CHAPTER - I
FIRST PHASE: STRUGGLE

“Though old and infirm, I can assure you that the God of death will fail miserably to remove me from the arena of activity until I succeed in banishing all the privations that are facing the zamindars of the Punjab at the present moment. I will not rest contented until I have secured all the advantages for the zamindars in the light of the Acts passed by the Unionist ministry.”¹ This proclamation was made much later in his public yet it was a target that Chhotu Ram had set for himself very early in life.

Chhotu Ram was a man born ahead of his times, for him public life was an opportunity to work for the needy people. He was a man with frugal habits of lifestyle. He symbolized an unconditional commitment to the cause of the peasants. He was deeply influenced by the difficult environment of rural areas in which he was born and brought up and the plight of peasantry.

Chhotu Ram was born on November 24, 1881² in a Jat peasant family in a small village named Garhi Sampla, (Rohtak district of Haryana. However, there is a controversy about his date of birth. It was reported as November 1883 in The Tribune, March 7, 1937. Azim Husain mentions the years of his birth as 1882. After cross-examination of many documents, Prof. Y. P. Bajaj mentions the year of his birth date as November 24, 1881,³ which can perhaps be accepted as the correct date.

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¹ Balbir Singh, Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram – A Forgotten Statesman of Our Times, New Delhi, 1999, p. 11.
Chhotu Ram’s great grandfather Ram Rattan and grandfather Ram Das owned a land holding of less than 10 acres. In addition to this, they had acquired another 12 acres through mortgage.\textsuperscript{4} His father Sukhi Ram was a petty farmer of very limited means. To supplement the family income he used to do occasional transitions in purchase and sale of agriculture produce.\textsuperscript{5} In the years, 1894 and 1897 Sukhi Ram suffered a loss in cotton and could never free himself from the debts thereafter.\textsuperscript{6} Chhotu Ram’s elder brother assisted their father in routine agricultural works, but Chhotu Ram was never required to work in the field. His parents were not keen about his education,\textsuperscript{7} but in any case Chhotu Ram was enrolled in the primary school of \textit{Sampla} village in

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ibid}.
1891 at the age of 10, but he soon made up for the late start. Being the youngest son of the family, he was affectionately called ‘Chhotu’.

**Student Life:**

Chhotu Ram was sent to school initially with the main purpose of keeping him busy. Chhotu Ram showed his worth and promise right from the beginning of his educational career. Being sharp, industrious and a brilliant student he passed the first two classes in a single year. In 1895, he passed the primary examination with good marks by obtaining a scholarship and topped the district. The custom of child marriage was very common at that time, Chhotu Ram was thus married at the age of eleven with Gyano Devi (daughter of Ch. Nihal Singh of Kheri Jat), while, he was a student of 2nd standard.

However, his marriage was not a barrier in his study. In 1899, he passed his middle school examination with second position in Delhi Division and got a scholarship of six rupees. He had to face many obstacles in clearing his middle examination. As there was no proper road from Garhi Sampla to Jhajjar, he had to cover the whole distance on foot and carry his essential routine requirements like wheat, flour and ghee on his head.

Chhotu Ram was keen to pursue his studies further. However, not all this meant much for Sukhi Ram who had not even repaid the debt he had earlier taken. He was also against his son, as he is going to a distant place like

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8 Ibid.
11 *The Tribune*, Lahore, 7.3.1937, p. 3.
17 D. C. Verma, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
Delhi. Thus there were two main problems in his way, firstly he would have to pursue his higher studies in Delhi and secondly indebtedness of his father. Sukhi Ram sought the advice of the moneylender of the village, Lala Ghasi Ram. It was a hot summer day when both Sukhi Ram and Chhotu Ram went to the moneylender, where the ‘Pankha Episode’ occurred. The moneylender flung the pankha cord towards Sukhi Ram. It was a challenge to the self-respect of the poor peasant and Chhotu Ram felt deeply hurt.

He refused to do so and told the moneylender that he could have asked his son sitting by his side to pull the cord. The moneylender felt very embarrassed and asked his son to pull the pankha. This incident left an indelible mark on his mind and acted as a catalyst to hasten his revolt against the moneylenders as a class. This incident became the base of his future political activities. The moneylender advised Sukhi Ram to restrict Chhotu Ram to agriculture or to get him some employment in the police or Army and even a village patwari. He even, made the insinuating remarks that an elementary education was good enough for a Jat’s son.

