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## **The Veracious Spokesman of Downtrodden Peasantry Class in the United Punjab: A Case Study of Sir Chhotu Ram**

### **Abstract**

*This research article highlights Sir Chhotu Ram's political career and endeavours to unveil the panorama of his efforts for the elevation and amelioration of economically depressed 'Peasantry Class' in the United Punjab. Representing the same class and acquainted with their abject miseries, he addressed their usurped rights and launched a series of bills on constitutional grounds that would be immensely soothing and pacifying for the 'Peasantry Class'. To address the troubles of this social section, he granted them identity through division between urban and rural classes, purposely convincing to pay heed on peasantry's disappointments. Treading this track, he vehemently advocated the oppressed peasantry from the platform of the Unionist Party. His voice reverberated more vociferously when the tilted scale of peasantry was uplifted probably to the equilibrium in the society. Avoiding the confrontation, his political philosophy was based on constructive politics full of nationalism and patriotism believing in the United Punjab and his selfless zeal throughout his career advocated the unity and cooperation among the agrarian society of the province. His initiatives for increasing prices of agricultural products and other pro-agrarian stances put him in an enviable stead of evergreen patronage, and a virtual guardian of suppressed peasantry. The research paper also focuses on the symbiotic relationship formed between the peasantry and the Unionist Party and explores the mutual collaboration of both at every level.*

**Key words:** United Punjab, Chhotu Ram, Peasantry Class and their Problems, Unionist Party and Agrarian Legislation.

### **Peasantry Class in Theoretical Perspective**

If we see Chhotu Ram's struggle for the uplift of the oppressed and the exploited 'Peasantry Class' of the United Punjab from the perspective of Marxist theoretical jargon, both Karl Marx and Chhotu Ram endeavor to upraise the social status of the Proletariat (working) class who had held the lower position in the political and economic fields of the society. The peasantry, like the working class of the society was socially, economically and politically marginalized; they were culturally dominated and politically deprived of power. Chhotu Ram, being vociferous, indulged in haggling at each and every forum and also got successful in receiving massive shares for the peasantry class. The main purpose was to uplift the hard-pressed peasantry and set it to the stability and equilibrium on the pendulum of

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society, so that they may be accommodated, provided with equal rights and acknowledged as the dignified segment of the society. Very analogous to him, Karl Marx assiduously strived for the Proletariat via his intellectual capacity. In this political ambience, Sir Chhotu Ram, as a candid spokesman, proved an outstanding figure to the peasantry for their uplift in the United Punjab.

Chhotu Ram demonstrated the social movement that was systematized along with Marx's "theory of class struggle" for the betterment of the lower strata, the working class and the downtrodden peasantry of the society. He worked hard for day and night to remove poverty by raising voice at every corner of the province and institutions to bring justice to the oppressed class and to eliminate inequality from the community by giving them the equal rights as the 'Bourgeoisie' were enjoying. Chhotu Ram was determined to bring equality in economic and social matters to wipe out the deprivations of the oppressed peasantry. The peasantry class was dominated culturally but oppressed by the elite class (moneylenders) of the society who were all in all that time in political, social and economic spheres. As Karl Marx accentuated on the backwardness of the peasantry class and raised his voice against the Bourgeois society who had collared the Proletariat through their indirect economic shackles because Marx's struggle aimed at effacing the inequality from the society.<sup>1</sup> Chhotu Ram's struggle for the elevation of the 'Peasantry Class' is witnessed by the substantial work of Frantz Fanon who considers the role of the peasantry class important along with their contribution to bring a change in the political and social order of the society in colonial countries.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Antonio Gramsci also considered the working class as a major and vital force in the ideas and actions of subaltern classes that developed the society culturally, socially and politically to be its living force. Gramsci was well-aware of the situation that their subordination can be transformed into powerful factor only by the union of the peasantry class with each other through the development of class consciousness among the workers.<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx also highlighted the backwardness and political inactiveness of the working class in Europe.<sup>4</sup> If we see the Bourgeois in the Indian perspective of the United Punjab, in the colonial context, they did the same as the colonizers did with the colonized. Here, the Bourgeois were the oppressor and exploiters of the peasantry and the peasantry were the oppressed, dominated and the exploited ones who were being colonized by this Bourgeois.<sup>5</sup> This social transformation of the peasantry and to identify them as the "reasonable class" was the sole agent of social transformation that was done by Sir Chhotu Ram according to Marxist paradigm.

