

Bedtime for an era



COURTESY DILEEP PRAKASH/PHOTOINK



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Hall of light "Oak Grove School, Jharipani" and (right) "Bishop Cotton School, Shimla"

Dileep Prakash's boarding-school memories are anything but private, says **Shweta Upadhyay**.

Rows of hollow beds are raked down the length of a room. The room could be a hospital ward or a dormitory. It could even be an empty morgue. For photographer Dileep Prakash, though, it was where he lived. "When you're a kid, home means the comfort of being around your family and siblings," Prakash said. But the cheerless room was where he spent the majority of his nights. For his show *What Was Home* at Photoink, Prakash went back to his boarding school, where he spent nine years, to capture his childhood bed. He also captured its bakery, dhobi ghat and skeletons.

The project is an outcome of a "quest for memories". The wave of nostalgia so swamped Prakash in 2004, when he visited his alma mater Mayo College for this project, that it could not be contained by the college alone. Prakash realised that the building had changed with the passage of time and it didn't hold all his memories. This made him expand his project to other schools that belong

to the same era. "I spent 10 days at Mayo in 2007," the artist said. "I began photographing using a descriptive approach. But the more I recalled my memories, the more I sought out the silent and contemplative spaces that I took refuge in as a young boy. So I expanded my project to include 18 other boarding schools that held a similar resonance."

This roster of schools includes Doon School in Dehradun and Bishop Cotton School in Shimla. Like Mayo, built in 1875, they were all built during British rule. Attending boarding schools was a rite of passage for every upper-class English boy, and this pedagogical standard was transplanted to the countries of the British Empire. While they were, and remain, coveted educational institutions, boarding schools also worked as instruments of Macaulay's agenda to make natives genteel, "Indian in blood and colour but English in opinion."

Prakash's term at Doon lasted from 1975 to 1983, when the colonial agenda may have diminished but the discipline of a boarding life certainly hadn't. "Like all little children, I was very lonely, homesick," he recalled. "But as you grow older, you get used to it, and it becomes different being away from home. I

also remember the midnight feasts, breaking bounds to watch films." This dual relationship with his alma mater is evident in the images. But these aren't just Prakash's memories: not bound to a physical space, they evoke universal emotions of growing up in any place filled with both fun and dread.

One image that strikes an instant chord is of a skeleton inside a glass cupboard in a biology lab. At first glance it is eerie, but then the viewer recognises that the

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skeleton is grinning, slyly, as if making fun of their fear. It's a sharp analogy for the transition of things from being sources of childhood terror to being mundane and harmless. "All kids are scared of skeletons. We were told that we would be locked up with them," Prakash said. "But it was also hilarious, because we grew out of those fears." Other humorous images include a blackboard diagram of a cockroach's

reproductive system, or graffiti of Humpty Dumpty.

These bursts of humor do not take away the overall melancholic aura of his collection. These black-and-white images have no active human presence. Human life is evident only in the wear and tear in objects used by people, like rows of wash basins, defaced walls, and broken chairs. "These [the photographs] are about my memories and not about today's children," said Prakash. "They would have distracted my memories. That's why I kept them bare."

This refrain of memory has resounded through Prakash's exhibitions. His first show was on the steam locomotives of the mid-nineties, when the last steam engines still operated in India. In 2004, he published the book *The Anglo Indians*, a powerful but gentle record of the fast vanishing community. The cover picture—a gnarled, elderly woman wearing her best orange-satin dress and pearls outside her dilapidated house—summed up this cultural and communal twilight. It remains for us to wait and see whether *What Was Home* has captured the early twilight of the boarding school system in India. *What Was Home is ongoing at Photoink. See Photography.*

this exhibition of works by artists who are often categorised as makers of folk, tribal and traditional art. This exhibition has been designed by Annapurna Garimella. Ongoing.
39 Sirpur House, Gurgaon Sector 44, behind Epicentre, Gurgaon (0124-4888177). Tue-Sun 11am-7pm.

Epicentre

Mirage: A group show by artists including Sunil Jaiswal and Heera Lal. Mon Apr 4-Sun Apr 10.
Apparel House, Sector 44, Gurgaon (95124-2715000). ☎ HUDA City Centre. Daily 10am-7pm.

