CHAPTER - IV
LEGACY OF POLICIES AND IDEOLOGIES

Relevant to the Present Times:

The roots of today’s phenomenal development of Punjab and Haryana can be traced in the historical context as development which is a continuous process of evolving patterns. In our study period, the peasantry was, as noted, in a very poor state. Indebtedness, exploitation, illiteracy and backwardness were rampant. In due course of time, the region as we know was transformed into one of the most progressive and dynamic of economies. Yet serious issues remain untouched. Chhotu Ram foresaw, seventy years ago, what we witness today - a resurgent peasantry. He knew that the Indian peasantry would come into its own way one day. Chhotu Ram changed the socio-economic scenario through his policies and programmes which not only liberated the peasantry from social, economic and political shackles but also resulted into systematic initiation of developmental works in rural areas.¹

In this sense, the social, economic and political ideas of Chhotu Ram formulated during the colonial period continue to have relevance in the present times. That is why, we find traces of the influences of the ideas of Chhotu Ram on the politics of leaders like Charan Singh and even Devi Lal. The emergence of peasant movements in different parts of India also indicates the continuing relevance of his ideas.

Chhotu Ram liberated the peasantry and rural masses through a series of legislative measures popularly known as ‘Golden Laws’ which he got passed and implemented in Punjab inspite of unprecedented opposition. Some of his agrarian reforms like consolidation of land holdings are still relevant in the context of prevailing condition in large parts of the country. Earlier almost

the entire provincial revenue was charged from the peasantry, yet hardly any amount was spent on agriculture and rural development. He devoted himself not only in rationalizing the tax structure i.e., providing relief to poor and taxing the rich but also initiated policies and programmes aimed at rapid development of the completely neglected rural sector with more priority to unprivileged sections and regions of the province. He gave priority to development of agriculture, irrigation, animal husbandry, high value horticultural crops, labour intensive and rural industries, rural infrastructure including roads, education, health, drinking water supply and other amenities of life to strengthen balanced development of agriculture and industry as well of urban and rural sectors.

Chhotu Ram organized not only the agriculturist, the backward and the downtrodden people, rural institutions etc. into organic political entities but also awakened them to take up the cause of communal harmony within the limitations imposed by the British under the guise of, so called Diarchy, and later Provincial Autonomy.

The present economic, political, social and religious situation of the region of Chhotu Ram’s domain is totally different from that of his times. This change is due to the policies and programmes initiated and advocated by him and the path shown by him. The awareness and the urge which he himself and his policies had created in the masses, especially in the peasantry, have overcome the catastrophic effects of the partition of 1947. The successive governments of the region followed more or less the same path of improving and encouraging agriculture and rural development, as proposed by Chhotu Ram.

The process of development in Haryana and Punjab today, can in many ways be traced to his policies. Chhotu Ram was well aware of the prevailing exploitation, backwardness and ignorance of rural masses. His aim was to bring about the economic salvation of this exploited class. The chief

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plank of his party was the upliftment of backward classes and backward areas. Chhotu Ram followed a policy of repelling attacks on the Alienation of Land Act, proposing and enacting other measures of relief from indebtedness and protection of debtors. He sought to raise their net income in order to provide permanent relief from exploitation, rationalizing the tax structure and providing relief to peasantry, diverting an increasing amount of state expenditure towards rural areas. He sought to cut down the wasteful government expenditure, formulate and implement a comprehensive agriculture cum rural development programme involving entire rural life with active participation through panchayats and co-operative societies. He suggested measures for rapid industrialization of the province with special emphasis on agro-based, rural and cottage industries, seeking development in agriculture, irrigation, education, public health, roads and infrastructure. He wanted to remove social evils and taboos and support the cause of national integration and communal harmony.  

It is commonly believed that Chhotu Ram’s efforts for financial reforms, economic policies and ideology were restricted merely to the rural and agricultural sector. Some critics have charged Chhotu Ram as being incapable of thinking beyond the confines of agriculture and the agriculturists. Based on the demographic realities of the Punjab, Chhotu Ram was justified in concentrating his efforts on the improvement of the economic conditions of the agriculturists and the rural area in general, but this is not to suggest that he ignored the urban areas and their problems.

Chhotu Ram had fought tooth and nail against the exploiting class and was successful in establishing a virtual Kisan Raj in Punjab by enacting the Golden Acts. These Acts were adopted by later governments across India in some form or the other. The Legislative enactment by Chhotu Ram and the Unionist Party brought about a dynamic change in the rural society of Punjab.

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3 Ibid, p. 312.
Though his stand regarding the Punjab Land Alienation Act created some controversy, amendments in this particular Act by the Unionist Government provided relief to the peasants and saved them from the clutches of money-lenders. Undoubtedly, these measures had far reaching consequences. These went a long way in protecting the interests of the agriculturists and promoted the growth of agriculture in the province. The roots of the ‘Green Revolution’ in Punjab and Haryana can, in fact, be traced to the works and policies of Chhotu Ram.⁴

**Political Legacy:**

It is pertinent to point out that the ideas of Chhotu Ram were framed at a time when southern Punjab (present Haryana) was a backward region in comparison with the rest of Punjab. It had, by and large, a primitive system of agriculture, which was quite often affected by the lack of rainfall, frequent drought and famines. The people of this region had a share neither in administration nor in the power structure at various levels despite their superior numerical strength.

The legacy of Chhotu Ram’s ideology and actions made some impact on the politics of leaders like Charan Singh and Devi Lal despite a fundamental difference in their approach towards British imperialism. It is also important to mention here that even if Chhotu Ram is perceived as collaborating with the British but he did this for protecting and promoting the interests of the peasantry in general. On the other hand, Charan Singh took an active part in the struggle against imperialism, but like Chhotu Ram, he advocated the cause of rural people and agriculturists when he remained in power at the state and centre levels. Chhotu Ram worked with the Muslim landlords of the western Punjab in the Unionist Party which was an alliance of the Muslim agriculturists and the Hindu agriculturists. Charan Singh followed Chhotu Ram when he became Revenue Minister in Uttar Pradesh Government.

