Chapter VIII

THE NATURE OF CHHOTU RAM'S IDEOLOGY AND PROPAGANDA

Chhotu Ram had realised quite early that his ideological position in Rohtak district, i.e., 'Jatism', was too narrow to prove serviceable in the whole of Punjab, although, numerically speaking, the Jats constituted in Chhotu Ram's estimate about 50 percent of all the agricultural castes in Punjab. Chhotu Ram had also speculated for a time on enlarging his ideology of 'Jatism' in Rohtak to include a few more agricultural castes which could be termed as "Aigr" consisting of Ahirs, Jats, Gujars and Rajputs. This notion remained, however, at the realm of mere speculation and was soon dropped permanently in favour of the word zamindar, 'zamindar interests', and finally a 'zamindary party'. Even for this purpose, 'statutory casteism' created by the Alienation of Land Act of 1900 continued to be the basis. Chhotu Ram openly admitted that the 'zamindar' was constituted by caste alone and did not mean the actual tiller of soil. In 1933 he maintained:

I always mean by the word zamindar, a statutory zamindar. There are no other zamindars in existence.

Again in 1937 Chhotu Ram asserted in the Punjab Assembly:

A man born in an agriculturist family even though he may have left his ancestral profession continues to be an agriculturist in mentality.

1 JG, 18 Dec. 1916, p. 2. The population of Jats in the whole of Punjab in 1921 was 4,411,129 out of a total of 10,447,000 recognised as "agricultural tribes". This made them 42.23 percent of the total agriculturists in Punjab. Figures calculated from Census of India, 1921, Punjab, XV, prt.II, p.220.


3 PLCD, XXXII, 17 Mar. 1933, pp. 559-60. Chhotu Ram answers a query of Gokal Chand Narang.

4 PLCD, I, 2 July 1937, p. 950.
Making 'zamindar interests' the basis of his ideology for the whole of Punjab, Chhotu Ram carried on a relentless war on their behalf through the press and platform as he had done for the 'Jats' of Rohtak district. All the demands made on behalf of Jats, beginning from places in government services to proportional representation at the Round Table Conference at the all-India level, were made simultaneously for the 'zamindars' of Punjab as well. The demand for a 'just share' for the 'zamindars' was carried on in the columns of the *Jat Gazette* and through questions and debates in the Legislative Council. Chhotu Ram claimed 56 percent share for the 'zamindars' (statutory agricultural tribes) in the whole of Punjab in all government services on the basis of the executive resolution of 1919, 80 percent on the basis of zamindar population, and 90 percent on the basis of the zamindars contribution to the

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government treasury. It may be repeated here that all the demands made by Chhotu Ram on behalf of the agriculturists were mainly for the Hindu agriculturists, although in the counting of percentage agriculturists of all religions were included.

In its essence, the basis of all these demands was the notion of agriculturists vs. non-agriculturists. In his belief in the principle of a division between agriculturists and non-agriculturists, Chhotu Ram went to the extent of suggesting that maintenance of such a division alone would bring salvation first in Punjab and then in the whole of India. His ultimate aim, he said, was to establish a 'zamindar government' in the centre, as in numerical terms the agriculturists comprised ⅔ths of the entire population of India. This ideological commitment to 'zamindar interests' found full public expression under the Provincial Autonomy when Chhotu Ram claimed that "Zamindar Raj" had been established in Punjab in which, he proudly declared, five out of six ministers were "Taksali zamindars" (pure). In public meetings in 1938 Chhotu Ram boasted:

Jo rasta mene bataya hai agar is per chalen to Punjab mein Zamindar Raj hamesha qayam rahega. (If you continue to follow the path indicated by myself there shall always be Zamindar Raj in Punjab).

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8 JG, 13 April 1927, pp. 3-4; 25 April 1927, p. 7; 29 June 1927, p. 7; 31 Aug. 1927, pp. 3-6; 3 April 1929, p. 5.
10 JG, 7 Jan. 1931, p. 4.
12 Chhotu Ram's speech at Rohtak in JG, 5 Jan. 1938, p. 4. Also see his speech at Sonepat zamindar conference in JG, 9 Feb. 1938, p. 5. Chhotu Ram in his speech at Khaneval on 13 Dec. 1938 declared at a huge gathering of zamindars: "If zamindars would only keep awake they would hold political power in the province for all times to come". See Tribune, 15 Dec. 1938, p. 2.
An ideology based on 'zamindar interests' in Punjab had necessarily to assume the character of being non-communal as well; for the zamindars belonged to all religious complexions. Therefore, the category of zamindars of Chhotu Ram included statutory agriculturists of all castes, creeds and communities, thus giving an outwardly wider dimension to the 'zamindar ideology'. This non-communal basis of the Unionist Party, popularly called the 'Zamindar Party', was widely proclaimed and propagated by Chhotu Ram. Chhotu Ram repeatedly insisted that communalism had no place in his political creed. "I do not stand either for Hindu rights or for Muslim rights. My creed stands on the basis of common secular and economic interests", he declared in 1929 in the Punjab Council.

Whatever their approach in theory, in practice the Unionists could not rise above constitutional communalism. This is clear from the appeals and demands of the Unionist leaders themselves. Chhotu Ram's appeal to the British Government to do justice to the Hindu agriculturists in preference to the Muslim agriculturists or Sikh agriculturists was one clear indication of this. In fact, in such matters, Chhotu Ram seldom spoke on behalf of the Muslim or Sikh agriculturists. Other Unionist leaders like Fazl-i-Hussain also put forward loud claims for their own co-religionists. Chhotu Ram himself was, as late as April 1933, openly accusing Fazl-i-Hussain of being a communalist. But, by 1932, Chhotu Ram was giving open credit to the same man for having created a "non-communal zamindar party"
amidst communal clashes. Chhotu Ram's own concept of what constituted communalism was no different from that of Fazl-i-Hussain. In 1935, in a tribute to Fazl-i-Hussain, Chhotu Ram made his own stand on communalism absolutely clear. He said:

Sir Fazl-i-Hussain has been credited with pro-Muslim proclivities. I, for one, am prepared to admit that within limits Sir Fazl-i-Hussain was and probably still is pro-Muslim. But is not a Hindu pro-Hindu or a Sikh pro-Sikh or a European pro-European within the same or possibly even wider limits?

Similarly, although Chhotu Ram acclaimed the Unionist Party as the 'Zamindar Party' of Punjab he also had to acknowledge that the membership of Zamindar Party was not confined to the agriculturists alone, and that the Muslim non-agriculturists and Muslim urbanites were also included in it. Fazl-i-Hussain had never denied this inclusion of urbanites and non-agriculturists. This had necessitated use of another supplementary word. The word 'backward classes' was therefore often substituted for zamindar to be able to claim support of wider sections of society. These were designated as the "have-nots" of society who were included in the programme outlined by Fazl-i-Hussain at the time of the establishment of the party. Among backward classes were included all agriculturists, irrespective of their socio-economic status, all the untouchables, irrespective of their being non-agriculturists, nearly all Muslims, and in general all 'backward classes' whether urban or rural.

18 Fazl-i-Hussain Coll., 24: see statement of Chhotu Ram in The Light, 1 April 1935.
19 Muslim non-agriculturists and urbanites mentioned by Chhotu Ram were: Sheikh Sir Abdul Qadir, Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal, K.S. Din Mohammad, Sheikh Abdul Gani, Sheikh Muhammad Sadiq, and Khwaja Muhammad Yusuf, ibid., pp. 22-23.
21 Punjab Information Bureau, Five Years of Provincial Autonomy (Lahore 1942).
irrespective of their religion or caste.

The slogan of raising the 'backward classes' and 'backward areas' to the level of advanced classes was included by Chhotu Ram among the four basic principles of the Unionist Party. However, beyond bracketing the untouchables with the agriculturists and making verbal commitment to raise the lot of the 'backward classes' nothing was ever done in practice for them. On the question of extending the Alienation of Land Act to other backward classes, Chhotu Ram exposed himself. The often repeated demands of the untouchables to be included among the statutory agriculturists created by this act were repeatedly turned down by him. On the contrary, he advised them not to raise the question of any repeal or amendment of the act as this would evoke the antagonism of the zamindars against them. Chhotu Ram, himself, like the other members of his party, was heavily reliant on the votes of the landowners who were perpetually engaged in a socio-economic conflict with the untouchables, whose voting rights were severely limited at the time. In the fact of his assertion of 'Jat Raj' for Rohtak and 'Zamindar Raj' for Punjab it was very difficult for Chhotu Ram to convincingly advocate the interests of the untouchables while projecting an ideological commitment to the 'backward classes'. In any controversy between the landowners and untouchables, the two supposedly integral parts of the backward classes, Chhotu Ram openly took the side of the landowners. Chhotu Ram, who demanded recognition of Hindu agriculturists as a separate unit and of Hindu

22 Chhotu Ram, op.cit., p. 3.
23 For details see above chapter III, pp. 101-2.
24 See above chapter III pp. 75-80.
Jats among Hindu agriculturists as a further separate sub-unit, vehemently opposed any similar demand from the untouchables.

