CHAPTER - II
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IDEOLOGY

It was Chhotu Ram’s confirmed view that mere political independence without economic emancipation is simply a myth. That was the reason why throughout his political career, he remained engaged in preparing the ground for a truly prosperous peasantry. Chhotu Ram was inspired by the teachings of Bhagwad Gita and Lord Krishna. In a speech at Rohtak he once said (March 1, 1942), “The conviction reflects the inner soul of my life. I have chosen the path of serving the weak according to my own light and have selected the peasant as the symbol of weakness and as the flag bearer of the army against the forces of tyranny and social exploitation.” Like Mahatma Gandhi, Chhotu Ram firmly believed that real India lives in the villages and peasantry constituted the backbone of the nation. But the condition of the peasantry was pathetic as it was exploited by the British Government as well as local moneylenders.

Rising from the modest beginning to an eminent position as a politician of his time, he came to be looked upon as a symbol of uncompromising opposition of the exploitation of rural masses whose total emancipation became his passion.

The Punjab of his Times:

As noted earlier, a major portion of Punjab is of plains and contains a deep alluvial soil that is considered the best in the world for agriculture as it is full of essential mineral constituents.\(^1\) However, the life of peasantry was miserable owing to many reasons: taxation policies with high rate of land revenue and frequent occurrence of famines,\(^2\) excessive litigation, uncertainty of animal life with high cattle mortality,\(^3\) complicated and costly social

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customs, small land holdings, illiteracy, ignorance, corruption etc. All these factors compelled the agriculturists to borrow money from the moneylenders.

**Population of some major districts of Punjab:**

**Density of Population in 1931**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Area (In sq. km.)</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Density (Per sq. km.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambala</td>
<td>38884</td>
<td>4077565</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jallandhar</td>
<td>48801</td>
<td>4606446</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahore</td>
<td>31642</td>
<td>5879075</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawalpindi</td>
<td>55395</td>
<td>3914849</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multan</td>
<td>82375</td>
<td>5102917</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>257097</strong></td>
<td><strong>23580852</strong></td>
<td><strong>520</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table indicates that the density of population varied in the province. In the absence of any clear demarcation between villages and towns in Punjab, all places in British Punjab having a population of 5000 or more were taken as towns at the time of conducting census operations in 1881.

**Proportion of Urban and Rural Populations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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This table shows the proportion of urban and rural population in the province at the Census after every decade. The above table also shows the decline in the urban population during the period 1891-1901 and from 1901-1911. While the decrease from 1891 to 1901 was only marginal, from 1901 to 1911 it was substantial. However, there was a significant rise in the urban population during the decade 1921-1931.

The colonial rulers transformed the barter economy of Punjab into an exchange economy in order to achieve their own interests. The policy also badly affected agriculture. The Britishers’ policy resulted in the decline of indigenous handicraft industry. The whole process led to an increase in unemployment, with artisans and craftsmen being forced to leave their traditional work.

**Dependence on Agriculture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (In percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agriculture at that time had become a profession of loss. The condition of the peasantry was deteriorating day by day. Perhaps, the most important reason for the backwardness of agriculture and poverty of the cultivators in the province was the fragmentation and endless sub-division of landholdings.

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## Land Holdings in Punjab, 1924

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Holdings</th>
<th>Holdings</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of owners</td>
<td>Percentage of the total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 1 Acre</td>
<td>625400</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1-3 Acres</td>
<td>908400</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 3-5 Acres</td>
<td>520000</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5-10 Acres</td>
<td>630600</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 10-15 Acres</td>
<td>288300</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 15-20 Acres</td>
<td>150100</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 20-25 Acres</td>
<td>94000</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 25-30 Acres</td>
<td>168700</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 Acres and above</td>
<td>120900</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table speaks volumes about the land holding of the peasants. According to H. Calvert, about 17.9 percent of the owners of the cultivated land in the province possessed less than one acre of such land each and the area thus owned was only 1 percent of the total. About 40.4 percent of the land owners owned from one to less than five acres.

The unequal distribution of land holding was also an important factor that contributed to the plight of the poor peasantry. Even in the home district of Chhotu Ram, the land holding varied considerably which is given in the table:

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### Size and Distribution of Land Holdings in Rohtak District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Holdings</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 1 Acre</td>
<td>1097</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 1 and Below 3 Acres</td>
<td>3370</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 3 and Below 5 Acres</td>
<td>2594</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 5 and Below 10 Acres</td>
<td>3872</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 10 and Below 15 Acres</td>
<td>1776</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 15 and Below 20 Acres</td>
<td>1173</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 20 and Below 25 Acres</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 25 and Below 50 Acres</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 50 Acres</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the above table 45.9 percent of the peasant proprietors were owners with holdings of acres between 1 acre and 5 acres, 25.2 percent with holdings measuring between 5 to 10 acres. 28.9 percent with size holdings of 10 acre and above, however some land holdings went beyond 50 acres. As the average holdings came to 5.7 acres nearly half of the total holdings in Rohtak District even below this average.\(^9\)

The main cause of the plight of this larger section of society, Chhotu Ram rightly traced, in the anti-agriculturist and the anti-labour policy of the British rulers. The point is amply and clearly confirmed by the fact that the British rule gave full protection to the moneylenders who further enlarged their net of exploitation.\(^11\)

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Peasant Indebtedness:

The advent of the British rule in Punjab was followed by a series of changes. The natural economy was transformed into a market economy. The agriculturists were asked to pay land revenue in cash and also in a fixed time. Whenever there was a failure of crop due to natural calamity or insect-pest attack or bullock loss or any other personal loss, the peasants were forced to take money from the village moneylender.\(^{12}\) Another result of the taxation policy was that it put almost 90 percent of the burden on the agriculturists including the self-cultivators, tenants and also on the agricultural labour.\(^{13}\)

Famine Commission of 1880 reported, “There is everywhere a serious amount of agriculture debt and, at any rate, there is habit of running account with the moneylenders which always slides into debt when a crop is lost or a bullock has to be replaced.”\(^{14}\) The regular civil courts which started the settlement of suits for debts against agriculturists were, for the most part, presided over by *munsiffs* recruited from the towns and were ill versed in rural affairs and customary rights in land.\(^{15}\)

M. L. Darling compared 43000 properties, and summarized the detail as given below:

**Comparison of Debt of Small and Big Properties**\(^{16}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of free of Debt</th>
<th>Percentage of mortgage Debt to total debt</th>
<th>Average Debt (Rs.)</th>
<th>Debt in multiple of land Revenues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large Properties</td>
<td>25840</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Properties</td>
<td>17180</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{13}\) *Jat Gazette*, (Tr.), 25.5.1927, p. 7.


\(^{15}\) *Ibid*.

The above table shows that though numerically the debt was more on the large proprietors in comparison to the small proprietors, however, in realistic term, whereas by owing Rs. 570, the debt of the large proprietor was only ten times the land revenue due from him, the small proprietors, though owed only Rs. 310, his debt was 27 times the land revenue. Thus, the problem of indebtedness was larger in the case of small peasants rather than the large peasants.

The burden of debt, along with the rigid and punctual condition of payment of land revenue and water rates, made the economic condition and the living standard of the average tiller of the land quite miserable.