⁴ Pardaman Singh (ed.), *Chhotu Ram: In the Eyes of His Contemporaries*, New Delhi, 1992, p. 29.
in the post independence period. Like Chhotu Ram, Charan Singh gave priority to the development of agriculture sector and the cottage industries and attracted support from both the Hindu peasantry and the Muslim peasantry. Both Chhotu Ram and Charan Singh realized the importance of education, and improvement of the status of women. Both were opposed to communalism because they did not want the peasants to get divided on the basis of religion. Like Chhotu Ram, Charan Singh initiated a non-communal peasant based society that sought to protect the rights of the peasantry.

Chhotu Ram’s first priority was his lifelong struggle to end the exploitation of the peasants. Both through legislation and public speeches he sought to relieve them from their century’s old woes. Although the various enactments have become part of a bygone history, there remains the satisfaction that the peasant today is far better in his condition than say a hundred years ago or even before that. Chhotu Ram will perhaps go down in history as the first ever champion of the peasantry in India.

Chhotu Ram was an astute politician who kept the predominantly Muslim members of the Unionist Party in a disciplined manner. This was no easy task and for this he proved his worth as a statesman of the highest order. Though Chhotu Ram was not a nationalist in the conventional mode, his nationalism, however, was of a different kind.

How was Chhotu Ram viewed in the rural society, outside the confines of council politics? What was his impact on popular ideology? These are questions which await the curiosity of the historian. Today the memory of Chhotu Ram does not lie buried in the archives in London and Delhi, but in the myths and imagery of the peasants of Haryana, Punjab and Western U. P., where he is regarded as their saviour. Chhotu Ram’s secular language, which

7 Balbir Singh, Sir Chhotu Ram: In Thoughts and Deeds, New Delhi, 1994, p. 255.
not only rejected religious orthodoxy but also set an economic agenda which over shadowed the growing influence of communal politics in our country.  

Even as Chhotu Ram passed away in 1945, his political style of a united rural community was appropriated as noted above by another Jat leader, Charan Singh from Bagpat in Western U. P. He advocated similar concerns, though the two functioned in different contexts and regions. Both came from peasant families, became lawyers and drew upon peasant culture. Both were spokesmen of the down-trodden and both of them were dedicated to upliftment of the peasantry. Both were products of Jat cultural assertion and the Arya Samaj movement.  

Chhotu Ram, while getting the Panchayat Act passed in 1940, had said, “This will give Swaraj to the villages. The autonomy which provinces had received in the provincial sphere will be transmitted to villages by the enforcement of this measure”. He also urged that the success of the Act depended upon the resources these institutions would have at their disposal and thus advocated that sufficient funds should be allocated to them. It is important to mention that the present Panchayati Raj Act is inspired by Chhotu Ram’s political vision to a great extent. 

Chhotu Ram was an example of selfless politics. According to Mohinder Singh Thind (one of his contemporaries), “Chhotu Ram was thoroughly non-communal. In 1926-27, he refused to accept a Ministerial berth when Raja Narender Nath, Lal Gokul Chand Narang, Pandit Nanak Chand, Leaders of Hindu Mahasabha, offered ministership to him on the ground that he would be a nominee of the Punjab Hindus. He declined and added that he could very well live without being a Minister as his forefathers

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9 S. N. Malik, Seth Chhaju Ram: A Life with a Purpose, 1861-1943, Delhi, 1994, pp. 111-112.
10 Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol. XII, 5.3.1940, p. 135.
and his people had lived.”\textsuperscript{12} This secular stand remained the basis of his politics till his last day. In more general terms it can be said of Chhotu Ram’s political legacy that today it has provided the \textit{Jats} of North India with a common shared past of their subordination and denial of their place in history. Second, the \textit{Jat} political leaders of Haryana in particular have appropriated Chhotu Ram’s political legacy. They too identify the present day Congress as a \textit{Bania-Brahman} block in a new context and under different conditions. This indicates that \textit{Jat} identity once formed gained a certain level of autonomy and is used and reinterpreted by new claimants. Today it serves for example the Hindu \textit{Jats} of the Haryana region to relate to the wider community of \textit{Jats} in North India and advance their own territorial claims and cultural aspirations. Celebrating Chhotu Ram as their real hero and patron saint acts as a powerful force in the organization of the \textit{Jats} as a self conscious community and, in addition, lends weight to their new version of \textit{Jat} identity.\textsuperscript{13}

Both Chhotu Ram and Charan Singh wanted unity of the agriculturist castes of all classes and religions. Both were opposed to the traders and moneylenders. Both of them wanted due share for the peasantry in the administration and politics. Both favoured strengthening of institutions of Local Self Government and were critical of the attitude of the bureaucracy. Both of them supported remunerative prices for the agricultural products.\textsuperscript{14}

The social and political ideology of Chhotu Ram also appeared to have influenced the thinking and behavior of Devi Lal, another important \textit{Jat} leader of Haryana, despite significant differences in their social, cultural, economic and political background. While Chhotu Ram belonged to a family of peasants having small land holding, Devi Lal belonged to a family of big landlords.\textsuperscript{15} While Chhotu Ram many a time was seen working with the

\textsuperscript{12} Pardaman Singh, (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, p.31.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid}, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{15} Ram Raja, \textit{Chautala to Chandigarh}, New Delhi, 1978, p. 31.
British, Devi Lal actively participated in the freedom struggle against British Imperialism.\textsuperscript{16}

The Land Alienation Act of 1900 was a decisive step that gave the \textit{Jats} and other castes attached to lands the property rights on their holdings, making them more assertive in social and political life. This act prevented the transfer of agricultural land by sale or otherwise, to non-agriculturists.\textsuperscript{17}

In Punjab and Haryana, right from the days of Partap Singh Kairon and Prof. Sher Singh down to the time of Sardar Amrinder Singh and Bhupinder Singh Hooda, the \textit{Jats} have continuously pressed their claim to dominance, whenever that dominance has not been permitted by whatever combination of forces, both the states have witnessed turmoil, toppling the government, at times even at the cost of the party. Politics in Haryana as well as in Punjab before its division in 1966 has been dominated by the \textit{Jats}. The legacy of Chhotu Ram’s politics, for the most part, has thus continued to determine the course of power politics in the region. Whether we like it or not, the dominance of the major caste or community in each state of the Indian Union is a hard fact. It is inbuilt into the fabric of our democracy, and cannot be washed away so long as the present form of our political ideology continues.\textsuperscript{18}

