

The Bindi...

durga prasad

The lady looked back over her shoulder. 'She couldn't possibly read my mind,' I thought. I was conscious of the guilt my eyes betrayed. They moved to meet hers with calculation. She was looking at me, without any trace of emotion on her face, without any consciousness in her eyes.

The bindi on her forehead started at me. 'Red', the color of love. 'Bindi', I remembered my mother saying as she dressed me up for school, 'is the symbol of *subag*. It represents joy and happiness for a woman'. My mother's bindi was different though. She preferred yellow bindis, and wore the red ones on special occasions. I didn't know if I had 'observed' that. It just struck me as obvious.

True to her words, her *subag* had remained intact. She hadn't.

The bus jerked. The bindi kept staring at me. I looked away. It felt bad to think of her fate...I didn't like the comparison.

'Solan waale!', the conductor shouted into the wind sweeping across his face. I looked at Pavan sir and winked. He had managed to find a seat beside a pretty young woman. A pang of envy crossed my thoughts. The lady was newly married, from the *sindoor* on the parting of her hair and her young, fresh looks, and ah! the Bindi.

The trips we stole to Asha, Usha, Pratap or any of the other theatres in town used to give us a good taste of the population between which the school was located. In those days, we didn't mind standing in the bus on the half hour ride to Imphal. We rather enjoyed it. Our barren eyes would relax at the sight of college going women in *phaneks*, or leggy school girls



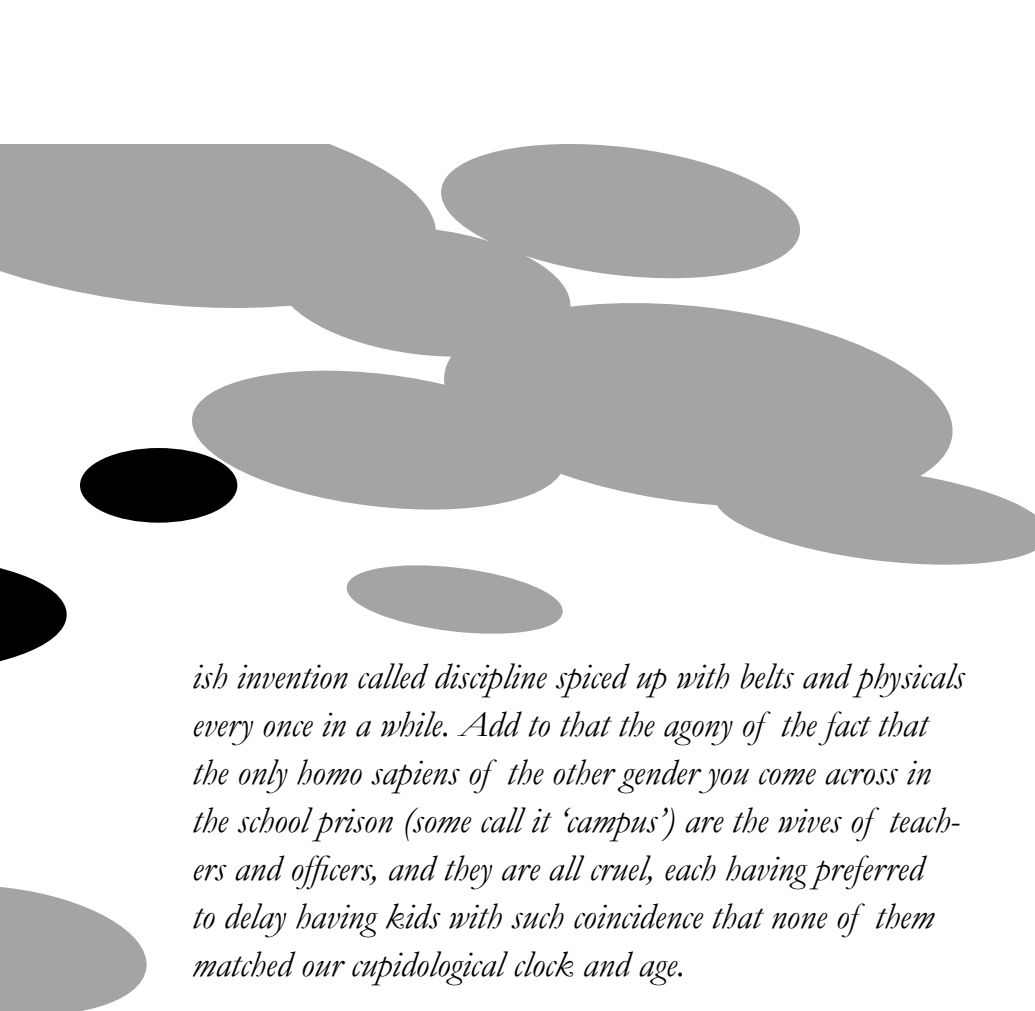
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returning from school with their overloaded school bags , holding on to the railing. The collegers would whisper and smile between them, while the girls' endless talk would enliven the atmosphere inside the moving bus.

Those were also the days when hormones would be restless. The slightest touch was bliss, with memories staying along to give respite from the tight schedule and the regular punishment sessions at the end of the day, before the body finally gave in to deep sleep.

The feminine touch is bliss, and I do not connect it to carnal desires. It is generally the first thing that you experience when you come into the world, apart from the light that you experience outside, and the sound of happiness at your wailing. There is something beautiful about the way things are in this world, and the touch of a female is perhaps one of the sweetest things that can happen to you, particularly if you are a young bloke in a military school and your life consists of khakis, and studies, and a devil-



ish invention called discipline spiced up with belts and physicals every once in a while. Add to that the agony of the fact that the only homo sapiens of the other gender you come across in the school prison (some call it 'campus') are the wives of teachers and officers, and they are all cruel, each having preferred to delay having kids with such coincidence that none of them matched our cupidological clock and age.

The bus slowed, coughing like a chronic patient. I pushed myself through the crowd and made my way to the door. Pavan sir came up from behind. A doodhwallah who had been eyeing his intentions to arise, immediately pounced upon the seat he had vacated. He sat upright- looking straight at the head of the

person in front- determined to dispel any doubts about his invulnerability to looks and his ability to stop himself from looking in the direction of a fantasy of youth called beauty.

In college, we referred to the species as "Goodlooking aunties". The bolder ones would throw meaningful glances at them to catch any glimpse of guilt or suggestion in their eyes. Presently, this 'instance' simply stared away at the tress and hills outside. The bindi stared back at me. I looked away.

We got down at the bus stand, stepping cautiously on the pebbles in the puddle. It had rained here while we were making merry in Shimla. I jumped from the last island - a disfigured brick - on to solid land and moved forward to meet Nawang, the trademark large grin adoring his face.

