Chhotu Ram entered the provincial politics in 1924. In the Council he joined the Punjab National Unionist Party established by Fazl-i-Hussain and Lal Chand. He was to remain one of the staunchest supporters and pillars of this party till his death in January 1945. Before 1924, from the point of view of the officials of Rohtak district, Chhotu Ram had been involved in very dubious politics which kept their suspicions of him alive till the introduction of Provincial Autonomy in Punjab.

The first political organisation that Chhotu Ram joined was the All India Congress Party in 1916. He became the President of Rohtak District Congress Committee in that year and remained so till he resigned in August 1920. Along with Congress politics, Chhotu Ram was, as pointed out earlier, also active in the socio-religious reform movement of the Arya Samaj which was sweeping the south-east Punjab at that time. However, despite being involved in both these organisations Chhotu Ram was able to stay on the right side of the British Government. This was possible because till the end of World War I, the Congress party itself had not fallen on the wrong side of the British and had in fact greatly helped the British in their war efforts. The case of Arya Samaj was different because the

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1 For details see below chapter VIII, pp. 269-80.
No unfavourable comment on Chhotu Ram is available in the District Records once he became a minister under the Provincial Autonomy in 1937.
2 For details see above chapter VI, pp. 184-6.
3 For details see above chapter V, pp. 163-7.
British had nearly always been suspicious of the Arya Samaj. But even here they had to acknowledge that the Jats of Rohtak district despite very strong Arya Samaj influence had rendered great assistance during the war. Chhotu Ram himself, although at that time both a Congressite and an Arya Samajist, had rendered invaluable services towards war recruitment in Rohtak district. During this period, i.e., 1916-19, Chhotu Ram had established a close personal equation with H. Harcourt, the then Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak, who considered Chhotu Ram his personal friend. Harcourt was condemned and ridiculed by the subsequent Deputy Commissioners of Rohtak as a "sympathetic officer", who was too much of a "Ma Baap" and not enough of a "Hakim". Harcourt had initiated the practice of working through various committees which he had established in the district for different objects and had the leading people of the district fully involved in the work of the committees. Harcourt had specially taken many of the Jats into his confidence for this work and had consulted them on various subjects. These Jats were helped by Harcourt in their work of social mobilization. He gave active backing to the local Jat sabhas and Jat Mahasabha and gave direct support in the establishment of Jat educational institutions and the starting of a paper for the Jats, i.e., the Jat Gazette.

5 See above chapter I, pp. 28-30.
6 H. Harcourt, op. cit. Chhotu Ram and Harcourt were actually the co-authors of this book; for this see Harcourt's letter to Gandhi, 10 May 1927 in Gandhi Coll., XXXII, p. 12494, p. 118.
8 HO Notes, H.A. Casson, 1919, op. cit.
9 Ibid.
of Chhotu Ram. During this time Jats of Rohtak were split in two distinct factions. One was the Arya Samaj faction headed by Lal Chand and Chhotu Ram and the other the Sanatan Dharam faction headed by Jats like Mahants of Bohar, Bahal Singh zaildar of Bohar, and Ghani Ram of Gohana tehsil, head of the Jats of Ahulana Got (sub-caste). Of these two factions, Harcourt blatantly favoured the Arya Samaj faction and of the two leaders of the Arya Samaj faction he favoured Chhotu Ram as against Lal Chand. This partiality shown towards Chhotu Ram was shared to a certain extent by C.W. Dallas, the then Commissioner of Ambala division. Chhotu Ram, who headed the District War Committee for recruitment during the war and was a favourite of the Deputy Commissioner, succeeded early in his career in establishing his influence among some of the 'socially superior' Jats of Rohtak. Consequently, during this period he came to be known, in the official circles, as "the strongest man in the district" who had "his finger in every political pie". Before his transfer from Rohtak district, Harcourt got sanctioned a substantial reward of 4 squares or 100 acres of land for Chhotu Ram in a new colony in Montgomery and the title of 'Rai Sahib'. Things however changed swiftly for Chhotu Ram after the war and for two years (1919-1921) he was caught amidst great controversy.

The Punjab disturbances of 1919 changed the political equilibrium of the province. The Congress furiously agitated

10 For details see above chapter II, pp. 41-3.
11 HO Notes, H.A. Casson, 1919, op.cit.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
15 "Men to be known", op.cit.
16 HO Notes, H.A. Casson, 1919, op.cit.
against the Rowlatt Acts. The Jat dominated district of Rohtak also showed a great deal of participation by Jats in this agitation. It was expected of the favoured "Jat leaders" like Chhotu Ram that they would not only boycott the agitational meetings but also render "service" to the government by refuting the "false" allegations made against the Rowlatt Acts and explaining its 'true' scope and meaning. Chhotu Ram not only failed to do this but he actually participated in the meetings organised against the acts. In fact, in a mass meeting held at Rohtak on 11 August 1919, Chhotu Ram advocated the sale of proscribed literature. This was a direct challenge to the Punjab Government because on that very day a fresh order prohibiting the publication of any account regarding the disturbances without pre-censorship in any newspaper English or Indian had been issued. Chhotu Ram, who had openly participated in the public display of unprecedented enthusiasm against the acts, refused along with other prominent residents of his district to join Lal Chand, the only 'Jat leader' of Rohtak who openly sided with the British, in issuing a "loyal manifesto" as desired by the British officials. R.C. Bolster, who succeeded H. Harcourt on 18 March 1919, took exception to this behaviour of Chhotu Ram whose efforts in establishing himself as the 'leader of Jats' had been so amply


Comm. Ambala Div. to DC Rohtak, 29 April 1918, H0 Notes, H.A. Casson, 1919, op.cit.


Ibid.
and readily promoted by Bolster's predecessor and who had been selected as a recipient of both honours and material rewards. Bolster, therefore, proposed prosecution of Chhotu Ram for his "seditious" role in the disturbances of 1919. Although this could not be carried out in view of lack of incriminating evidence against Chhotu Ram, still for the official record Bolster firmly penned down that "during the unrest of 1919 this man (Chhotu Ram) had proved actively disloyal". He also played down Chhotu Ram's earlier help to the British in active war recruitment and said that Chhotu Ram had helped in the British war efforts only because his own "Jat community" stood to benefit by it. He also passed stay orders in 1920 regarding the reward of land grant made to Chhotu Ram with the following noting:

No action to be taken till his attitude became more clear. It was later found, much to the regret of the Deputy Commissioner, that Chhotu Ram had already acquired possession of the land grant in the summer of 1919 due to some mistake.

Chhotu Ram had clearly fallen in great disfavour after the departure of Harcourt. In fact, none of the Deputy Commissioners who succeeded Harcourt favoured his policy of taking the local leaders into confidence. Consequently, Harcourt's policy was reversed. Chhotu Ram was also on his side unable to establish any equation with any other Hakim (official) of Rohtak. In fact, the administrative circles of Rohtak district were describing Chhotu

22 Ibid. Also "Men to be known", op.cit.
23 "Men to be known", op.cit. Also see "Disorders Inquiry Committee", evidence, op.cit., p. 478.
24 Ibid.
26 Ibid. Also "Men to be known", op.cit.
Ram as one of those who had "instigated" the murder of Rai Sahib Balbir Singh, a zaildar of Bohar; for Chhotu Ram had always been considered a "dead enemy" of the Mahant of Bohar, head of the 28 Sanatan Dharam faction of Jats in Rohtak. Chhotu Ram in return 29 took to criticising the district officials in the Jat Gazette. He complained that he was being unnecessarily persecuted by the district officials who had issued orders to suspend his occupation of the land grant and who, he claimed, also attempted to cancel his licence as a practising lawyer.

This obvious official pressure on Chhotu Ram was to affect adversely his association with and membership of the Indian National Congress as he began to reel under it. In the wake of the new turn taken by the politics in Punjab, the hitherto loyal 'Jat leaders' were generally being asked to 'redefine' their loyalty to the 31 government. Chhotu Ram having been pointedly asked by the district officials to clarify his attitude found it necessary to resign from the Congress on 8 August 1920, following the adoption of the creed of non-violent non-cooperation by the Congress. Apart from other reasons that made Chhotu Ram resign from the Congress, it is clear that having cooperated with the British officials for so long and having received their very generous patronage under Harcourt, he decided to continue to remain in the ranks of the recipients of

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28 "Men to be known", op. cit.
29 Ibid. Also for Chhotu Ram's criticism of the district officials, see below chapter VIII, pp. 292-6.
30 JG, 1 June 1921, pp. 3-5.
31 Reference to this was made in a letter of Chowdhri Lajpat Rai, President of Jat Association, Hisar, 22 April 1919, to H.A. Casson, Comm. Ambala Div. See CF Comm. Ambala Div. F. No. A-4, I.
32 For other reasons behind his resignation from the Congress, see above chapter VI, pp. 184-6.
official favours rather than sign away his all as the Congress creed of 1920 demanded from its followers.

