Chapter VI

CHHOTU RAM AND THE CONGRESS MOVEMENT IN ROHTAK DISTRICT 1920-40

Rohtak district was easily the leading district of the Ambala division from the point of view of Congress influence. That the Congress was better entrenched and better organised in this district than anywhere else in the Ambala division was acknowledged by Chhotu Ram himself in 1920. In fact, from 1920 right up to 1943 Rohtak was considered the "most Congressite" district of this division by Salusbury, the then Commissioner of the Ambala division. Despite this, it was Chhotu Ram who continued to dominate Rohtak till his death in early 1945. Apart from other reasons, once again, as in the case of Arya Samaj, it was Chhotu Ram's continued hold in Rohtak district among certain classes specially among the Jat landowners and his successful anti-Congress work that primarily accounted for the weak position of Congress in Rohtak.

Chhotu Ram himself started his political career as a Congressite. He joined the Indian National Congress in 1916, and was elected the first President of the Rohtak District Congress Committee that very year. He continued in this capacity up to 8 November 1920, when he resigned from the Congress party itself. His association with and resignation from the Congress would need explaining. During the war years, the Congress had been cooperating with the government in promoting the war efforts and so was Chhotu Ram. Chhotu Ram was the secretary of the District War Committee, and in recognition of his contribution to the war efforts he was given the

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1 JG, 1 Aug. 1923, p. 12.
title of 'Rai Sahib' and a hundred acres of land in a new colony in Montgomery district of Punjab. But the Congress politics underwent a radical change after the conclusion of the war. On 4 September 1920, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress adopted at its special session in Calcutta the resolution of non-violent non-cooperation. The movement of non-cooperation included surrender of titles and honours awarded by the British Government and boycott of legislatures, law courts and government educational institutions. Along with this, an anti-recruitment campaign started by the "Delhi people" also seemed to affect the villages of the Haryana region.

In order to conduct this movement the Congress was to be reorganised from the smallest village unit up to the All India Congress Committee which was to appoint a Working Committee to direct the affairs of the party. Not all the Indian nationalists were in favour of the non-cooperation movement started by Gandhi. Many of them resigned from the Congress and began to work either as independents or as national liberals. Chhotu Ram also resigned from the Congress but he did not join the rank of independent nationalists or of liberals who were to form the liberal party distinct from the Congress. He in fact turned a complete somersault and landed on the side of the loyalists. All that remained of Chhotu Ram's earlier association with the Congress was the Khaddar apparel which also he discontinued in 1924 after he was included in the Council of Ministers by the

Punjab Governor. In explaining why he had resigned from the Congress, Chhotu Ram, right from 1920 to as late as 1942, claimed that it was because of his abhorrence of unconstitutional methods of struggle against the British Government and the fact that no campaign of non-cooperation on a really wide scale could remain peaceful and non-violent. Chhotu Ram also remained unenthusiastic by the constructive programme of the Congress which included rural uplift, panchayati system, swadeshi movement, and the uplift of the untouchables, although he professed great sympathy with it. It is quite clear that Congress national outlook and technique of mass participation which cut across caste and region was not going to suit Chhotu Ram's emerging politics based on 'casteism' and the upper strata of Jat peasantry.

Once having resigned from the Congress, Chhotu Ram led a systematic campaign towards the suppression of this movement and in support of the colonial government. The British officials were

5 Hardwari Lal, interview, 9 June 1978: As soon as Chhotu Ram became a minister he seemed to have invested a lot of money in European clothes. He began getting his clothes made by the famous English firm "Ranken and Company" of Lahore. He however retained the turban which was no longer a Khaddar one. Around 30s he changed over to Churidar and Achkan and also to Dhoti and Kurta for his extensive tours of the villages. According to Hardwari Lal, he had firmly bid good-bye to Khaddar after becoming a minister in 1924 and all his clothes were either silken or at least mill-made.


7 Chhotu Ram said: "although I support panchayati system, swadeshi movement, and the uplift of the untouchables, yet I cannot support the non-cooperation movement." JG, 20 Aug. 1920, p. 10.

8 For certain other reasons behind Chhotu Ram's resignation from the Congress see below, chapter VII, pp. 219-20.
specially worried by two aspects of the Congress movement: the possibility of a campaign for non-payment of land revenue, and the probable impact of the Congress propaganda on the army personnel. The British administrators feared all other aspects of the movement because they would lead to the first. For example, the call of national education was merely to obtain a large body of volunteers who would act as propagandists in the rural areas and in particular instigate the people not to pay the land revenue. The second aspect had special relevance to Rohtak district. Both these questions intimately involved the predominant Jat community in Rohtak district as the Jats were not only the predominant landowning caste in Rohtak but they also supplied a large number of recruits to the Indian army. Chhotu Ram whose politics were based on the support of the landowners and military personnel of Rohtak was as apprehensive of the Congress propaganda as the British officials. Regarding this he wrote in the Jat Gazette of February 1921:

We (Jats) are being invited to leave the army and not to take to education and remain illiterate. We are asked not to give the land revenue so that the government can confiscate our lands. Is this policy going to benefit us? We must look at the non-cooperation movement from the point of view of what is beneficial to our caste.

British administrators knew that the Congress in Punjab was dominated by the non-agriculturists and urban Hindus, and both the officials and the Congress also knew that in the predominantly rural Haryana region the Congress would not be able to make progress without gaining a fair share of support from among the agriculturists and specially from the Jats of Rohtak district. It was thus

9 CSQ Rohtak, F. No. H-8, Joint-Secretary, Punjab, to all Dcs, 4 Mar. 1921.
10 For details see above chapter I, pp. 8-13, 28-30.
11 JG, 23 Feb. 1921, pp. 4-5. Deputy Collector,
imperative for the administration to enlist the help of "influential" and "respectable Jats" against the Congress movement. The British officials of Rohtak district therefore came to rely for the purpose more and more heavily on Chhotu Ram and his followers and to a lesser degree on Dal Chand as his influence was on the wane. Both of them were treated as sources of information regarding the Congress and were expected to keep their Jat clientele out of 'Congress hands'. Chhotu Ram was to prove extremely useful in checking the growing influence of the Congress.