## **Introduction**

Moaning under the usurping and exploiting circumstances, the peasantry was a hapless class in the United Punjab. Miraculously, amidst such chaos, a generous healer with panacea of their miseries emerged in the form of Sir Chhotu Ram, who rendered the *zamindars'* (landholders) interests. The main principle of his ideology relentlessly waged a war for the restoration of the peasantry's rights.<sup>6</sup> Chhotu Ram belonged to a *jat biradari* of Rohtak District and he was the youngest son of Chaudhary Sukhi Ram. Chhotu Ram was born on November 24, 1881 at Garhi Sampla named Ram Rachpal Garhi Sampla in the vicinity of Sampla.<sup>7</sup> Being the youngest at home, he was called 'Chhotu' and later on well-known with this name.<sup>8</sup> His father Sukhi Ram was affluently prosperous because, being an illiterate

peasant proprietor, he dabbled in moneylending in addition to running cotton business.<sup>9</sup> He prophesied the proficient future leadership of the *jat biradari* in Chhotu Ram's image and paid concentrated attention to his education.<sup>10</sup>

He did his Matriculation from Christian Mission High School Delhi and passed Intermediate examination from St. Stephen's College Delhi in 1901 and 1903 respectively with good grades.<sup>11</sup> While trekking towards his intellectual pursuit, he was awarded a merit scholarship in St. Stephen's College.<sup>12</sup> After his father's death in September 1905, Chhotu Ram was desperately keen to fulfill his ambitions and joined St. Stephen College.<sup>13</sup> However, his education depended on scholarships and the support from a wealthy benefactor, Seth Sir Chhaju Ram of Alakpura.<sup>14</sup> To complete his higher studies, he joined Law College at Lahore in 1905.<sup>15</sup> Simultaneously, he got the employment as a teacher in the Rang Mahal Missionary High School Lahore.<sup>16</sup> In 1907 once again succumbing to the outburst of plagues he had to veer away the treading of this journey and with qualms and compulsions resumed the service of Raja of Kalakankar as a private secretary.<sup>17</sup> Then he joined the Law College Agra, where he secured L.L.B degree in first division in 1911.<sup>18</sup> He also taught in a local high school at Agra and he was enrolled as a practicing Lawyer at Agra in 1912, but ultimately shifted to Rohtak.<sup>19</sup> In 1912, Chhotu Ram shifted from Agra to Rohtak because his *Jat biradari* needed more of his services.<sup>20</sup> He was an active member of Jat Mahasabha Samite since its inception in 1905 and became its secretary in 1913.<sup>21</sup> He started joint practice with Chaudhary Lal Chand and despite divergent outlook, this partnership lasted for eight years.<sup>22</sup> He worked as an honorary secretary of the District Recruitment and War Committee, and got a title of 'Rao Bahadur' in 1916 from the Viceroy of India".<sup>23</sup> It was due to his efforts that "recruitment figures in Rohtak District multiplied from 6,245 in January 1915, to 22,144 in November 1918".<sup>24</sup> All these traits encompassing his embryonic initiative of guarding 'Peasantry' and reinforcing it at massive level made him immensely a stalwart figure and robust representative at provincial level.<sup>25</sup>

### **Chhotu Ram's Mission for the Elevation of the Peasantry Class**

Chhotu Ram was more sincere and loyal to the peasants than himself and came out all the guns blazing in defense of peasantry class.<sup>26</sup> He started working for the amelioration of their socio-economic condition in cooperation with the government.<sup>27</sup> As K.C. Yadav writes that, Sir Chhotu Ram came to be the most powerful man in the Punjab. He devoted his heart and soul to this program and worked day and night, literally transformed into reality throughout his career.<sup>28</sup> Chiefly, the invisible but inseparable connection with his ancestors created in him the pro-agrarian tendency and hence he took this burden to be a committed and determined spokesman.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, by 1916, due to his stern struggle, he became as a popular advocate of the downtrodden agriculturists of the Rohtak District.<sup>30</sup> He started issuing an Urdu weekly, *Jat Gazette* in 1916, to find out the solutions and explore further avenues for the betterment of this moaning section.<sup>31</sup> Despite bitter criticism on the publication of *Jat Gazette*, although it was not harmful but fruitful.<sup>32</sup> Through his writings which were published in *The Tribune* and the *Jat Gazette*, under the tital of "Bechara Zamindar" (the unfortunate, deprived and the helpless Peasant).<sup>33</sup> According to Khalid Shamasul Hassan, "Sir

