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"Philosophy of Ch. Chhotu Ram to upliftment the Rural Society"

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Before analysing and writing about a person, his background, his past history, his family, neighbourhood, environment, circumstances, actions, feelings, thoughts and dreams are considered. it is a fact that present is connected to the past in one way or the other. Ch. Chhotu Ram was so important personality that he represented in himself an institution an embodiment of thoughts, a popular leader pivot of the future of peasantry society of Punjab before independence and trust worthy to the core. He gained popularity not only Hindu peasantry Society, but also Muslim and down trodden people in a short time. Being Minister without any vested interest, smiling without getting tired, thought of the upliftment of the peasantry society and its rural poor citizen.

Some pepole gain greatness by virtue of hard work like Lal Bahadur Shastri, Ch. Charan Singh,Ch. Chhotu Ram, Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, while on some people greatness is thrust upon. Some people are born great like Indira Gandhi, George Bush, Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto. Ch. Chhotu Ram was the only person in Punjab history before independence who was a unique combination of sterling qualities of sacrifice like Nelson Mandela, popularity like Gladstone, adimnstrater like Bismark,champion communal harmony like M.K.Gandhi and leadership quality to organise the people like Hitler.

During his student life, Chhotu Ram experienced the deepest punch of poverty and helplessness of rural people in general and of peasantry in particular.[1] Chhotu Ram became a very popular advocate. He could also lead a luxurious life like many other advocates of his time. He could also amass wealth like many other politicians if he so desired. But legal practice and politics were for him a path of personal sacrifice and selfless service to the peasantry and downtrodden and not the pursuit of wealth, power and abuse of authority.

According to Chhotu Ram,. A Sanskrit couplet which he had read in Hitopdesh for the first time in his school in 1897 planted a sapling of his life mission i.e. improving the lot of the peasantry and downtrodden in his heart. The couplet says : "In ordinary course of nature thousands upon thousands are born everyday but he alone is truly born whose birth leads to the elevation of his race". Thus leaving all personal considerations of his own and of his family for comforts, money and power; he directed all his time, energy, talent and labour towards the selfless and fearless service for the

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upliftment of longue tied, poverty stricken, debt laden peasantry and downtrodden and worked for secularism and oneness of the nation.

Chhotu Ram rightly saw in the anti-agriculturist and anti-labour policy of British rulers who also gave full protection to money-lenders and traders oftenly enlarging their net of exploitation. The irony was that though the producer of food was worst-affected, being squeezed and sucked by the trading community delivering kicks to their empty stomachs.[2] According to Darling, "Bulk of the Punjab cultivators are born in debt, live in debt. And die in debt".[3]

Further illiteracy, frequent occurance of famines, traditional rainfed farming with small and fragmented fields as autumn leaves, ignorance and extravagance of cultivators on social customs, illegal extortion of money and high handedness of officials were more causes responsible for the pitiable condition of peasantry. Sir Chhotu Ram fought for the emancipation of helpless peasantry ad the downtrodden both inside the legislative and outside.

1 Agrarian Acts.

Excessive land revenue and rigidity in its collection was one of the main reasons for the distress and indebtedness of peasantry who had to sell not only their lands but also their cattle, ornaments and though not very often their daughters too in order to pay off their land revenue.[4] The Punjab Land Revenue (amendment) Act. 1928 which got Governor General's consent in Feb. 1929 provided substantial relief to all land owners big and small and also fixed 40 years as period of settlement. By 1938, the land revenue rates in Punjab was the lowest in the country as a whole.[5] Another important legislation was the Restitution of Land Mortgaged At, 1938 which was amended in 1939, 1940 and 1943 to put an end to benami (fictitious) transactions.[6] This device was resorted to by the moneylenders to frustrate the intension of the Act. of 1901. Also this Act protected the peasantry from the agriculturist money-lenders. The Act also provided for restitution of land mortgaged before June 8, 1901 free of cost to real owners. Accordingly, 3.65 lakhs land mortgagers got back 8.35 lakh acres of their mortgaged land for Rs. 413 lakhs without any cost.

Punjab Regulation of Accounts Act, 1930 which required the maintenance of a regular record of loan and furnishing of six monthly statement of accounts in request of loan to the debtor. The Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act 1934 under which the interest on loan could not exceed the principal. The debtor stood discharged of the loan liability if he had paid the creditor twice the amount of principal. The Punjab Debtor Protection Act, 1936 prohibited attachment of, in the execution of a court decree, the land on which the debtor and his family depends, standing crops, standing trees, dwellings, one third output of food grains, bullock cart, mil cattle etc. The Punjab Registration of Money Lender's Act 1938 compelled all moneylenders (except land owners who lent money to their tenants for the purposes of agriculture) to get themselves registered and obtain licenses from the District Collector and loan entries could be made only in the register certified by the Government and they could charge only the regulated rate of interest. Unlicensed money-lenders were

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debarred from the claim of getting loan repayment. Under the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness (Amendment) Act XII, 1940, Debt Conciliation Boards were established at District headquarters for settling debts of long standing duration in order to save both the creditors and debtors from litigation.

To remove the hurdles of countless boundaries, irrigation channels and supervision, the Punjab Consolidation of Holdings Act 1936 and its amendments in 1940 and 1945 were passed and cooperation department was entrusted the job of consolidation of holdings. Another Agrarian Act for the benefits of tillers of land was the Punjab Tenancy (Amendment) Act IX, 1939.

Another reason for economic backwardness of peasantry was the prevalence of shady deals and malpractices in marketing. The Punjab Agricultural Produced Markets Act IX, 1941 were passed to ensure proper returns to the farmers. These were fiercely attacked by traders and hartals were observed for a long periods. Their implementation led to the establishment of regulated marketing system in the State.