In his campaign of combating Congress influence and in his critique of the National Congress, Chhotu Ram did not neglect any of the different aspects of the non-cooperation movement some of which he ridiculed in such a way that the point was driven home. Chhotu Ram also laid great emphasis on criticising those aspects of the Congress programme which stood to make a dent among those social classes which were being mobilised by him for creating a base for his future political action, viz., the landowners and the military personnel of Rohtak district.

The no-tax campaign had a special significance for Rohtak district. It was a district prone to yearly natural calamities.

14 See above chapter II, pp. 64-66.
15 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. H-17, pp. 85-89.
16 Chhotu Ram declared spinning of Charkha as being "unmanly" and requested Mahatma Gandhi to provide "bangles" to men along with Charkhas. See JG, 16 Feb. 1921, pp. 5, 10; 23 Feb. 1921, pp. 4-5. For Chhotu Ram's views on other aspects of non-cooperation movement see JG, 12 Jan. 1921, pp. 7-10; 19 Jan. 1921, pp. 3-4; 26 Jan. 1921, pp. 11-12; 2 Mar.: 1921, p. 1; 17 Jan. 1923, pp. 13-16; 14 Mar. 1923, p. 11; 11 April 1923, pp. 11-12; 18 April 1923, pp. 13-16; 14 Nov. 1923, p. 15.
17 All the Confidential Fortnightly Reports from Punjab (1921-1945) make an observation regarding this. The normal years were few and far between the destructive ones. Also see above chapter I, pp. 15-16.
Crops depended on a precarious monsoon and inadequate canal irrigation and, therefore, often failed. Landowners consequently needed and clamoured for large scale remission and suspension of revenue which often had to be made. But despite these concessions the revenue collection had never been easy. Though the district also contained a few very big landowners, its major population consisted of numerous small landowners and an equally large number of tenants, mostly tenants-at-will. From the point of view of collection of land revenue, it was far easier to control a region dominated by a few landlords and big landowners and much more difficult to control a very large number of small landowners with varying sizes of landholdings in case of their falling prey to the no-tax campaign. This factor combined with the natural inability to pay land revenue due to the bad harvests and notorious fall of agricultural prices in the thirties, created a serious economic situation in Rohtak which could be politically exploited by the Congress campaign in the rural areas. The no-tax campaign of the Congress in Rohtak district would have been equally popular with small landowners as well as tenants of all kinds. In so far as it incited the tenants to withhold the payment of rents to landlords it was calculated to harm the richer landlords. In Rohtak district, where the number of tenants was increasing alarmingly, the emerging rich landowners and landlords, who mainly sided with Chhotu Ram, therefore stood to be gravely affected by the Congress no-tax campaign.

Not feeling much danger from these emerging rich landowners falling prey to the Congress campaign, Chhotu Ram concentrated on

18 See above chapter I, pp.15-17.
19 For detailed figures see below chapter IX, pp.319-21.
the smaller landowners by frightening them with the prospect of their losing their land. In 1920 itself Chhotu Ram warned that the non-payment of land revenue by farmers could lead to the deprivation of all their lands at the hands either of "revengeful sundried bureaucrats" or of the moneylenders who would gladly purchase the land when put to auction by the government. Between 1921-23, Chhotu Ram constantly referred to the "disastrous results" of following the no-tax campaign. He claimed that the no-tax campaign in Rai Bareily and Faizabad had led to violence and murder, burning of crops of kisans(Tenants), confiscation of land, looting of their belongings, and auctioning of their lands and goods, all because of non-payment of land revenue. During the civil disobedience movement of 1930, he pointed to the woes of the cultivators of Bardoli in order to frighten the landowners of Rohtak district.

The Harvana Tilak, interestingly for the opposite reasons, extolled the achievements of Bardoli landowners who through their non-cooperation had forced the government into returning the confiscated lands. The Jat Gazette, given to contradicting all such news, gave wide publicity to the fact that the government had indeed confiscated the lands of no-tax supporters as acknowledged by the Harvana Tilak and added that they would not be returned as the government had decided to deal sternly with the movement of non-

20 JG, 3 Nov. 1920, p. 3; 23 June 1920, p. 5. For similar views on no-tax campaign see PLCD, XX, 3 Dec. 1931, pp. 293, 417; XXII, 1 Nov. 1932, pp. 80-81.
payment of taxes.

Despite this propaganda, parts of village Chulkana and village Gangana in Rohtak district joined the movement of non-payment of land revenue in the year 1930 and 1932 respectively. The landlords of village Chuchakwas, tehsil Jhajjar, were also not able to collect rents as the tenants refused to pay. Tenants of village Chuchakwas were led by Mangli Ram, an Ahir tenant, who was significantly considered "less of an Ahir and more of a Congressman". Both the Haryana Tilak and the Jat Gazette gave the movement a great deal of publicity. The non-payment of revenue movement was no less attractive in Rohtak district than elsewhere in India; and Chhotu Ram openly recognised, in the press and the Punjab Legislative Council, the attractiveness of the civil disobedience and no-tax campaign to the landowners. Knowing the vulnerable position of Rohtak district in this respect, Chhotu Ram made repeated and very emotional appeals to the government in 1930-31 in favour of wide scale remission and suspension of revenue in case of the landowners of Rohtak district.