Withdrawal of Chhotu Ram from the Congress made little impact on the non-cooperation movement in Rohtak. The Jat High School of Rohtak, a pet project of Chhotu Ram, fell to the non-cooperators. Chhotu Ram's withdrawal from the Congress had clearly cost him dear in terms of support from the 'Jat community'. He had also alienated many of his Jat followers by ignoring their claims for rewards at a time when he had enjoyed the confidence of the Deputy Commissioner and was in a position to recommend their cases. This decline in Chhotu Ram's popularity resulted in 1921 in his defeat in the first election to the Punjab Council from the Jhajjar and Sonepat rural constituency of Rohtak district. Chhotu Ram lost to Rai Bahadur Sarup Singh, a Jat Risaldar and a follower of the Arya Samaj, though only by 26 votes. This defeat was seen by the officials and others as a clear indication of the diminished influence of Chhotu Ram among the Jats of Rohtak.

However, by the time of the second elections to the Punjab Council Chhotu Ram was able to consolidate his position among his Jat voters. In 1924, he got himself elected as the Vice-Chairman of the Rohtak District Board and also as the Director of the local Cooperative Bank; both these were offices of influence and also of vast patronage. By that time the local 'Jat politics' of Rohtak

33 See above chapter II, pp. 49-50.
35 IOR:L/P & J/6/1925, F. No. 3302. Also see above chapter V, pp. 165-6.
36 "Men to be known", op.cit. Also see above chapter I, pp. 34-35.
37 C & MG, 16 Sept. 1924, p. 5.
had also witnessed a change. The Sanatan Dharam faction of Jats had been weakened considerably by the murder of Rai Sahib Balbir Singh and the death of Rai Sahib Ram Saran Dass. These two deaths had large repercussions on the strength of this faction primarily because they led to a split and intense infighting over the possession of the monastery lands, as the Mahants had been owners of very large estates. Chhotu Ram, on the other hand, was feverishly working all this time towards the mobilization of the Arya Samaj faction of Jats. With the decline of Sanatan Dharam faction, the Arya Samaj faction emerged supreme in Rohtak district politics, and although within a year this faction was also to split into two, i.e., between Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand, it certainly ensured for the time being the victory of both in the second elections to the Punjab Council. After a resounding success by a majority of 1,902 votes, Chhotu Ram joined Fazl-i-Hussain and Lal Chand in the Punjab Council. They had organized themselves into an 'Agriculturist Party' or the 'Zamindar Party' as it was then known. The broad idea of organizing such a party had originated with Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, who had advocated "political alignments by race and not by religion" as the "only solution for Punjab". Fazl-i-Hussain had given shape to this idea by organizing a group of 35 Mohammadan members in the first Punjab Council into a 'Rural Bloc' as the majority belonged to rural areas. This 'Rural Bloc' was enlarged to include a few

38 HD Notes, E.H. Lincoln, 4 April 1933, op. cit.
39 For details see above chapter V.
40 For details see above chapter II, pp. 65-62.
41 IOR: L/PJ/6/1925, F. No. 3302. Chhotu Ram won this election in a triangular fight.
42 Magnab: of Macnab Papers, p. 103.
Hindu ruralites headed by Lal Chand. Soon fifteen members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee also started to support it. Thus came into being the National Unionist Party, officially described as "a local moderate party mostly comprising of landowners of Punjab".

In the first Reform Council, Edward Maclagan, the then Governor of Punjab, selected Fazl-i-Hussain and Lala Harkishan Lal to the first ministry established by him in 1921. Fazl-i-Hussain openly used his ministerial powers as the education minister to further what the officials described as the 'Mohommadan interests'. Chhotu Ram who had not been able to enter the Punjab Council in its first election showed himself a scathing critic of Fazl-i-Hussain in particular and the ministry in general. In the Jat Gazette of January 1921, Chhotu Ram wrote:

We cannot congratulate the government on appointment of two urban based members as ministers. It is an insult to the rural members who are in majority. At least one minister should have been appointed from among them.

Chhotu Ram continued to attack Fazl-i-Hussain and said that his election from the special constituency of landlords made a mockery of the "true representation" of the "zamindar interests" in the Council. In April 1923, he applauded the attempt of Raja Narendra Nath to bringing a vote of censure against the ministry, and commented:

44 Ibid.
47 "Ministers of Punjab", an article by Chhotu Ram in JG, 12 Jan. 1921, p. 2.
48 Ibid.
49 "Zamindars and Fazl-i-Hussain", an article by Chhotu Ram in JG, 4 April 1923, p. 4.
Sir Fazl-i-Hussain pursues a policy which benefits the Muslims only as he himself is a Muslim. He has also never attached any significance to the rights of zamindars or issued any circular for their benefit.

In July 1923, Chhotu Ram repeated the charge that Fazl-i-Hussain was a communalist and anti-zamindar:

We have objected to the appointment of Sir Fazl-i-Hussain because he is communal minded. He says that he stands for backward classes but in reality he makes no concessions to the zamindars. He works for Muslim non-zamindars alone.

The very next year, in 1924, soon after his election, Chhotu Ram joined the group in Punjab Council headed by the same man whom he had condemned as a 'communalist', 'urbanite' and 'anti-zamindar' and started to defend him. By 1936, Chhotu Ram had several times condemned all similar condemnations of Fazl-i-Hussain as being born out of "narrow mindedness", "partisanship and petty jealousy".

In reality the social basis of the two leaders was the same. Both were landlords; Chhotu Ram was 'urban' by profession and Fazl-i-Hussain by 'origin'. Chhotu Ram moreover was as much of a constitutional communalist as Fazl-i-Hussain. Chhotu Ram's 'Jat interests' and 'Hindu zamindar interests' were virtually the same as 'Muslim interests' of Fazl-i-Hussain. Both were indeed representatives of the upper stratum of the 'interests' which they claimed to represent. Another common basis was their publicly professed hatred of the 'urban Hindu'. In case of Fazl-i-Hussain, a British official recorded:

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51 C & MG, 14 July 1936, p. 6.
53 For constitutional communalism of Chhotu Ram and Fazl-i-Hussain see above chapter II, pp. 51-61 and below chapter VIII, pp. 250-1.
He (Fazl-i-Hussain) realised that the Hindu moneylender was hateful to the peasant and particularly to the Mohammedan peasant... his astute mind had also grasped the fact that the rural representatives were a majority of legislative Council; could they be induced to act unitedly? This he soon taught them to do and urban Hindus learnt to quail before him.

Chhotu Ram thus found a great deal of common ground which could be shared with Fazl-i-Hussain's Rural Bloc, which had already been joined by Lal Chand. What emerged out of this alliance was the National Unionist Party of Punjab. Although Lal Chand was associated with Fazl-i-Hussain earlier than Chhotu Ram it is Chhotu Ram who is regarded as the actual co-founder of the National Unionist Party in Punjab. The reason lay perhaps in the acute differences between Lal Chand and Fazl-i-Hussain and open confrontation between the two in the Punjab Council in March 1923. Besides, it was Chhotu Ram who in actuality made this newly established party a permanent and most stable political factor in Punjab politics.

The same year that he entered the Punjab Council Chhotu Ram was taken as the Minister of Agriculture in place of Lal Chand who had been unseated as a result of successful election petition against him on charges of corrupt practices. Lal Chand himself had taken over from Harkishan Lal who had resigned in 1923.

Maclagan believed that Fazl-i-Hussain and Lal Chand formed a

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55 In the opinion of Azim Hussain, son of Fazl-i-Hussain, the reason was the deep imprint left by the ability and efficiency of Chhotu Ram and also his loyalty to the principles of the Unionist creed; so much so that any earlier association of a "lesser man" like Lal Chand with the Unionist Party was all but forgotten. Azim Hussain, Interview, 10 Nov. 1978.