**Chhotu Ram’s Economic Ideology:**

The economic ideology of Chhotu Ram was influenced by his social ideas. It is also pertinent to point out that his political ideas were further shaped by his economic ideology. The economic ideology of Chhotu Ram, in turn, was shaped by the surrounding conditions of the times that he lived in. His birth in a medium-sized land owning but poor peasant family made Chhotu Ram aware of hardships and difficulties faced by agriculturists.\(^\text{17}\) The economic hardships that he had to face for pursuing his studies in Delhi, for example, only increased his dedication to the cause of the poor and backward sections of society. The formation of his pro-rural ideas was further shaped during his stay in Delhi. Chhotu Ram contributed an article entitled, ‘The Improvement of Indian Village Life’ to the St. Stephen’s college magazine. The article shows his deep understanding of rural society.\(^\text{18}\) Though Chhotu Ram was not a trained economist, yet he had a deep understanding of economic history and economic theories as well as financial constraint of the rural masses. He gathered scattered ideas and integrated them to suit the contemporary Punjab’s economic conditions. His economic policies were


based on ground realities. He always studied economic problems and prescribed answers for them. His economic ideas did not grow in a vacuum. They resulted from the time and the environment in which he lived and worked. His politics in this sense was a preface to his economics that he wanted to see for Punjab and India. Being a down-to-earth man, Chhotu Ram’s approach to most of the economic problems was practical and productive. He strongly believed that the economic fate of the country depended on the rural economy.\textsuperscript{19}

**Reasons for Peasants Indebtedness:**

Chhotu Ram rightly recognized the causes of the deteriorated economic conditions of the agricultural classes. He not only realized the crushing impact of the indebtedness on the peasantry but also their reasons. Some of these were described by him:\textsuperscript{20}

i. They had to bear the burden of unfair taxation in the province.

ii. They were unable to secure fair prices for their production.

iii. The crushing burden of indebtedness.

iv. They had to spend a major part of their earnings on litigation.

v. Illiteracy and ignorance were responsible for their deprivation.

vi. Under-representation of the class of peasantry in the public services too accounted for their lot.

With a view to uprooting the prevailing communalism and other socio-economic evils, the Unionist Party aimed at providing protection to the weak and maximum assistance to the backward.\textsuperscript{21} The main policy of the Unionist Party was to establish a peculiar kind of socialism as is revealed by Chhotu Ram in one of his speeches: “I prefer to have the mentality of a worker and a

\textsuperscript{19} A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{20} *Ibid*, p. 115.

peasant rather than that of a capitalist.”22 He was in favour of imposition of further tax on the wealthier and the rich and not on the poor, whether they were agriculturists or non-agriculturists. He declared: “If I am anything, I am a poor man’s man, whether rural or urban.”23 He was also of the opinion that taxes should not be imposed on all the non-agriculturists but on wealthier classes alone. People call the peasant ‘annadata’ (food producer) but nobody cares to think that he also needs food for himself. The greatest wonder of the world is that one who produces food himself remains hungry.24

Chhotu Ram was very good with statistics. He frequently used them to make a point. Every year three or four crore rupees were being spent on litigation alone.25 The ratio of money lenders’ in Punjab was four times higher than the rest of India.26 As a consequence, the peasants’ total debt in the province was Rs. 55 crore in 1918 and it rose to Rs. 140 crore in 1930.27

The indebtedness of the Punjab peasants was greatly out of proportion of its percentage of the population in the country. The British Punjab had only 7 percent of the population of British India, but its share of debt exceeded 15 percent of the total debt.28

Chhotu Ram strongly opposed the imposition of taxes on the poor peasantry. He stressed on the improvement of general economic condition of the peasantry, which required sincere efforts in fields other than a revision of the land revenue system. The presence of a high volume of agricultural indebtedness, which was unfortunately for the most part unproductive, checked the improvement in all directions and constituted one of the most serious problems for agricultural economy in Punjab.29

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### Total Land Revenue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Land Revenue (in crore)</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Land Revenue (in crore)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>1932-33</td>
<td>4.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>1933-34</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>1934-35</td>
<td>4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Net Income Per Acre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Net Income</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Rs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layallpur</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amritsar</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohtak</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jallandhar</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoshiarpur</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ludhiana</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above comparison demonstrates that despite the fall in the price of agriculture commodities during the great economic depression, the tax remained unchanged. In 1937, the revenue income of the Punjab was Rs. 11 crore 17 lacs and out of this Rs. 9 crore came from the peasantry alone.\(^{31}\)

Chhotu Ram was a ‘socialist’,\(^{32}\) in the sense that he concentrated on the economic problems without mixing them with caste and religion. He

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organized the peasants on economic programmes that were non-religious and non-sectarian.33

**Ideas for Industrial Development:**

He advocated the expansion of the industrial base of the province with defined objectives:

i. To enhance the interest of masses without undue encroachment on the interest of capitalists, big landholders and money lenders.

ii. To take up economic reconstruction and reorganization of agricultural and industrial life of the province so as to cope with the problem of unemployment.

iii. To overhaul the educational system in all its branches.

iv. To improve methods of marketing including reform of objectionable market usages and practice.

v. To distribute equitably the burden of taxation.

vi. To promote industries with special emphasis upon cottage industries in rural areas so as to provide supplementary means of income to rural masses.

vii. To promote and study the commercial interest of the Province.

Chhotu Ram strongly advocated the necessity of agriculture based industries as well as the development of cottage industries in the province.34 Chhotu Ram hoped that industry would try to interconnect with agriculture. In fact, he viewed industry as a medium to elevate the financial condition of the agriculturists. According to him, “One of the best remedies for ills to which agriculturists are subjected is, to industrialize the province.”35

His interest in encouraging industry was basic and genuine. For

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example, as early as 1925 he pushed through the scheme of starting industrial schools. On persistent requests, from the industrialists of Punjab, he pursued the opening of an Engineering College in Punjab. To ensure sufficient supply of power he played an effective role in the sanction of the Mandi Hydro Electric Scheme. His efforts saw the scheme through by 1934-35 at a cost of about Rs. 6.25 crore.\textsuperscript{36}

He emphasized on cottage industries and agriculture based industries also. He was not in favour of big industries in comparison to small scale ones. He encouraged private capital for investment by liberalizing laws and tariff rates. He ensured that purchase of \textit{Swadeshi} articles was encouraged for government use. Chhotu Ram invited the then reputed economist K. T. Shah to prepare a plan for industrial development of Punjab.\textsuperscript{37}

Chhotu Ram laid special emphasis on industries and took the following measures:

i. Opened technical and industrial schools.\textsuperscript{38}

ii. Allowed breaches into the Punjab Alienation of Land Act in two regards namely for obtaining loans from the Industries Department and for acquiring plots for installing industries.\textsuperscript{39}

iii. Provided industrial loans to the educated unemployed and spread female industrial education to an amazing extent in the province.\textsuperscript{40}

iv. He took noteworthy steps for promoting the use of the indigenous and locally produced goods in Government offices and popularized \textit{Swadeshi} goods.\textsuperscript{41}

v. Increased the provisions of the Industries Department in the provincial

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, Vol. XVII, 17.3.1941, p. 123.
budgets and instituted an Industrial Research Fund which was the first experiment of its kind in the country.  

vi. He encouraged the industrialists for investing in state-shared or privately owned big industries and guaranteed them technical knowledge and legal protection.

vii. He initiated and got completed the Mandi Hydro Electric Project for the supply of electricity at a cheap rate to industries.

viii. He organized the conduct of an industrial survey of the province both district-wise and industry-wise with a view to preparing in exhaustive plan for the industrialization for the province.

**Economic Vision:**

Chhotu Ram’s economic ideology was not subservient to any political expediency, rather it guided his politics. He thought it was the foremost duty of every citizen to work to better the lot of the peasantry. His ultimate aim was to bring lasting prosperity as a whole. It was because of the economic visionary view of Chhotu Ram that his advocacy for reduction in Government expenses was distinctly more emphatic during the period of the Great Economic Depression.

