

## CHAPTER - XII

### TWO LUMINIARIES

#### **Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram**

That the peasant community in India has been a wretched lot for centuries together is a fact could not reasonably be doubted or denied. Even a causal glance at the uninterrupted, chequered history of the Peasant Movement should easily show how a mass of illiterate, ignorant, disorganized and disgruntled humanity has over the centuries been subjected to the most inhuman treatment at the hands of the government of the day, or those who happened to be placed in more fortunate or privileged position in the society. There are, on the other hand, communities — traders, transport and even petty shopkeepers — that have faced their own problems, but the plus point in their favour is that they have always sought to solve their problems with their own means and mettle and, if necessary, with the help of their leaders. It should now be readily obvious that the peasant community stands sharply distinguished from all other communities in that it has over the last many centuries been smitten by inertia, quietism, apathy and indifference, all combining to produce a hell on earth itself. Nor, ironically, has it been lucky enough to have produced from within its own tribe a leader singularly devoted to the cause of economic emancipation and social rehabilitation of his peasant fraternity from sheer love of goodness.

But, as we know, 'old order changeth, yielding place to new'. Consequently, suffering could be the eternal damnation of some and happiness the eternal lot of some other. There is behind this realm of change a certain logical necessity which serves as the sole custodian of the eternal moral order of the universe. This is what we call Destiny, the ultimate ground of the explanation of all kinds of phenomena, natural and non-natural.

It was way back in 1881— 24th November, to be more precise— that Destiny sought self-fulfilment in the birth of a child affectionately called "Chhotu" in virtue of his being the youngest son of a modest farmer, Chaudhari Sukhi Ram, in a sleepy hamlet, Garhi, whose 500-odd denizens had branched off from their native place, Sampla, in Rohtak district, about 40 kilometres West of Delhi. The boy, whose birth-name was Ram Richhpal, was sent to a primary school at Sampla and his name was entered as Chhotu Ram in the school register and was known by that name throughout the whole of his life. He was exceptionally intelligent and promised a bright academic career. For his middle school education he went to Jhajjar, a sub-division of Rohtak district, from where he passed his examination with a very high position of merit. Acting on the advice of his creditor, Lala Ghasi Ram of Sampla, Sukhi Ram wanted his son to be a patwari, who in those days commanded great respect among peasants. Who could possibly predict that one day that seemingly rustic boy would decide the fate of thousands of patwaris as Revenue Minister? "And the moneylender who so smugly underrated the Jat boy find his whole class tremble at the blows the Unionist Leader would strike to uproot usury could hardly be imagined then."

With financial assistance assured by his uncle Raje Ram, Chhotu Ram joined the St. Stephen's High School at Delhi. Here too he worked hard and passed his examination with a high percentage of marks. In 1903 he passed his intermediate examination from the St. Stephen's College, Delhi, again with good marks. Just then he happened to meet Sethi Sir Chhaju Rsm (1861-1943), one of the most prominent of

philanthropists of his times. While going to his village Alakhpur, district Bhiwani, Haryana, Seth Chhaju Ram had the irrepressible urge to incidentally share a few hukka puffs with Chhotu Ram at the Ghazibad railway station, and it was here that the young Chhotu got himself ingratiated into Sethji's eyes. Sethji supported Chhotu Ram financially even after his studies. It is said that the "Neeli Kothi" at Rohtak was got built for Chhotu Ram by Sethji.

It was indeed a stroke of good luck that a poor boy like Chhotu Ram should have received his education in an elite institution like the St. Stephen's High School first and later in the St. Stephen's College. During his long stay at these Christian institutions he had developed a strong taste for fluent speaking in English and for prolific writing. He wrote a very revealing article for the inaugural issue of the college magazine, *The Stephenian*, which won him laurels from his class-mates as well as his teachers. He passed his B.A. examination in 1905, and on returning home learnt of the sudden and sad demise of his father, who had left behind a debt which Chhotu Ram paid later.

Although Chhotu Ram wanted to prosecute his studies further, he felt called upon to shoulder the family responsibility and pay off the bania's debt at the earliest to avoid attachment of property at his hands. Lucky smiled at him once more when he was appointed the assistant private secretary to Raja Ram Pal Singh, ruler of a small state, Kalakankar in the Pratap Garh district of U.P., at a handsome salary of 40 rupees per month. Besides his manifold duties like taking dictation from the Raja, Chhotu Ram also looked after the English section of the *Hindustan*. The Raja was a nominated member of the Legislative Council of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Nay, he was much more. He was a man of high literary taste and well bred. He liked Chhotu Ram and his work immensely, but the latter was feeling increasingly homesick. He wanted to study further. Upon his return from Kalakankar he went to Lahore to do the L.L.B. course, but the outbreak of plague frustrated his plan. Once again he joined the Raja's service at Kalakankar, but he gave up the job to joint the L.L.B course at the Agra Law College. He was both a law student at the St. John's College and a teacher in the St. John's High School. He obtained his law degree from the Allahabad University and started legal practice at Agra where he made his mark as a criminal lawyer. But Agra could not captivate him for long; he was mostly overcome by a feeling of nostalgia. Accordingly, he returned to Rohtak and started his practice there with his life long associate, Chaudhry Lal Chand. Even here Chhotu Ram dominated the legal scene. But his contribution in other spheres of activity was no less remarkable. He recounted the hardships he had encountered while ignited by the desire for higher education. Many Jat students did not pursue their studies further for want of a high school. Accordingly, Chhotu Ram launched the funds drive and in 1913 the first ever Jat high school was started at Rohtak, and Chhotu Ram personally invited dedicated teachers to join the school. Most of the Jat civilian and defence personnel are the products of this institution.

But the need for a community news-bulletin was no less urgent. The peasants needed to be aroused from their centuries old slumber and made conscious of their grievances. The journalistic experience he had gained during his stay at Kalakankar paid him rich dividends. With the help of some of his friends he raised finances for an Urdu Weekly, the *Jat Gazette*. In a number of articles he himself wrote for the paper he highlighted the problems of peasantry in the province and made every possible effort to arouse his tribe from apathy and sluggishness. He was equally vocal in writing on rampant corruption in the Rohtak district, and many bureaucrats became

his sworn enemies. He had established close proximity with the Deputy Commissioner, H.Harcourt, and consequently he had utilized his position of power and privilege for his community's good. But after Harcourt, the new Deputy Commissioner, R.C. Bolster's ears were poisoned by Chhotu Ram's detractors and tale-bearers. Bolster, therefore, proposed prosecution of Chhotu Ram for his "seditious role" during the anti-British campaigns of 1919. But the Superintendent of Police and the Commissioner of Ambala Division could not run the risk of provoking people in whose eyes Chhotu Ram was a great leader. So, the Deputy Commissioner's recommendation was turned down. Attempts to harm Chhotu Ram continued unabated. The humiliated Deputy Commissioner passed stay orders in respect of the reward of 100 acres of land the Government had made in appreciation of his war efforts. But again the Deputy Commissioner had to eat the humble pie because Chhotu Ram had already taken possession of the land grant. Although Chhotu Ram had ably served as the Honorary Secretary of the District War Committee and helped on an unprecedented scale in the recruitment of Jat boys to the army during the war days, yet the prejudiced Bolster played down all such acts, saying that he had helped in the British War effort just because his own Jat community stood to gain by it.