Photography

arts.i (Religare)

American Psyche: A group show by American photographers including Amy Stein and Jim Goldberg. The show gives a ringside view of middle class homes, vagrants, empty shopping malls and studio portraits of families. Until Sat Apr 9.
7 Atmaram Mansion, Level One, Scindia House, Kasturba Gandhi Marg (4372-7000). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily 10am-11pm.

Gallery Nvya

Orgasm: A show by Sahil Mane. From Thur Apr 7.
101-103, Square One Designer

Arcade, C-2, District Centre, Saket (2956-4333). ☎ Malviya Nagar.

Habitat World

Delhi 'O' Delhi Foyer Contemporary encounters with history: A show by Sohail Akbar, an Associate Professor of Still Photography at Jamia Millia Islamia. Ongoing.
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road (4366-2009). Daily 10am-8pm.

Max Mueller Bhavan

Photographing the metropolitian: A group show by Verena Jaekel and Sandip Kuriakose. Until Fri Apr 8. See pic box on pg 99.
3 Kasturba Gandhi Marg (2332-9506). Mon-Sat 11am-7pm. ☎ Rajiv Chowk.

Photoink

What Was Home: Dileep Prakash revisits his alma mater Mayo College and 18 other boarding schools built during the colonial era. It has resulted in a haunting black and white collection that reflects childhood fears and joys. Ongoing. See Preview.
MGF Hyundai Building, 1 Jhandewalan, Faiz Road (2875-5940). ☎ Jhandelawan. Mon-Sat 11am-7pm.

Quill and Canvas

Solo show: A show consisting of digital photographs by Saba Hasan. Ongoing.
122 South Point Mall, Golf Course

Road, DLF-V (0124-4050306). Daily 10.30am-9pm.

Vadehra Art Gallery

Solo Show: A show by Rameshwar Broota. Ongoing.
D-178 Phase I, Okhla (6547-4005). Mon-Sat 11am-7pm.

Events

Book Launch: A historical chronicle about an eighteenth century painter. *Nainsukh of Guler* will be launched by its author BN Goswami. Sat Apr 2. See Page turner.
40 Max Mueller Marg, Lodhi Estate (2461-9431). 6.30pm.

Film screening: *Poetics of Colour* is based on the life of artist Natvar Bhavsar. The film explores the multi-cultural life of Bhavsar, who was born in India and grew up in New York where he interacted with artists like Rothko. Tue Apr 5.
Epicentre, Apparel House, Sector 44, Gurgaon (95124-2715000). ☎ HUDA City Centre. 7.30pm

Workshops

Art workshop: Rohit Kumar Sharma conducts this workshop organised by the Indian Habitat Centre. Fee ₹ 3,500. Ongoing.
Palm Court Conference Room, India

Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road (4366-2009). Classes only on Saturday and Sundays. Sat 2.30pm-5pm, Sun 11.30am-2pm. The workshop is for adults.

Collage workshop: Harpreet Singh holds a collage workshop called "Cut and Paste" that includes drawing, painting and collage making. This workshop will help participants create new objects with recycled materials like calendars and boxes. Fee ₹ 2,700. Ongoing.

Visual Art Gallery, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road (4366-2009). Classes only on Saturdays and Sundays. Sat 11am-1.30pm, Sun 2.30pm-5pm.

Paint your Canvas: This workshop run by Kavita Jaiswal aims to give participants a feel for oil painting techniques. Fee ₹ 1,000 (IHC members); ₹ 1,500 (non-members).
Habitat World, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road (4366-2009). Fri 9.30am-1pm.

Painting and sketching: The course outline includes the history of painting, freehand technique, practice composition, silhouette and perspective, exploring texture, and 3-D elements. This two-month workshop organised by Sri Aurobindo Centre for Arts and Communication takes place twice a week (Sat & Sun) and is conducted by Kavita Nayyar. Fee ₹ 8,000. For details, contact Sri Aurobindo Centre for Arts and Communication, Sri Aurobindo Society, Delhi Branch Campus, Shaheed Jeet Singh Marg, Adhchini (2656-1986, info@saimc.com).

Shalom: Feel at home.

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