Chhotu was a prolific writer as his writings created consciousness among the petty peasants about their rights”.<sup>34</sup>

### **Sir Chhotu Ram at the Podium of Congress**

When Chhotu Ram joined the Congress, like many other prominent politicians, he accepted to become the first president of the Rohtak District Congress Committee and continued his presidency up to November 8, 1920.<sup>35</sup> As an active member of the INC, Chhotu Ram took part in the Satyagrah Movement launched by Gandhi.<sup>36</sup> Analogous to it in another meeting on April 11, he read out loudly Gandhi’s message stressing upon the people not to take any violent step to the disgrace of their mission.<sup>37</sup> He was appointed the chairman of the Reception Committee<sup>38</sup> to receive Satya Pal who was arriving at Rohtak to preside over an INC conference.<sup>39</sup> On September 4, 1920, under the leadership of Gandhi, the INC in its special session at Calcutta adopted the resolution of ‘non-violence and non-cooperation’.<sup>40</sup> Chhotu Ram also opposed this resolution in a political conference organized by the INC at Bhawani (in Ambala Division) on October 22, 1920.<sup>41</sup> On November 6, 1920, in another political conference which was convened at Rohtak, Chhotu Ram sternly rejected the idea of non-cooperation.<sup>42</sup> He was so upset and compact with the claims and rights of the rural populace as if the latter made no part of the Indian nation.<sup>43</sup> However, his withdrawal from the Congress clearly indicates his stance to make difference from Congress’ point of view and he decided to leave the Congress on November 8, 1920.<sup>44</sup> K.C. Yadav stated, “Chhotu Ram was a moderate and constitutionalist as he was opposed to the Congress measures”.<sup>45</sup> According to Raghuvendra Tanwar, his humble background and experience of poverty in his early years not only left a lasting impression on him but appears to justify his exit from the Congress.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Chhotu Ram’s early association with the Congress led him towards the start of his successful political career.<sup>47</sup>

### **Punjab Peasantry under Hefty Taxes**

Chhotu Ram being the guardian of peasantry was against the illicit attitude such as non-payment of taxes<sup>48</sup> including those of land revenue.<sup>49</sup> That’s why Chhotu Ram’s resolution as penned down by *Tribune*.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, he was aware of this fact that the agriculturists were not in a position to fight on both the fronts with the government and the moneylenders.<sup>51</sup> Concisely, Chhotu Ram’s nationalism could not fit with the non-cooperation method of the Congress<sup>52</sup> that compelled him to move away from the Congress”.<sup>53</sup> Chhotu Ram’s arguments and politically witty outlook was of the same magnitude.<sup>54</sup> According to him, not only moneylender’s exploitation was responsible for their destituteness and retardation, the government’s taxation policy also intensified their miseries.<sup>55</sup> Chhotu Ram, through *Jat Gatteze*, warned the *Jat* community not to establish an affinity with the INC as a class.<sup>56</sup> He was overtly inciting the peasantry not to tolerate their exploitation by the government.<sup>57</sup> Anyhow, after his disaffiliation from the INC, he robustly competed the Punjab Legislative Council (PLC) election as an independent *Jat* leader which regrettably turned into his failure, but this flimsy failure could not hamper and damp his zest for the uplift of the peasantry.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, from 1921 to onward, on account of his rural background and affluence, he acquired the position as a practicing lawyer at Rohtak District.<sup>59</sup> Chhotu Ram, being a committed personality was more powerful and potent.<sup>60</sup> To

his long held belief the rift between the agriculturalists and non-agriculturalists would herald redemption first in the Punjab.<sup>61</sup> And more interestingly such cracks were already existing there;<sup>62</sup> superficially there was no symptom of discrimination but this difference was existent there.<sup>63</sup>