What Chhotu Ram did by way of getting legislation introduced in the Punjab for the welfare of the peasants is in itself a distinct contribution to his credit. His contemporary relevance can well be gauged in the process that he initiated and which went so far as to produce something that was almost a revolution. It was Chhotu Ram’s firm belief that bound the agriculturists together with a certain ethos that needed to be promoted and preserved as their common mark. Never did he preach of the need for a change in what

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{17} Bhim Singh Dahiya, \textit{Power Politics in Haryana: A View from the Bridge}, New Delhi, 2008, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 33.
claimed to be the essential mark and the measure of their professional identity. It is this identity that brought the peasantry together every time when a struggle had to be waged against the government’s anti-farmer policy. Charan Singh inherited this very spirit of the farmers and identified himself with it. It was the same spirit that had been infused by Chhotu Ram in the farmers. That was why, the farmers discovered in him a hero. It was this very spirit that was at work in different states. In Rajasthan, Baldev Ram Mirdha and Kumbha Ram Arya organized the agriculturists in order to infuse in them the spirit of a fearless and hardworking farmer. In Haryana, Devi Lal became the champion of this agriculturist ethos, while in U. P. there were dedicated people like Mahendra Singh Tikait. All are furthering the same agriculturist trait that all peasants are alike. They share the same common purpose and are bound by a discipline that has its own meaning and charm. All this Chhotu Ram wanted to transmit to the farmers, and this has its own relevance even today.  

The manner in which political leaders have sought to claim Chhotu Ram’s political legacy can be best understood from an example. On November 17, 2004, the personal belongings of Chhotu Ram included two cane chairs, a sword, a door with a frame, two windows and a darry which was knitted in jail in Rohtak were exhibited. These items were kept in his haveli presently owned by the son of the then Nawab of Malerkotla. The relics were escorted from Lahore by the Chairman of the National Minorities Commission, Mr. Tarlochan Singh and Ajay Chautala, M. P.

Not surprisingly, like Chhotu Ram, Devi Lal has given priority to agriculture over industry and to rural sector over the urban sector. Like Chhotu Ram, Devi Lal also worked for liberating the peasantry from the

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clutches of indebtedness. Like Chhotu Ram, Devi Lal advocated remunerative prices for crops. While Chhotu Ram rescued peasantry from moneylenders, Devi Lal waved off the loans that they owed to the cooperative banks. We also notice some influence of social, economic and political ideas of Chhotu Ram on the Akali leaders like Parkash Singh Badal and the policies and programmes of the Akali Dal.

We can trace the impact of his ideology on the ideology of the political parties of 21st century, especially of North India. An important element in Chhotu Ram’s ideology was the uniting the peasantry. This implied the building up of a united front of the peasants of all castes, of all classes and of all religions. Chhotu Ram was perceptive enough to recognize that Jatism alone would not be sufficient for getting political power and for protecting the economic interests of the peasants. That is why he decided to join hands with the Muslim landlords of the province for founding the Unionist Party for building up this broad-based united front. His strategy of building up Zamindara League, Young Zamindar Association and the Zamindar Students Associations had the same object. Even the slogan of AJGR22- an alliance of major agriculturist’s castes the Ahirs, Jats, Gujjars and Rajputs had the same objective. Chhotu Ram also made maximum use of ruralism for achieving his political objectives. Even these days we observe that most of the political parties use the same tactics to remain in power.

Chhotu Ram believed in the ideal of secularism. His advocacy of secularism was in tune with his plea for separation of religion from politics and basing political parties on economic interests instead of religion. It was also required for uniting the Jats and peasants of all the religions. It was also needed for enlisting the support of the rural masses as a whole. Besides, Chhotu Ram required the slogan of secularism for countering the religion

based political parties like Muslim League, Hindu Maha Sabha and the Akali Dal on the one hand and for rejecting the claim of the Congress as a secular party on the other. But the secularism of Chhotu Ram was not based on the opposition to religion. In fact, it was a consensual model of secularism. It not only justified the continuation of the separate electorates for the Muslims and the Sikhs to enable these communities to get due representation in the provincial Legislature, but also justified distribution of the government jobs among various religious communities in accordance to their numerical strength. Chhotu Ram succeeded in getting the posts reserved for various religious communities divided into the agriculturist and non-agriculturist categories on the basis of their numerical strength in their religious denomination.23

Chhotu Ram’s secularism did not prevent him from continuing his association with the Arya Samaj on the one hand and the All India Jat Maha Sabha on the other. The peculiar nature of Chhotu Ram’s secularism has to be understood in the context of his socio-economic background on the one hand and his political compulsions on the other.24

Chhotu Ram also realized the importance of the use of modern idiom for political mobilization. He had the insight to perceive that the use of the traditional idiom alone would not be effective in the age of modernization. It would have to be combined with the use of the modern idiom. He not only contributed in English and Urdu newspapers published from Lahore but also launched an Urdu Weekly, Jat Gazette in 1916.25 He also edited it for some time. Even after he gave up its editorship, he continued to use the columns of this weekly for mobilizing political support as well as for imparting political education to the masses. When he was in the Congress, the Jat Gazette

mobilized support for the party and when he co-founded the Unionist Party, this weekly was used for enlisting mass support for the Unionist Party.26

**Legacy in Economic Policies and Issues:**

Chhotu Ram is well known for his economic vision even today. Chhotu Ram was against the Congress on the issue of non-payment of land revenue. He argued that if they (the peasants) were asked not to pay land revenue, this would lead to the confiscation of their lands.27 He left the Congress and co-founded the Unionist Party. He had been trying to ameliorate the condition of the poorer classes, particularly the rural masses and for this purpose, he had sponsored legislations, which were wholly constructive and aimed to provide opportunities to rural areas so that they could compete, in some way, with their richer urban classes.28 Chhotu Ram was the first economic thinker who stressed, initiated and implemented the policies and programmes for the systematic development of agriculture and rural development and reconstruction by taking the whole village life in its entirety.29

