

INDIGO

-Louis Fischer

Indigo deals with a battle between the oppressor and the oppressed is an uneven battle. The issue of Indigo harvesting and high handed attitude of the Britishers becomes a road to freedom for the sharecroppers. The only way out to win it is to develop qualities like self – reliance, strong will, courage. Must openly stand up against injustice of any kind and not accept it lying down. Persistence and patience of Gandhiji helps him in procuring justice for the peasants.

Talks about the need to fight our own battles in time of adversity instead of depending on others it is very important to be first free of any kind of fear.

The account is also reflection of the efforts made by Gandhiji to improve the health conditions as well as social and cultural life of the peasants. Carries a universal message for all to adapt to.

NOTES

Raj Kumar Shukla- A poor sharecropper from Champaran wishing to meet → Gandhiji.

Raj Kumar Shukla- an illiterate but resolute hence followed Gandhiji Lucknow, Kanpur, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Patna, Muzzafarpur & then Champaran.

Servants at Rajendra Prasad's residence thought Gandhi to be an untouchable. Gandhiji considered as an untouchable because of simple living style and wearing, due to the company of Raj Kumar Shukla. Decided to go to Muzzafarpur first to get detailed information about Champaran sharecropper.

Sent telegram to J B Kiplani and stayed in Prof. Malkani's home a government servant. Indians afraid to show sympathy to the supporters of home rule. The news of Gandhi's arrival spread- sharecroppers gathered in large number to meet their champion.

Gandhiji chided the Muzzafarpur lawyer for taking high fee. Champaran district was divided into estate owned by English people, Indians only tenant farmers. Landlords compelled tenants to plant 15% of their land with indigo and surrender their entire harvest as rent.

In the meantime Germany had developed synthetic indigo British landlords freed the Indian farmers from the 15% arrangement but asked them to pay compensation. Many signed, some resisted, engaged lawyers, landlords hired thugs.

Gandhiji reached Champaran and visited the secretary of the British landlord association to get the facts but denied as he was an outsider. Gandhiji went to the British Official Commissioner who asked him to leave Trihut, Gandhiji disobeyed, went to Motihari the capital of Champaran where a vast multitude greeted him, continued his investigations.

Visited maltreated villagers, stopped by the police superintendent but disobeyed the order. Motihari black with peasants' spontaneous demonstrations, Gandhi released without bail Civil Disobedience

triumphed. Gandhiji agreed to 25% refund by the landowners, it symbolized the surrender of the prestige.

Gandhiji worked hard towards social economic reforms, elevated their distress aided by his wife, Mahadev Desai, Narhari Parikh. Gandhiji taught a lesson of self-reliance by not seeking help of an English man Mr. Andrews.

SOLVED SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

Q.1 How did Shukla succeed in persuading Gandhiji to visit Champaran?

Ans: Rajkumar Shukla was a tenacious and resolute person. He kept on pressing Gandhi to visit Champaran till he finally agreed to do so. After meeting Gandhi for the first time at Lucknow he followed him everywhere right up to Sabarmati ashram. His resoluteness urged Gandhi to yield.

Q2. What problems were the Champaran indigo Sharecroppers facing?

Or

What did the peasants pay to the British Landlords as rent?

Ans: The Champaran indigo sharecroppers were the victims of injustice of the landlord system in Bihar. Most of the arable land in Champaran belonged to English Landlords who compelled their Indian tenants to plant indigo in 15% of their holdings. They demanded the entire harvest as rent and thereby increased their poverty and miseries.

Q.3. Why did Gandhiji visit Muzzafarpur on his way to Champaran? Who received him there?

Ans: Shukla had given a fairly detailed account of injustice meted out to the indigo sharecroppers of Champaran by the British landlords. However, Gandhiji wished to gather more information about the issue to have a better insight into the problem. Hence he visited Muzzafarpur. There he was received by J.B. Kriplani, and a large number of his students.

Q.4 What episode in Patna showed Gandhi the existence of a rigid caste system?

