

INDIGO

Summary

This story describes Gandhi's struggle for the poor peasants of Champaran. In those days most of arable land in the Champaran district was divided into large estate owned by Englishmen and worked by Indian tenants. The chief commercial crop was Indigo. The landlords compelled all tenants to plant 15% of their Indigo and surrender the entire Indigo harvest as rent. This was done by long term contract. The British didn't need the Indigo crop any more when Germany had developed synthetic Indigo. Just to release the peasants from the 15% agreement they demanded compensation. Some illiterate peasants agreed but the others refused.

One of the sharecroppers named Raj Kumar Shukla met Gandhi in this regard and compelled him to visit Champaran because of the long term injustice of landlords. Then the two of them boarded a train for the city of Patna in Bihar. From there Shukla led him to the house of a lawyer named Rajendra Prasad. Mahatma Gandhi's humble and simple attire made the servants mistook him as another poor peasant. He surveyed before taking any vital step in order to get those peasants justice. It was the time when British government punished those who in any condition gave shelter to national leaders or protesters.

Gandhi's arrival and the nature of his mission spread like a wildfire. Many lawyers and peasant groups came in large numbers to support him. The lawyers accepted the fact that their charges were high and for a poor peasant it will be irksome. Gandhi rebuked them for collecting big fee from the sharecroppers. He stressed on counseling as this would give the peasants enough confidence to fight their fear. He managed to get justice after a yearlong battle for the peasants. He also made arrangements for the education, health, and hygiene for the families of the poor peasants. He gave them the lesson of self-reliance.

Main points

1. Raj Kumar Shukla, a poor sharecropper wished to meet Gandhi to complain about the injustice of the landlord system in Champaran.
2. Shukla followed Gandhi everywhere and begged him to fix a date to come to his district.
3. Gandhi was much impressed and fixed a schedule.
4. Gandhi and Shukla reached Patna to meet Dr. Rajendra Prasad but he was out of town.
5. Then decided to go to Muzzafarpur first to get detailed information about Champaran sharecroppers.
6. Sent telegram to J B Kriplani and stayed in Prof.Malkani's home – a government servant.
7. Indians afraid to show sympathy to the supporters of home rule.
8. The news of Gandhi's arrival spread- sharecroppers gathered in large number to meet their champion.
9. Gandhi chided the Muzzafarpur lawyers for taking high fee from poor sharecroppers.
10. Champaran district was divided into estate owned by English people, Indians were only tenant farmers.
11. Landlords compelled tenants to plant 15% of their land with indigo and surrender their entire harvest as rent.
12. In the meantime Germany had developed synthetic indigo –British landlords freed the Indian farmers from the 15% arrangement but asked them to pay compensation.

13. Many signed, some resisted, engaged lawyers, landlords hired thugs.
14. Gandhi reached Champaran- visited the secretary of the British landlord association to get the facts but denied as he was an outsider.
15. Gandhi went to the British Official Commissioner who asked him to leave Trihut. Gandhi disobeyed, went to Motihari the capital of Champaran where a vast multitude greeted him, continued his investigations.
16. Visited maltreated villagers – stopped by the police superintendent but disobeyed the order.
17. Motihari black with peasants – spontaneous demonstrations – Gandhi released without bail – Civil Disobedience triumphed.
18. Gandhi agreed to 25% refund by the landowners, it symbolized the surrender of the prestige.
19. Gandhi worked hard towards social economic reforms.
20. Gandhi taught a lesson of self-reliance.

Short Answer Type Questions

Q1. Why was Gandhiji impressed with Rajkumar Shukla's tenacity and determination?

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

Q2. Why did Gandhi chide the lawyers who represented the interests of group of sharecroppers of Champaran?

Ans. Gandhi 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.

Q3. 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 peasants to pay them compensation which some of the peasants resisted and fought their case in court.

Q4. What made the British realize that the Indians could challenge their might hither to unquestioned?

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

Q5. How did Gandhi make the peasants fearless and self-reliant?

Ans. Gandhi 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.

Q6. Why is Raj Kumar Shukla described as being 'resolute'?

