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## Catalytic Role of Sir Chhotu Ram's Ideology in National Movement in Haryana: An Evaluation

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### Abstract:

*This paper highlights the catalytic role of Ch. Chhotu Ram, during the period of National Movement in Haryana. Sir Chhotu Ram reviewed the cause-effect relationship between the British Authorities and deteriorating conditions of the farmers of joint Punjab during late 1930's and early 1940's periods. He highlighted the farmer's grievances, which subsequently became an integrated part of National Movement. As a result, he tried to air the voice of the farmers of Punjab, consequently, it made the national movement more substantial and affected the political-ideologies of his contemporary leaders of different political parties, with special reference to Indian National Congress.*

**Key words:** *Catalytic Role, National Movement, Farmers Sufferings, Political Ideologies, Contemporary Political Leaders.*

### Introduction:

In the nineteenth century, India was extremely fertile in the sense that it produced various great personalities

who were fully devoted to display their talents in various areas of life. *Haryana* was no exception to it. One of those luminaries that *Haryana* produced was popularly known as Sir Chhotu Ram. Ram Richpal later on known as Chhotu Ram was born on Nov. 24, 1881 as the youngest son (called Chhotu) of Ch. Sukhi Ram, a small farmer of *Garhi Sampla* village in *Rohtak District*. At that time nobody could ever imagine that small boy belonging to such a poverty ridden family could become a savior of the royalties of undivided Punjab who had to live a wretched life of abject poverty, helplessness, unsury exploitation<sup>1</sup>. Though much has been written on the life and work of Sir Chhotu Ram (1881-1945), still many aspects of his life and work remain either unrepresented or misinterpreted. This paper seeks to remove both the deficiencies relating to his political ideas, his world view and his *political achievements*. After setting at *Rohtak*, Chhotu Ram widened his sphere of

activities. *Arya Samaj* was a very popular movement in *Rohtak* during that time. His works of social reform and spread of education appealed to the young lawyer. He joined the movement and took up its work seriously. Reciprocity, the *Arya Samaj* made him the organizing secretary in this institution.

In the same time, he also entered into the *nationalist* politics. This was his old love. He was attracted to it during his seven years stay in Delhi. In fact, it has flowered into a '*real interest*' during his stay at *Kalakankar*. The Raja of that place was a congress sympathizer with what was called then 'the moderate' outlook. Gandhi and other contemporary congress leaders used to visit him frequently. Madan Mohan Malaviya, who edited the Raja's paper, *Hindustan*, was a permanent resident of *Kalakankar*. These great men and the nationalist atmosphere seems to have had a sort of direct impact on Chhotu Ram, who became, informally though, a congressman of moderate hue<sup>2</sup>. It is because of their development, the dynamic young man came to the notice of the district officials who also began to look at him as somebody who could be useful to them as well. During the world war, H. Harcourt made him Honorary

Secretary to the District Recruiting Committee, where he worked hard and did wonders. Harcourt took him to other departments also<sup>3</sup>. There also he worked successfully. Recognizing his services, the government conferred on Chhotu Ram the title of Rao Bahadur in 1916. Impressed by his merit and popularity, the district congressmen elected him as their president<sup>4</sup>. All these were, indeed, plenty of sunshine for him in those days but not in the post-war days when Harcourt left the district. The new incumbent was an altogether different person and did not like men with strong political, especially nationalist views. Secondary the post-war political situation had also its effect on him. During the *Anti-Rowlett Act Agitation (1919)*, for instance, the district was disturbed, and as Chhotu Ram was politically active there, his name was suggested by the local government for deportation<sup>5</sup>. But before the government could take any action, a new development changed the whole scene. The congress launched a non-cooperation agitation, followed by civil disobedience movement to oppose the *Rowlett Act*. Chhotu Ram, a moderate and constitutionalist as he was, opposed both these measures. He wanted to oppose the Act constitutionally. As a

result, his relations with congress become sour, so much so that he had to leave it.

The post-war developments forced Chhotu Ram to give up the present stage 2<sup>nd</sup> as well(1920). The strange circumstances, which has been compelled him to leave congress. This was a great set-back for the fast growing leader. There was a big clash in his mind for some time. *Casteism* and *Communalism* clashed with *Secularism* and *Nationalism*, *Congresses* (specially its method of non-cooperation) and its preference for the town 'classes' clashed with constitutionalism and well-being of the village peasant and worker. What to do was a big question with him now. After living in confusing state for some time, he answered it. He joined hands with another ex-congressman, Sir Fazl-i-Hussain and formed the *Unionist Party*(1923). The basic aim of the new outfit was to safeguard the interest of the *peasantry*. The village was to be its social base<sup>6</sup>. He fought the forces of economic exploitation of the peasantry and the working classes and protecting their rights. He challenged the communal forces led by the *Muslim league* and did not allow to vaise their head as long as he was at the helm. Jinnah could have his way only when he

was gone. He spared no pains to build a *secular, dynamic society*.

