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MAPPING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHIMANLAL MALOT FOR HARIJAN UPLIFTMENT IN RAJASTHAN

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ABSTRACT

Banswara princely state was situated in the southern part of Rajasthan. In the rainy season, it becomes an island. In 1947 its population was about three lakhs, of which about 75 % were Harijans and tribal Bhils. Local rulers ruled this state, and it witnessed a social awakening among the Bhangis in the 1930s. Mr. Chimanlal Malot was one of the thousands of youths who sacrificed for the country in the thirties, inspired by the spirit of "freedom is our birthright, we will take it." Among them, the teachings of Gandhi were also inspired. Due to Gandhian and Sarvodaya's backgrounds, Malot realized the pitiable conditions of the bhangis and Bhils and took leadership in awakening social consciousness among them. The formation of 'Shant Sewa Kuti' in the third decade of the twentieth century and its continued expansion up to 1947 and beyond was an essential social stimulus to the awakening of bhangis and Bhils in Banswara town. An explanatory method is used in this research paper. The main focus of this paper is to evaluate the work done by Malotji who achieved some success in his work and carried out his efforts even after independence.



KEY WORDS: Shant Seva kuti, Dalit upliftment, constructive work, Dalit education, temple entry, Khadi work, Prajamandal movement, and Charkha.

The early career of Mahatma Chimanlal Malot ji:

Born on June 6, 1908, in a general merchant family of Banswara Nagar. He was the fourth son of Narayanlal and Sringari Devi. In contrast to his brothers, Mr. Chimanlal was born with a different purpose. So he refused to sit at the shop and (both) to marry.¹ Malot ji studied upto middle school standard as there was no system for further education in the princely state then. In that middle school of the princely state, he was deeply influenced by two headmasters, a Bengali named Mr. Banerjee and Mr. Hokmichand Surana who inculcated strong national sentiment in him. Mr. Hokmichand Surana of Mewar also spread the ideas of social reform among them through Arya Samaj. Therefore, from his student days, Malotji was attracted to social reform and nationalism. Initially, he was attracted

¹Srimal, Deepak, *Itihas purush Malot*, publication *Vagad naamba*, Banswara, 2003, p.6

torevolutionary terrorism. But, a local Gandhian activist Baba Laxmandas took him to take up constructive Gandhian programs.²

The family members separated him from the family, considering him a rebel, due to which the problem of bread and livelihood arose in front of him. He learned tailoring and started making a livelihood from it. In the spare time, he collected some books by going door to door and started a small library and book distribution among young students. He also started ordering one or two national newspapers available to everyone at his shop as a public reading room. Discussions on national topics also started there. In this way, Malotji started the work of spreading national building and reformation. By around 1930-32, Malotji had also become a Khadi holder.³

Propagation of national ideology and establishment of *Shant Seva Kuti*:

Banswara was then a small princely state, and Maharawal Prithvi Singh was its notorious despotic ruler. In 1930's some patriots started "Khadar movement" in Banswara. Naturally, Malotji also joined them. Nevertheless, the state felt mutiny in Khadi and could not tolerate it. By intimidation, the Khadi sale and many false allegations against Malotji were started, and his house was searched. The fathers of his fellow youths who used to visit Malotji's place were called, threatened, and pressured to leave Malotji's side.⁴

Gandhian constructive work, like Harijan upliftment, education, Abolition of untouchability, Khadar making, etc was going throughout India. So, Malotji realized that before doing any national work, it is necessary to awaken national consciousness among the people. Malot believed that the emancipation of bhangis and Bhils was only possible by education. As a staunch follower of Gandhi, he came into close contact with Thakkar Bappa and worked to raise the socio-educational conditions of both Bhangis and Bhils.⁵ Therefore, he started the work of a library-reading room on a large scale. He collected new books again by begging and donating, and newspapers with national ideology started being ordered. In the early 1930s, social organizations such as *Shant Sewa Kutir*, Banswara,⁶ which actively launched reform programs for improving the socio-educational conditions of bhangis and Bhils, established.

Shambhulalji Patiyat used to run the reading room established by Malot; The king had a close eye on this because political discussions used to take place there, and even to spread their thoughts, a handwritten magazine named '*Sevak*' was also brought out.⁷ In this library, 1409 books of literature in Hindi, English, Gujarati, etc., were there. Furthermore, five daily, six monthly, and seven weekly newspapers had been coming.⁸ Malotji not only offered his full-time services for this work but also offered his private house received in the family partition for the building of the library reading room. Then Malotji would sometimes have dinner at this and sometimes that colleague's place and would spend nights in the corner of the library. As the trends started increasing, a well-organized organization named '*Shant Seva-Kuti*' was formally formed in 1935 with some of his very close and trustworthy colleagues.

