



Raymond Griffith

I began teaching English at Punjab Agricultural University in March of 1973. I have been working here for three trimesters, not a long time certainly, but long enough for me to gain some insight into the operations and atmosphere of the University. This will be my final trimester at PAU for we are leaving Punjab in February in order to teach at a university in the Republic of Korea. Now seems an appropriate time, therefore, for me to organize and report my impressions of PAU.



THE AUTHOR, Prof. Raymond Griffith (47), Ph. D. in English, is an American, currently teaching in an honorary capacity at PAU. The village life fascinates him. In an interview he told me that Punjab's villages were very sophisticated and the villagers "are honest, direct and easy to deal with." In his excitement while describing the naturalness and 'peace' that shrouds villages, the Prof. shut his blue eyes, fumbled for words and with a faint starchiness in his voice added "Oh! many people have no idea of village aristocracy." A juggler of words, he also writes poetry : vignettes of rural life provide the fibre for his well knit compositions. In Feb. '74 he leaves for the Republic of Korea. In this article he sums up his impressions about PAU.

P P S Gill

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PAU is truly a great university. The physical plant is, of course, undoubtedly magnificent. Even the most superficial tour of the campus will reveal this fact. Working amidst surroundings of beauty and aesthetic order surely inspires the students, the faculty, and the staff. After teaching here for a few months, however, I have discovered other less obvious reasons for the excellence of PAU. The trimester system which allows instructors to evaluate directly their own students is superior, I believe, to the system of internal and external examiners in most educational institutions here. Also, since PAU functions as an autonomous entity within the educational structure, the University appears to be able to move more rapidly to anticipate and answer current needs in research and instruction than can colleges that are units in a longer chain of administrative command and decision.

I have had the opportunity to observe a number of colleges and universities at close range in my life, and I find that there are many important areas in which PAU is exceptional. The leadership, for example, is inspired. Last summer when I was staying in Mussoorie. I wished to investigate the flora and fauna of the area, especially the giant rhododendrons of Landour. In the local bazaar I purchased a volume entitled *Flowering Trees*. Since I was also interested in learning more about the art of the mountain regions, some neighbours lent me a book on the paintings of the Kangra valley. I read both books one week and was impressed with both. Only after completing them did I realize that the two books had the same author - Dr M. S. Randhawa, the Vice-Chancellor of PAU. That this man is a definitive authority on both science and art is a tremendous asset to the University. In his controversial and stimulating book *Two Cultures*, C. P. Snow theorizes that the catastrophe of modern society results from the fact that it has been split into two cultural establishments, with men of science in one group and men of the humanities in the other, and with little effective communication between the two divisions. Many men of science lack fundamental knowledge of humanistic ideals, and many experts in the humanities lack essential understanding of modern

technology. One result of this division is that educational institutions can become warped in their outlook because of one-sided leadership without balanced perspectives. This is certainly not true at PAU where, for example, the new museum of traditional Punjabi culture is located right across the road from a field filled with the screen cages in which entomologists carry on research. Science and art are here side by side.

My teaching experience has been limited by necessity to work with teachers of English, and it has been a very happy experience indeed. I fully subscribe to the philosophy of the professors of English at PAU who maintain that real teaching demands more than spoonfeeding passive students with facts and information read from yellowing notes. These things the students can learn on their own from books. The most important function of teaching is to teach the students desirable attitudes about this mass of facts and information. In many an institution students are filled with raw knowledge without absorbing enlightening attitudes. Thus, when they graduate, they are still but half-educated.

I think this emphasis on attitudes can be seen in the way PAU as a whole constantly stresses the potential and the possibilities and the excitement and the romance of Punjab. Thus Punjabi students are encouraged to gain needed skills and to put them to use in their great state. By imparting attitudes I do not mean that one brainwashes the students to think as one wants them to think. On the contrary, teaching enlightening attitudes is keeping over in mind and expressing the real values of life and the true purposes of education. I could sincerely display enthusiasm about the advantages of village life when teaching English to students from villages because I honestly think rural Punjab is an exceptionally fine place to live. As a matter of fact, I have recently moved from Ludhiana to Lalton Kalan where I am very happy and where I am practising what I preached.