Chhotu Ram strongly advocated a graded cut in the salaries of the Government servants instead of 10 percent uniform cut in the salaries of all the employees whether drawing Rs. 50 or Rs. 5000 per month. He proposed a graduated scale of reduction as shown in the table below:

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46 *The Tribune*, Lahore, 12.1.1945, p. 3.
48 *Jat Gazette*, (Tr.), 6.12.1931, p. 3.
Proposed Salary Reduction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary (In Rs. per month)</th>
<th>100-500</th>
<th>500-1000</th>
<th>1000-2000</th>
<th>2000-3000</th>
<th>Above 3000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduction proposed</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This was a sensitively designed proposal that saved a considerable amount for the government.

Uplift of the Peasantry:

Chhotu Ram’s role in the Punjab politics during his political career was significantly determined by his emergence as a peasant leader. The economic basis of the politics of Chhotu Ram helped in uniting the various agriculturists under the banner of the National Unionist Party, formed in 1923. This found expression in the emergence of the first Unionist Government in the province in 1923 (1923-26) and 1937 (1937-45). In his ideology, the cementing force among different sections of the peasantry was to be economic interests and not religion and caste.\(^{49}\) Punjab was principally a province of small self cultivators, the number of big landlords being insignificant. For example, in the Punjab, out of its total population of about 2.358 crore, over 37 lacks possessed land,\(^{50}\) while in U. P. only about 12 lacs out of a population of nearly 4 crore, owned land.\(^{51}\)

For the upliftment of peasantry and to awaken the down trodden people, he wrote a series of 17 articles under the title, ‘Thagi Bazzar ki Sair’ and ‘Bechara Zamindar’. He usually quoted a line from Iqbal, “Kamosi guftgu hai, baizubani hai zuban meri.”\(^{52}\) (Silence is my speech, my tongue being incapable of any expression.)

In Legislature, he tried to root out the past anomalies on principles of

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\(^{49}\) Madan Gopal, op. cit., 1971, p. 36.
\(^{50}\) Jat Gazette, (Tr.), 1.7.1931, p. 1.
\(^{51}\) Punjab Legislative Council Debates, Vol. XXIII, 2.3.1933, p. 646.
\(^{52}\) D. C. Verma, op. cit., p. 169.
equal distribution of taxes between agriculturists and non-agriculturists spending provincial revenues on reconstruction and social welfare activities in rural areas.

**Laws and Amendments passed by the Unionist Party in the Punjab Legislative Council and Punjab Legislative Assembly:**

In 1924, Chhotu Ram represented a bill in the Council entitled, ‘Borrowers Protection Bill.’ According to this Bill, every money lender in Punjab had to maintain regular accounts in the book prescribed. However, this Bill was opposed by the opposition. But this Bill proved very beneficial for the peasantry. As a Minister of Agriculture, Chhotu Ram took up the ‘Mandi Hydro Electric Project’ which was successfully implemented inspite of objection from various quarters. 

53 Inspite of a short term (1924-26) as Minister, Chhotu Ram was always anxious in the Punjab Legislative Council to do something beneficial for the peasantry. He initiated many amendments to the controversial Punjab Alienation of Land Act that was passed in 1900.

The main features of this Act were:

i. No attachment of land in execution of decrees.

ii. It forbade, except by special sanction, the role of land by agriculturist to non-agriculturists.

iii. Outlawed mortgages having the condition of sale clause attached to them.

iv. Declared a number of tribes among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as agriculturist’s tribe such as Jats, Rajputs, Ahirs, Gujjars etc. while others such as Bania, Khatris, Aroras etc. as non-agriculturists.

v. Limited the leases of land in lieu of loans to a period not exceeding twenty years.


It is very important to know Chhotu Ram’s stand on this Act. He was one of the staunch supporters of this Act. He even got amended this Act in order to maintain its spirit. This Act was hailed by the Unionist Party as their ‘Magna Carta’ and rallied support around this Act as a safeguards for the rural population. In spite of some controversial, provisions, this Act was welcomed throughout the Punjab countryside.

Some of the important Legislative provisions were:

i. It restricted the share of the state to maximum of 25 percent of the net assets and the measure of enhancement to a similar proportion in excess of assessment at the expiring settlement.

ii. It placed reassessment of land revenue on a statutory basis.

Before the amendment in this Act, the State could claim 50 percent of the net assets and enhanced land revenue to an unlimited extent. The act was a great boon to the agriculturists, who could now cultivate the land on a long term basis without fear of uncertain and repeated settlement operations and the perpetual anxiety of unlimited enhancement of the Government demand. Besides, there was a long list of laws that were introduced as well as supported by Chhotu Ram and the Unionist Party, as a member of the party and as the Minister of Development Department and Revenue Department, he got enacted these Agrarian Laws:

**The Punjab Regulation of the Accounts Act of 1930:**

This Act was an important measure got enacted by the Unionist Government. The salient features of this Act were that it made mandatory for the creditor:

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57 A. Husain, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
i. To maintain his (money lender) account book properly in legible hand.

ii. To make the updated account books available for inspection after every six months.

iii. Information about the rate of interest to be charged on the amount.

iv. Decrees got issued from a court of law if any.

v. Statement about the person / persons who have stood surety if any.

vi. Warning to be given, if any poor or casual maintenance of the account books.

vii. Violation of the provisions of the act was to amount to the loss of interest wholly or in part and also of the cost of suits.\(^6^0\)

**The Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act VII of 1934:**

Due to bad crops and effects of the depression years, the debt of the Punjab peasantry had reached Rs. 92/- per head in 1934, being the highest in the country.\(^6^1\) The purpose of this Bill was to provide relief of indebtedness by amending the law governing the relation between the debtors and the creditors. In 1921, the total agricultural debt was around Rs. 90 crore and in 1929 it rose to 135 crore rupees, showing an increase of 50 percent. A little later in 1932, the total debt was approximately Rs. 200 crore. If we calculate the total amount of interest payable at the minimum rate of 1 percent per annum, it will come to Rs. 24 crore. It means an annual recurring burden of Rs. 24 crore was to be borne by the agricultural classes of the province as interest alone.

The main features of the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness were\(^6^2\):

i. The maximum rate of interest was lowered to 12 percent per annum simple interest or 9 percent per annum compound interest.

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ii. Establishment of one Conciliation Board in every district to settle the debt amicably of which some part was to be paid immediately and the rest in instalments. These Boards could conciliate in cases involving debt not exceeding Rs.10000.

iii. In no case the interest amount was to be allowed in excess of the principal lent after 1934. But the Imperial Bank or any bank registered before 1937, under the Indian Companies Act (1913) and the co-operative societies were exempted from the purview of the clause. Banking companies registered since 1937 were not given this exemption because some moneylenders, after the passage of Act, had organized themselves into banks to realize their old debts.

iv. The debtor against whom a decree had been issued could not be arrested for the non-payment of the debt.

v. Houses and other dwelling sites could not be attached or sold unless they were proved to have been lying vacant for more than a year.

This Bill made a provision that the interest on loan could not exceed the principal. The debtor stood discharged of the loan if he had paid the creditor twice the amount that he borrowed. It saved the debtors from a loan of about Rs. 200 lacs. Chhotu Ram remarked, “It is mentioned to benefit those teeming millions who are strangers to two square miles a day. It is the man behind the plough who will benefit by this Legislation.”