After the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms had to be given practical shape by the Government. The first election in the province was held November 1920, but, as bad luck would have it, he lost to Risaldar Sarup Singh of Badli village by a narrow margin of 26 votes. Lal Chand was returned unopposed. Chhotu Ram's defeat, as the present author believes, was a divine blessing in disguise. He had now ample time to work out the details of a future political party that would bring about the exploited peasantry's emancipation from the moneylender's clutches. But this, he believed, could only be effectively accomplished through the constitutional methods of a political ideology. So, he joined the Congress party in 1916 and soon he was made the president of its Rohtak unit. But he resigned in 1920 in the wake of Grandhiji's non-cooperation call. In his view non payment of taxes and defiance of law was hardly short of an armed rebellion.

In 1923, the second election to the Punjab Council was held. Chhotu Ram contested from the Jhajjar-Sonipat Constituency and was opposed by his old rival's son, Risaldar Randhir Singh. Lal Chand also contested for second time from his old Constituency. Happily enough, both came off with flying colours. This happiness was increased manifold when Lal Chand was appointed a minister. But unhappiness soon took over. His election was declared null and void and he was debarred from contesting election for five years. By this time, however, the Unionist Party had emerged in its full force and with the Unionists behind him, Chhotu Ram became the minister in place of Lal Chand who became a minister in Bharatpur state on Chhotu Ram's personal efforts. Chhotu Ram's ministerial term lasted from 1924 to 1926. It was during this tenure that Chhotu Ram initiated the resolution in the Council for the construction of the Bhakra Dam. He also ensured the enactment, called the "Registration of Moneylenders" law.

The third election to the Punjab Legislative Council was held in 1926. By this time the Unionist Party had firmly secured a sound footing in the Punjab, and both Fazl-i-Husain and Chhotu Ram produced wonderful results. But the communal Hindus strenuously opposed Chhotu Ram's possible inclusion in the cabinet, and the Lieutenant Governor, Sir Malcolm Hailey, easily succumbed to their communal tactics. Consequently, an urban Hindu, Manohar Lal, was given a ministerial berth. All the newspapers, both English and Vernacular, vomitted venom against Chhotu

Ram and made all possible and impossible attempts to play down his organization and administrative competence.

For almost a decade from 1926 to 1936 Chhotu Ram remained out of the Cabinet but the work that he did for the good of peasantry was his sole occupation and recompense. It was from this period onward that many important legislations were passed by the Council. The Punjab Alienation of Land Act of 1900, against which the money lenders were united in any attempt at amendment thereof, was the focus of Chhotu Ram's attention. Three amendments were introduced. According to one amendment, no mortgage or lessee could put the use of the land under charge for a purpose other than for it was. According to the second amendment, certain sales and mortgages of land, found incompatible with the provisions of the Punjab Alienation of Land Act, were declared illegal or invalid. According to the third amendment, agriculturist money lenders were classified as non-agriculturists and could not, therefore, permanently acquire the land of agriculturist debtors.

The Restitution of Mortgage Land Act of 1938 terminated all old mortgages existing before June 8, 1901 when the Punjab Alienation of Land Act (passed in 1900) had come into effect. It is in this way that an estimated 3,65,000 peasants became the owners once again of 83,50,000 acres of land which in the remote past had been taken away by money lenders under the laws of land then in force.

The Punjab Agricultural Produce Marketing Act of 1938 made it mandatory for the mandis and the mahajans to get themselves registered. The registration of the mandis was to be followed by the formation of mandi regulation committees, with two-third representation of the peasants and one-third of the mahajans. Gokul Chand Narang was crude in his unrestrained remarks: "Through this legislation, penny worth peasants would sit along side millionaire mahajans in the committee." Chhotu Ram quick to pay him back in his own coin: "The Jat deserves no less respect than the Arora mahajan. It is the same community about which Dr. Narang, during a conference of Haryana Hindu, had said that it was the protector of the Hindu community. The time is not far off when the hardworking peasant would leave the worshippers of money far behind."

Some unscrupulous mahajans resorted to the evil practice of using false weights and measures. They kept two scales : one to be used when the peasant was selling his produce to his creditor and the other when it was being sold to him for his pressing needs. All such practices were recognized as cognizable offences, and those who indulged in such practices were to be got prosecuted by the weights and measures inspectors appointed under the law by the Government.

It is well known that once the peasant fell into the mahajan's dragnet it was rather impossible for him to seek deliverance. The mahajan would in all cases manipulate accounts in his most arbitrary and capricious way. The Punjab Registration of Moneylenders Act of 1938 was brought into play under which the moneylender was required to obtain a licence for doing his business. Conciliation Boards were set up and the members, mostly peasants, were there to help the indebted peasant in every possible way. The peasant had only to fix an eight-anna stamp on his application and all would follow for his knowledge.

The Punjab Debtors Protection Act made things difficult for the decree-holders. They could now take only a few things as clearly specified in the act. Under the new dispensation the decree-holder could not seek attachment of bullock-cart, the milch-cattle, the beasts of burden, cow-sheds, the fodder-store, etc. Nor could he be arrested just on filing a false report of resistance in the execution of the decree.

Obviously, all such laws brought tremendous relief to the peasants and gradually their socio-economic condition began to improve. They could now lead a life of respect and prosperity, with Chhotu Ram as the daughty champion of the weak and the lowly.

With the coming into operation of the Provincial Autonomy Act of 1935 things had taken a different shape. So long as Fazl-i-Husain was alive, they were sorted out and solved through mutual cooperation and consultation. But with his passing away in July 1936 the whole burden of retaining the Unionist Party in fine spirits had come to rest on Chhotu Ram's shoulders. Sikandar Hyat Khan, the new leader of the party, was no match for his predecessor. And under the new act it was to be the party rule based on democratic methods. It was clear to Chhotu Ram that any step on his part to claim the party's leadership in the Assembly could invite Jinnah's Muslim League sooner than expected. So he got Sikandar appointed the first Premier. But he was found to be as ambitious in establishing a communal rapport with Jinnah as his predecessor. The Sikandar Jinnah Pact, was a clear pointer to his sectarian ideology. But Chhotu Ram was too keen to save the party rather than his colleague. So, he sided with him even if such a step smacked of undue favouritism. On every move, Chhotu Ram managed to hold Jinnah in Punjab.

With Sikandar's demise in 1942 things once again became unsavoury for Chhotu Ram. For the same consideration that had guided him in the case of Sikandar's accession to the Unionist leadership, Chhotu Ram was able to have Khizar Hyat Khan Tiwana elevated unanimously as the Premier. But there was a progressive decline in the intellectual and moral fibre of the new incumbent. Jinnah had been somehow gaining stronger foothold in the Punjab, and it was Chhotu Ram who asked him to forget all about the Muslim League in the Punjab and the partition of the country.

### **Irrigational development and Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram**

Creating and expanding irrigational facilities is a major step in enhancing the production and productivity in farming. The increased irrigational facilities (in a region) resulted into increased prosperity of the peasantry in particular and of the other sections of population in general. In the following pages, an effort is being made to peep into the irrigational development aspects of Sir Chhotu Ram's policy of economic development in erst-while Punjab province, the fruits of which are being reaped by the today's peasantry of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi & Rajasthan.

Sir Chhotu Ram's irrigational policy was broad based in nature. On the one hand, he wanted to bring down the water charges (by rationalizing these in accordance with agricultural prices), remove corruption and inefficiency in irrigation department and on the other hand, he wanted to execute a number of minor and major irrigational projects ranging from tubewell irrigation, non perennial canals to Hydro-electric projects like Bhakra Dam. He was also interested in keeping the revenues of irrigation in the Irrigation Department itself (by proposing separate budget for Irrigation Department completely independent of main budget, on the pattern of Railway Budget) so that this huge amount, which accounted for nearly 50% of revenue receipts, could be utilized on expansion of irrigation facilities and lowering down the water rates so that the economy of the agriculturists as well as of the province could be strengthened.