Sukhi Ram acted on advice of his moneylender and advised his son to seek employment and the job of Patwari. Further education was going to be beyond Sukhi Ram’s means. The moneylender’s advice made it easy for Sukhi Ram to reject his request for higher education. However, education was the first love for Chhotu Ram. When Ch. Raje Ram came to know about it, he gave him a sum of Rs. 40/- for pursuing higher studies at St. Stephen’s.

19 *Ibid*, p. 11.
21 Raghubir Singh Shastri, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
High School.27 At St. Stephen’s High School, that is also known as Mission School situated at Chandni Chowk, Delhi, he got a full fee concession28 and a stipend of Rs. 6/- per month based on his performance at the middle examination.29 All these things went in his favour and make it possible for him to compete with his classmates.30

Incidentally, Mahtab Rai, who stood first in the middle school examination, also joined the same school and this led to a healthy competition between them. Chhotu Ram showed promise and determination as he topped ninth class. He passed his matriculation examination in 1901 with first division.

**Nick Named As ‘General Roberts’:**

St. Stephen’s School had its hostel on the same campus. This hostel had about two dozen rural students as its inmates and Chhotu Ram was deputed as their monitor. The hostel sweeper, who served the Superintendent (Pt. Janki Nath) at his residence, often neglected his duties in the hostel. Chhotu Ram brought this to the notice of the Principal who then took the charge of boarding himself. This happened because Chhotu Ram had called upon his fellow boarders to rise and revolt against injustice. They went on strike that lasted for fifteen days and created a sort of stir. Because of this, the Principal of the school Mr. Kelly directed the sweeper to obey Chhotu Ram (the monitor of hostel). Because of his boldness, the students gave Chhotu Ram the nickname of ‘General Roberts’, whose memory was still alive in Delhi even about 4 decades after the revolt of 1857.31

**In St. Stephen’s College:**

Chhotu Ram passed his matriculation examination. His domestic and financial condition was not good. Raje Ram, the benevolent uncle was still

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sympathetic but college education was no easy matter. As Sukhi Ram had still not got over brooding over his previous losses and showed no more interest than he had done earlier.32

Chhotu Ram too was actually experiencing the financial strain but his desire for higher education pushed him on. His uncle, however, again came to his rescue. This enabled Chhotu Ram to join St. Stephen's College. Having completed just seven months in the Intermediate class, he felt it was not possible for him to continue. He became upset because he had no financial source to help him in his studies. He wrote to the Principal that it was not possible for him to continue his studies because of financial reasons and health problems. Without waiting for the Principal's reaction, he returned to his village.33 The Principal of the College asked the Vice-Principal S. K. Rudra and Pt. Raghwar Dayal Shastri (Head of Sanskrit Department) to personally go to Chhotu Ram's village and bring him back. When they reached the village, they found Chhotu Ram participating in a debate with a Sanatan Dharma Pandit over the practice of idol worship. Chhotu Ram as earlier noted himself was an Arya Samajist.34

The studies at St. Stephen's resumed and the college authorities checked that in future he should not be embarrassed financially. He was assured of all possible help from the college. If Chhotu Ram's studies were hampered by financial constraints, there would be the invisible hand of destiny to pull him out. He was always inspired with the vision of a bright future, which he thought he could realize only through hard work. At St. Stephen’s College, he was adjudged the best student in Sanskrit and English literature.35 Chhotu Ram managed to get a scholarship from the Delhi Board and was granted free studentship. Thus with this help he passed his

intermediate examination in 1903.\textsuperscript{36} Chhotu Ram was keen to complete his graduation but financial problems again troubled him.

**Meeting With Seth Chhaju Ram:**

At this stage he was helped by the well-known philanthropist Seth Chhaju Ram.\textsuperscript{37} As Chhotu Ram was in a problem as how to continue his studies, he got a chance to meet at Ghaziabad Railway Station the rich Calcutta based businessman, Seth Chhaju Ram (1861-1943). Chhaju Ram was impressed not merely by what Chhotu Ram had achieved in spite of his poverty, but by what he planned to do in future. Chhaju Ram advised the young boy for studies in Sanskrit and promised him all financial help so long as he needed it.\textsuperscript{38} With this generous offer, Chhotu Ram joined his B. A. class with Sanskrit subject in D.A.V. College, Lahore.

