

IBADAT BARELVI

## On Ralph Russell

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This is an abridged translation of a chapter on Ralph Russell in 'Ibādāt Barēlvī's book.<sup>1</sup> They were long-standing friends and colleagues and the chapter contains some entertaining incidents from their times together. 'Ibādāt Barēlvī's widow, Fehmida, used incidents from this chapter when she spoke at a memorial meeting for Ralph at Government College University, Lahore in September 2008. I am most grateful to Fehmida both for her warm hospitality when I stayed in their home in 1998 and for reminding me about *Ghazālān-e Ra'nā* and sending me a copy.

In translating I have made a few editorial changes. I have shortened the telling of some incidents to avoid repetition, omitted a couple of less interesting passages, and moved one paragraph from near the end to earlier where it seemed to fit better. Where 'Ibādāt Barēlvī recounts Ralph's enjoyment of wordplay with Urdu expressions, the point would be lost without explaining the Urdu original so I have had to add a few sentences to do this.

In two places I have changed the text to correct factual points. 'Ibādāt Barēlvī remembered the date of their first meeting in Delhi as "a few months before the Partition of India" (i.e. 1947), but at that time Ralph was a student in London and he did not return to India until mid-1949. I therefore altered this to "soon after the Partition of India." Later 'Ibādāt Barēlvī says that Ralph returned to London where "he completed his studies at SOAS and gained a B.A. Honors in Urdu; and after the death of Dr. Graham Bailey he became a lecturer in his place." The actual sequence of events was that Ralph had already gained his degree and been appointed a lecturer before he went to India in 1949. He started teaching immediately after he returned in Sept. 1950, and a year later, when Graham Bailey retired, Ralph became head of the department. Graham Bailey died a few years later.]

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<sup>1</sup> *Ghazālān-e Ra'nā* (Lahore: Idāra-e Adab-o-Tanqīd, 1990), 145–76.

ONE AFTERNOON soon after the Partition of India I was sitting in my room at the Anglo Arabic College in Delhi when my friend and colleague Kwaja Ahmad Farouqi came to see me. With him was someone who was clearly a foreigner. “This is Ralph Russell,” he said, “He’s English, and he’s interested in Urdu language and literature. He speaks quite good Urdu but hasn’t had a lot of practice, so he’s a bit hesitant.”

I said—in English—“Glad to see you,” but he answered in Urdu, “And I’m glad to meet you—I had heard of you and wanted to meet you!” He explained that he had been studying at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, and had been given several months’ study leave to come to India. “I want to spend time with people like you and learn Urdu from you.” I said I was very happy that he was interested in Urdu and that we would be delighted to help him. He stayed about an hour, drinking tea and chatting. When towards evening he was about to go I said, “Come and eat with me tomorrow night and we can talk some more.” He said, “*Inshā’ al-Lāb*—God willing—I will certainly come.” I checked that he wouldn’t have any difficulty finding his way. He said he was staying with an Indian friend in New Delhi, and knew the way from there.

When he arrived the next evening—early—he said, “I’m sorry, I was so keen to have time to talk to you that somehow I left much too early!”

“You did just the right thing,” I said. “Now we’ll have plenty of time to talk. And you speak Urdu very well. Your accent is like that of a real Urdu-speaker, not like an Englishman at all, and I think that’s very important.”

Ralph said, “You’re being too kind. There’s still a lot wrong with my Urdu. Sometimes I have to search for a word and it just doesn’t come.”

I said, “But your Urdu is idiomatic and fluent. How did you learn it? And how did you first get interested in learning it, and working on Urdu?”

Ralph said, “I was serving here in the British army during the Second World War and was working alongside Indians. Most of them were Madrasis who spoke Tamil, but there were a couple who could also speak Urdu. I liked the language and thought I should learn it, so I studied it and after a few months I could get by. Now I can read and write a bit, but I can’t yet speak it properly. I really need more practice, talking with people like you.”

I said, “For someone who’s not been learning long your progress is astonishing. I’m sure you’ll be speaking perfectly very soon.”