It was not only the government which stood to lose by the landowners getting involved in the movement of non-cooperation but also Chhotu Ram who could lose his following from among the village

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26 CFSo Rohtak, F. No. H-18, pp. 95-98.
27 HO Notes, E.H. Lincoln, 4 April 1933, op.cit.
28 CFSo Rohtak, F. No. H-17, pp. 72-73. Also see above chapter III, pp.108,122.
Also see below chapter VII, pp.272-4.
lambardars, zaildars, and safedposh, the three officials of the subordinate revenue service recruited not only from among the 'rural notables' but also from among the ex-soldiers. In Rohtak district, the lambardars although belonging to 'non-official' revenue agency were held responsible for the collection of land revenue in their individual and joint capacity. It was a difficult situation for the lambardars. They were unable to collect the land revenue not only where the no-tax campaign had made some impact but also where the owners of land were genuinely unable to pay. They were penalised by the district administrators for this inability. Intimidating and pressurising tactics which the revenue collection authorities adopted did not always avail, and there were frequent clashes between the landowners and the authorities. The clashes were reported not only in the weekly Haryana Tilak and daily Pratap but also in the Jat Gazette. During 1930-31 a large number of lambardars tendered their resignations and equally large number found themselves locked up for their failure to collect the land revenue. Between 1921 to 1940 Ambala division, in the whole of Punjab, showed the highest number of cases of "coercive process" issued against the lambardars for collection of arrears of land.

31 GI: Home Poll, F. No. 112, 1931, p. 3.
33 JG, 9 Sept. 1931, p. 3; 23 Sept. 1931, p. 3; 18 June 1932, p. 3.
34 Ibid. Also JG, 16 June 1931, p. 2.
35 CFso Rohtak, F. No. H-18, p. 381.
revenue, and Rohtak district headed the list in this division. Similarly, among the warrants of arrest executed against lambardars, Rohtak district showed 602 warrants in 1931-32 out of a total of 1,349 warrants in the whole of Ambala division. In fact, Rohtak district continued to show the largest number of warrants of arrest against lambardars, i.e., between 50 to 60 percent of the total warrants of arrest in the Ambala division. The British officials publicly lamented the "deterioration" of the lambardar agency in the Ambala division. Some of the lambardars were of course penalised because of their known sympathy with the Congress. The Harivana Tilak, which otherwise considered lambardars as the "notorious enemies of the Congress", the "supporters of Chhotu Ram", and the "steal frame of the British in the rural areas", published a series of cases in which lambardars were compelled to resign for having joined the Congress. The weekly also gave wide publicity

36 Statement of "coercive process" issued in the Ambala division and in Rohtak district against lambardars for collection of arrears of land revenue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ambala Div.</th>
<th>Rohtak Dist.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>1,159</td>
<td>204</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>213</td>
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<td>1932-33</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>205</td>
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<td>1933-34</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>239</td>
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<td>1934-35</td>
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<td>1935-36</td>
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<td>1936-37</td>
<td>740</td>
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<td>470</td>
<td>118</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>166</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td>818</td>
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</tbody>
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37 PLRA, 1931-32, p. 7.
38 PLRA, see para 7 of the relevant years.
41 HT, 15 Sept. 1931, p. 2. For details of lambardars support to Chhotu Ram see above chapter I, pp. 30-31.
42 HT, 29 Sept. 1931, p. 5.
to the case of Rao Kalu Ram, a lambardar of village Kheri-Kumhar, who was on joining the Congress suspended and subsequently dismissed on 2 July 1931 by Zaman Mehdi Khan, the then Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak. The dismissal of the lambardars was politically exploited by the Congress to such an extent that a subsequent letter had to be issued in 1935 by the Punjab revenue department advising caution and restraint in the dismissal of the lambardars.

Chhotu Ram openly expressed his apprehension, if only as a matter of tactics, that the refusal of the government to heed the demands of landowners for suspension and remission of land revenue combined with official high-handedness could well create in Rohtak a situation worse than the Congress movement of civil disobedience and the no-tax campaign. The Haryana Tilak gave wide publicity to Chhotu Ram's apprehensions and predicted that the movement of non-payment of land revenue was imminent in Punjab. All these sustained and feverish activities of Chhotu Ram in speaking on behalf of the 'poor zamindars' of Rohtak and in warning the government were born not only out of his apprehension that discontented landowners would be alienated from the British Government but also, and indeed more, out of the possibility that the loyalists like himself would lose their following among the landowners. His hold on the landowners,

43 HT, 30 June 1931, p. 3; 14 July 1931, p. 3; 21 July 1931, p. 3; 11 Aug. 1931, p. 9; 8 Sept. 1931, p. 5; 15 Sept. 1931, p. 2; 29 Sept. 1931, p. 5; 20 Oct. 1931, pp. 4-5, 8; 10 Nov. 1931, p. 3. Also Hindustan Times, 9 Aug. 1931, p. 5. JG also mentioned the case, see 8 July 1931, p. 6.


right up to the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31, depended on his hold over the village notables like lambardars, safedposh, and zaildars among the 'non-official' revenue agency and patwaris and tehsildars among the official agency. It is to be noted that Chhotu Ram was very greatly concerned about the composition of official revenue agency, and he vociferously campaigned for the recruitment of revenue officials including patwaris and tehsildars from among the Jats and Hindu agricultural castes.

