

Class 12 (English) - Flamingo

CH. 5 - INDIGO

by Louis Fischer



About the Author

Louis Fischer (1896-1970) was born in Philadelphia in 1896. He served as a volunteer in the British Army between 1918-1920. Fischer made a career as a journalist and wrote for The New York Times, The Saturday Review and for European and Asian publications. He was also a member of the faculty of Princeton University.

Introduction to the chapter

The story is based on the interview taken by Louis Fischer of Mahatma Gandhi. In order to write on him he had visited him in 1942 at his ashram- Sevagram where he was told about the Indigo Movement started by Gandhiji. The story revolves around the struggle of Gandhi and other prominent leaders in order to safeguard sharecroppers from the atrocities of landlords.

Summary - 1

In December 1916 Gandhi went to Lucknow to attend the annual convention of the Indian National Congress. There were 2,301 delegates and many visitors. A peasant from Champaran, Rajkumar Shukla, asked Gandhi to visit his district. Shukla followed Gandhi, wherever he went. In 1917, Gandhi and Shukla boarded a train for Patna. Shukla led Gandhi to the house of a lawyer named Rajendra Prasad. They could not see him as he was out of town.

Gandhi decided to go first to Muzaffarpur to obtain complete information about the conditions in Champaran. He reached Muzaffarpur by train at midnight on 15 April 1917. Professor J.B. Kriplani, received him at the station. Gandhi stayed there for two days. The news of Gandhi's arrival and the nature of his mission spread quickly through Muzaffarpur and to Champaran.

Sharecroppers from Champaran began arriving there. Muzaffarpur lawyers briefed Gandhi about the court cases. He chided the lawyers for collecting big fees from the sharecroppers. He thought that lawcourts were useless for the crushed and fear-stricken peasants. The real relief for them was to be free from fear.

Then Gandhi arrived in Champaran. He began by trying to get the facts from the secretary of the British landlords' association. He refused to give information to an outsider. Gandhi said that he was not an outsider. Next, Gandhi called on the British official commissioner of the Tirhut division. The commissioner started bullying Gandhi and advised him to leave Tirhut. Instead of leaving the area, Gandhi went to Motihari, the Capital of Champaran. Several lawyers accompanied him. A large crowd of people greeted Gandhi at the railway station. It was the beginning of their liberation from fear of the British.

A peasant had been maltreated in a nearby village. The next morning Gandhi started out on the back of an elephant. Soon he was stopped by the police superintendent's messenger and ordered to return to town in his carriage. Gandhi complied. The messenger drove Gandhi home. Then he served him with an official notice to quit Champaran at once. Gandhi signed the receipt for the notice and wrote on it that he would disobey the order. Gandhi received a summons to appear in court the next day. At night Gandhi telegraphed Rajendra Prasad, sent instructions to the ashram and wired a full report to the Viceroy.

Thousands of peasants gathered around the court house. The officials felt powerless. The authorities wished to consult their superiors. Gandhi protested against the delay. The magistrate announced that he would pronounce sentence after a two-hour recess. He asked Gandhi to furnish bail for those 120 minutes. Gandhi refused. The judge released him without bail. The court started again after a break. The judge said he would not deliver the judgement for several days. He allowed Gandhi to remain at liberty.

Gandhi asked the prominent lawyers about the injustice to the sharecroppers. They consulted among themselves. Then they told Gandhi that they were ready to follow him into jail. Gandhi then divided the group into pairs and fixed the order in which each pair was to court arrest. After several days, Gandhi was informed by the magistrate that the case had been dropped. For the first time in modern India, civil disobedience had triumphed.

Gandhi and lawyers conducted an inquiry into the complaints of the peasants. About ten thousand peasants deposed. Documents were collected. Gandhi was summoned by Sir Edward Gait, the Lieutenant-Governor. He met the Lieutenant Governor four times. An official commission of inquiry was appointed.

Gandhi remained in Champaran initially for seven months and then came for several shorter visits. The official inquiry assembled evidence against the big planters. They agreed in principle to make refunds to the peasants. Gandhi asked only 50 per cent. The representative of the planters offered to refund up to 25 per cent. Gandhi agreed. The deadlock was broken.

Gandhi explained that the amount of the refund was less important than the fact that the landlords had been forced to give some money and their prestige. The peasant now saw that he had rights and defenders. He learned courage. Events justified Gandhi's position. Within a few years the British planters abandoned their estates. These now went back to the peasants. Indigo sharecropping disappeared.

Gandhi wanted to do something to remove the cultural and social backwardness in Champaran villages. He appealed for teachers. Two young disciples of Gandhi, Mahadev Desai and Narhari Parikh, and their wives volunteered for work. Several more came from Bombay, Poona and other distant parts of the land. Devdas, Gandhi's youngest son, arrived from the ashram and so did Mrs. Gandhi. Primary schools were opened in six villages. Kasturba taught the ashram rules on personal cleanliness and community sanitation.

Health conditions were miserable. Gandhi got a doctor to volunteer his services for six months. Three medicines were available : castor oil, quinine and sulphur ointment. Gandhi noticed the filthy state of women's clothes. One woman told Kasturba that she had only one sari. During his long stay in Champaran, Gandhi kept a long distance watch on the ashram and sent regular instructions by mail.

The Champaran episode was a turning point in Gandhi's life. It did not begin as an act of defiance. It grew out of an attempt to lessen the sufferings of the poor peasants. Gandhi's politics was closely connected with the practical day to day problems of the millions. He tried to mould a new free Indian who could stand on his own feet and thus make India free.

Gandhi also taught his followers a lesson in self-reliance. Gandhi's lawyer friends thought that it would be a good idea for Charles Freer Andrews, the English pacifist, to stay in Champaran and help them. Andrews was willing if Gandhi agreed. But Gandhi opposed it forcefully. He said, "The cause is just and you must rely upon yourselves to win the battle." Thus, self-reliance, Indian independence and help to sharecroppers were all bound together.