The organization's objective was to make moral, physical, and economic development of the Banswara community. The organization wanted to fulfill its purpose through schools, hostels, libraries, industries, gymnasiums, publications, publicity, etc.⁹ Malotji continued to work as its founder minister

²Ibid. p.6

³*Rajasthan ke Prakash Stambh*, volume 4, Rajasthan Hindi Granth Academy, Jaipur, 2003, p.107

⁴Ibid, pp.107-108

⁵Shyamlal, education among tribals, Printwell publishers, Jaipur, 1987, pp. 107-110.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷Srimal, Deepak, *Itihas purush Malot*, publication *Vagad naamba*, Banswara, 2003, p.15

⁸Malot, Chimanlal, *Shantevakutikisankshipt report (1947-1949)*, Yugantra press, Choda Rasta, Jaipur, p.7

⁹Ibid, p.3

for life.¹⁰ Over the years, this institution has seen many ups and downs, but its form of social service has remained unchanged in some form or the other to date. The credit for this can also be given partly to Dr. Mohansingh Mehta, who, during his tenure as Diwan of the princely state in 1944-47, persistently donated a considerable piece of land near the city to Malotji to strengthen the institution's tendencies. Due to this piece of land, the institution could survive even after the death of Malotji.¹¹

Formation of *ShantsevaKuti* and Beginning of Harijan service:

As soon as the work of the library-reading room became stable, Malotji took up the work of Harijan service. Initially, he started teaching the children of the Bhangis of the city to make them know the alphabet. Along with this, to give information about health and cleanliness to the Bhangis and to set an example for them, he made his residence in a hut in the middle of the colony of Bhangis and started living there. With the instigation of the Raja, the Naima caste took this act very seriously and excommunicated him from the caste. Upper-caste people used to make fun by calling him "*Chiman Bhangi*."¹² The state also punished Bhangis, who were salaried employees of the municipality, in various ways so that they did not send their children to study with Malotji and expelled them from their locality. Malotji remained firm, paid no heed to such hindrances, and continued his Harijan education work.

An acute need was felt to open the school exclusively for untouchable children. In early 1935, a school dedicated to untouchable children was opened in Bhangi Basti using donations from his supporters. Thus 'Kasturba Gandhi Harijan School'¹³ came into existence. Here they provided education from *Prathama* to *Uttama*. In 1950 the total number of students in these schools was 148. Slates, pencils, books, etc., were also free for all Harijan children. Five students passed in the first class: Karulal, Kachrulal (Harijans), Heerjibhai, and Baldev were tribals. Of these, Hirji later became Pradhan of Talwara. Many students who came from Kuti became Sarpanch.¹⁴ It was the result of Malotji's hard work that a Harijan youth Karulal passed the examination of "*SahityaRatna*" (H.S.S., Prayag), and many boys studied up to Visharad and Prathama.¹⁵

A Mahila Pathshala was also run by the institution since 1944. This school worked until 1949 the government opened a women's school.¹⁶ The organization realized that with a hostel, it is possible for Dalits students like Bhils, Mehtar, etc., to come from outside and get an education. Furthermore, scavengers and other Harijans students who live in small huts can only get a higher education if they stay in the hostel. This hostel was inaugurated on June 6, 1949, by Shri BhurelaljiBaya, the transport minister of Rajasthan. In 1949 16 students were living in the hostel, of which 7 were Mehtar, 7 were Bhils, and 2 were from the upper caste.¹⁷

In 1937, when revered Thakkar Bapa and Mrs. Rameshwari Nehru came to Banswara on behalf of the '*Harijan Sevak Sangh*', they saw Malotji's work and praised him. Then Bapa wrote in Gandhiji's '*Harijan*' - "This state (Banswara) and its neighboring states are so inaccessible that it is difficult for outsiders to reach and bring new light, but a young man named Mr. Chimanlal Malot is here, One who is doing his work braving great odds without being affiliated with any organization."¹⁸

As a result of this remark of Thakkar Bapa and Mrs. Nehru, when Mr. Jamnalal Bajaj founded the '*Rajasthan Harijan Sevak Sangh*', Malotji was included in the Sangh in 1940. Thus he came in contact with the national workers of the entire Rajasthan. Mr. HaribhauUpadhyay of Ajmer and Mr.