**The Punjab Debtor’s Protection Act II of 1936:**

This Act was drafted and piloted by Chhotu Ram, on March 31, 1936. It was, to all intents and purposes, a corollary to the Punjab Relief Indebtedness Act and was passed on April 16, 1936. While introducing the Bill in the Council, Chhotu Ram said, “The first consideration which we should keep constantly before our mind’s eye is that the population of Punjab

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64 Raghuvendra Tanwar, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 73.
is 23.5 million out of which 90 percent is in debt, it means 21,00,000 people. And the interests of this overwhelming section of Punjab population are pitted against the interest of just 40,000 moneylenders. This act was strongly defended by Chhotu Ram and opposed by the leaders of the business community. The main objective of the Act was to provide more and effective protection to the debtors. The main features of this Act were:

i. The period of the limitation of the executive of debt decree was reduced from 12 to 6 years.

ii. Civil courts could not lease out the land of the agriculturist debtor in satisfaction of a decree as it made mandatory for them to send the files to the Deputy Commissioners.

iii. The Act further directed the Deputy Commissioner to lease out only that much land of the debtors as they thought was surplus from the livelihood of the debtor family calculating which they were not to include the income of any family member other than the debtor’s own. And after his death, ancestral land and property of the statutory agriculturist debtor could be neither auctioned nor leased out in satisfaction of a decree.

iv. The most impressive provision of this Act was that the crops, cattle, trees, ancestral property, furniture and some part of the land of the debtor were exempted from attachment.

Referring to the Act, Chhotu Ram said in the Assembly, “Whole fodder crop and all other crops of every agriculturist will be exempted from attachment. It means that one thousand mounds of wheat of a zamindar producing three thousand mounds will be exempted. But in the case of small landholders, who do not produce more than twenty or thirty maunds, we have

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66 A. K. Rathee, and D. S. Nandal, op. cit., p. 175.
68 Punjab Government Gazette (Extraordinary), 12.1.1939, p. 345.
provided effective protection by providing that a minimum of twenty *maunds* of grain in every harvest shall be free from attachment in all cases that means forty *maunds* in a year.\(^{69}\)

**The Punjab Registration of Money Lenders Act III of 1938:**

In those days, money lending had neither any code of conduct nor were such lenders even willing to submit to the authority of the government. They charged interest for the money at their own will and the rate of interest sometimes exceeded 25 percent per month.\(^{70}\) In the year 1938, Chhotu Ram’s efforts resulted in the enactment of another beneficial measure namely, The Punjab Registration of Money Lenders Act.

The Act had the following provisions:

i. Every money lender was required to get himself registered by taking out a license on paying the prescribed fee, penalty for not complying with was the withholding of assistance by the courts in realizing his debts.

ii. Any money lender’s license would be cancelled if he violated (section 3), Regulation of Account Act 1930, made fraudulent entry in his account books, charged higher rate of interest than prescribed under section 2 of the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act, 1934.

iii. Cancellation of the license of a money lender resulted in the same penalty until its renewal as if he had not taken out any license.\(^{71}\)

iv. The registration and license could be cancelled for reasons clearly stated in section 6 of the Act.\(^{72}\)

This act brought much relief to those peasants who were not in a position to repay their debts because of their crops having been damaged or destroyed by natural calamities. Nor could the money lenders approach the court and get the decree.\(^{73}\)

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\(^{71}\) *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, Vol. VIII, 20.3.1939, p. 443.


\(^{73}\) *Ibid*, p. 291.
The Punjab Restitution of Mortgaged Lands Act IV of 1938:

Another important measure of Chhotu Ram was in the direction of releasing the peasants’ mortgaged lands. To end this practice, he got the Restitution of Mortgaged lands Act, 1938 Act IV enacted.\textsuperscript{74} This Act restored without any payment, about 4200000 acres belonging to nearly 366780 small landholders, which were mortgaged prior to 8 June, 1901\textsuperscript{75} with the moneylenders for approximately worth Rs. 41300000.\textsuperscript{76} The main principle of the Act was that any mortgager who had benefited from the mortgaged lands twice or more than the principal advanced, was not entitled to any further compensation. The lands so mortgaged by anyone to anyone, stood restored to the original owner without any payment.\textsuperscript{77} This act benefited 3.65 lacs mortgages and immediately took possession at 8.35 acres land which had been mortgaged for a mere 4.13 lacs. The Government created a land reclamation unit for the purpose. It was a laudable attempt to revive peasantry in the entire province.\textsuperscript{78}

The Punjab Agricultural Produce Market Act IX of 1939:

This act was aimed at putting an end to the existing malpractices in the \textit{mandis}.\textsuperscript{79} The main objectives of this Act were to make better regulation of the purchase and sale of agricultural products and establishment of markets for agricultural products in Punjab. The main features of this Act were:\textsuperscript{80}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Establishment of market committees with certain powers and duties.
\item The minimum number of seats for the farmer in market committee was fixed as 2/3 members.
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Punjab Government Gazette (Extraordinary)}, 6.9.1938, pp. 115-117.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid}, 5.12.1939, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates}, Vol. VIII, 5.3.1940, pp. 134-135.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid}, Vol. VIII, 20.3.1939, p. 444.
\textsuperscript{78} Balbir Singh, \textit{op. cit.}, 2009, p. 293.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates}, Vol. VIII, 20.3.21939, p. 441.
\textsuperscript{80} A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 182.
iii. Purchase and sale of particular agricultural produce, specified in notification, could only be carried on by licensed businessmen in areas to which the notification applied.

iv. Collection and dissemination of information regarding all matters relating to crop statistics and marketing.

v. The powers of the market committees included to regulate business and levy certain fees in respect of transaction of sale and purchase that took place in notified areas. The fee was to be diverted to the market committee fund which was to be utilized for salaries, maintenance of the market, construction and repair of the buildings for markets and for health, convenience and safety of the persons using it.

The farmers were exploited by the merchants and the commission agents (Aadtis) as they were not given appropriate rates for their produce. In support of the Act, Chhotu Ram argued, “I may point out that if the zamindars begin to get even two annas in a rupee more than they do now for their produce, the total additional income which will accrue to those people who are engaged in agriculture would be at two annas per rupee and the additional income works out ten crore of rupees yearly. This will be the benefit that will accrue to those people who are connected with agriculture.”

The Punjab Relief of Indebtedness (Amendment) Act XII of 1940:

This Act aimed to put an end to the indebtedness of the peasantry of Punjab. The main features of the Act were:

i. If the creditor or any of the joint creditors failed to be present in person or through his accredited agent at any of the hearings fixed by the coordination based or failed to produce full particulars and documents required under the act, the debt payable to him or the joint creditors, whatever the case, was deemed as fully discharged for all purposes.

82 A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, op. cit., p. 176.
ii. Rate of interest was lowered from 18¾ to 12½ percent simple interest in case of unsecured loans and on secured debts it was lowered from 12 to 7½ percent simple interest per annum and the compound interest was altogether abolished.

iii. If creditors refused to accept a reasonable offer made by the debtor, the Conciliation Board could issue a certificate in respects of such debts, which deprived such creditors of any interest (earlier it was allowed at 6 percent per annum) on the debts after the date of certification, and even if such a creditor succeeded in obtaining a decree from the court, its execution was deferred until the claims of all those creditors who had accepted the offer had been satisfied.83

This Act also applied to all non-agriculturist debtors whether living in rural areas or urban areas, whose one main residential house could not be attached or sold in the execution of a debt decree. As a result of this Act, the Debt Conciliation Boards were set up at district headquarters, which allowed interest of 7.5 percent per annum for secured loans and of 12.5 percent for unsecured loans. By 1942, loans worth Rs.1400 lacs were settled at these rates.84

The Punjab Weights and Measurement Act XII of 1941:

This Act aimed at ensuring proper weights and measures in the market and mandis.85 The object of this act was to check fraudulent weights.86 This act was put in practice to curb and punish those traders who used underweight or overweight measurement units. Government found that 66 percent traders were using such units to exploit the farmers. At the end of a public speech, Chhotu Ram used to say, “To protect the peasant from his clenches (exploiters) and to struggle for their economic and social

83 Ibid, p. 175.
improvement is my endeavour.”

This Act prohibited the use of false weights and measures. As most of mahajans kept two scales, one to be used when the agricultural produced was being bought from the farmer and the other when it was being sold to him for his requirements. The poor peasant suffered on both counts. All such practices were brought under cognizable offences and standard weights and measures alone could now be used both for buying and selling of any type of agricultural product. Special inspectors were appointed to inspect the weights and measures.