Summary - 2

Louis Fischer met Gandhi in 1942 at his ashram in Sevagram. Gandhi told him that how he initiated the departure of the British from India. He recalled that it in 1917 at the request of Rajkumar Shukla, a sharecropper from Champaran, he visited the place. Gandhi had gone to Lucknow to attend the annual meeting of Indian National Congress in the year 1916. Shukla told him that he had come from Champaran to seek his help in order to safeguard the interests of the sharecroppers. Gandhi told him that he was busy so Shukla accompanied him to various places till he consented to visit Champaran. His firm decision impressed Gandhiji and he promised him that he would visit Calcutta at a particular date and then Shukla could come and take him along to Champaran. Shukla met him at Calcutta and they took a train to Patna. Gandhi went to lawyer Rajendra Prasad's house and they waited for him. In order to grab complete knowledge of the situation, he reached Muzzafarpur on 15th April 1917. He was

welcomed by Prof. J.B Kriplani and his students. Gandhi was surprised to see the immense support for an advocate of home rule like him. He also met some lawyers who were already handling cases of sharecroppers. As per the contract, 15 percent of the peasant's land holding was to be reserved for cultivation of indigo, the crop of which was given to the landlord as rent. This system was very oppressive. Gandhi wanted to help the sharecroppers. So he visited the British landlord association but he was not given any information because he was an outsider. He then went to the commissioner of Tirhut division who threatened Gandhi and ask him to leave Tirhut. Instead of returning, he went to Motihari. Here he started gathering complete information about the indigo contract. He was accompanied by many lawyers. One day as he was on his way to meet a peasant, who was maltreated by the indigo planters, he was stopped by the police superintendent's messenger who served him a notice asking him to leave. Gandhi received the notice but disobeyed the order. A case was filed against him. Many lawyers came to advise him but when he stressed, they all joined his struggle and even consented to go to jail in order to help the poor peasants. On the day of trial, a large crowd gathered near the court. It became impossible to handle them. Gandhi helped the officers to control the crowd. Gandhi gave his statement that he was not a lawbreaker but he disobeyed so that he could help the peasants. He was granted bail and later on, the case against him was dropped. Gandhi and his associates started gathering all sorts of information related to the indigo contract and its misuse. Later, a commission was set up to look into the matter. After the inquiry was conducted, the planters were found guilty and were asked to pay back to the peasants. Expecting refusal, they offered to pay only 25 percent of the amount. Gandhi accepted this too because he wanted to free the sharecroppers from the binding of the indigo contract. He opened six schools in Champaran villages and volunteers like Mahadev Desai, Narhari Parikh, and his son, Devdas taught them. Kasturbai, the wife of Gandhi used to teach personal hygiene. Later on, with the help of a volunteer doctor he provided medical facility to the natives of Champaran, thus making their life a bit better. A peace maker, Andrews wanted to volunteer at Champaran ashram. But Gandhi refused as he wanted Indians to learn the lesson of self reliance so that they would not depend on others. Gandhi told the writer that it was Champaran's incident that made him think that he did not need the Britisher's advice while he was in his own country.

Indigo – Text & Explanation –

When I first visited Gandhi in 1942 at his Ashram in Sevagram, in central India, he said, "I will tell you how it happened that I decided to urge the departure of the British. It was 1917."

The Author explained his first meeting with Mahatma Gandhi. He says that he first met Gandhi in 1942 at his ashram which was in Sevagram. It was located in central India. Gandhi said that he would tell him about his struggle against the British which first took place in the year 1917.

He had gone to the December 1916 annual convention of the Indian National Congress party in Lucknow. There were 2,301 delegates and many visitors. During the proceedings, Gandhi recounted, "a peasant came up to me looking like any other peasant in India, poor and emaciated, and said, 'I am Rajkumar Shukla. I am from Champaran, and I want you to come to

my district’!’ Gandhi had never heard of the place. It was in the foothills of the towering Himalayas, near the kingdom of Nepal.

Convention: agreement

Delegates: Representatives

Peasant: small farmer

Emaciated: thin

Champanan: A place in Bihar

He says that in the month of December, in the year 1916, Mahatma Gandhi went to attend the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress at Lucknow. There were about 2,301 representatives and visitors. Gandhi recalled that a small farmer named Rajkumar Shukla came to him who was poor and thin. He requested Gandhi to visit Champanan, a place in the foothills of the Himalaya mountain range, near the Kingdom of Nepal.

Under an ancient arrangement, the Champanan peasants were sharecroppers. Rajkumar Shukla was one of them. He was illiterate but resolute. He had come to the Congress session to complain about the injustice of the landlord system in Bihar, and somebody had probably said, “Speak to Gandhi.”

Sharecroppers: a tenant farmer who gives a part of each crop as rent.

Resolute: determined

He told Gandhi that he was a sharecropper. A sharecropper is a farmer who gives a part of the crop as rent to the owner of that piece of land that he cultivates. He told him that because of an old agreement, many of the peasants in Champanan were sharecroppers. He had come to meet Gandhi on someone’s suggestion as he was determined to find a solution for the sharecroppers who were facing hardships due to this agreement. He sought Gandhi ji’s help.

Gandhi told Shukla he had an appointment in Cawnpore and was also committed to go to other parts of India. Shukla accompanied him everywhere. Then Gandhi returned to his ashram near Ahmedabad. Shukla followed him to the ashram. For weeks he never left Gandhi’s side. “Fix a date,” he begged.

Committed: dedicated

Accompanied: go somewhere with (someone) as a companion or escort

Cawnpore: British name for the city of Kanpur

After hearing his problem, Gandhiji told him that he had to visit Cawnpore and some other parts of India due to prior appointments. Shukla went with him everywhere. After this Gandhi returned to his ashram near Ahmedabad. Shukla was always there with him for several weeks, begging him to fix a date to visit Champanan.

Impressed by the sharecropper’s tenacity and story Gandhi said, “I have to be in Calcutta on such-and-such a date. Come and meet me and take me from there.”