In order to divide the burden of taxation equally between agriculturists and traders, the Punjab General Sales Tax Act, 1941 was passed which imposed tax on the sale of goods in cities and towns. The Punjab Trade Employee's Act 1941 made it compulsory for all traders, shopkeepers, businessmen, industrialists to observe one day's holiday in a week. This provided the much needed relief to all workers employed in industry and trade without affecting the business.

2 *Agriculture development works*

Chhotu Ram and his party took numerous steps for the development of agriculture, irrigational facilities, industries and for the development of Punjab economy in general and of the peasantry in particular. Remissions of land revenue and water rates in the time of failure of crops were ordered; taccavi loan was given in more liberal scale; a net work of land mortgage banks and co-operative credit societies was created for helping to release agriculturists land mortgaged with money-lenders and to issue loans on easy terms.[7] Peasants welfare fund was started[8] reclamation of waste land was started[9] Government seed farms were setup to Tehsil level to evolve new varieties of various crops[10] better agricultural implements and improved seeds were made available to farmers; also proper attention was given to improve the breeds of livestock[11] large number of Veterinary Hospitals and dispensaries were started in villages[12] fruit cultivation was promoted, nurseries were started and fruit preservation was encouraged to improve income of farmers.[13] Panchayat Boards were revived to arbitrate disputes among agriculturists so as to save them from indebtedness.[14] The removal of oppressive burdens coupled with provision of additional facilities and pervasive awakening of peasantry greatly promoted agriculture.

3 *Irrigation development works*

Chhotu Ram made concerted efforts not only in improving irrigation facilities and in rationalizing irrigational dues but also endeavored to streamline the working of the irrigation department of the province for the service of farmers. He wanted to execute a number of minor and major irrigational projects starting from the implementation of tubewell irrigation schemes, non-perennial canals and achieving the maximum up to Bhakra Dam Project.[15] He wanted to banish famines from

south east Punjab (now Haryana) which was the most backward region at that time.

To provide immediate relief he gave practical shape to kharif Extension Canal Scheme in 1940[16] providing irrigation to 3.5 lakh acres in Kharif season. He also rejuvenated in Gurgaon the bund (embankment) irrigation in 1943 which had been deteriorated during the preceding quinquennium by having by having been placed under the charge of irrigation department.[17] Inspite of Governments apathy towards the Bhakra Dam Project, Chhotu Ram did not let the project disappear. As a result of him, surveys connected with Bhakra Dam Scheme were completed and the project was reviewed with a view to generating from it hydro- electric power also.[18] To settle the dispute between the Governments of Sind and the Punjab, Chhotu Ram managed t compensate the Sind Government in 1944 by paying her Rs. 2 crores.[19] But for Sir Chhotu Ram's efforts Bhakra Dam might have been delayed still further and might have been changed in scope.[20] Other two more schemes formulated in 1943 to bring water from Western Yamuna Canal by boring a two mile long tunnel through the Delhi Hills and bring water of two rivers Toshi & Giri of Sirmur State by constructing dam on them[21]did not mature during his life time.

Chhotu Ram's irrigational work did not confine only to south eastern districts of the Province. It was mainly due to his effort that major projects like Haveli Project was completed in 1939 and Thal Project in 1942. It was again due to the efforts of Chhotu Ram that a scheme was stated to raise water levels of wells in Doaba in 1941 and a small canal was dug in Pind Dadu Khan area in 1942. Thus, irrigational improvements during Chhotu Ram's period not only resulted in agricultural development but also provided a great stimulus to trade and industry in the province.

4.***Industrial development works***

To tackle the problem of unemployment both in rural and urban areas[22] and to improve the lot of the peasantry Sir Chhotu Ram advocated strongly the necessity particularly of the agriculture based industries as well as the development of cottage industries[23]in the State.[24] For encouraging industrialization he allowed breaches into Punjab Alienation of Land Act for (i) obtaining loan from Industries Department and (ii) for acquiring plots for installing industries[25] opened technical and industrial schools[26] revived pottery industry[27] encouraged beekeeping and poultry farming[28] instituted industrial research fund. He provided industrial loans to the educated unemployed and spread female industrial education.[29]

5 Social Walfare Work

Sir Chhotu Ram gave maximum importance to social welfare activities so as to raise the backward areas economically and education ally, providing them hospitals, drinking water and communication facilities; eradicating social evils like drinking, taboo on widow remarriage etc. and improving the lot of laboureres, downtrodden, backward classes and scheduled castes. He believed in the principle of proper educational system as the backbone of any and every society neglecting education of rural classes is mainly responsible for their fall in to the clutches of money-lending classes and their failure to notice the injustice done to them by the Government for not providing the facilities of sanitation, hospitals, drinking water, roads, etc.[30]

Chhotu Ram’s welfare activities covered the scheduled castes of all classes whom he

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called backward classes so as to remove the feelings of casteism and religious differences and encourage their united efforts.

The work and policy of Sir Chhotu Ram and his party before independence laid the foundations for Green Revolution which ushered in after mid sixties with the evolution of High Yielding Varieties.

Chhotu Ram was a great visionary. He had recognized that the bane of our nation is communalism which had pushed us back. The only panacea for this evil is to form political parties on the basis of common economic programme. Thus,he had formed National Unionist Party,the main objective of which was not only to solve the economic problems of agriculturists but also to make this province the cradle of country's communal unity.[31] The communal harmony in Punjab will show positive impact on other part of the country and thereby it would pave the path for the country's independence.[32]

Thus, Chhotu Ram organized the agriculturists the backward and downtrodden people, rural institutions etc. into organic political entities not only for uplifting them from dust and made men of them but also awakened them to take up the cause of communal harmony and oneness of the motherland.

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