### **Chhotu Ram: A Stalwart Pillar of the Unionist Party**

Primarily, in 1922, Sir Fazl-i-Husain formed a loose 'Rural Block' of the Muslims and the Hindus coming from the rural areas in the Punjab Legislative Council.<sup>64</sup> Initially, it was a hankering group of likeminded people not a political party, but with the passage of time in 1923 this rural group was converted by Fazl-i-Husain with the help of Chhotu Ram<sup>65</sup> into the Unionist Party.<sup>66</sup> The co-founders of it along with Sir Fazl-i-Husain, Chaudhary Lal Chand and Sir Chhotu Ram, along with pioneers, Chhotu Ram was reckoned as the devotee of the peasants from the very first day.<sup>67</sup> According to K.C. Yadav, "the basic aim of the new outfit was to safeguard the interests of the peasantry".<sup>68</sup> The classification articulated by Chhotu Ram encompassed entire agrarian species irrespective of their creed, caste, color and communities as per the party manifesto.<sup>69</sup> As a result of successful election petition in 1924, the urban Mahasabhite Hindus succeeded in toppling Lal Chand from ministership<sup>70</sup>, Malcolm Hailey, the then Governor of the Punjab (1924-1928), responded on constitutional lines and invited Sir Fazl-i-Husain to select his fellow on slot of Chaudhary Lal Chand.<sup>71</sup> Resultantly, Chhotu Ram was appointed as a Minister for Agriculture<sup>72</sup>, being the staunch supporter of the Unionist rural uplift program.<sup>73</sup>

From the Unionist platform, officially Sir Chhotu Ram enjoyed various portfolios. Firstly, in 1924 he was appointed as a 'Minister for Agriculture'<sup>74</sup> (for six months); later became a 'Education Minister' (for rest of the term, 1925-26).<sup>75</sup> He tried to boost up the educated people to take interest and pride in agricultural pursuits<sup>76</sup> and introduced an innovative scheme for the creation of model villages and *chaks*.<sup>77</sup> The echoing slogan of elevating and extricating the peasantry out of the squalor and retardation was preferably included in the manifesto of the Unionist Party.<sup>78</sup> Owing to this fact, Sir Chhotu convinced the peasantry<sup>79</sup> that their redemption in the Punjab exists solely in cooperation with the Unionists.<sup>80</sup> Madan Gopal is of the view, in fact, "Zamindara League"<sup>81</sup> worked as an extended or tertiary branch of the Unionist Party against the Congress which was trying to organize the *zamindars* for its own purpose.<sup>82</sup> He wanted to bring about unity among the agriculturist classes so that they might be able to represent their efficacy of legitimate rights to the governments in a more effective manner.<sup>83</sup> He was above communalism<sup>84</sup> and he did not create differences or the malice between the Muslim and the Hindu peasants on socio-economic grounds.<sup>85</sup> Under the Communal Award of 1932, these differences appeared for the first time when he raised his voice against reserved seats for the Muslims in Punjab.<sup>86</sup> According to Ian Talbot, "Sir Chhotu Ram consoled Zamindara workers, who were disheartened by the rising tide of communalism, with verses from Allama Iqbal, his favorite poet:

*"Tundi-e-baad-e-mukhalif se na ghabra aye uqaab  
Yeh tou chalti hai tujhay ooncha urranay ke liye"*

(Don't get dishearten from the intensity of adverse-wind, O' Eagle; it only blows to help you fly even higher).<sup>87</sup>