Months passed. Shukla was sitting on his haunches at the appointed spot in Calcutta when Gandhi arrived; he waited till Gandhi was free. Then the two of them boarded a train for the city of Patna in Bihar. There Shukla led him to the house of a lawyer named Rajendra Prasad who later became the President of the Congress party and of India. Rajendra Prasad was out of town,

but the servants knew Shukla as a poor yeoman who pestered their master to help the indigo sharecroppers. So they let him stay on the ground with his companion, Gandhi, whom they took to be another peasant. But Gandhi was not permitted to draw water from the well lest some drops from his bucket pollute the entire source; how did they know that he was not an untouchable?

Tenacity: determination

Haunches: thighs

Boarded: get on, enter

Yeoman: a man who cultivates a small piece of land

Pestered: bother, harass

Permitted: allowed

As Gandhi was impressed with the determination of the peasant, he said that he would be visiting Kolkata after a few months and that Shukla should meet him there. On the day that had been fixed, Shukla was eagerly waiting for Gandhiji. When Gandhi got free, they both took a train to Patna. Then they went to the house of a lawyer- Rajendra Prasad who later became the President of India. When they reached there, he was not at home. But the servants allowed both of them to stay at the grounds because they knew Shukla. They all knew him because Shukla used to assist their master in helping indigo sharecroppers. They didn't allow Gandhi to draw water from their well as they took him to be an untouchable and didn't want to pollute the entire water source.

Gandhi decided to go first to Muzaffarpur, which was en route to Champaran, to obtain a more complete information about conditions than Shukla was capable of imparting. He accordingly sent a telegram to Professor J.B. Kripalani, of the Arts College in Muzaffarpur, whom he had seen at Tagore's Shantiniketan School. The train arrived at midnight, 15 April 1917. Kripalani was waiting at the station with a large body of students. Gandhi stayed there for two days in the home of Professor Malkani, a teacher in a government school.

En route: on the way

Imparting: pass on, giving

As Shukla was not able to provide Gandhi with adequate information, therefore, he decided to go to Muzaffarpur which was on the way to Champaran to obtain the complete information. He sent a telegram to Professor J.B Kriplani who was a teacher at Arts College in Muzaffarpur. Gandhi had seen him at Tagore's Shantiniketan School. Gandhi took a train to Muzaffarpur that arrived at midnight on 15th April 1917. Kriplani was already waiting there with his students. Gandhi stayed there for two days at Professor Malkani's home who was a teacher in a government school.

“It was an extraordinary thing ‘in those days,’” Gandhi commented, “for a government professor to harbour a man like me”. In smaller localities, the Indians were afraid to show sympathy for advocates of home-rule.

The news of Gandhi's advent and of the nature of his mission spread quickly through Muzaffarpur and to Champaran. Sharecroppers from Champaran began arriving on foot and by conveyance to see their champion. Muzaffarpur lawyers called on Gandhi to brief him; they

frequently represented peasant groups in court; they told him about their cases and reported the size of their fee

Extraordinary: exceptional, remarkable

Harbour: here, entertain

Sympathy: support, pity

Advocate: supporter, protector

Advent: arrival

Conveyance: transportation

According to Gandhi, it was a remarkable thing that a government professor was entertaining him because in those days people in small localities were afraid of supporting those who supported home rule. The news of Gandhi's arrival and the purpose of his mission spread through Muzaffarpur and Champaran, very fast. Sharecroppers started to visit him. Muzaffarpur lawyers informed Gandhi about the whole situation as they represented various peasants in the court. They explained to him about their cases and the fee that they charged them.

Gandhi chided the lawyers for collecting big fee from the sharecroppers. He said, "I have come to the conclusion that we should stop going to the law courts. Taking such cases to the courts does little good. Where the peasants are so crushed and fear-stricken, law courts are useless. The real relief for them is to be free from fear."

Most of the arable land in the Champaran district was divided into large estates owned by Englishmen and worked by Indian tenants. The chief commercial crop was indigo. The landlords compelled all tenants to plant three twentieths or 15 percent of their holdings with indigo and surrender the entire indigo harvest as rent. This was done by long-term contract.

Chided: criticize, scold

Conclusion: result, end of something

Fear stricken: afraid

Arable: land suitable for farming

Tenants: occupants paying rent in cash or kind

Estate: property

Compelled: forced

Surrendered: to give in

Contract: agreement

Indigo: plant that produces a blue color

Gandhi scolded the lawyers for charging such high fee from the poor sharecroppers. He decided that it was useless to go to the courts as the judiciary was not doing anything good for the peasants. He said that as long as the peasants were suppressed and full of fear, it was useless to visit the courts. He wanted to set them free from fear. Most of the cultivable land in the Champaran district was owned by Englishmen who had divided them into various estates (property). The peasants were the occupants of these lands. Englishmen forced the peasants to cultivate indigo on 15 percent of their land and to give the crop to them as rent. All this was done through a long term agreement.

Presently, the landlords learned that Germany had developed synthetic indigo. They, thereupon,

obtained agreements from the sharecroppers to pay them compensation for being released from the 15 percent arrangement.

The sharecropping arrangement was irksome to the peasants, and many signed willingly. Those who resisted, engaged lawyers; the landlords hired thugs. Meanwhile, the information about synthetic indigo reached the illiterate peasants who had signed, and they wanted their money back.

Learned: come to know

Synthetic: Chemical based, artificial

Compensation: payments

Arrangement: Process

Irksome: irritating

Resisted: opposed, to be against something

Thugs: cheats

Illiterate: uneducated

While all this was going on, the landlords came to know about the chemical indigo being prepared in Germany. It was a blue color dye made with chemicals. They started demanding money from the poor peasants in order to cancel their agreements as they no longer required the indigo plantations. The sharecropping system was very annoying, so many of the peasants paid for the cancellation of the agreements. But as the news about synthetic indigo spread and reached the uneducated peasants, they started demanding their money back.

At this point Gandhi arrived in Champaran. He began by trying to get the facts. First he visited the secretary of the British landlord's association. The secretary told him that they could give no information to an outsider. Gandhi answered that he was no outsider.