¹⁰Srimal, Deepak, p.7

¹¹Ibid, p.8

¹²Told by Dr. R. K. Malot, the grandson of late Chiman Lal Malot, to the author on July 6, 2023

¹³Shyamlal, education among tribals, Jaipur, Printwell publishers, 1987, this aspect has been more fully discussed in chapter V p. 107

¹⁴Srimal Deepak, p.24

¹⁵Ibid, p.8

¹⁶Malot, Chimanlal, *Shantevakutikisankshipt report* (1947-1949), Yugantra press, Choda Rasta, Jaipur,p.8

¹⁷Ibid, p.5-6

¹⁸Srimal Deepak, p.8

Achaleshwar Prasad Sharma, editor of '*Praja-Sevak*' of Jodhpur, were admirers of Maloji and were always ready to help him in his work in every way. The second advantage of the above comment was that Malotji started getting financial help from outside for his work.¹⁹

Famine and epidemic relief work:

In 1937, a severe famine broke out in Rajputana. Tribals suffering from poverty and hunger were wandering here and there in search of work. Banswara town was also full of such tribals then. However, the state government was silent and passive about them. Malotji was moved to see their pitiable condition, and he took it upon himself to start relief work for them. This work was to be done only with the help of the public. There needed to be more state cooperation and help from outside. Still, Malotji retained courage. They have collaborated with middle school students. Their groups were formed, and each group went out before going to school and after leaving school to ask for donations of a handful of flour in the localities designated for them. At first, people laughed at this, but as soon as people, especially housewives, began to understand its purpose, they started donating flour freely. Some even give ready-made chapatis.²⁰

This area of Vagad has been notorious for *Naru* disease (Dracunculiasis) for centuries because of its raw step wells and drains. Before independence, there was hardly any family in which one or the other person was not suffering from *Naru* disease. Moved by this, Malotji once conducted a comprehensive survey of the people suffering from *Naru* disease and started the medical system by calling doctors from outside. 1941 there was a severe cholera outbreak in the state's rural areas. There was a dispensary in the city in the name of the hospital on behalf of the state. There was no arrangement for a hospital in the villages. The tribals also believed in exorcism, considering such an epidemic as divine wrath. The result was that people started dying in large numbers, and villages started getting empty. In many families, no one was left to lift the dead bodies. Despite this, the state was sleeping in its *Kumbhakarnisleep*. Let alone sending doctors or medicines to the villages, no information regarding the prevention of diseases was also disseminated. Then Malotji once again got moved. He made several gangs of his associates. Everyone was given training to give cholera injections and basic information about necessary medicines and prevention of the disease. Such teams were sent to different areas. It was a very tough task as there were no means of transport, no proper arrangements for food and drink. He was carrying medicines, food, and regular bedding and moving from one village to another. Once such a situation also came while serving the patients, Malotji became a cholera victim. Then the workers put him on a cot and brought him to Banswara.²¹

Due to such selfless service works of Malotji, on the one hand, his reputation increased with the public; on the other hand, the government started feeling afraid of him. To give the public expression of its displeasure, the government disqualified Malotji from membership of the municipality. At this time, Malotji was an elected member of the municipality.

Work for the Prajamandal and Khadi:

In 1945, the Praja Mandal was formed in Banswara. Till then, the '*Kuti*' was doing the work of Praja Mandal, and the political work of *ShantsevaKuti* was handed over to Praja Mandal separately. In this, too, Malotji set an example of great sacrifice. To keep his concentration on Harijan work, he took no position in the Praja Mandal and helped other colleagues become its ministers.²² Many people have worked hard in Banswara, such as Manishankar Nagar, Laxman Das, Janardan Nagar, Amrit Lal Nagar, Surya Karan Doshi, Kalu Ram Harijan, BaldevKatara, etc. Their activities remained limited to educating the bhangis and Bhils and awakening social consciousness among them²³.

¹⁹Ibid, p.9

²⁰Ibid, p.9

²¹ Ibid, p.10

²²*Rajasthan ke Prakash Stambh*, volume 4, Rajasthan Hindi Granth Academy, Jaipur, 2003, p.112

²³Chimanlalmalot, pp.8-10

In 1945, a famine situation again prevailed in the princely state. The Praja Mandal instigated a mass movement to restrict the withdrawal of food grains from the princely state and to improve the distribution system. As a result, the workers of Praja Mandal, including Malotji, were put in jail again. Now, the circumstances were not the same as before. The Diwan of the state, Dr. Mohan Singh Mehta, was Nationalistic. Public anger against this arrest was also intense. Therefore, within a few days, workers were released from jail.