Chhotu Ram, thereafter, always looked up to Seth Chhaju Ram with deep reverence, regards and used to call him as his godfather.\textsuperscript{39} Seth Chhaju Ram asked him to study at D.A.V. College, Lahore but after the intermediate examination, Chhotu Ram wrote to Chhaju Ram that he wanted to join Delhi instead of Lahore, as there was a hope for a scholarship from District Board. In reply, Chhaju Ram assured him that he would continue his help to him even in Delhi.\textsuperscript{40} He graduated in 1905 in spite of his personal and monetary difficulties.\textsuperscript{41} He passed B. A. with flying colours and stood first in Sanskrit in the University.\textsuperscript{42} In those days, the University examination used to be held at Lahore, in the college, along with his study he participated in co-curricular activities. He became captain of school football team, started writing in the college magazine, and took part in debates.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{36} *Jat Gazette* (Tr.) 22.1.1963, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{39} H. L. Agnihotri and S. N. Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Raghuvendra Tanwar, ‘Sir Chhotu Ram: A Study in Regional Leadership’, *Journal of Haryana Studies*, Vol. XVI, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, 1984, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{42} J. R. Siwach, *op. cit.*, p. 125, and also N. B. Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{43} Ranjeet Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
It was during his studies at the St. Stephen’s College when Chhotu Ram wrote a thoughtful article, entitled ‘The Improvement of Indian village life,’ published in the inaugural issue of the college magazine, ‘The Stephenian,’ edited by C. F. Andrews, who was impressed by this article, and showed it to his friend, Sir Robert Carlyle, asking him to help Chhotu Ram. With his efforts, Chhotu Ram was offered the post of Naib Tehsildar, however he spurned the offer and made up his mind to pursue LL.B. 44 Chhotu Ram’s seven-year stay at Delhi brought him in close contact with students drawn from rich and educated sections of Delhi Society. 45 Though his relations with them were cordial, however, his urban friends usually treated boys from rural areas as rustics. The Jat students got a lion’s share of these jokes. Off-course this was in perfect good humour with no desire to hurt and no malice behind them. Chhotu Ram took admission in M. A. English in St. Stephen’s College, but once again the economic condition of the family came in the way. 46

He was now conscious of his responsibility as the educated member of his family and wanted to relieve it of the burden, which had come to rest on his shoulders during his stay at the college. He had to repay the ever-multiplying debt of Lala Ghasi Ram, which his father had taken. 47

**Days in Kalakankar:**

After the death of his father, Chhotu Ram had to shoulder the responsibility of his family. 48 Chhotu Ram daily scanned the advertisement columns of the newspaper after he had discontinued his post-graduate studies. It was in the year 1905, he noted an advertisement according to his ability. The Raja Rampal Singh of Kalakankar District Partap Garh (a Talukdar in Audh) needed a secretary. 49 Chhotu Ram sent his application in response to

46 Ranjeet Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
the advertisement. In September 1905, he got his appointment letter from Raja Rampal Singh.

Raja Rampal Singh was also liberal in his political persuasion. Because of the abilities and personality of Chhotu Ram, he appointed him on a salary of Rs. 40/- per month with free boarding and lodging.\textsuperscript{50} Chhotu Ram took up the job of an Assistant Secretary.\textsuperscript{51} The Raja put Chhotu Ram in-charge of his weekly paper the \textit{Hindustan}, which published in English and Hindi, in addition to his duties as Private Assistant Secretary. Chhotu Ram had a flair for writing, soon he started contributing to the English weekly and the Raja was deeply impressed by his way of thinking and logical expression.\textsuperscript{52} However, Chhotu Ram was feeling somewhat socially suffocated and could not stay there for more than six-months due to uncongenial surroundings.\textsuperscript{53} He left Kalakankar, even though he had no ready plan for the future.

\textbf{Student Life Again:}

Chhotu Ram decided to join Law College at Lahore as most of the public figures at that time were lawyers and with such a profession, he could participate in public life.\textsuperscript{54} He joined the law college at Lahore in 1906.\textsuperscript{55} Law classes used to be in the evening so he had free time during the day to meet his expenses. He simultaneously started teaching at the \textit{Rang Mahal Mission High School}, Lahore\textsuperscript{56} on a salary of Rs. 50/- per month. An additional income from tuition made Chhotu Ram free of financial issues. After few months, a virulent plague broke out at Lahore and as a result, he was compelled to leave Lahore. He was still indecisive when he once again got a

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Jat Gazette} (Tr.), 22.1.1963, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{52} H. L. Agnihotri, and S. N. Malik, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{53} N. B. Sen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{54} Raghubir Singh Shastri, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{55} K. C. Yadav, (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, 1976, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{56} A. Husain, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 156.
call from his previous employer to reach Kalakankar again. Now the Raja appointed him Superintendent of Education on a salary of Rs. 60/- along with all the previous facilities. He served under the Raja for three months and as his Assistant Private Secretary for one year (1907-08).

