Indigo by Louis Fischer

In one line: in 1917 Gandhi goes to Champaran in Bihar at the request of a poor sharecropper, Rajkumar Shukla, defies a British order to leave, wins the indigo farmers a 25 per cent refund and frees them from fear.

Background: Louis Fischer (1896-1970), American journalist. The chapter is an extract from his biography *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. Unit theme (NCERT): Gandhi's leadership in winning justice for the oppressed through argument and negotiation.

The chapter in six stages

1. **Shukla's request.** Lucknow Congress, December 1916. Shukla follows Gandhi to Cawnpore and the ashram near Ahmedabad ("Fix a date") and waits for him in Calcutta.
2. **Patna and Muzzafarpur.** Rajendra Prasad's servants keep Gandhi from the well. Kripalani meets him at midnight, 15 April 1917; he stays with Professor Malkani. "The real relief for them is to be free from fear."
3. **The indigo problem.** Tenants grew indigo on 15 per cent of their land and gave the whole crop as rent. After Germany made synthetic indigo, landlords took compensation to end the deal.
4. **The order to leave.** At Motihari Gandhi is told to quit Champaran, writes that he will disobey, pleads guilty. Peasants surround the court. The case is dropped: first win of civil disobedience in modern India.
5. **Inquiry and refund.** About 10,000 statements; commission with Gandhi as the only peasant member. Gandhi asks 50 per cent, accepts the planters' 25 per cent. Prestige, not money, was the point.
6. **Beyond politics.** Schools in six villages, a doctor, cleanliness lessons by Kasturbai. Gandhi refuses C.F. Andrews's help: a lesson in self-reliance.

सारांश हिंदी में

दिसंबर 1916 में लखनऊ कांग्रेस में चंपारण का गरीब किसान राजकुमार शुक्ला गांधीजी को अपने ज़िले में बुलाता है और महीनों उनके पीछे लगा रहता है। चंपारण में अंग्रेज़ ज़मींदार किसानों से उनकी 15 प्रतिशत ज़मीन पर नील उगवाकर पूरी फसल लगान में लेते थे। जर्मनी के कृत्रिम नील के बाद उन्होंने किसानों से मुआवज़ा लेकर यह करार खत्म किया।

मोतिहारी में गांधीजी को चंपारण छोड़ने का आदेश मिला, पर उन्होंने उसे मानने से इनकार किया। हज़ारों किसान अदालत के बाहर जमा हुए और मुकदमा वापस हुआ। जाँच के बाद ज़मींदार 25 प्रतिशत पैसा लौटाने पर राज़ी हुए। गांधीजी ने स्कूल, इलाज और सफाई का काम शुरू किया और लोगों को आत्मनिर्भरता सिखाई।

People

Person	Remember
Rajkumar Shukla	Illiterate but resolute sharecropper
Rajendra Prasad	Patna lawyer; later President of India
J.B. Kripalani	Professor; meets Gandhi at midnight
Prof. Malkani	Government teacher who shelters Gandhi
Sir Edward Gait	Lieutenant-Governor; sets up commission
C.F. Andrews	English pacifist; sent away to Fiji

Themes

Theme	Proof
Freedom from fear	"to be free from fear"
Civil disobedience	Disobeys the order, pleads guilty
Ordinary people	Shukla; crowds at Motihari
Self-reliance	"should not seek a prop in Mr. Andrews"
Politics and daily life	Schools, doctor, sanitation

Word meanings (शब्दार्थ)

Word	Meaning	हिंदी	Word	Meaning	हिंदी
emaciated	very thin	बहुत दुबला	arable	fit for crops	खेती योग्य
sharecropper	pays part of crop as rent	बटाईदार	irksome	annoying	परेशान करने वाला
resolute	determined	दृढ़ निश्चयी	conflict of duties	two duties clash	कर्तव्यों का टकराव
tenacity	not giving up	लगन	deposition	statement on oath	बयान
harbour	give shelter	शरण देना	protracted	long	लंबा खिंचा
chided	scolded	डाँटा	seek a prop	look for support	सहारा ढूँढना

Gandhi's method (link to satyagraha)

Gets the facts first · talks to the other side · disobeys openly and without violence · accepts the penalty, refuses bail · helps officials control the crowd · gives way on money, not on principle.

Common mistakes

- Indigo is an extract from a biography, not a short story.
- Indigo was grown on 15 per cent (three twentieths) of the land, not 50 per cent.
- Gandhi asked 50 per cent and accepted 25 per cent, the planters' offer.
- Synthetic indigo came from Germany. The commissioner was of Tirhut division.
- Gandhi pleaded guilty; the Lieutenant-Governor dropped the case.

Memory trick: "Lucky Cows Always Climb Past Muddy Meadows" = Lucknow, Cawnpore, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Patna, Muzzafarpur, Motihari. Numbers: "15 grown, 50 asked, 25 taken".

Practice questions with answers

1. **Why did Gandhi agree to a 25 per cent refund?** The amount mattered less than the principle: by paying anything back, the landlords lost part of their prestige and the peasants learnt they had rights.
2. **Why is Champaran called a turning point in Gandhi's life?** It was the first success of civil disobedience in India. He "declared that the British could not order me about in my own country".
3. **How did Gandhi influence the lawyers?** He chided them for big fees, and his readiness to go to jail for strangers shamed them into staying: leaving would be "shameful desertion".
4. **How do we know ordinary people helped the freedom movement?** Shukla brought Gandhi; thousands gathered at Motihari; about ten thousand peasants gave statements; volunteers ran the schools.
5. **Why did Gandhi refuse Andrews's help?** Relying on an Englishman showed weakness; the cause was just and Indians had to win it themselves.

Answer lengths: short answers 40-50 words, long answers 120-150 words (CBSE 2025-26 pattern). Match the length to your paper.