



“Sir Chhotu Ram Champion of Communal Harmony”

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Abstract

An internal conflict was going on in Chhotu Ram’s mind about this time between sectarianism, communalism and nationalism. This he resolved in the following manner; “In the beginning I was a fairly Bigoted Arya Samajist and as a natural corollary a communalist. This conflicted with my aspiration for a united front among zamindars (in the Punjab sense of the term) regardless of caste and creed. I was definitely a bigoted zamindar and thus a sectarian. This conflicted with the orthodox requirements of nationalism. I was a Congressman both inwardly and outwardly and thus anti-Government. This conflicted with my conviction that a backward class- the class to which I belonged was admittedly a backward class- could not afford to fight against Government. This inner conflict set me a difficult problem to solve.

Keywords: Communalist, Conflicted, Conviction, Salvation, Communal, Harmony

After prolonged and careful consideration. I discovered a solution which to my mind was perfectly satisfactory. The solution was as follows:

- a. Religion must be divorced from politics and political organization must proceed on the basis of economic interests. So I decided to relegate religion to its proper place in private life.
- b. To serve the weak and to raise the fallen is, in my view, the essence of human duty. Agricultural classes are the most numerous and yet most ruthlessly exploited section of Indian humanity. They provide at least in the Punjab ready elements for bringing into existence a powerful, well-knit unit of political organization. If organised on the basis of communal harmony, first in the Punjab and then by the contagion of example in the whole of India. They can lay the foundation of the country’s political salvation. Their organisation on these lines will secure the common benefit of the largest section of the poor and the downtrodden including the Jats. Thus organised, they will also serve as the vanguard, as the champions of all exploited classes. The organisation of agricultural classes, though sectarian, will logically, serve the interest of nationalism no less than those of my pet sectarianism.”¹

Chhotu ram was a great visionary. He had recognised that the bane of our nation is communalism which had pushed us 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.² The



communal harmony in Punjab will show positive impact on other parts of the country and thereby it would pave the path for the country's independence³.

Communalism in any form had no appeal for him. Against the repeated fierce on-slaughts of rabid communalism, Sir Chhotu Ram stood firm like the Rock of Gibraltar⁴. He was opposed to Hindu mahajans. He was also opposed to the Azad Punjab demand of the Sikhs. He never supported the Muslim demand for Pakistan. Mr. Jinnah, considered Punjab as the cornerstone of the scheme of Pakistan. He thought he would succeed in establishing a Muslim League Ministry in Punjab because Bengal and Sind had Muslim League Ministries. On 20th August, 1942 the Muslim League adopted a resolution offering co-operation to British Government and condemned the Quit India Movement and in return demanded that Government should concede Pakistan to it⁵. Immediately Sir Chhotu Ram urged His Majesty's Government not to make any declaration on the subject of Pakistan because any such declaration would certainly cause extensive trouble the Punjab. His argument against any such declaration was so forceful that the Punjab Governor, B.J. Glancy lent support to the views of Chhotu Ram⁶.

Chhotu Ram made intensive tours for the collection of funds required to keep up the campaign and addressed a number of meetings with a view to convincing the masses against the partition of the country⁷. The steps taken by Chhotu Ram to fight Jinnah and his league had inspired such a great response to his call of national unity that Jinnah, inspired such a great response to his call of national unity that Jinnah, in spite of his incessant efforts in March-April, 1944 failed to change Punjab Premier and most of his Muslim colleagues by misinterpreting Sikandar's poet with Muslim League in most communal manner. Ultimately, he had to leave Punjab empty handed after reading Chhotu Ram's Press statement in 1-5-1944 asking Jinnah to abandon the idea of Pakistan and leave Punjab within 24 hours. This victory of Chhotu Ram over Jinnah resulted in great appreciation of Chhotu Ram by Urban Hindus and their press offering him their leadership. But he declined it on the ground that he was as much opposed to their communalism as to that of Jinnah's Muslim League.⁸ Muslim peasantry followed their Kisan Massiah end lock and entitled him Rahhar-e-Azam at Layallpur on April 8, 1944 to match him up against Quad-e-Azam. The firm stands of Sir Chhotu Ram against communalism for the oneness of mother land proved him one of the greatest patriots that India ever produced. He cut Jinnah to size who dared not come to Punjab again so long as Chhotu Ram was alive.

The sudden publication of C. Raja Gopalachariay on July 10, 1944 along with its approval by Gandhiji vide his letter dated 17th July, 1944 to Jinnah completely disturbed Chhotu Ram's planning of not letting Pakistan to emerge at all. Expressing his resentment against the C.R. Formula, Sir Chhotu Ram wrote a long letter to Mahatma Gandhi on August 15, 1944 in which he strongly opposed the partition of the country and suggested a solution to the problem⁹. Mahatma Gandhi never replied his letter. After these shocking developments, the ever-happy Chhotu Ram was never found smiling¹⁰.

Sir Chhotu Ram able supported by his chief Malik Khizer H-yat Khan launched a vigorous programme for the political education of the masses, particularly the peasantry and with aim of



national unity in view Zamindar Leagues were formed in all districts of the province. It was usual for Sir Chhotu Ram to speak for three or four hours at a stretch and sometimes two or even more meetings were addressed in a day. He would then probably rush back to Simla or Lahore for some urgent consultation and come back for the interrupted tour. He was incharge of one of the heaviest portfolio. He knew no rest and never slept for more than three or four hours in the night. Nor did he ignore his copious correspondence all over the country and with all sorts of people and writing to the press. Unduly heavy stress of work affected his health but he continued with it by sheer strength of his will he would yield. His last public speech was at Jhang in early November, 1944 where he spoke for three hours, even though he was running a temperature feeling weak and supporting himself with stick. He fell seriously ill suffering from acute heart trouble. He also had an attack of malaria followed by dysentery. His health broke down with heart attacks on 17th and 14th November, 1944. Doctor advised him complete bed rest for a long time on Jan.9, 1945 woke up as usual and everything was normal. He was quite cheerful, had tea and read the papers as he used to do on other days. At about 10.00 a.m. he had the third heart attack¹¹. His end came unexpectedly, dramatically and under shocking circumstances.

Conclusion

During his student life, Chhotu Ram experienced the deepest punch of poverty and helplessness of rural people in general and of peasantry in particular.

Religion must be divorced from politics and political organization must proceed on the basis of economic interests. So, he decided to relegate religion to its proper place in private life.

Thus Chhotu Ram organized the agriculturists, the backward and the 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.

References

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