### **Major works and achievements in Irrigational Development**

Sir Chhotu Ram wanted to execute a number of minor and major irrigation projects for creating irrigational facilities in less irrigated areas. He started from the implementation of irrigation scheme for non perennial canals and achieving the maximum up to the clearance of Bhakra Dam project.

**(A) Bhakra Dam Project :** Since this was the most ambitious and major irrigational project pursued by Sir Chhotu Ram for famine prone areas, it ought to be dealt in greater detail. Though this project could not materialise in his life time, yet it owes its existence to the persistent and untiring efforts of Sir Chhotu Ram. The pressing reasons for early execution of this project can be summarised as follows :

- i) The South-East Punjab, especially the districts of Hisar, Gurgaon and Rohtak being a famine/drought prone area, crop and cattle loss was enormous for instance, in a single famine during 1900, 1243000 cattle perished in Ambala division of them 448000 died in Hisar district alone. Frequent famines were responsible for the economic distress of the people of this region.
- ii) Due to the acute scarcity of irrigational facilities the otherwise fertile land could not meet even the fodder demand for its livestock.
- iii) Irrigation by wells was not feasible for the presence of brackish water even at a depth of 120 feet, in this region.
- iv) Existing irrigation facilities by canals were restricted to a very small area.

Thus, keeping in view the above mentioned factors, the prosperity and economic welfare of the people was dependent on creation of such facility as Bhakra Dam which could provide irrigation facilities which in turn change the deplorable conditions of this region. In support of Bhakra Dam Sir Chhotu Ram spoke, "The Government have to spend a great deal in famine works, remitting a considerable amount of land revenue, granting big sums as taccavi to the zamindars. The heavy expenditure can be avoided if the scheme under discussion is executed. Besides in place of fluctuating revenue (i.e. only on matured crops) the systems of fixed revenue can be implemented. The income thus derived would be a permanent one. With the prosperity of people value of their property will increase, therefore, cases of sale, mortgage and gift will increase and Government will get more revenue in form of stamp fees. The excise revenue will increase, purchasing power will increase. Purchase of foreign goods will increase and Government will realize more revenue in form of custom duty. The income of railways will increase. Trade will flourish and new centres of trade will come into existence. So not only people but Government will also gain." (PLCD VOL. XXIII, 1933, pp. 757-791).

Bajaj in his book on Chhotu Ram reported that Bhakra Dam as originally conceived was simply a water storage project without any ideas of generating hydro-electric power from it. The dam derives its name from the village Bhakra situated in the erstwhile state of Bilaspur. High rocks around it, formed a natural sloping lake covering an area of about 80 square miles. River Sutlej falling into this lake, passed through a narrow passage of about 200 to 300 yards. The original plan was to block this passage and then to reutilise the arrested water for irrigating the South-Eastern belt of the Punjab.

The preliminary enquiry was started in 1915, when the Punjab Government had appointed an official with a view to finding the ways by which irrigation could be

made available to the dry tracts of Hisar, Rohtak and Karnal districts as a reward for their war efforts. In 1919, estimates were completed and preliminary enquiry came to an end. The total project cost was estimated at Rs. 14,44,74,926. The proposed height of the Dam was about 400 feet with an area to be irrigated- 25 lakh acres. The then Lieutenant Governor, Sir Michal O'Dwyer gave assurance for this Dam at Rohtak in a darbar held in his honour in 1919. In 1922 or 1923 Government all of a sudden changed its opinion and preferred that Project as being more economical to Bhakra Dam Project. Then nothing was heard about this project till 1924. It was Sir Chhotu Ram, who considered it as the first charge of his public welfare activities and reopened the Bhakra Dam Scheme in 1924. He moved a resolution in the Council to impress upon the Government to take up this project without any further delay. In the same year, after assuming the charge of Minister of Agriculture, Sir Chhotu Ram asked for the files relating to the Bhakra Dam Project and himself went to inspect the proposed site. After that, he repeatedly insisted the Government to give a practical shape to the project. In the meantime, he exhorted the farmers of the region to urge the Government for early execution of the project. On Sir Chhotu Ram's persuasion the agriculturists of the Haryana region presented memorandums to the three ministers during 1925-27 urging them to start this project. Consequently Government appointed some geologists for report and the report submitted was favourable. Government again sent an officer (Mr. Nicholson) to America to study dams there and to bring along him a specialist to report on possibility of this scheme. Consequently Mr. Wiley (American Dam Expert) was brought here. He advised the Government to make a dam of 500 feet instead of 400 feet height thereby enhancing the storage capacity from 2.75 million feet acres to 4.5 million feet acres and the discharge of water from 11,000 cusecs to 12,500 cusecs for six months in a year. Further the area proposed to be irrigated was increased from about 6 million acres to nearly 12 million acres, out of which nearly 47.5 lakh acres were to receive this benefit for the first time.

In spite of approval of the site (by foreign experts too), the work on the project could not be undertaken because of the objections raised and hinderances placed by the Governments of Bombay and Sind, the ruler of Bilaspur and the Punjab states, and the indifferent attitude of the Central and the Provincial Governments. But despite the objections, hinderances and delaying tactics on one or the other pretexts by the concerned Government, Sir Chhotu Ram continued making zealous efforts to realise his aim and dismissed all the objections as flimsy.

Punjab Governments indifferent attitude towards this project can be seen from slow efforts it made to sort out the matter between Punjab and Sind and other states and spending a meagre amount on surveys, etc. Sir Chhotu Ram was successful in appointing a committee of two Superintending Engineers (this committee's report was found useless) and later a commission to settle the dispute between the Governments of Sind and Punjab. The commission recommended the payment of Rs. 2 crores to Sind, against which Sir Chhotu Ram appealed to Privy Council but fearing the prolongation of the case, he got this amount paid to the Sind Government in 1944.

The rulers of Bilaspur and the Punjab states also took almost two decades in giving their approval for this project. Sir Chhotu Ram attributed this to the indifference of the Central Government. He remarked that had the Government of India been genuinely interested in this scheme, these would not have resisted for such a long time.

The Government's objection regarding this project being uneconomical and financial stringency in the province stands exposed in the face of following arguments put forcefully by Sir Chhotu Ram : The Chief Engineer, Irrigation, Punjab pointed out in 1933 that the project when completed would bring a return more than the mere interest on the investment and even the farmers of South-East Punjab had offered to pay higher irrigation charges so as to cover the entire interest charges on the total investment on this project. As regards the funds needed for this project, one of the beneficiary states, namely, Bikaner, was prepared to pay up its share right from the beginning, for the rest Government could easily raise a loan, even the non-agriculturist bankers like Gokul Chand Narang were prepared to subscribe to the loans for the Bhakra Dam.

In spite of the Government's apathy towards the Bhakra Dam Project, Sir Chhotu Ram did not let the Project disappear. He moved resolutions and raised questions urging the Government to take up the project. On occasions, his arguments created embarrassing situations for the Government. On his passionate pleas, Revenue Member (and also co-founder of the Unionist Party) Sir Fazl-i-Hussain remarked that Chaudhary Chhotu Ram had been so persistently insisting on the implementation of Bhakra Dam Scheme that he was daring to the extent of annoying us (Government).

