INTRODUCTION

Chhotu Ram forged with the predominant Unionist Muslims of Punjab an enduring political alliance which was instrumental in forming one of the most successful non-Congress ministries under the Provincial Autonomy. The alliance also ensured for the British in India a politically safe province, which could otherwise have been both politically and economically one of the most vulnerable provinces in their Indian empire. Chhotu Ram's value to the colonial rulers was freely acknowledged by Linlithgow and Wavell, the last two Viceroy's of India, who paid Chhotu Ram the fulsome tributes paid to no other politician of Punjab. This very Chhotu Ram had been earlier contemptuously dismissed by the British officials as coming from 'low parentage' and as a troublesome politician. Later he was because of his steadfast loyalty and services rendered to the British empire knighted and gifted hundreds of acres of land. With enormous political backing from his constituents and plenty of financial resources at his command, Chhotu Ram emerged first as the leader of the 'Jats of Rohtak' and then gained recognition and acceptance by the officials and others as the leader of the 'Hindu agriculturists' of Punjab. With such formidable backing he became a force to be reckoned with in the province.

Chhotu Ram was born in November 1881. His real name was Ram Richpal; but being the youngest in the family the name Chhotu stuck for life. His father, Sukhi Ram, belonging to the 'Ohlan' Got (sub-caste) of Jats, was a small landowner in village Garhi-Sampla of Rohtak district. After his schooling in Rohtak, Chhotu Ram joined St. Stephen's Mission School and College on a free studentship. Having passed his intermediate examination from there he joined the D.A.V. College,
Lahore, for his B.A. After graduation, he took over in 1906 as the Assistant Private Secretary to Rampal Singh, the Talukdar of Kalankankar and a political leader in the United Provinces. Chhotu Ram remained there for nearly three years. In 1910, he came to Agra to teach at St. John's Mission High School and also joined law studies. By late 1911 he had started his law practice in Agra and within a year changed over to legal practice at Rohtak in partnership with Lal Chand. It was during these years that he became both an Arya Samajist and a Congressite. In the wake of World War I he cooperated with the British in the war efforts and helped provide recruits and money. In 1916, he had also ably launched his weekly newspaper, the Jat Gazette, with the help of the Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak. In 1920, he broke-off with the Congress when the party changed its tactics in relation to the British rulers and adopted non-violent non-cooperation as its fighting creed. His first attempt in 1921 at fighting elections to the Punjab Council was a failure, but he succeeded in his second attempt in December 1923 and joined the Rural Party of Fazl-i-Hussain and Lal Chand which had by now been established as the National Unionist Party of Punjab. From then onwards there was no turning back for Chhotu Ram, and he stood unbeaten in all the subsequent elections. He died in harness on the 10th of January 1945. He was first the Minister of Agriculture from 1924 to 1925 and then the Minister of Education from 1925 to 1926. In 1927, he was elected the leader of the Unionist Party in the Punjab Legislative Council, a position he retained till 1936. In 1936, he was elected as the President of the Punjab Council and, with the death of Fazl-i-Hussain in the same year, he emerged as the most important leader of the Unionist Party along with Sikander Hayat Khan. He was the chief organiser of his party's election machinery
during the first elections to the Punjab Assembly held in 1937. The Unionists won the elections with a big majority and formed the ministry under Sikandar Hayat Khan. Chhotu Ram took over as the Minister of Development from 1937 to 1941. He was the Minister for Revenue from 1941 to 1945.