In 1944-45, Malotji started a Khadi production center on a large scale in the new population of the city. Apart from spinning and weaving, making *Pinjaiand Puni* was also done here. There was great enthusiasm among the youth for this work. Malotji's personality had become such that the youth used to get ready to support him in his every work. Women used to come to the center and learn to spin.²⁴

Inter-caste marriage of Malot ji:

Malotji was still unmarried. He had no desire to marry. In a resolution of the Sabarmati ashram, Gandhi's message was that all the volunteers should do inter-caste marriage to remove social disparity. So, for social reform, he took a new revolutionary step of inter-caste marriage with an illiterate and abandoned adult woman, who belonged to a caste considered inferior even among untouchables. Who could stop the young men ready to sacrifice themselves in this great social revolution?²⁵

The auspicious marriage of Shri Chiman Lal Malot ji was completed on April 26, 1947, with Pushpavati Devi. Inter-caste and inter-provincial marriage is the first in the history of Banswara. Malotji belongs to the Nema community and remembered that 10 years earlier, he was an outcast for Harijan's work. This marriage took place in a khadi dress in the Prajamandal office.²⁶

Malotji also adopted his wife's daughter from her ex-husband as his own daughter and educated her, and married her to a young man from an elite family. This married life of Malotji was also a harsh austerity because the difference between the rites of a merchant son of thoughtful service and an uneducated individualistic tribal woman was also present here. Nevertheless, Malotji maintained this marriage till the end and posthumously handed over his inheritance to his wife.²⁷

Gandhi Jayanti and Harijan service after Independence:

Even before independence, the procession which used to be taken out in the city on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti now started being given a massive form. On the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti in 1949, the organization celebrated Gandhi Week as Charkha Jayanti from September 19 to October 2, 1949. On the last day morning procession, the *Charkha Takli* competition and day-long collective Charkha Yagna took place. On this occasion, the Banswara district spinning board was established by all-India Charkha Sangh. On this occasion, a women's conference was organized to create awareness among the women of Banswara on October 3, 1949, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Sarasvati Ojha, headmistress of the local girl's school.²⁸

For special education among the Harijans of Banswara, two-night schools were opened by the organization in August 1949 in Chamar and Sargaramohalla.²⁹

After independence, a representative government was also formed in the princely state of Banswara. However, Malotji kept himself away from him. Gradually the princely state was merged into small and then big Rajasthan. But till then, opportunistic politics had also started in the country, and service, sacrifice, etc., had become secondary. In such a situation, how could there be any place for a selfless, passionate, service-oriented, and principled person like Malotji? Malotji decided to carry

²⁴Srimal Deepak, pp.10-11

²⁵ Ibid, p.19

²⁶*DenikNavjyoti*(newspaper),vol13, date May 18, 1947, National Archives, Jaipur, p. 3

²⁷Srimal Deepak, p.12

²⁸Chimanlalmalot, pp 7-11

²⁹Ibid, p. 12

forward the creative work of Shantseva-Kuti.³⁰ Malot ji made Harijans enter Roopchaturbhuj temple. He led the public movement for the use and entry of untouchables in public places, wells, step wells, and temples.³¹ It was the efforts of Malotji that among the bhangis, several leaders, such as Nathulal, Kachrulal, Kalulal, and Vijay Kumar, who later on came under the influence of Gandhi's Congress and worked for their community, came forward. Nathulal, Kachrulal, Kalulal, etc., became active members of Congress and were involved in its activities. Some of these leaders also became members of the Banswara Safai Mazdoor Union. Another important leader responsible for propagating Gandhi's ideas within this community was Kachrulal. Under these leaders, during the colonial period, they witnessed a few strikes organized by the bhangis in the town. The strikes were the only weapon through which they could get their demands.

The ultimate sacrifice for the people:

Malot started a monthly paper, 'Sarvodaya Vahak,' in 1960 from Banswara. Later on, he was joined in his work by many workers from upper-caste Hindus, Bhils, and Bhangis.³² Even after independence, the condition of Bhangis needed to improve more. One of the qualities of Malotji was that he was so firm about his institutions and principles that he could not compromise with the opportunists. As a result, intending to weaken the influence of Malotji, some of his comrades who were in power stopped the financial assistance the *Shant-Seva-Kuti* received from Social Welfare Department for its various activities.³³ According to Nathulal Harijan, who was very close to Malotji, the main reason for stopping government assistance was Bhogilal Pandya, who wanted to merge '*Shant Seva Kuti*' in his 'Rajasthan Seva Sangh' ashram of Dungarpur. For this, Siddhraj Daddha specially organized a camp in Banswara.³⁴ The government and leaders of independent India remained indifferent in this regard. Therefore, due to financial constraints, the critical trends of *Shant-Seva-Kuti* stopped in Malotji's time. In 1966, to change this situation, Malotji decided to take up the profession of Bhangi after a long mental struggle.³⁵