Chhotu Ram's pro-landowner bias against untouchables got reflected in his propaganda; propaganda which showed almost no attempts to woo them even during the 1937 elections. The only major reference he made to the untouchables was to repeatedly accuse the Congress of exploiting the untouchables for its own political game. The Congress in this region had started to pay special attention to the untouchables right from 1920s. After the elections of 1937, Chhotu Ram openly acknowledged that the untouchables had not voted for the Unionist Party. After the elections, however, seven out of a total of eight representatives of untouchables, all of whom had won with Congress help, went over to the Unionists. Chhotu Ram had openly advised them to be "practical" and join hands with the ruling party. "Their salvation in Punjab lay only with the Unionist", said Chhotu Ram quite blatantly, "for the Congress would never form the ministry in Punjab". He also pointed out that in refusing to join the Zamindar Party the untouchables also stood to antagonise the agriculturists in the rural areas where both had mutual interests. Chhotu Ram could issue this 'threat' as he knew that under the restricted franchise the untouchables would hardly become politically dangerous specially when they were economically weak with no resources.

26 JG, 15 Sept. 1937, p. 1; Also see above chapter III, pp. 99-102.
27 All the issues of HT deal with the work of Congress Committee Rohtak with regard to the untouchables.
28 JG, 24 Feb. 1937, p. 8; 4 May 1938, p. 6; Also see above chapter III, p. 102.
29 JG, 23 Feb. 1938, p. 3; 2 Mar. 1938, p. 4; 7 Dec. 1938, p. 4; 14 Dec. 1938, p. 1; 8 Nov. 1939, p. 3. Also see HT, 11 May 1937, p. 3.
30 Ibid.
31 JG, 16 June 1937, p. 4; 22 Dec. 1937, p. 6; 4 May 1938, p. 6; 2 Nov. 1938, p. 3. Also see above chapter III, pp. 101-2.
to fall back upon.

As a reward for changing loyalty two from among the seven untouchable members were made parliamentary secretaries. This was held as an example of the "interest" taken by the 'Zamindar Government' in the welfare of the untouchables. Other achievements claimed on behalf of the untouchables were in the field of education. Officially, the party in five years of its administration claimed as its greatest achievement an expenditure of Rs. 29,968/- per year on scholarships for the children of the untouchables. It is significant that the Unionist Government had set aside a much larger sum of Rs. 1,25,000/- as annual scholarships for children of the soldiers during the same period. Some of the elected representatives of the untouchables having found that the Unionist Party was clearly unwilling to take up any of their demands went back to the Congress fold. Beyond propaganda commitment to uplift the 'backward classes', the Unionists refused even to accommodate and project their demands in the official programme and propaganda of the party. The word 'backward classes' therefore included effectively in its contents 'zamindars' or the landowning agriculturists as the major and perhaps the only component.

The word 'zamindar' and 'zamindar interests' as used by

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33 Tribune, 8 April 1932, pp. 5-6. Also see JG, 18 Oct. 1938, pp. 1, 8; 26 Oct. 1938, pp. 3, 7; 9 Nov. 1938, p. 7; 18 Jan. 1939, p. 1; 22 Mar. 1939, pp. 1, 8; 8 Nov. 1939, p. 3.
34 Punjab Information Bureau, Five Years of Provincial Autonomy in the Punjab (Lahore 1942), pp. 34-35.
35 Ibid.
Chhotu Ram and his fellow Unionists were used as blanket terms regardless of any socio-economic content or categories. In fact, the definition of the word zamindar as a statutory agriculturist excluded from its fold agricultural labourers and many of the tenants. But Chhotu Ram maintained that the words zamindars and kisans were synonymous regardless of the land relationship among them as they belonged to the same community. He repeatedly declared that "moong moth me koi farq nahin hota" (there is no difference between moong—one kind of pulse and moth — another kind of pulse). According to him, except for Punjab, all other provinces of India, especially the United Provinces, the Central Provinces and Bihar had unbridgeable differences between zamindars and kisans, and very complicated problems regarding mazdoors (agricultural labourers) and the untouchables. But Punjab was, he declared, a unique state in this respect.

The official view of the Unionist Party was in this respect an obvious projection of Chhotu Ram ideas. This myth of the "identity of interests" between the big landowners, petty owners, tenants and agricultural labourers was sedulously propagated through official channels by the Unionist ministry. The Punjab Information Bureau brought out two publications: "Eighteen Months of Provincial Autonomy"

37 JG, 1 July 1931, pp. 1-2; 9 Nov. 1938, pp. 2, 7; 22 Feb. 1939, pp. 5, 8; 2 July 1939, pp. 7, 8.
38 PLAD, I, 2 June 1938, pp. 949-50. Also see JG, 9 Feb. 1939, p. 4.
40 Ibid.
in 1939, and "Five Years of Provincial Autonomy" in 1942. Both works attempted to explain the happy cooperation between the landowners and the tenants not only on the agricultural farm but also at the polling station. It was claimed that the zamindars were behind the political solidarity of the Unionist Party. Both works maintained that the term 'zamindar' in Punjab applied to "all classes ranging from the few big landlords to the numerous tenants and agricultural labourers many of whom belong to the so called scheduled castes". These classes were considered to be overlapping one another. It was also claimed that "more than six lakhs of the smallest holders stood in the same position and had the same interests 42 as the owners of big estates". Finally, it was added:

These hard facts blur the distinction which certain economic theorists in the Punjab try to draw between the landowners and the tenants as if they were mutually exclusive classes or between the 'non-working land magnate' and the 'cultivating proprietor of a small holding'.

In rejecting all socio-economic differences within the category of zamindar Chhotu Ram and his colleagues were greatly helped by the Alienation of Land Act of 1900, which had proclaimed certain castes as 'statutory agriculturists'. The castes proclaimed as 'agriculturists' or 'zamindar castes', as they come to be known, were 'zamindars' by virtue of belonging to a 'zamindar caste'. For example, in the 'zamindar caste' of Jats, the zamindars were not only the actual landowners but also tenants of all kinds and even some agricultural labourers. The 1911 census of Punjab acknowledged that apart from conferring material advantages the act had in fact

41 Eighteen Months of Provincial Autonomy (Lahore 1939). Also extracts of it given in the editorial of Tribune, 12 Jan. 1939. Also Five Years of Provincial Autonomy (Lahore 1942).
42 Ibid., see Introduction.
given "dignity" to this class of agriculturists. Chhotu Ram's insistence on the word zamindar being an all embracing word was, therefore, a mere projection of the euphemism 'zamindar' as applied to the Punjab society through the legislative enactment of 1900. Playing upon the 'dignity' part of it, Chhotu Ram asked the tenants to reject the word 'kisan' as it was being applied to them by the Congress in favour of the word 'zamindar', for "kisan" in his opinion was "an inferior word and insulting in its connotations".

These varied categories of 'agriculturists' ranging from the non-working landed magnates to untouchables jumbled together under the heading of zamindar were, it was claimed, in return represented by the so called 'zamindar members' in the Council. However, a description of the true complexion of these members by Chhotu Ram himself contradicted the above claim. Regarding these members, Chhotu Ram had written in 1932:

A large portion of them are grantees of land, jagirdars, title-holders, honorary magistrates, sub-registrars, and zaildars, or candidates for government patronage and official favours.

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43 Census of India 1911, Punjab, XIV, prt. 1, Report, p. 428. Also see Annual Report on the Working of Alienation of Land Act Punjab, Act XIII of 1902, yr. 1902, pp. 4, 13. Being an agriculturist placed immense "social distinction" on people. Even the ICS recruits including those like B. Tyabji, a Muslim from Bombay, were categorised into agriculturists and non-agriculturists. It caused a great deal of resentment among those who did not fall in the former category. Badr-ud-Din Tyabji, Interview, 16 Aug. 1979.

44 "My Political Belief", an article by Chhotu Ram in JG, 17 July 1931, p. 2. The Congress on the other hand tried to expose the class divisions existing in the rural society of Punjab. The HT in this connection wrote that the attempt to make zamindars (landowners) out of kisans (tenants), was a "sly design" of Chhotu Ram and his partymen. The weekly posed the question: "How will the condition of kisans improve even if they are called zamindars as is being suggested by the Jat Gazette". HT, 18 April 1939, p. 3.

45 Chhotu Ram, op.cit., p. 17.
According to Chhotu Ram, "for men of this type opposition to the government of the day would in any country be a heresy", and "such men were necessarily conservative by nature". There is no reason to believe that such men did not continue to dominate the Unionist Party of the Provincial Autonomy established under the India Act of 1935. With this complexion of the zamindar representatives, Chhotu Ram rightly maintained in 1936 in his pamphlet, "Punjab Unionist Party - Rules and Regulations", that the basic policy of the Party at the provincial level could only be a policy of "close cooperation" with the government in all spheres of life and the adoption of constitutional means for attaining their declared goal of Dominion Status. This pamphlet was issued as the election manifesto of the Unionist Party in the same year with one significant change made by Fazl-i-Hussain who substituted the goal of "Dominion Status" by "complete independence".