We kept on chatting for a couple of hours and then the food was served. I wanted him to experience a proper Indian meal so I had ordered a special spread of biryani, *qorma*, kebab, *shirmāl*—bread made with

milk—etc. He ate everything with great enthusiasm, and was full of praise. “Compared to this, English food is bland and tasteless,” he said. “They just eat to fill the belly, to make sure they’re nourished. Indian food is quite another thing, it conveys a sense of a high level of culture!”

I said, “You’re right, our food has been developed over centuries. There’s no doubt, no other country has food as delicious as this.”

Russell stayed until about ten o’clock, talking in his delightful way about all sorts of things. When he was about to leave I said, “Before you go, you should try some paan—betel leaves that we chew with lime paste. It’s the way we always finish a meal like this.”

He did take one—but it was his first experience of paan and I could see from his manner that he wasn’t too happy about it, though he tried not to show it. When I saw his discomfort I said, “Paan is a cultural thing with us—you’ll never be able to speak Urdu well if you don’t take it!”

He said, “That’s why I took it. And now I’ll definitely acquire a perfect mastery of Urdu!” And he gave a huge, enthusiastic laugh.

As he was leaving I said, “The day after tomorrow we’ve arranged to have a mushaira in College Hall, where some of India’s great poets will be reciting their poems—Jōsh, Jigar, Ḥasrat Mōhānī, Aṣar, Majāz, Jazbī and many others have promised to be there. It’ll be a good opportunity for you to be present at a mushaira. You should definitely come so you can get an idea of how everything is done. That’s also something special in our culture.”

Once again Ralph arrived early. I was involved with the preparations so I took him along with me to College Hall and showed him how things were set up for people to sit on the carpet. When he saw it all—the white cloth spread over the carpet, the bolsters, the paan trays, the spittoons—he was delighted and said, “This is my first experience of this kind of mushaira, and I really like the atmosphere. I’m really grateful you invited me.” I explained the significance of each object—the white cloth that draws people’s eyes to where the poets sit, the bolsters that enable the poets to sit comfortably on the carpet, all the things you add to paan set out, for most of the poets liked to take it, and the spittoons ready for them to spit into, the candles in their holders that made the place bright. I explained how a candle was set in front of the poet whose turn it was to recite, and how, when he was reciting well-known poems, the listeners would call out the last couplet and express their praise with exclamations like “*Vāh vāh!*” or “*Subḥān Allāh!*” I wanted him to understand what was going on, and not feel strange in this gathering.

While we were talking some of the poets arrived. I introduced Ralph to them and before the mushaira began they were all chatting and laugh-

ing together. When it was about to start I took Ralph up to the dais, and there he sat on the carpet for three hours with all those well-known poets. He listened to them all reciting as if he understood every verse and was totally involved in listening. But there were signs of something else in the expression on his face. When it was over I asked him, “So tell me, how did you like it?”

He said, “I didn’t understand a word! But I tried to give the impression to the poets and the audience that I understood everything. There was no way I could call out the last lines but I did try to join in the praise.”

I said, “You’ve taken an important step forward—now your Urdu will get better every day!”

It was nearly eleven o’clock, after eating a meal with the poets, that he left.

A few days later he went back to Aligarh and then to Lucknow, where he spent some time meeting scholars and taking in the atmosphere among them. And then he returned to London.

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Ralph began teaching Urdu at SOAS, and after the retirement of Dr. Graham Bailey he became head of the Urdu Department. Meanwhile after the establishment of Pakistan I moved to Lahore and began teaching and doing research at the Oriental College. In those years we wrote to each other regularly and in this way we remained close and knew about each other’s academic work. He was working on the poets Mīr Taqī Mīr, Saudā, Mīr Ḥasan and Ghālib and writing about the ghazal, the most popular form of classical poetry. He sent me typescripts of these articles which I read with great interest, becoming aware of his analytic capacities and impressed by his obvious interest in the classical poets. At that time Dr. Khurshidul Islam was his colleague and Ralph gained a lot from working with him, both in getting practice speaking Urdu and in helping him understand the conventions of classical Urdu poetry. After Khurshid Sahib returned to Aligarh, Aziz Ahmad was appointed in his place. Ralph was able to work closely with him too for several years and did a translation of his novel *Aisī Bulandī, Aisī Pastī* which was very well received. When Aziz Ahmad had completed his term and gone to the University of Toronto as Professor of Islamic Studies, there was a vacancy for a lecturer in the South Asian Studies Department in London. Ralph proposed me for this post and this was accepted. I was able to get leave from Panjab University for three years, and after a lot of arrangements and paperwork, in October 1962 I set off for London.

