

# Indigo - Louis Fischer

( Flamingo - Prose - Chapter 5 )

## About the Text

Extract from Louis Fischer's biography  
'The Life of Mahatma Gandhi' (1950).

Narrates the 1917 Champaran ~~strike~~ satyagraha -  
Gandhi's first major civil-disobedience  
campaign on Indian soil. \*



indigo leaf

## Background : Champaran 1917

Champaran district, Bihar - fertile land,  
owned by British planters. \*

Peasants forced to grow indigo on ~~the~~ 3/20  
of holding - called tinkathia system.

tinkathia = 3 out of 20 kathas compulsory indigo  
← share-cropping

Germany invented a cheap synthetic dye.

Natural indigo market crashed in Europe.

Landlords ~~freed~~ released peasants - but  
demanded compensation for releasing them !

1917 - Champaran - Bihar 1st satyagraha  
← on our soil

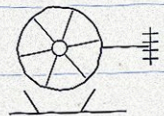
## Rajkumar Shukla's Request

Shukla - a poor, illiterate peasant of Champaran, suffering under the planters.

Travelled to Lucknow Congress (Dec 1916) specifically to meet ~~Ahro~~ Gandhi and plead for Champaran's cause.

" resolute, tenacious " - Fischer ← Shukla's quality *gharaha*

Followed Gandhi everywhere - Cawnpore, the ashram, Calcutta. Refused to give up. Finally Gandhi agreed and set a date.



( self-reliance )

### Gandhi's Journey to Champaran \*

- ① Patna - stopped at Rajendra Prasad's house.
- ② Servants mistook him for an ordinary peasant.
- ③ Muzaffarpur - met Prof. J. B. Kripalani.
- ④ Lawyers of Muzaffarpur came to brief him.
- ⑤ Gandhi scolded them for taking heavy fees from poor share-croppers.

Reached Champaran - began direct inquiry by visiting affected villages himself.

## The Conflict & Court Drama

### Official Resistance

Police superintendent ordered Gandhi to leave Champaran immediately. Gandhi politely ~~agreed~~ refused to obey the order.

" I will not leave " - Gandhi - civil disobedience  
← begins here

### Court Scene

- ① Summons issued - Gandhi appeared in court.
- ② Thousands of peasants gathered outside.
- ③ Gandhi pleaded GUILTY before the magistrate.
- ④ Stated - the higher law of conscience compelled him to disobey unjust orders.
- ⑤ Judge postponed sentence, then dropped case.

### Why it Mattered

First time : Indians defied British law openly - and the British backed down.  
Showed that ~~force~~ moral courage beats fear.

Lesson : ∴ fearlessness + truth - satyagraha  
← core idea

## Settlement & Constructive Work

### Commission of Inquiry

Lt. Governor set up an official Commission of Inquiry - ~~Bose~~ Gandhi was a sole peasant rep.  
 Heaps of evidence collected from peasants.  
 Planters' guilt could not be denied.

Refund : 25% of dues - symbolic, not  
 - monetary win

Money mattered less than what it represented - planters had to surrender, peasants learned they had rights & courage.

### Cultural & Social Work

- ① Primary schools in six villages.
- ② Kasturba taught hygiene to women.
- ③ Volunteers - Mahadev Desai, Narhari Parikh.
- ④ Doctor came for 6 months - Dr. Dev.
- ⑤ Cleanliness drives - latrines, wells, lanes.

" a very ordinary thing " - Gandhi's  
 - humility

Real victory = Indians had been freed from ~~indigo~~ fear of the British.  
 ( = the deeper meaning of Champaran )

## Characters

### M. K. Gandhi

- Strategist : combined legal aid + civil disobedience + constructive work.
- \*Humble : called his action 'ordinary'.
- Fearless : refused to obey unjust law.
- Self-reliant : asked peasants to help themselves first, not depend on him.

### Rajkumar Shukla

- A poor illiterate sharecropper.
- Resolute, tenacious - trailed Gandhi for weeks until he agreed to come.
- Symbol of ~~weak~~ awakened peasant agency.

### Rajendra Prasad

- Hosted Gandhi at Patna (was out then).
- Lawyer, later India's first President.
- Joined Gandhi as a volunteer-lawyer.

### Charles Freer Andrews

- English clergyman, Gandhi's friend.
- Lawyers wanted him to stay for support.
- Gandhi refused : Indians must fight their own battle, not lean on a Briton.

## Themes & Literary Devices

### Major Themes

- ① Satyagraha - truth-force, non-violent protest.  
Champaran was its first Indian trial.
- ② Peasant agency - Shukla embodies the rise of the common Indian voice.
- ③ Self-reliance - Gandhi declined Andrews' help so peasants stand on their own.
- ④ Fearlessness - moral courage > legal force.
- ⑤ Symbolic win > monetary gain.

### Literary Devices

- Biographer's voice  
( 3rd-person account )
- Anecdotal narration  
( story-like incidents )
- Direct dialogue  
( quoted speech )
- Symbolism : ~~dye~~ indigo  
( colonial exploitation )
- Tone : factual, admiring

( quick recall )

#### GLEAN

- G - Gandhi's strategy
- L - Leadership built
- E - Empowered peasants
- A - Andrews / allies
- N - Non-violence wins

## Key Quotations

" battle of Champaran is won " <- Gandhi

" resolute and tenacious " <- Fischer on  
<- Shukla

" a very ordinary thing " <- Gandhi's  
<- modesty

" render humble service " <- Gandhi's  
<- court reply

## Exam-Pattern Points

Short Answer ( 3 marks ) :

- ① Why did Shukla follow Gandhi everywhere ?
- ② What was the tinkathia system ?
- ③ Why did Gandhi refuse Andrews' help ?

Long Answer ( 6 marks ) :

- ④ How did Champaran transform peasants ?
- ⑤ Discuss Gandhi's leadership style in the Champaran episode.
- ⑥ What is the symbolic significance of the 25 % refund settlement ?

## Quick Revision

### Timeline

- ① Dec 1916 - Shukla meets Gandhi at Lucknow.
- ② Apr 1917 - Gandhi reaches Patna → Muzaffarpur.
- ③ Apr - Tours villages, collects evidence.
- ④ Apr - Summons issued; pleads guilty.
- ⑤ 1917 - Lt. Governor's commission set up.
- ⑥ 1917-18 - 25 % refund settlement reached.
- ⑦ 1917-18 - Schools, doctor, sanitation work.

### Core Takeaways\*

- \* First mass civil-disobedience in India.
- \* Win was MORAL, not just financial.
- \* Peasants learned courage & rights.
- \* Self-reliance > external (foreign) help.
- \* Trained future leaders (Rajendra Prasad).

satyagraha = truth + non-violence

<- Gandhi's  
<- core idea

Indigo dye died in Europe -

but the dye of ~~colonial~~ colonial fear  
also began to fade in India.



[ End of Chapter 5 : Indigo ]