This theoretical identity of goal, somewhat forced and superimposed, did not bring the Unionists closer to the Congress. Chhotu Ram and his partymen continued to adhere to his declared policy of 1932, i.e., cooperation with the British Government to subvert "the hot house growth of national independence". In following this policy the Unionists came to adopt an ideological programme and propaganda which was both a response and a reaction to the programme of the All India Congress. Fazl-i-Hussain in his

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., see hand written change made by Fazl-i-Hussain.
48 Ibid., see hand written change made by Fazl-i-Hussain.
49 Chhotu Ram, op.cit., p. 3.
foreword to the pamphlet 'National Unionist Party', written by Chhotu Ram in 1932, had acknowledged: "the programme of work was practically put into my hands by the Congress movement".

Chhotu Ram went one step further and claimed during the elections of 1937 that the Unionist Party was the "real Congress" in Punjab. For himself, he claimed the status of a Congressman. Explaining how all this transformation had taken place, Chhotu Ram declared in 1939:

I found out about the Congress when I was a member of it for four years, that it was only a party of greedy Banias who wanted to swallow the zamindars. So we established another Congress foundations of which were laid down by Sir Fazl-i-Hussain. We are the poor man's Congress in actuality.

At the more immediate and local level of his constituency, Chhotu Ram was compelled by circumstances to assume the role of a Congressman, during the years before 1937 when he was 'out of power' and was trying to create a strong political base for himself in Rohtak district. The Jat peasantry was moreover undergoing extreme economic distress because of the depression and the resulting drastic fall in the prices of agricultural products. Chhotu Ram could not hope to maintain his political influence unless he took up radical postures. In impersonating this role Chhotu Ram utilised the Jat Gazette and the Zamindar League to a great extent. Regarding this Zaman Mehd1 Khan, the Deputy Commissioner, wrote in this respect to CC Garbett, the Chief Secretary to Government of Punjab in September 1931:

I want to put you in possession of real facts. As you are aware there is little difference now between the Congress and the Zamindar League of Chowdhri Chhotu Ram.

50 Ibid.
52 JG, 4 Jan. 1939, pp. 1, 8.
53 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, DC Rohtak to Chief Secretary, Govt. of Punjab, 21 Sept. 1931.
His newspaper, Jat Gazette, is carrying on practically the same propaganda against the government as the Congress.

By 1933, the general remarks made by the district administration regarding the tone, etc., of the Jat Gazette read:

A paper of Rao Bahadur Chhotu Ram's party started with the object of uplifting the Jat community, but has since become a blind supporter of the party and attacks the government servants indiscriminately. It often exhibits pro-Congress tendencies.

The 'pro-Congress' activities of Chhotu Ram which gave him a radical image, created later a great deal of misunderstanding regarding his ideology. Immediately, it brought the wrath and aroused the suspicions of the district authorities. His activities and movements were kept under surveillance from the year 1931. Lincoln gave direct orders to the tehsildars in 1932 to quietly discourage the zamindars from helping or joining the Zamindar League of Chhotu Ram.

Plans to sue the secretary of the Zamindar League under Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code were however dropped. The Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak inquired in 1932 into the grounds of the land grant made to Chhotu Ram long time ago in 1919. In order to bring the Jat Gazette to its knees he also proposed to blacklist it with the government as well as with the regiments; the paper being mainly supported by the government advertisements and by the subscriptions supplied from regimental funds. The proposal was, however, for

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56 Ibid., Lincoln's interview with Chhotu Ram, 12 Jan. 1932.
57 Ibid., H.O. Notes, DC Rohtak, 3 April 1933, op.cit.
58 Ibid.
59 H.O. Notes, E.H. Lincoln, 22 Mar. 1934, op.cit. Also see above chapter II, pp. 48-49.
reasons unknown, not carried out. Another attempt was made in 1933 by the district officials to have the *Jat Gazette* prosecuted under sections 124-A and even 153-A of the Indian Penal Code; the attempt was however dropped later. Inundated with complaints from the district authorities, the Governor promised to have "Chhotu Ram on the mat". Lincoln recorded gleefully that the same had been effected. Yet the suspicions of the district authorities regarding Chhotu Ram's involvement in the Congress movement were to remain till as late as 1936 when great exception was taken to his contribution of Rs. 10/towards the Congress Jubilee Celebrations in December 1935. The *Harvāna Tilak*, on the other hand, ridiculed Chhotu Ram for this paltry contribution.

Chhotu Ram's propaganda work in the rural areas of Rohtak district was declared by the Deputy Commissioner in 1936 to be "communist" in nature. In fact, several of Chhotu Ram's articles appearing in the *Jat Gazette* could indeed be interpreted to show a similarity with the communist propaganda of the time and the utilisation of the same by Chhotu Ram. For example, the *Jat Gazette* quoted Ram Kishan, a member of the Nau-Jawan Sabha, and a proto-communist organisation, as having said at Rohtak in November 1929: "We do not want to exchange the rule of Kale Pānias with Gore Pānias. We want kisans and mazdoors to rule India." Chhotu Ram adopting the same

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60 Ibid.
61 CFDC Rohtak, F.No. 12/40, Lincoln to Mian Abdūl Aziz, 10 Nov. 1933.
63 Ibid.
66 CFDC Rohtak, F.No. 12/40, Lincoln to Mian Abdul Aziz, 10 Nov. 1933. Also HO Notes, Ghulam Mustafa, DC Rohtak (1936-39), 26 June 1939, op. cit.
67 FG, 27 Nov. 1929, p. 4.
slogan repeated it verbatim in 1938. Those of Chhotu Ram's articles which were considered "communist" in nature by the district authorities appeared mostly in 1933, and were addressed to the kisans. Several such articles under the heading of "Bechara Zamindar" (the unfortunate peasant) were written by Chhotu Ram in the Jat Gazette. The Deputy Commissioner felt that he was creating general dissatisfaction with regard to the payment of land revenue in the minds of agricultural classes. Chhotu Ram in these articles challenged the basic principle that government was the owner of land and stated:

Forgive me if I ask you how this land belonged to you and how are we your tenants.

In the opinion of the Deputy Commissioner, Chhotu Ram deliberately referred to the "inequities" in the land revenue law in order to create "disaffection in the minds of the zamindars". His greatest objection was to the following passages of the Jat Gazette:

No body can put off the revenue demand. It is like a messenger of death which must have its toll. There is the fear of attachment and sale. The property both moveable and immovable is in danger. There is an apprehension of arrest. There is the fear of the arrest of Lambardar. There is the fear of forfeiture.

Evidently, when the non-payment of a demand is full of such terrible consequences, it is much more unbearable than death itself. The demand is made without having regard to the produce. Remission is almost nil. Suspension is not a blessing but has often proved a

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68 JG, 23 Nov. 1938, p. 3. For a similar quotation of Chhotu Ram see above chapter VI, p. 206.
69 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 12/40, SP to DC Rohtak, 1933.
70 "Bechara Zamindar", JG, 28 June 1933; 12 July 1933; 19 July 1933; 26 July 1933; 9 Aug. 1933. Also see, "Zamindar Ko Nei Zahinat Ki Zaroorat Hai" (the need for a new mentality for the zamindar) in JG, 30 Aug. 1933. Also, reference to these articles is made in HO Notes, M.R. Sachdev, 20 Oct. 1933, op. cit.
71 Ibid.
72 "Bechara Zamindar", JG, 19 July 1933, p. 3.
73 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 12/40, p. 3.
74 Ibid., pp. 3-4. For details see "Bechara Zamindar", an article by Chhotu Ram in JG, 28 May 1933, pp. 3-4.
curse for in Barani land the crops are average once in three years. For these reasons the land revenue has been the chief source of the indebtedness and the ruin of the zamindar.

In the 9 August 1933 issue of the Jat Gazette, Chhotu Ram argued that the government was not going to grant any redress to the zamindars and that it was only interested in providing relief to the non-zamindars and the urban population. In conclusion, Chhotu Ram went on to say:

The zamindar should take to action and should find out some way to get rid of his present trouble. There is only one solution and that is that the zamindar must take to action with full devotion and give preference to the work of organisation over everything else.

Chhotu Ram's appeals for large scale exemptions of land revenue because of "sorry plight" of the landowners were however not accompanied by a corresponding demand on behalf of the tenants for the lowering of rents, although their (i.e., tenants') 'sorry plight' had obviously come in handy in his writings. Other articles of Chhotu Ram, considered "most objectionable" by the district authorities, appeared in the Jat Gazette and other newspapers mostly between 1931 to 1933. Here, it must also be noted that while he was writing such

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75 Ibid. Also JC, 9 Aug. 1933, pp. 3-4.
76 Newspaper cuttings of Chhotu Ram's "most objectionable" work were collected in the district office Rohtak. Along with the cuttings a resume of "the most objectionable" articles was given as follows: (a) Tribune, 1931: "Chhotu Ram's statement to the press as the leader of the rural Unionist Party answering the question, whether Congress is dead or alive, appeared under the heading, 'Is Congress Moribund?' Chhotu Ram declared Congress 'a dynamic force which was tightening its hold everywhere'.
(b) Tribune, 1931: 'Congress and the Rural Areas', an article by Chhotu Ram applauding the Congress work at the national level.
(c) JC, 20 Jan. 1931: "Two newspaper cuttings describing the non-payment of taxes as the strongest weapon in the hands of the Congress". (d) JC, 2 Mar. 1931: "Two articles, one against British rule in India showing corruption in the government and second criticising the repressive policy of the government of

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'objectionable' articles, he was also severely criticising the Congress movement for civil disobedience through his writings and speeches.

