

Haunting memories of the old school

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For some people, school memories are happy and cheerful and filled with laughter and friendship. Many of us, though, will always be haunted by the dark, lonely corridors, forbidding classrooms and those dreaded sports or Maths periods in the schools we studied in. Dileep Prakash's photographs, based on 19 boarding schools in India, including his alma mater Mayo College, are moving, tranquil and deeply nostalgic. *What was Home*, Prakash's exhibition, was inaugurated at the Photoink Gallery in Delhi yesterday.

Prakash started off by wanting to rediscover Mayo College and document it. On his return, 25 years later, he found his old schoolboy fears and feelings coming back to him when he visited his alma mater. "Mayo College was home to me for nine years. On returning to the place, I could sense and explore the memories and feelings that were

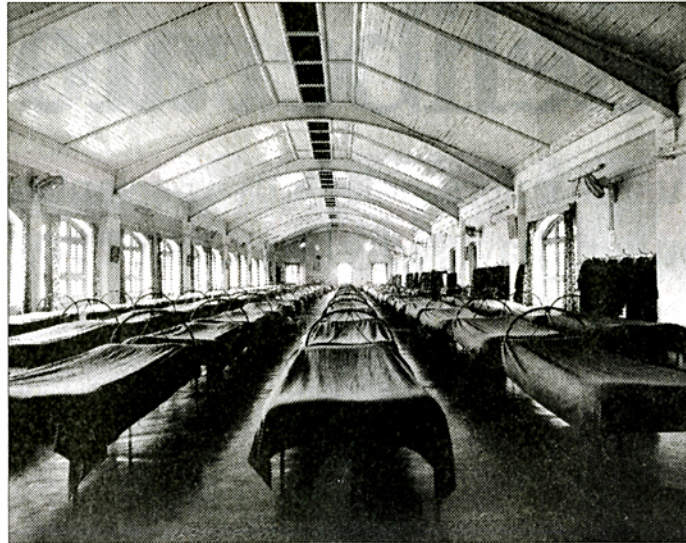


The Doon School, Dehradun

once a part of my life. The spaces in the school seemed to contain my homesickness, loneliness and the fears I had as a young boy weaned away from the comfort of home," says Prakash. Prakash then decided to visit other colonial-era schools to see if they contained similar memories and experiences. "I found

old memories and feelings across those 19 schools," says Prakash. "The schools were different and I hadn't studied in the other 18. But I could sense a part of my old self in their classrooms and corridors."

Some of the schools that feature in the series are the Lawrence School, Sanawar, the Doon



Oak Grove School, Jharipani

School, Dehradun, Bishop Cotton School, Shimla and the Scindia School, Gwalior. Prakash made it a point to focus on schools that were built in the same era and for the same purpose, which at that time was to serve as educational institutions for the children of Indian princes and officers of the civil services. These schools

have changed over time. Prakash has, however, made it a point to avoid taking pictures of the air-conditioned computer labs and the LCD television screens in the classrooms. "Those weren't a part of my memories," says Prakash. "The project was very personal one and dealt with my reminiscences."



The Lawrence School, Sanawar

PHOTOS: DILEEP PRAKASH/PHOTOINK

Venue: Photoink Gallery,
Jhandewalan, New Delhi
Dates: March 28 - May 28
Timing: 11am-7pm, Mon to Sat

The images are black and white, and devoid of activity. The classrooms, dorms, cafeterias and bathrooms in Prakash's images

resound with silence and with the stillness of a momentous era gone by. In spite of the images denoting crowds and numbers — the dozens of beds photographed in dorms and the scores of chairs in classrooms — the images are lonely, poignant, and reflective of the tenderness of growing up in a boarding school.