After much struggle, Malotji was reluctantly accepted by the Banswara municipality as a sweeper in their services. Bhangis had supported Malot. In 1967, when Malot was appointed to Banswara municipality,³⁶ he swept the road and cleaned drain. Although Malotji did not lack the qualifications desired for a sanitation worker, municipal officials also understood that the real purpose of Malotji was more than just doing a job. Malotji would regularly appear for attendance along with other Bhangis and faithfully clean the roads and drains assigned to him. Taking care of his prestige, the municipality had given him a convenient area from Gandhi Murti to Kushalbagh Gate, on which he got furious and said, I am not working to show off; I am working for real.³⁷ To establish the prestige of the labor of the society and to remove the distinction of high and low in the name of caste, Malotji wanted for himself the intensive area in the middle of Sadar Bazar of the city, which was given to him.

Seeing this radical transformation of Malotji, Mr. Trilokchand Jain of *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, who later became the State Minister of industry under the Janata Party rule, wrote that "Gandhi wished to be born in a Harijan's house if he got a human body again, but Malotji showed it by becoming a Harijan in this very birth."³⁸

While gaining the experience of Bhangi life, Malotji drew the municipality's attention towards the many 'obstacles' and problems of the Bhangis as a cleaning worker and prayed for the desired

³⁰Srimal Deepak, pp.11-12

³¹Ibid, pp.17-21

³²Shyamalal, education among tribals, chapter V, Jaipur, Printwell publishers, 1987 p. 107

³³Srimal Deepak, p.12

³⁴Ibid, p.16

³⁵*Rajasthan ke Prakash Stambh*, volume 4, p.113

³⁶Shyamalal, education among tribals, Jaipur, Printwell publishers, 1987, p. 109

³⁷Srimal Deepak, p.15

³⁸Ibid, p.13

improvement. The municipality was not ready for this, but the leaders also knew that as long as Malot was there, such reformist attacks would continue against them, which would be difficult to counter.³⁹

The most considerable side effect of Malotji's acceptance of the municipal job was that on this basis, his freedom fighter's pension from the state government was also stopped, and later, he had to be freed from the services of the municipality. Malotji was entirely broken inside in his last days because of being insulted and harassed by his old comrades and followers. His financial condition had also become very weak. Most of the companions were separated or had become strangers. The harmful effect of all these was gradually affecting his health as well. Thus, towards the end of his life, he became seriously ill and consequently was admitted to M.G. Hospital Banswara. Finally, on November 25, 1969, he left this world.⁴⁰In his honor, the municipality stopped its work that day, and he was given an emotional farewell on behalf of the municipality.⁴¹The death gave a crushing blow to the progress of Bhangis and Adivasi. The bhangis, caste Hindus, and others gave him a new name, and he was then called '*Bagad ka Gandhi*.'⁴²

Dr. Mohansingh Mehta, who had been Diwan twice in the princely state from 1939 to 1940 and 1944 to 1947, had said in his speeches in Banswara later in 1955 that the modern political history of Banswara is a history of Chimanlal Malot and his *Shant-Seva-Kuti*.⁴³Apart from Harijan's work, another good effect of his efforts has been that the Harijans of Banswara have been safe from the propaganda of Christianity and the small caste conversion scheme.⁴⁴

On the death of Malotji, the country's well-known Sarvodaya leader Shri Gokul Bhai Bhatt, said- "Late Chimanlal has succeeded in many fields in his life. He was engaged in the service of orphans, and by his character, he did such a thing that other Ordinary workers like us could not. He had a yearning to improve the condition of the Harijans. Such workers are rare. He faced hardships in life with a smile and fought like a brave warrior. Shri. Malotji left the real lesson of service."⁴⁵

Malotji was a warrior in the true sense who remained steadfast to his objectives and principles throughout his life and continued to struggle with society and the government. Malotji may have become irrelevant in the opportunistic politics of his last days, but the people of Banswara can never forget Malotji and will be indebted to him for all time to come.

³⁹*Rajasthan ke Prakash Stambh*, p.114

⁴⁰This date is mentioned on the epitaph of Chimanlal Malot

⁴¹Srimal Deepak, p.15

⁴²Shyamlal, Ambedkar and Dalit movement: special reference to Rajasthan, Rawat publication, Jaipur, 2008, p. 40

⁴³*Rajasthan ke Prakash Stambh*, p.115

⁴⁴Srimal Deepak, p.19

⁴⁵*Rajasthan ke Prakash Stambh*, p.115