As a result of his persistent efforts some spade work was done by the Government (Until, 1937), when Unionist Party assumed power. Sir Chhotu Ram after becoming Minister, started his zealous efforts with added force.

A High Dam Circle was created in 1939 to prepare the designs and revise the estimates of the Bhakra Dam. By 1942, surveys were completed and the project was revised with a view to generate hydro-electric power too. Rs. 2 crores were paid as compensation to the Sind Government to avoid prolongation in the implementation of the project. On Sir Chhotu Ram's persuasion, the ruler of Bilaspur changed his attitude and agreed to allow the raising of the Dam on its original site. Between November, 1944 and January 9, 1945 he signed the agreement on Bhakra Dam with Punjab Government. Sir Chhotu Ram, on behalf of Punjab Government, put his signature (incidentally his last) on the file for the approval of Bhakra Dam Project on 8.1.1945, only a day before his death.

**B) Other Projects :—** Sir Chhotu Ram wanted an early execution of the Bhakra Dam Project which could not materialise as expected. So in the meantime to bring irrigation water to the dry regions of South-East Punjab he proposed the tubewell irrigation scheme in Karnal district to which Government agreed in 1936. This scheme was proposed as a stop gap arrangement till Bhakra dam was given a practical shape (PLCD Vol. XXVI, 1935 pp. 175). Under this scheme the water of the Western Yamuna canal could be utilised for irrigating the drier districts of Rohtak and Hisar also. Accordingly, the Government proposed to provide life irrigation from the Western Yamuna canal by installing tubewells in the water logged areas, and thereby providing irrigation facilities to the whole of Haryana region. However, necessary machinery for this could not be imported owing Second World War.

Sir Chhotu Ram's determination for bringing irrigation facilities to South-East Punjab can be seen from his speech in assembly on June 22, 1937, wherein he remarked. "I can assure members, who represent South-East districts that I will not allow my colleagues here a moment's rest until he does something to bring to the thirsty lands of South-Eastern districts, water to irrigate them. Whether that water



comes through the construction of Bhakra Dam project or through undertaking some other project is immaterial to me" (PLAD, Vol.I, 1937, pp. 500)

Another scheme, i.e., Balehu Dam Project was being examined as an alternative to Bhakra Dam was referred to High Dam Circle. In 1943, two undermentioned schemes, were also studied to provide irrigation to these districts, namely (i) to bring water from the Western Yamuna canal by boring a two miles long tunnel through the Delhi hills, and (ii) bringing the waters of the rivers Toshi and Giri of the Sirmur State by constructing dams on them, reported Bajaj (pp.189). Though these schemes, too, did not mature in Sir Chhotu Ram's life time, yet he succeeded in giving practical shape to the under mentioned irrigational projects for providing relief to the South-East Punjab. Kharif Extension canal scheme, costing Rs. 6 lakhs was undertaken in 1940 to provide non-perennial irrigation (during Kharif season only) to 3.5 lakh acres (PLAD Vol. XII, 1940, pp. 132). Another non-perennial canal was commissioned in June 1941 to irrigate dry tracts of Hisar district. Work on some more nonperennial canals was undertaken in 1941 and 1942 (PLAD Vol. XX, 1942, pp. 68). In 1943, he got rejuvenated the embankment irrigation that was practised in Gurgaon district during pre-British periods (PLAD Vol. XXI, 1943, pp. 352).

So far, Sir Chhotu Ram's irrigational work in respect of South-East Punjab were discussed, however, his works in this field were not confined to this region alone. His other works in the field of irrigation were as follows :

In 1924, he agreed to Thal Project, in preference to Bhakra Dam, costing Rs. 2.95 crore. In 1927, he moved a resolution, in Council, asking the Government to start and complete the work on Thal project. This project was meant for the farmers of the areas lying in between the river Attock and the rivers, Jhelum and Punjab. Sir Chhotu Ram stressed for this project as it would add to the prosperity of the people of the Thal area and also add to the revenues of the Government.

In 1940, Sir Chhotu Ram again introduced a bill in the assembly for implementation of this project and the construction work was started. Now the project cost was revised to Rs. 1.15 crore and the project was completed in 1942 thereby providing irrigational facilities to about 1.5 million acres.

Haveli project was completed in 1939 within a record period of about 18 months, costing Rs. 3.66 crore (thereby saving Rs. 1.7 crores from its estimated cost which was Rs. 5.36 crore and providing perennial and non-perennial irrigation to 7 lakh and 8.5 lakh acres respectively (PLCD Vol. XXVI, 1935, pp. 175, PLAD Vol. XII, XV, 1940, 1941, pp. 132, 602, respectively). Another scheme costing about Rs. 2.5 crore was undertaken in 1942, to raise the water level of the wells in Doab (the area lying in between the rivers Sutlej and Beas).

Again in 1942, a small canal was dug in Pindi Dadu Khan areas (PLAD Vol. XIX, 1942, pp. 185). Reorganisation of districts and sub-divisions was undertaken in Rawalpindi area in 1943 with a view to explore irrigational possibilities in these barani areas. Though Sir Chhotu Ram's irrigational works neither confined to any particular area or region nor it favoured any particular community, yet some misguided elements charged him for ignoring Muslim region. On such allegation, Sir Chhotu Ram remarked, "A man who is so narrow minded as to deprive Muslim villages of canal water and favour Hindus on the ground of religion is not a fit person to occupy the position of a minister and only those persons are capable of attributing such unworthy motives to the ministers, whose own souls are so deeply darkened by bigotry. I can only refer to the fact that the complaints which were received in this connection were referred for inquiry to local officers and were found to be devoid of

truth". Of the local officers who conducted the enquiry, two were Muslims (PLAD Vol. XXI, 1943, pp.365).

It may be safely concluded that Sir Chhotu Ram adopted a comprehensive and broad based policy of irrigation for the province. On the one hand, he focussed his attention on rationalizing the water charges, removing corruption and increasing efficiency in irrigation department and on the other hand advocated, helped and executed a number of minor and major irrigational projects all over the province. These policies resulted into alround increase in irrigational facilities of different kinds and an appreciable increase in acreage under irrigation as shown in table -III.

Sir Chhotu Ram strived hard for increased budget provisions for the Irrigation department. The budget provisions for this department were increased from Rs. 140lakh in 1937-38 to about Rs. 196 lakh in 1944-45 showing an increase of about 40 percent during this period. As a result of Sir Chhotu Ram's persistent efforts the total canal mileage reached upto 23209 miles in 1945-46 against 19601 miles in 1932-33 in Punjab province.

Similarly, the number of massonary wells as shown in table II increased from 299667 in 1935-36 to 341713 in 1945-46, when irrigation charges were rationalized and loans and other benefits were provided to the peasantry. This resulted into net increase of 42046 number of wells after 1935-36.

**Table I      Total canal Mileage in Punjab over years**

Year	Canal Mileage	Percentage change over previous figures
1892-93	12368	-
1902-03	16893	+ 36.5
1912-13	16935	+ 0.2
1922-23	19664	+ 16.1
1932-33	19601	- 0.3
1945-46	23209	+ 18.4

*! Source :* Census Report.

**Table II      Number of Wells in Punjab**

Year	Masonry Wells	Non-Masonry Wells	Total
1906-07	246041	33137	279174
1910-11	242526	28460	270986
1921-22	269623	25964	295587
1931-32	291807	22338	314145
1935-36	299667	17723	317390
1940-41	333824	29666	354490
1943-44	329329	17593	346922
1945-46	341713	—	—

*Source :* Director, Land Records, Publication, Punjab.