56 Lal Chand moved a cut in Fazl-i-Hussain’s salary on 13 March 1923 as a protest against his policy of giving insufficient weightage to the minorities on communal grounds. See FLCD, IV, 13 Mar. 1923, pp. 1274-7.

combination which represented the feelings of the predominant majority in the Council on most questions. Chhotu Ram's appointment as a minister to succeed Lal Chand was also said to be in keeping with the constitutional practice of making the choice of the ministers on party lines. Maclagan had not followed this principle in the formation of the first Punjab ministry. The reason advocated then was that in the first Council it had been impossible to forecast the lines on which the party feeling would range itself. Therefore, those persons were selected as ministers who primarily represented the 'interests' of different communities. With the emergence of the Rural Bloc in the Council and Lal Chand's support to this bloc the 'constitutional practice' was claimed to have been implemented. However, the appointment of Chhotu Ram in place of Lal Chand had not been really matter of fact or automatic.

The new Governor, Malcolm Hailey had found it "extremely difficult" to choose Lal Chand's successor. Hailey did not consider Chhotu Ram to be "very distinguished a politician". Indeed, Chhotu Ram was at the time a man of little importance; he had negligible following in the Council; and most people outside Rohtak had not even heard his name. In fact Hailey had been extremely sorry to

58 Ibid. Also PAR, 1923-24, p. 24.  
59 PAR, 1923-24, p. 3.  
60 Ibid.  
61 Hailey Coll, (MSS Eur K.220), 68: Hailey to Council, 12 Aug., 1924. Hailey had very seriously considered Raja Narendra Nath as a possible successor to Lal Chand. The Raja was only dropped because the Swarajists had promised to support him; support which was considered very "undesirable" and "uncertain" by Hailey. For details, see ibid.  
62 Ibid., Hailey to Michael O'Dwyer, 19 Sept., 1924.  
63 Tribune, 17 Sept., 1924, p. 1. Also see K.L. Gauba, Oral History Transcript No. 76, prt. II, (NMML), p. 258. Gauba said: "He (Chhotu Ram) was a small man from Rohtak when he was picked up by Sir Fazl-1-Hussain".
see Lal Chand go, but at that time he was determined to keep the Agriculturist Party in power. Chhotu Ram was therefore selected as a minister in place of Lal Chand primarily because he had the advantage of keeping the Agriculturist Party together and, as a 'Hindu representative', he could work with this predominantly Muslim party.

Chhotu Ram's candidature was advocated by Fazl-i-Hussain who arranged several telegrams to be sent to the Governor from different places in Punjab requesting the appointment of Chhotu Ram as a minister. A deputation of military officers of Rohtak also met the Governor for the same purpose. The military personnel of Rohtak after the disqualification of Lal Chand had clearly come to look up to Chhotu Ram for representing and safeguarding their interests in the Punjab Council. Interestingly this deputation emphasised the appointment of a Muslim as a minister in case Chhotu Ram was not acceptable to the Governor. The forces of landed interests were clearly bidding for solidarity and positions of power inside the Council. Chhotu Ram's selection aroused great resentment among the Hindu Communal press because his membership of Fazl-Hussain's party had branded him in the eyes of the Hindu communalists. Even Tribune deprecated the appointment of Chhotu Ram.

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66 Tribune, 12 Sept. 1924, p. 4.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
Ram on communal grounds and declared that he was totally unacceptable to the 'Hindus' of Punjab.

Chhotu Ram remained the Minister of Agriculture for about six months. He handed over this ministry to Sardar Joginder Singh and served as the Minister of Education from 1925 to 1927. After the third elections to the Punjab Council Chhotu Ram was dropped from ministership in favour of Manohar Lal, an urban Hindu. Manohar Lal was declared by the Tribune a "genuine Hindu" and intellectually superior to Chhotu Ram. The Tribune, claiming to project 'Hindu interests', remarked that Hailey had earned the "gratitude of the Hindu community" of Punjab by dropping Chhotu Ram, and went on to smugly suggest that Chhotu Ram had been given his "due".

The reason for dropping Chhotu Ram from the ministry was given later in an interesting observation by a British official:

Chowdhri Lal Chand's Hindu successor though an agriculturist had neither his character nor his ability. Consequently after the elections to the third Council in December 1926 the Governor, Sir Malcolm Hailey, decided to revert to the original practice and an urban Hindu was substituted; his appointment making a definite abandonment of the principle of party (or so called constitutional) government.

This open reflection on Chhotu Ram's ability or rather lack of it was obviously biased as Chhotu Ram was notoriously unpopular with the district administrators. The real reason for this change was indicated by Irwin in his letter to Birkenhead, the Secretary

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70 Tribune, 16 Sept. 1924, p. 11; 17 Sept. 1924, p. 4.
71 PAR, 1926-27, p. 2.
73 Ibid., also p. 4.
75 For unpopularity of Chhotu Ram with the district administrators see below pp.241-2, f.n. 150; chapter VIII, pp.292-7.
You have no doubt seen that Hailey has appointed three ministers in the Punjab and his reasons for doing so may interest you. The old ministry consisted of two - Joginder Singh and Chhotu Ram. Chhotu Ram though a Hindu, was accepted as a Minister by the Muslim party (which was practically the "Rural Party") for the sake of the few extra votes he brought to the combined block. In the recent elections however he has lost two followers and his value to Muslims has therefore decreased. On the other hand, the Hindus, who had for some time been in permanent opposition, but had lately shown an obvious desire to come into closer touch with the government, felt the weakness of their position as a permanent minority in the population, and believed that they had suffered greatly from what they described as a coalition of government and the Muslim party. Hailey's difficulty was that if he carried on with the old ministry, the Hindu Party as such would have been permanently excluded, as they would have entirely refused to accept the pro-Muslim Chhotu Ram as a representative. They would probably have been driven back on opposition, which would have aggravated the communal tension in the province, and possible to swaraj. Hailey could, of course, have carried on government by aid of the Muslim bloc, but he decided that it would be wrong to exclude the Hindus and he therefore appointed Manohar Lal as a more or less moderate member of their party. He realises the risk of alienating the Muslim bloc and he has done what he could to sooth them by giving them a minister of a distinctly rural type in Firoj Khan, who is a barrister and also a representative of the "country families". In the third minister, Joginder Singh, he has a man of no particular party but friendly to government. I think Hailey has taken the wisest course, though personalities count for so much in Indian politics that it is not safe to say that his scheme will succeed.

Hailey's abandonment of the earlier constitutional practice in 1927 and the consequent dropping of Chhotu Ram from the ministership was clearly related to the changed politics of Punjab. The second Reform Council of 1924 contained the representatives of the Swaraj Party for the first time. Within two years the party's anti-government posture had proved disturbing to the British officials. Hailey's apprehension regarding the 'urban Hindus'

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76 Birkenhead Coll, MSS Eur D.104/M2/10/5L, letter, 13 Jan. 1927.
77 H.K. Trevaskis, op.cit., I, p. 146.
78 Ibid.
going over to the Swaraj Party had a basis in this. The possibility of keeping the two separate existed as the differences between the two, non-Congress urban Hindus and Congress urban Hindus, hinged on their activity inside the legislature. The non-Congress Hindu members had dismissed the policy of non-cooperation within the Council for more active participation in order to safeguard the 'Hindu interests' in Punjab. In their opinion the 'Hindu interests' could be best served by joining Fazl-i-Hussain and thus placing themselves in what they considered to be the best position from which they could forestall any new "anti-Hindu policies". If permanently excluded from sharing power there was nothing to stop them from joining the pro-Congress forces. The communal minority of non-Congress urban Hindus was openly threatening to turn themselves into "permanent" non-cooperators. Hailey realised that any rejection of their overtures of friendship might drive them to 'extremist' politics and into the "arms of the Congress". The British administrators certainly did not want the strengthening of the Swarajist forces in Punjab on any account. In fact the "progressive disintegration" of the Swarajists by the time of third election to the Punjab Council, leaving only three members where earlier there had been nine, had afforded immense satisfaction even to the members.

81 This point was emphasised by Hailey in all his correspondence during 1925-1928. See Hailey Coll, 7 B: Hailey to Michael O'Dwyer, 6 August 1925; 10 A: Hailey to Alexander Muddiman, Home-member, Jan. 1927; 9 C: Raja Narendra Nath to Hailey, 18 Dec. 1926.
of the House of Commons in England. Hailey, who had always been somewhat contemptuous of Chhotu Ram, had considered him and his three followers as "insignificant and negligible in the Council", and since his value in terms of actual support to the Muslim Bloc of the Unionist Party had in any case been greatly reduced in 1926 elections, he was conveniently dropped in 1928.

