

Colleges double as vigilante groups

Holding hands and hugs are a no-no in few city colleges. If found 'guilty', students go through public humiliation

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College is a time to experience new things in life, to learn from them and move ahead in life," is something the average Indian child would have heard — and the preposition here is important — *before* getting into college.

The elders and teachers who told you that never meant it.

Colleges and universities, with a silent understanding with parents, dictate the personal life of students with both written and unwritten rules.

"Protecting the students from harm" and "Keeping with Indian culture" are refrains given as rationale for tyranny, which is nothing but a thinly-veiled facade for 'We are not comfortable that they have a life of their own'.

One of this city's biggest colleges has an iron rule about how girls are not supposed to enter college wearing leggings and without a dupatta.

Hawk-eyed security guards have been hired to check how closely a woman's clothes stick to her body.

Two students from the opposite genders are not allowed to be together in a seemingly remote part of college.

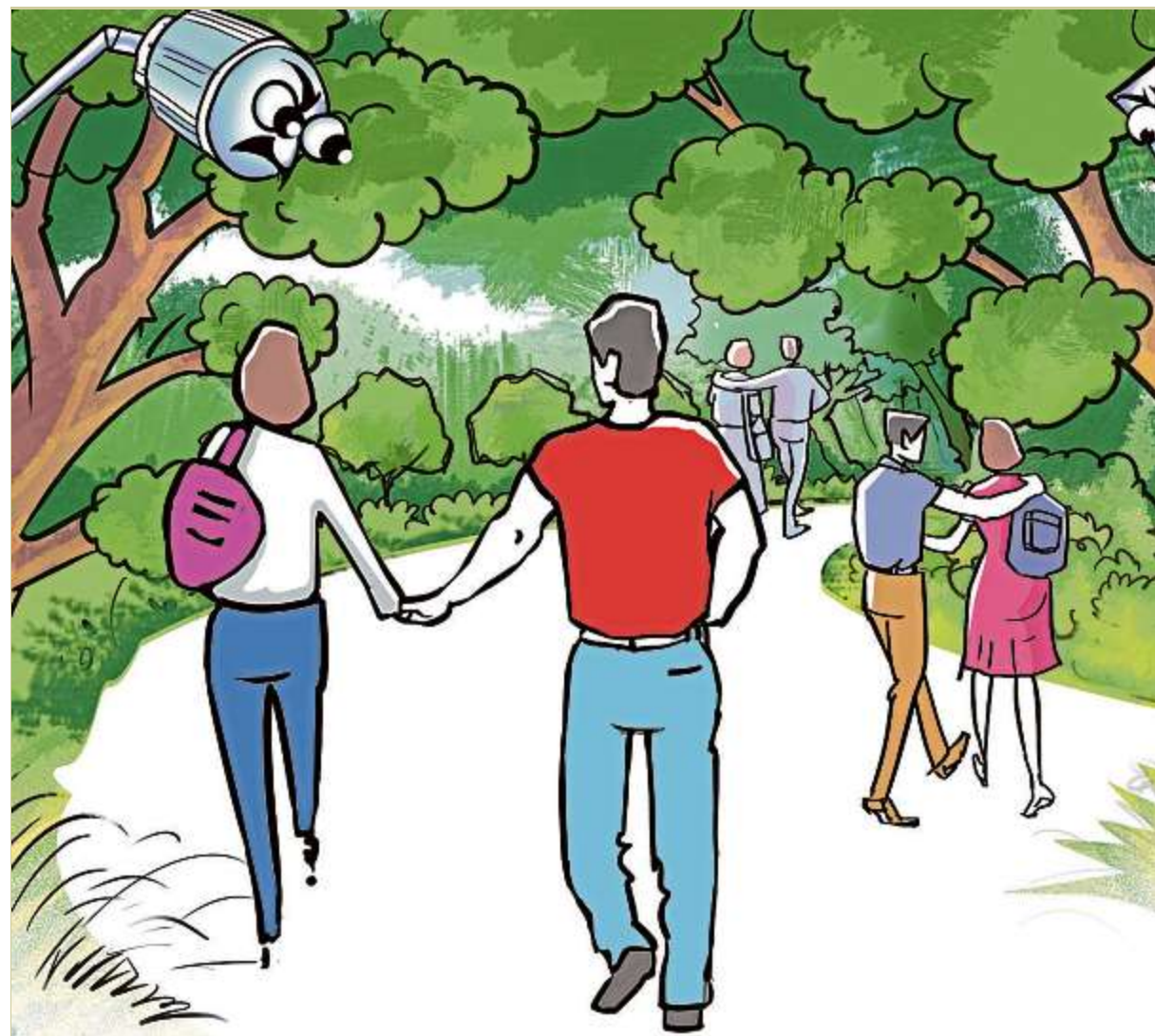
Holding hands and hugs are a no-no. Hands may shake, provided the rest of the body assume a posture that is visibly platonic.

Strategically placed cameras are constantly on the look-out for a boy and a girl, that by any stretch of imagination, may look like a couple.

When found guilty of these non-crimes, public humiliation is a favoured method of torture.

It does not matter to the colleges that the prohibition is giving both men and women very confusing ideas about how to be with the opposite gender in an increasingly cosmopolitan world.

In some colleges, students are barred from using elevators, even if your class-



room is on the top floor, to make sure nothing untoward happens in a span of 20 seconds when the moralising world is shut out behind a closed door.

A faculty member of the above mentioned university says what is happening there is nothing other than "moral policing". This is done openly and no one thinks of questioning the authorities.

One recent 'scandal' in the college was that a boy and a girl high-fived in the library. Concerned authorities, who were angry enough to have them drawn and quartered, confiscated the boy's ID card and told them "such things are unacceptable in a place like this".

The professors have not been told in so many words to stop all the hugging and the holding of hands.

However, it is known that their roles are not restricted to imparting knowledge; an eye for moralising students is supposedly as much a part of a good teacher's CV as any degree.

"I am clueless as to why such weird rules are imposed on students. There is no logic behind this and the fact that no one has ever raised a question is even more surprising. Having said that, I don't think there is any scope to raise this issue because of the attitude of the management," the faculty says.

Asim Siddiqui, assistant professor at Azim Premji University, says these colleges are guardians of the conservative principle that people must marry 'the right one' within their caste and religion.

"I think colleges try to maintain those things and make sure no one transcends those boundaries. That is the basic custom that forces moral policing in colleges. For colleges, which are supposed to be modern, liberal and safer spaces, social and cultural customs are more important than the freedom of an individual," he says.

Universities, therefore, are vigilante bodies that tell you what to wear and

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UNIVERSITY**

whom to be with.

They have a far greater reach than the average group of hardliners attacking a bar or a shady motel, because of sheer number of people of another caste and class that students meet at a university.

"This is a contradiction of 'co-ed' educational institutions. It is not possible to have rules that limit 'interactions', that is the reason so many transversions are happening. The point of honour killing and moral policing is that 'they' want to terrorise others with a fear of punishment. People who are in charge of institutions and socially dominant groups want to control others. The desire for domination is very powerful," says Siddiqui.

Control incites rebellion; every individual is born with an innate sense for freedom and when that freedom is threatened, we see a rebel born. Though some might give in to these pressures, others might retaliate.

So, that's the experience and exposure that your parents were talking to about your whole life: read your books, cover your chest and take the stairs, and no matter what you do, do not high-five in a library.

(With inputs from Theres Sudeep)