**Table III      Area under irrigation in Punjab (in acres) from different sources**

Year	Area irrigated by *
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	Government canals	Private canals	Tanks	Wells	Other sources	Total irrigated area
1901-02	4530766	410610	30791	3746785	132341	8851293
1935-36	10143044	414877	35060	4284960	137910	15051851
1936-37	10885910	466288	33760	4086756	131993	15604707
1938-39	11165912	444098	41526	4749094	142968	16543598
1939-40	11405798	453873	34559	4721922	151292	16767444
1940-41	11564788	475061	46927	4681633	129837	16898246
1941-42	11638981	452158	47815	4618110	157675	16914745
1942-43	12109550	454504	37517	3862368	152590	16859828
1943-44	12483235	494865	37769	4126056	150307	17603165

\* Area Sown only

Source : Land Records Punjab.

Table IV **Average of irrigated land for selected period, by regions**

Region	First period	Second Period	Years in each period
British India	21.6	23.6	1908/09 - 21/22, 1922/23-45/46
Greater Bengal	13.3	15.0	- do -
Madras	28.7	27.9	1907/08-21/22, 1922/23-45/46
United Provinces	28.7	29.4	1891/92-17/18, 1918/19-45/46
Greater Punjab *	43.5	55.5	- do -
Bombay Sind	15.5	16.4	1891/92-18/19, 1919/20-45/46
Central Provinces	2.9	4.8	1891/92-17/18, 1918/19-45/46

Source : Blyn, George, "Agricultural trends in India." pp. 187.

\* included N.W.F. Province and Delhi.

### **Progress in Irrigation Development in Punjab vis-a-vis In other provinces.**

The efforts of Sir Chhotu Ram and Unionist party resulted into bringing 14.85 million acres under irrigation by canals in 1945-46, whereas this acreage was about 11.56 million in 1921-22. The areas under irrigation (sown only) increased from 15,051, 851 acres (from all sources) in 1935-36 to 17,603,165 acres in 1943-44, showing an increase of 2,551,314 acres during these years as shown into table III. Out of total cultivated area 32.4 million acres nearly 18 million acres were brought under irrigation by 1945-46. Thus, about 55% of the area was brought under irrigation which itself was a sort of achievement even under today's circumstances.

The significance of this accomplishment becomes more clear when one sees this in comparison with earlier period for the Punjab itself and in comparison with other provinces as depicted in table IV. It can be seen from the table that up to 1920 the percentage of the irrigated area was about 43% in Punjab which increased to about 55% in 1945-46 i.e. about 21% increase in irrigated area over this period, while in case of other provinces, the percentage irrigated area remained more or less static during this period. It is interesting to note that in the provinces like United Provinces (U.P.), there were equal (rather more than Punjab) opportunities for increasing the irrigational acreage. Thus, the policies adopted and executed by Sir Chhotu Ram and the Unionist party greatly benefited the peasantry and the entire Punjab province in the sphere of irrigation.

### **Pre-independence Punjab Peasantry and Deenbandhu**

The economic development of today's Punjab and Haryana can be termed as phenomenal. Besides, being the largest suppliers of food-grains to the central-pool, the per capita income of these two states is also among the highest in our country. But this development is not a matter of abrupt transformation. Since development is a continuous process of evolving patterns, its roots can be traced in historical context.

Today, the farmers of this region present a coherent group of awakened, receptive, open-minded, hard working and instinctive husbandry men. They have more or less equally good partners (individual and institutional) who provide education, improved production technology, farm implements, machines and tools, effective systems of trade, marketing, finance and allied services etc. There is now presence of a dynamic element in farming community.

Hardly century ago, the conditions were entirely different. The farmers, though hard working, were placed in a most discouraging and unfavourable milieu, amidst feudalism in rural areas and crude and petty capitalism in urban areas in a stagnating society. Farmers were illiterate, backward, indebted and exploited lot. Their tools and implements were primitive. The systems of credit, trade, marketing and allied services though dependent on the farmer yet were hostile and exploitative towards him. The qualitative and quantitative changes in this region which occurred thereafter had been very rapid indeed. In consequence a modified and improved physical, social, economic and political environment has emerged and the region has been transformed from a backward agricultural economy to one of the most progressive and dynamic economic in the country. The process of this change has its roots in the transitional period which had been introduced by the Montagu Cheimsford reforms (1919-20) during the British rule.

In order to trace the path of development i.e. from where and under what circumstances/conditions (social, economical, political, technological etc.) the economy has reached as of today, one has to go back in the historical context as it were the actions of yester years which have created the milieu of today. For the purpose of this enquiry, we start from pre-British period.

#### **Conditions in the Pre-British period**

In Pre-British period, the society was predominantly rural. The villages were self sufficient and its affairs were self sufficient and its affairs were settled by the panchayats as per the customs of the area. Land was communally owned. Economy was static but self sufficient. The urban population being very small did not provide any substantial market for food and other agricultural produce. There was ample scope for expansion of cultivation, in excess of the needs, which was not exploited for the lack of organised trade, commerce, communications, incentive and reward.

#### **Economic Consequences of the British Rule**

The British transferred the natural economy into exchange economy in order to achieve their own selfish motives. This transformation resulted into disintegration of compact society, increased inequalities and a section of society (i.e. the money-lenders) becoming sufficiently strong to exploit others (i.e. peasants, artisans and other backward sections of the society) with the legal help provided by the British. The British dominance further resulted into dispossession of the peasantry, indebtedness of peasants and artisans, decline of indigenous handicraft industry increased pressure on land, increased tax burden (in cash) on peasantry in the form of land revenue, water tax (abiana) undermining of the village institutions and their authority in village

affairs, almost monopolistic hold of moneylenders in the matters of credit and marketing, using dishonest market and trade practices etc. With the continuous British exploitation there was stagnation in agricultural and industrial production. Agriculture and agriculturists were in a very depressed state.

Following the above path, Punjab economy entered the 20th century where entire rural society with the exception of money lenders was facing hardship, excessive exploitation and imbalances. Rural masses were illiterate, ignorant and suppressed. Though the Britishers also initiated some legislative (and other measures too) steps to show lip sympathy to ruralities against exploitation, indebtedness, illiteracy etc. but that too was at much lower scale than warranted. The interest of the exploited and backward masses was never uppermost in their mind and strategies. The process of the opening up of the economy, World War-I and immigration, etc, exposed the peasantry to the outer world conditions. This exposure alongwith some development works initiated in the Punjab helped in breaking the dormancy of the peasantry.

### **Sir Chhotu Ram's Entry**

Farmers got further impetus with the introduction of reform schemes and with the advent of Sir Chhotu Ram on Punjab's political arena, the peasantry found its voice. Sir Chhotu Ram fearlessly highlighted and struggled for the cause and development of the exploited peasantry and other backward sections of the society. He organised the peasantry, co-founded the Unionist Party, launched an Urdu weekly, established Zamindara league, Jat Mahasabha, educational institution etc. with the sole aim of awakening the exploited and ignorant.

Sir Chhotu Ram changed the entire socio-economic scenario through his policies and programmes which not only liberated the ruralities from educational, social, economic and political shackles but also resulted into systematic initiation of development works in rural areas.