When I arrived at the London airport there was Ralph Russell waiting for me. It hadn't even occurred to me that he would be there because he lived about thirty miles from London, in Harlow New Town. As I came out he approached me saying, "*Ādāb 'arz!*—greetings! Look, here I am. I thought you should have a proper reception. I hope you had a comfortable flight?" I said, "Very comfortable, no difficulties," and in his enthusiastic way he said, "Now you're in London, you're my guest. The journey must have been a bit tiring but now you're here, *Inshā' al-Lāh*, there won't be any problems. I'm always happy to help in any way you need."

I said, "My friend, you've gone to so much trouble, coming so far, and at night too! It must have been very troublesome for you."

Russell said, "It's the first time you've come to London. Of course I should be here to receive you." And he picked up my suitcase and said, "Come, let's go out and get a taxi to take us to your hotel near SOAS, where the university has arranged for you to stay." So we went outside and saw a taxi standing there. Ralph gestured to the driver and he came over to us, we loaded all my luggage and off we went to the Waverley Hotel. We got to the hotel and gave my details at the reception desk. Once again Russell picked up my case and took me up in the lift to my room on the third floor. He stayed with me about an hour, chatting about all sorts of interesting things. It was nearly eleven o'clock before he said, "I need to go now. It's late and I won't get home till after midnight. We'll meet in the morning in the School. Come at your leisure, about ten o'clock. Just cross the park in Russell Square and you'll see the building opposite you. We'll meet in my room and then I'll take you to get all the official business about your appointment done."

When he had gone I kept thinking, This man is English but he has the courteous manners of the East! And his warmth and sincerity—it's what we normally expect to see in people from India or Pakistan. Maybe it's the effect of studying Urdu and our culture that has now become part of his character!

During my time in London I had the chance to observe Ralph very closely. We were together for six years. We worked together in the same room, ate our midday meal together, drank coffee together and had afternoon tea. Together we planned our work on Urdu studies and Urdu literature, and together we designed the syllabus for teaching Urdu. Together we made recordings of many of Urdu's important poets and writers for the Urdu Department, so our students could listen to them.

The thing I found most difficult about settling in London was finding a house, and Ralph gave me a lot of help in this. We went to the university lodgings bureau for a list and he came with me to look at several places. The first thing he did in each one was go into the kitchen; only after that did he take stock of the other rooms. When I asked him why, he said, “If there isn’t a good, comfortable kitchen, for me it doesn’t feel like a home. If the kitchen is well set-up and clean, then I can feel at home.” Anyway, after looking at several houses Russell found one that he liked and I said goodbye to the Waverley Hotel and moved into it. At that time I was alone in London so I had to cook my own evening meal. When I had to spend so much time each evening in the kitchen, I realized the truth of Russell’s view of how important it was that the kitchen should be comfortable, clean and neat. And some time later, when my family arrived in London, they too agreed with him.

Ralph was himself an extremely simple-living man, like a dervish, oblivious of material needs. He hardly knew the meaning of a desire for wealth. He was unconcerned about appearances and didn’t bother about his own comfort. He always lived in rented accommodation and never thought of buying his own house, although it wasn’t difficult to do at that time because university teachers could get a one hundred percent mortgage. Privately-owned motorcars were common, but he didn’t think of getting one for himself. He went everywhere by bus, train and tube, explaining that he preferred it because he could read on the journey.

At this time he was a lecturer and had been one for eight or ten years. He hadn’t yet published any books and for this reason hadn’t been made a Reader. But he had done a lot of work on *Mir*, *Saudā* and *Mir Ḥasan*—I’d seen the typescripts and liked them, and I thought, why should this work not be the basis of him being appointed to a Readership? And that would also raise the status of the Urdu Department. So one day I spoke to Professor [John] Brough about this—he was head of South Asian Studies and a great Sanskrit scholar. When he heard that Ralph had done excellent work on the classical poets, with a book soon to be published, he said, “You show me the draft and I’ll make the appropriate arrangements to consider him for a Readership.” A little while later when Ralph and I were sitting drinking coffee and talking in the senior common room, Professor Brough came up to us and said, “I read the draft with great interest. It’s an excellent piece of work so I’ve put in a recommendation to the director of the School and to the university selection board that you should be appointed a Reader. They should confirm it in a few weeks.”