Another major factor which prompted this change was the desire of Hailey to weaken the Agriculturist Party of Punjab. By 1928 Hailey was convinced that the newly acquired strength of the Agriculturist Party in the Punjab Council could be an effective hindrance to the collection of land revenue and other allied rates specially during the agriculturally bad years. He voiced his suspicions and anxiety regarding the inevitable menace and danger of the rural representatives championing the demands of the 'agriculturists' in the Council and successfully opposing the government on every possible question till such demands were met. The same apprehension had been voiced by Maclagan, the former Governor of Punjab, to Reading in 1924. Hailey had, undoubtedly by 1928,

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82 House of Commons Debates (Hansard), 20 July 1926. See comment of Earl Winterton, Under-Secretary of State for India, p. 1066.
83 Hailey Coll, 8 A: Hailey to John Maynard, 2 July 1925.
84 Hailey in a lengthy written explanation to Dr. A. Low, 10 Jan. 1961, denied any deliberate attempt to weaken the Agriculturist Party. For this see Hailey Coll, 51: pp. 5-29. However Hailey's papers clearly belie this assertion.
85 Hailey Coll, 12 B: Hailey to E.B. Francis, 10 May 1928.
86 Hailey Coll, 12 C: Hailey to C. Rhodes, 5 July 1928.
87 Reading Coll, MSS Eur E.238/26: Maclagan to Reading, 27 May 1924. Maclagan in May 1924 had advised the Viceroy against any extension of franchise which in his opinion was bound to lead to the predominance of both 'rural' and 'Muslim' elements in Punjab. As an effect of the same he candidly opined:

There are always dangers in having too agrarian a Council as has been found in other countries and we shall probably have difficulties with the rural element in matters such as settlements and the enhancement of water rates.

Ibid.
experienced this danger in Punjab in his dealings with the Agriculturist Party. Therefore a representative of the 'urban element' "out of sympathy with the old landowning and military classes" was introduced in the ministry as a counterpoise to the growing strength and ambition of the 'agriculturists'. Chhotu Ram was replaced by an 'urban Hindu' who was not "entirely under their (agriculturist) thumb". Hailey, by his own admission, feared in Punjab not so much an "urban agitation" as the "possibility of agrarian combination in regard to land revenue and similar questions", and the fact that the same could be exploited against the government. This change brought by the growing importance of the Rural Party in Punjab was sought to be justified by Hailey to the Viceroy on the ground that such a move stood to "broaden the basis of our administration" and had the added advantage of "turning our opponents into friends".

By substituting Chhotu Ram with an 'urban Hindu', Hailey was able to accomplish three very important objectives. Firstly, he effectively weakened the Agriculturist Party which was his original intention. Secondly, by introducing communal principle at the ministerial level he also weakened the forces of existing non-communal political parties, particularly the Congress. Majority of the contemporary press was quick to point out that this change made a

88 For details of the troubles which Hailey faced at the hands of Agriculturist Party, see Hailey Coll, 12 B: Hailey to E.B. Francis, 10 May 1928.
90 Hailey Coll, 10 A: Report, Hailey to Arthur Hirtzel, Under-Secretary of State for India, 10 Mar. 1927.
91 Hailey Coll, 10 C: Hailey to C. Rhodes, 5 July 1928.
93 For communal representation of the ministry see Irwin's letter to Birkenhead, 13 Jan. 1927, above, p. 223.
mockery of the 'non-communal' stand of the Unionist Party or its 94 claim of being a political party at all. Thirdly, as Hailey himself claimed, he successfully brought about a situation in Punjab in which "Hindus would have but little connection with all India politics". The formation of Punjab ministry on this new principle, once effected, was firmly maintained as a "set convention" till 1937, thus leaving no room for a 'rural Hindu', i.e., Chhotu Ram.

The press, by and large, applauded the ministerial change made by Hailey. Fazl-i-Hussain however made his displeasure clear through his paper the Muslim Outlook which passed scathing strictures on Hailey and his professed abhorrence of communal considerations. Although Chhotu Ram did not complain of any "personal bitterness" on account of being excluded from the ministry, he doubted the "constitutional correctness" of Hailey's action. He also faced embarrassment amongst his associates when Hailey refused to let Chhotu Ram publish a letter in which he (Hailey) had ostensibly given some reason for dropping Chhotu Ram from the ministry. Chaffing under the change, Chhotu Ram assumed the role of the opposition leader in the Council under the guidance of Fazl-i-Hussain, who had also been shifted to the Governor's Executive Council in 1926 as a Revenue Member, and brought a motion of no-confidence against the ministry. But the motion was lost miserably.

94 Tribune, 4 Jan. 1927, p. 3.
95 Hailey Coll, 7 B: Hailey to E.B. Francis, 26 May 1925.
98 Ibid., Muslim outlook, 5 Mar. 1927.
100 Ibid., Hailey to Chhotu Ram, 31 Jan. 1927.
Moreover, by attacking Hailey's ministry, Chhotu Ram lost the Governor's sympathy altogether.

Despite his dislike of Chhotu Ram even Hailey was unable to stop the growing importance and political stature of Chhotu Ram. By selecting him as a minister in September 1924 as soon as he entered the Council Hailey had unwittingly provided him with a spring-board to fame and popularity. Although he remained a minister only for 2½ years and could not come back as a minister for more than 10 years, the fact that he was a likely candidate for ministership acted in his favour and helped him emerge as the undisputed leader of the 'Jats' of Rohtak district and the 'Hindu agriculturists' of Punjab.

So far as the Muslim dominated Unionist Party was concerned, Chhotu Ram, despite the greatly diminished support which he offered to them after 1926 elections, was still valuable enough to be accommodated in different party posts. In January 1926, Chhotu Ram was elected as the leader of the Unionist Party; a position which he retained till October 1936. Although the real head continued to be Fazl-i-Hussain, Chhotu Ram's nominal leadership gave to the overwhelmingly Muslim-dominated Unionist Party the image of a non-communal body. He also headed the Government Select Committee to give evidence before the Simon Commission in 1928. It was at Fazl-i-Hussain's insistence that Chhotu Ram was included in the committee. But Hailey showed his resentment by giving the Unionist Party three

102 Ibid.
103 Tribune, 7 Mar. 1937, p. 3.
104 This was pointed out in a Secret Report of the Director of Intelligence Bureau, 14 May 1936. See IOR: L/P & J/8/690, 1942.
members instead of four, as he had earlier intended, because of the Unionist Muslims' "clinging to Hindu Chhotu Ram".

In 1929 Chhotu Ram was nominated a member of the Punjab Reforms Committee appointed to make recommendations on the distribution of seats and formation of constituencies and the problem of franchise in Punjab. In the years 1928, 1930, and 1931, Chhotu Ram was also a nominated member of the panel of Chairmen of the Legislative Council and a member of the Standing Committee on Finance. But all this did not bring Chhotu Ram the much coveted ministership. Although he was the leader of the Unionist Party in Punjab he was passed over for ministership on many occasions. The reason for this, in the opinion of Emerson was:

Chhotu Ram could be a minister only in place of a Muslim and with the consent of the Muslim Community, or at any rate with the consent of Unionist Party, which is practically the Muslim party. The Muslims have not been able to pull the interests of party above communal considerations, and as a result their leader has not been for some years able to obtain office.

There is obvious truth in the above statement as the Muslims of the Unionist Party were hardly ever united. But it may be emphasised that Fazl-i-Hussain repeatedly wrote that he considered Chhotu Ram as deserving of a ministerial post and also showed his disappointment when Chhotu Ram was by-passed in 1930. Fazl-i-Hussain held very high opinion of Chhotu Ram's capability and wrote in October 1935 that in case of his (Fazl-i-Hussain's) forming the

105 Hailey Coll, 12 B: Report to Irwin, 12 May 1928.
ministry under the Reforms it would not be without Chhotu Ram. Fazl-i-Hussain also made it a point to profusely praise Chhotu Ram at public functions whenever an occasion arose.

Nevertheless, this neglect of Chhotu Ram gave the urban communal Hindus, who "bittingly disliked" him, the opportunity of "jeering" at him. In 1930 elections, the number of Chhotu Ram's rural Hindu followers from the south-east Punjab had considerably increased, and they had begun to urge that if the Unionist Party was keen on their support they should "accomodate" their leader. By 1936 the position of Chhotu Ram had become very embarrassing, and he had started to feel the need to clarify his position. He therefore staked his claim to the presidentship of the Legislative Council which fell vacant in 1936 owing to the appointment of Shahub-ud-din as a minister in place of Fazl-i-Hussain.

