

Explanation of the lesson 'Indigo'

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 Gandhi 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 British advice while he was in his own country.