According to the district officials the sole aim of these articles was to arouse the zamindars by telling them that the government was pursuing an anti-zamindar policy and to incite them to action. The Deputy Commissioner was in particular worried by the fact that several schools of the district contributed to the paper. He called attention to the alarming headlines in the Jat Gazette dated 26 July and 30 August 1933 which exhorted the readers of the Jat Gazette to read out these articles to their "illiterate brothers".

"cutting the vein but not applying the balm!". (e) JG, 10 Aug. 1931: "Congress Movement and the Government", indicating that government will have to abandon its present policy of repression even though the Congress movement was dead". (f) JG, 10 Aug. 1932: "Communal Bitterness in Punjab". (g) JG, 7 Oct. 1931: "Withholding of Land Revenue in Punjab due to Debt and Economic difficulties of the Cultivators". (h) JG, 4 Nov. 1931: "Attack on the Police", also another article, 'Government and the Zamindars', indicating how government alone is responsible for the sorry plight of the zamindar and if it wants to improve the lot of the zamindar it must revise its unjust revenue policy which was opposed to the principles of revenue assessment in force in other civilised countries". (i) JG, 31 Aug. 1932: "The communal Award has kindled the Fire of Communalism". (j) Tribune, 25 Nov. 1932: "Chhotu Ram called the Congress 'a dynamic force' and the Congress movement despite repressive roller of the British Bureaucracy still not dead; said, Congress enjoys far greater prestige among people than its comple critics are disposed to concede". (k) JG. 15 Feb. 1933: "The Bharatpur State and the Jats", criticised British Resident of Bharatpur Council is not respecting Jat sentiments in celebrating the birth anniversary of the Maharaja Suraj Mal on Basant day. Situation may lead to Jat Jathas. British administration warned not to force the hands of the Jats in taking up Satyagraha".


77 See above chapter II, pp. 145-46 ; chapter VI, pp. 190-1, 200, 206:
78 Cf. CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 12/40, p. 7.
79 Ibid., p. 6.
The effect of these articles was declared to be "pernicious" on the minds of the readers "who were mostly Jats of Rohtak district". The Superintendent of Police was similarly concerned about the "objectionable articles" addressed to kisans in the Jat Gazette which would find their way into schools where their contents would be imbibed by the students.

Similar propaganda was carried on by Chhotu Ram through the Zamindar League. The confidential fortnightly report of the Punjab Government for April 1931 pointed out that the more or less constitutional Zamindar League of Chhotu Ram has been swallowed up by the far more extreme Zamindar Sabha although the old name had been retained. The Deputy Commissioner felt that Chhotu Ram was responsible for making the Zamindar League more and more like the Congress. Although the Zamindar League was founded in 1924, it became active only in 1928; by the thirties, it had started to propagate that the zamindars were under a much greater burden of taxation than the townsmen. Lincoln maintained that the Zamindar League propaganda was preparing the "soil for the Congress", and that in the matter of non-payment of taxes there was little to distinguish between what the Congress and the Zamindar League was preaching. The secret official communications repeatedly asserted that the propaganda of the Zamindar League was little removed from the Congress propaganda. For instance it had become a common feature of the day for the Zamindar League to hold "monstrous meetings" all over Rohtak.

80 Ibid.
81 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 14/40, SP to M.R. Sachdev, 4 Sept. 1933.
82 GI : Home Poll, F. No. 18/IV/31, April 1931.
83 HO Notes, E.H. Lincoln, 4 April 1933, op. cit.
84 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, Lincoln's interview with Chhotu Ram, 19 Nov. 1931.
85 Ibid., Lincoln's interview with Chhotu Ram, 4 Jan. 1932.
86 Ibid.
and discuss openly the "alarming and starving condition and distress of zamindars owing to the failure of crops". The speakers described the "pitiable" and "miserable" condition of the zamindars in such a way that the rural audience was reported to have been "moved to tears". All these Zamindar League functions ended up by passing several resolutions for exemption of zamindars' dues to the government. Apart from this, a certain confusion regarding Chhotu Ram's activities through the Zamindar League also arose because similar bodies with identical names, like the Zamindar League of central Punjab, were close to communism.

The propaganda of Chhotu Ram through press and platform dubbed as 'communist' by the district officials would seem to indicate a development in his ideology to accommodate the tenants' demands along with those of the landowners. A reading of his articles written during years of economic depression has led not only his contemporaries but even later writers to hold up Chhotu Ram as the upholder of the downtrodden and the weak. This changed ideology also seemed to justify Chhotu Ram's claims to be the representative of all 'zamindars', i.e., from landowning cultivators, tenants and agricultural labourers, to big landowners, landlords, and...

87 IOR:F/12071/1935, F. No. 92/51/100/1, pp. 6-7.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 GI: Home Poll, 18/IV/31, April 1931; 18/9/32, June 1932; 18/7/33, June 1933; 18/2/34, June 1934.
91 For the opinion of Chhotu Ram's contemporaries that Chhotu Ram was the champion of have-nots, see Tika Ram, Sir Chhotu Ram: Apostle of Hindu Muslim Unity (n.d.), pp. 73-91. For a similar but recent opinion, see Raghbir Shastri, Chowdhri Chhotu Ram, Jeevan Charitra (Hindi) (Delhi 1965); Madan Gopal, Sir Chhotu Ram: a political biography (New Delhi 1977); H.L. Agnihotri and S.N. Malik, A Profile of Courage - A Biography of Chhotu Ram (New Delhi 1978); and Y.P. Bajaj, "Chowdhry Chhotu Ram and his Work", Ph.D. thesis (Kurukshetra University 1972).
landed magnates. But we have to answer the question: Why did these changed ideas not become a permanent part of his ideology, were given up completely later, and why were they projected only during a certain period? After projecting near communistic propaganda, why did Chhotu Ram attempt in 1937 to fight the election from landlords' constituency? The continued support of Chhotu Ram by the landowning classes from among the rest of the agricultural classes in Rohtak district casts doubts on the fact of any real change in his ideology; for the landowning classes not only offered the greatest opposition to the Congress programme in Punjab but also stood against the interests of agricultural labourers and small tenants. The allegation of the district administrators about Chhotu Ram being an "advanced Congressman" is so obviously prejudiced that it has to be discounted. Yet the reasons behind the projection of a different ideology by Chhotu Ram during certain specific years have to be explained.

These reasons can be traced both in the general condition prevailing in Punjab as also in the specific conditions found at the local level in Rohtak district. The period between 1916 and 1927 was a period of high agricultural prices in Punjab. The crash came in 1929-30. The enormous fall in the price of agricultural commodities in the post 1929-30 period brought the average landowner of Punjab to the brink of bankruptcy by 1931. With this came the declaration of civil disobedience movement by the Congress resulting in political panic among the British authorities. In 1930s, Sri Ram Sharma and Ram Phul, both Congress leaders, were publicly preaching in Rohtak district the start of the civil disobedience and non-payment

92 GI: Home Poll, F. No. 18/IV/30, Mar. 1930.
93 For details see below chapter IX, pp. 309-11.
of taxes movement. They were openly accusing the British officials of "looting the zamindars to fill the government treasury". Punjab was inundated with Congress hand-bills and pamphlets telling the kisans of Punjab "Lagaan Mat do" (not to pay land revenue) on account of economic depression and general apathy of the government towards them during this time. The propaganda of the Congress fell on very favourable ground created by extremely low prices. The Congress stood ready to cash-in on the economic discontent specially among the lower sections of the Punjab rural society. Rohtak district was also witnessing the growing popularity of the Congress and rapid recruitment into its ranks particularly from among the 'Jat zamindars'. In November 1931, Zaman Mehdi Khan wrote:

There is no doubt that the Congress is very strong in this district and the party of Rao Bahadur Chowdhri Chhotu Ram M.L.C., a leader of the Jats in this district, is in active sympathy with it. A large number of Jat zamindars were convicted for various political offences last year and even now a majority of the Congress volunteers come from this community.