The British administrators were always particularly worried about the political situation in Rohtak district because it was from here that the army received a large contingent of recruits. To take one single village, Chhara alone supplied 349 recruits during the World War I out of an average population of 1,017; and 24 of them died fighting. Rohtak district stood third in the whole of Punjab in the matter of supplying recruits to the army and the majority of these recruits were Jats. The confidential information reaching the British administrators was disturbing for it showed that the Congress propaganda during non-cooperation and Khilafat movement had indeed affected personnel of the Jat regiments. In fact, Rohtak district was a major stronghold of a successful non-cooperation movement in

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47 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11-39, p. 7. Also CFSO Rohtak, F. No. H-17, p. 5.
48 For details see below chapter VIII, pp. 258-9 Also see Appendix I.
49 See the stone in Chaupal of village Chhara on which the details have been inscribed. It is difficult to get the exact figures regarding the population of village Chhara during the World War I. Only an average estimate of 1,017 persons per village in Jhajjar tehsil is available in the District Census of 1951: Punjab Dist. Census Handbook, 1951, Vol. II, Rohtak dist. Table No. 2, 3 (Chandigarh 1965).
50 For more details see above chapter II, pp. 41, 43, 45-50, 57-58.
51 C.P.C. Bamford, Histories of the Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movement, second edition (Delhi 1974), p. 34.
The town of Jhajjar was the main trouble spot. The non-cooperators took over the local Municipal Committee. The Congress and Khilafat flags were hoisted over the Town Hall, pickets were posted at the outskirts of the town; the payment of municipal octroi duty was stopped; a Kaumi Panchayat (national arbitration court) was established in the Town Hall which decided matters for weeks on end. It took the administration 20 days to bring the situation under control. These attempts were doubly frightening to the British administrators; firstly, because they represented not merely a disintegration of existing law and order but also successful substitution of the existing set up of administration by an adequate alternative, nationalist machinery; secondly, the tehsil of Jhajjar was foremost in the entire district of Rohtak in supplying the largest number of Jat recruits to the British Indian army. The British apprehensions were further aroused when in view of the huge success achieved in 1921-22, a Congress meeting in March 1929 decided, along with the adoption of the resolution of civil disobedience, to create "a battle field" in Rohtak district. Rohtak district was selected by Mahatma Gandhi as the "centre" for civil disobedience movement for the Ambala division if not for the whole province. The district officials believed that this decision of the Congress leading to the reorganisation of the Party at the village level and recruitment of a large number of rural followers.

52 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 6-A, K.W, see "Unrest at Jhajjar 1922".
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
56 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. H-17, see Confidential letter from K.B. Pirzada Muzaffar Ahmed, Retired Deputy Collector Meham dist. to Malik Zaman Mehdi Khan, 17 April 1930.
57 HO Notes, Malik Zaman Mehdi Khan, 4 Dec. 1931, op.cit.
in the Rohtak district would make for an "explosive situation".

As Rohtak continued to provide a substantial number of army recruits even during the World War II, the apprehensions of the British did not lessen with time. These, in fact, increased due to the close proximity of Rohtak district to Delhi and the known desire of the Congress to stir up unrest among the Jats. As early as 1922 the Congress propaganda had its effect among the ex-army men in Jhajjar tehsil. In that year four army pensioners, two Jats and two Ahirs, had become Congress volunteers at village Beri. The threat of forfeiture of their pensions brought three of them around in 1923.

Seeing all this and not willing to take any chance the decision to forfeit military pensions and other rewards in case of "grave misconduct" was taken in 1924. Follow up instructions for "stern action" were circulated by the Punjab Government in 1930 and action was enjoined to be taken during civil disobedience movement and other movements which generated disaffection against the government.

In the same year recruiting officers were directed to counteract propaganda aimed at creating political unrest among the martial classes. District Soldiers' Boards were also asked to organise counter-propaganda and to send reports regarding "sedition activities".

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60 CFOO Rohtak, F. No. 6-A, K.W., Confidential D0, No. 239 to Comm. Ambala Div., 13 Nov. 1922.
61 Ibid., Report to DC Rohtak, 9 Jan. 1923.
62 CFOO Rohtak, F. No. M-10, see letter No. A-29162-3(A.G8) Military, 10 Nov. 1924.
63 CFO Comm. Ambala Div., F. No. H-22, see DO-11467-S, 12 Feb. 1930; Deputy Secretary Army Dept., 30 June 1930; Circular to all Comms and DCS of Punjab, 13 Sept. 1930. All these laid down instructions for the govt. pensioners, military or civil, who were declared to be "under special obligation to abstain from seditious activities", pp. 96-109.
64 CFOO Rohtak, F. No. H-16, Confidential letter, dated, 23 June 1930.
Inspite of all these steps, it was clear that the Congress propaganda among the military personnel was catching on by 1930. During 1930-31, the Congress had in the district active sympathisers and fund contributors among the army pensioners and even among the serving personnel, drawn specially from among the Jats of Rohtak. It was during 1931 that the Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak sent orders to the recruiting officer at Delhi that Jats from three villages "notorious" for Congress activities, namely, Sanghi, Mokhra, and Madina, should not be recruited in the army. Prompt action was also taken against armymen (all Jats in this case) found guilty of supporting the national movement. Village Madina, a big Jat village, in particular stood out for its anti-government activities. In 1931 this village "illtreated" an infantry column of the Leicestershire Regiment passing through the district.

The establishment of Taziri Chowki (additional police for which the villagers had to pay) on village Madina was recommended as a measure of penalty. The Congress activities, however, did not slacken. By November 1931, the Congress had succeeded in organising a 'Seva-Dal' in Rohtak and enlisted for it 45 volunteers, mostly Jat

69 Seven complaints were made by Lt. Col. C.S. Davies, the commanding officer of the Battalion. These were: Cows were not allowed to be slaughtered; villagers refused to sell milk and supply wood to the army contractor; patridge shooting was hindered by the villagers by making a line in front of the guns; 'R.S.M.' and Band Masters were stoned while walking on the main road; officers' tents were stoned after dark; bullocks were not given for drawing water; supply-lorry and the contractor were stoned, etc. GI: Home Poll, F. No. 7/VII/31, Police, 1931, pp. 1-2.
70 Ibid.
by caste. In the opinion of the district officials Rohtak became a 'chhaoni' (cantonment) and these volunteers taught to do propaganda, preach sedition and practice lathi drill constituted the Congress 'Fauj' (army). Apprehending that Rohtak might provide the lead in civil disobedience movement, as the resumption of the movement had been announced by Mahatma Gandhi in Italy, the Seva-Dal was declared an unlawful body under the Criminal Law Amendment Act on 23 December 1931. All the Seva-Dal volunteers were listed as No. 10 Badmashes and put under police surveillance. Commenting on the Congress Seva-Dal, the Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak observed:

This is a district with numerous ex-soldiers and people who thoroughly understand everything relating to military training and know Fauj serves only one purpose, viz. to fight.