Ans. Shukla took Gandhi to Patna. He led him to the house of a lawyer, Rajendra Prasad, who was out of town, but the servants recognized Shukla as a poor indigo peasant. So they let him and his companion Gandhi stay on his premises. They presumed him to be another peasant. They thought Gandhi was an untouchable so he was not permitted to draw water from the well for fear that some drops from his bucket may pollute the entire well.

Q.5 . Why was Gandhiji impressed with Rajkumar Shukla's tenacity and determination?

Ans. Rajkumar Shukla the Champaran-Sharecropper requested Gandhiji in Congress Session in Lucknow to fix a date to visit Champaran where the sharecroppers were subjected to injustice. Till Gandhiji fixed a date he did not leave him rather he accompanied him wherever he went. Gandhiji was impressed by his tenacity and determination and finally agreed to go there from Calcutta.

Q6. Why did Gandhi chide the lawyers who represented the interests of group of sharecroppers of Champaran?

Ans. Gandhiji chided the lawyers for collecting big fees from the sharecroppers to fight their case in law courts. He felt taking their case to law courts would do little good when they were so crushed and fear stricken. So his first priority was to free them from fear.

Q7. What were the conditions of sharecroppers of Champaran?

Ans. The peasants of Champaran were tenants of British landlords. Under long term sharecropping arrangement they were growing Indigo on 15 percent of their holding and surrendering the harvest as rent to the British landlord. But when Indigo price fell due to synthetic Indigo developed in Germany the landlords obtained agreement from the peasant to pay them compensation which some of the peasants resisted and fought their case in court.

Q8. What made the British realise that the Indians could challenge their might hither to unquestioned?

Ans. The spontaneous demonstration around the courthouse by the peasants of Motihari on knowing that Gandhiji was in trouble was the beginning of their liberation from fear of the British which made the British realise that now the Indians can challenge their might.

Q9. How did Gandhiji make the peasants fearless and self-reliant?

Ans. Gandhiji made the peasants fearless by letting them know about their rights, fighting their case and by obtaining the refund of compensation made to the British landlords who were behaving as lords above the law.

LONG ANSWER QUESTION

1. Why do you think Gandhi considered the Champaran episode to be a turning point in his life?

Value Points:

Champaran peasants suffered exploitation, injustice and atrocities at the hands of the British landowners.

Gandhiji was appalled at the condition of the sharecroppers.

He tried to alleviate the pain and sufferings of the distressed peasants.

Was even willing to go to jail.

Inspired the lawyers to work for their welfare.

Thousands of farmers demonstrated to show solidarity with Gandhiji.

He emerged as a live politician. Champaran movement a national movement in the course of freedom struggle.

Eradicated fear from the minds of the ordinary people. Forced Britishers to refund a part of money they had taken illegally. Thus Britishers power was challenged.

After political struggle stayed back in champaran. Providing medical help and teaching them the value of hygiene and cleanliness.

Taught them a lesson in self-reliance. Thus Champaran incident – it turning point in his life.

2. Why did Gandhiji consider freedom from fear more important than legal justice for the poor peasants of Champaran?

Value Points

Exploitation of indigo farmers by British Landlords. Farmers resorted to legal help to fight cases against the landlords. Not too many got encouraging results and also, this could only get them short term benefits. Farmers terrorized and crushed under the exploitation by landlords.

Gandhiji practical and farsighted approach felt that if the downtrodden farmers could be released from fear, rest everything would fall into place.

Started an exercise in empowering the farmers and giving them lessons in courage through his own example.

Dealt with all the clever moves of the Britishers fearlessly and boldly without getting intimidated by their orders.

Felt that lessons in courage would remain with the farmers all their lives and would never be taken advantage of/ exploited.

3. On the basis of your reading of the account of Champaran in Indigo, write a brief character sketch of Mahatma Gandhi.

Value Points

Gandhiji-man of outstanding qualities. Unassuming and modest, Dogged determination.

Thorough and organized, Empathy/compassion for sharecroppers, Persistent worker. Fearless, Farsighted and practical, Persuasive and good convincing power, Humanitarian and holistic approach thinks not only of political or, economic solutions but also concerned with social and cultural progress as well as health issues.

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