It had been a risk, though a calculated one, for Chhotu Ram to force the hands of the Muslim members of his party in the Punjab Council who had not been able to put the interests of the party above their 'communal considerations'. But Chhotu Ram, who knew of his unpopularity with the 'urban Hindus', was still willing to take a chance with the Muslim majority in the Council. Commenting on his unpopularity, E.H. Lincoln had said in 1933:

He (Chhotu Ram) will never represent the Hindus in the Council unless the Muslim party throws him over entirely and he turns a complete somersault.

111 Fazl-i-Hussain Coll, 26: Speech, 1936.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 HO Notes, DC Rohtak, 3 April 1933, op.cit.
It is perhaps with this in mind and in view of the overtures from 'urban Hindus' made from time to time, that Chhotu Ram decided to call matters to a head. A shrewd judge of the political situation, Chhotu Ram realised, as did some of the other Muslim members of the Unionist Party such as Nawab Muzafar Khan, that the trend of politics as indicated by the Simon Commission in its Report of 1929-30 was going to make some Hindu support to the Muslim majority essential for its very existence in power. Nawab Muzafar Khan had written in 1930 the following in a secret note to the home secretariat:

So far as the Muslims are concerned the position has become worse than before. Uptil now the Muslim majority in the Punjab had been maintained with the help of official votes. If the Simon suggestions are followed and the official element removed the present strength of Muslims will be gone and they will be at the mercy of non-Muslims.... what an average Muslim feels is that Muslims have been placed at the mercy of Hindus.

The consequent India Act of 1935 incorporating certain changes in the constitution lent credence to the above observation. By 1936, even the Governor of Punjab saw it fit to comment in the same vein:

The Unionist Party is the largest single party but is not sufficiently strong to out-vote all other non-officials if the latter combine.

This reality had also been recognised by the "more intelligent among Muslims". The support of Chhotu Ram and his followers had become essential and far more important under the scheme of Provincial Autonomy than it had been under the Reformed Council. It was also felt that it was unlikely that the Unionist Muslims, divided into factions due to personal jealousies and intrigues, would ever

117 See below, p. 251.
120 Ibid., Emerson to Linlithgow, 16 Oct. 1936.
succeed in coming together. In fact, there had always been the danger that because of factional struggle among the Unionist Muslims the non-Muslim members of the party might get the leverage. Fazl-i-Hussain had therefore always advised his Unionist Muslim colleagues in Punjab that non-Muslims should be kept out of the factional trials of strength among the Unionist Muslims. Nevertheless, the deteriorating relationship among the Unionist Muslims had ended up by May 1936 in giving Chhotu Ram the much desired leverage. Chhotu Ram became one of the signatories of an important memorandum of reconciliation effected on 17 May 1937 between the two factions of Sikandar Hayat Khan and Shahub-ud-din. The position accorded to Chhotu Ram in 1937 in this factional discord ultimately resulted in 1943 in his holding the balance between two warring factions of the Unionist Muslims and being solely responsible for keeping them together under the Premiership of Khizir Hayat Khan Tiwana. The importance of the support of Chhotu Ram's group to the Unionist Muslims also grew as there was hardly any support available from other political quarters. The 'urban Hindus' could not be depended upon. They were, by and large, either sympathetic towards the Congress or too openly communal to throw in their lot with the Muslim Unionists. Besides, ideologically they had been projected as the enemies of ruralites for all these years. Relations with the Sikhs had been seriously spoilt over the Shahid Ganj dispute. In October 1936 it seemed unlikely that the 'Sikhs' would join the


Unionist Party although it was speculated that some may support a coalition ministry. In view of all this, the dependence of the Unionist Muslims on the rural Hindu group of Chhotu Ram grew and specially so because Chhotu Ram had been consistently loyal to the Unionist Party, and his followers had joined this party at his command. Chhotu Ram's attempt to contest the election of the President of the Legislative Council in 1936 was, therefore, a reflection of the increased importance of the Rural Hindu Bloc led by him in the reigning political alignments of Punjab.

In view of his newly gained importance as the leader of Rural Hindu Bloc, Sikandar Hayat Khan made a special attempt, and with a great deal of manoeuvring among the Unionist Muslims succeeded, to get their support for Chhotu Ram. With every member present and voting Chhotu Ram was elected by a very large majority. The victory of Chhotu Ram also established the importance of his support and that of his group of Hindu ruralites to the Unionist Muslims. The victory, in the opinion of the Punjab Governor, finally destroyed any chance of the rural Hindu following of Chhotu Ram breaking away from him. Such a possibility had obviously existed and had unmistakably been a potential threat to Sikandar Hayat Khan, thus compelling him to manoeuvre things on behalf of Chhotu Ram. Politically the Unionist Party stood to gain as, by its own admission, Chhotu Ram's position in the Council could be utilised to gain the support of the general rural constituencies.

125 Linlithgow Coll, 12: Emerson to Linlithgow, 10 Oct. 1936.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Linlithgow Coll, 112: Emerson to Linlithgow, 16 Nov. 1936.
129 Ibid.
It also finally reasserted the non-communal nature of the party.

By the time of the implementation of the Provincial Autonomy in Punjab, Fazl-i-Hussain and Chhotu Ram were the "acknowledged leaders" of the Unionist Party. In fact, the support of Chhotu Ram and his group proved crucial to the success of Unionist Party in the elections to the first Punjab Assembly. Fazl-i-Hussain died in July 1936 and the elections of 1937 were managed by Chhotu Ram. The consequent success of the Unionist Party was a personal success for him. For this success Chhotu Ram was knighted in 1937. The Unionists captured 90 out of a total of 179 seats in the Punjab Assembly.

In the Ambala division the hold of Unionists was considered so complete that in the opinion of Sri Ram Sharma, a prominent Congressite, "no one could dare stand from rural constituencies in the Haryana region". In the fourteen years preceding 1937 Chhotu Ram had consolidated his own position in his constituency to such an extent that "no one was willing to stand on Congress ticket from Rohtak". Consequently, the Congress, the main opposition party in the south-eastern Punjab, was noticeably unsuccessful in the rural constituencies of this region. The Congress was able to win only one rural seat in the Ambala division out of the five which it had contested. It however was able to capture both the urban seats of this division. The Unionists headed by Chhotu Ram

131 Lala Firoze Chand, Oral History Transcript No. S.105 (Cambridge), 17 Sept. 1974, p. 34.
132 The Indian Year Book, 1940-41, p. 988; PLAD, I, 2 July 1937, p. 500; XVII, 8 April 1941, p. 402.
133 GI; Home Poll, F. No. 18/2/1937, Feb. 1937.
134 Sri Ram Sharma, Oral History Transcript, (NMML), No. 191(Hindi) P. 61.
135 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
captured seven rural seats in the division out of a total of eight. The British officials were jubilant at the failure of the Congress in the rural constituencies of south-eastern Punjab which bordered on the obviously troublesome United Provinces; and Chhotu Ram was given full credit for this. In the words of Emerson: "The influence of Rao Bahadur Chhotu Ram and the organization which he has been building up for years were the decisive factors". Chhotu Ram was also given credit for forcing the Congress to remain exclusively urban Hindu in complexion. Apart from this Chhotu Ram also supplied to the predominantly Muslim and big landlord-ridden Unionist Party the massive following of the comparatively 'small landowners' of the Haryana region, thereby giving it, superficially at least, a wider social base than it could ever hope to acquire on its own. It is significant to note here that in the widely differing landholding structure of Punjab the upper stratum of the peasantry or the 'rich landowners', the followers of Chhotu Ram in this region, were but 'petty landowners' as compared to the really 'big landowners' of those districts of Punjab from where the predominantly landlord Muslim followers of the Unionist Party were drawn.

Chhotu Ram having proved his worth both to the Unionist Muslims and to the British was now a clear choice for a ministerial post which had been denied to him for so long. He was openly tipped for ministership by the newspapers. The Governor of Punjab had also written just before the elections that "Chhotu Ram was the most

139 Ibid.
140 Linlithgow Coll, 87: Emerson to Linlithgow, 19 Feb. 1937.
141 Ibid.
142 C & MG, 18 Feb. 1937, p. 2, see editorial, "The Punjab Lead".
outstanding rural candidate for ministership". Chhotu Ram was consequently made the Minister of Development in 1937, a post which he held till 1941. In 1941, he was made the Minister of Revenue; he continued in this office till his death in 1945.