And that’s what happened—they accepted Professor Brough’s recommendation, Ralph became a Reader, and it was very useful for the

Urdu Department.

In Ralph's character there was something of the ascetic. He just got on with his work, completely unaffected by the desire for praise or a concern for reward or recognition. Working on his subject was for him nothing less than an act of dedication. Getting up, sitting down, walking about, whatever he was doing he was busy with his work. He took it upon himself to make exceptional efforts in teaching his students, both language and literature—there were some who thought that he gave his teaching work too much time. For the beginner students he gave at least eight or ten lectures a week. Apart from that he was also revising the syllabus, taking tutorials, arranging seminars, and still giving regular time to his own study of Urdu. He and I sat together to read the work of some major Urdu writers and we had lively exchanges about various aspects of what we were reading. And with all this, he still devoted a major part of his time to writing on literary subjects. The characteristics of the ghazal form, the work of important ghazal poets, the personalities and life work of Mir and Ghālib—these were his special subjects. And now that his books have been published anyone can get an idea of how deep his interest in Urdu is and what unusual capacities he has for working on it.

He hasn't had that much practice writing in Urdu, but his handwriting is very good—and the reason is that he practiced on a slate and from that developed a well-formed way of writing. When he writes Urdu it looks as if he is stringing pearls. But he is nervous about writing letters or articles in Urdu, perhaps because he doesn't have confidence in his ability. So he usually writes letters in English and the same with his academic and literary work. He doesn't write Urdu fast but what he does write is always correct.

However, he has acquired an excellent command of spoken Urdu. He speaks exactly like any mother-tongue speaker—relaxed and idiomatic conversational Urdu, and with a good accent. He never makes mistakes and he speaks fluently—he can tell jokes in Urdu, swear, laugh and tease. His pronunciation is always correct, he knows the forms of politeness, and in conversation never uses any English words. Among us it has become common for people to use countless English words when speaking Urdu, but you'll never find him doing that. If anyone uses an English word while speaking Urdu with him, he assumes it's a new Urdu word he hasn't yet met! Once that happened when I unconsciously used an English word because I couldn't at that moment think of an equivalent Urdu one, and he asked, "What does that word mean?"

He delights in joking and playing with words and is never serious for long. He always has some witty remark to make, and his conversation is

scattered with funny comments about people and what they're doing, especially those who don't understand Urdu. Once when we were sitting in the common room drinking coffee—he was always lively at coffee time—he began to make joking remarks about some of the professors sitting a little way off, playing with his repertoire of common derogatory expressions in Urdu. “He looks exactly like a monkey,” he said, gazing at one of them. “Just look at his face!” And of another, “He’s a real *badmash*” (scoundrel). “He really deserves to be called a *ḥarām-zāda*” (illegitimate, dishonest person). Or of another, “He’s an idiot,”—*ullū kā paṭṭhā* (son-of-an-owl). I was very entertained by his witty style of speaking but I kept quiet; and the unfortunate victims of the comments he was tossing about did not have the slightest idea what Russell Sahib was saying.

He took great delight in watching young girls and made a game of imitating the way the ghazal poets talk about their beloveds. Sometimes if he saw a beautiful girl he would say, “That’s my *jān!*” (my life, my darling). “O my *jān!* She’s a *jān* you could die for.” If he saw a girl who was moderately attractive he would say, “She’s a *nīm-jān*” (a half-*jān*). “She can’t be my *jān*.” And a girl who wasn’t good-looking would be *bē-jān* (lacking the quality of *jān*). “She can’t qualify as a *jān* at all. You have to take pity on her—she’ll never send arrows into anyone’s heart. She’ll never be a calamity for anyone.”

Walking about the streets of London, going about the university, listening to him talk in this way, I always used to say, “If any of these people know Urdu, they’ll kill you! This game of yours is going to get you into trouble!” But Russell went on joking, saying, “Nothing will happen. We’re just honest people saying what’s true, and practicing Urdu.” And then he would quote the verse, “What is there to fear in love?”

