

## Pulin Sir – a Tribute



I confess that consistent academic excellence was not my forte or core competency at SLHS. I did just enough to hold my head above water. Most of my exertions were, however, unleashed in the school grounds. And this is where enter Pulin Sir – arguably one of my favourites amongst the staff of SLHS. I feel honoured to write this passage dedicated to Pulin Sir, as I struggle to juggle my fast-fading memory to recall and share some of my very happy associations with him.

Most of us, me included, know him as Pulin Sir, not by his full name, Pulin Makhal. He was present when I joined the school back in 1956, when I finished school in 1967 and continued thereafter till his retirement.

Let me rewind, dig into my memory bank and try to describe Pulin Sir. He was well built, above-average in height, on the darker side, a well-toned body, broad shouldered with bulging biceps, a flat tummy with no noticeable excess fat on his body, short hair and a receding hairline. He was a serious-minded and focused individual, knew his job well and performed it with panache. I seldom saw him smile.

Pulin Sir was in charge of physical instruction activities in the school for a pretty long time – the most familiar and popular ‘PT Master’, as he was known to all. The physical instructor’s role was an apt one for Pulin Sir as he was the epitome of physical fitness; a perfect example of the adage ‘Health is Wealth’. Sports, games and exercises were his first and only love.

Pulin Sir would be mostly seen on the school grounds, engaged in conducting drills and exercises for students and honing the callisthenic (those days we used to term it as gymnastic) skills of pupils through rigorous practices and workouts. He was conspicuous by his neat turnout – well-creased trousers, white vest and sports shoes – and the trade mark whistle in his mouth, which he would blow often, either to get a row/column during the drill straightened up or track the participants taking-off for the vault, pommel horse or other gymnastic acts. He set high standards for his wards to achieve and had a knack of spotting & nurturing talents.

I am able to visualize the hot afternoons in the school with Pulin Sir, impeccably dressed in sports attire, squatting on his knees on the edge of 3/4 layers of green-coloured (or was it brown) thick and bouncy mattresses, signalling to the participants standing one behind the other in a row on one end to race down, do the tumble-downs, somersaults and such precision acrobatic feats on the mattresses and emerge exultantly from the other end. It was a standard sight to behold and savour.

The Annual Sports Meet was the showpiece event of the school. It used to be conducted usually on a Saturday afternoon in the school ground, witnessed by a large assembly of parents and guests, enthusiastically cheering the participating students competing in the finals of the various athletic events. Pulin Sir was invariably the master conductor of the event. It was his show and he would perform with gusto. Weeks before the Meet, the heats for the various athletic events comprising of walking, running, throwing and jumping, ably supervised by Pulin Sir, would have been completed with only the finals of the races scheduled on the grand finale day along with some exciting races like the 4 x 100 relay, the obstacle race, the long-distance races, race events for the parents. The high point of the Meet was the breath-taking gymnastics display by his handpicked wards, sequenced & competently directed by Pulin Sir himself. I remember the well-rehearsed march pasts, the oath taking by the participants, the dare-devil and precision jumps by the well-trained gymnasts (all students of the school) through the rings of fire, the pyramid formations and other impressive displays of callisthenics. The much-awaited gymnastic show was invariably the cynosure of all eyes, credit for which was due to Pulin Sir for his untiring and proficient efforts. Pulin Sir used to be centre of attraction, ably assisted by a plethora of other staff and the boy scouts, all performing their assigned roles with enthusiasm & clockwork precision.

I used to be a regular participant in the Sports Meet & would manage to win a prize or two in some running event and mount the victory podium. I remember a particular year when I drew a blank. Pulin Sir, finding me sobbing, walked up to console me saying that it was not the end of the world. He counselled me not to lose heart but try harder the following year and make it to the victory stand.

I was a keen footballer and represented in school both in the junior and senior teams. Pulin Sir was a great source of motivation for our team, witnessing all our matches in the home ground, often pitching in with his advices on strategies to be adopted during the game and ardently cheering us from the touch lines. Those days we used to have annual football matches between the Staff and Students. Pulin Sir was a regular member of the staff team as its goalkeeper.

A man of few words, who believed more in action on the turf, Pulin Sir always aimed for high standards and perfection from his pupils, be it in gymnastics or the field exercises or athletics. He was known to be a hard taskmaster and brooked no non-sense. The epigram in Bengali, "Pulin Sir Arer Gatta, Bina Poyasai Atta; Khethe Jodhi Chao; St. Lawrence e Jao, is synonymous with Pulin Sir and has now become part of folklore of SLHS even after he has called it a day.

Pulin Sir taught me how to set high standards, be passionate and persistent in my pursuits, take failures in the stride and above all, the virtues of self-discipline.

Pulin Sir is around 95 years old (perhaps the only surviving member of the SLHS staff of our times and amongst his contemporaries) and lives with his family somewhere in Garia in Kolkata. Though the body is weak, his spirits remain strong as, I believe, he is happy to see his old pupils, which probably helps him to relive his glorious past. I wish Pulin Sir good health & happiness and look forward to his reaching the coveted century mark and celebrating it in style amidst his family, well-wishers and proteges. My pranaams to a great guru. Hail Pulin Makhhal Sir.

**by Gopal Hari, SLHS - 1967 Batch**