



**INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT
SENIOR SECTION**

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

FLAMINGO: INDIGO

By: LOUIS FISCHER



Louis Fischer (1896 — 1970) was a Jewish-American journalist. Among his works were a contribution to the ex-Communist treatise *The God that Failed* (1949), *Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1982), as well as *Life of Lenin*, which won the 1965 National Book Award in History and Biography. The following is an excerpt from his book *the life of Mahatma Gandhi*. The book has been reviewed as one of the best books ever written on Gandhi by Times Educational Supplement

Theme / Central Idea of the Lesson. Analysis of Indigo

Theme

The leadership is shown by Mahatma Gandhi to secure justice for oppressed people through convincing argumentation and negotiation.

The chapter 'Indigo' emphasizes the fact that effective leadership can solve any kinds of problems without any harm to anybody. This chapter deals with the way Mahatma Gandhi solved the problem of poor sharecroppers of Champaran in a non-violent way.

Justify the title of Indigo

Justification of Title

The title 'Indigo' focuses our attention on the issue of exploitation of indigo sharecroppers at the hands of cruel British planters. The British compelled them through a long-term agreement to plant indigo on 15 per cent of their land and surrender the entire harvest as rent. After the development of synthetic indigo by Germany, the British planters extracted money from the peasants as compensation for being released from the 15 per cent agreement. The peasants who wanted their money back filed civil suits. Rajkumar Shukla persuaded Gandhi to take up the case of Indigo sharecroppers. So indigo sharecropping exemplifies the injustice of the British and the Indians' submission to British authority.

The Champaran movement that centred on indigo sharecropping led to the social and cultural upliftment of the peasants. Thus the title 'Indigo' is highly suggestive and appropriate.

Moral/ Message of the lesson – Indigo

Message

The story 'Indigo' highlights the unequal economic system that existed during colonial British rule. It resulted in Indian peasants suffering, while the British planters exploited them. It also highlights the importance of Gandhi's decision to take up their case, which exposed the unjust system.

CHAPTER NUTSHELL

Role of Rajkumar Sukla

1. Poor, emaciated peasant from Champaran.
2. Contacted Gandhi in 1916 in Lucknow.
3. Gandhi dismissed him.
4. Shukla came to complain about the injustice and the landlord system in Bihar.
5. Shukla followed Gandhi to Cawnpore Later at Calcutta.
6. Impressed by the sharecropper's tenacity and story Gandhi relented.

The Issue

1. Arable land in Champaran divided into estates owned by Englishmen, worked by Indian tenants.
2. Chief commercial crop indigo.
3. Tenants to plant on 15% indigo.
4. To surrender entire indigo as rent.
5. Synthetic indigo in the market.
6. Landlords force new agreements.
7. Ask for 15% compensation.
8. Peasants resist, widespread unrest.

How Gandhi reached Champaran

1. Went to Muzaffarpur with Shukla.
2. Obtained complete information.
3. Discussed with Kriplani.
4. Met lawyers, chided them, understood legal angle.
5. Met peasants sensed unrest.
6. Realised peasant fear-strikes.
7. Feels he should arm them with the tool of courage, fearlessness.

Role of Lawyers

1. They represented cases in courts, collected fee.
2. Gandhi criticised them for being duping/misguiding the peasants.
3. They gave legal support.
4. However, they were non-committal if he was arrested.
5. Gandhi appealed for justice for sharecroppers when arrested.
6. Lawyers feel guilty of desertion.
7. They supported Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement.
8. They helped him file grievances against landlords.

Steps were taken by Gandhi

1. Approached British landlord association.
2. Commissioner, cold-shouldered.
3. Proceeded to Motihari, got mass support from peasants, continued investigation.
4. Served official notice to leave Champaran.
5. Signed, said would disobey the order.
6. Served summons, Motihari black with peasants.
7. Peasants demonstrate outside the courtroom.
8. Officials powerless, Government baffled.
9. Gandhi was encouraged by mass support.

10. Court arrest, says obeying the voice of conscience.
11. Convinces lawyers to join the movement.
12. Continues to collect legal evidence.
13. The government forced to set up the Inquiry Commission.
14. Meeting, the deadlock over compensation.
15. Agrees to 25%, landlords learned they were not above the law, peasants got courage.
16. Battle of Champaran won.

Qualities of Gandhi

1. Appreciates loyalty/commitment.
2. Understands the issue e.g., meets Kriplani/lawyers/peasants.
3. Connect with masses.
4. Organised e.g., civil disobedience plan.
5. Fairleader e.g. won lawyers' support.
6. Visionary e.g., improves social, the cultural backwardness of Champaran.

In Brief: Rajkumar Shukla- A poor sharecropper from Champaran wishing to meet Gandhiji - an illiterate but resolute hence followed Gandhiji Lucknow, Cawnpore, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Patna, Muzzafarpur & then Champaran-Servants at Rajendra Prasad's residence thought Gandhiji to be an untouchable -Gandhiji considered as an untouchable because of simple living style and wearing, due to the company of Rajkumar Shukla. He decided to go to Muzzafarpur first to get detailed information about Champaran share-cropper. Sent telegram to J B Kriplani & stayed in Prof Malkani home- a government servant. Indians afraid to show sympathy to the supporters of home rule -The news of Gandhiji'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, and landlords hired thugs. Gandhiji reached Champaran- 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, Gandhiji 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.

Read the extracts and answer the following questions:

1. 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.

- (a). Who is mentioned as ‘champion’ in the above lines?
- (b). How did sharecroppers arrive Muzaffarpur?
- (c). Who are ‘they’ here?
- (d). Where were the peasant groups represented?

2. Most of them wore khadi and worshipped Gandhiji but beyond that they had not the faintest appreciation for political thought of any kind. Naturally they were all averse to the term ‘Communism’.

- (a) Who are “them”?
- (b) What was the role of the poets in Gemini Studios?
- (c) Why did they wear khadi and worship Gandhiji?
- (d) Why were they averse to communism?

Short Answer Questions:

Q1 Why is Rajkumar Shukla described as being ‘resolute’?

Q2. Why do you think the servants thought Gandhiji to be another peasant?

Q3. List the places that Gandhi visited between his first meeting with Shukla and his arrival at Champaran.

Q4. What did the peasants pay to the British landlords as rent? What did the British now want instead and why? What would be the impact of synthetic indigo on the prices of natural indigo?

Q5. Why did Gandhi agree to a settlement of 25 percent refund to the farmers?

Q6. How did the episode change the plight of the peasants?

Q7. How was Gandhi able to influence lawyers? Give instances.

Q8. What was the conflict of duties in which Gandhi was involved?

Q9. When did Gandhi say ‘The battle of Champaran is won’?

Q10. “Civil disobedience had triumphed the first time in India”. How did it happen?

Long Answer Questions:

Introductiontwo sentences...- name of the lesson and author, and the theme.....body (1 - 2 paragraphs)

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

Q2. How do we know that ordinary people too contributed to the freedom movement?

Q3. How did Gandhi use Satyagraha and non-violence to achieve his goal?

Q4. How did Rajkumar Shukla prove to be an important link between Gandhi and his Champaran campaign? *****