Chhotu Ram's cardinal object was to assist the agriculturist classes.<sup>88</sup> When the government decided to impose some sanctions regarding the *benami* lands<sup>89</sup> (around the cultivated land, there is some tracts of waste land called "*benami*" land), Chhotu Ram galloped his horses to get the land and allot it to the landless *Harijans* and *Kammis*.<sup>90</sup> To assist the backward areas, he put the D.A.V. institutions and Radhakrishnan High School, Jagraon on the list of those given grants and encouraged the commencement of 'Ayurvedic Classes'.<sup>91</sup> He also urged the government to start these big projects of 'Thal irrigation program'<sup>92</sup> and 'Bakra Dam', for agricultural crops in all conditions and stabilize the costs of wheat.<sup>93</sup> In 1929 Sir Chhotu Ram tabled several resolutions<sup>94</sup> for peasantry class and their problems.<sup>95</sup> Regarding this, Sir Chhotu Ram wrote many articles<sup>96</sup> in which he asked for reforms such as retrenchment in the services.<sup>97</sup> In 1936 on the demise of Sir Fazl-i-Husain, Sir Chhotu Ram was elected as a president the Punjab Legislative Council.<sup>98</sup> Later, in the provincial elections of 1936-37 of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, Sir Chhotu Ram won his seat from the Jhajjar constituency with a huge majority.<sup>99</sup> In 1937 he was also awarded as a "knight" the title of Sir conferred on him by the King.<sup>100</sup> During Sir Sikandar's Ministry (1937-42), in 1937 Sir Chhotu Ram was firstly appointed as a 'Minister for Development', later on, in 1941 he was appointed as a 'Revenue Minister' which he served to this office till his death under the Premiership of Malik Khizr Hayat Tiwana.<sup>101</sup> According to Khalid Shamasul Hassan, "Sir Chhotu's stand for his ideals was strong on account of his practicality and his maturity of thought was a great boon for the Unionist Party".<sup>102</sup>

### **Chhotu Ram: A Driving Force behind the Agrarian Legislation**

Sir Chhotu Ram made a significant contribution for the agrarian reforms through legislation.<sup>103</sup> In this regard, some of his speeches are marvelous in the Punjab Legislative Council, as once he delivered: "It is a thousand disenchantments that when we direct our efforts to save the downtrodden classes from the exploitation of the moneylenders".<sup>104</sup> In the realm of agrarian legislation, Chhotu Ram claimed the execution of the Regulation Bill, two amendments of the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 and determining of two significant measures for the indebted peasantry, i.e., 'The Punjab Relief Indebtedness Act of 1934' and 'The Punjab Debtors' Protection Act of 1936'.<sup>105</sup> However, the critics of the Land Alienation Act, it widened the magnitude and bulk of the holding of the rich agriculturists<sup>106</sup> who were the real beneficiaries of this Act.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, the *Jat Gazette* spoke in the favor of the advantages of this Act.<sup>108</sup> According to daily *Inqilab*, "the peasants of the Punjab were so much depressed due to their indebtedness to the *Sahukars*, *Mahajans* and *Banias* (moneylenders) that their deliverance from that indebtedness appeared to be a far cry".<sup>109</sup> The Punjab Alienation of Land Act provided the launching pad for all subsequent legislation in the agrarian field in pre and post Provincial Autonomy of the Unionist Party.<sup>110</sup> According to Prem Chaudhary, "later on, 'Land Alienation Act' was also termed as 'Magna Carta' in the history of the land reforms of India".<sup>111</sup> As far as the Land Alienation Act was concerned, it had been 'amended' many times according to the requirements of the peasant proprietors.<sup>112</sup> Anyhow, 'The Alienation of Land

Amendment Bill' owed immense vitality because the moneylenders made considerable gains by unscrupulous manipulation of accounts.<sup>113</sup> The Unionist Party, with the help of Chhotu Ram, immediately brought forward the 'Punjab Land Alienation (Amendments) Bill' which nullified the efforts of both the rulings and defused the confusion therein.<sup>114</sup> According to this amendment, it was clearly mentioned that no court would be authorized to issue any orders to permit the sale of land of an insolvent.<sup>115</sup> The prime object of this Act was to protect the peasant proprietors<sup>116</sup> and detain agricultural land forfeiting from passing out of the hands of the tillers of the soil to those of moneylenders due to indebtedness.<sup>117</sup> The net result of this Act was the creation of another class of agriculturist moneylenders<sup>118</sup> who were more greedy than the Hindu *Banias* (Hindu Moneylenders).<sup>119</sup> They also tarnished that the Unionist Party was the exploitative offspring of the Land Alienation Act,<sup>120</sup> "which claimed to be a 'Party of Peasants',<sup>121</sup> but which was essentially a political instrument fashioned out for the benefit of the newly created rural rich".<sup>122</sup> However, statistical facts proved that this Act failed to protect even the statutory agriculturists from the moneylenders as the mortgages and sales of land from statutory agriculturists mounted up in the Punjab (between 1902-1903 to 1925-26).<sup>123</sup>