Ans. Raj Kumar Shukla was a poor, illiterate sharecropper from Champaran who having heard of Gandhi came to Lucknow to seek his assistance. He was illiterate but resolute. He wished to bring the plight of the sharecroppers of Champaran to the notice of Gandhi and followed him everywhere till he finally agreed to go to Champaran.

Q7. Why do you think the servants thought Gandhi to be another peasant?

Ans. Gandhi was committed to accompany Raj Kumar Shukla to Champaran to address the tribulations of the sharecroppers of that area. En route to Champaran from Calcutta, Raj Kumar Shukla made Gandhi stop in Patna to meet a lawyer called Rajendra Prasad who later on became the first President of India. The servants thought that Gandhi was another peasant as he had come with an illiterate peasant.

Q8. Why did Gandhi agree to a settlement of 25 per cent refund to the farmers?

Ans. Gandhi agreed to a settlement of 25 per cent refund to the farmers just to break the deadlock. Gandhi felt that the amount was less important than the fact that the landlords had been obliged to surrender a part of the money and along with it a part of their pride.

Q9. How was Gandhi able to influence the lawyers? Give instances.

Ans. Gandhi's sincerity of purpose, convincing argumentation and a logical approach deeply influenced the lawyers. Chiding them for over-charging the

peasants, he encouraged them to court arrest for the poor peasants' cause, if he himself got imprisoned.

Q10. What was the attitude of the average Indian in smaller localities towards advocates of 'home rule'?

Ans. In the smaller localities, Indians were afraid to show sympathy with advocates of 'Home Rule'. Thus it was surprising for Gandhi that he received support from Professor J.B. Kripalani of the Arts College of Muzzafarpur. He met him at the station with a large group of students and also housed him for a couple of days.

Q11. How do we know that ordinary people too contributed to the freedom movement?

Ans. Freedom movement is the story of the contribution and sacrifices of countless unknown and unsung heroes like Raj Kumar Shukla and other Champaran sharecroppers. But for their active support and show of solidarity, the first victory of Civil Disobedience in India would not have been possible.

Long Answer Type Questions

Q1. Why was the share-cropping arrangement irksome? What was its fate?

Ans. Most of the cultivating land of Chaniparan district was divided into large estates owned by the Englishmen. It was worked by Indian tenant peasants, for which they paid rent. Indigo was the chief commercial crop. The English planters compelled all peasants to grow indigo in three-twentieths or 15 per cent of their land holdings. The entire indigo harvest was to be surrendered as rent to the British landowners. The landlords came to know that Germany had developed synthetic indigo. Thereupon they obtained agreement, from the share-croppers to pay them the compensation. This share-cropping arrangement was irksome to the peasants. Some signed it willingly and those who opposed engaged lawyers. The landowners hired thugs who forcefully collected the compensation amount.

It was at this point Gandhi reached Champaran. Gandhi's civil disobedience and peasants' spontaneous demonstration compelled the Lieutenant Governor to appoint a commission of inquiry into the share-croppers situation. The official inquiry concluded that the landlords had to refund the part of the money to the peasants. After a few years they abandoned their estates. The indigo share-cropping disappeared completely.

Q2. How did Gandhiji win the battle of Champaran?

Ans. After his arrival at Motihari, Gandhiji used a house as the headquarter so that he can have complete investigation for the sharecroppers. At that time there came a report about mal-treating a peasant. Next morning Gandhiji went to see him but he was overtaken by the police superintendent's messenger with an order to come back. When he reached home, Gandhiji was asked to quit Champaran at once. Gandhiji signed the order but wrote to disobey the order. Next day Gandhi appeared in the court. That night Gandhiji telegraphed Rajendra Prasad to come with the influential friends. When the peasants knew that Gandhiji was in trouble with the authorities, the court ground of Motihari became black with peasants. The officials felt powerless and they had to seek his help. The trial was postponed but Gandhiji protested the delay. In between he was left at liberty. Now Gandhiji asked the prominent lawyers what they would do in case he was sent to jail. They told that they would follow Gandhiji and give the court arrest. Gandhiji exclaimed: "The battle of Champaran is won".

Q3. How did a visit to Champaran become a turning point in Gandhi's life? How does this show Gandhi's love and concern for the common people of India?