Sir Chhotu Ram rightly recognised the causes of the deteriorated economic condition of the agricultural classes as in lack of proper diagnosis, there cannot be worthwhile remedial measures. Some of these, he described :

- i) The crushing burden of indebtedness.
- ii) The fact that they have to bear more than full share of the burden of provincial taxation.
- iii) Peasants inability to secure a fair price for their produce.
- iv) Illiteracy and ignorance.
- v) Under representation of these classes in public services.
- vi) Prevalence of litigation and bribe.
- vii) The root cause of the sad plight of this vital section of society was the anti-agriculturists and anti-labour policy of the alien (British) rulers (whom he called 'white traders' or Corey Bania). White traders were exploiting the country through black traders (i.e. Indian traders, moneylenders, sahuksars etc.).

First, we glance at burden of indebtedness. It is clear from Table. I that over years (from 1921 to 1936) the total agricultural debt increased by 122% i.e from Rs.90 crores to Rs200 crore. Debt per head of those supported agriculture increased from Rs76 to Rs.106 while at the same time debt per cultivated acre increased from Rs.31 to Rs 66 .

The depression of 1929's further severely worsened their economic condition as the gross value of agricultural produce in Punjab, which was Rs. 128 crore in 1921 declined to Rs.65 crore in the year 1936. With the decrease in gross value of the agricultural produce, the burden of this debt increased tremendously without any fault of the zamindars (or the agriculturists) or without any further lending by the moneylenders.

Table: V      **Different aspects of agricultural indebtedness in the Punjab.**

Item	Years			
1921	1929	1930	1936	
(i) Total agricultural debt (in crore of Rs.)	90	135	140	200
(ii) Percentage increase in debt over 1921	-	50	56	122
(iii) Debt in multiple of land revenue	19	27	52	50
(iv) Debt per cultivated area (Rs./acre)	31	45	46	66
(v) Total number supported by agriculture	11864688	-	12932511	18800000
(vi) Debt per head of those supported by agriculture	76	-	104	106
(vii) Gross value of agricultural produce (in crore of Rs.)	128	99	83	65
(viii) Debt as a percentage of gross agricultural produce	70	136	168	307

*Source :* Calculated from the data taken from Punjab Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee Report, Census reports, Provincial Budget etc.

**Fall in income per acre :** Due to depression the average net income per acre (for ten districts) fell from Rs. 32-8-4 in 1928-29 to Rs. 7-13-4 in 1931-32 as per 'Farm Accounts of Punjab. However, the net income did not include the remuneration for the labour of the cultivator and his family. Further, the holdings under report were all irrigated and were situated in the relatively prosperous districts of Punjab. If barani holdings from poorer districts such as Hisar, Gurgaon, Mainvali etc. were included, the average net income in 1930-31 would fall from about Rs.8 to Rs.4 or 5 per acre. Again, the average land holding per cultivator in Punjab was 7.2 acres which means the total net income per holding was about Rs.33 per annum in 1930-31 as against average net income of Rs237 per annum in 1928-29.

So, on account of fall in prices, gross income as well as net income per acre fell heavily but expenditure fell to a far smaller extent. In 1930-31, the gross income per acre fell 65% as compared with 1925-26 and 44% as compared with 1929-30. On the other hand the decrease in expenditure in 1930-31 was 12% and 11% as compared with 1925-26 and 1929-30 respectively.

The effects of great fall in prices can be summarised as follows :

- (i) Agriculture had become unremunerative a large extent
- (ii) The burden of rural debt had increased beyond the capacity of the borrower to pay
- (iii) The burden of government dues became intolerable.
- (iv) The agriculturist suffered both ways i.e. what he bought was dearer and what he sold was cheaper than before.
- (vi) The money lender cum-trader had gripped the farmer more forcefully than before.
- (vii) The relief measures undertaken by

government proved ineffective in providing any substantial relief to the peasantry.

**Courses of Debt** : The reasons ascribed by different authorities on the subject can be listed as : (i) Small size of holding and its fragmentation (ii) Constantly recurring losses of cattle due to diseases and drought (iii) Improvidence of the farmer (iv) Expenditure on marriages and other domestic ceremonies (v) Litigation (vi) Money lender and his vicious system of business and (viii) Government demand in form of land revenue and water expenses.

These reasons withstanding, the root cause of this indebtedness was the fixed government demand in the form of land revenue and abiana in cash. The need and urgency to pay field land tax no matter what the state of harvest combined with the legal support provided to the money lenders was the major cause which set into motion the peasants indebtedness.

Land revenue and abiana accounted for about 40 per cent of the expenditure incultivation as shown in Table VI.

Table : VI **Percentage share of items of expenditure in cultivation.**

Items	1925-26	1929-30	1930-31	1931-32
1. Land revenue and water rates	41	43	40	46
2. Seed	6	9	6	8
3. Upkeep of bullock	36	36	45	46
4. Hired labour (charges for kamins, winnowing & harvesting)	17	9	5	6
5. Implements & Misc.	—	3	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source* : Farm Accounts in Punjab.

\* Higher cost due to replacement as one bullock died.

So that government dues formed most considerable proportion and were rigidly collected. Though the government sometimes made remission in land revenues and water rates yet these formed a considerable proportion of total expenditure (Table VI).

If we see the land revenue to Gross Agricultural Product (GAP), due to fall in agricultural prices during depression, the proportion of output absorbed by state charges rose up to 20% from nearly 10% during 1920s.

**Burden to taxation on agriculturists** : The most distinguishable evil of the taxation policy of that period was that it put nearly 85% to 90% of the burden on the agriculturists. The largest heads of the revenue were land revenue, irrigation charges and stamp duties, all of these were contributed by the agriculturists. Further, it is notable that even of the remaining provincial charges like stamp and excise duties and other charges under different heads, a major proportion was paid by the agriculturists e.g. in the year 1934, out of total provincial revenue of Rs.1061 lakh, the agriculturist paid Rs.901 lakh (nearly 85%). Professor Narain, Brij (noted economist of that time) while giving his evidence before the Punjab Land Revenue Inquiry Committee, said, "I have never made a secret of my opinion that agriculturists in the Punjab are for more heavily taxed than nonagriculturists". Taking himself as an ordinary town-man

he added, "If my income is reduced by one half and my income tax is doubled, I shall be a lightly taxed man as compared with an agriculturist". In other words the burden of taxation on an agriculturist was more than four times that on his town fellow.

**Marketing System :** The policy followed by the British resulted into the development of market relations but these policies were pursued to fulfil their own objectives, without much care for the society, a lot of imperfections and malpractices crept into it. In absence of effective regulations and checks the entire marketing system was in full control of money lenders-cum-traders. The peasant was the worst sufferer and received the worst in the bargain, both when he bought and when he sold. The merchant money lender-cum-trader controlled the entire marketing system of the then Punjab by virtue of his monopolistic powers especially in the field of credit and marketing. Besides he (the moneylender-trader) was the most important link of the white traders or the Britisher's chain who connect the peasantry with them (white traders). They (merchant-money-lender) sold goods provided by British industries and purchased raw material (agricultural) from the farmers for onwards transmission to industries in the England (and in India too).

Thus, nearly 90% of the growers sold their produce in the village itself through their creditor who was generally the village shopkeeper-cum-money lender. The reasons for this state of imperfect marketing can be summarised as:

- i) The prime cause was debt, which obliged the debtor-peasant to sell through his creditor (village shopkeeper-cum-money lender).
- ii) Inconvenience of taking the produce to market mainly due to lack of good roads and other means of transportation.
- iii) Lack of information about rates.
- iv) The suspicious system of selling prevalent in the markets.
- v) Undue deductions e.g. watta, Dharmao, shagirdi etc.
- vi) Use of faulty weights and scales by the traders.
- vii) Illiteracy and ignorance.
- viii) Commission agents and brokers acting chiefly in the interest of buyers.
- ix) Market organisation which was in complete control of traders without any regulations etc.