But one day it really did catch up with him. It happened that we were walking along Shaftesbury Avenue heading for Oxford Circus where we had things to do. When we got to Oxford Street we saw a man dressed in a typical old-style suit and hat with an umbrella in his hand, walking very fast. When Russell saw him he burst out laughing and said, “What a character he is! He looks like someone out of the Victorian era. He could almost be a character out of one of Nazīr Aḥmad’s books!” The man turned around and said, in excellent Urdu, “Sir, you need to watch your tongue and speak with respect. I am a retired Indian Civil Servant and have lived in India a good number of years. There’s far too much license in this country. If you were in India and talked that kind of disrespectful nonsense, you’d have been in for it.” And then he walked on and went into a shop, leaving us very embarrassed.

I said to Ralph, “You see? Today you picked on someone who knows



Urdu. Look what a beating you got!”

Russell said, “It doesn’t matter. Sometimes that has to happen—it’s just a risk you take.”

We used to eat our midday meal together, sometimes in SOAS and sometimes in the refectories in the other colleges nearby—as university teachers we could eat in any of them. Russell seldom went to the SOAS refectory because there was a special room for the teaching staff where you had to eat in a formal setting at tables where waitresses served each professor individually. Russell didn’t like this conventional atmosphere. His habit was to stand in line at the self-service canteen to get his food and eat informally with everyone else. He didn’t follow the conventions of how Westerners eat. He didn’t even like using a knife and fork, preferring to eat Indian-style with his hand. Once when we had gone to eat in Birkbeck College there was chicken on the menu and I began eating it with a knife and fork. When he saw this Russell said, “It’s hard work eating chicken with a knife and fork. Eat it with your hands or you’ll get fed up very quickly.”

I said, “You read my mind. Really, I struggle eating with a knife and fork. Now you’ve made it easy for me.”

Ralph said, “English people choose to do it the difficult way for no good reason. It should definitely be eaten with your hand!”

He was by temperament someone who challenged authority and didn’t go along with accepted customs. He associated the social restrictions of conventional English society with its imperial history, and he was an enemy of imperialism. His sympathies were with ordinary people and he was an active Communist. He thought imperialism and capitalism were like an ugly scar on the face of humanity. Humanism and a love of humanity was fundamental to him. He wanted all people to be regarded as equal and was convinced that in both the East and West there should be governments that would do away with class divisions and bring all people to the same level. And still today this is what he looks forward to.

In London University there was a group of teachers who were Communists and politically radical. Ralph Russell was one of their most active members. They used to get together and discuss things once a week, often on Fridays. One Friday when I arrived at my room I found a large group of people gathered there, Russell among them. Their meeting had just finished and they were on the point of leaving. When they had gone I asked Russell who they were and what the meeting had been about. In his usual relaxed way he said, “They’re all university teachers,

progressives and revolutionaries. We meet every week and discuss what's going on in the universities, the problems of university teachers, and the general political situation. And we plan what political action we can take to benefit ordinary people. In this country we are free to say and do what we think right, and there isn't any restriction on teachers taking part in politics."

I said, "That's all right, but it would be much better if the group didn't meet in this room—because it makes me very afraid! I have to go back to Pakistan sometime, and there's no question of that kind of freedom there."

He said, "There's no need to be afraid. You're in a free country where there is complete freedom of speech and belief in the universities. And anyway, you have nothing to do with this group. And they're all English."

I said, "But in a country like Britain, what kind of revolution do you people want? It's a developed country after all, where people have everything they need."

Russell roared with laughter and said, "You're quite right, here everyone is free, they have enough to eat, they can get work, and when they don't work they even get a pension. But there are still class distinctions and we want to end them. Some people here are very rich, some are very poor, and we want to get rid of all that. That's what we plan and work towards."

I understood all he was saying, and I stayed there listening for a long time, delighted with his eloquent way of explaining it.