During the World War II, the Congress began to demand the abolition of the division of Indian people into 'martial' and 'non-martial' classes and the conversion of the Indian army into a truly national army by opening recruitment to all castes and to spread it more or less equally over all the provinces. This demand alarmed Chhotu Ram just as it had alarmed the other members of the Unionist Party, who were heavily dependent on the support of military personnel. This demand undercut the economic interests of 'the martial classes' of Punjab and specially of the Jats of Rohtak as the army service was the second biggest profession of the Jats. Chhotu Ram was therefore anxious to maintain the distinction between

71 CFSD Rohtak, F. No. H-18, DC Rohtak to C.C. Garbett, Chief Secretary, Govt. of Punjab, 7 Dec. 1931; GI: Home Poll, F. No. 18/XII/1931, Dec. 1931.
72 Ibid. Also HO Notes E.H. Lincoln, 4 April 1931, op. cit.
73 HO Notes, E.H. Lincoln, op. cit.
74 CFSD Rohtak, F. No. H-18, Confidential DO 246, 7 Dec. 1931.
75 Ibid. Also see GI: Home Poll, F. No. 18/XII/1931, Dec. 1931.
martial classes and non-martial classes. In fact as early as 1921 he had put the issue rather bluntly:

What have the Jats got apart from agriculture and military service? Literate and semi-literate Jats have joined the army and become Sardar Bahadurs and some even officers. Now we are being asked to leave the army.

During 1931, Chhotu Ram assisted the British officials by giving wide publicity to the suspension of the pensions of army personnel on account of their sympathies with the Congress. This was also used as an unmistakable warning to the potential and actual sympathisers of the Congress among army personnel. His own advice to them, appended to the news item in the Jat Gazette was:

Steer clear of the Congress movement and its programme which is one of extremism and unconstitutionalism.

Chhotu Ram also helped the government in selecting the possible recruits from among the retired army personnel who could help control the situation regarding their fellowmen in the villages and counter any adverse effects of the Congress programme. He also offered to help these recruits in their work. He invited 60 leading landowners, ex-armymen and practising lawyers to a meeting and the following two resolutions were passed on 10 January 1932:

76 JG, 23 Feb. 1921, pp. 4-5.
77 JG, 25 July 1931, p. 6; 23 Sept. 1931, p. 4. HT also, for different reasons, gave similar news regarding confiscation of the pensions of "Faujis" of Rohtak district, see 29 Sept. 1931, p. 5.
78 Ibid.
79 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 18, letter of Chhotu Ram to DC Rohtak (n.d.), p. 171.
80 CFSD Rohtak, F. No. H-18. Chhotu Ram sent the names and vocation of 35 people who attended this gathering. A breakup of these shows: 6 military men (all officers); 3 risaldars; 1 dafadar; 8 pleaders; 4 zaildars; 8 lambardars; 2 safedposh; and 2 rich titled men, Rai Sahib Ghazi Ram of Ahulana and Rai Sahib Chowdhri Daryav Singh of Mokhra. All of them were Hindu Jats except 2 Muslim pleaders of Rohtak. p. 243.
81 Handwritten letter of Chhotu Ram to E.H. Lincoln, 10 Jan. 1932, CFSDRohtak, F. No. H-18. Chhotu Ram claimed the attendance of 60 people but the list of names given to the DC contained only 35 names.
This representative gathering of zamindars (Hindus and Muslims), including pleaders, retired military officers and other zamindars, advises all zamindars not only to keep aloof from any subversive political movement such as civil disobedience or non-payment of taxes but actually to fight against it, if and when started.

The second resolution merely made public what had been privately and secretly offered by Chhotu Ram to the Deputy Commissioner only two days earlier, i.e., on 8 January 1932. It read:

This gathering appreciates and confirms the public-spirited offer of R.B. Chowdhri Chhotu Ram, M.L.C., to place the services of the "Jat Gazette" and the "District Zamindar League" at the disposal of government for the purpose of combating (if necessary) the movement of civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes in the south-eastern districts of the Punjab including the province of Delhi, commonly known as the 'Hariana tract' and promises full support to government in the maintenance of law and order.

Nevertheless, the Congress activities in the district with the help of volunteers from among the Jats continued almost unabated. The Deputy Commissioner therefore decided to utilise the services offered by both Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand in curbing the Congress activities, specially among the Jats. The first letter written by E.H. Lincoln towards this end, both to Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand, was in January 1932 and it read:

With reference to your offer I send you a list of the persons who are now picketing the shops in Rohtak town. As I am very anxious to keep the Jats away from this movement, I should be glad if you could use your influence to prevail upon any of them to withdraw from picketing.

This was accompanied by a list of 32 Jat volunteers. The Deputy Commissioner continued writing to Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand in the...
strain of this letter reproduced above. All of his letters, contained lists of Jats who were participating in the Congress activities of a "subversive kind", i.e., non-payment of land revenue and boycott of government servants in increasing numbers. Both Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand were invited to wean the Jat volunteers away from such 'dangerous movements'.

Lal Chand and Chhotu Ram rendered invaluable service to the British Government in this connection. Chhotu Ram had already supplied in 1930 two "very dependable" men, both Jats from village Chhara, to control "wilder elements" among landowners in the district. On personal invitation from the Deputy Commissioner, Chhotu Ram became more active and kept him constantly informed through a series of letters of the progress that he was making in this direction. He supplied a list of "notorious villages" which were susceptible to Congress propaganda, lists of Congress volunteers who had been sent to Delhi in different jathas, and a list of important Congressmen in the district. He also deputed Tikâ Ram to Sonepat and Gohana, and his nephew, Siri Chand to Jhajjar and Rohtak, to organise anti-Congress activities. He sent to the Deputy Commissioner a list of his friends and close associates, who could be relied upon for supplying similar assistance in bringing the "desired information" to the Deputy Commissioner.