Thus the peasant was not in a position to secure a fair price for his produce.

### **Anti agriculturist Policy of the British**

The taxation policy adopted by the British was such that it put nearly 90% of the burden of tax on the agriculturist (discussed earlier). To quote in the words of Sir Chhotu Ram, while speaking on the budget for 1928, on February 26, "As a representative of the peasantry, I want the government to realise that 9 rupees out of 10 in the budget come from the pockets of the poor Zamindars ....."

The rural people had no say on the expenditure by the government. The benefits of the tax collected from agriculturists mostly went to the urban people. Moreover, the moneylenders and the government flourished at the cost of rural people. The government was ignoring the rural areas by reducing the funds allocated for rural upliftment as shown in tables VII and VIII.

Table : VII : **Expenditure made by the Government on the rural and urban health (from 1919-20 to 1923-24).**



Area	Expenditure on the execution of Project (in Rs.)	Expenditure on establishment (in Rs.)	Total expenditure (in Rs.)	Total expenditure in terms of %
Urban	18,64,726	1,12,680	19,77,406	89.7
Rural	1,98,616	1,00,976	2,99,592	10.3

*Source :* Punjab Provincial Budget

Also table VII shows the more or less same pattern of discriminatory spending on rural and urban areas in respect of sanitation and water supply. Here one feature of the government apathy can be seen from yet another factor that on one side the amount spent on urban sanitation and water supply was as high as 86% of the total amount and on the other side there were backward districts of D.G.Khan, Mianwali, Hisar Rohtak, Gurgaon, Hoshiarpur and Kangra, where even drinking water in rural areas was not available.

**Table : VIII Money spent by Government (in forms of grants-in-aid) on improvement of sanitation and water supply.**

Year	Amount spent on		%age amount spent
Areas	on rural areas		Urban areas Rural
1929-30	382510	99585	20.6
1930-31	293500	24617	07.7
1931-32	280948	19052	06.3
1932-33	190445	1864	0.96
1933-34	134904	66463	33.0
Total	1282307	211581	14.1

*Source :* Calculated from the figures taken from P.L.C.D. Vol. XXVI, 1935.

After this brief discussion, we focuss our attention on what Sir Chhotu Ram's views, policies and programmes for the masses for their economic and social freedom.

**Participatory approach :** Sir Chhotu Ram advocated and initiated a comprehensive policy for agriculture and rural development. He was of the opinion that the rural and agricultural problems of various kinds could not be tackled separately but a comprehensive approach on a continuous basis with active people's participation and government's help had to be followed in order to achieve positive results. The villages and peasantry had long list of problems which could not be tackled until and unless the efforts were not initiated involving the whole village life. His comprehensive policy included the economic programmes of market reforms, fair price and maintenance of price parity, agricultural research, extension and education programmes, consolidation of holdings, improved methods of farming, encouraging rural and cottage industries, cattle improvement, improvement in public and animal health etc. Panchayats, cooperative thrift and better living societies, cooperative marketing societies, cooperative credit societies, educational institutions etc. were established to help, teach and guide the villagers. Various debt removing measures were initiated and implemented. Steps were initiated to educate the farmers and other villagers in learning the habit of thrift and refrain from wasting money on factions, fighting, litigations expensive and unnecessary social customs and ceremonies.

The important steps in Ch. Chhotu Ram's economic upliftment programmes were :—

- (i) To relieve the masses from heavy burden of indebtedness and taxes.
- (ii) To provide better infrastructure, institutions and facilities for agriculture, rural development and industrial expansion.
- (iii) To increase the real income of the masses through better agriculture, rural and allied industries.
- (iv) To provide gainful employment of permanent nature in agriculture and industries.
- (v) Simultaneous industrial development (first and foremost the agriculture).
- (vi) To remove exploitation, illiteracy, ignorance and backwardness.
- (vii) Removing social evils and organising masses against them.
- (viii) Ensuring people's participation in development process through panchayats, local bodies and cooperatives etc.

In brief, the immediate benefits arising, as a result of Sir Chhotu Ram's policies and programmes, can be discussed as follow :

**(I) Reduction in indebtedness :** Notable success was achieved in reducing indebtedness in Punjab through various acts enacted by Sir Chhotu Ram. A total number of 29 Debt- Conciliation Boards were established upto 1939 which received 40,720 and 27060 applications from debtors and moneylenders involving debts of Rs.5.634 crore and Rs.2710034, respectively. By 1940, of the debtors category 26000 applications were disposed off settling the claims of Rs. 2.46 crore at Rs.35.85 lakhs. These Boards settled debts totalling Rs.3.61 crores at Rs. 1.38 crore by mutual consent. During, 1940 alone, 26000 cases involving a total debt of Rs.2.26 crore were disposed off. The extent of reduction effected in that year was as much as 60.8% of the debt admitted in the application for the settlement of debts. Further, the climate for voluntary conciliation of debts in late thirties was also extremely favourable because of a wide range of exemptions of property provided by the various agrarian acts which made the recovery of even secured debt very difficult (quoted from "Agricultural Legislation in India (1958) Vol VIII).

By the year 1942, the claims of nearly 14 crore were disposed off throughout the Punjab. All India Rural Credit Survey (Vol. I part p.221) reported that the conciliation legislation showed most successful results in the Punjab.

Darling reported that for the first time for at least two generation debt was no longer a milestone round the peasants neck. He further writes, "My enquiries suggest that in the Punjab from 75% to 90% of the unsecured debt was cleared and from 66% to 77% of the mortgage debt.

#### **Land revenue and irrigation charges compared to agricultural production.**

Because of fall in agricultural prices during depression, there was a sharp increase in the proportion of output absorbed by state charges. But as situation improved (rise in prices of agricultural produces, as a result of the policies followed by Sir Chhotu Ram for economic development) there was again a marked decrease in

the irrigation charges (2.6%) and land revenue (1.9%) demand of the state as a proportion of gross agricultural output which strongly indicated a marked improvement in the economic position of the farming community as a whole and lessened burden of government revenue on them. Now land revenue and other government demands no longer forced the peasantry to entangle itself with debt trap of the moneylenders again.

### **General condition of the finance during 1944-45**

Sir Chhotu Ram tried successfully (upto a limit) to broaden the provincial tax structure. By 1944-45 non-agriculturists had to pay almost 15 to 20 times of the tax paid by them before 1934. Yet tax per head was higher on agriculturists.

With the efforts of Ch. Chhotu Ram the Punjab finance- both on the revenue side and the expenditure side was on a new and enlarged level of the order of Rs.20 crore leaving behind the regions of Rs.11 crores in 1936-37 when Unionist Party assumed power. This satisfactory position achieved through difficult and abnormal periods greatly resulted into increased expenditure on beneficent departments, irrigational projects, initiating and strengthening of special Development Fund and Peasant's Welfare Fund which greatly added to the economic progress of the province.

To cite a few instances, the expenditure on Beneficent Department increased from Rs.313 lakh in 1936-37 to Rs.637 lakh in 1944-45 i.e. it was increased by 62%.

The metalled road mileage increased from 3904 in 1932-33 to 5000 miles in 1944-45. The noteworthy feature of this increased mileage was that it connected the villages to the nearest mandis which benefitted the peasantry and rural masses. At that time Punjab had a larger mileage of road than all the rest of India in 1945.

