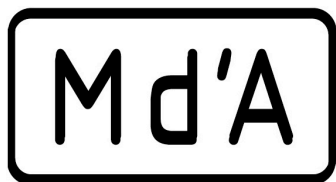
One Day I Locked My Flat in Soul City, the story that gives the book its name, is reeking of philosophy and the suffocation that a man feels when he decides against what is termed 'normal'. The great tide of people walking on the road arouses a myriad thoughts in the mind of the author; full of curiosity about the lives of others and walking along with them for a little while. But it is when he decides to go against it that he realizes the reality of it all - it's difficult to go against the flow; you need great strength to do that but it is possible.

Moonlight Tandoori is a moving story of an Indian student in England who finds himself falling in love with a heterosexual Bangladeshi boy. Rao communicates the closeted experience with telling silences and intimate moments mixed with sly smiles and unpredictable hate.

The story *Psychoanalysis* shows the westernization of attitudes about intimacy, where even casual physical contact between men is viewed with suspicion. The inclusion of humor is welcome in an anthology that might have veered towards earnestness.

Autobiography of an Unknown Indian is a witty tale written from the perspective of a runaway man, who spends almost his entire life travelling on trains. You can sense all the sights, sounds and smells of his escapade, and more, because this man is also high on smack.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: R. Raj Rao was born in Bombay and teaches Literature in local Indian languages at the University of Pune. He is one of the major Indian activists for gay civil rights. His publications include the novel *The Boyfriend*, a collection of poetry, *Slide*



METROPOLI d'ASIA



Show, writings for the theatre (*The Wisest Fool on Earth and Other Plays*) and a biography of Nissim Ezekiel. He also edited the volumes "Indian Writers" in *Interview and Image of India in the Indian Novel in English* (1960 - 1980).

PRESS REVIEWS:

"R. Raj Rao is considered to be one of the main protagonists in the on going gay liberation movement in India. This compilation of short stories by him is a milestone in Indian gay literature." Gary, Editor, *Quickcontent.com*

"The collection has invited comparison with Jean Genet. But Rao is probably closer to Marcel Proust. Inspired by a madeleine dipped in tea, Proust locks himself up in a cork-lined apartment and recalls times past. Rao one day locks his flat in soul city and ventures out, only to return to his cup of coffee, happier contemplating the world from his window. An insightful read into the lives of those who live and love alone." *Outlook India*

FOCUS ON:

- A book which is outspoken about the numerous traumatic phases gay men experience - rejection, hate, ridicule, abuse, indifference, and violence.
- An author who – with the novel *The boyfriend* – has already reached a wide success of public and critics in and out of his country.