In the cabinet Chhotu Ram was ranked number two, next to the Premier. Chhotu Ram in fact informed the Punjab Governor that Sikandar Hayat Khan had chosen him (Chhotu Ram) to be his (Sikandar's) successor. However, after the death of Sikandar Hayat Khan in December 1942 Chhotu Ram declined to contest for the leadership. He was fully aware that whatever his political importance to the Unionist Muslims the communal situation in Punjab would not let any one except a Muslim hold the office of the Premier for any length of time. Subsequently in January 1943 the choice of the Premier fell on Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana. Nevertheless it speaks volumes for the strength and influence of Chhotu Ram that even the Viceroy expected "pressure" on behalf of Chhotu Ram in this matter.

Chhotu Ram had emerged, since the highly successful result of 1937 elections, as the blue-eyed boy of the highest British bureaucrats not only in Punjab but also at the all India level. Whatever may have been the opinion of the officials of Rohtak district, under the Pro vincial Autonomy, no official could find

146 Linlithgow Coll, 92: Glancy to Linlithgow, 2 Jan. 1943.
147 Ibid. Also see 'Note on the Punjab Ministers', 21 July 1943. Even C & MG speculated upon Chhotu Ram's chances of becoming the Premier. See, 29 Dec. 1942, p. 3.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid., Linlithgow to Glancy, 1 Jan. 1943.
any fault with Chhotu Ram now. His prestige among official circles rose higher every year. The periodic reports of Punjab Governor to the Viceroy regarding Punjab ministers and notes on other matters relating to the province stand a testimony to the high esteem in which Chhotu Ram was held by the official-world and specially by the two Viceroy, Linlithgow and Wavell. While Sikandar Hayat Khan was alive, Chhotu Ram was ranked above him in all respects and also above the next Premier, Khiziar Hayat Khan Tiwana, who in any case was not considered to be of the same calibre as Sikandar Hayat Khan. Glancy, for example, wrote to Linlithgow in January 1942:

Sir Chhotu Ram is made of sterner stuff than his leader (Sir Sikandar). He still pursues his ideals persistently and often passionately. But though his outlook is the same as ever, he has been of late circumspect in his public utterances. He is an effective and hard working minister of marked capacity whose instinct is to ride straight at his fences, whatever their dimensions.

This view was fully endorsed by Linlithgow. In 1943, at the time of filling up the vacancy in the Executive Council, the highest
office open to an Indian right up till independence, the Viceroy showed his marked preference for Chhotu Ram. He wrote to the Governor on 2 March 1943, that he would "very much like to get one of those tough Punjabees like Chhotu Ram". A few days later he again added: "I have a high opinion of Chhotu Ram's ability and courage and I dare say he would make a very good member". Glancy, confirming this opinion of the Viceroy, wrote back:

In point of ability, application and the courage of expressing his opinion, I think Sir Chhotu Ram is admirably fitted to be a member.

However, Chhotu Ram was not appointed to the Viceroy's Council. The reasons reveal the importance of Chhotu Ram as the leader of the Rural Hindu Bloc in the Assembly and the value of his actual physical presence in the Punjab ministry for its continuation in office. Both the Viceroy and the Governor declared Chhotu Ram to be "indispensable" to the newly formed ministry of Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana and his withdrawal from the cabinet at that juncture was seen to be "dangerous" to the ministry. He was deemed to be "one man who was keeping the ministry together".

The Punjab Premier, Sikandar Hayat Khan, also acknowledged that Chhotu Ram's support through his group of Hindu ruralites was essential for the very existence of his ministry. He firmly resisted Jinnah's pressure to merge the Unionist Party with the Muslim League and refused to hail the catchword of "Pakistan" in March 1941, even though such a step left him in a minority of one.

154 Linlithgow Coll, 12: Linlithgow to Amery, 2 Mar. 1943.
155 Linlithgow Coll, 92: Linlithgow to Glancy, 13 Mar. 1943.
156 Ibid. Also letter, 11 Mar. 1943 and 17 Mar. 1943. Also see Glancy to Linlithgow, 13 Mar. 1943.
157 Ibid., 13 Mar. 1943.
158 Ibid., Linlithgow to Glancy, 17 Mar. 1943.
159 Linlithgow Coll, 90: Craik to Linlithgow, 4 Mar. 1941.
The acceptance of such a proposal, in his opinion, would have brought about a split between himself and his non-Muslim supporters, i.e., the Khalsa National Party and "the most important Hindu rural group led by Sir Chhotu Ram". Without their support, he contended, his party could not command a majority in the assembly or hope to secure a majority in the next general elections. Linlithgow also felt that a walk out by Chhotu Ram and his rural Hindu group together with the 'Sikhs' on the question of a Muslim League government in Punjab would have meant the end of an effective ministerial government in Punjab. The political situation was, therefore, safe only so long as there was no merger of the Muslim League and the Unionist Party. Chhotu Ram, who was obviously "upset" by the Sikandar-Jinnah pact, nevertheless put up a spirited defence of Sikandar Hayat Khan in public and in a press statement declared that the Unionist Party was "unaltered" by the pact. He ignored the possible inconsistencies in Sikandar Hayat Khan's attitude and made a united cause with him out of his fear of the danger from the Congress just as certain Sikhs under the guidance of Sunder Singh Majithia had done.

160 Ibid.
161 Ibid. A. H. Batalvi holds the "threat" of Chhotu Ram and his group of eight associates going out of the Unionist Party as the only reason why Sikandar did not form a Muslim League ministry in Punjab, despite explicit agreement in the Sikandar-Jinnah Pact. A. H. Batalvi, Interview, 9 Dec. 1978. Also see his Iqbal ke Akhri do Saal (Lahore 1961), third edition (Urdu), pp. 6-8.
162 Linlithgow Coll, 92: Linlithgow to Glancy, 21 July 1943.
It is true that help of both the Hindu Rural Bloc of Chhotu Ram and the Khalsa Sikhs under Sunder Singh Majithia was essential for the continuation of the ministry; but it may be noted that whereas Chhotu Ram and his group of rural Hindus were Unionists, the Sikh supporters of the Khalsa National Party were a different political party altogether. In fact the only political party of the Sikhs which could claim to be a 'Rural Party' was the Akali Dal which was anti-Unionist and in coalition with the Indian National Congress. Despite the Sikandar-Baldev Singh Pact of June 1942, the British officials remained very sceptical of the 'Sikh' support to the ministry. With the 'Sikhs' so "utterly unreliable" and willing to bargain with any political party, whether the Unionists or the Congress or the British Government, whoever offered them the best terms, the importance of a steadfast and loyal group like that of Chhotu Ram increased. The continued presence of Chhotu Ram and his Rural Hindu Bloc alone gave some viability to the claims of the Unionist Party, an overwhelmingly Muslim semi-communal party, of being a 'non-communal zamindar party'. It was small wonder, therefore, that Sikandar Hayat Khan took care to emphasise publicly that the division of 'zamindar and non-zamindar', i.e., agriculturist and non-agriculturist, had no communal basis precisely because its existence was first prominently noticed and accepted in the Hindu 'dominated' south-eastern Punjab, particularly Rohtak district, and not in its Muslim 'dominated' areas.