Many of his ideas in this context, as we can observe, have been adopted by the state governments across the country. Chhotu Ram was a visionary in many ways. For example, he supported Gandhiji’s views on *Panchayati Raj*. He also knew that unless power was transferred to the rural people, the country would not remain united and strong.30

Chhotu Ram’s movement had spread not only in Punjab and Haryana but also to the states of Rajasthan, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Gujrat, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Charan Singh had a long record of public life and like Chhotu Ram, he had been a strong advocate of the peasant and the rural

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26 Ibid.
cause as a whole. His book, ‘India’s Economic Policy – the Gandhian Blueprint’ deals mainly with economic policies and to that extent it builds up a convincing case for drastic change in the strategy of development. If his thesis of economic decentralization with emphasis on agriculture and cottage industries is implemented, it will help in tackling some very pressing problems like unemployment and may also help in mitigating poverty to some extent. Interestingly it was Chhotu Ram who first thought on these lines.

**Agricultural Issues:**

Considering that Chhotu Ram started from the scratch and worked against tremendous handicaps and disabilities, his achievements were not small. By strictly constitutional methods, he built up a strong peasant movement in the Punjab and Haryana which agriculturally are the most prosperous states in the country today. Chhotu Ram first brought the peasantry together under a common political platform which developed into an effective political organization and simultaneously propagated a creed of a lasting ideological impact.\(^{31}\)

Chhotu Ram also encouraged bee-keeping, poultry farming, forestry and small stock development in the province. Thus, his contribution to development of agriculture covered almost all the aspects. The future development of our agriculture depends, to a greater extent than in the past, on non-cereal crops especially horticultural crops, animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries which were emphasized by Chhotu Ram before independence.\(^{32}\)

Chhotu Ram advised the peasantry to learn how to assert his views. Words are the soul’s ambassadors and kindness is the golden chain by which society is bound together, he would often say as he wanted to harmonize the rural way of life. Anyone can see that despite the Green Revolution and the White Revolution and partial mechanization of farming, irrigation projects,

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\(^{32}\) *Ibid.*
rural electrification and roads and other trappings of modernization, there is however, less perceptible an improvement in the situation or technical advancement in the day-to-day life of the farmer. His crusade to release the toiling masses of Punjab peasantry from the clutches of moneylenders was not only hailed by the people of the then Punjab province but also emulated by other provinces. The policies of Chhotu Ram were fundamental in nature and an agrarian society/economy cannot ignore them. He started systematic agriculture and rural development policies taking the village life in its entirety i.e., covering every aspect of village life in it - agriculture, animal husbandry, education, finance, public health, sanitation, small rural and cottage industries and social aspect etc. Participation of villagers was ensured through panchayats and co-operative societies. The development work was started with special emphasis on the most backward regions and people irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Rural development was taken in its broader perspective designed to improve the economic and social life of the people. Though this programme of development could not take off as desired by Chhotu Ram due to a number of constraints such as famine in south east Punjab, Second World War, food scarcity in Bengal etc. yet it set a path of systematic development and reconstruction of villages. This whole approach is very relevant today. 

Chhotu Ram was against the policy of making large grants of land by the Government. He also objected the sale of land by auction as the price obtained through auctions was not always the actual price of land. Chhotu Ram suggested fixing a minimum price for the land rather than letting the people raise its value. He opined that land should not be sold to capitalists, as it was advisable neither from an economic point nor from the farmers point. Chhotu Ram cited the conditions of Bengal and Oudh. He said, “A few millionaires own the whole land and poor tenants sweat and labour for the

33 Ibid, p. 313.
swelling of the pile of the landlords, which results into an account of plenty in which they live while the country benefited in no way by their wealth nor do the poor tenants.” He further said, “We must not help in creating profligate landlords who enjoy at the cost of the poor labourers and tenants.”

Thus, Chhotu Ram wanted the capitalists not to invest in land but to invest in trade, business and industries where there was more need for the capital for developing these professions. It can be summarized that, Chhotu Ram was against selling or leasing out of crown land (as more than 80 percent of such land was handed over to the capitalists in this way) to the capitalists. This is also a major issue today.

Another service rendered by Chhotu Ram to the depressed and scheduled castes was that he extended the benefits of the Debtors Protection Acts (got legislated by him during 1934-44) to them. By virtue of these acts, one residential house, household goods, grains, animals, etc. of every scheduled caste were not allowed to be auctioned in the satisfaction of a decree. Also, they could submit their debt cases to Conciliation Boards which acted as a big check on the excesses committed by the moneylenders. He favoured selling of such land to the agriculturists whose business was to cultivate for themselves and that too on easy instalments and on economic price. The efforts of Chhotu Ram in this regard, during his first Minister-ship (1924-1926) resulted into the reservation of 2.5 lacs acres in Nilibar colony for sale to the small agriculturists on hire purchase basis. Again, out of remaining 11.85 lacs acres, major portion was set aside for sale to the agriculturists. In 1926, out of 804600 two crops yielding irrigated acres, and 280000 one crop yielding irrigated acres, 407500 and 260400 acres respectively were sold to small agriculturists, while lands sold through

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36 Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol. XII, 5.3.1940, p. 136.
auction amounted to 320000 acres.\textsuperscript{37} All the acts enacted by the Unionist Government strengthened the position of the Punjab peasantry to a great extent. Now no debtor could be arrested or imprisoned in execution of a decree for money. Their cattle and places for tying them were also protected. No decree could be passed now against the agricultural debtors for more than twice the principal. Moreover, their exploitation was also stopped and they were now able to get better prices for their produce. Indeed, in the field of agrarian legislation, Chhotu Ram’s success lies in his being accepted by the contemporary as well as the present day agriculturists as the representative of the ‘poor down trodden kisan’.