Ans. After having clues from Raj Kumar Shukla, Gandhi reached Champaran to understand the appalling conditions of sharecroppers. He found that the large estates were owned by the Englishmen where Indians worked there as their tenant farmers and they paid 15% of their land yield. After great tussel, Gandhi and the lawyers made the Britishers agree to refund 25 percent of the money. Thus farmers became bold and got their rights. Within few years, the landlords left chains over the estates and the farmers became the owners. On finding backwardness of the people there, he appointed volunteers to teach the villagers. Kasturba taught the ashram rules and personal hygiene and community sanitation. A doctor helped the villagers in their health problems. The people realized the value of self-reliance. The countrymen embarked on the task of national freedom movement. It was a turning point in Gandhi's life. All his activities were expressing his love and concern for the Indians.

Q4. What were the steps taken by Gandhiji to solve the problems of social and cultural backwardness in the villages of Champaran?

Ans. Gandhiji saw the cultural and social backwardness in the Champaran villages. In order to educate them he made an appeal for teachers. His two new young pupils Mahadev Desai, Narhari Parikh and their wives offered to work. Several more teachers came from Bombay (Mumbai), Poona and other distant parts of India. His youngest son Devdas and Mrs. Gandhi (Kasturba) also arrived from the Ashram. Primary schools were also opened in six villages to

teach children. Kasturba taught the ashram rules on personal cleanliness and community sanitation. In order to improve the miserable health conditions, Gandhiji got a doctor. He volunteered his services for six months. Kasturba talked to the women to get rid of their filthy state of clothes. During his long stay at Champaran, Gandhiji taught people self-reliance and freedom from the fear of the British. Thus he paved the path for the freedom of India.

Q5. “Freedom from fear is more important than legal justice for the poor.” Do you think that the poor of India are free from fear after Independence?

For the motion

I think that in the present day, the poor in India have been relatively free of fear for the following reasons:

- (a) Ours is a democratic country encouraging the values of individual freedom.
- (b) The Constitution of India guarantees freedom to every citizen in India and this makes a man fearless in his attitude compared to the situation that had prevailed in this country under British domination.
- (c) The legal system in the country is impartial and sympathetic towards people's rightful privileges and demands. This gives the poor in India a voice and a sense of fearlessness.
- (d) The Press in India is ever vigilant and makes it a point to report instances of the abuse of freedom. It is a widely watched medium among both the urban and rural poor and gives them the moral courage to resist curbs on their freedom.
- (e) A sound system of administration ensures that the poor in India are given legal and personal protection.

Against the motion

- (a) Despite being the world's biggest democracy, the poor in India live in denial of fundamental freedoms because they are afraid to raise their voices against injustices committed against them.
- (b) Economic suppression and the lack of social security measures make the poor live in abject fear of falling a prey to disease and death or of being a victim of state and police atrocities.
- (c) Women are in constant fear of their personal safety in both cities and villages irrespective of their age, their education and other empowering tools.
- (d) Corrupt practices and male dominance make their lives oppressive and fearful, for they are denied their basic right to existence if they raise their voices against acts that are committed by their superiors.
- (e) The poor are soft targets for vote bank politics and they dare not oppose the local mafia for fear of the fallout and flack that will come upon him, his villages and his family members.

Q6. Exploitation is a universal phenomenon. The poor indigo farmers were exploited by the British landlords to which Gandhiji objected. Even after our independence we find exploitation of unorganized labour. What values do we learn from Gandhi's campaign to counter the present day problems of exploitation?

Ans. Exploitation is a universal phenomenon. It exists since the origin of the society. The mighty rules the poor. It makes a strata of society slaves and the other one rule them. Since the British rule, this phenomenon is on. They exploited Indians in each and every possible way. Most noticeable was the exploitation of the poor Indigo farmers. They had been getting nothing for their hard work. Gandhiji taught them to speak against it using the power of truth, education, peace and non-violence. The condition is even same in today's scenario. Labourers are still being exploited in unorganized sectors. They Work for long hours but do not get paid according to labour laws. They need to remain united, come ahead and fight for their rights. Legal paths should be followed to get what they deserve. No one should be ready to work in unhygienic and improper working conditions. Togetherness, strength and self-determination will definitely bring fruitful results to the labourers in every field.