Next, Gandhi called on the British official commissioner of the Tirhut division in which the Champaran district lay. "The commissioner," Gandhi reports, "proceeded to bully me and advised me forthwith to leave Tirhut."

Proceeded: begin a course of action

Bully: trying to harm others considering them to be weak

Forthwith: immediately, at once

When Gandhi arrived at Champaran, he decided to gather the facts. For this, he visited the secretary of the British landlord's association. The secretary didn't answer him because he could not give any information to an outsider. After this, he went to the commissioner of the Tirhut division. Champaran district was under Tirhut division. The commissioner not only threatened Gandhi but also suggested him to leave Tirhut immediately.



Gandhi did not leave. Instead he proceeded to Motihari, the capital of Champaran. Several lawyers accompanied him. At the railway station, a vast multitude greeted Gandhi. He went to a house and, using it as headquarters, continued his investigations. A report came in that a peasant had been maltreated in a nearby village. Gandhi decided to go and see; the next morning he started out on the back of an elephant. He had not proceeded far when the police superintendent's messenger overtook him and ordered him to return to town in his carriage. Gandhi complied. The messenger drove Gandhi home where he served him with an official notice to quit Champaran immediately. Gandhi signed a receipt for the notice and wrote on it that he would disobey the order.

Accompanied: go along with someone

Multitude: a large number of people

Investigations: inquiries

Maltreated: ill treat

Superintendent: Manager, supervisor

Overtook: went ahead of him

Complied: followed or obeyed

Though Gandhi was threatened by the commissioner, he didn't leave the place. He then went to Motihari which was the capital of Champaran. He was joined by several lawyers. When they reached the station, they were welcomed by a large number of people. He then went to a house which was later converted into his headquarters. He started his inquiry into the matter. Gandhi decided to visit a nearby village when he came to know about an incident of ill treatment with a peasant. He was on his way, on an elephant, when the superintendent's (Supervisor) messenger stop him and ordered him to return back to the town. Gandhi followed him and the messenger took him back to his home. He was then served a notice which ordered him to quit his movement and return back. Gandhi received the notice and signed a receipt on which he wrote that he would not obey the order.

In consequence, Gandhi received the summons to appear in court the next day.

All night Gandhi remained awake. He telegraphed Rajendra Prasad to come from Bihar with influential friends. He sent instructions to the ashram. He wired a full report to the Viceroy.

Morning found the town of Motihari black with peasants. They did not know Gandhi's record in South Africa. They had merely heard that a Mahatma who wanted to help them was in trouble

with the authorities. Their spontaneous demonstration, in thousands, around the courthouse was the beginning of their liberation from fear of the British.

Consequence: result

Influential: powerful

Wired: Telegraphed

Merely: only

Authorities: officials, power

Spontaneous: voluntary, unforced

Demonstrations: protest

Courthouse: court building

Liberation: release

As a result, Gandhi got summons to appear in court next day. Gandhi wasn't able to sleep the whole night. He telegraphed Rajendra Prasad and asked him to come to Bihar and get some powerful people along. He sent some guidelines to the Ashram and also telegraphed the whole matter to the viceroy. Next morning, Motihari was full of peasants as they wanted to support Gandhi. None of them knew about his works in South Africa. They only knew that there was a Mahatma who wanted to help them and was in trouble due to the officials. They started gathering in front of the courthouse. This incident was their attempt of setting themselves free from the fear of the British.

The officials felt powerless without Gandhi's cooperation. He helped them regulate the crowd. He was polite and friendly. He was giving them concrete proof that their might, hitherto dreaded and unquestioned, could be challenged by Indians.

The government was baffled. The prosecutor requested the judge to postpone the trial. Apparently, the authorities wished to consult their superiors.

Concrete: solid

Hitherto: Earlier, Previously

Dreaded: regarded with great fear or apprehension

Unquestioned: not examined or inquired into

Baffled: confused

Prosecutor: Lawyer or barrister

Postpone: delay

Apparently: seemingly, evidently

As the crowd had gathered in front of the court building, it became difficult for the officers to control the mob. They had to take Gandhi's help to regulate the crowd. Gandhi politely told the officials that if they would misuse their power, then there were chances that they would have to face a revolt from the Indians. As the situation was getting tougher, the lawyer requested the court to postpone the trial by some days. The authorities decided to first consult the higher authorities.

Gandhi protested against the delay. He read a statement pleading guilty. He was involved, he told the court, in a "conflict of duties"—on the one hand, not to set a bad example as a lawbreaker; on the other hand, to render the "humanitarian and national service" for which he

had come. He disregarded the order to leave, “not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience to the higher law of our being, the voice of conscience”. He asked the penalty due.

The magistrate announced that he would pronounce sentence after a two-hour recess and asked Gandhi to furnish bail for those 120 minutes. Gandhi refused. The judge released him without bail.

Protested: objected, disapproved

Pleading: the action of making an emotional or earnest appeal to someone

Guilty: at fault

Conflict: to be against someone

Humanitarian: Concerned with human welfare

Conscience: sense of right and wrong

Magistrate: civil officer who administers law

Pronounce: declare or announce

recess: break

bail: an amount of money that a person who has been accused of a crime pays to a law court so that they can be released until their trial.

Gandhiji objected against the delay in the proceedings of the case. He read a statement in front of the court in which he accepted his fault in a very humble manner. He said that he was not a lawbreaker and didn't want to go against the law but his duty towards humanity has a greater influence on him and it forced him to do so. He refused to leave the town because he wanted to help the sharecroppers as it was his moral duty. The magistrate asked him to arrange for bail because he was going to give his judgement after the 2 hour long break. Gandhiji refused to seek bail and later on, he was released without it.

When the court reconvened, the judge said he would not deliver the judgment for several days. Meanwhile he allowed Gandhi to remain at liberty.