Chhotu Ram had recognized rural sector as the key sector of the country’s economic development which was treated as the residual sector by our policy makers and planners which resulted into a stagnant rural growth. There naturally had to occur mass movement of population from rural to urban areas for seeking better prospects which resulted into multiplication of city slums making socio-economic development of our country more difficult.

Chhotu Ram had foreseen this and advocated and implemented a number of policies and programmes to put a check on this. He advocated a positive policy for developing the agricultural sector. Several institutions for credit and marketing were established and improved. Debt relief measures were undertaken. Institutions for research, extension and teaching of agriculture were established and strengthened. Rural education, health, infrastructure etc. were given priorities, ignorance and indebtedness were removed to a longer extent and irrigation schemes were initiated and completed. Improved seed farms, cattle breeding centers and other institutions for the servicing of agricultural production were established. In a way, farmers were prepared for active engagement in any work of development up

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
to 1945. As a result of the efforts of Chhotu Ram and the Unionist Party, the co-operative movements progressed at a much faster rate in Punjab. As far as cooperative credit was concerned, it touched about 20 percent of the population of the province by 1946. Though this in itself, was not a quite impressive figure, it strongly laid the foundation on firm footing for further take off by educating the farmers not only in the field of credit but also in consolidation of holdings, better farming, saving, veterinary, land reclamation, thrift, marketing etc.

Chhotu Ram’s emphasis on agriculture first with increased infrastructure in rural areas along with encouraging industries simultaneously came into sharp focus with the development of Punjab and Haryana of today which followed the path shown by him. The successive governments of this region encouraged agriculturists in many ways and rural development with increased emphasis. Industries were also encouraged but stress was on ‘agriculture and rural infrastructure development first.’ It was his major contribution that the per capita income of this region is higher than in other states.

His relevance in today’s circumstances can be listed as, broadening tax structure and equally sharing of tax burden by different sections of the society with emphasis on levying additional burden on wealthier sections be the urban or rural, equitable spending of government revenue on different sections of population, creating infrastructure and providing facilities of health, education, roads, markets and so on the ratio of population. Likewise, wasteful government expenditure, curbing corruption, retrenchment in Government services without affecting the beneficent activities of lower strata of government servants were encouraged by him. He also worked for enthusing the spirit of national integration, opposing communalism, emphasizing unions of people and formation of political parties on economic

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basis. Removing social taboos and other social abuses are also some key legacies of Chhotu Ram.\(^{40}\)

Chhotu Ram’s work is still alive in most policies and programmes that the governments after independence have been pursuing. The work done by him as Development Minister was continued in the political circles of the adjoining provinces like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan etc. The various agrarian laws were closely studied and attempts were made to see if they could in any meaningful sense be used in their own provinces. The general impression had gained credence that they covered most aspects of the peasantry’s life and could serve as models of formulating new enactments. Soon after independence in 1947, the U. P. Congress Government turned its attention to the prevalent zamindari system. An act was passed in the Assembly to bring this to an end. The land was given to the tenants and the landlords were paid compensation in lieu of their landholdings. The tenants became the owners and this proved a milestone in the way of ensuring food self sufficiency.\(^{41}\)

**Legacy in the Punjab:**

With Chhotu Ram’s death in January, 1945 and the subsequent partition of the country, things changed radically, almost beyond recognition. While the Muslim peasants in the Pakistan’s Punjab remained where they were, the Hindus and Sikhs had to migrate to the Indian side weeping bitterly for Chhotu Ram most of whom had considered him their bête noire all along. The peasantry in the Pakistan’s Punjab was communalized under the influence of the Muslim League in the post-partition era and thus Chhotu Ram who was once looked upon as their great benefactor. The Sikh peasants in the Indian Punjab too were so much influenced by their religious leaders that they too soon became strangers to Chhotu Ram’s name and work. The other half of the Punjab that came into existence in 1966 was Haryana. The peasants of

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\(^{40}\) *Ibid*, p. 314.

other communities and some regions—Ahirs, Rajputs and Gujjars developed loyalties towards their own leaders, with the ostensible reasons of maintaining their distinct identity in an age of ‘vote bank’ politics.\textsuperscript{42} Even though a section of Haryana’s rural population still reveres and remembers Chhotu Ram, an age has gone by and the generation gap is having its impact. Chhotu Ram is remembered more as a token than as a principal.

**Legacy in Industrial Issues:**

Industries were a reserved subject up to 1936 and quite a few indirect restrictions of Central Government in later period impeded the progress of industries in Punjab. In view of the world wars, Great Economic Depression and famines, provincial revenue scarcity—all combined to create a scene in which traditional village industries were dominated by larger ones. However, Chhotu Ram made a beginning in consumer goods and agricultural processing through small and medium size units. Chhotu Ram used the couplet:

\begin{quote}
“Bakat ki fikar kar nadan musibat ane wali hai, 
Teri barbadiyon ke mashware hain asmanon mein,
Zara dekh isko jo kuchh ho raha hai, hone wala hai,
Dhara kya hai bhala ahde kohan ki dastanon mein,
Yeh khamoshi kahan tak lajjate faryad peda kar,
Zamin par tu ho aur teri sadha ho asmanon mein,
Na samjega to mit jayega, ae duniya ke anndata,
Teri to dastan tak bhi na hogi dastanon mein.” \textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

(Concern yourself with the future, for some trouble is imminent. There is conspiracy in the skies. You must know whatever is transpiring, and what is likely to transpire. It is of no avail to brood over the dead past. What is there in remaining tight-lipped? Be vociferous. While you are on the ground, your voice must pierce through the skies. Oh! the giver of food to the

\textsuperscript{42} A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 314.
\textsuperscript{43} Balbir Singh, \textit{op. cit.}, 2009, P. 135.
world, if you do not understand this, your own story will not find any place in other stories of the world.)

As a result of his polices, a new awakening swept the Punjab countryside. Tax structure was rationalized, increased government spending was directed towards rural areas, indebtedness was removed up to a great extent, malpractices of money-lenders were curbed, and agriculture and rural development programmes were initiated and implemented. The development in the fields of education, public health, agriculture, irrigation and industries was also seen. The policies of Chhotu Ram played an important role in the development of the province. His policies and programmes provided the initial impetus to economic growth in an otherwise depressed and stagnant economy and society during pre-independence period.

