

## Ideology of Sir Chhotu Ram & His Contribution to Social Reforms

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**Abstract:** *The fact is that Sir Chhotu Ram worked as social reformer in the era of joint Punjab. Being a Congress member, he devoted his full life to strengthen the party in the beginning years and he joined the All India Congress Party in 1916 and became the President of Rohtak District, Congress Committee. But, he was no longer satisfied with the policies of Congress and he left the party and joined Punjab Unionist Party in 1924. Consequently, he was remained one of the staunchest supporter and pillar of the Unionist Party till the end of his life. During his political life in the **Punjab Unionist Party**, he got much legislation for the improvement in the life of peasantry class and trodden people. Therefore, Sir Chhotu Ram's devotion to peasantry class nobody can't deny the fact that he fully supported the British Government and the government framed many laws for the welfare of weaker classes. The*

*present research paper highlights the ideology of Sir Chhotu Ram as a statesman and his contribution to social reforms.*

**Keywords:** Unionist Party, Punjab Assembly, Statesman, Social Reforms.

**Introduction:** Sir Chhotu Ram joined the **All India Congress Party** in 1916 and he played an active role in the politics of Rohtak district in the consequent years. However, Sir Chhotu Ram's main contribution was in the socio-religious reform movement of the Arya Smaj, but despite being involved in both the organizations, he was able to stay on the right side of the British Govt. Meanwhile, the disturbances prevalent in the Punjab of 1919 changed the political scenario and the Congress furiously agitated against the Rowlatt Acts. The Jat dominated the district of Rohtak also showed a great deal of participation in the agitation and it was

expected that Chhotu Ram would favour the boycott. But Chhotu Ram showed the loyalty to British Government and made statements in favor of the British Government. It annoyed the Congress Party and consequently he had to leave the party. He entered the Punjab Provincial politics in 1924 and joined the *Punjab National Unionist Party* established in 1923 by Fazl-i-Hussain and Lal Chand.

**Role as an Educationist:** Sir Chhotu Ram joined the *Punjab Unionist Party* in 1924 and he emphasized on opening schools in rural areas and providing reservations to the students belonging to the agriculturist families. He established the Anglo-Sanskrit Jat High School in 1913 and Jat Hero's High School in 1921 in the Rohtak district, when he became the Agriculture Minister in 1924 and later the minister for developments; he enhanced the budget allocation for education in the rural areas. He got a resolution passed in the *Punjab Legislative Council* in 1924 instructing the administration of the various professional colleges to provide special concession in fees to the students of

agriculturist families. Therefore, there was a remarkable increase in the admissions. Moreover, he got enacted the *Punjab Primary Education Act*. He also took keen interest in the opening of institute for women education. That is why; some of the scholars call him a champion of female education.

**Role in Agricultural Development:** Most of the scholars assume the fact that the major contribution of Sir Chhotu Ram as a statesman was in the direction of providing fair price for commodities of the peasants. In 1937, he got the *Punjab Agricultural Produce Marketing Act* enacted along with the standardization of the weights & measures and setting up of the market committees with power to regulate business that took place in the notified area. He also got two another Acts: *The Punjab Weight and Measures Act-1941* and *The Punjab Sugarcane Act-1943*. The first Act declared that the manufacturer and use of false weight and scales would be a criminal offense. The second Act provided that the income from this Act would be spent on providing Roads to

leading Sugarcane factories and providing shelters for the peasants carts.

Here it is also noteworthy that to give practical shape to his efforts, to non-perennial canals, one in Rohtak district and one in Hisar District were dug in 1941-42. Its credit goes to Sir Chhotu Ram. *The Haveli Project* was another landmark in the regime of Sir Chhotu Ram which was completed in 1939. A division was instituted for finding irrigational possibility in the western part of province. By 1944, Sir Chhotu Ram had also obtained clearance from the ruler of Bilaspur and the Govt. of Sindh. Though, it could not be materialized in his life time. Though, *Bhakra Dam Project* was the most ambitious and the greatest irrigation project undertaken by the Sir Chhotu Ram. He had signed the agreement in this respect before the one day of his death in 1945.

Thus, Sir Chhotu Ram provided relief to peasantry class and he made special efforts for the progress of agriculture and rural society. He started the *Jat Gazette* in 1916. He explained

the objective of this weekly news paper and he wrote that its main objective was to find out the means for the betterment of rural community and unity amongst members and also to represent legitimate rights of the needy rural people. Sir Chhotu Ram also suggested that British Government should frame more and more legislation for the welfare of peasantry class.