Mir Maqbool Mahmud, (brother-in-law of Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan) a Unionist member from Amritser, introduced in the PLC 'The Registration of Moneylenders Bill' on July 16, 1938, to remove this evil and check the irregularities of the moneylenders by compelling them to obtain licenses.<sup>124</sup> The main object of this Act was to provide some relief to the poor cultivators<sup>125</sup> with a restriction that every moneylender in the Punjab had to register his name and maintain regular books of account in the form prescribed and that at the borrower's request, he would furnish him with a copy of his account.<sup>126</sup> Pandit Nanak Chand opposed this motion and called it purely a Muslim measure.<sup>127</sup> It is interesting to point out that Chhotu Ram showed very low interest in it because in their opinion, there was no symptom of a class struggle in its persuasion.<sup>128</sup> Anyhow, the main purpose of this Act was to assist the backward classes, as it was the political slogan of the Unionist manifesto. During discussions, this bill was altered materially in form and was named as 'The Borrowers Protection Bill'.<sup>129</sup> The Punjab Restitution of Mortgaged Lands Bill, on 21 July, 1938 provided for the termination of the old mortgages of land Influenced before 8 June, 1901 which were still subsisting.<sup>130</sup> This also provided relief on payment of a reasonable compensation when necessary by the mortgagor to the mortgagee.<sup>131</sup> It was estimated that this would result in over 700,000 acres being returned to its real owners.<sup>132</sup> Following, the Restitution of Mortgaged Lands Act decreed the delay of the executing relief providing task, owing to the immense piles of petitions and burden on the administrative elements.<sup>133</sup> Chhotu Ram's ever-lasting shade for peasantry, an auspice of them permanently<sup>134</sup> presented justification if needed.<sup>135</sup>

Another significant amendment termed as 'Zamindar Sahukra Act'<sup>136</sup> introduced in 1938 gave the reason of its promulgation since the agriculturalists moneylenders who were witnessed as covetous to impel the debtors to give up their stretches of lands.<sup>137</sup> The weekly *Gazette* briefed the vitality of this Act as: "there is no necessity to explain and endorse the claim that to what a greater extent the *zamindar* achieved benefits".<sup>138</sup> Apart from this, various other fruitful amendments

were executed by Chhotu Ram from the platform of the Unionist Party. Besides these ‘The Alienation of Land, Further Amendment Bill’, commonly known as the ‘Benami Transactions Bill’.<sup>139</sup> This bill empowered the deputy commissioner to declare all transactions null and void, if found to be in violation of the original Act.<sup>140</sup> The last but stronger portion of such agrarian legislation came out in the form of ‘Punjab Agricultural Markets Products Bill’ generally labeled as the ‘Mandi Act’ of 1939, which claimed the regulation of markets for the fair prices given to the peasantry.<sup>141</sup> This bill mainly intended to protect the growers of agricultural commodities<sup>142</sup> from various malpractices of shopkeepers and brokers.<sup>143</sup> Chhotu Ram speculated as, “the Act will ensure that the producers get a better price for the grain sold to the *sahukar*”.<sup>144</sup>

Each Act provided shield to *zamindars* against moneylender class and protected them from heavy burden of taxation.<sup>145</sup> The opponents made hue and cry, especially the Punjab Congress Party and the Hindu Mahasabha badly criticized the agrarian legislations.<sup>146</sup> Collectively, these bills or acts protected peasantry and there was widespread impression that all these Acts were oriented to be advantageous for all agriculturalists.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, this hypothesis was verified by Sir Henry Craik, the then Governor of the Punjab (1938-1941), in August 1938, as: “there are signs signaling that the tillers of soil are emerging and having a well-proportioned deal of benefits”.<sup>148</sup> Further, Sir Henry Craik said, “Sir Chhotu Ram endures to be the most argumentative in the public gathering, the most active campaigner of the agrarian legislation of the ‘Unionist Ministry’.”<sup>149</sup> Raguvendra Tanwar is of the view: “the agrarian legislation which was directed towards improving the condition of the peasants and of other rural people had, on the whole, gathered widespread support from various sections of the rural society of the Punjab”.<sup>150</sup> Meanwhile, Sir Chhotu Ram convened a ‘Zamindara Conference’ on September 4, 1938, at Lyallpur<sup>151</sup> to demonstrate the support for agrarian legislation.<sup>152</sup> Sir Chhotu Ram addressed the gathering, arguing that their party was only working for the peasants welfare and for the rural interests.<sup>153</sup> This conference successfully proved that all the peasantry<sup>154</sup> of the Punjab stood with the Unionist support behind Sir Chhotu Ram.<sup>155</sup> The agrarian legislations and the conferences aroused a great deal of enthusiasm amongst the peasantry class of the United Punjab.<sup>156</sup> These agrarian legislations were the chief incentive for the popularity and prestige of the Unionist Party in the Punjab.<sup>157</sup> Undoubtedly, Sir Chhotu Ram’s role in the agrarian legislation was significant in all aspects and he was the chief driving force behind the agrarian legislation.<sup>158</sup> His work in the interests of the poor of all classes, and particularly for the *zamindars* is recognized for his agrarian legislations.<sup>159</sup>