There was no occasion in Chhotu Ram’s long public career, during the second quarter of twentieth century, when he failed to rise to his conviction. Commenting on Chhotu Ram’s economic measures, which profited the whole province, Civil & Military Gazette records that these were, ‘Pioneer measures in the modern economic history of India’.  

Because of Army recruitment, Punjab peasantry got a reprieve from the depressed conditions. The peasants turned to military service to supplement their agricultural income. This service proved a boon in improving their economic conditions. On the whole, about 4 to 5 crore rupees - a sum equal to the total land revenue of the province was received annually by the Punjab soldiers.

Industrial development of the Punjab province during the period under review drew the attention of even the Government and policy makers of other provinces. The Premier of Orissa, Mr. Biswa Nath said in a statement issued to The Tribune in December, 1937 that in the field of industrial

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44 Y. P. Bajaj, *op. cit.*, 1972, p. 278.
development, “Punjab is moving faster than any Congress province.”\(^{46}\) A similar statement was also made by Mr. L. M. Patil, the Minister for Industries, Bombay, “The Punjab Government has no doubt done remarkably commendable work in this direction.” Thus, it can be concluded that Chhotu Ram’s efforts were appreciated not only by the people of his province but also by many leading men of other provinces too.\(^{47}\)

Chhotu Ram was a rare phenomenon in the public life of the pre-independence Punjab. The general run of people who were attracted to public life, was comparatively of high caliber and even amongst that Chhotu Ram was different. Politicians in those days worked for acquiring power, as they do now, but public office was a means of some end different from self-aggrandizement. Chhotu Ram’s ambition was not personal. It was infused with a mission to raise the lot of the people amongst whom he was born. Chhotu Ram’s memory is alive among the rural population all over northern India. Even in the Punjab on the Pakistan side, now that emotional upsurge that divided the province has cooled down, men like Fazl-i-Hussain and Chhotu Ram are still remembered for what they did for the common people.\(^{48}\)

Though Chhotu Ram raised many vital issues yet many of these still remain unsolved. The best memorial to Chhotu Ram would be to carry on the work he initiated. There is no properly organized peasant organization in the country at the moment although each political party is careful to express concern for the man behind the plough when the rural vote is needed. The Government in Delhi and in northern states – Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh where Chhotu Ram is still a name to be conjured, institutions or projects are named after him. It is really a matter of sad omission that Chhotu Ram’s name is not associated in any form with the ‘Bhakra Dam’ and allied

\(^{46}\) *Jat Gazette*, (Tr.), 1.7.1931, p. 2.


projects as real originators.\textsuperscript{49}

He also favoured the labour class as while discussing the Punjab Fixation of Minimum Rates of Wages Bill, he remarked, “They (Gopi Chand Bhargava, etc.) should wait patiently for the time, when industries are better established and become more prosperous than they are… when that day comes… we should like our labourers to get not only Rs.1, but Rs.2 per day.”\textsuperscript{50}

It is the legacy of the policy of Chhotu Ram that every tenth soldier in Indian Army is Haryanvi. Chhotu Ram encouraged the farmers for enlisting themselves into army. Because of the depressed condition of agriculturists and the agriculture, lack of additional sources of income, absence of proper industries and other avenues of employment, etc., the army service was the only way to improve the economic, social and educational position of the backward agriculturists up to a certain extent. Chhotu Ram threw himself heart and soul into a campaign (during the First World War) for enlisting agriculturists into army.

His policy of encouraging army recruitment resulted in the enormous economic, social, educational gain for the agriculturists in particular and for the province in general. His ever growing sense of concern for the weak and the exploited, depressed peasantry, working classes and scheduled castes, his irrepressible desire to promote communal amity, to prepare the stage for the construction of Bhakra Dam, to work for setting up industries improving facilities for rural credit and sanitation, all these have ultimately contributed to the bringing about of the Green Revolution whose benefits the nation is reaping today.\textsuperscript{51}

Though Chhotu Ram was not a professional economist, he had a deep

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, p. 219.
\textsuperscript{50} Y. P. Bajaj, \textit{op. cit.}, 1972, p. 205.
\textsuperscript{51} Balbir Singh, \textit{op. cit.}, 1999, p. 7.
understanding of economic history and economic theory. His economic policies were down to ground realities. None of his economic ideas was utopian and speculative; all of them could be easily put to practice. They resulted from the age and the environment in which he lived and worked. His politics were a preface to his economic ideology that he wanted to make for Punjab province and India. Being a down-to-earth man, his 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’, the country being overwhelmingly rural. The village was in the centre of his economic thought. The justification of his policies in this regard is reflected today in economic theories and thinking of many economists. The economic development of today’s Punjab and Haryana in our country is not because of large scale industrialization, but because of strong agricultural development as envisaged by Chhotu Ram and followed by the rulers of this state after Independence. Once the agrarian economy becomes progressive, the growth of the industries follows automatically. The states of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, etc. where agricultural development was not so strong, failed to improve the economic position of its masses despite having large steel mills, engineering and petro-chemical complexes, oil refineries, etc. Modern industries are mainly less employment generating industries. 52

Legacy in Education:

Chhotu Ram was an enthusiastic supporter of female education. It was his conviction that Indian women could progress only when they get rid themselves of unhealthy social customs. He saw himself as a champion of female education but he also believed that female education must not be made compulsory in the environment prevailing in those days. Chhotu Ram laid emphasis on opening domestic training schools for female workers in India. In his article, ‘The Improvement of Indian Village Life’, he drew a picture of

52 Interview with S. N. Malik, Hisar, July 6, 2012.
women as the reservoir of folk, culture and dances. Though he was not in favour of compulsory universal education for girls, he always laid emphasis on the role of education for girls to shape the character of children as useful citizens by becoming enlightened, efficient and educated mothers.

