

MIND MAP

SUMMARY OF THE STORY

The story 'Indigo', written by Louis Fischer narrates Gandhiji's struggle for justice to the poor peasants of Champaran. In those days, 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 Indigo on 15% of their land and surrender the entire Indigo harvest as rent. This was done by a long term contract. The British didn't need the Indigo crop any more when Germany developed synthetic Indigo. But to release the peasants from the 15% agreement, they demanded compensation. Some illiterate peasants agreed but the others refused.

When Louis Fischer first met Gandhi in 1942 at his ashram in Sevagram, he told him how and why he decided to disobey the British in 1917. Gandhi had gone to the December 1916 annual convention of the Indian National Congress in Lucknow where he met a poor peasant named Rajkumar Shukla who pleaded Gandhi to visit Champaran. Rajkumar Shukla was one of the sharecroppers who was determined enough to accompany Gandhi everywhere till he fixed a date to visit his district. Impressed by the resoluteness of the peasant, Gandhi agreed to meet him in Calcutta and go with him to Champaran from there. After a few months when Gandhi went to Calcutta, 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 mistake him for another poor peasant. However, Gandhi was not allowed to draw water from the well as they thought that he might turn out to be an untouchable.

Then, Gandhi decided to go to Muzzafarpur to gather more information about the condition of the peasants in Champaran. The news of Gandhi's advent and his mission spread rapidly through Muzzafarpur and Champaran. Many lawyers and peasant groups came in large numbers to support him. Gandhi came to know that the lawyers were charging a fee from the peasants. The lawyers accepted the fact that their charges were high and for a poor peasant it was irksome. Gandhiji rebuked them. He advised them against taking the farmers' cases to the law court as he felt that all that was needed was to make them feel liberated from fear. He stressed on counselling as this would give the peasants enough confidence to fight their fear. He looked into the matter, stood by the side of the poor peasants and fought a long battle of one year, managing to get justice for them. This made the peasants courageous and made them aware of their fundamental rights.

Gandhi's work at Champaran didn't just confine to political or economic struggle. He also worked on social issues like arrangements for education, health and hygiene for the families of the poor peasants. He taught them the lessons of self-reliance and self-dependence. This was one of the first struggles that paved the way for India's independence.

5. INDIGO

by Louis Fischer

CHARACTER SKETCH: Rajkumar Shukla

Rajkumar Shukla was a poor peasant from Champaran. He was a sharecropper under the British landlords there. Under an old agreement, the peasants were compelled by the British to grow indigo on 15% of their land and part with it as rent. Later, to free them from Indigo cultivation, they collected compensation. This became a big trouble for all the peasants in Champaran and there was no one to help them. For this, Rajkumar Shukla had been advised to speak to Gandhiji who he was told, would be able to do something about their problem.

Rajkumar Shukla was resolute and tenacious to take Gandhi with him. It was because of his determination that Gandhiji, went on to initiate one of the most powerful movements in the history of our national struggle.