Many individuals in the teaching profession believe that teaching upper levels of undergraduates and the postgraduate students is more prestigious than instructing lower levels. Many

an institution tragically allows its students in their first years to be supervised and evaluated by hacks and incompetents, and then foolishly expects the students to blossom suddenly into creative scholars in their final college years. But by then it is far too late. Attitudes and study habits have already become crystallized. The English teachers with whom I have worked at PAU do not make this mistake. They give close and dedicated attention to elementary freshman courses which are the essential foundation for all advanced university training.

During my first trimester here, Assistant Professor Amarjit Singh and I taught sections of the same freshman class in the College of Agriculture, and I was impressed with the fact that he devoted more thought and preparation and labour to this class than many professors do to doctoral courses.

I also admire the way PAU works so closely with the larger community. I some times find it difficult to locate friends in other departments, such as botany and horticulture and extension education, because PAU leaders do not sit isolated and passive behind thick office walls. They go out into the field and the community for work and research. PAU also enthusiastically welcomes the larger community into its campus. In September, for instance, I was on the scene at the time of the smaller autumn version of the Kisan Mela. I saw hordes of farmers milling about, attending exhibits, buying seed, and feeling completely at home at the PAU, which wisely realizes that the higher purpose of education is not to educate a handful of enrolled students, but to educate all members of the larger community.

Time and again I have been impressed with the expansive vision of teachers from PAU who think on an unlimited scale. I have heard Dr S S Bal speak to the international students of PAU on the freedom movement in India. I have heard Dean K. Kirpal Singh talk about the great economic possibilities of increased fruit production in India. I have heard Dr Raghbir Singh discuss the great ambitions of PAU's extension education program. I have heard Dean S. Bajaj philosophize on the important goals of the College of Home Science.

I have heard Dr S. S. Grewal rhapsodize about the vital role of a college of agriculture in the economy of the community. These are a few individuals chance has led me to meet and hear. I know there are many more men and women of vision. And I certainly do not wish to ignore the men of vision who originally planned and built PAU long before I appeared upon the scene at this late date.

This then is perhaps the most exceptional feature of PAU—the large number of dreamers on the faculty who work to make their dreams become reality. How refreshing to encounter such a high proportion of starry-eyed idealists governed by principles, rather than the clique of fishy-eyed cynics governed by expediency which one finds in control of many institutions. Take, for example, Professor Hazara Singh with whom I work. In his home are portraits of his noble heroes, men like Gandhi and Socrates and Shelley and Tolstoy. His hero of heroes, however, is Abraham Lincoln. I wish that more Americans, especially those representing their country overseas, reflected in their actions a fraction of this man's appreciation of Lincoln's dedication to freedom and equality and justice for all men everywhere.

In the Department of Languages, Culture and History of PAU I found exactly what I came to India seeking - a place where I could teach creatively in an atmosphere of love and honesty and professional integrity. I realize PAU was never intended to be a liberal arts university. I realize that an agricultural university's achievement is primarily measured in the advances it makes in the development and introduction of plants, in the advances it inspires and implements in all branches of agriculture and animal husbandry. But I think that one can see in many parts of the world important technological institutions that have become highly effective by becoming efficient and cold-blooded machines that stress only material progress and ignore the soul of man. PAU, I have found, is an institution with a soul.

REMINISCENCES

Hazara Singh

It appears that Dr Raymond Griffith got interested to be associated with the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana after going through *Flowering Trees* and *Paintings of Kangra* authored by its then Vice-Chancellor, Dr M.S. Randhawa. He wrote to the latter in early 1973 offering to share his experience of teaching English, in an honorary capacity, during his stay at Ludhiana. Through routine noting thereon the letter got referred to me with the observation, 'For necessary action', initialled by the functionaries in the downward order. The unproductive exercise consumed three weeks. The third trimester of the academic session 1972-73 had started about a fortnight earlier.