Chhotu Ram was, however, keen to join the P.C.S. (Additional Assistant Commissioner) and asked Raja Ram Pal Singh for six months leave. The Raja gladly agreed and treated the period of leave as on duty. He also suggested that in case he wished to return, his salary would be Rs. 100/- with better facilities. Chhotu Ram did well in all other papers, except mathematics wherein his marks were so low that he failed to qualify for this post. Once again, he left the job, at Kalakankar, which was at an unusually long distance from his native place. Moreover, Chhotu Ram was keen to serve his community.

After weighing all his prospects and possibilities, Chhotu Ram again joined the Law Degree College at Agra. To finance his studies he taught at the St. John Mission High School, Agra. He passed LL.B in first division in 1911.

**Law Practice at Agra:**

The LL.B degree gave a complete new turn to Chhotu Ram’s professional career and he took up legal practice with all his zeal. He started this new profession as a young High Court Lawyer at Agra (1911). In Agra, he worked as a lawyer of criminal cases and created an impact in and around Agra, with the result that he came to rank as one of the legal luminaries in

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57 D. C. Verma, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
58 N. B. Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
60 D. C. Verma, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
63 N. B. Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
65 Y. P. Bajaj, *op. cit.*, 1972, p. 3.
adjoining district Mathura, Bharatpur, Aligarh etc. However, even though he was a new comer in the profession yet people started to come to him to seek counseling on important legal matters. He chose the local Jat Boarding House as his residence-cum-office, served as its Superintendent and even collected funds for its repairs and renovations. This place came to be used for holding meetings of the Jat Sabha.

His three-year stay at Agra was extremely useful because he put himself on a firm legal footing through hard work. He was extremely honest in his dealings with his clients and in some cases, he rendered free services. In the beginning, he took up two very complicated cases. In one case, twenty-seven persons were accused in a dacoit case three of whom had turned approvers. Chhotu Ram inspected the site of the crime to gather relevant information from the people as well as to obtain circumstantial evidence. By the time the case came for hearing, Chhotu Ram had sufficiently armed himself with facts and logics, he pleaded the case so energetically that all the accused were acquitted honorably. He, thus, established himself well.

**Returns to Rohtak:**

As the result of the transfer of the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi after the Royal Darbar in 1911, the Haryana region came in close proximity to new capital and acquired more importance. Sonepat tehsil, which was a part of the Delhi district, was now transferred to Rohtak to make it more viable. Despite his popularity in Agra Chhotu Ram decided to leave Agra and shifted to Rohtak in 1912.

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70 *Ibid*.
72 *Jat Gazette*, (Tr.), 22.1.1964, p. 7.
In October 1912, he made Rohtak as his centre of practice as a partner of Chaudhari Lal Chand.\textsuperscript{73} This partnership lasted for eight years.\textsuperscript{74} In those days, the lawyers maintained a distance from their client.\textsuperscript{75} Chhotu Ram reacted to all this and was the only one in the courts who freely mixed with litigants and even shared the \textit{hukkah} with them.\textsuperscript{76} In protest, the Bar Association passed a resolution asking Chhotu Ram to change his ways. However, Chhotu Ram stuck to his stand. His only defence was that all those who came to him were poor peasants and it was the duty of all of us to help them. He was firm in rejecting the resolution and reiterated that it was a human obligation to try to mitigate the sufferings of others.\textsuperscript{77} It was about this time that he cleared the debt left behind by his father.\textsuperscript{78}

\textbf{A Model Code of Conduct for Lawyers:}

After long protracted deliberation, Chhotu Ram came out with a carefully worded code of conduct, which he wanted to make unconditionally and absolutely binding on all lawyers alike. Chhotu Ram formulated a code of conduct consisting of five principles for himself that he followed throughout his practicing career.\textsuperscript{79} These principles were as follows:

i. Never to resort to dubious means to extract more and more money, on one pretext or another from the clients.

ii. Always to make full study of the case undertaken and gave his best to take it to a successful conclusion.

iii. Always to render free advice to those who come for consultation.

\textsuperscript{73} K. C. Yadav, (ed.) \textit{op. cit.}, 1976, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{74} Balbir Singh, \textit{op. cit.}, 1994, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{75} Balbir Singh, \textit{op. cit.}, 2009, pp. 24-25.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{78} Madan Gopal, \textit{op. cit.}, 1997, p. 40.
iv. If someone comes to the lawyer for seeking his advice or help in order to cause harm to his rival, he should be dissuaded from doing so and prepare him, if possible, for reconciliation.

v. It is absolutely and categorically binding on a lawyer to treat his clients kindly, or if for some reason they happen to visit their lawyer at night or late hours, they should be provided with food and lodging.  