Rajendra Prasad, Brij Kishor Babu, Maulana Mazharul Huq and several other prominent lawyers had arrived from Bihar. They conferred with Gandhi. What would they do if he was sentenced to prison, Gandhi asked. Why, the senior lawyer replied, they had come to advise and help him; if he went to jail there would be nobody to advise and they would go home.

Reconvened: to start again after a small break

Liberty: free

Prominent: Important, well known

Conferred: granted

When the court proceedings restarted, the judge refused to deliver any judgement for many days to come. He allowed Gandhi to remain free. Some well known lawyers like Rajendra Prasad, Brij Kishor Babu and Maulana Mazharul Huq came from Bihar to help and advice Gandhi. Gandhi asked that if he was sentenced to jail, then what would be their course of action. One senior lawyer replied that they were there to help him out and if he was sentenced to jail, then they would return back.

What about the injustice to the sharecroppers, Gandhi demanded. The lawyers withdrew to consult. Rajendra Prasad has recorded the upshot of their consultations — “They thought, amongst themselves, that Gandhi was totally a stranger, and yet he was prepared to go to prison for the sake of the peasants; if they, on the other hand, being not only residents of the adjoining districts but also those who claimed to have served these peasants, should go home, it would be shameful desertion”

They accordingly went back to Gandhi and told him they were ready to follow him into jail. “The battle of Champaran is won,” he exclaimed. Then he took a piece of paper and divided the group into pairs and put down the order in which each pair was to court arrest.

Injustice: unfairness

Withdrew: left

Upshot: result, conclusion

Consultations: discussion

Desertion: action of leaving a place, organization etc

When Gandhi came to know about their decision, he asked them to help the sharecroppers who were facing unfairness. Rajendra Prasad and other lawyers concluded that if Gandhi could go to jail for the people of their area, although he was a stranger, then they should also follow him as they had always claimed to serve the peasants and fought their legal battles too. They decided that if Gandhi went to jail, then they would follow too. On hearing this, Gandhi assured them that their struggle for Champaran’s peasants had been won. He divided the group into pairs of two and made a sequence in which they had to voluntarily surrender in the court.

Several days later, Gandhi received a written communication from the magistrate informing him that the Lieutenant-Governor of the province had ordered the case to be dropped.

Civil disobedience had triumphed, the first time in modern India.

Gandhi and the lawyers now proceeded to conduct a far-flung inquiry into the grievances of the farmers. Depositions by about ten thousand peasants were written down, and notes made on other evidence. Documents were collected. The whole area throbbed with the activity of the investigators and the vehement protests of the landlords.

Lieutenant-Governor: deputy governor

Province: region, territory

Civil Disobedience: peaceful form of political protest

Triumphed: won

Grievances: complaints

Depositions: a formal written statement

Evidence: proof

Throbbed: produced a lot of vibrations due to a huge crowd

Investigators: the inspectors

Vehement: showing strong feeling; forceful, passionate, or intense.

After some days, the Magistrate sent a letter to Gandhiji in which it was written that as per the orders of deputy governor, the case against him had been taken back. It was for the first time in

modern India that a peaceful protest against the government had been won. Gandhi and other lawyers carried on with an in - depth investigation into the injustice with the farmers. Statements of about ten thousand peasants were recorded and various documentary proofs were collected. The whole area vibrated with activity- the investigators and the protesting landlords.

In June, Gandhi was summoned to Sir Edward Gait, the Lieutenant-Governor. Before he went he met leading associates and again laid detailed plans for civil disobedience if he should not return.

Gandhi had four protracted interviews with the Lieutenant- Governor who, as a result, appointed an official commission of inquiry into the indigo sharecroppers' situation. The commission consisted of landlords, government officials, and Gandhi as the sole representative of the peasants.

Summoned: called

Leading: prominent, popular

Associates: supporters

Protracted: lasting for a long time or longer than expected or usual.

Representative: spokesperson, agent

In June, Gandhi was called up to be present before deputy governor Sir Edward Gait. Before meeting him, he met his chief supporters and made plans for civil disobedience, in case he did not return. Gandhi had four long interviews with the deputy commissioner which led to the formation of a commission that inquired into the indigo sharecroppers' situation. The commission had landlords, government officials and Gandhi who was the only spokesperson for the peasants.

Gandhi remained in Champaran for an initial uninterrupted period of seven months and then again for several shorter visits. The visit, undertaken casually on the entreaty of an unlettered peasant in the expectation that it would last a few days, occupied almost a year of Gandhi's life.

The official inquiry assembled a crushing mountain of evidence against the big planters, and when they saw this they agreed, in principle, to make refunds to the peasants. "But how much must we pay?" they asked Gandhi.

Initial: at the start

Uninterrupted: continuous

Entreaty: an earnest or humble request

Assembled: gathered

Gandhi remained in Champaran for seven months. He also made several short visits later. His visit on the request of a peasant was presumed to last a few days but it took a year. The official enquiry didn't favor the planters, hence, they agreed to pay back to the peasants. But they questioned Gandhi regarding the amount to be repaid.

They thought he would demand repayment in full of the money which they had illegally and deceitfully extorted from the sharecroppers. He asked only 50 per cent. "There he seemed adamant," writes Reverend J. Z. Hodge, a British missionary in Champaran who observed the entire episode at close range. "Thinking probably that he would not give way, the representative

of the planters offered to refund to the extent of 25 per cent, and to his amazement Mr. Gandhi took him at his word, thus breaking the deadlock.

”This settlement was adopted unanimously by the commission. Gandhi explained that the amount of the refund was less important than the fact that the landlords had been obliged to surrender part of the money and, with it, part of their prestige. Therefore, as far as the peasants were concerned, the planters had behaved as lords above the law. Now the peasant saw that he had rights and defenders. He learned courage.