Prof. Amarjit Singh shared the seating room with me. I showed the communication to him Neither of us spoke, but shared our concurrence through a smiling glance. Telephones were not common then. An affirmative reply in a correspondingly receptive manner was promptly despatched. Just after 48 hours, a sonorous voice 'Prof. Singh' was heard. A tall person with impressive physical appearance and radiating face came in and said 'I am Griffith'. We shook hands cordially. Formalities were skipped over. He chose to teach the B.Sc. (Hons.) School students of the College of Basic Sciences & Humanities. Within a short span, his way of teaching illustrated an earlier observation of the leader of a visiting team from the Ohio State University, USA. PAU had not yet been established. The concept of integrating teaching, research and extension was not practised then. The teaching faculty contained hardly a score of teachers designated as Assistant Professor and above. The Principal introduced the senior most among us detailing

his academic achievements and stressing on the length of his teaching experience as 'more than twenty years'. The guest tersely observed "Oh! one year's experience repeated more than twenty times". Our brief association with Dr Griffith confirmed, 'A teacher teaches, a good teacher explains but an excellent teacher inspires'.

Another incident impressed even a stoic person of my peculiar disposition. During February 1974 while the Griffiths were packing for their voyage to South Korea, Mrs Griffith had to leave for Delhi a couple of days earlier than Dr Griffith was scheduled to depart. She chose that he would stay at our home for those two days. We felt delighted and excited for being thus owned. He desired us to let him plan his own routine. He was keen to evaluate the scripts of his students in time and discuss their performance with them, if they chose so. That night, the electric supply remained off for an irritatingly long time, Next early morning, with a candle on the tea tray, when I knocked at his door, I found him examining the answer sheets adjusting a torch between his neck and shoulder; an exhausting exercise which he had been carrying on for the last few hours. He smiled and relaxing his neck observed "I have to keep my appointment with my students with strict punctuality". My yardstick for assessing the worth of a teacher got supplemented* '..... a dedicated teacher toils as well'. I wrote the sonnet 'Raymond Griffith' that day enchanted by his commitment to the assignment undertaken.

After its inception on December 1, 1962, PAU switched on to the trimester system of education, based on the concept that

- i) one hour's contact with the teacher in the classroom may keep the student busy for at least two hours in the library for making the latter self-reliant instead of a spoon-fed; and
- ii) the postgraduate students be enjoined to supplement their academic attainment with equal emphasis on research.

The medium of instruction had been English and majority of its students coming from rural areas did not possess the required proficiency in that language. The University neither had nor was inclined to start a separate department of languages. Many teachers, transferred from the erstwhile Government Agricultural College, as core staff of the University, did not possess Doctorate Degree, prescribed as essential by PAU for new recruits to the faculty for the posts of Associate Professor and above. They were not to be blamed for this deficiency as under the traditional system Ph.D. had been suggested as a remedial requisite for those not having obtained 50% marks in the Master's exam. The old lot became a victim of sort of academic segregation. But we did not lose heart in spite of occasional pinches and punches. Fortunately Dr M.S. Randhawa realising the importance of language teaching got a separate Department of Languages, Culture & History formed in 1970. Master's course in Journalism was also introduced under its aegis. This recognition imparted a lot of impetus to us. I wrote a brief manual *On the Use of Library*. It proved quite useful for the undergraduate students.

Dr Griffith got me associated with the conducting of TOFEL (Test of English as Foreign Language) for the Punjab region. I studied closely the model papers after every quarterly test. The next manual *Style in Writing Technical Papers and Theses* for the postgraduate students was prepared accordingly. Dr Griffith wrote the Foreword thereto with a feeling of elation. That Foreword appears separately in this text. Both these texts are PAU publications. Association of Dr Griffith with our department proved to be a blessing.

Courses in English Speech were also introduced later. Another manual *Correct Pronunciation of English Words Commonly Mispronounced* followed. Prof. Kartar Singh, who headed the Postgraduate Department of English in the local Government College, lent valuable help in that compilation. Any educational

institution, not recognising the importance of languages (the first invention of man after his first discovery i.e. fire) is like a person lacking vision.

Dr M.S. Randhawa expressed keen desire to meet Dr Griffith after reading his text 'PAU : University with a Soul'. His secretary conveyed the time of appointment. Dr Griffith evinced no interest and politely declined 'Not today'. That afternoon while leaving the Department he casually observed "In the States the seniors come to congratulate and appreciate and do not summon their colleagues to flaunt their patronage".