### **Chhotu Ram Role in the National Movement in Haryana:**

The leaders like Gandhi ji, Chhotu Ram helped the British in the recruitment of soldiers and collection of war funds during *First World War*(1914-1918)<sup>7</sup>. In appreciation of his services, local administration bestowed upon him the title of Rao Sahib in 1916<sup>8</sup>. Chhotu Ram became the president of *Rohtak District Congress Committee* in 1916 and kept on serving it till 1920<sup>9</sup>. Within a few years Chhotu Ram realized that congress party particularly in Punjab was urban oriented and was not doing anything worthwhile for the emancipation of poor peasantry. In April, 1919 Mahatma Gandhi and congress launched *Satyagraha* or passive resistance against *Rowlett Act* and Chhotu Ram took active part in it as a member of congress<sup>10</sup>. However, Chhotu Ram did not support the barren non-cooperation movement started by Gandhi ji in 1920 because of it was fraught with dangerous consequences including passing the land of peasantry to money lending classes at nominal prices if they refuse to pay land tax under the non-cooperation programmed. Peasantry would be

reduced to the status of tenants and laborers' and they would be on the verge of starvation<sup>11</sup>. Eventually Chhotu Ram left congress in 1920 to work for the emancipation of the suffering peasantry from age old tutelage of the exploiters, the money *Landers* and the government. Sir Chhotu Ram really a lackey of the British who kept away the village people, the peasants, to be precise, from the freedom movement from 1919 through 1947. This is the period when Gandhi was absolutely at the helm, and we had four major nation-wide movements, namely, the '*Anti-Rowlet Act*' Agitation and '*Non-cooperation Movement*', 1919-1922, the '*Civil Disobedience Movement*', 1930-1934, the Individual *Satyagraha* movement, 1941 and the *Quit India Movement*, 1942 launched for freedom under his leadership.

A locational social analysis of the four movements gives, contextually, a very important fact for our purpose. A pretty large number of the *Satyagrahis* from our region came from villages. They were mostly peasants and Jats by caste<sup>12</sup>. The '*Unionist Party*', which the critics say weaned away the village people from national struggle, was at the zenith of its power and popularity at this time. Its influence upon the villagers,

specially the peasants and *Jats*, was immense. How come, then, one might ask, the largest number of the congress *Satyagrahis* in the movements, were the villagers, the peasants, mostly jats from Chhotu Ram's own district *Rohtak* and *Hisar*<sup>13</sup>? The answer is that neither the *Unionist Party* nor its, master-builder and sustainer in the period, Chhotu Ram were against India's freedom or struggle for it. Actually, of all the national parties and persons who differed from the Congress on these two counts, the difference between the Congress and the *Unionist party*, thanks to Chhotu Ram, was the narrowest. The truth is that the *Unionist party* was, implicitly though, the creation of the factors and forces generated by Gandhi ji. In other words, it was the offspring of Congress.

The *Unionist Party* had, like the *Congress*, '*Dominion Status*' as its aim. In 1936 it changed it, at the behest of its founder, Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, to '*complete independence*'<sup>14</sup>. Both the parties wanted *Swaraj* to come and worked in their own ways, though, to attain it. They also did not differ much from each other in respect of their programmed of work. Sir Fazl-i- Hussain has explained their similarity in this respect very clearly 'The programme of work was practically put into my hands by the

Congress'<sup>15</sup>. What the two parties, in fact, different in was the method, to attain *Swaraj*, to be precise. The Congress would not mind, rather it welcomed, conformation, non-cooperation, disobedience or defiance of law, etc. for achieving *Swaraj*. The Unionists, on the other hand, stood for constitutional means to achieve it<sup>16</sup>. After the provincial autonomy, his status rose higher and he came to be the most powerful man in Joint Punjab. He had the will and capacity to fight the whole world in defense of his basic principles and programs. A new order of things came into existence now. That is revolution *Inquilab, Inquilab Zindabad*. He devoted himself heart and soul to this programme and worked day and night, literally, till his death, to transform it into a reality.

### Conclusion:

Now reviewing the vital role of Sir Chhotu Ram, it can be treated out that the *National Movement* was enriched by the crucial issues of the problematic areas of the farmers of joint Punjab, during the period of late 1930's and early 1940's. On the basis of observation of deteriorating conditions of the farmers, laborers of Punjab, which had been given rise to expedite the *National Movement* with the substantial

issues. These issues, pertaining to the grievances of the farmers enriched his ideologies, which made a considerable difference with the views of the contemporary leaders, belonged to different political parties, particularly with the congress leaders. Ch. Chhotu Ram aired his views by highlighting his views on bye -cutting the British policy, and also the ideology of congress party , as a result, formed '*Unionist Party*' which was vested with the protection of farmers interests and their rights. In essence, Ch. Chhotu Ram was a '*silent agent*', behind the '*National Movement*' who had been proved conducive to produce a welfare orientation of the people, belonged to various strata of society of joint Punjab.

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