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87 CFOO Rohtak, F. No. H-17, Chhotu Ram to H.C. Malik, DC Rohtak, 29 Mar. 1930.
89 Ibid.
The Congress had volunteers from all castes and classes. Chhotu Ram could, however, do nothing about 'non-Jat Congress workers'. In fact, he wrote to this effect to the Deputy Commissioner, frankly admitting that 'Brahmins' and 'Mahajans' were not amenable to his influence and that he could tackle the Jat volunteers only, and that too not directly but through "local friends of influence". Chhotu Ram also seems to have had informers among the Congressmen of Rohtak who kept him posted with the activities of the Congress. His description of three of them is rather interesting:

One of them is not a spy but a friend, one of remaining two was practically a spy, and the other midway between the two.

Chhotu Ram also claimed to have placed "five smart young men", through his friend Tika Ram, at the disposal of the Central Intelligence Department for helping them in discovering "revolutionaries".

Right up to the time of his death Chhotu Ram remained a vigorous opponent of the Congress and frequently wrote in the Jat Gazette against all aspects of the non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement of the Congress. He attacked the Congress in the same way as he had earlier attacked the Arya Samaj. He claimed that the Congress was an organization dominated by

92 Ibid.
93 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, Lincoln's interview with Chhotu Ram, 4 Jan. 1932.
94 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 15/43, see handwritten letter of Chhotu Ram marked "Strictly Confidential" to DC Rohtak, 2 Jan. 1932.
95 Ibid.
96 This was brought to the notice of the dist. administrators in a handwritten note of Chhotu Ram to E.H. Lincoln (n.d.), CFDC Rohtak, F. No. H-18, p. 33.
urbanites and non-zamindars. The Congress on its part described the Unionist Party of Chhotu Ram as a party of "Nawabs, Jagirdars and big landlords". Chhotu Ram retorted by describing the Congress Party in Punjab as a party of "moneylenders, shopkeepers, and capitalists, all exploiters of zamindars".

The Punjab Congress, both at the provincial level and at the level of Rohtak district, was riven with factions and infighting. In referring to this point, Chhotu Ram quoted extensively either from the newspapers sympathetic to the Congress or the top Congress leaders themselves. Jawaharlal Nehru, who criticised the Punjab Congress for infighting and factionalism, was often quoted by Chhotu Ram and his criticism given wide publicity.

In exposing the ailments generally of the Punjab Provincial Congress and specially of the Rohtak district Congress, Chhotu Ram secured valuable help from the Haryana Tilak which was controlled by one faction of the Congressites in Rohtak and which also commented with disapproval on dissensions among its fellow Congressites.

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97 JG, 6 April 1938, p. 7.
98 JG, 4 April 1937, p. 3; 5 May 1937, p. 3; 10 Oct. 1937, pp. 4-5; 17 Oct. 1937, p. 3; 1 Mar. 1938, p. 3; 25 Mar. 1938, p. 4; 6 April 1938, p. 7; 11 May 1938, p. 6; 18 May 1938, p. 3; 25 May 1938, p. 3; 22 Feb. 1939, pp. 5, 8; 8 Mar. 1939, p. 3.
99 For dissensions in the Rohtak Congress party, see AICC Papers, F. No. 7/193. See letters from Rohtak district: Daulat Ram Gupta to Kripalani, 2 Aug. 1938, p. 3; Harish Chander Gupta to Kripalani, 2 Aug. 1938, pp. 15-18; Dharam Chander Gupta, 2 Aug. 1938, pp. 18-23; Mange Ram Vatsa, 8 Aug. 1938, p. 26; for an abstract of another letter cataloging the Congress difficulties in Rohtak, see pp. 27-28; Inspection Report of the Punjab Provincial Committee dealing with misappropriation of funds of Rohtak Congress Committee (26 Jan. 1936 to 29 Nov. 1938) see pp. 4-8. Also see Bhargava Papers, almost all letters deal with factionalism in the Punjab Congress.
Congressmen.

Under the scheme of Provincial Autonomy, the Unionist Party, which had secured overwhelming majority in the general elections and formed the ministry in Punjab, came under bitter attack by the Congress. Chhotu Ram's criticism of the Congress also grew sharper and more vehement. He took to unsparingly condemning the Congress ministries formed in other provinces of India. The Congress Government in United Provinces, where 'agriculturists' were estimated by Chhotu Ram to be one crore in numerical strength, was the special target of attack. According to Chhotu Ram, the Congress in the United Provinces had totally failed to accord any representation to the 'agriculturists' in the formation of its ministry. Chhotu Ram's main criticism on this ministry concentrated on the fate of kisans and mazdoors seen in the police repression on them in the cities, in withdrawal of the support of Kisan Sabhas from the Congress, and in the insistence of the Congress on the collection of land revenue against its promises of exemptions. He also criticised the Congress ministers who he claimed were superficially accepting nominal salaries but in reality receiving full allowances. "Hypocrisy" of the Congress promises specially to kisans and mazdoors, who


103 All the issues of JG for 1937-38 contain at least one news-item or an article in criticism of the Congress ministry of the United Provinces.
were declared to have voted the Congress ministry to powers, was played up to serve as a warning to their counterparts in Punjab.

Chhotu Ram's vehement attack on the Congress during the elections of 1937 concentrated on showing to the prospective voters the fate of different communities under a possible Congress Government. For the Jats of Rohtak, Chhotu Ram wrote:

The Congress in Rohtak district is in the hands of people who are anti-Jats. They abuse the Jats and will ruin them completely if they ever come to power.