The reason for Chhotu Ram's sympathy with the Congress at this time emerge clear. Chhotu Ram was faced with the rapid growth of the

94 TOR/L/P & J/7/2008/1930, F. No. 283.
95 Ibid.
96 The activities of the Congress in this connection specially in regard to the rent demand made on the tenants during an economically depressed period may be seen in the Proscribed Literature Punjab (1930-35), NAI, DOL&R, and EM. For example, "Prantiya Congress Committee Ka Kisanon Ko: Lagan Ka Ek Paisa Na Do" (n.d.), "Jwala Mukhi Mein Dabi Hui Aag" (1930), "Prantiya Congress Committee Ka Kisanon Ko Adesh: Lagan Ka Ek Paisa Na Do" (1932); "Zulmi Sarkar" (1934); "Mazdoor Kisan" (1935); "Lagan Band Ker Do" by Prantiya Congress Committee (n.d.); "Congress Committee Ka Elan: Lagan Bandi ka Elan" (n.d.).
97 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, DC to Lt. Col. T.M. Carpendale, 3 Nov. 1931. For 'Jat following' of the Congress in Rohtak district see above chapter VI.
Congress among 'Jats', i.e., the Jat tenants and petty owners of land. He realised the attraction of Congress propaganda to these classes of Jats and he privately acknowledged to the Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak that a programme similar to that of the Congress had become necessary in order to cut into the strength of the Congress.

At a time when the attempt of the Congress was concentrated in setting up a parallel government in the "home of Hindu Jats", i.e., Rohtak district, Chhotu Ram was obviously hard put to appease the young rebels in his own party who, he claimed, were getting "impatient" and who wanted to work with the Congress so long as the Congress did not harm "their interests". The younger men also considered the Jat Gazette to be "unnecessarily pro-government". The other local paper, the Haryana Tilak, on the other hand, was active in exposing the hollow pretentions of Chhotu Ram by a non-stop attack on his professed ideology. It concentrated on showing that different classes and strata existed among the so-called zamindars of the Haryana region and alleged that Chhotu Ram and his party were spokesmen of the big zamindars only. In return, the Haryana Tilak put forward the claim of being the representative of the interests of the kisans of this region. In the face of this attack, Chhotu

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98 Ibid., Lincoln's interview with Chhotu Ram, 12 Jan. 1932.
100 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, Lincoln's interview with Chhotu Ram, 12 Jan. 1932.
102 HT, 23 Oct. 1928, p. 3; 20 Nov. 1928, p. 3; 15 Oct. 1929, p. 9; 5 Sept. 1933, p. 3; 12 Sept. 1933, p. 5; 19 Sept. 1933, p. 3; 17 Oct. 1933, p. 3; 7 Nov. 1933, p. 5; 17 July 1934, p. 3; 28 Aug. 1934, p. 3; 1 April 1937, p. 8; 1 July 1938, p. 8; 14 June 1938, p. 3; 29 Sept. 1938, p. 6; 17 Jan. 1940, p. 2; 24 Jan. 1940, p. 4; 14 Feb. 1940, p. 2; 8 May 1940, p. 1.
103 Ibid.
Ram's partial adoption of the Congress programme was necessarily an attempt to establish his bona fides regarding his claim to represent all zamindars, from landowners to tenants of all kinds. Thus, knowing the attraction of the Congress propaganda in the rural areas of Rohtak district, Chhotu Ram tried to put forward a similar programme himself. When assailed by the district officials for such attempts made through the Zamindar League, Chhotu Ram told them in private:

> It is necessary for the League to organise the zamindars, otherwise the Congress would organise the zamindars for its own purpose.

Clearly an alternative to the Congress had to be offered to the smaller landowners and tenants of Rohtak district who were being mobilised by the Congress on the slogans of opposition to heavy taxes and the non-payment of taxes. Chhotu Ram explained to the Deputy Commissioner that criticism of heavy taxation and demand for their revision or scaling down had to be incorporated even in his own election campaign. About the Zamindar League, Chhotu Ram clearly told the Deputy Commissioner:

> Unless the League kept on working it could not take action against the Congress in time of need, as the people would say that it only came out at the bidding of government.

As an assurance to the district officials, Chhotu Ram pointed to his own conservatism behind the projection of radical demands by insisting in private that the pace of reforms demanded was to be the slowest and that the zamindar could not hope to get anything they

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104 CfDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, Lincoln's interview with Chhotu Ram, 19 Nov. 1931.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
were out for even in twenty years. About the Zamindar League also, he gave assurance that during his life time it would never pass into bodies like the Zamindar Sabha and the Kirti Kisan Sabha of the central Punjab. By 1943, with the latter two bodies becoming stronger, he dropped the Zamindar League of Rohtak in favour of the Jat Sabha.

The fact that Chhotu Ram was not with the Congress as was alleged by the district authorities of Rohtak is also obvious from his anti-Congress work which he was zealously pursuing at the same time as his 'pro-Congress' work. This was brought to the notice of the district officials by Chhotu Ram himself from time to time. In carrying out simultaneously two contradictory lines through the Jat Gazette and the Zamindar League, i.e., condemning the civil disobedience movement of the Congress and trying to woo the potential Congress recruits by adopting an approach similar to that of the Congress, Chhotu Ram had made himself a persona non grata with the district authorities. But his contradictory stand of Chhotu Ram was understood somewhat better by the officials by late 1933, when Lincoln wrote in his handing over notes:

I think there is a great deal of bluff in Rao Bahadur Chhotu Ram. In his heart of hearts he probably thinks it best to keep clear of Congress and not risk his skin

107 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, Lincoln's interview with Chhotu Ram, 4 Jan. 1932.
108 Ibid.
111 For Chhotu Ram's anti-Congress work, see above chapter II, pp. 45-46; chapter VI, pp.186-213.
112 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, C.C.Garbett to Lincoln, 19 Jan. 1932. All issues of the HT comment on the anti-Congress and anti-kisan work of Chhotu Ram.
113 HO Notes, E.H.Lincoln, 4 April 1933, op.cit.
114 Ibid.
but he and his lieutenant Tika Ram do not fail to take advantage of Congress for their own ends, a lot of sword rattling I should call it.

However, the fact that the lower class voters of Rohtak district needed a different kind of approach was realised not only by Chhotu Ram but also acknowledged by the Governor. Emerson in his letter of 21 January 1937 to the Viceroy wrote the following in regard to the Hindu and Sikh constituencies:

I was told that with many of the smaller voters there was a definite prejudice against any one who could be described as pro-government.

Thus the necessity for weaning of the "smaller voter" away from the Congress had clearly emerged by the time of the Punjab Assembly elections. That is why Chhotu Ram had felt that a different ideological approach was necessary through the Jat Gazette and the Zamindar League. The British officials, on the other hand, knowing fully well the dangers of an "aroused consciousness" among the zamindars because of the intensive anti-government propaganda of Chhotu Ram, put pressure upon him to moderate his demagogical activity among them. According to Chaudhri Ghulam Mustafa, Chhotu Ram started to behave himself from 1934 onwards as he was effectively pulled up by the Governor.

Effective stoppage under official pressure and prodding of Chhotu Ram's propagation of a different, more radical ideology to suit the lower class voters of Rohtak also explains his desire to change his constituency and fight election from the landlords constituency in the elections of 1937. The ultimate appeal of Chhotu

116 HO Notes, DC Rohtak, 26 June 1936, op.cit.
Ram remained confined to his traditional supporters with majority of them belonging to the landholding classes. That is why even in the course of the election campaign he highlighted the following approach:

To promote the interests of the masses without undue encroachment on the interests of the capitalists, big landholders and moneyed people.

That the more radical ideological approach to the petty landowners and the tenants, etc., remained confined to paper is also clear, apart from other factors, from the agrarian policy adopted by the Unionist Party in the late thirties. The fact that Chhotu Ram was the main driving force behind the agrarian legislation, which proved 'golden' for the bigger landowners only, clearly discounts any serious or genuine commitment of Chhotu Ram to a radical ideological approach during 1931-33.

Further, though much to the annoyance of the highest British officials, Chhotu Ram's advice to the landowners of Punjab to withhold their produce from the market in order to get the "maximum price" during the World War II also clearly points to the class of landowners who were being supported by him in reality. This act of Chhotu Ram was for once frankly and truthfully condemned by the Viceroy as "ruthless political opportunism" and an "unholy bid for his own popularity". This condemnation of Chhotu Ram, however, surfaced only when the British interests and the overriding call of war along with the general food situation in India and Europe came in direct conflict with the interests of the better off and substantial landowners who were so ably represented by Chhotu Ram.

117 FLAD, I, 2 July 1937, p. 947, see Chhotu Ram's speech.
118 For the agrarian legislation see below chapter IX, pp. 372-5.
119 For details of the food controversy see above chapter VII, pp. 252-4.
120 Linlithgow Coll, 92; Linlithgow to Glancy, 13 June 1943, and 19 June 1943.
in the Punjab Assembly. Also, Chhotu Ram's support to the continuation of the 'Batai' system in Punjab exposed that his sympathy lay primarily with the upper stratum of landowners. In Rohtak, where most of the land was Barani, the Batai system prevailed extensively. Under this system rent was paid in kind; landlord's share equalled half the produce of the soil; the landlord did not share in any of the expenses of cultivation or provide the plough or cattle. Chhotu Ram declared Batai to be a system which was conducive to a "happy relationship between the zamindar and the kisan, both sharing equally during good and bad crops". He actually espoused the Batai system and declared that it was superior to the cash rent system prevalent in other regions and provinces. In reality, the Batai system was notorious for being beneficial to the landlords only. In 1926, the Punjab Government inquiry into the Batai system in Lyallpur district had revealed that the landlord took 80 percent of the net produce and not half as was generally believed.