Deceitfully: dishonestly

Extorted: took forcibly

Adamant: firm

Amazement: surprise

Obliged: required, made legally bound to do something

Deadlock: a situation in which no progress can be made

Unanimously: without opposition

Prestige: honour, esteem

Defenders: protector

The moneylenders had thought that Gandhi would ask for the full payment of the money which they had taken from the peasants forcefully and fraudulently. But he asked for only fifty percent and his decision was firm. A missionary, Reverend J. Z. Hodge who had a close watch on the matter reported this. The planters offered to pay only 25 percent as they thought it would be rejected by Gandhi. He immediately accepted it. Gandhi said that the amount of money was not important but by giving money, the planters had bowed down to the peasants and had given away their honour too. The planters who earlier behaved as if they were above the law, now had to abide by it. This made the peasants realize their rights and give them courage to fight for them.

Events justified Gandhi’s position. Within a few years the British planters abandoned their estates, which reverted to the peasants. Indigo sharecropping disappeared.

Gandhi never contented himself with large political or economic solutions. He saw the cultural and social backwardness in the Champaran villages and wanted to do something about it immediately. He appealed for teachers. Mahadev Desai and Narhari Parikh, two young men who had just joined Gandhi as disciples, and their wives, volunteered for the work. Several more came from Bombay, Poona and other distant parts of the land. Devadas, Gandhi’s youngest son, arrived from the ashram and so did Mrs. Gandhi. Primary schools were opened in six villages. Kasturbai taught the ashram rules on personal cleanliness and community sanitation.

Justified: marked by a good or legitimate reason

Abandoned: deserted, inhibited

Estates: property

Reverted: returned

Contented: willing to accept something, satisfied

Events had proven Gandhi’s position. The British planters had to leave their property within the next few years. These properties were returned back to the peasants. Indigo sharecropping

soon came to an end. Gandhi was not satisfied by achieving political or economic solutions - he sought to remove the cultural and social backwardness of Champaran. Gandhi wanted to do something to remove the backwardness in the villages of Champaran. He requested teachers such as Mahadev Desai and Narhai Parikh and their wives to teach the villagers. Both of them were followers of Gandhi. Many other volunteers came from Bombay and Poona to join them. Mrs. Gandhi and their youngest son Devdas arrived from the ashram for their help. Primary schools were opened in six villages where Kasturbai used to teach the ashram rules on cleanliness and community sanitation.

Health conditions were miserable. Gandhi got a doctor to volunteer his services for six months. Three medicines were available — castor oil, quinine and sulphur ointment. Anybody who showed a coated tongue was given a dose of castor oil; anybody with malaria fever received quinine plus castor oil; anybody with skin eruptions received ointment plus castor oil.

Gandhi noticed the filthy state of women's clothes. He asked Kasturbai to talk to them about it. One woman took Kasturbai into her hut and said, "look, there is no box or cupboard here for clothes. The sari I am wearing is the only one I have."

Miserable: unhappy, sad

Volunteer: a person who offers his service free of cost

Eruptions: here, a spot, rash, or other mark appearing suddenly on the skin.

The health conditions of the people of Champaran were very poor. So, Gandhi got a doctor who offered his services free of cost for six months. There were only three medicines- castor oil, quinine and sulphur ointment available. A patient with a coated tongue was given Castor oil, a malaria patient was served a dose of quinine and a patient with a skin disorder was given ointment and castor oil. The women of the area used to wear dirty clothes. When Gandhiji tried to know the reason through his wife, he was told that those were the only saris each of the women had.

During his long stay in Champaran, Gandhi kept a long distance watch on the ashram. He sent regular instructions by mail and asked for financial accounts. Once he wrote to the residents that it was time to fill in the old latrine trenches and dig new ones otherwise the old ones would begin to smell bad.

The Champaran episode was a turning-point in Gandhi's life. "What I did," he explained, "was a very ordinary thing. I declared that the British could not order me about in my own country."

Instructions: orders, commands

Residents: locals

While Gandhiji was in Champaran, he kept a long distance vigil on the ashram. He used to send letters of orders regarding financial matters. Once, he wrote to the locals that it was time to dig new latrines as the old ones had started giving foul smell. The Champaran incident changed Gandhi's life. He said that he had done a regular thing- he had put his point across that the Britishers could not order him in his own country.

But Champaran did not begin as an act of defiance. It grew out of an attempt to alleviate the distress of large numbers of poor peasants. This was the typical Gandhi pattern — his politics

were intertwined with the practical, day-to-day problems of the millions. His was not a loyalty to abstractions; it was a loyalty to living, human beings.

In everything Gandhi did, moreover, he tried to mould a new free Indian who could stand on his own feet and thus make India free.

Defiance: opposition

Alleviate: uplift

Distress: torture

Intertwined: twisted, braided, knitted

Abstractions: something which exists only as an idea.

The Champaran satyagraha was not an act of opposition. It was an attempt to help out the poor and tortured peasants. This was Gandhi's way to solve issues. His politics was knitted up with the everyday problems faced by the millions of people. He did not aim at the fulfilment of ideas, rather, he was concerned for the people. The basic idea was to serve humanity and make a free Indian who could stand for his rights.

Early in the Champaran action, Charles Freer Andrews, the English pacifist who had become a devoted follower of the Mahatma, came to bid Gandhi farewell before going on a tour of duty to the Fiji Islands. Gandhi's lawyer friends thought it would be a good idea for Andrews to stay in Champaran and help them. Andrews was willing if Gandhi agreed. But Gandhi was vehemently opposed. He said, "you think that in this unequal fight it would be helpful if we have an Englishman on our side. This shows the weakness of your heart. The cause is just and you must rely upon yourselves to win the battle. You should not seek a prop in Mr. Andrews because he happens to be an Englishman".

"He had read our minds correctly," Rajendra Prasad comments, "and we had no reply... Gandhi in this way taught us a lesson in self-reliance".

Self-reliance, Indian independence and help to sharecroppers were all bound together.

Pacifist: Peace maker

Vehemently: in an intense manner

Self Reliance: self sufficiency, self support

prop: support

Charles Freer Andrews who was a peacemaker, visited Gandhi before going on a tour of duty to the Fiji islands. Gandhi's lawyer friends wanted Andrews to stay at the Ashram and help them but Gandhi refused. He said that they did not need the help of Britishers as it showed a lack of trust in their own abilities. He asked them not to seek any help from Mr. Andrews as he was an Englishman. Rajendra Prasad later on stated that Gandhi had read their thoughts and his reply served as a lesson of self sufficiency for them. Being self dependant, free and helping the peasants - all these acts of Gandhi were inter connected.