Other Acts:

Chhotu Ram and the Unionist Party took numerous steps to improve the lot of the agriculturists through various other acts. To divide the burden of taxation equally between the traders and the agriculturists, the Government passed The General Sales Tax Act 1941 that imposed a tax on the sale of goods in cities and towns. Chhotu Ram got the Punjab Sugarcane (Amendment) Act 1943 enacted. This act made provision that the income from the tax levied on the agriculturists by the sugarcane mills would be spent on improving roads leading to sugar factories and on providing shelters for the peasants and their bullock carts. We can say that because of Chhotu Ram’s economic ideology the condition of agriculturists rose up and, thus, by 1942, the Punjab peasantry had become the lowest land revenue payer in the whole country.

Chhotu Ram stressed on the need of providing better and improved quality of seeds to the farmers. He, therefore, emphasized on setting up a network of Government Seed Farms. The Government in 1927 conceded to

89 Pardaman Singh, (ed.) op. cit., p. 28.
this demand in principal and agreed to establish one Government Seed Farm in each *tehsil*.92

**Peasant Welfare Fund:**

Chhotu Ram initiated the Peasant Welfare Fund with the objective of removing backwardness and bringing about upliftment of the peasantry. He revealed to the Assembly that he had raised the cry for assimilation of the principle of assessment of income tax in the hope that the government might agree to make other reasonable concessions to the land owners.93 Because of his practical approach to the problems of peasantry, he knew the fact that peasants had to suffer a lot in case of natural calamities like hailstorms and damage to their crops by locusts. He created Peasant Relief Fund to provide relief to the peasants in the time of natural calamities.94

**Irrigation Facilities:**

As most of Punjab Province parts were deficient in rainfall, therefore, agriculture prosperity of Punjab, to a very large extent, depended on irrigation.

**Area Irrigated by Canals over Years**95

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area irrigated (in millions acres)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area irrigated (in millions acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887-88</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-01</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>12.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913-14</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>12.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>1945-46</td>
<td>14.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

92 *Jat Gazette*, (Tr.), 15.6.1927, p. 4.
Area irrigated by canals was rising steadily as shown in the above table. In his efforts to make the agriculturists self depended, Chhotu Ram gave practical shape to the Kharrif Canals Extension Scheme 1940. Two non-parallel canals, one each for Rohtak and Hisar District (1941-42) were dug.

A division was instituted (1943-44) for finding irrigational possibilities in the western parts of the province. New scheme of tube well irrigation and lift irrigation from western Jamuna Canal were also started.

Chhotu Ram laid emphases on irrigation facilities. From 1937, Chhotu Ram’s efforts for bringing irrigation facilities to the South-East Punjab were based on the two-fold scheme as deducible from above i.e., to work for an early execution of the Bhakra Dam Project and in the meantime take steps to give practical shape to tube-well irrigation, he remarked, “I can assure members, who represent South-Eastern districts that I will not allow my colleague here a moment’s rest until he does something to bring to the thirsty land of the South-Eastern districts, water to irrigate them. Whether that water comes through the construction of Bhakra Dam Project or through undertaking some other project is immaterial to me.”

In 1937, Chhotu Ram expedited the process of completion of the project of Bhakra Dam. A High Dam Circle was created in 1939 to prepare the designs and revise the estimate of the Bhakra Dam. The surveys connected with the Bhakra Dam were completed and the project was revised with a view to generating hydroelectricity. On January 8, 1945, in Shakti Bhawan, Chhotu Ram signed the Bhakra Dam scheme as Revenue Minister.

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96 *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, Vol. XII, 5.3.1940, p. 132.
101 *Jat Gazette*, (Tr.), 26.3.1941, p. 63.
This, incidentally, was his last signature. The next day he passed away.\textsuperscript{103} The Haveli Project was another landmark to the credit of Chhotu Ram and this project was completed in 1939.\textsuperscript{104} Another scheme, the Beas Dam Scheme was also started to raise the water level high of the well of Doaba (the area lying in between the rivers Sutlej and Beas).\textsuperscript{105} As a consequence of his efforts, the net irrigated area in the southeast Punjab increased considerably.

**Percentage of Net irrigated Area in Different Districts of Haryana\textsuperscript{106}**

*(Derived from the average figures)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>1911 (1908-09 to 1912-13)</th>
<th>1921 (1918-19 to 1922-23)</th>
<th>1931 (1928-29 to 1932-33)</th>
<th>1941 (1938-39 to 1942-43)</th>
<th>1951 (1948-49 to 1952-53)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rohtak</td>
<td>15.26</td>
<td>28.42</td>
<td>33.11</td>
<td>42.50</td>
<td>37.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hisar</td>
<td>10.93</td>
<td>15.84</td>
<td>13.48</td>
<td>17.08</td>
<td>17.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnal</td>
<td>26.58</td>
<td>40.38</td>
<td>43.00</td>
<td>54.11</td>
<td>44.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurgaon</td>
<td>12.95</td>
<td>17.33</td>
<td>17.17</td>
<td>13.06</td>
<td>14.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambala</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>6.79</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>8.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>69.53</strong></td>
<td><strong>108.76</strong></td>
<td><strong>113.12</strong></td>
<td><strong>135.32</strong></td>
<td><strong>121.95</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table clearly shows the results of the efforts made by Chhotu Ram.

**Upliftment of Employees:**

For the upliftment of employees, Chhotu Ram enacted the *Trade Employee Act, 1940*. This Act has received so much of public appreciation that some have gone to the extent of remarking that Sir Chhotu Ram was the harbinger of this kind of acts, not only in India but in the whole of Asia.\textsuperscript{107} The advantages which accrued out of this Act to all the employees engaged in shops, banks, commercial establishment etc., were:


\textsuperscript{104} *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, Vol. XII, 6.3.1940, p. 132.


\textsuperscript{107} *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 13.7.1969, p. 4.
i. Every employee got 4 paid holidays in every month.

ii. No employee could be dismissed without having been given a month’s notice thereof.

iii. No employee could be compelled to work for more than 11 hours a day, and 40 hours a week.

iv. No commercial establishment was to be opened before 8:30 a.m.

v. All employees with 15 days continuous service were to get their salaries for the holidays.

vi. All employees with one year’s continuous service were entitled to 15 days leave with pay.

vii. Children below the age of 14 could not be employed in any shop or commercial establishment.\(^{108}\)

This Act benefitted not only the employees, but the traders too by making their domestic life more systematic and social by fixing the working hours of their establishments.