Another matter which greatly contributed to the confusion regarding the ideological commitment of Chhotu Ram was his advocacy, during 1927 to 1935, of the application of the principle of income-tax to land revenue. However, he actively opposed this principle from 1940 onwards, and advocated its replacement by the Peasant Welfare Fund. On 22 February 1928, Chhotu Ram moved a resolution in the Punjab Council asking for the application of the principle of

121 Board of Eco. Inq., Punjab Village Surveys; village Gijhi in Rohtak dist. (Lahore 1932), p. 190.
123 Jg, 12 July 1939, see Chhotu Ram's article on the Batai system, pp. 7-9.
124 Ibid.
125 Board of Eco. Inq., Some Aspects of Batai Cultivation in the Lyallpur dist. of Punjab (Lyallpur 1926), p. 7 and statement IX.
income-tax to the assessment of land revenue leading to the exemption of owners of small holdings altogether or scaling down the revenue demand on them to an appreciable extent. The official majority declared the proposal to be "revolutionary" and "politically inexpedient" and combined with the non-agriculturists and Fazl-i-Hussain to defeat the move. The resolution was lost by 14 votes, there being 20 Ayes and 34 Noes.

This was a demand that was to be turned into a battle-cry by the Congress and the other leftist forces in Punjab. Since this demand was extremely unfavourable to the big landowners and was also anti-government, Chhotu Ram's support to it made him appear a radical or even a revolutionary, and definitely an upholder of the rights of the petty landowners. Interestingly, in the contemporary press except for Chhotu Ram the rest of the 'zamindar members' stood condemned as false sympathisers of 'zamindars'. Lajpat Rai's weekly, The People, wrote: "Hollow pretentions of the Rural Party to ask for justice to the small peasant proprietor stood exposed by its opposition to Chhotu Ram's resolution". The Tribune wrote: "Chhotu Ram's resolution furnished a test of the sincerity of zamindar members". It declared the resolution to be the "touch stone of the much-wonted affection which the Government and non-official members of the house

126 PLCD, XI, 22 Feb. 1928, pp. 79-89; 23 Feb. 1928, pp. 89, 115, 126-30. For the propagation of this principle before it was introduced in the Punjab Council, see Appendix I, II, III.
127 For the list of names see PLCD, XI, 22 Feb. 1928, pp. 129-30.
129 The People, VI, no. 9, 1 Mar. 1929, p. 131.
professed for the poor zamindars". Chhotu Ram alone came out successful in this test of the sincerity and affection which many professed for the petty landowners. In fact Chhotu Ram's arch enemy, the Haryana Tilak, also complimented him on his stand and requested him to forsake the so called zamindar party because all pretensions of this party stood exposed.

The Jat Gazette, even 10 years after the proposal was mooted, continued to remind its readers of the "generosity" of Chhotu Ram in bringing forward this proposal. It often quoted outside acclaim which the other newspapers accorded to Chhotu Ram in this connection.

One such article taken from the newspaper Naresh of January 1937 read:

Chhotu Ram, a big landlord and a big zamindar of the Unionist Party, had proposed in the Punjab Council that the land revenue should be charged on the income-tax principles. If it had been passed the small zamindars would have been relieved of the land revenue demand and the burden would have shifted to the big zamindars. Chhotu Ram also proposed total exemption of those who paid Rs. 5/- as land revenue. The Unionist Party alone shows that big zamindars are willing to even harm themselves for the benefit of small zamindars.

In this controversy Chhotu Ram had clearly emerged as the champion of the smaller peasant proprietors. This feeling was never allowed to die down by Chhotu Ram who propagated it through the press, in his public speeches, and in the debates of the Punjab Council. He also

131 Ibid.
132 HT, 6 Mar. 1928, p. 6. Also see editorial, "The Reality of the zamindar party", 13 Mar. 1928, p. 3.
blatantly accused the opposition of the "non-Party Hindu politician fraternity" in the Council for defeating his attempts in this direction.

Why was Chhotu Ram foremost in voicing a demand which stood to affect his chief supporters? Once again, it may be noted that this demand was the most popular demand of the day. It was made popular by the constant attacks of the Congress on the land revenue system. The often repeated claim, voiced by local Congressmen of Rohtak district, that under Swaraj the poor farmers would not be required to pay any land revenue had to be somehow countered. Chhotu Ram's proposal in the Council was therefore a step in the direction of taking the wind out of the Congress sails. It was so effective that even the nationalist press could not deny him credit on this score. But despite all this praise of the 'principle' behind Chhotu Ram's proposal of 1928, it remained in his own eyes a "goal" to be reached within the next forty years. In his oral evidence to the Indian Statutory Commission Chhotu Ram reasserted that it was merely an "ideal" to be worked out in the course of the next forty years. Starting from 1928, the achievement of the goal was visualised only in 1968! This was the revolution which Chhotu Ram wanted to accomplish. It may also be noted that the proposal was never visualised by Chhotu Ram as being against the interests of the big

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137 GL: Home Poll, F. No. 18/X/31, Oct. 1931. See speech of Lala Shyam Lal (Congress) in Rohtak.
140 Except for the weekly The People, 1 Mar. 1928, VI, No. 9, p. 131, no other paper, including the HT or the Tribune, commented on this lengthy period of 40 years. They merely commented on and applauded the principle behind it.
landowners as understood at the time. Regarding this he had said 141
in the Council:

My resolution does not propose that the burden of land revenue would be shifted from the shoulders of smallest holders to those of the landlords.

Yet both these aspects were ignored by the popular press which 142 continued to harp on the principle of the proposal, thereby giving Chhotu Ram a handle to project his own image as the upholder of the rights of the smallest of landowners. In any case, Chhotu Ram started to oppose this principle in 1940. In that year, Chhotu Ram interestingly revealed to the Assembly that he had raised the cry for the assimilation of the principle of assessment of land revenue to the principle of assessment of income-tax in the hope that the government might, in order to avert this "threat", agree to make other "reasonable concessions" to the zamindars.

The situation changed under the Provincial Autonomy. The Unionists formed the ministry and the demand for the application of Chhotu Ram's proposal was pressed from all quarters specially the 144 Congress and the Communists. In view of this, a land Revenue Committee was set up immediately on 24 June 1937 to examine it and 145 its underlying principle. Chhotu Ram, who had never been serious about his own proposal and knew that under the system of Provincial Autonomy instead of the British Government he himself would be the special target of attack for having projected the demand for so long, took a quick somersault in 1940. He opposed Sri Ram Sharma's

142 Even a newspaper like the Tribune criticised the government and non-official members for professing to stand for 'poor zamindars'. The attack was clearly reserved for the government and non-officials only. Tribune, 24 Feb. 1928, pp. 2, 10.
143 PLAD, XII, 4 Mar. 1940, p. 47.
144 Linlithgow Coll, 112: Emerson to Linlithgow, 22 May 1937.
145 Ibid.
amendment to the Land Revenue Bill on 7-8 January 1940 which had asked for the exemption of land revenue of small landowners and self-cultivators. From then onwards, Chhotu Ram started to openly criticise what he had earlier espoused. Interestingly, he offered the same arguments against the proposal which had been put up by the official group in rejecting the demand in the Council of 1928. Chhotu Ram advocated 'un practicability'/making an assessment on this principle as one of the arguments. Similarly, he agreed that the "illiterate cultivators" would not be able to maintain their accounts. Another official argument which had been advanced and which he now took up was that it would lead to the fragmentation of landholdings by owners who would sub-divide their holdings in order to avoid the application of the income-tax provisions. The need of the hour in 1940, he maintained, was consolidation and not fragmentation of the land holdings. In the opinion of Haryana Tilak, the change of front by Chhotu Ram and others of his party in 1940 was because the real purpose of taking up the cry of income-tax principle for land revenue purposes and exemption of small landowners from land revenue had been achieved. The purpose being to get the support of these classes during the elections of 1937.

Having changed front, Chhotu Ram at once accepted the recommendations of the Land Revenue Committee of 1938 to establish

147 FLAD, XII, 4 Mar. 1940, p. 47. This argument had been advocated both by H.W. Emerson, the then Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Punjab and also Fazl-i-Hussain in 1928. FLCD, XI, 22 Feb. 1928, pp. 79-89 and 23 Feb. 1928, pp. 89-130.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid. Also XVIII, 12 Jan. 1942, pp. 514-23; XXII, 7 Mar. 1944, p. 405. This argument was advocated by Sayad Mohammad 1928, pp. 2, 9; The Report of Land Revenue Committee 1938, also held the same opinion.
150 HT, 8 May 1940, p. 1.
a small scale development fund. This recommendation was given a practical shape in the form of "Peasant Welfare Fund" launched in 1942 by Chhotu Ram himself with an initial contribution of Rs. 30 lakhs. The Fund was to receive Rs. 10 lakhs a year out of the land revenue receipts from small holders and was to be utilised for rural development. Chhotu Ram's 'radical proposal,' 'revolutionary' in principle, was quickly exchanged for a project in which relief in land revenue to the small owners found no place. Only Chhotu Ram publicly pledged that this fund would be utilised for giving relief to the small landowner in times of scarcity. In fact the items on which the fund was to be spent bore not even the remotest relation to the problem of land revenue demand in Punjab. Curiously, this was the outcome when Chhotu Ram was the Chairman of the Committee of 14 members which decided on the utilisation of this fund.