We can trace Chhotu Ram’s legacy in the working of some state governments where Right to Education (R.T.E.) has been introduced and many scholarships are being given to backward and scheduled class students. Chhotu Ram had an impressive record of service in the ambit of Provincial Autonomy circumscribed by the British with so many reservations and safeguards within the frame work of Government of India Act, 1935. The pragmatism of Chhotu Ram lay in the fact that he made this so called provincial Autonomy work, while some of the leaders in the Congress described it as a vehicle with all brakes and no engine. Chhotu Ram himself had to face a number of problems to complete his education. In 1913, he started Anglo-Sanskrit Jat High School and become its secretary. He encouraged rural people to send their children to schools. As a Minister of Education, he got many resolutions passed in the Punjab Legislative Assembly to reserve seats in educational institutions for the agriculturists. He implemented fee concession in schools for all the agriculturists and scheduled caste pupils. He also implemented the scheme of establishing rural libraries. About 2000 libraries were opened up to 1926. He made the provision for equal grants to all educational institutions, run by religious committees. It was the result of his efforts that all aided schools were asked to admit depressed class students. Non-compliance of this would have resulted into stoppage of grants-in-aid as these schools were denying admission to the students of depressed or scheduled classes.

53 Madan Gopal, op. cit., 1977, p. 36.
55 A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, op. cit., p. 263.
56 Ibid, p. 262.
58 A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, op. cit., p. 266.
Almost all state governments have made it mandatory in the present time (through 134 A, Act of R.T.E.) for the grant-in-aid and private schools to give 25 percent admissions to the students who belong to below poverty line families. Chhotu Ram started a number of co-educational institutions, whose number increased from 630 in 1922-23 to 3784 in 1926-27 and the number of students increased from 197716 to 98414.\(^59\) He instituted a ‘Peasant Welfare Fund’ out of which scholarship were to be given to children of small farmers who paid Rs.25 or less as land revenue.\(^60\) Chhotu Ram tried hard to improve and extend the education under a well thought-out plan. One of the main objectives of his party was to banish illiteracy from the province.\(^61\)

To commemorate the contribution of Chhotu Ram in the Haryana region several colleges, institutes, places, trusts, missions, scholarships, societies, academic chairs, memorial lectures, etc. have been started after the name of Chhotu Ram. Some of these are:

i Chhotu Ram Trust, Rohtak

ii Chhotu Ram College of Education and Polytechnic, Rohtak

iii Ch. Chhotu Ram Mission, Kheri Jat, Rohtak

iv Ch. Chhotu Ram (CCR) Post Graduate College, Muzaffar Nagar, U.P.

v Ch. Chhotu Ram Memorial Museum, Gram Uthan Vidya Peeth, Sangaria, Ganganagar, Rajasthan

vi Chhotu Ram Memorial Scholarship Society, Chandigarh

vii Chhotu Ram Rural Institute of Engineering and Technology, Kanjhawala, New Delhi

viii Chhotu Ram Rural Institute of Pharmacy, Kanjhawala, New Delhi

ix Chhotu Ram Institute of Law, Rohtak

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\(^{59}\) Ibid, p. 262.

\(^{60}\) Madan Gopal, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 83.

Likewise, to recognize, encourage, honour and create new incentives among farm scientists in the country for the purpose of improving the quality of life in the villages through farm oriented pragmatic research in all fields of agriculture and rural development, the Haryana Agriculture University (Hissar) instituted ‘Sir Chhotu Ram National Award’ for outstanding research in agriculture and rural development.

**Legacy in Social Upliftment Issues:**

As we have seen, Chhotu Ram was basically committed to unifying rural society on economic grounds. This included the deprived and backward classes. 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 any possible communal clashes, to provide equal opportunities to all sections of population of every caste, creed and religion, he advocated for the equal representation of rural people in elected bodies, government services and educational institutions etc. He favoured reservation. As far as the reservation of rural people in elected bodies was concerned, the Joint Parliamentary Committees also criticized the under-representation of rural people and over-representation of urban people in the case of general seats in
Punjab Legislature. It was due to the tireless efforts of Chhotu Ram that land was allotted to the Harijans for the first time in Punjab. He admitted, “Let me also point out that three thousand acres have been reserved for scheduled castes for whom much lip sympathy is professed by the opposition.”

Chhotu Ram tried to remove the feelings of casteism and religious differences from among the scheduled castes (kamins of all classes) by declaring all of them as backward classes and thereby eliminating the stumbling blocks from their path of united efforts. His efforts in improving the conditions of scheduled classes can be understood as follows:

i. He strongly pleaded for the allocation of an equitable share for them in Government jobs.

ii. Impressed the Government to reserve a just number of scholarships for them in educational institutions.

iii. All aided schools were called upon to admit depressed class students

iv. Regularly donated a considerable part of his own income as scholarships to the needy students of whom majority was that of the scheduled castes.

In retrospect, one might not be too wrong in regarding Chhotu Ram as one of the few most clear headed leaders of pre-independence India. He seems to have defined his political and social objectives as well as his theatre of action in an unambiguous fashion. He did not permit his ambitions to cloud his vision of the Punjab of his dreams. Unlike the political leaders of today, he did not compromise the integrity of his social purpose with private needs and aspirations of his own and his family for comfort, money and power. As such, his actions remained clearly directed towards selfless and fearless service of his people. As we have seen, in post-independence India growing communalism of politics has been one of the biggest threats to Indian unity.

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Chhotu Ram believed that communal problems were basically economic problems, and that religion could not be the basis of political activity. If an economic programme for the amelioration of the poorer sections and the down-trodden could be drawn up and taken to the people, particularly in villages, communalism would be obliterated from the nation, the fire of communalism would lose its fury and get ultimately extinguished for lack of fuel on which it feeds. To eradicate this problem, he co-founded the Unionist Party. He said, “The bane of our nation is communalism, which has pushed us back. I firmly believe that the only panacea for this evil is their organization (the Unionist Party)-formed on the basis of common economic programme.”