Dr Griffith would read with keen interest my various write-ups, particularly the poems. He liked immensely my ode-like composition on Abraham Lincoln and complimented me by a concise remark that even the Americans did not adore that benefactor of humanity so ardently. Perhaps he talked to the effect to his mother, who sent me, *The Complete Rhyming Dictionary* by Clement Wood as a birthday gift. She advised that it was an essential handbook for poets and song writers. We got into regular correspondence thereafter. She sent me her poem on flotilla of small boats in a lake, asserting that it would not be dabbled with under the pretext of vetting while publishing it. Her wishes were honoured which she admired with maternal pride. We could not find that poem for inclusion in this text.

Dr Griffith, perhaps belonged to mixed Irish ancestry. He had been keen to learn more about the pioneers and martyrs of the freedom struggle of India. The Irish too had been and still are the victims of the British Colonial attitude. He was delighted to meet at my place Kiron Chander Das, younger brother of Jatin Das, who passed away in the Borstal Jail, Lahore on September 13, 1929, after a historic hunger strike of 63 days, undertaken to seek better treatment for political prisoners whom the colonial rulers treated

as anarchists. His poem 'A Mango For Me' followed that meeting. He felt immensely elated when this poem got published in *Advance*, Chandigarh along with my article 'Tribute to Martyrs'. His brief verse 'Songh' appeared in *The Sikh Review*, Calcutta. He would claim thereafter with pride 'Punjab in India is my second home where I am owned'.

In the beginning of December 1973 North India came under the grip of fog for almost a fortnight. The sun would be seen hardly for a couple of hours in the afternoon, struggling against the thick cover of fog. Dr Griffith who had shifted to the neighbouring village of Lalton faced bravely the ordeal offered by the reduction of visibility and the numbness caused by chill. He gave vent to his feelings against these odds by observing 'Now I understand as to why the sun is worshipped in India'. I also tasted, though not so intensely, the harshness of elements. The Griffiths invited us to tea on the Christmas afternoon on December 25, 1973. I and my sons cycled to their place. The younger of the two, Mandeep, popularly called Mona, who was about eight then, was shivering with cold on our arrival there. But the warmth with which we were received was exceptionally comforting. Mona still recollects fondly that visit. He often refers to the books for children which the Griffiths gave him on the Diwali night which they spent with us that year.

Dr Griffith talked generously of the breakfast which he had with us on the day of his departure. He called it a royal treat and complimented my younger daughter, Paramjit for her excellent culinary preparations. Patting her he observed that Jeane would feel envious of him for her having missed this hospitality as such a filial attachment was rare in the States.

During his tour on bicycles of the places associated with the foundation of The Khalsa and the departure of the Tenth Master

from Anandpur via Chamkur-Machiwara-Muktsar to Damdama Sahib he desired me to accompany him. I spent the first three days with him visiting various shrines and historic monuments. He wondered as to why all such places were not having corresponding landscaping service for enhancing their grandeur. During those three days with him I became further introspective in my disposition realising 'How indifferent we Indians are about our history and culture, which the foreigners are eager to explore'. My subsequent creative and research activities got influenced accordingly.

Thereafter for a quarter of century, we could not meet each other in person, though we remained in intermittent correspondence. Mrs Jeanne Griffith contributed a lot in keeping that contact lively and warm. Dr Griffith called it 'homecoming' when he visited Ludhiana in November 2001. He was wizened and ripened and I, a disabled old man, constrained by knee-trouble and restrained by bypass surgery. But when we hugged each other we felt elated rather rejuvenated. His letter dated January 12, 2002, is a memento of that fruitful association extending over three decades.

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RESPECTABLE PROTECTION

Hazara Singh

Dr Raymond Griffith, an academician from USA, offered to teach English at Punjab Agricultural University in an honorary capacity during early 1973, which considerate gesture was accepted with reciprocating appreciation. Being impressive by appearance and effable by nature he soon became a popular person at the campus. He asked me hesitatingly one day if incestuous marriage was accepted in India. On my looking askance at him, he stated that almost every week one or another acquaintance had been approaching him with the request

‘Dr Griffith, I am marrying my daughter next Sunday. Please attend the function’.

I felt amused and said ‘He meant that he was going to solemnise the wedding of his daughter’.

Griffith exclaimed ‘Oh! He should have said that he was marrying off his daughter’.

I considered it as an opportune moment to have a puzzle solved. ‘Raymond’ I said, Your surname is Griffith. How is it that your mother is called Mrs Mary Hicks ?’

Griffith laughed and replied in an easy tone .