Question and Answers

Q1- Why do you think Gandhi considered the Champaran episode to be a turning-point in his life?

A1- The Champaran event had solved various problems faced by the poor peasants. They were relieved from the torture they had to face at the hands of the landlords. Thousands of people supported him. This was considered as a turning point in the life of Gandhi. He once said that what he did was an ordinary thing as he didn't want the Britishers to order him in his own country.

Q2- How was Gandhi able to influence lawyers? Give instances.

A2- Gandhi asked the lawyers about their course of action if he was sentenced to jail. They answered that they would return back. He then asked them about the plight of the peasants. This made them realize their duty towards the social issue and they decided to go to jail with Gandhi.

Q3- What was the attitude of the average Indian in smaller localities towards advocates of 'home rule'?

A3- The average Indians in smaller localities did not support the advocates of Home Rule as they feared to go against the British government. For Gandhi it was surprising that Professor Malkani allowed him to stay at his home even though he was a government teacher.

Q4-How do we know that ordinary people too contributed to the freedom movement?

A4- Ordinary people too contributed to the freedom movement. This can be justified by the following events:

- A large number of students accompanied Prof. J.B Kriplani to welcome Gandhi at Muzzafarpur railway station.
- Peasants also came to see him either on foot or by conveyance.
- A large number of people gathered to demonstrate around the courtroom.

Short Answer Type Questions (3 Marks, 30-40 words)

Question.1. Why did Gandhiji feel that taking the Champaran case to court was useless? (Delhi 2014 Modified)

Answer. When Gandhiji got to know about the plight of the peasant groups in Champaran from his discussion with the lawyers, he came to the conclusion that the poor peasants were so crushed and fear-stricken that law courts were useless in their case. Going to courts

overburdened the sharecroppers with heavy litigation expenses. What really needed to be done was to make them free from fear.

Question.2. How did the Champaran peasants react when they heard that a Mahatma had come to help them? (Compartment 2014)

Answer. When the Champaran peasants heard that a Mahatma had come to help them, they assembled in Motihari in large number. Thousands of peasants held a demonstration around the courthouse where Gandhiji was supposed to appear. The crowd was so uncontrollable that the officials felt powerless, and Gandhiji himself helped the authorities to regulate the crowd.

Question.3. What made the Lieutenant Governor drop the case against Gandhiji? (Compartment 2014)

Answer. When Gandhiji was asked to appear in the court in Motihari, thousands of peasants held a demonstration around the courthouse. The officials felt helpless and the government was baffled. The trial was postponed, as the judge didn't want to aggravate the situation. He held up the sentence for several days, after which Gandhiji was released without bail. All these events made the Lieutenant Governor drop the case against Gandhiji.

Question.4. Why did Gandhiji oppose when his friend Andrews offered to stay in Champaran and help the peasants? (Foreign 2014)
or

Why did Gandhiji object to CF Andrews' stay in Champaran? (Foreign 2009)

Answer. CF Andrews, an English pacifist, was a devoted follower of Gandhiji. The lawyers thought that being an Englishman, Andrews could be of immense help to them in their cause of fighting the battle of Champaran. Gandhiji, however, was against this because he felt that enlisting an Englishman's help showed weakness. Their cause was just, and they had to win the battle by relying on themselves. This would make them self-reliant.

Question.5. Why do you think Gandhi considered the Champaran episode to be a turning point in his life? (All India 2011)

Answer. The Champaran episode began as an attempt to alleviate the distress of poor peasants. Ultimately it proved to be a turning point in Gandhiji's life because it was a loud proclamation that made the British realise that Gandhiji could not be ordered about in his own country. It infused courage to question British authority in the masses and laid the foundation of non-cooperation as a new tool to fight the British tooth and nail.

Question.6. What did the peasants pay to the British landlords as rent? (Foreign 2011)

Answer. The British landlords had entered into a long-term contract with the farmers according to which they compelled all tenants to plant 15% of their holdings with indigo. The sharecroppers had to surrender the entire indigo harvest as rent.

Question.7.Why did Gandhiji decide to go to Muzaffarpur before going to Champaran? (Foreign 2011)

Answer. Rajkumar Shukla had given quite a lot of information to Gandhiji about the indigo sharecroppers of Champaran. However, Gandhiji wished to obtain more complete information about the conditions than Shukla had imparted. He visited Muzaffarpur, which was en route to Champaran, to inquire from the lawyers there about the issue, as they frequently represented the peasant groups in the court.

Question.8.Why do you think the servants thought Gandhi to be another peasant? (Delhi 2010)

Answer. The servants knew that Rajkumar Shukla was a poor farmer who pestered their master to help the indigo sharecroppers. Since Gandhiji accompanied Shukla and was dressed simply, they mistook him for a peasant. Gandhiji's modesty and unassertiveness also led to the assumption that he was a peasant.

Question.9."The battle of Champaran is won!." What led Gandhiji to make this remark? (Foreign 2010)

Answer. The lawyers first decided to return home if Gandhiji. was arrested. But they soon realised their mistake. When they declared that they would fight for the peasants' cause in the event of Gandhiji's arrest and volunteered to court arrest for the cause of the sharecroppers, Gandhiji was very pleased and exclaimed, "The battle of Champaran is won!."

Question.10.Why did Gandhi agree to the planters' offer of a 25% refund to the farmers? (Delhi 2009)

Answer. Gandhiji agreed to a settlement of 25% refund to the farmers in order to break the deadlock between the landlords and peasants. For him the amount of the refund was not very important. The fact that the landlords had been obliged to surrender a part of their money as well as their prestige gave a moral victory to the farmers. Thus, Gandhiji not only made the landlords accept their dishonesty but also made the farmers learn a lesson in defending their rights with courage.