Chhotu Ram invited Prof. K. T. Shah, an eminent economist to prepare a tentative plan for the industrial development of the province.\(^{109}\) Chhotu Ram established an industrial research fund in 1938 in the province with an object of helping industrial research.\(^{110}\)

**Influences on His Social Planning:**

A story goes that Chhotu Ram was inspired as a student in 1897 by a Sanskrit couplet of the ‘Hitopdesha’ in a text-book. The couplet could be translated into English as “In the ordinary course of nature thousands are born every day, but he alone is truly born whose birth leads to elevation of his race.”\(^{111}\) The social ideology of Chhotu Ram was not only influenced by the


Hitopdesha but also by his days with the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, that is his stay at Agra from June, 1908 to September, 1912. Chhotu Ram’s social thinking was the product of the time, situation and conditions that he lived.

Chhotu Ram had not many advantages, but his hardships and adverse circumstances proved to be a blessing in disguise. He used to repeat in his rural conferences a popular verse of Iqbal:

“Tundia badai mukhalif se na ghabra e uqqab
yeh toh chalti hain tujhe uncha uthane kai liye.”

(Do not get disheartened by the fury of the adverse winds, o eagle, as these winds blow to enable you to fly still higher.)

The Bhagavad Gita:

The philosophy of the Gita also left an indelible mark on his thought. According to Chhotu Ram, he was inspired by Lord Krishna’s advice to Arjun, “Thou shall not depart from the path of duty by any hope of reward or fear of penalty, thy concern is only with action, not with fruit thereof,” He also often quoted Lord Krishna’s sermon to Arjun, “In the performance of the duty thou should be indifferent to comfort and discomfort to gain and loss, to victory and defeat.”

In addition to the Gita, Chhotu Ram continued, “I have a deep conviction in the teaching of Lord Krishna. This conviction reflects the inner soul of my politics and constitutes the real philosophy of my life. I have chosen the path of serving the weak and raising the fallen, according to my own lights, and I have chosen the agricultural classes as the symbol of weakness and as the standard bearers of the army of rescue and relief against the forces of social tyranny and economic exploitation.”

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Influence of Sir Mohammad Iqbal’s Poetry:

Chhou Ram was greatly influenced by the poetry of Mohammad Iqbal, although politically their views were far apart. Chhotu Ram said, “In my dogged perseverance on the path of what I consider to be my duty I have been chiefly sustained by the next divine philosophy which was unfolded on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Next to the Gita, the dynamic philosophy preached by Sir Mohammad Iqbal, the poet philosopher of the East has deeply influenced my thinking.” 115 While Gita gave him philosophy, Iqbal gave him the ideas for which he launched a relentless crusade.

What impressed him the most was Iqbal’s concept of ‘Khudi’ i.e., self and he used to recite the following lines of the poet quite often, “Khudi ko kar buland itna ke har taqdeer se pahle khuda, bande se khud puche bata teri raza kya hai.” 116 (Raise thyself to such a height that God may himself ask you what do you wish to achieve.)

He depicted the plight of Punjab peasantry which was going from bad to worse day after day, in a small booklet, ‘Bechara Zamindar’, which graphically described the pitiable condition of the peasants in Punjab and also called for necessary action to remedy the situation. His advocacy of the unity of the peasantry irrespective of the caste, class and religion has to be understood in the light of his peasant background and also keeping in view that the size of the land holding did not necessarily make differences in the economic position of the peasantry in the area to which Chhotu Ram belonged.

That is why he did not differentiate between large, medium and small sized landowners; Chhotu Ram therefore, often said, “Moong moth main kaun bada kaun Chhota?” (There is no different between various categories of peasantry.) 117

His social ideology was formed by the economic hardships that he

had to face for pursuing studies in Delhi which created in him dedication for the cause of the poor and backward sections of the society. It was during his stay in Delhi that he could notice the huge gap that existed in the economic conditions of the urban and the rural areas. He found that there were virtually two different societies, one affluent and the other poverished. It is this that made him aware of the urban rural divide. The formation of his pro rural ideas on the one hand and the anti-urban ideas on the other started in Delhi. The sarcastic remarks that he had to hear from his urban school mates in Delhi for being a student from rural area not only strengthened his pro-rural attitude but also embittered his anti-urban feelings.

This is evident from the following statement of Chhotu Ram, “My seven years of study at Delhi brought me in close contact with students from the highly cultured sections of Delhi society. My relations with them were entirely cordial, but in friendly banter, these urban comrades always styled their school and college fellows from the countryside as rustics, and bumpkins. \textit{Jats} came to form a particularly heavy share of these jokes. The epithets were used in perfect good humor, with no desire to hurt, and no conscious sting behind them but it will be over sighting to pretend that they did not proceed from an undercurrent of a feeling which, though innocent in appearance, had a vein of disrespect and disdain for my class.”\textsuperscript{118}

\textbf{Influence of Arya Samaj and Social Approach:}

It was during his stay at St. Stephens College that Chhotu Ram came under the influence of \textit{Arya Samaj}. On the social plank, the \textit{Arya Samaj} was against orthodoxy, hypocrisy and irrational rituals that had corrupted or perverted the Hinduism. It was also against the caste based \textit{varna} system and pleaded for widow re-marriage. On the political side, the \textit{Arya Samaj} advocated nationalism, \textit{Swaraj} and good governance through decentralization. Despite his deep involvement in political activities, particularly the

advancement of the economic lot of the poor peasants, he found time to popularize and propagate the tenets of Arya Samaj. He proudly claimed himself to be a member of the Samaj although he remained an active stalwart of the Muslim dominant Unionist Party.\textsuperscript{119} Besides Arya Samaj, the education at Delhi also left deep impact on the social ideas of Chhotu Ram. The higher education and social surroundings made his social ideas more articulate. This is evident from the articles contributed by him about a rural society in the college magazine. Before he concluded, he advised his younger friends that:

i. Think deeply, carefully, calmly and dispassionately until you form a clear conception of your goal. When the goal has once been clearly formed, follow it with your gaze steadily fixed on it, undeterred by difficulties, undaunted by setbacks, undismayed by defeats, unperturbed by the year of adversaries.

ii. Banish religion from politics. Religion is a mere dope, an opiate, administered to you by interested and designing people to prevent clear and independent thinking.

iii. Practice subordination of the interest of individuals to the interest of the community systematically until it becomes a fixed habit.

iv. Bow before the decision of the majority as if it were decision made by you in the exercise of your own free volition.

v. Render unquestioning obedience to the command of the leader after it has once issued.

vi. If you belong to any of the backward classes, resolutely refuse to hand over the reins of leadership to outsiders because people led by outsiders can never develop those qualities of independence, dignity, self-respect, self-help and self-reliance which alone hold the key to success and progress.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{119} H. L. Agnihoti and S. N. Malik, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{120} Ganda Singh, `A speech of Sir Chhotu Ram: 1\textsuperscript{st} March, 1942’ the Punjab Past and Present, Vol. VIII, Part I, April, 1974, p. 225.
Chhotu Ram preached that the rural masses would one day overthrow the domination of the upper exploiting classes once they organized themselves under the leadership of the peasantry, the largest section of rural population. Chhotu Ram did not claim to be a revolutionary and his methods were confined to bringing about changes in the rural areas by progressive legislative, administration and economic measures.

The social ideology of Chhotu Ram was perhaps also influenced by his stay with Raja Ram Pal Singh of Kalakankar (U. P.) in 1907,\textsuperscript{121} when he worked as his Private Secretary. The liberal and nationalist outlook of Raja Ram Pal made a profound impact on the social ideology of Chhotu Ram. His tenure as an editor of the \textit{Hindustan}, a weekly owned by the Raja also brought a significant change in Chhotu Ram’s ideology. However, Kalakankar was a small state in U. P. yet Raja Rampal’s father Raja Dinesh Singh was a nationalist despite his feudal background. He had association with nationalist leaders like Madan Mohan Malviya.\textsuperscript{122} Chhotu Ram’s association with the weakly owned by a liberal nationalist was also bound to influence the social ideas of Chhotu Ram. His discussion with Raja Ram Pal played an important role in bringing about changes in his social ideology. His life, thus, was dominated by four social passions - love for the poor, Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity, integrity of the country and nation building with a just social order.