Ralph is passionate about his work and keeps himself busy with it all the time. There is never any question with him of wasting time or sitting around not doing much—whatever he's doing, he just continues with his work. And that's one of the reasons why over the past twenty or twenty-five years he has achieved so much for Urdu language and Urdu literature. He has written many excellent articles about Urdu language and done a lot of work on the forms of Urdu poetry, including several noteworthy pieces on the Urdu ghazal. He has also done valuable work on the classical poets of Urdu. His work on Mīr Taqī Mīr, Mīrzā Saudā and Mīr Ḥasan has been published under the title *Three Mughal Poets*, and he has with great diligence written a comprehensive book on Ghālib's life and character which was beautifully produced by a London publisher. A second volume on Ghālib with English translations of his poetry is at the moment in the final stages of preparation. He has also designed a syllabus for the study of Urdu language which is very appropriate to the needs of

English learners. With its help people are able to learn basic spoken Urdu in just a few months and learn to read and write the language with confidence.

His work on Urdu literature often brings him to India and Pakistan for several months at a time. In India he usually stays with Dr. Khurshidul Islam in Aligarh, and in Pakistan he stays with me in Lahore. The times he spends in my home are filled with life. He is completely at ease and informal. He spends time with the children, we have interesting conversations, he tells funny stories, is joking and laughing, and because of his presence the whole house is lively and happy.

One day I overheard him talking to my son Farhan, whom we call Jo Jo. I listened, fascinated.

“Tell me Jo Jo, are there any buffalos near your house that I can go and see? I really like buffalos.”

Jo Jo said, “There aren’t any near here. But if you come with me I can show you where there are some. But why do you want to? I don’t like buffalos at all. They’re strange, unattractive animals—heavy, black bodies, and you can’t drive them. And they make things dirty. They spend all their time chewing. I hate them.”

Ralph said, “Those are all things I like about them! They don’t say things about anyone, they don’t hit anyone, they don’t make anyone anxious. And the most important thing is that they give us milk. And I love milk. Especially fresh milk.”

Jo Jo said, “Then you should get yourself a buffalo and take it to London!”

Ralph’s conversation was always entertaining, full of jokes that reflected the fun-loving side of his character but also showed the interest he took in the idioms of Urdu. For instance, at that time we lived in a house in the new campus of Panjab University and in the mornings we would walk along the road where Allama Iqbal Town is now. Along the way there was a small mosque. At one time it had been the village mosque, but it was now abandoned and dilapidated. As we walked past Ralph began talking about it. “It’s worth looking closely at this old mosque. It’s literally a half-brick mosque.” (There is an Urdu expression about building a half-brick mosque (*dēṛḥ īnṭ kī masjid*), meaning setting yourself up to be something important with very little basis.) “Wherever I go, whoever I’m with, if they want to see a real half-brick mosque I’ll tell them about this one.” That kind of thing used to make me laugh helplessly.

When he was in our house he often had puris for breakfast—a flat-bread that becomes a light round ball when cooked in oil. He delighted in

hot, fresh puris, eating them with great enjoyment. He would tell the story of an Englishman who when presented with fresh puris asked, “How do they blow them up like this? How do they fill them with air?” We used to find this story very funny. Everyone in the house just loved him coming, and we all had a delightful time when he was there.

Our house was his headquarters when he was in Pakistan, and he would come and go to various other places. One of his favorite places was a village in Gujerat District called Kanyal where he had a friend who was a peasant farmer, Choudhry Nazir. He made sure to go there to meet him each time, making the fifteen or twenty mile journey from Sara-e Alamgir in a tonga along with all the other village passengers. When he came back he always had interesting things to tell us. The first time he returned after two weeks in Kanyal I asked, “How was your time there?” He replied, “Very enjoyable. I stayed in an ordinary village house and sat on a charpoy under the trees having long chats with Choudhry Nazir and his brothers. His wife cooked a dish from the leaves of a mustard plant, which we ate with chapatis made with corn and butter, and we drank yoghurt. I had a great time.”

I said, “OK, it was fine as far as the food went, but what did you do for those two, three weeks? Where did you sleep? What did you do about relieving yourself in the mornings? How did you wash?”

He said, “I sleep alongside the others, on a charpoy in the big common building in the village. In the mornings we each take a lota and go to some faraway fields to relieve ourselves. And at the mosque there’s a place where you can wash, or sometimes we go to the canal. You can get a good wash there wearing *jāñgiya* (short loose trousers). And the language is another interesting thing—they’re all Panjabi-speakers and I don’t speak it, but I really enjoy listening to it. I understand quite a lot and I’m sure after a while I’d be able to speak a bit too. I’m practicing. It’s a very lively language, there’s absolutely no pretense or self-consciousness about it. People speak in a very direct, informal way, and that appeals to me very much—I’ve been completely caught up in it.”