For removing market imperfections the 'Punjab Agricultural Markets Act' was enacted in 1941 and more than 100 market committees were constituted till 1943 throughout the province. The result of this was for all to see in the marketing of agricultural produce in Punjab and Haryana.

There were several other fields where developments were experienced appreciably.

Though, Sir Chhotu Ram made great efforts in rationalizing the tax structure but due to the imperfections inherent in the system itself e.g. inelastic nature of most of the sources of revenue at the disposal of Provincial Government, slow pace of industrialization and not so expanded trade, limited scope for manoeuvrabilities etc., he could not do as much as he wanted to do. But his work in these circumstances was commendable, as in his own words", that in future payments shall be made by the 'Lajjis' living in cities to the provincial exchequer and it would be spent on the poverty-stricken ruralities instead of reverse which was the case hitherto fore ..... A new order of thing will come into existence. This is true revolution. Longlive revolution". (P.L.A.D. Vol. XV 1941).

Though, the ideal, mentioned by him in his above statement, could not be realised by him in his life time, yet he showed the path and adhered to it till his last.

The policies adopted by Sir Chhotu Ram, for economic upliftment of downtrodden peasantry and other backward sections of the society, were not restricted to the removal of indebtedness and remission of taxes alone, as he himself was aware

and convinced that these (removal of indebtedness and remissions) could not go very far as the economic conditions of the debtors were concerned. He was of the opinion that, "remissions, however extensive relief in indebtedness, however, radical, were not going to help the province unless something was not done on the positive side". He stressed on "improving the assets" of the debtors, increasing production in both i.e. agriculture and industry and better facilities for marketing. To cite Sir Chhotu Ram himself, "After all, the prosperity of the province will depend upon its capacity for increased production, both agricultural and industrial. Every possible effort should be made to work in collaboration with each other". (P.L.C.D. Vol. XXVIII, 1933).

Therefore, he stressed on increasing agricultural production and to turn it into manufactured articles. He emphasized on increasing the productive capacity of the soil and subsidiary industries which could provide work of a lucrative character.

Though, Sir Chhotu Ram was not professional economists but he had a deep 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. His economic ideas did not grow in a vacuum. They resulted from the age and the environment in which he lived and worked. His politics was a preface to his economics that he wanted to be 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 overwhelming rural. The village was the centre of his economic thought.

He emphasized more on agriculture, agro-based small, rural, cottage and allied industries, but he was not averse to big industries. From the stand point of employment, supply of consumer goods, equitable distribution of income and wealth, development of human personality artistic skills etc., small scale industries were considered to be superior to large scale industries, by him. Yet, he emphasized the importance of both. He opined that one Chhotu Ram had to move heavens and earth to do what he thought he ought to do in the fulfilment of his pre-determined mission. It was always his endeavour to harness to the maximum the energies of both his body and mind for fulfilling this mission. He would go even without food if the work he had to do was urgent. He found no time for enjoyment; he had no hobby, no pastime, no recreation. Towards the fag end of his life his responsibilities as the co-founder of the Unionist Party had increased manifold. Khizar Hyat needed to be kept politically alive just to ward off the Muslim League's influence in the Muslim majority Punjab. He was equally circumspect about the increasing horde of his detractors and enemies. He had to ensure the smooth sailing for the party which solely depended upon him for its survival. There were official files pertaining to his ministry, and he never gave a noting on any without a careful perusal. And there were thousands of people seeking to meet him daily from far and wide, and thousands of letters awaiting replies. Then he had to write replies and rebuttals for the hostile press. With advancing age energies of mind and body began to dwindle, while workload continued to increase in inverse ratio. He had to act against Jinnah's threatening postures. The best way he thought in which he could frustrate Jinnah's designs was to address meetings in rural areas where lived the bulk of majority of population that literally worshipped him as their living god. There was also the plan to start some newspapers, in English and Urdu. from Lahore to enlighten public opinion about the increasing inroads of Muslim League communalism in the province. So, he undertook long tours for collection of funds for such a pressing need.

With the mounting pressure of work that was to be done without losing time, Chhotu Ram addressed his audience for three to four hours at a stretch, and if time permitted he addressed two to three meetings the same day. Sometimes he had to finish off his meetings in order to rush to Lahore or Shimla for some urgent official work. There was no fixed time for his meals, and often he skipped the schedule. What served as his food and kept him alive was the warm and affectionate response he received from his peasant fraternity. He had his mission that had to be accomplished before death brought the warrant for him. But death was inevitable, while nothing else was. In early November 1944 he developed some serious complication while addressing a public meeting at Jhang continuously for three hours. He fainted after the speech, and was rushed to Lahore. While yet under medical observation, he developed complications arising from malaria and dysentery. Yet he kept up his spirits and continued to do what he thought was urgent. For the last many decades the Bhakra Dam project had been exercising his mind, and this was what he sought to clear. He ordered prompt payment of six crore of rupees to the Sind Government which the Punjab Government was supposed to pay in terms of an agreement. Chhotu Ram hurriedly gave final touches to the agreement with the Maharaja of Bilaspur in whose territory the reservoir for the proposed Dam was to be built. He felt greatly relieved after discharging his primary obligations, and it seemed that he would be normal in a short time. Just during this time there was the danger to the Khizar Government ; it was sought to be toppled when certain mischievous elements thought that Chhotu Ram could not rush to save it. He directed the party affairs right from his bed, because the doctor did not allow him at any cost to move out of the bed. The no-confidence motion was rejected, and this brought tremendous relief to Chhotu Ram.

Himself convinced of steady improvement in his health, he expressed a desire on 8th January 1945 to be left alone in his room. Not even the doctors were allowed inside. Consequently, he got up to try his physical stamina and made an attempt to get up from his bed. Unable to steady himself up, he fell on the floor in a state of coma. The door was pushed open and he was put into the bed again. There were hopeful signs of revival. He passed the night somewhat in peace. Next morning he had his tea as usual and read newspapers. At about 10A.M. he suffered a massive heart attack, followed by suffocation. Premier Khizar and other colleagues arrived, but he breathed his last soon after. He beckoned towards Khizar and said : "Mein chala, Ram bhala kare". He now closed his eyes and entered into his samadhi, as a karma-yogi does.

Hell had broken loose on the entire province. It was plunged into sorrow of a magnitude unknown to human memory. All around there was doom and gloom. The entire country mourned his death. Senior Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Rajagopalachari, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel and others paid glowing tributes to the memory of one who had relentlessly fought for the downtrodden and the exploited.

The mortal frame of the body was wrapped in the Unionist flag and also the tricolour flag of the Congress of which he had been the district president in the initial stages of his political career. A sea of humanity was surging forward, inconsolably sobbing and weeping. The last journey was for Prem Niwas, Rohtak, where the body was to be kept for the last glimpses of the public. The last rites were performed at the Jat College grounds amidst pathetic scenes. The peasants were seen sobbing and wiping out tears from their eyes. "Our raja is dead", they cried out. He had left the mortal world after accomplishing the sole mission for which he had taken birth. He was the peasant leader par excellence, without a second in the entire Peasant history.

What the trusted leader once said in a characteristically prophetic tone is worth recording in the present context: "Though old and in firm I can assure you that the God of Death will fail miserably to remove me from the arena of activity until I succeed in banishing all the privations that are facing zamindrs of the Punjab at the present moment. I will not rest contented till I have secured all the advantages for the zaminfars in the light of the acts passed by the Unionist Ministry."

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