Chhotu Ram had firm conviction that the main cause of backwardness of peasantry has been the lack of strong organization. It was Chhotu Ram’s confirmed opinion that political independence without the economic content was simply a myth. Chhotu Ram’s prominence as a lawyer was just a prelude to his momentous career in the field of social service and politics. He started a Jat Sabha at Rohtak with the aim of organizing such associations at all district headquarters and later in all villages, and became its secretary in 1913. The Jat Sabha was open to the agriculturist of all communities irrespective of their religion. Chhotu Ram considered education as the key to progress. At that time there was not even a single high school in Rohtak, the student of this region had to go to Delhi for further studies. To end this problem an Anglo-Sanskrit Jat High School founded at Rohtak in March 1915. Baldev Singh along with Dr. Ramji Lal and Matu Ram planned this school. Chhotu Ram became the founding Secretary of the Managing Committee of the school. He mobilized considerable funds for making the school a success. However, the managing committee in a special meeting held in the absence of Chhotu Ram resolved to join the non-cooperation

81 Jat Gazette, (Tr.), 22.3.1987, p. 3.
84 A. Husain, op. cit., p. 156.
85 Ibid.
86 D. C. Verma, op. cit., p. 52
88 Ibid.
89 Raghuvendra Tanwar, op. cit., 1984, p. 53.
90 Jat Gazette, (Tr.), 9.1.1946, p. 33.
movement and declared disaffiliated itself from the Punjab University. All this compelled Chhotu Ram to resign from the Secretary-ship of the school in 1921 and established the Jat Hero’s High School at Rohtak.\(^\text{91}\)

**Supporting War Efforts:**

The First World War (1914-1948) broke out, and in this, he saw an opportunity to get the youthful Jat boys enlisted in the army. The Jats were traditionally considered as coming from a martial race. Chhotu Ram saw in this chance for the sturdy youth to go to distant lands, see for themselves how people there were trying to modernize themselves and bring with them new ideas in the light of which they could learn to improve their conditions and move towards their economic, social and educational advancement.\(^\text{92}\) Chhotu Ram was appointed as the Secretary of ‘War League’ by Mr. Harcourt, \(^\text{93}\) (the Deputy Commissioner) and appointed as Secretary of District Co-Operative Committee. He acted as Honorary Secretary to the District recruitment Committee, Rohtak and made hectic efforts in providing combatant and non-combatant aid to the government.\(^\text{94}\)

To support his view he said, “With a view to averting the threat of the possible German penetration into the East, the Indian should extend their maximum support and thereby strengthen their claim to attain Self Government and Home Rule.”\(^\text{95}\) He was conferred the title of ‘Rao Sahab’ in 1916,\(^\text{96}\) in addition to this, four squares of crown land was allotted to him in 1919.\(^\text{97}\)

\(^{91}\) D. C. Verma, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

\(^{92}\) *Ibid*.


\(^{94}\) Y. P. Bajaj, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

\(^{95}\) *Ibid*, p. 6.


\(^{97}\) *The Tribune*, Lahore, 7.3.1937, p. 3.
As Editor of *Jat Gazette*:

In 1916, he started an Urdu Weekly ‘*Jat Gazette*’,\(^{98}\) to awaken the peasantry. He himself edited ‘*Jat Gazette*’ upto 1924.\(^{99}\) Explaining the objective of the *Jat Gazette*, he wrote that the purpose of *Jat Gazette* was to suggest means for the betterment of the backward rural community and to bring unity amongst its members.\(^{100}\)

Very soon, the weekly became popular and Chhotu Ram’s articles and comments often cited and even reproduced by many urban newspapers at Lahore and Delhi.\(^{101}\) Chhotu Ram used ‘*Jat Gazette*’ as the main plank against the exploiters of the peasants and against the erring officials.\(^{102}\) The columns in the *Jat Gazette* contributed by Chhotu Ram created a stir among the urban people and the village moneylenders as well as among the government circles. The two columns ‘*Thagi Bazzar ki Sair*’ and ‘*Bechara Zamindar,*’ were written by Chhotu Ram to draw attention of people and government officials towards the worst condition of the peasantry.\(^{103}\)

**Beginning of Political Career: As a Congress Member**

Chhotu Ram was fast emerging as a progressive politician. He joined the Congress in 1916. He was the first President of the District Congress Committee of Rohtak and held that office for nearly four years.\(^{104}\) When Chhotu Ram started *Jat Gazette*, he was an active Congressman, the President of the District Congress Committee. He was a great supporter of Mahatma Gandhi.\(^{105}\) Chhotu Ram was greatly influenced by Gandhiji’s programs and policies specially his work for rural community’s upliftment. The Rowlett Act of 1919 resulted in angry protest all over the country. Mahatma Gandhi gave a

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\(^{98}\) A. Husain, *op. cit.*, p. 156.