**As a Unionist:** Sir Chhotu Ram shared with *Punjab Unionist Party* in 1924. He remained the Minister of Agriculture and development from 1924 to 1926 after the 3<sup>rd</sup> elections to the *Punjab Legislative Council*; he was dropped from Ministership in favor of Manohar Lal who was intellectually superior to Sir Chhotu Ram. Meanwhile Sir Chhotu Ram assumed the role of the opposition leader in the council under the guidance of Fazl-i-Hussain who had been shifted to *Governor's Executive Council* in 1926 as a revenue member and brought a motion of non-confidence against the ministry. So far as the Muslim dominated *Unionist Party* was concerned, Sir Chhotu Ram fully supported it in 1926 elections and he

was elected a leader of *Unionist Party*. Now he was in an effective position which he retained till October 1936. Although the real head of the party continued to be Fazl-i-Hussain and Sir Chhotu Ram as a member of the party gave full support and his image remained as a non-communal member. He also added the *Government Select Committee* to give evidence before the *Simon Commission* in 1928.

In the consequent year of 1929, Sir Chhotu Ram was nominated a member of *Punjab Reforms Committee* to make recommendations on the distribution of the seats and the formation of constituencies including the problem of franchise. In the year of 1928, 1930 & 1931, he was also a nominated member of the panel of chairman of the *Legislative Council* and a member of Standing Committee on finance. In 1930 elections the number of Sir Chhotu Ram's Hindu followers from the South-East Punjab had considerably increased; and they had begun to urge that if the *Unionist Party* was keen on their supports, they should accommodate with their leader. Thus by 1936 the

position of Sir Chhotu Ram had become very remarkable and he started to feel the lead of the need to clarify his unique position; but he knew the fact that the urban Hindus were still against him. Nevertheless, the deteriorating relationship amongst the Unionist Muslims had ended up by the end of May 1936. Now Sir Chhotu Ram had become a signatory force between the two factions of the *Unionist Party* with the name of Sikandar Hayat Khan and Shahub-ud-din.

Moreover, Sir Chhotu Ram having provided his worth both to the Unionist Muslims and to the British Government now was a clear choice for a ministerial post which had been denied to till now. He was openly tipped for ministership by the newspaper. The Governor of Punjab had also written just before the elections that Sir Chhotu Ram was the most outstanding rural candidate for ministership. Consequently he was made the Minister of Development in 1937 and the Minister of Revenue in 1941 and he continued on this post till his death in 1945. However, in the cabinet Sir Chhotu Ram was ranked at

number two, next to the Premier. Sir Chhotu Ram, in fact, informed the Punjab Governor that Sikander Hayat Khan had chosen him to be his successor but after the death of Sikander Hayat Khan in 1942. Sir Chhotu Ram declined to contest for the leadership because he was fully aware that whatever his political importance to the Unionist Muslims, the communal situation in Punjab would not let anyone except a Muslim hold the office of the Premier. By January 1943 Sir Chhotu Ram agreed that the Unionist Party had been living on its past prestige and by May 1944 he openly declared that the Premier (Khizr) was a weaker person surrounded by the weaker followers.

Meanwhile, it may also be noted that Jinnah's talks which Sir Chhotu Ram to get him to join as a representative of his group in *Muslim League* indicates the political importance of Sir Chhotu Ram in the Muslim Community. However, on the two occasions, i.e. *Sikandar-Jinnah Pact* and the *Food Crisis of 1943* Sir Chhotu Ram's withdrawal of his support in the ministry confirms the importance of Sir

Chhotu Ram as a leader of Hindu Unionist Member of the Punjab Assembly which contributed the required basic in dispensable element to the very life and the existence of the Muslim dominated party in the Punjab. Sir Chhotu Ram knew it very well that the Unionist Government of Punjab could not remain in power without the support of South-East Punjab or from the Haryana region because eight to twelve members were with the Sir Chhotu Ram. If he removed his support, the Government will collapse very soon; but in Sir Chhotu Ram, the loyalist Muslims of the *Unionist Party* found a Hindu who would not rejoin the Congress and the Hindu communist. Thus, he contributed the party stability and he remained a stabilizing factor in the politics of Punjab who got the backing of the British Government for the working of provincial autonomy in the Punjab.

**Conclusion:** To conclude, we can say that Sir Chhotu Ram was completely against communalism and he played a crucial role as an opponent of Jinnah's demand for partition of India on

communal basis. In the very beginning years of his political career and as a statesman, he focused on socio-economic evils of Punjab. When he joined the Unionist Party, he aimed at to provide protection to the weaker sections of the society and he adopted the path of secularism. Therefore, it is an assumed fact that Sir Chhotu Ram made an immense contribution as a social reformer and he remained a staunch supporter of the *Unionist Party* in his political life. That is why; his contribution to the politics is not less than Gandhi in any way as remarked by Cabinet Minister Virender Singh.

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