### **The Last Phase**

The last few years of Sir Chhotu’s life were very fruitful, in a sense that he was struggling on many fronts. On one hand, he led a provincial government campaign for the war-efforts, during World War-II and recruitments in the army, to fulfill the demands of the British Government.<sup>160</sup> It is important to mention here that across the Punjab, Sir Chhotu Ram received an exemplary response from different communities during all his public speeches.<sup>161</sup> His last public appearance in this regard was also important with massive gathering in Jhang.<sup>162</sup> He addressed the audience for continuously three hours and fell down at the end of his speech,

precipitated by a heart attack and died on January 9, 1945 at the age of 63 years uttering the last words, 'may God help all', the great man slept the eternal sleep.<sup>163</sup> Sir Chhotu's dead body was wrapped in the Unionist flag by the Punjab Premier Khizr Hayat and sent to Rohtak.<sup>164</sup> His last rituals of cremation were performed with the enormous crowd of people of all communities in the ground of the Jat Heroes College at Rohtak with full state of honors.<sup>165</sup> According to Ian Talbot, the then Premier of the Punjab Khizr Hayat Tiwana publically declared: "Sir Chhotu Ram was not only an illustrious son of the Punjab and a valued colleague but a cherished friend whose unflinching kindness and support I can never forget or replace".<sup>166</sup> Lord Wavell (1883-1950) paid tribute<sup>167</sup> to him and said, "Chhotu Ram was the strong man, had a very limited outlook and devoted mission to increase the fortune of the Punjabi agriculturalist and send a condolence message".<sup>168</sup>

While encapsulating his exemplary contribution, during Sir Chhotu Ram's life Sir Fazl-i-Husain's compliments were in these words, "he was very apt and befitting to his efforts for peasantry".<sup>169</sup> Further, Sir Fazl-i-Husain wrote in his diary about the qualities of Sir Chhotu Ram: "He was hard working, intelligent, and clear headed, distinctly and considerably above the average".<sup>170</sup> Quaid-i-Azam's point of view regarding Sir Chhotu Ram was not admirable, he thought, "Sir Chhotu Ram is obstinate as he maintains and insists that every member of the League Party in the House owes his prime commitment to the principle, programs and policy of the Unionist Party".<sup>171</sup> Glancy, the then Governor of the Punjab (1941-1946), reported to Viceroy of India, Linlithgow (1936-1944) verified<sup>172</sup> the tussle between Sir Chhotu Ram and Jinnah regarding the stance on Punjab.<sup>173</sup> Briefly speaking, undeniably Chhotu Ram being a guardian and ambassador of the downtrodden peasantry, was a resolute and persistent in his efforts for the elevation of rural class in the United Punjab.<sup>174</sup> Sir Chhotu's ability and competence was also acknowledged by the Governor of the Punjab, such as the then Governor Glancy conveyed to Linlithgow in these words: "Chhotu Ram is made of firmer stuff than his leader Sir Sikandar".<sup>175</sup>