\(^{100}\) *Jat Gazette*, (Tr.), 12.12.1916, p. 1.

\(^{101}\) D. C. Verma, *op. cit.*, p. 53.


\(^{103}\) A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

\(^{104}\) *The Tribune*, Lahore, 7.3.1937, p. 3.

\(^{105}\) Madan Gopal, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 44.
call of *Styagraha* on March 30, 1919. Chhotu Ram took an active part in the Satyagraha movement as a member of the Congress.\textsuperscript{106} Chhotu Ram delivered a rebellious speech on April 11, 1919 and urged people not to take law in their hands.\textsuperscript{107}

**Disillusionment with the Congress:**

In August 1920, the Congress Party adopted a resolution of Non-Cooperation and strikes were organized all over India. Chhotu Ram opposed Non-Co-Operation Movement started by Gandhiji. Jinnah and Pt. M. M. Malviya also opposed Gandhiji’s programme. Chhotu Ram independently came to the same view like the other Punjab’s moderate leaders. On October 8, 1920, Mahatma Gandhiji and Ali Brothers visited Rohtak to impart life to the Non-Co-Operation Movement. They also attended the Ambala division political conference, held at Bhiwani from October 22, 1920 to October 24, 1920. Chhotu Ram also attended the conference as the member of the subject committee of the conference.\textsuperscript{108} In his speech, Chhotu Ram protested against the boycott of educational institutions and non-payment of land revenue clauses of the Non-Co-Operation Movement.\textsuperscript{109} Chhotu Ram thought that this movement would adversely affect the tiller of the soil.

He finally parted with the Congress on this issue. On November 8, 1920, he resigned from the Congress.\textsuperscript{110} His main reason given was that the downtrodden rural folk would be ultimately involved in the nonpayment of land taxes, which would lead them into chaos resulting in their own devastation.\textsuperscript{111}

Chhotu Ram also said about the Non-Co-Operation Movement, “We were being asked to give up our military jobs, boycott education and remain

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\textsuperscript{107} H. L. Agnihotri and S. N. Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{108} *Jat Gazette*, (Tr.), 3.11.1920, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 26.10.1969, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{111} Y. P. Bajaj, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
illiterate, we were being asked not to pay land revenue, but all this will lead to
the confiscation of our land. We must look at the Non-Co-Operation
Movement from a perspective that is conducive for the welfare of our
community.” Chhotu Ram also said, “On the non-payment of land revenue
issue, however small, the farmers could be deprived of all his lands.” He
again emphasized that the participation of peasants in the movement might
get that lands confiscated and purchased by the non-agriculturists, the main
aim of Chhotu Ram was to awaken the peasantry and to free them from the
exploiters, the moneylenders. He thus decided to fight the peasantry’s battle
on two front at the same time, first with the moneylenders and secondly with
the Government.

He went on record saying: “I never believed, and never can believe,
that any campaign of Non-Co-Operation on a really wide scale would remain
non-violent. It would not remain peaceful even in action. Non-violence in
word or thought is possible only among angels. Defiance of law and non-
payment of taxes are to my mind, on a par with armed revolt, and lay the axe
at the root of those fundamental principles on which the structure of human
society rests. They must result in bloodshed, chaos and violence.” He came
to the conclusion that Non-Co-Operation was a futile creed and hence
resigned from the Congress.

Ch. Chhotu Ram, who was also an active member of All India Jat
Mahasabha and worked as its Secretary from 1918 to 1921, though All India
Jat Mahasabha he prepared a solid platform for the upliftment of the
peasantry. Chhotu Ram often recited in simple Urdu:

‘Khuda ke bande to hain hazaron,
Banon main phirte mare-mare,

112 Jat Gazette, (Tr.), 23.8.1921, p. 4.
113 Ibid, 23.6.1920, p. 5.
115 Ganda Singh, op. cit., p. 223.
Mein uska banda banoonga jisko,
Khuda ke bandon se pyar hoga.’

(Thousands of God’s worshipers aimlessly wander about in the woods; I shall worship him who loves God’s people alone.)

