

PRAKASH CHIBBER - By the Batch of 1990



"Come late? No plate!

Want free? Climb a tree!"

This is a couplet that will forever be etched in the minds of all DGH students from the 80s onwards. The author, a very tall and hefty man with a moustache that reminded one of an Army General or a Major, was one who had a booming voice that could travel across the field without the aid of a megaphone, and who was never seen without his golf cap. This was Mr. Prakash Chibber - the PT teacher with a heart.

He wasn't the typical PT teacher who believed in creating jocks out of us. He believed and loved sports, and he wanted us to embrace it too, not out of fear but out of love. And when that failed he would induce the fear of his best friend - a bamboo stick which he would carry with him on his rounds and which he liberally used to whack the calves and butts of boys at random. He was far, far lenient with the girls for whom he reserved his one-liners as salvos to shake them up and get them sprinting.

As Ujjwol recalls - "The thing I remember is that the girls never got whacked even though they were just as wicked as the boys. He was always easy on them. The boys were whacked at random, but it was never that bad. I dreaded his murga punishment the most. "When told to do murga we would often take the support of the gym walls to rest our butts on, which of course Mr. Prakash would quickly spot and whack us again with his best friend, the cane.

"Of course, most of us hated doing the morning drills on the main field after breakfast as well. With Mr. Prakash banging on the drum to keep time, we all had to line up and subject our bodies to some physical activity while uttering magical incantations like "sideways down - up down" or "forward down- sideways down -up down'.

"He was a funny man behind his burly moustache. His dry sense of wit and rhyme can only be described as being Siddhu-esque if you follow cricket commentary.

“His poetry placards at his ‘Sasta Bhojan’ stall during May Fair were legendary as was the sight of him walking around with his tin megaphone screaming “Roll Up! Roll Up!”. Needless to say, Mr. and Mrs. Prakash's stall of Dahi Vadas and Kaati Rolls was the first to run out of stock. His “Come Late, No Plate” was always a prediction and not a statement.

“His witty one-liners extended to him coining Prakiesque masterpiece terms like ‘Bhojan Party’ which applied to people who came to play some sport but usually just hung around and did nothing. So if you were supposed to be playing basketball and you just kept chatting or sitting during the period you would hear him in a sonic boom that would shake your innards - “You have come to play or join the Bhojan party?” And this was quickly followed by “I will show you!” which basically was the cue for stage exit left, or to start begging the players to pass you the ball so that you looked busy by the time he and his best friend came down to the courts!”

The swimming pool was another area where students got themselves in hot water. Vanessa remembers - “One thing I remember about Mr. Prakash was that he would make us run around the swimming pool if we did not bring our swimming costumes.”

I hated swimming and would drown in 3 feet of water and so would make excuses week after week to be allowed to sit out citing some scab or a wound which I would scratch to maintain its ‘freshness’ - till one day he turned to me and said, “How come this one wound is never healing? I want it healed by next class.” I realized my game was up and so the next class saw me back in the chlorinated pool struggling to keep my head above water and hearing him shout “Paddle! Paddle your legs harder!” ”

Mr. Prakash’s universe was the office adjoining the gym floor. The room was always packed with sports equipment and shields and cups and always had a musty smell of leather and sweat. It was like Ali Baba’s cave of Sporting Equipment. As Ujjwol recounts - “I remember that in his office next to the gym he had pictures of many sporting events but the one I remember most is a B&W photo of him when he was a young man. He was ripped and built like a tank.

“He was also always giving advice on home remedies for all sorts of ailments including constipation and diarrhea. “Drink laaats of waaater,” he would say in case of diarrhea. For constipation, his tip was “One should pinch the tips of the fingers of the other hand and hold for 30 seconds and then release and move on to the next finger and so on. Many of us did try this method but of course, have no empirical evidence to back it up though it seemed to work for us!”

Mr. Prakash was truly a gentle giant. By simply saying “I will show you!” a person who never knew how to play hockey would suddenly start playing like a pro at the thought of being shown anything by him. Physical education and sports in DGH would not have been the same without him. He personally looked into and organized every sporting event, whether it was chasing Gangaram to make the white chalk lines in athletics or putting up the daily sporting event schedule on the school notice board.

We salute you, Mr. Prakash. Thank you for being such a good sport!

by Anirban Bhattacharyya Ujjwol Pradhan Vanessa Ann Rodrigues