This work on Chhotu Ram seeks to analyse the role of Chhotu Ram from his base in Rohtak district to his emergence in the provincial politics of Punjab. It is not the intention of this work to provide a study of the politics of Punjab as such. Here, the politics of Punjab is seen in relation to the socio-economic factors in the agrarian society of Punjab which made for the success of Chhotu Ram in becoming an indispensable force to the Unionist Party. While doing so, the work seeks to analyse how and why Chhotu Ram became such a force not only at the provincial level but also first and foremost at the local level of his constituency in Rohtak district. It deals with the social forces he mobilised and the nature of programme, ideology and propaganda he evolved and utilised during his rise from the status of a local leader with limited support to that of a leader of provincial status. The work investigates the reasons which enabled Chhotu Ram to successfully mobilise the economically and numerically predominant Jats of Rohtak district around the slogan of caste and to turn them into a political force of considerable magnitude. In this connection Jat relations with the other castes and communities have also been studied in order to explore the deeper socio-economic reasons which made for the success of populist slogans such as that of 'Jatism' in Rohtak district, specially when Chhotu Ram's supporters were to be found chiefly among the landowning classes.
How and why did this 'casteism' of Chhotu Ram, which included in itself highly stratified classes, receive the support it did in the Haryana region, and how did 'Jatism' of Chhotu Ram operate in reality not only among different socio-economic strata of his own castemen, but also in relation to other castes and religious minorities like that of the Muslim? The operation of 'casteism' in relation to his constituency and its modification by Chhotu Ram later to suit the whole of Punjab has also been dealt with. The working of 'casteism' has also been studied in relation to the two momentous movements of the time in the socio-religious and political spheres of Rohtak and Punjab, i.e., the Arya Samaj and the Congress. The reasons for the success of Chhotu Ram's politics in face of, and in relation to, these two anti-British movements, one supposedly opposed to casteism and the other nationalist and secular, are examined.

The programme, ideology and propaganda of Chhotu Ram, projected and articulated differently at the two levels, i.e., the local and the provincial, have been analysed with a view to establish their relationship with the changing socio-economic and political climate of both the district and the province. The reasons behind the projection and even wide acceptance of a 'radical and revolutionary' image of Chhotu Ram, while all the time he was an out and out loyalist, have been studied. Some light has also been thrown on the relative appeal of the two political parties, the Unionist and the Congress, and on the following they commanded among the different strata of society, specially among the Jats in Rohtak district. The real class basis of Chhotu Ram's adoption and propagation of caste ideology and populist slogans through press and platform is also examined through study of the
comprehensive agrarian policies that Chhotu Ram followed during the late thirties. These policies clearly stood to benefit the richer sections of Punjab’s landowning class, the supporters of Chhotu Ram and his fellow Unionists. The effects of the agrarian legislation of the late thirties and early forties on the different strata of agriculturists and non-agriculturists as well as on the Congress have been co-related with the direct benefits which accrued to the landed interests and their representatives as also to the promoters of these interests, i.e., the colonial government. Policies adopted in the agrarian field bring out the basis of the alliance between the colonial rulers and the overwhelmingly Unionist Muslims, landlords and landowners and the Hindu ruralites of the Haryana region united in the ministerial Party.

This interpretation of Chhotu Ram’s role in Punjab politics also traces the explicit involvement of the colonial rulers in the successful emergence of casteism as a viable force in the Provincial politics and their hand in the eventual and successful rise of ‘caste leaders’ like Chhotu Ram. This work analyses the tools and agencies utilised by the British in promoting casteism and also seeks to explain how and why casteism as an instrument to divide the Indian society was given such importance in this region as compared with the utilisation of other divisive issues favoured elsewhere by the British administrators for achieving the same purpose.

The major analysis of this dissertation relating to Chhotu Ram’s role in Punjab politics centres around Rohtak district. Rohtak district has been made a case study in this respect not only because of the strength and hold of Chhotu Ram in this region, which alone made it possible for him to play a role in the politics of Punjab
for twenty long years, but also because this district was the acknowledged 'centre' of the Haryana region in all political matters. This case study of Rohtak district throws light on the structure of socio-economic relations prevailing in the district which made for the success of Chhotu Ram's politics and may, therefore, be taken as a prototype of the entire Haryana region nearly all of which came to be so effectively consolidated and led by Chhotu Ram. However, Rohtak district has not been treated in isolation from the rest of Punjab but as very much a part of it; and similarities as well as differences between the south-east region and the rest of Punjab have been highlighted wherever necessary. This study also seeks to bring out the how and why of this small region's ability to play such an important role under the leadership of Chhotu Ram in the politics of Punjab and within the Unionist Party.