In 1919, Montague Chelmsford Reforms were announced and Diarchy was introduced at the provincial level. In pursuance of such an objective, the Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 announced soon after the end of the First World War in 1918 a schedule for holding elections to the legislative councils in the provinces in accordance with rules and regulations as laid down by the Halifax Committee. The reforms stipulated that the electorates of the rural and urban population shall be separate, and that the number of seats allotted shall be in proportion to the population. The Punjab Council consisted of 71 elected members comprising of 35 Muslims, 21 Hindus and 15 Sikhs besides 23 official and the non-official members to be nominated by the Governor. Under the regulations of Montague-Chelmsford Act the election of Punjab Legislative Council were held in 1921. Chhotu Ram filed his nomination paper from Sonipat-Jhajjar constituency.

**Seeks Elections:**

Although Chhotu Ram was very popular among the masses, he lost the election to Risaldar Sarup Singh of Badli. (who won by a narrow margin of 22 votes) Under the Montague Chelmsford Reforms, the next elections to the Punjab Legislative Council were held in December 1923. In these elections, Chhotu Ram defeated his opponents Risaldar Randhir Singh of Badli and Pt. Phool Kanwar of Machrouli. His friend Ch. Lal Chand was elected to the Legislative Council of Punjab.

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Formation of the National Unionist Party:

The year 1923 stands out as memorable not only in the political career of Sir Chhotu Ram, but also in the political history of Punjab. In the year 1923, Chhotu Ram and Fazl-i-Husain (1877-1936) with Umar Hayat Khan Tiwana of Sargodha, Shahabuddin of Sialkot drew up a plan for a rural party to safeguard the interest of the rural backward classes. The new party also came to be known as the Zamindara Party or ‘The Unionist Party’ among the masses. The Governor, Sir Edward Maclagan readily recognized the Unionist Party as the majority party in the council. He appointed Fazl-i-Husain as Education Minister and Lal Chand as Minister of Agriculture. However, later Chhotu Ram was appointed as Agriculture Minister as Lal Chand’s candidature was cancelled after an election petition.

Chhotu Ram’s first term as minister lasted from September 28, 1924 to December 26, 1926. During this brief period, twice he was in charge of the Department under Fazl-i-Husain as along with the Agriculture Department, he was given the charge of Education Department.

The aims and objective of the Unionist Party:

i. To attain Dominion Status within the British commonwealth of Nations by constitutional means.

ii. To demonstrate that given suitable opportunities and reasonable facilities as Indians are by nature capable of shouldering the responsibilities of self-rule.

iii. To show that the constructive efforts, if directed in a spirit of good will and earnestness to working of reforms, can produce better result for the Indian Community than mere destructive criticism of malicious opposition.

125 A. Husain, op. cit., p. 156.
126 Ibid.
iv. To provide equal opportunities as well as facilities for advancement to all.
v. To secure a fair distribution of the burden of provincial taxes between agricultural and other classes.
vi. To ensure a just and fair representation of all communities and classes in the public services of the state.

vii. To check the exploitation of economically backward classes by economically dominant classes.

viii. To promote indigenous industries and to encourage the use of indigenous goods.

ix. To banish illiteracy from the province.
x. To secure decentralization of power, systematically and gradually.

xi. To encourage growth of Local Self-Governing Institutions.

xii. To diminish litigation.

xiii. To promote measures that tends to promote economy.

xiv. To check the menace of corruption and bribery at all levels of national life.

xv. To preserve intact the Land Alienation Act as a means of protecting the interest of the backward classes especially in rural area.\textsuperscript{128}

**Third Election 1926:**

The third election under the provision of Act of 1919 was held in 1926 and Chhotu Ram was returned to the Council with a comfortable victory from his old constituency of Jhajjar-Sonepat.\textsuperscript{129} Though everyone expected that Chhotu Ram would be included in ministry, but his claim was ignored. This time the urban Hindus succeeded in keeping Chhotu Ram away from the ministry.

\textsuperscript{128} Madan Gopal, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{129} H. L. Agnihotri and S. N. Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
As a Member of Punjab Legislative Council and Punjab Legislative Assembly:

In January 1927, he was elected the leader of the Unionist Party in the Punjab Legislative Council and continued to serve in this capacity for a decade, till October 1936. Meanwhile, he was also a member of Standing Committee on Finance. He utilized this period in strengthening his ties with the masses. He politely declined a governmental offer to make him Prime Minister of Kashmir as he wanted to confine his activities for the upliftment of the tillers of land. Monetary consideration did not carry much weight with him. In 1928, 1930 and 1931 he also acted as a nominated member on the panel of the Chairman of the Legislative Council. In 1929, he had also been nominated as a member of the Punjab Reforms Committee appointed to make recommendation on the distribution of seats, formation of constituencies and the problem of franchise in Punjab.