One of the most important contributions of Chhotu Ram was where he impressed upon the government and society to accord the Scheduled Castes an equal place with other classes. He emphatically asked social reformers, “To bring moral and social pressure to bear upon the persons, who were obstructing the scheduled castes in the exercise of what they alleged to be their rights.” For example, in 1940, the Jats and Rangars were not allowing the Chamars of village Moth (Hissar District) to sink a drinking water well. Chhotu Ram intervened and settled the dispute in favour of the Chamars.

In 1938, while addressing the Provincial Civil Service and Subordinate Officers at Jalandhar and Karnal, he told officials that they should give no place to communal biases in their official conduct, and if anyone was found guilty of such behaviour, the matter would be dealt with as seriously as corruption, and to award punishments to such officers, he added that he would show absolutely no mercy. Chhotu Ram noted in an article in Jat Gazette that the Jats, Gujjaars, Rajputs, etc., constituting a considerable

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64 The Tribune, Lahore, 14.1.1933, p. 7.
65 Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol. XVI, 10.3.1941, p. 313.
66 Raghubir Singh Shastri, op. cit., p. 298.
part of the Indian population, could lay the example of their unity and bring about communal harmony in the country.\textsuperscript{68}

The zeal with which he opposed the communal politics, undoubtedly carves out for him a place among nationalist leaders. Chhotu Ram’s separation of religion from politics and his notable emphasis on the oneness of the Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs in order to solve the communal question, makes him stand out.\textsuperscript{69}

**Legacy in Social Welfare Issues:**

The Social welfare policies of Chhotu Ram are very much relevant these days. Take the example of the evil of drinking. He was in favour of prohibition and even introduced partial prohibition in some of the districts of the then Punjab. At the same time he was against any encouragement of liquor for the purpose of increasing state revenue. He advocated prohibition even at the cost of revenue as he was well aware of the damage to society due to drinking.\textsuperscript{70} Although in Haryana, Bansi Lal Government had banned the sale of liquor in the state from July 1, 1996, which proved a failure, but the policy of Chhotu Ram in this connection is much more relevant today in order to check the menace of liquor and degradation of social life of the society.\textsuperscript{71}

Being an *Arya Samajist*, he was a great admirer of the work done by *Arya Samaj* for the emancipation of women. According to him, ‘The position of women in the village society needed much improvement, women do most of the work in the house, labour side by side with men in the fields and are very badly treated.’\textsuperscript{72} He was in favour of women education, but not in making it compulsory. The Primary Education for Boys Act of 1919 had

\textsuperscript{68} *Jat Gazette*, (Tr.), 25.5.1941, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, p.33.
\textsuperscript{70} A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, *op. cit.*., p. 296.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Madan Gopal, *op. cit.*, 1977, p. 22.
proved a failure, and as there was shortage of trained lady teachers, moreover parents in backward areas did not like their daughter to receive education from male teachers and in co-educational institutes. The overall impact of his efforts in the field of female education was, however, notable. Chhotu Ram was a strong supporter of the cause of women’s emancipation through education and eradication of social evils and customs. He wrote in *Jat Gazette*, “Prudence is a women’s greatest property, ornaments and beauty. I oppose her confinement to the four walls of the house, as well as to the unhygienic custom of *Purdah*, but I strongly criticize their loitering aimlessly, smoking and drinking.” He was also in favour of widow re-marriage.

The people of the region, both in India and Pakistan, especially in Punjab and Haryana, celebrate his birthday which falls on *Basant Panchami* every year with great enthusiasm. Chhotu Ram was fondly addressed by the people of Punjab by the titles of *Rehbar-i-Azam* and *Deenbandhu*. He understood the problems of the rural people and worked out practical solutions. C. Rajagopalachari said, “Chhotu Ram not only had great aims but also knew how to achieve them.” Chhotu Ram used to say that irrespective of our different religions, the same ancient blood is flowing through our veins and we are all brothers and sisters, and religion cannot separate us and we have the same secular interests. Chhotu Ram has left behind a valuable legacy of thought, words and deeds, which had crystallized in the form of selfless public services.

The path shown by Chhotu Ram brought the rural mass into mainstream of human progress to create an environment where they could fully develop and express their capabilities so that they not only contribute to, but

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73 *Jat Gazette*, (Tr.), 1.7.1931, p. 6.
76 *Ibid*. 

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also benefit from development. Chhotu Ram’s policy and programmes are all the more relevant in the present context of rural development which has been the victim of neglect in this country. It is easier to implement such an agenda under the present political set up in the country than it was in the economic, social and political set up prevailing in the life time of Chhotu Ram provided our leaders show that strong commitment and selfless service to the poor as Chhotu Ram did in those extremely difficult times.\footnote{A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 314-315.}

Chhotu Ram’s dedication to the cause of the poor won for him the high appreciation of another important Indian, C. Rajagopalachari. As Chief Minister of Madras, under provincial autonomy, he made Chhotu Ram’s agrarian legislation his guiding post. Chhotu Ram’s economic ideas, agricultural, irrigational, industrial and social-welfare work and policies also were in close accord with his politics. The encouragement of backward areas and communities were the watch-words, whereby he strived till his last to bring an enduring prosperity in Punjab and in the country as a whole.\footnote{H. L. Agnihotri and S. N. Malik, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 126.}

We can, thus, conclude that the policies and ideology of Chhotu Ram formulated during the colonial period continue to have relevance even in the present time because of the crises in the development in agriculture on the one hand and the growth of sectarianism on the other. We can find the influence of his ideas on politics and policies of contemporary political parties. His impact on the education policies is also quite visible.

What makes Chhotu Ram so different from most leaders of his time was his ability to foresee issues and above all to ensure that his politics was not detached from his economic reading of ground realities. He was bold in his statements and political stands. His strength lay in his ability to relate with the masses. If observed carefully and virtually everything he stood for is

\footnote{A. K. Rathee and D. S. Nandal, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 314-315.}

\footnote{H. L. Agnihotri and S. N. Malik, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 126.}
greatly relevant in our present time. His vision of rural Punjab was quite similar to Mahatma Gandhi’s vision of rural India. Just as Gandhi will remain relevant for ages to come, even though to a bigger degree, no doubt, Chhotu Ram’s policies and vision with regard to the peasantry too will remain relevant in the ages to come.