Chhotu Ram started the \textit{Urdu} weekly, the \textit{Jat Gazette} in 1916, which he himself edited up to 1924.\textsuperscript{123} Explaining the objective of \textit{Jat Gazette}, he wrote that the purpose of it was to find means for the betterment of the backward rural community, to bring unity amongst its members and also to represent the legitimate right of the needy rural masses to the government.\textsuperscript{124} In an article published in the College magazine in 1907, Chhotu Ram reflected on ways to improve life in rural areas, to end the problem of the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{121} Madan Gopal, \textit{op. cit.}, 1971, pp. 22-23.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{123} A. Husain, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 156.
\end{flushright}
people and to curb the monopoly of the village Bania.\textsuperscript{125} Infact everything he wrote, almost always had a social message.

Throughout his life he followed the principle that one of the best and the most effective ways of improving the social status, economic and political position and standard of living of the rural people especially agriculturist was through education. Chhotu Ram realized from the very beginning that the lack of education among the rural people was mainly responsible for their miseries, exploitation, indebtedness and backwardness. Due to illiteracy they have been tolerating the injustice done by the Government.\textsuperscript{126}

**Emphasis on Education:**

The British did rather little to spread education among the common people of the province.\textsuperscript{127} The picture about the dearth of the educational institutions and illiteracy in erstwhile Haryana is below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Area (Sq. Miles)</th>
<th>No. of Schools</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>No. Of Students</th>
<th>Percentage of D to E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ambala</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>689970</td>
<td>9559</td>
<td>16.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gurgaon</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>643177</td>
<td>6308</td>
<td>11.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hisar</td>
<td>5217</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>804889</td>
<td>3521</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Karnal</td>
<td>3153</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>799787</td>
<td>5831</td>
<td>8.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rohtak</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>541489</td>
<td>6746</td>
<td>14.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table illustrates the lack of education among people of the province, and government’s apathy towards education. Main reasons for Chhotu Ram’s laying emphasis on promoting education among the agricultural class was his belief that India would definitely be independent

one day and that in view of their educational backwardness, the agriculturists would be left behind and would therefore neither be able to reap the fruit of democracy nor to perform duties as citizens of an independent country.\(^{128}\) For him, the *Arya Samaj* became a medium for educational growth and social reform.

*Arya Samaj* movement which aimed at removing the dead wood of Hindu orthodoxy, made a powerful hold on the people of Haryana. The *Jats* of Haryana are mostly follower of *Arya Samaj*. Chhotu Ram was no exception and he was born and brought up in the surroundings which helped him to embrace the reformist cult of *Arya Samaj*, he also fully motivated the movement of *Arya Samaj* despite his deep involvement in political activities, particularly advancement of the economic lot of the poor peasants. He found time to popularize and propagate the tenets of the *Arya Samaj*. He proudly claimed himself to be a member of the *Arya Samaj* although he remained an active stalwart of the Muslim dominated Unionist Party.\(^{129}\)

Chhotu Ram repeatedly declared that he was a *Jat* by birth but an *Arya Samajist* by his faith and religious convictions.\(^{130}\) In order to put an end to the exploitation and backwardness of the peasantry, to maintain unity amongst all sections of Punjab population, to avoid a possible communal hatred and to provide equal opportunity to all sections of population irrespective of caste, creed and religion, he left no stone unturned.

Due to the Non-Co-Operation Movement, he founded *Jat Heroes High School* at Rohtak. The new school showed considerable progress and its enrollment crossed 700 students.\(^{131}\) He opposed the boycott of government educational institutions by rural people during Non Co-Operation movement. Chhotu Ram also initiated the growth of education in Rajputana in 1918 when

\(^{128}\) Imperial Gazetteer of India, Punjab, Vol. II, 1910-19 for various districts.
\(^{130}\) Ibid, p. 51.
\(^{131}\) Raghubir Singh Shastri, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
he visited Jodhpur to collect funds for Jat School, Rohtak and primarily to awaken the peasantry of Jodhpur about the need of education.\textsuperscript{132} In the Punjab Legislature, he always laid emphasis upon providing more educational facilities to the rural people and raised a strong voice whenever he found a move contrary to the interests of the rural people. In the Council he would not spare any minister - unionist or non unionist whenever the minister showed any slackness in the promotion of education.\textsuperscript{133}

Chhotu Ram shaped the education policies of the Unionist Government as its co-founder and effective member. Chhotu Ram’s initiative was to set up primary and middle schools and high schools in rural areas, high schools in towns and at least one intermediate college in each district. Chhotu Ram insisted on starting primary schools to provide equal education opportunities. He said, “These schools must be opened and as far as the buildings of primary schools are concerned our children would very well receive education under these trees like our forefathers if required.”\textsuperscript{134} The enrollment of primary and middle schools increased from 5.40 and 1.31 lacs respectively in 1922-23 to 7.98 and 3.43 lacs respectively in 1926-27.\textsuperscript{135}

As seen in the table below a significant increase was noticed in the admission of the agriculturists’ students in Central Training School, Lahore and 56 per cent seats were reserved for them in the Engineering School, Rasul.\textsuperscript{136} The ambitious educational plan of the Unionist Party was given practical shape by Chhotu Ram during 1924-26, when he was Minister of Education, by opening a large number of new schools and intermediate colleges and upgrading many of the existing primary, middle and high schools.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{132} Jat Gazette, (Tr.), 9.1.1966, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{133} Punjab Legislative Council Debates, Vol. XXVII, 1.11.1935, pp. 448-449.
\textsuperscript{135} Sanaullah Khan, History of Education in Punjab, Lahore, 1932, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{136} A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, op. cit., pp. 262-263.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
Admission in Central College, Lahore (1924-25)\textsuperscript{138}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Sikhs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agriculturists</td>
<td>Non-Agriculturists</td>
<td>Agriculturists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.T.</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.A.V</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of Chhotu Ram and Unionist Party’s efforts, the number of schools for adults increased from 630 with 1776 pupils in 1922-23 to 3784 with 98414 pupils in 1926-27. The primary schools which were 156 in 1923-24 in rural areas increased to 2947 in 1938-39. The number of middle and high schools rose from 363 and 161 in 1917-18 to 3309 and 406 respectively in 1938-39. The number of intermediate colleges was only 5 in 1923, whereas in 1938-39, there were 38 degree colleges in the Punjab.\textsuperscript{139}

\textbf{Emphasis on Technical Education:}

Chhotu Ram laid special emphasis on technical education to rural youth so that they could go to other professions as land alone would not be sufficient to provide gainful employment. In 1924, he got a resolution passed by Punjab Legislative Council and got circulated among various professional and technical institutes viz. Medical College, Lahore; Medical School,

\textsuperscript{138} Y. P. Bajaj, \textit{op. cit.}, 1972, p. 352.
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Ibid}, p. 264.
Amritsar; Veterinary College, Lahore that special concessions should be
given to students belonging to agriculturist families for admission to these all
technical institutes and colleges.\(^{140}\)

