

Boarding schools & collective nostalgia

By **Karanjeet Kaur**

When it comes to inspiring works of art, nostalgia is a helpful emotion. And so it is with Dileep Prakash's latest exhibition *What Was Home* that eulogises the boarding school experience. The exhibition opens on March 28 at the PhotoInk gallery on Faiz Road.



Dileep Prakash

Prakash cut his teeth in photography early, when his father gifted him a camera when he left for Mayo College, Ajmer. In 1999, Prakash put an idea he'd had for several years into action. The result was a splendid exhibition of black and white photographs of the steam locomotive. Soon after, came a massive project close to his heart, a visual archive of the Anglo-Indian community, for which Prakash met 5,000 families, and eventually photographed only 1000.

The number of boarding schools that Prakash has photographed pales in comparison. But what the exhibit may lack in scale, it more than makes up for with its quietude and mellow reflection. None of the 47 black and white portraits have people. "My memories were about the spaces, how I related with them and the feelings they recalled. If I'd photographed current students, the work would have been about them and not about how I remembered my experiences," says the photographer. Most pictures are in the small 11X14 in format.

Towards the close of the visual narrative, pictures emphasising community and discipline come thick and fast — rows of wash basins, dorms and beds.

But even those of us who have never seen the inside of a boarding school will identify with the photos. That is how collective nostalgia works.