

BOOK

Letting the 'S' word out of the innocent basket

A book that explores the subject of child sexuality through eleven accounts

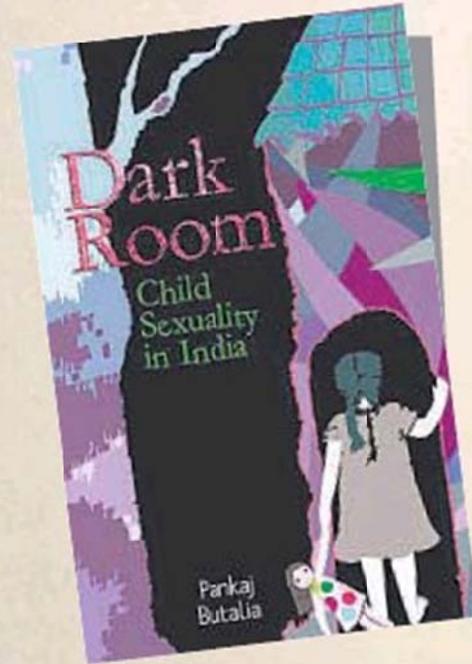
Documentary filmmaker Pankaj Butalia's first book — *Dark Room: Child Sexuality in India*, elucidates the centrality of sex in pre-teen years by penning poignant narratives highlighting child sexuality in our country. Butalia has included accounts of eleven people cutting across class, caste, gender and geographical areas, narrating stories of child sexuality with a significant number being centred around guilt in experiencing sexuality in pre-teen years.

"I was asked to write about Delhi but I said no. I had my own set of experiences and wanted to see if I could collect many more from others," says Butalia, who soon began speaking with people about their childhood experiences.

The filmmaker-turned-author spoke to more than hundred people belonging to different age groups about their early childhood experiences but nobody was willing to

be a subject of his stories. "I spoke to about hundred people. They were friends, friends of friends. A couple of them narrated their stories but none wanted me to put down these accounts in a book. It took me a while to convince them, I even agreed to make these accounts anonymous but no one agreed. And I could certainly not pen it down without consent," he said.

With numerous failed attempts, Butalia almost gave up. But soon, people agreed to talk. Ranging from Pune to Odisha, Ambala and Delhi among other places, he managed to put together eleven stories about varied childhood experiences in a span of more than two years. The book strikes as the much-needed conversation, out of academic areas on child sexuality in India. It aims to highlight the taboo around sex which is perceived to be completely absent in the pre-teen years. Yet, the "innocent" memories of childhood are many a



time tainted with sexual abuse and fear.

"Of all the people I spoke with, most of them had some or the other kind of child abuse experience while others talked about their pre-teen years and sexuality. Adults often ignore what happens with a child before teenage or puberty. We like to assume there is no such thing as sex then. Therefore, when children

explore their bodies, it come across as 'taboo'," says Butalia.

The author says he refuses to have drawn any inferences or coloured stories with judge. "People narrated to me their stories and all I have done is rewritten them to bring out a novel perspective in each one of them, make readers connect with every account," he says. **PTI**

ARTAGENDA

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Listen

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Pankaj Butalia

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Author and Filmmaker

Pankaj Butalia taught Economics at SRCC for twenty years.