154 The proposal of Chhotu Ram for spending "Peasant Development Fund" was:
1) Rs. 10 to 15 lakhs for scholarships to the children of agriculturists paying a land revenue of not more than Rs. 25/.
2) Rs. 5 lakhs for promotion of rural and cottage industries.
3) Rs. 5 lakhs for grant of special relief to the agriculturists who could not be included under the then existing rules of the government.
4) Rs. 5 lakhs for building roads linking villages with the highways.
5) Rs. 5 lakhs for supply of drinking water and reafforestation.
6) Rs. 15 lakhs for opening of cooperative shops for the sale of agricultural produce and supply of agricultural needs. This was declared to be for both the 'poor agriculturists' and the 'bigger landowners' who could join the cooperative shops by paying a certain amount of money.
Apart from land revenue on income-tax principle, Chhotu Ram had also demanded lessening of the rate of land revenue. This demand for substantial relief to the small holder was also born out of political necessity. But since the officials frowned upon it and did not consider it necessary, Chhotu Ram gave it up after 1937. The plea he made this time was the need to carry on 'constructive work' which would be hampered by any such relief. He accepted in return the proposal for assessing land revenue on a sliding scale made by the British officials. Although the sliding scale of land revenue was subject to a maximum and not to a minimum the British officials themselves realised that in practice the proposal stood to benefit the government by securing for it the benefit of high prices; for in the wake of economic depression and natural calamities coupled with tense political situation, suspension and even remissions had, in any case, to be granted. Even the official report on land revenue had commented adversely on the perpetual operation of the land revenue system by way of remissions. Emerson openly and proudly claimed that the sliding scale introduced in the land revenue system one element found in the assessment of income-tax, viz., assessment would be approximately in accordance with current

158 Ibid., Emerson to Linlithgow, 22 May 1937.
159 Ibid.
160 PLAD, XIV, 6 Dec. 1940, p. 856; XII, 27 Jan. 1941, p. 962; XIX, 10 Mar. 1938, p. 47.
profits. The system, interestingly, left out the other half of the income-tax principle which would have meant exemption of land revenue on certain small payers altogether. In practical working it was found that a rise in land revenue demand was almost invariably shifted on to the shoulders of the subordinate cultivators by the bigger landowners who had surplus to sell and who were the chief beneficiaries of the rise in prices. This was evident in the application of the sliding scale to the Lyallpur district which led to the kisan movement of 1939-40.

Thus, to sum up in this aspect, on all the questions regarding land revenue Chhotu Ram showed himself in reality to be contrary to the image he was projecting. His advocacy of certain principles regarding land revenue, etc., remained clearly at the level of propaganda. Though he partially succeeded in his attempts at creating in the popular mind a different image of himself and of the interests he stood for, in reality his policy, initially moulded in response to the Congress, continued to be guided by the dictates of British Raj, and the interests of the larger landowners, and remained essentially conservative.

One last aspect of Chhotu Ram's political and ideological stance, mainly during the years 1930-1936, moulded in response to his personal relations with the district officials and its reflection in his questions in the Council and in the columns of the Jat Gazette, remains to be discussed. Almost all the issues of the Jat Gazette

till 1936 carry news items and special articles written by Chhotu Ram strongly criticising the district officials, which the district officials as well as the people took as direct criticism of the government itself. For example, the district officials took strong exception to 23 articles serialised under the heading "Bazar Thagi Ki Sair" (a ramble through the Thagi market), in which the government was attacked for corruption in various departments. Another article termed "very objectionable" by the officials was titled "Mr. Lincoln Phir Tashrif La Rahe Hain" (Mr. Lincoln is coming again). Zaman Mehdi Khan, the Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak in 1931, wrote to the Chief Secretary, Government of Punjab, that Chhotu Ram had criticised him greatly in the Jat Gazette and had also prepared a memorandum demanding his transfer knowing that his transfer from Rohtak had already been sanctioned. According to him, Chhotu Ram's object was "to impose upon the ignorant people and to show them that he, i.e., Chhotu Ram could get even the Deputy Commissioner transferred". Lincoln also had opined earlier that the Jat Gazette followed the policy of "attacking all outgoing officers". The reason in the Deputy Commissioner's opinion was to show that he (Chhotu Ram) had access to the highest provincial officials and could get them to take action against the local administrators. Chhotu Ram's intentions behind these attacks were also

166 Beginning from 4 April 1933 JG carried 23 articles in a serial form titled "Bazar Thagi Ki Sair". For objections to it see CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 12/40, DC Rohtak to Comm. Ambala Div., 16 Sept. 1933.
168 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 11/39, DO from DC Rohtak, 21 Sept. 1931.
169 Ibid.
170 Ibid., Lincoln's interview with Chhotu Ram, 4 Jan. 1932.
171 Ibid.
interpreted as "Sambhaloing" ("taking care of") the in-coming officer.

Because of his criticism many of the district officials turned so much against Chhotu Ram that they refused in 1933 to remove the punitive police imposed on Rohtak in 1930 on account of dacoities even when they themselves agreed that there was no longer any need for its continuation. The reason was that Chhotu Ram had been writing a great deal against the punitive police in the Jat Gazette and demanding its removal. Thus the Superintendent of Police wrote to the Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak in 1935 against its withdrawal before the originally proclaimed period because that would give the impression to the public that Chhotu Ram had been able to get the punitive police removed despite the opposition of the district officials who would then lose all prestige. The Deputy Commissioner, agreeing with the Superintendent of Police, added:

Impression will go around that concession is the outcome more of the representation and influence of Chowdhri Chhotu Ram who was able to show how unjust the government action has been than the conviction that the circumstances of the case justified the curtailment of the period.

Several complaints were also made of Chhotu Ram's general "misbehaviour" and "bullying attitude" towards police by the district officials. Chhotu Ram openly referred to the police during the

172 Ibid., DO from DC Rohtak, 1 Mar. 1933.
173 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 10/38.
175 Ibid., SP to DC Rohtak, 14 April 1935.
176 Ibid., DO No. 149-57 from DC Rohtak to Comm. Ambala Div. (n.d.).
court cases as "expert liars". In one case, the Additional District Magistrate complained that Chhotu Ram had made a most unwarranted remark in the court by saying: "Agar Police ka yahi hal Raha to is Government ka takhta ult jayega" (if the police continues this way, the government of the day would be toppled). Chhotu Ram's frequent and public attacks on the police were particularly resented, as an attack on the police was considered a "natural attack" on the government itself.

Chhotu Ram also spoke very openly against the judicial system introduced and operated by the British administrators in India. He repeatedly and publicly asserted that it worked in favour of the "educated urban class" against the "illiterate zamindars". Chhotu Ram's comment on his own wholesale condemnation of the judiciary was that he had begun to speak in the "strain of Mahatma Gandhi". In the opinion of the Deputy Commissioner, the reason behind the severe condemnation of judiciary was the attempt of Chhotu Ram, also a practising lawyer, to obtain "ascendancy over the magistrate". According to him Chhotu Ram succeeded in getting his own way where there were "timid" magistrates.

178 Ibid. Above remark was made in the court of Mr. Ratan Singh, case No. 98/2 under Section 397 IPC and also in the Garhi-Sampla Police Assault case. These and other instances of Chhotu Ram's 'misbehaviour' were recorded on 21 Oct. 1932.

179 Ibid., ADM to DC Rohtak, 18 Oct. 1932.


181 JG, 5 Jan. 1921, p. 7; 14 Mar. 1923, p. 4; 16 Sept. 1931, pp. 4-5. Also see letters of Chhotu Ram to Harcourt in H. Harcourt, op. cit., pp. 7-16. Also below Chapter IX, p.

182 Chhotu Ram to Harcourt, 13 April 1924, in H. Harcourt, op. cit., p. 13. Confidential

183 CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 9/37; /3. circular of DC Rohtak, to all DMs, 27 Oct. 1932.

184 Ibid.
series of questions, what he turned as "questions of public interests", regarding the nature and amount of work done by certain magistrates, number of acquittals and discharges, number of police stations inspected by the Superintendent of Police, and so on. The Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak believed that the motive behind these questions was to "intimidate" the officials who were serving in the district. The Commissioner of Ambala division agreed with this interpretation and added that Chhotu Ram in fact wanted to establish through these questions a sort of "ascendancy" over officials serving in the district. On the whole, the district officials considered Chhotu Ram's articles and numerous Council questions as a "nuisance". In the Deputy Commissioner's words, the motives of Chhotu Ram were:

First to try and funk the local officers and secondly to give him (Chhotu Ram) access to high government officers to talk of matters thus giving him an opportunity of complaining against them. Then of course, there is his own importance involved.