I quoted the famous verse of Mīr:

You’re still in the first stage of love, so why cry?  
Just wait till you see what is yet to come.

He said, “Yes! These days I am in exactly that state!” And then he immediately quoted the last couplet of the same ghazal, which ends

Time is as precious as honor—why waste it?

I said, “So this verse also applies to you?”

He said, "That's right! See what a lucky person I am!" And saying that he gave the typical big Russell laugh.

On one occasion when Russell came to Lahore he had with him an Italian student of his who was studying the society and culture of Pakistan and India. He introduced us and said, "She's a very good student. She's been in the cities, and I've brought her with me so she can get to know something about the way of life of people in the villages. I'm taking her to Kanyal. She'll stay there two or three weeks, meet Choudhry Nazir, see his buffalos, sit on his camel, meet the women of his family."

I said, "For God's sake don't take her to Kanyal! She will be miserable there. We'll show her some villages near Lahore that will give her an idea of rural Pakistani life."

But he was adamant that she should definitely go to Kanyal, and stay there at least two weeks.

I said to the girl, "Under no circumstances should you go. You'll be very uncomfortable there."

She said, "Ralph is definite that he wants to take me. He thinks if you come to Pakistan and don't see Kanyal, you haven't seen anything. Everyone can see the cities—I really want to see the life of people in poor remote villages."

So she went with him to Kanyal. And two weeks later when they returned and I asked her, "So tell me, how was it in Kanyal?" she said, "You were right, it was a disaster. Now I've seen what rural life in Pakistan is like. I had to sleep for fifteen days in a mud house, in one big room with twelve or thirteen women and children—such fat women who snored all night and kept getting up to breastfeed the babies—and mosquitoes biting, and no question of any light. For the whole two weeks I didn't get any sleep at night. There wasn't any arrangement for bathing. And the food was a kind I'm just not used to."

I said, "Well, Ralph Russell fulfilled his mission and you've seen village life. I told you how it would be. Russell is crazy, like someone madly in love. He thinks others are as crazy as he is, and if they're not he tries to make them so!"

She said, "I have to say, I am really impressed with his patience and tolerance."

I said, "He's like one of those wandering Sufis who give up every comfort. He can cope with anything. He commits himself completely to what he thinks right. But everyone can't be like that. He's had those qualities for years."

For the next few days the girl stayed in our house, relieved to be comfortable, and began to feel much better.

Russell is an exceptionally serious and sincere student of all things to do with Pakistani and Indian ways of life—social, religious, the way people speak, the way they behave. He goes to endless trouble, traveling in the towns and countryside, to make himself familiar with everything about our way of life. And there's no doubt that he knows more about all the different aspects of our way of life than people who live here.

He is extremely hardworking and never wastes a moment. He never sits around doing nothing, he is working all the time. There is no such thing as "leisure" in his lifestyle, his work itself is his recreation, and he does this work absolutely oblivious of any need for praise or thought of reward. He doesn't work with any idea of material gain or fame. To him work is what life is about, life is founded on work.

It's true that he's not a person who mixes much in society and doesn't spend time meeting a lot of people. He has only a small number of close friends but with them he is the friend of all friends. He takes great care of them, and anything they need of him he will do. The whole time I was in London he was always being thoughtful about me and helped me in all possible ways. He often took me with him to his home in Harlow about twenty-five or thirty miles away, where he would be doing things for me the whole day. My family and I got on very well with his children, and his wife was also very considerate of us. It is because of all this that our time in London was such a happy one, because of them that we never for a moment felt like strangers, and for almost six years we lived there as if it was our own city, our own country.

It's now almost twenty-five years since I left London to return to Lahore but I still have vivid memories of that time with Ralph. I will never forget his love, his boundless sincerity and integrity, under the shade of which we lived so happily. We worked closely together all those years and both of us benefited greatly, learning a lot from each other. Even now that we live thousands of miles apart, the deep affection and closeness that were the basis of our relationship at that time are still there, just as they were when I was in London. The truth is that the time I spent in London with Ralph was the best time of my life. □

—*Translated by Marion Molteno*