166 IOR/L/P & J/8/510, 1942, Linlithgow to Amery, 15 June 1942.
167 IOR/L/P & J/6/1995, 1930, Emerson to H. Haig, Secretary to the Govt. of India, Home dept., New Delhi, 3 Jan. 1930. An ex-Punjab civilian similarly maintained that "Sikhs" were indeed considered "untrustworthy people". A.A. Williams, interview, 8 Jan. 1979.
168 JG, 12 Oct. 1938, see speech of Sikandar Hayat Khan delivered at Lyallpur, p. 7. Also another speech of Sikandar delivered at Rewari in Tribune, 8 Oct. 1938, p. 9. Chhotu Ram was called "father of zamindar movement" and Rohtak as the "birth place of zamindar movement".
The value of Chhotu Ram and his group to the Muslim Unionists and the British colonial government became even clearer under Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana, the second Premier of Punjab. The Punjab ministry was in 1943-44 facing a crisis of great magnitude. Jinnah, who had laid low during the time of Sikandar Hayat Khan, made a determined bid now to turn the Unionist label of the Punjab ministry into a Muslim League one. By January 1943, even Chhotu Ram privately agreed that the party had been living on its "past prestige". Khizar, a weaker man than Sikandar and wavering in his attitude, could not be relied upon by the British administration to withstand Jinnah. Despondent under his onslaughts, Khizar very often felt that he was fighting a losing battle. By May 1944 Chhotu Ram opined that the Premier was "surrounded on all sides by weak persons" and was being "plied by so many people with weak advice". Except for Chhotu Ram, Khizar's ministers were considered unreliable and without any political backing. The British administrators were greatly apprehensive of the disruption of the Unionist Party, as it would have undermined their war efforts. This "disaster" was to be

169 Appendix IX, Chhotu Ram to A. Hussain, 4 Jan., 1943.
171 IOR:L/P/10/21, 1944, Wavell to Amery, 18 April 1944.
172 See Appendix IX, X. Chhotu Ram, realising the critical political situation in Punjab, attempted to call Azim Hussain, ICS, from Delhi to Punjab to strengthen the resistance to Jinnah. Azim Hussain, interview, 10 Nov. 1978.
173 Regarding the ministers during the Unionist and Muslim League controversy, Glancy wrote to the Viceroy in late 1943 that Manohar Lal "had no political backing and therefore was of no consequence"; Mian Abdul Ghye was "distinctly nervous when the trouble was at its worst"; Nawab Jamal Khan was "wavering in his loyalty to the Premier"; Nawab Ashraf Hussain Quereshi was "too new" and was related through marriage to Shaukat; lastly Baldev Singh was described as a kind of "political opportunist", who was "inclined to side against Jinnah as long as the line of action did not amount to political suicide". See IOR:L/P & J/ 5472, 1945, Glancy's note on the Punjab ministers, 1943.
averted at any cost. The reason for this fear was clearly penned down by Wavell in a private letter to Amery on 18 April 1944:

A Muslim League government would be bitterly opposed by Chhotu Ram as an influential rural Hindu element and probably by some of the Muslims.

This observation was based on the report of the Punjab officials sent to the War Cabinet which, after giving certain reasons, firmly concluded that the 'Hindu Jats' would remain attached to Punjab only so long as the Unionist Government survived. Indeed, there was no question of Chhotu Ram joining Jinnah on any ground as any acceptance in any form, of Jinnah's communal approach would have proved suicidal for Chhotu Ram in relation to his base in the predominantly 'rural Hindu' and 'Jat electorate' of the south-east Punjab. In any such realignment the 'Hindu communal' parties which had always campaigned on communal grounds, assuredly stood to gain at his expense. Therefore, Chhotu Ram's inevitable opposition to a Muslim League government was bound to weaken the solidarity of Punjab and hence undermine the British war efforts.

It is in this situation, so crucial to the British in India, that Chhotu Ram seemed to have played the key role, which is best described in Glancy's report to the Viceroy:

Throughout Jinnah's campaign he (Chhotu Ram) has been the most valuable and uncompromising supporter of the Unionist cause. He has played the role of an indomitable sheep-dog, padding steadfastly round the flock with a baleful eye and a bared fang for any straggler whom panic might dismay.

176 Ibid., Wavell to Amery, 18 April 1944.
177 PRO/CAB, F. No. 91/1, 1942, Secret Proceedings of the War Cabinet, 8 Mar. 1942.
178 IOR:L/P & J/5472, 1945, Secret note on Chhotu Ram, Revenue Minister, 10 July 1944. Sir Penderal Noon also firmly held the opinion that Chhotu Ram was "an obstacle" to Jinnah in winning over the Unionist Muslims to his side. Interview, 2 Nov. 1978.
The battle has been welcome enough to one of his fiery composition... It would certainly have been an interesting experience to have listened in at the interview when Jinnah endeavoured to persuade Chhotu that the Unionist label should be dropped; few of the Qaid-i-Azam's ventures can have been more futile or foredoomed to failure.

It may also be noted that Jinnah's talks with Chhotu Ram to get him to join as a representative of his group in a Muslim League ministry does highlight Chhotu Ram's importance in the province. Jinnah openly vowed to "break Chhotu Ram's power in the Punjab" as he believed that Chhotu Ram alone was a hindrance to his political designs in Punjab. He in fact accused Chhotu Ram of "weakening the building force of Islam" through the Jat Mahasabha.

Although Chhotu Ram's role in a primarily 'Mohammadan' quarrel was understandably and essentially limited, it is interesting to note that the failure of Jinnah to have his way in Punjab was put down to "Khizar's subservience to Chhotu Ram" and the fact that "Khizar was coming too much under the control of Chhotu Ram". Equally interesting is the fact that Jinnah's public receptions in Punjab invariably ended with the slogans of "Qaid-i-Azam Zindabad" and "Chhotu Ram Murdabad". The contemporary press also, during the entire ministerial crisis of 1943-44, gave importance mainly to Chhotu Ram; his attitude and agreement was considered essential to any future change of nomenclature and fate of the Unionist ministry.

180 Ibid., R.F. Mudie, Member, Executive Council of the Viceroy, to Jenkins, 14 April 1944.
181 IOR:L/P & J/5472, 1945, Glancy to Wavell, 10 July 1944. Also see Chhotu Ram's Presidential Address in the All India Jat Mahasabha, 8-9 April 1944 in M.N. Mitra, Indian Annual Register, I, Jan.-June 1944, pp. 291-2.
182 IOR:L/P & J/5/221, 1944, Confidential Report from G. Congahan (N.W.F. Province) to Wavell, 23 May 1944.
184 C & MG, 12 July 1943, p. 2; 16 July 1943, p. 6; 20 June 1943, p. 4; 23 June 1943, p. 2; 6 Aug. 1943, p. 3. Also see Shankar's cartoon in Hindustan Times, 28 April 1944, p. 3, in Appendix XI.
Even otherwise Chhotu Ram played a very important role in the field of non-Muslim war recruitment to the British Indian army. The south-eastern Punjab, which had supplied a large number of recruits in the World War I, was once again needed to perform a similar service during the World War II. In this case Chhotu Ram's influence among the 'martial' classes of south-eastern Punjab and specially among the Jats of Rohtak district was going to prove decisive, specially in case the Unionist Government broke down for some reason. On this ground also the support of Chhotu Ram and his group of Hindu ruralites was more significant in the eyes of British officials than the support of any of the Sikh groups. Attitude of the 'Sikhs' had always remained rather disconcerting to the British since the Gurdwara agitation of the 1920s. As early as 1925, the House of Commons made a reference to the "embittering relations" between the British and the "Military Sikhs". The Khalsa National Party which was backing the British could not speak of much support for themselves. The Akalis had pointedly refrained from endorsing the British stand during the World War II. The World War II did not bring the same large flow of volunteers from among the Sikhs as earlier, despite several efforts at speeding up recruitment among

188 There was considerable anxiety over the 'Sikh situation' as the number of desired recruits was difficult to obtain. One of the main reasons for this reluctance, according to some officials, was the feeling among the 'Sikhs' that if they went overseas their lands and villages would be seized by the Muslims who were "plotting" to seize power in Punjab. See IOR:L/FQ/6/106 B, 1942, note by Major General Lockhart, 25 Feb. 1942.
them. It was noted in the secret proceedings of the War Cabinet in September 1943 that "the Sikhs are inclined to be truculent".

For this reason, the south-eastern region of Punjab and recruitment from there came to be considered rather important; and Chhotu Ram's influence was considered decisive as he was the only leader who could command the following of his fellow castemen. His hold over this region had come to be considered so complete by 1937 because no other member of his group of rural Hindus could come anywhere near him in popularity, prestige and acceptability as a leader; so much so that the government was hard put to appoint Chhotu Ram's successor after his death. No one was considered outstanding enough and in fact officials feared the dissolution of the 'Jat group'. Tika Ram, his successor, fell far short of Chhotu Ram's capacity for work and forcefulness. The by-election in Chhotu Ram's constituency was won by his nephew, Siri Chand with a "streaky past"; he was believed to have won the seat because of the "sheer popularity and prestige" which Chhotu Ram had commanded. Some newspapers speculated about the future of the Unionist ministry as a result of Chhotu Ram's death. The Governor himself considered Chhotu Ram's death a

190 PRO:CAB, F. No. 91/2, Sept. 1943.
191 The rural Hindu followers of Chhotu Ram, except for Ram Sarup (from North-Rohtak Rural Constituency), were all new men who had been elected to the Punjab Assembly for the first time in 1937. This also gave Chhotu Ram an edge over them inside the Assembly. He had been a member since 1924. See PLAD, I, 5 April 1937, pp. 1-6.
193 IOR:L/P & J/5/248, 1945, Glancy to Wavell, 10 June 1945.
"calamity" and a "severe blow" to the Unionist Party. In fact, Glancy doubted for some time the ability of Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana to lead the Unionist Party after losing his chief lieutenant, Chhotu Ram.