Regarding the innumerable complaints of lower officials against Chhotu Ram, Mian Abdul Aziz, Commissioner of the Ambala division, also observed that it had indeed become difficult to deal with Chhotu Ram at the local level as he was given to frequent

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185 A sample of the type of questions which Chhotu Ram asked can be found in Q. No. 1301 sent to the Punjab Council on 18 Oct. 1932:
(a) The number of Magistrates at present exercising powers under section 30 of the Criminal Procedure Code in Rohtak district.
(b) The number and nature of cases tried by each of the Magistrates referred to in (a).
(c) The date on which evidence first commenced to be recorded in each case.
(d) The date on which the evidence of the last witness entered in the calendar was recorded.
(e) The date on which arguments were heard.
(f) The date on which order was announced.
Source: CFDC Rohtak, F. No. 9/37, pp. 1(a), 3(a).
188 HO Notes, E.H. Lincoln, 4 April 1933, op. cit.
"running down" of the district officials in his paper in order to impress the "Rohtak Jats" with his own importance.

This modus operandi was also necessary in view of the fact that the Jats of Rohtak were at this time, during the early 1930s, split into two factions, i.e., those of Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand. Chhotu Ram was always able to score over Lal Chand precisely because of the image that he was able to project, i.e., the image of getting 'work' done for the 'Jats' of Rohtak district and commanding considerable influence with the government. Lal Chand on the other hand despite being "pleasant" and always having got along well with the officials was no longer considered "useful" in the district by 1936 even by them.

Chhotu Ram, who had realised that at the local level of his constituency the dominant Jat electorate of Rohtak district were going to be impressed by what he could do for them and by his bullying and anti-district officials attitude, was not deterred by the fact that at the provincial level he cooperated so closely with the same government. He had very early realised the advantages of making the "maximum noise and speeches", and had asserted as early as 1921 that the government "gave in" to those who made a political impact on it. Chhotu Ram's ultimate triumph at the more immediate and local level through these methods certainly showed that he had succeeded in

190 For details of factional politics in Rohtak district see above chapter II, pp.65-67.
191 An assessment of Chhotu Ram before the Punjab Assembly elections under Provincial Autonomy was made by the DC Rohtak, see HO Notes, M.R. Sachdev (1936-39), 11 May 1939, op.cit.
192 Ibid.
evolving a political style which was popular with and appreciated by his constituents.

At the provincial level Chhotu Ram's identification with the political policies and ideology of the colonial government was total, and he fully cooperated with it. A complete loyalist, it was he who with Sikandar Hayat Khan had proclaimed a month before the war broke out that "If England fights the Punjab fights". As Chhotu Ram himself put it: "Punjab had manfully shouldered the burden of carrying on the King's Government and defied Congress and League alike". It was clear that Chhotu Ram's domination in politics depended upon keeping Punjab free of both Congress and Muslim League influence. This could be done only if the British remained firm in Punjab where alone, according to Chhotu Ram, existed the third party constituted by the "agriculturist and the martial classes - the soldier and the loyalist". The All India Jat Conference actually adopted a resolution requesting the British officials to throw in their lot on the side of the loyalists. Regarding the ultimate ambition for Punjab, the Unionist Government, of which Chhotu Ram was one of the most important architects, wanted the province to pull out of British India and develop a direct relationship with the Crown. They wanted a "Sovereign Punjab" as a reward for its war services with "sovereign rights of a native state of the highest

194 Brayne Coll, 64: See Brayne's note titled "The Honourable Sir Chhotu Ram".
195 Ibid.
196 Brayne Coll, 69: See Brayne's note to R. Coupland, 19 Sept. 1943.
197 C & MG, 7 Dec. 1942, p. 4. See "Jat Advise to Britain".
standing" and a British Ambassador in place of a Resident.

At the height of Indian national movement during the war Chhotu Ram along with Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana was quoted by F.L. Brayne as saying: "Neither quit nor divide". Both of them, according to Brayne, wanted the British "to stay and help in their standard of living, to develop their country and to share in the government of it, but hesitated to say so openly for fear of victimisation if we depart". As a political solution of India's problems, Chhotu Ram in a long chat in June 1943 with Brayne disclosed his mind candidly. Brayne recorded in his diary:

"Saw Chhotu Ram in afternoon... long talk on politics; he agrees entirely that we must bypass Gandhi etc., says Jinnah is a nobody, made sentinel by the British. Says we summon all who want to win the war, 90 percent of Congress will join us, disfranchise the rest and invite the cooperators to name ministers. Viceroy's Council should consist of men with following in the rural-martial tribes, not intellectuals with no following who will disappear when trouble starts."

Both Chhotu Ram and Khizar were "very suspicious" of Delhi and White Hall. "They say", Brayne reported, "not only is Delhi Bania minded but it always tries to appease its enemies at the expense of its friends". Both of them in fact advised that the "traitors" should remain "locked up". Chhotu Ram wrote to Brayne in January 1944.

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199 IOR: L/P & J/7/6251, 1543, letter of Major Short to the Secretary of State, 13 Oct. 1943.
201 Ibid., A note by Brayne (n.d.).
202 Brayne Coll, 194: Diary of F.L. Brayne, 28 June 1943. The distortion in the language is because of the style of writing adopted for recording observations in the diary.
that "so far the Government of India has always had a soft corner for those who thwart it and obstruct its policy".

It was resentment of sorts that led Chhotu Ram to politically project his otherwise deeply conservative and loyalist political ambitions at the national level once again during the 1940s in a 'revolutionary' way. In May 1943, Chhotu Ram's advice openly given at a public function of the Chamars held in Lahore cantonment stunned and shocked the British officials. In this function, Chhotu Ram advised the Chamars not to stand in the way of Swaraj, as "Free India will afford the maximum of opportunity for self expression to the members of all communities". Chamars were interestingly promised a due share in the administration of "free India" in proportion to their population. For this speech, so contradictory to the realities of his aims and ideology and privately offered advice, Chhotu Ram was once again pulled up by the Governor on orders from the Viceroy, who took strong exception to this speech as reported in the newspapers. Chhotu Ram was sternly told to issue a refutation which, he of course did immediately. Yet Chhotu Ram's shrewdness is apparent. For many who had attended the function Chhotu Ram stood as much for Swaraj as the Congress regardless of what his political critics and detractors had to say.

However, as brought out earlier, it was really at the local and not the national level that Chhotu Ram projected a different,

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207 Ibid.
208 Linlithgow Coll, 125: Linlithgow to Glancy, telegram 17 May 1943.
209 Ibid., Glancy to Linlithgow, telegram 18 May 1943.
populist line of policy and propaganda towards officials which led to a great deal of confusion in a correct understanding of the true basis of his ideological and political commitment. The lower class voters of Rohtak district, very susceptible to the Congress propaganda, needed a different kind of popular propaganda from what was being undertaken by the Unionist Party at the provincial level. Chhotu Ram reflected this need in his Congress-style propaganda with its special appeal to the kisans of Rohtak and in his anti-government official attitude through the Jat Gazette and the Zamindar League. For more than a decade, before 1937, Chhotu Ram's upholding of the application of the principle of Income-tax to land revenue and exemption of smaller landowners, along with questioning the rate of land revenue demand, confused the political picture. The agrarian legislation of the late 30s, for which Chhotu Ram was given the entire credit, also succeeded in obtaining for him a radical image. In fact, Chhotu Ram in a zamindar conference of Lyallpur, held in September 1938, declared that he had brought "Inquilab" (revolution) among the zamindars through the 'Zamindar Laws'. He also asserted that he was himself 210 Inquilab personified. In fact during 1938-45, he took to frequently concluding his speeches with the slogan of "Inquilab-Zindabad" (long live revolution). All these enabled Chhotu Ram to acquire a radical and populist image which he fully exploited to woo the lower class voters. His appeals for remission and exemption of land revenue, innumerable Council questions, criticism of district officials, and personally offensive

211 Ibid.
behaviour towards them, were all part of a wider strategy of getting to be known at the local level as the chief source of assistance to the peasantry and their indefatigable defender. That he succeeded in this objective is quite clear. Similarly his appeal in Rohtak district to caste and tribal sentiments endeared him to the majority of 'Jat voters' of the time thereby enabling him to claim the general following of the single largest 'community' in Rohtak. It was this that enabled him to speak with authority inside the Unionist Party. It is to Chhotu Ram's credit as an astute political tactician that being a big landlord himself, and the champion and benefactor of the richer sections of the land-owning classes and of the retired and serving men of the British Indian army, he could successfully claim to represent rural areas and agriculturists drawn from all rural socio-economic classes and strata. His final success lay in his being accepted by the contemporary as well as the present day readers and writers as the 'champion of have-nots' in the province and representative of the 'poor down-trodden kisans'. That this image was also accepted by the majority of the rural voters in Punjab is clear from the success that the Unionist Party achieved under Chhotu Ram's leadership in the elections of 1937.