‘After my father’s death, mother chose to marry one Mr Hicks. She did not drop that surname even after legal separation with her second husband. I send her a card regularly on Mother’s Day. Whenever I am in the States, I call at her with appointment in the home for old people’.

Griffith also informed that after every such visit she invariably ascertained whether he carried sufficient money with him. On my asking the purpose thereof he said

‘The gangsters frequently waylay the people driving home late at night. If their victim does not have sufficient amount to meet their expectations, they hit him hard contemptuously for he lacks respectability according to their norms’.

I felt uneasy to learn such unusual things about a country, the dreamland of many. For making me feel relaxed, he told me

‘My mother shows with pride to her colodgers the letters she receives from you. People in USA normally do not like to communicate through writing as they find it convenient to talk on phone. Printed cards, suitable for each occasion, offering a large variety are available which are posted to cover corresponding social obligations’.

After a pause, he continued ‘The colodgers envy my mother when she reads to them your long affectionate letters because they never receive any such communication from their offspring even’.

After he left, I kept buzzing ‘East is East, West is West, never the twain shall meet’. To my great astonishment they met at my home itself.

We are an ageing couple living in a spacious house, constructed keeping in view the needs of a joint family. Our children are well settled but scattered in three countries. Hence the upkeep of an empty nest entails a lot of physical exertion. They talk to us often on phone to ascertain our welfare but expect us to keep writing to them detailed letters for filling their emotional gap.

During May 1993 we became the victims of a burglary. Earlier in the afternoon my wife received touching and fascinating Mother’s Day cards from USA and Canada. There had been a duststorm followed by showers in the evening. We had a nice sleep. Surprisingly, neither of us felt the urge to go to washroom that night. When we woke the next morning, we found the other bedroom bolted from within. Lo ! The studyroom as well. On going out we discovered that the glasspane of a window had been removed and the grill unscrewed. The almirahs had been ransacked and a locked trunk removed to a corner of the courtyard. It had been broken

open and the contents lay scattered around it. The condition in the studyroom, to which the entry got provided through the combined bathroom, was no better. Being present at home, we did not expect any such daring breaking-in. The steel almirah in that room remained unlocked. A day earlier I had drawn a handsome amount from the bank for the routine biennial repairs. The purse lay on the table. I knew precisely what I had been deprived of My wife, who is more methodical in safeguarding her valuables and effecting savings than me, took time to ascertain her loss. The burglars had been choosy. They lifted yellow metal and cash only. The loss exceeded a six-figure sum.

Old age coupled with pain in knees restricts my movements. I rang up my eldest son who reached within an hour. Finding that we had escaped any physical harm, he heaved a sigh of relief. When I remonstrated that why he had been ignoring my advice to remove his jewellery to the bank locker, he submitted calmly.

‘I had kept a part of it at home to ensure your protection. Imagine, if after ransacking the almirahs, the intruders had not found any cash or ornaments, they were sure to awaken you and mishandle even to find out where the valuables had been hidden. On your resistance, the desperadoes could have gone to any extent. Material loss does not mean much. Thank God, that neither of you needs hospitalization. In that event there could have been none to attend to you there for long’.

In a flash I got reminded of what Griffith had talked two decades ago about respectable protection from antisocial elements.

The police was informed. They came, inspected the site, found fault with us for being careless, advised us to pack the scattered articles and have the grill refixed, but showed no inclination to register the first information report on the plea that nothing was going to come out of that. Being a local officer, my son could persuade his counterpart in the police set-up to have at least the report registered. We were obliged after thirty six hours of the mishap.

Alongwith started a stream of callers—friends, neighbours and fun-seekers. After the preliminary what and how, all congratulated us for our having escaped any physical harm. Some of them even indulged into philosophising. I normally choose to sleep in the studyroom, because the cooler in the bedroom aggravates my knee trouble. It was sermonized that the Almighty managed our safety. Had there been no squall followed by showers, the hot weather would have necessitated switching on of the cooler, leading to my opting to sleep in the studyroom and thus exposing myself to a possible encounter with the intruders.

We are sadder and wiser after the event, but ponder often that the police being busy with its *other more important tasks*, if packs of burglars continue to break in, what shall ensure our protection next ? Electrical gadgets... parchments... crockery... till we get pushed to a home for old people.

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