The importance of Chhotu Ram in the political alignments of Punjab is also brought out in the repeated attempts made by the Hindu communal leaders to woo him away from the Unionist Party to their side. The first attempt had been made in 1926 by Gokal Chand Narang and a few other Hindu communal leaders who approached Chhotu Ram with the offer of a ministership. Again, in 1930, a political offer had been made; this time the presidentship of the Punjab Legislative Council was offered. In 1935, a joint Hindu-Sikh front of Joginder Singh, Master Tara Singh, Gokal Chand Narang, Raja Narendra Nath, and Sardar Mangal Singh, offered Chhotu Ram the leadership of their joint Hindu-Sikh front and the post of a minister. Once again in March 1936, Gokal Chand Narang tried to get all the Hindus and Sikhs under his banner, but Chhotu Ram would have nothing to do with this. Chhotu Ram rejected all these offers and remained consistently loyal to the Unionist Party. His universally known popularity with the Unionist Muslims of Punjab is therefore not a matter of surprise. Together they were able to keep the Congress at bay. Internally divided the Congress Party of Punjab did not know how to deal with Chhotu Ram whose presence had provided the most

196 Ibid.
197 IOR:L/P & J/5472, 1945, Glancy to Wavell, 10 June 1945.
198 C & MG, 28 July 1936, p. 2. Also see "Leaves from a Unionist's Diary", an article by Ahmed Yar Khan Daultana, 6 Aug. 1936, p.2.
essential and stabilising element in the pro-British Unionist ministry and whose personal popularity in the 'Hindu dominated' region of Punjab was growing every year at the cost of the Congress. In the opinion of a Punjab civilian, Chhotu Ram had the "unusual distinction of keeping rural Hindus in the eastern Punjab out of the Congress fold". He further destroyed the Congress hold over the "agricultural masses" of Punjab through his agrarian legislation. In fact, the Congressmen in Punjab were unable to deal with his frequent abusive tirade against the Congress and Congressmen, and often accused him of corrupting individual Congressmen, tarnishing their image and that of their party and its work, and successfully misleading the "masses" of Punjab. Even Jawaharlal Nehru was unable to devise any effective method to combat Chhotu Ram's continuing menace to the Congress except to recommend a social boycott. Chhotu Ram, therefore, as was accepted by the Congress, was one effective unsurmountable barrier to the growth of Congress in Punjab.

Chhotu Ram's pivotal role in the formation and continuation of the Unionist Government was again underlined when in 1943 the threatened dismissal of Chhotu Ram nearly brought down the Unionist ministry. This crisis occurred in June 1943 when Chhotu Ram, in view of the prevailing high prices, advised the landowners of Punjab, in a series of speeches delivered during his tour of the province, that

201 See above, pp. 238-40.
202 James Pennz Papers, MSS Eur D.323/1, p. 175.
203 For details see below, chapter IX, pp. 380-3.
205 Ibid., Jawaharlal Nehru to Gopi Chand Bhargava, 1 Sept. 1937, pp. 77-78.
there being no possibility of import of Australian wheat they should withhold wheat from the mandis, not sell it at the controlled price, and hold out for a better and higher price. He was sternly pulled up by the Punjab Governor and made to issue a repudiation. However, again at the Food Conference in Delhi, Chhotu Ram once again demanded a very high price for the Punjab wheat, and consequently came under heavy attack. British administrators, who had been supporting and abetting the landowners of Punjab, were now frightened of this menace of food shortages and high prices. They turned around and accused the Punjab ministers of "conniving" at higher prices for wheat because they were all landowners. Equally suddenly, "the starving peasants" of Bengal became more important and Punjab ministers were dubbed as "black marketers". Chhotu Ram came under specially virulent attack by the British officials. The Viceroy, under heavy pressure from the cabinet and public opinion in England, felt it necessary to threaten Chhotu Ram with dismissal even if it meant the fall of the ministry or imposition of section 93 in Punjab. Glancy, however, explained the persistent posture of Chhotu Ram on the question by the facts that the rate of wheat in other states was much higher than in Punjab and that all states, e.g., the United

206 Linlithgow Coll, 81: Linlithgow to Glancy, 16 June 1943; Glancy to Linlithgow, 18 June 1943; cuttings of the Tribune, 9 June 1943 and the Milan, 10 June 1943. Also see below, P.
207 Linlithgow Coll, 92: see Chhotu Ram's repudiation in Inquiltab, pp. 41-42. Also Glancy to Linlithgow, 18 June 1943.
208 Ibid., Glancy to Linlithgow, 29 July 1943.
211 For details see below chapter VIII, p. 283.
Provinces and even Bengal, had indeed made huge profits out of the sale or export and import of agricultural commodities in their provinces. He also pointed out that if this discrepancy continued the Punjab grower will not refrain from "embrassing" the ministry and the ministry in turn would make things awkward for the colonial government. The food crisis was a definite indication to the fact that by now even leaders like Chhotu Ram, who had been generally cooperating with the colonial government, wanted to exact a price for their cooperation. Consequently, if their own interests or the interests of their constituents were served by inflation they would encourage it. The crisis blew over. The Punjab Unionist ministry survived the only serious crisis brought about by Chhotu Ram's insistence on keeping in the forefront the interests of the big landowners of Punjab. In a conflict between the interests of big landowners and the colonial government it was clear whose interests were to prevail but not without a fight from the representatives of those interests such as Chhotu Ram. Here, it may also be noted that the other Unionist ministers also held the same view as Chhotu Ram, but once again it was Chhotu Ram who was held by the officials to be the most "uncompromising" and "fanatical" about prices, and the "chief offender" in the entire food crisis.

The successful working of the Provincial Autonomy in Punjab held a pride of place in the eyes of British authorities in India.

213 Ibid., Glancy to Linlithgow, 30 Sept. 1943.
214 Ibid.
216 Linlithgow Coll, 92; Linlithgow to Glancy, 17 Aug. 1943.
Punjab was held up as an ideal case province where constitutional advance in the parliamentary form of government towards realisation of the goal of self government according to the colonial model was to be successfully demonstrated not only to the whole of India but to Britain as well as the rest of the world. Punjab's massive contribution to the war effort and its continuation in office when the Congress ministries had tendered resignations in 1939 in other provinces of India justified the opinion expressed by Linlithgow in August 1943 that Punjab Government had been "much the most successful parliamentary government in India". The British colonial government was certainly anxious that the Punjab ministry should not fall. The two occasions, i.e., Sikandar-Jinnah Pact and the food crises of 1943, when the ministry could have fallen were closely associated with Chhotu Ram and the possible withdrawal of his support to the ministry. This confirms the importance of Chhotu Ram who as the leader of the Hindu Unionist members of the Punjab Assembly contributed the required basic indispensable element to the very life and existence of the 'Muslim dominated' Unionist ministry in Punjab. Even the Haryana Tilak, the arch enemy of Chhotu Ram, acknowledged in its editorial of 22 September 1939 what was obviously common feeling and common knowledge among the people:

The Unionist Government cannot remain in power without the support of south-east Punjab or the Haryana region. Haryana's eight to twelve members are with Chhotu Ram who is with the Unionist Government. If their support is removed the Government will collapse.

217 C & MG, see editorial, 7 April 1937, 8 April 1937.
218 Linlithgow Coll, 92: Linlithgow to Glancy, 17 Aug. 1943.
219 HT, 22 Sept. 1939, p. 4.
In Chhotu Ram the loyalist Muslims of the Unionist Party found a Hindu who would not re-join the Congress or the Hindu communalists and who combined with them in forming a stable political party and a stable ministry. Apart from this, Chhotu Ram, as the most stabilising factor in the ministry in power in Punjab, also got the backing of the British authorities in India who for reasons of their own anxiously desired the successful working of the Provincial Autonomy in Punjab.