For the needy and helpless people, Chhotu Ram got fee concessions
in schools and implemented the scheme of establishing libraries in rural areas.
About 2000 libraries were opened up to 1926. The students could also borrow
newspapers and books from these libraries. Chhotu Ram was instrumental in
propagating the idea of rural libraries with his efforts, for each proposed
library, Rs. 500 were granted for its initial establishment and Rs. 50 as annual
maintenance grant.\(^{141}\) This led to increase in number of rural libraries, the
other main contribution of Chhotu Ram as Education minister was
rationalization of government grants-in-aid policy for private colleges. For
instance, out of total grant meant for private colleges, 50 percent was given to
Islamia College, Lahore, 37.5 percent to Sikh College and the remaining 12.5
percent was distributed among the colleges run by Sanatan Dharm and Arya
Samaj organization. Chhotu Ram corrected the imbalance to make it just and
equitable for all the privately managed institutions.\(^{142}\)

With a view to spread education among the rural people, Chhotu Ram
put pressure upon the Government for the opening of more institution in the
backward areas and he further insisted that their number should be
commensurate with the contribution made by the rural people to the state
exchange.\(^{143}\) The other important principles that he propagated for proper
education were that there should be seats reserved for agriculturists and no
reduction should be made in education expenditure by the Government.\(^{144}\)

\(^{140}\) \textit{Ibid},
\(^{142}\) Raghubir Singh Shastri, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 146-147.
\(^{143}\) \textit{Jat Gazette}, (Tr.), 20.4.1927, p. 3.
\(^{144}\) \textit{Ibid}, 16.4.1918, p. 4.
Emphasis on Women Education:

Chhotu Ram took keen interest in female education. He often said, “Prudence is women’s greatest property, ornament and beauty. I am opposed to her confinement to the four walls of the house, as well as to unhygienic customs of purdha. I favour their going out without purdha.”¹⁴⁵ As the compulsory Primary Education Act 1919 for boys could not be implemented, he was not in favour of making female education compulsory. However, due to his efforts the number of female pupils rose from 85000 in 1922 to 1210000 in 1927.¹⁴⁶

He made efforts to remove the prevailing inequality in the existing female institutions in different divisions of Punjab. Ambala Division was the worst placed, having just 3 high schools out of a total of 22 girls high schools in Punjab in 1933,¹⁴⁷ while there should have been 5 for equal proportion. Again in the whole Ambala division there was only one girls’ middle school. He pleaded for removal of regional anomalies in girls’ education. He made notable efforts to provide facilities for professional and industrial training to women. In Ambala Division, the number of girls who had passed M. A. was only 3 in 1931-32 and 6 in 1935. Similarly, the number of girls who had passed B. A. was 20 in 1931-32 and 91 in 1935. Likewise of F. A. the respective figures were 97 in 1931-32 and 193 in 1935. Only 336 girls passed the matriculation examination in 1931-32 and in 1935 their number was 823.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 1072.
¹⁴⁷ Ibid.
Number of students in Educational Institutions in Punjab Province:\(^{149}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School/ College</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Schools</td>
<td>376687</td>
<td>396044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Schools</td>
<td>568608</td>
<td>596371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>13132</td>
<td>16783</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scholarship to Female Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Name of Scholarship</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Silver Jubilee Scholarship of Rs.10/- each reserved for the agriculturists.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Silver Jubilee Scholarship of Rs.56/- each reserved for the agriculturists</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Scholarship for those women who received trainings with the demonstration parties at Rs.3/- each</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Scholarship of Rs.7/- each for the trainees at the Government Zanana School, Lahore.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Scholarship of Rs.5/- each for the trainees at the Government Zanana School, Lahore.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was all because of Chhotu Ram’s efforts that the fund for female industrial education was raised from Rs. 6000/- in 1920 to Rs. 79000/- in 1940.\(^{150}\) He opened a modern tannery and 6 new industrial schools in 1925, consequently the number of industrial school reached 22 and the strength of pupils in them reached 2000.\(^{151}\) He also established education in wool

spinning and wool weaving.\textsuperscript{152} He managed an increase in expenditure for the Education Department. The expenditure which was Rs. 98 lacs in 1921-22 was increased to Rs. 118 lacs in 1924-25. It was further increased after 1937, when the Unionist Party formed the Government, as shown in the Table:\textsuperscript{153}

**Percentage of Government Expenditure on Technical and Industrial Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Expenditure on Technical and Industrial Education</th>
<th>Percentage over 1936-37</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td>161.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td>165.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td>166.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-42</td>
<td>166.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-43</td>
<td>167.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-44</td>
<td>176.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-45</td>
<td>208.2</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He was instrumental in establishment of ‘Peasant Welfare Fund,’ out of which scholarships were to be given to children of small farmers who paid Rs. 25 as land revenue.\textsuperscript{154} He paid scholarship to deserving students of poor families. He used to send monthly allowances to some widows and orphans. One of the beneficiaries of the fund, later awarded the Nobel Prize in 1979, was Dr. Abdus Salam (Physics Nobel Laureate). The total such financial help came up to between Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000 per month. Chhotu Ram paid these monthly allowances/scholarships from his personal resources.\textsuperscript{155} The selection

\textsuperscript{152} Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates, 25.3.1938, p. 264.
\textsuperscript{153} A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 263-66.
\textsuperscript{154} Madan Gopal, \textit{op. cit.}, 1997, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
of students was always based on merit and means and had no connection with caste or religion.

### Literacy Percentage of Punjab

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**On Bureaucracy and Corruption:**

Chhotu Ram was a crusader against corruption. When a resolution on corruption came under discussion in the Punjab Legislative Council in 1933, he replied, “I have been sensing for some time that the officers are losing their contact with the public, for whose benefit they are supposed to work. The government benches, while not opposing the resolution have attempted to show that they themselves are not responsible for corruption, I don’t accept that the government has no responsibility in the matter of corruption amongst services. The government is as much responsible as the public. If the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police, the Executive Engineer and other District heads of department do not know what is happening in their department, they have neither eye to see nor ears to hear, such officers are useless.”

**Committedly Secular:**

With a view to uprooting the prevailing communalism and other socio-economic evils, the Unionist party had aimed at providing protection to the weak and maximum assistance to the backward. He often said that he was a nationalist to the core and that, some organizations have, out of motive,

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tried to paint him as a communalist. He said that, “The cloak of communalism did not suit him at all.” Chhotu Ram declared, “I am not communal, I do not stand either for Hindu rights or Muslim rights. I stand for the right of zamindar. My creed stands on the basis of common secular and economic interest.”

In a speech at Rohtak, he said, “The bane of our nation is communalism, which has pushed us back. I firmly believe that the only panacea of this evil is the Unionist Party. The Unionist Party is formed on the basis of common economic programme.” He was a secular man and never discriminated among communities on the basis of caste, creed and religion. He once remarked in a public gathering in Lahore in 1939, “The Muslims are 9 crore in India, it is impossible for the Hindus to turn them out. Similarly, it is not possible for the Muslims to destroy the Hindus. There is therefore, no reason why they should not give proof of tolerance and work together shoulder to shoulder like brothers.”

Once at a political rally in Sonepat, one of the speakers, a person of high stature of course, went off the subject and began to say something about religion. Chhotu Ram interrupted him and went to the stage and stopped him, saying that this was not a place to preach religion. He was completely against communalism, and was a staunch opponent of Jinnah’s demand for the partition of India.

He had a clear cut idea about religion and politics. In a speech at Rohtak, he remarked that religion should not be mixed with politics, and political organizations must proceed on the basis of economic interests. Because of Chhotu Ram’s opposition to the two nation theory of Jinnah, Sardar Patel once remarked to Sri Ram Sharma that he would not have worried about any of Punjab’s problems, had Chhotu Ram been alive.

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159 Ganda Singh, op. cit., p. 222.
163 Ganda Singh, op. cit., p. 222.