Chhotu Ram was elected the President of Punjab Legislative Council in 1936. He performed his role in a dignified way: “So long as I occupy this chair, I do not belong to any party.”

In 1936, Chhotu Ram had to shoulder even greater responsibility, as Sir Fazl-i-Husain died on 9 July after a brief illness. The Government of India Act 1935 provided provincial Autonomy. Now there were no “transferred and reserved” subjects at the provincial level. The first elections under this act were held in 1937. In the succeeding year, Chhotu Ram displayed his organizing capacity as the leader of Unionists. Apart from his own victory, he managed to pull through a good number of candidates of

132 H. L. Agnihotri and S. N. Malik, op. cit., p. 27.
134 Ibid.
136 Tika Ram, op. cit., p. 25.
his party, as member of the new legislative.\(^{138}\)

Chhotu Ram defeated his Congress rival Mange Ram by 11,450 votes in spite of the fact that many big Congress leaders like Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru made speeches at Rohtak in favour of Mange Ram. A major achievement of Chhotu Ram was that all candidates put up by him, defeated their Congress rivals. It is noteworthy that in Haryana region, Congress could win no seat from rural constituency although it won both the urban seats.\(^{139}\)

Even in the absence of Fazl-i-Husain, the Unionist Party begged 95 seats out of 175 total seats.\(^{140}\) The election of 1937 established the complete hold of the Unionist Party over the electorate. The victory of the Unionists with such an overwhelming majority resulted in the formation of the Unionist Government in Punjab. It was around this time that the title of ‘\textit{Rai Bahadur}’ in 1930 and later in March 1937 the title of ‘\textit{Sir}’ were conferred on him.\(^{141}\) Chhotu Ram became minister for Development in 1937; he held this portfolio till 1941 when he changed over as Revenue Minister. This position was held by him till his death.

The cabinet of Sikander Hyat Khan included Chhotu Ram, Sunder Singh Majithia, Manohar Lal, Abdul Haye and Malik Khizr Hyat Khan. However, Sikander Hyat Khan passed away in December 1942\(^{142}\) and was succeeded by Malik Khizr Hyat Khan Tiwana who remained the premier of the province from 1943 to 1946. Chhotu Ram thus played a second in command’s role to three premiers.\(^{143}\) Chhotu Ram pre-eminently tried to maintain good relations with his Muslim colleagues, for that was one of the possible ways to isolate Jinnah at least in the Muslim majority province of Punjab. However, he was well aware of the far-reaching implications thereof.

\(^{138}\) Y. P. Bajaj, \textit{op. cit.}, 1972, p. 25.
\(^{139}\) \textit{Ibid}.
\(^{142}\) Balbir Singh, \textit{op. cit.}, 1994, p. 126.
\(^{143}\) D. C. Verma, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 198.
Chhotu Ram remained busy in public service. To cite his words, “I am not prepared to give up my life-long principles for any material gains and honors.”\textsuperscript{144}

The political situation in India at the time was in a state of flux and for Chhotu Ram it became a race against time.\textsuperscript{145} With every passing day to Chhotu Ram it appeared that Punjab was leading towards partition. He was however, completely committed to opposing partition. For this reason, he toured Punjab extensively to build an opinion against the idea of partition. It may also be noted that across Punjab he received a huge response in his public meetings from all communities. From May to October, 1944 he attempted far too much of work. The last public appearance he made in this regard was in early November, at Jhang. He addressed the gathering for three hours continuously. He fainted at the end of this speech.\textsuperscript{146} Infact, it was a heart attack. Under the doctor’s (Nand Lal) advice, he had to be confined to bed. He showed some signs of recovery, however, on January 9, 1945,\textsuperscript{147} he received another massive heart stroke, which he could not survive and with these words, \textit{“Ham tau chale, Ram sab ka bhalla kare”},\textsuperscript{148} he breathed his last at 10:00 a.m. at the age of 63 years.

For the Unionist Party it was a huge loss. His body was wrapped in the Unionist Flag and the tricolor flag of the Congress of which he had been the District President in the initial phase of his political career. The last rites were performed at the Jat College’s ground in Rohtak. Never in its history had Punjab seen such a massive gathering of people.

In his death, the Punjab peasantry lost its leading supporter. Of equal importance is the fact that his death removed from the political scene, the staunchest opponent of the plan to partition of Punjab.

\textsuperscript{144} Raghuvir Singh Shastri, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 626.
\textsuperscript{145} D. C. Verma, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{147} Madan Gopal, \textit{op. cit.}, 1977, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{148} D. C. Verma, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 193.