Question.11.How was Gandhi able to influence the lawyers? Give instances. (All India 2009)

or

Hbw was Gandhiji able to influence the lawyers? (All India 2008)

Answer. Gandhiji's sincerity towards the peasants' cause and convincing arguments and negotiations, thoroughly influenced the lawyers. He chided them for overcharging the peasants and encouraged them to court arrest for the peasants' noble cause. He even rejected their proposal to seek Mr Andrews help in their battle against the Britishers in order to be self-reliant and independent.

Long Answer Type Questions (6 Marks, 120-150 Words)

Question.1. Why is the Champaran episode considered to be the beginning of the Indian struggle for independence? (All India 2014 Modified)

Answer. The Champaran episode was one of the major events in the struggle for independence. It was in the course of this small but significant movement that Gandhiji decided to urge the departure of the British from India.

A close examination of the problems of the Champaran peasants opened Gandhiji's eyes to the unjust policies of the British. He realised that people had to be made free from fear and only then could they be freed from foreign oppression. The spontaneous demonstration of the people proved that Gandhiji had the nation's support in his fight against the Britishers. It also aroused patriotism in the heart of the Indians.

The triumph of The civil disobedience at Champaran motivated the launching of the movement on a large scale during the freedom movement. Gandhiji's winning the case of the sharecroppers proved that British authority could be challenged. Hence, the Champaran episode served as a stepping stone to the Indian struggle for independence.

Question.2. Gandhiji's loyalty was not a loyalty to abstractions; it was a loyalty to living human

beings. Why did Gandhiji continue his stay in Champaran even after indigo sharecropping disappeared? (All India 2014 Modified)

Answer. After the Champaran battle was won and the land reverted to the peasants, Gandhiji continued to stay on in the region. His loyalty was, indeed, to living human beings and he realised that a lot needed to be done for the upliftment of the peasants in the villages of Champaran. Gandhiji took the initiative and began the work of eradicating their cultural and social backwardness. Primary schools were started so that the poor peasants and their children could be educated. Gandhiji appealed to teachers, and many of his disciples, including his wife and son, volunteered for the work.

Health conditions in the area were also miserable. Gandhiji got a doctor to volunteer his services for six months. All this goes to prove that Gandhiji's loyalty was not to abstractions, but his politics was always intertwined with the practical day to day problems of the millions.

Question.3. Describe how, according to Louis Fischer, Gandhiji succeeded in his Champaran campaign. (Compartment 2014)

Answer. The Champaran campaign was an attempt to free the poor peasants of Champaran from injustice and exploitation at the hands of the Britishers. Gandhiji succeeded in this campaign using his method of satyagraha and non-violence. He visited Muzaffarpur to obtain complete information about the actual condition of the sharecroppers. He first appealed to the concerned authorities, but when there was no positive response, he organised a mass civil, disobedience movement with the support of the peasants.

Gandhiji's main objective was to remove the fear of the British landlords from the heart of the poor peasants and mould a new free Indian, who could participate in the freedom movement of

the country.

He made the peasants aware of their rights and gave them a new-found confidence for fighting their own battles. He also taught them to be self-reliant by refusing to take the help of CF Andrews, his English friend.

Question.4. Why did Gandhiji agree to a settlement of 25% refund to the farmers? How did it

influence the peasant-landlord relationship in Champaran? (All India 2013)

Answer. Under an ancient arrangement, the peasants of Champaran were sharecroppers. The landlords forced the Indian tenants to plant 15% of their holding with indigo and surrender the entire indigo harvest as rent.

After Germany developed synthetic indigo, the landlords wanted to dissolve the agreement, as synthetic indigo would be cheaper. They asked the peasants for compensation to release them from this arrangement. Most of them signed it willingly, but felt cheated after they learned about synthetic indigo.

Gandhiji fought their case and the evidence that he collected was so overwhelming that the landlords were asked to repay. When Gandhiji asked for 50% repayment, the landlords offered to pay only 25%, as they wanted to create a deadlock, and thus prolong the dispute. To everybody surprise, Gandhiji agreed to a refund of only 25%. Gandhiji explained that the amount of refund was not important. What mattered was that the landlords were obliged to surrender a part of their money and with it, part of their prestige.

Question.5. Give an account of Gandhiji's efforts to secure justice for the poor indigo sharecroppers of Champaran. (All India 2012)

Answer. In the course of his journey to Champaran with Rajkumar Shukla, Gandhiji stayed at Muzaffarpur where he met the lawyers and concluded that fighting through courts was not going to solve the problem of the poor sharecroppers of Champaran. He declared that the real relief for them was to be free from fear.

With this intention, he arrived in Champaran and contacted the Secretary of the British Landlord's association. The Secretary refused to provide him any information. After this, Gandhiji met the Commissioner of the Tirhut division who served a notice on him to immediately leave Tirhut.

Gandhiji accepted the notice by signing it and wrote on it that he would not obey the order. He was even willing to court arrest for the cause of the peasants.

After four rounds of talks with the Governor, an official commission of inquiry was appointed in which Gandhiji was made the sole representative of the peasants.

Through this commission Gandhiji succeeded in getting 25% of the compensation award for the poor sharecroppers from the British landowners.

Question.6. The Champaran episode was a turning point in Gandhiji's life. Elucidate. (All India 2012)

Answer. Gandhiji himself accepted the proposition that the Champaran episode was a turning point in his life. It was then that he decided to urge the departure of the British from India. In fact the Champaran episode was the first experiment of civil disobedience in India. When

Gandhiji was on his way to Champaran, he stayed in Muzaffarpur, where he met the lawyers who were fighting cases for the sharecroppers. The peasants were so crushed and fear-stricken . that Gandhiji concluded that law courts were useless. The real relief for them was to be free from fear. The spontaneous demonstration by the peasants showed that they were instilled with a new strength and spirit. Gandhiji showed the poor peasants how to fight the British with 'satyagraha'. He made them aware of their power and the power of ahimsa. All this laid the foundation of his future movements and served as a great source of strength and motivation for all Indians.