In a nutshell, while applying the theoretical idea of Marxism, we can closely employ its full-fledged functionality in the context of peasantry class in the United Punjab. Through the angle of Marxist theory, the gap between the Bourgeois class and the Proletariat class can be seen in the United Punjab in the form of moneylender class and the peasantry class. The Hindu moneylender class not only suppressed the Punjab peasantry but they also propagated capitalism which had been observed from the viewpoint of Marxist ideas. The above whole discussion while implementing the class theory of Karl Marx, we can safely conclude that material needs come first. According to Marxist point of view, the material needs provide base for society. The Marxist theory divided the society into two major classes; the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat which are based on superstructure (elevation). Karl Marx says that when a particular group occupies the means of production (such as in the case of the United Punjab, the Hindu moneylenders suppressed the common peasants), it gives birth to peasantry exploitation. The conceptual description of the landownership, given by Chhotu Ram to the peasants in the United Punjab, was a commendable achievement. Through his speeches, he awakened the peasants who were in deep slumber, gave them courage and advised

them ‘to behave like a lion, not a jackal’.<sup>176</sup> A popular song almost in all of his public speeches was his start:

*“Zamindar ziada jan de, aik baat mann lai,  
Aik bolna lai seekh, aik dushman pehchan lai”*

(Zamindar forgets about other things but accept my one advice, Learn to express yourself and recognize your enemy).<sup>177</sup>

Sir Chhotu Ram created consciousness in the agrarian society, addressed the peasants’ problems, called them “do not forget your qualities and characteristics, identify your status and do not be afraid of anyone, open your eyes, stand up and nobody can harm you”.<sup>178</sup> Ian Talbot paid tribute to him and expressed, “Chhotu Ram stood head and shoulders above the Muslim Unionists as a galvanizing public speaker”.<sup>179</sup> This enthusiasm infused the new spirit in the peasant movement and Sir Chhotu Ram’s ‘dream of peasantry’s reasonable status in the society’ came true in the United Punjab.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude the debate, we can safely build an argument that Sir Chhotu Ram was a true and genuine representative and advocate of the downtrodden peasantry class of the United Punjab. Throughout his political career, he took many drastic steps for the uplift of the agrarian society and passed a number of legislations for the promotion of the rural backward classes of the province. His political philosophy enabled him to make the betterment in the agricultural sector and introduced the reforms for the rural progress with the collaboration of the British Government and the Unionist support. Being a social campaigner and a veracious spokesman of the marginalized peasantry class in the United Punjab, he occupied a distinct position of high rank among his contemporary politicians of the Punjab. Sir Chhotu Ram was addressed as the champion of the downtrodden class and the have-nots as well, not only by the writers of that era but also he is acknowledged as the ‘the champion of the have-nots’ even by the readers and writers of the present age. His absence also proved to be the major factor of the sudden decline of the Unionist’s Political strength in the Punjab as a death blow. Certainly, Sir Chhotu Ram was a bold, brave and courageous statesman and was fully aware of political realities of the United Punjab.

## Notes & References

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11. For details see Prem Chaudhry, "Social basis of Chaudhry Sir Chhotu Ram's Politics the Punjab Past and Present", vol. x-1, April 1976, 157.
12. Khalid Shamshul Hasan, 31 & K. C. Yadav, 12.
13. K. C. Yadav, ed., *Government Politics and Society in Colonial India*, 132.
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15. Ibid. 132.
16. Ibid. 12 & 133.
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22. For details see Madan Gopal, *Sir Chhotu Ram: A Political Biography*, 33.
23. K. C. Yadav, 14 & 135 & Prem Chaudhry, "Social basis of Chaudhry Sir Chhotu Ram's Politics the Punjab Past and Present", vol. x-1, April 1976, 157.
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26. The story was told of how Chhotu Ram accompanied his father when he went to a *bania* in Sampla to seek advice concerning his son's future. The moneylender threw the *pankha* (fan) cord to Chaudhary Sukhi Ram and ordered him to pull it, while he was thinking over the issue. Chhotu Ram could not bear this humiliation and questioned the *bania* about the property of such conduct. This incident is said to have acted as a catalyst in Chhotu Ram's decision to dedicate his career to improving the peasants' social and economic status and to destroying the moneylenders' influence. See Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement* (Karachi: OUP, 1988), 81fn & also Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, 136fn.
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52. For details See, Yash Pal Bajaj, 402.
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54. Ibid.
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63. Ibid.
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68. K. C. Yadav, 15.
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70. K. C. Yadav, 15-16.
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