His warning to Hindu agriculturists and minorities in Punjab read:

Minorities will be greatly harmed if the Congress ever comes to power in Punjab, as their first act would be to abolish the Alienation of Land Act, Sahukara Act, Debt Legislation, and the Gurudwara Act.

For the zamindars or agricultural tribes of Punjab, Chhotu Ram wrote:

In Punjab the Congress is controlled by the non-zamindars and a non-zaminder government would necessarily be an enemy of the zamindars.

Chhotu Ram speaking triumphantly in 1938, after the success of Unionist Party in the elections of 1937, "on behalf of millions of zamindars in Punjab" went on to warn:

For rural zamindars, poor kisans, and mazdoors, there is no difference between Gere (white) or Kale (dark) capitalists. They do not want that the government of the British, a government of traders, should be replaced by the government of Hindustani Bania. Zamindars will never want that they should be free from one Bania merely to be put under another Bania.

Agreeing that the Congress aim of 'Purna Swaraj' was very attractive, Chhotu Ram added:

108 Ibid. Also see JG, 23 Mar. 1938, p. 3.
The concept of Puran Swaraj in Punjab would only mean disposing off the zamindar government of Punjab so that the lalas of Congress can rule.

Significantly the words 'lalas' and 'panias' were invariably prefixed to the Congress in the vocabulary of Chhotu Ram and his weekly the Jat Gazette.

Apart from the press, Chhotu Ram also used the platform most extensively against the Congress. Touring the province along with Sikandar Hayat Khan, he spoke against the Congress even in the areas known as the Congress strongholds. In 1938, Henry Craik paid Chhotu Ram the greatest tribute by calling him "the most effective and combative platform speaker in the ministry" and added that "Chhotu Ram showed plenty of courage in attacking the Congress". However, Chhotu Ram's zeal in attacking the Congress in public soon got out of hand. In August 1937, he had to tender an unconditional apology and issue a clarification to the press with regard to his speech which had been highly critical of the Congress. The publicly insulting behaviour of Chhotu Ram towards Congressmen led the Congress to boycott Chhotu Ram socially and to ignore him completely.

In any case, by the late thirties Chhotu Ram had emerged as the most effective champion of the agrarian policy followed by the

111 Chhotu Ram in his speech in village Kharar of Rohtak dist. called the Congressmen, "Pagal Kute" (mad dogs) and also voiced certain very 'severe' and 'wholly wrong and irresponsible criticism' of the Congress. Chhotu Ram claimed that his speech had been deliberately distorted. For the entire controversy see Tribune, 12 Aug. 1937, p. 1; the editorial in 13 Aug. 1937, p. 7; 17 Aug. 1937, p. 3; 31 Aug. 1937, p. 2; 3 Sept. 1937, pp. 5, 6.
Unionist ministry. This agrarian policy placed the Punjab Congress in a very embarrassing position. The Congress in Punjab could not support the agrarian programme of the Unionists because by doing so they stood to evoke the wrath of the urban mercantile and middle class population and press among whom the Punjab Congress had its real following. At the same time, they could not oppose the agrarian legislation as it meant alienating the rural majority of Punjab. In failing to safeguard the interests of the professional and trading classes, the Congress of Punjab lost greatly in influence. Chhotu Ram exposed all this in his unrestrained attacks on the Congress and consequently became the "most unpopular minister" of Punjab among the Congress and the urban circles of the province.

A survey of the period from 1920 up to early forties would show that the Congress in Rohtak district was never a negligible political factor. All the personal interest and activity of Chhotu Ram and the Rohtak district officials as also intensive propaganda through press and platform did not fully succeed in counteracting the otherwise "weak and divided" Congress in Rohtak. The increase in the number of Congress followers could not be denied. Official records indicate that during the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31, the Congress in Rohtak district drew its volunteers mainly from amongst the Jats, Brahmins, Banias and Chamars; but among these the Jat volunteers were the most

114 ALCC Papers, F.No. PL-10 (1937-38), Satyapal, President Punjab Provincial Congress Committee to Subhas Chander Bose, 8 Dec. 1938.
numerous. Even Chhotu Ram, who always spoke and wrote of the Congress with a 'Bania' prefix, had to agree with the claims of the Harivana Tilak that the Congress in Rohtak district drew its largest number of recruits from among the Jats. This popularity of the Congress among Jats of Rohtak was acknowledged even in the Jat Gazette which published a news item regarding a conference of the Congress party held in Rohtak on 17-18 October 1931 and attended by 20,000 Jats. The realisation that many Jats followed the Congress was not something new to Chhotu Ram. As early as 1923 he had accused the Congress of splitting the 'Jat community' into two. If this was so, then why did the Congress not succeed in undermining the strength of Chhotu Ram, strength which was primarily claimed on the basis of his Jat following in Rohtak district? The answer to this lies in tracing the social basis of the Jat followers of the Congress in Rohtak and the extent to which it infringed on the following of Chhotu Ram.

Some of the Jat following of Congress in Rohtak district, as already pointed out earlier, can be clearly traced to military personnel, officials of the district revenue agency, and small landowners, who refused to pay land revenue during the civil disobedience movement. About the military personnel, the Deputy

117 HO Notes, Malik Zaman Mehdi Khan, 4 Nov. 1931, op. cit.
   Also see CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, p. 7. For the 'Jat following' of the Congress in Rohtak district also see below chapter VII, p. 217; chapter VIII, p. 279.
118 JG, 6 Jan. 1937, p. 7; 27 Oct. 1937, pp. 3-4. Also HT, 21 Jan. 1930, p. 3; HT claimed that 3/4ths of 2,000 Congress members in Rohtak dist. were from the agricultural tribes; most of these were claimed to be Jat by caste.
120 JG, 1 Aug. 1923, p. 12; 14 Nov. 1923, p. 5; 21 Nov. 1923, p. 3; 16 Dec. 1925, p. 8.
Commissioner was of the opinion that except for a few it was impossible to get any definite evidence of their sympathies and support for the Congress movement and that if any sizable number of them were in sympathy with the Congress their sympathies were covert. This may be said to hold true of the officials of the land revenue agency as well. Then, there were some landowners of village Chulkana and village Gangana in Rohtak district, who during the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31 refused to pay the land revenue. In village Chulkana the ring leader arrested by the police was a landowner called Kala, son of Badan, Gujar by caste. According to the Superintendent of Police, the land revenue against his name was merely Rs. 1 annas 12 and pies 9. In village Gangana, the six defaulting Jat landowners arrested were described as "illiterate" and "small zamindars" with "not much means at their command". The official reports clearly indicate that the Congress recruits who joined the no-tax campaign were necessarily men of small means; a limited number of them being petty landowners and others mainly tenants as in the case of village Chuchakwas. This, therefore, was hardly a dent in Chhotu Ram's support derived mainly from the bigger landowners of Rohtak. These small landowners along with a limited number of followers from among the officials of district revenue agency and the military personnel were never substantially large in number or socially influential to tip the

122 CFRO Rohtak, F. No. H-17, SP to DC Rohtak, 14 Sept. 1931.
123 Ibid.
balance against Chhotu Ram especially as most of them would not even qualify as voters under the system of restricted franchise.

The above mentioned classes clearly did not provide the bulk of Jat volunteers of the Congress in Rohtak district. Then, who were these so called Jat volunteers who provided the numerical strength of the Congress following in Rohtak? According to Chhotu Ram, the Congressmen of Rohtak referred to these Jat Congress volunteers as "mazdoors" Chhotu Ram described them as "doers of all menial jobs", those who set up Pandals and performed other construction work and prepared food for other Congressmen. He pointed out that most of the Jats in the Congress fold were "illiterate". Yet they were always in the forefront when it came to the point of courting arrest. According to him, the Jat Congressites were discriminated against even inside the jails. They got "inferior class" in the jails and were denied the facilities which were available to the "urban Congressmen". Whatever "sacrifices" the Jat Congressmen made, Chhotu Ram claimed, they were never recognised and rewards and recognition went to the "lalas" in the Congress. Chhotu Ram effectively pointed out that not a single Jat occupied any "respectable position" in the Congress organisation. Even the Haryana Tilak was unable to contradict Chhotu Ram in this connection. The only person of importance which the Haryana Tilak could indicate in its catalogue

125 JG, 6 Jan. 1937, p. 4.
126 "An Appeal to the Jats of Rohtak District Congress", an article by Chhotu Ram, JG, 26 Jan. 1938, p. 4.
128 Ibid.; also 7 Jan. 1931, p. 4.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid., also 25 Mar. 1931, p. 5.
131 Ibid.
of "Haryana Desh Bhakt" (patriots of Haryana) was master Baldev Singh, who incidentally also joined the Unionist Party in 1940. In the context of all this Chhotu Ram exhorted the Jat Congressmen to assert themselves and to form their own separate organisation inside the Congress - a clear bid to split the Congress on caste lines.

The official records of Rohtak district clearly point out that most of what Chhotu Ram was saying about the participation of Jats in the Congress movement was based on facts. The district records disclose that although the Rohtak district Congress Party drew its volunteers mainly from among the Jats, it was at the same time also true that no Jat held any office of importance in the organisational set-up of the Congress. The office bearers of the Congress were either Brahmins or Banias. Those arrested during the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31 numbered about 500, and the majority of these arrested volunteers were Jats. But the political limelight was stolen by six Congressmen who went on hunger strike in the jail on certain issues; of these six, four were Banias and two Brahmins.

133. "Haryana ke Desh Bhakt", leading article in HT, 30 April 1930, p. 6. The same stands affirmed in the list of prominent people involved in the Congress movement of 1919, 1921, 1931 and during 1937-46, as catalogued by Sri Ram Sharma, in his work, Haryaka Ka Itihas (Hindi) (Rohtak 1974), pp. 61, 66, 72, 90, 111, 116. Sri Ram Sharma was one of the most prominent Congress workers of this period (1921-45).
134 JG, 6 Jan. 1937, p. 4.
135 CFSD Rohtak, F. No. H-17, tehsildar Sonepat to DC Rohtak, 19 Feb. 1930.
136 Ibid.
137 HO Notes, E.H. Lincoln, 4 April 1933, op. cit. Also see CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, p. 7.
138 CFSD Rohtak, F. No. H-17, pp. 97, 1004.
The observation of the social complexion of the Congress recruits among Jats of Rohtak made by Lal Chand to the district authorities further substantiated Chhotu Ram's opinion. In his report, Lal Chand declared the Jat volunteers of the Congress to be, "men of no means, sort of runaways from their homes".

With majority of its followers among Jats coming from such social groups in Rohtak, it is clear why Congress was unable to make any substantial inroads in the higher class following of Chhotu Ram. This is however not to say that Chhotu Ram's sway over the Jat landowners in general was complete even in Rohtak district. But, by and large, a very negligible number from these landowners were recruited by the Congress. Even then Chhotu Ram was uneasy enough to speculate on changing his constituency for contesting the election under Provincial Autonomy. He seriously played with the idea of contesting from the landlords constituency, in which the voters were persons possessing big landholdings only. In fact both the Congress as well as the Arya Samaj were Chhotu Ram's rivals in claiming the loyalty of Jats. But neither the Arya Samaj nor the Congress ever succeeded appreciably in weakening Chhotu Ram's hold over the Jat landowners. Chhotu Ram, on his side, contrary to realities and in contradiction to his own recognition of the truth, kept on insisting upon and projecting the image of a 'united Jat community' which backed him, with himself as 'the sole representative of Jat interests'.

140 For details see above chapter I, pp. 38-39.