

STUDY OF IMPACTS OF GANDHIAN POLITICS IN CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Gandhi arrived in Patna from Calcutta (presently known as Kolkata) on April 10, 1917 with Raj Kumar Shukla. He started this journey with the request of Raj Kumar Shukla to understand the plight of the people of Champaran. Raj Kumar Shukla met Gandhi for the first time at the 32th INC Session held in Lucknow, who had gone in search of leadership to liberate the people of Champaran from their suffering. Historically, the people of Champaran had been struggling against the suppression of indigo planters since 1867. However, the struggle could not succeed in its final intend, while the tenants struggled against the power of suppression. In this case, Gandhi's struggle and methods culminated in the Champaran Agrarian Act – 1918, which freed Champaran's tenants from the grip of planters. This Chapter examines Gandhi's presence in Champaran, his political struggle, and the implementation of his strategies in the emancipation of Champaran's tenants in this background.

Keywords: Leadership, Indigo Planters, Power of Suppression, Grip of Planters.

Introduction

Gandhi's Arrival in Champaran

Gandhi returned to India on January 9, 1909, after the Satyagraha movement in South Africa ended in 1914. He did not participate in any public activity for a year on the suggestions of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. During this time, he studied the situation of India closely (Tendulkar, 1957, p. 1). However, Gandhi attended the 31th INC held in Bombay (currently known as Mumbai) in December 1915 as a delegate. He was elected from the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee (PCC) at the Congress Committee meeting held on December 13, 1915 (INC, 1916, p. 379). In addition, Madan Mohan Malaviya invited him to speak on the Banaras Hindu University's founding day, February 4, 1916. In this address, Gandhi emphasised upon the importance of peasants. According to him, "our salvation can only come through the farmer. Neither the lawyers, nor the doctors, nor the rich landlords are going to secure it" (CWMG, Vol. XIII, p. 214).

Gandhi's Challenge to the British Administration

Gorakh Prasad's house became the centre of Gandhi's struggle in Motihari. On the evening of the day when Gandhi reached Motihari, he heard the news of an attack on a tenant in the evening. Thereafter he went to Jasaulipatti village to meet the concerned tenant the next morning on 16 April (Tendulkar, 1957, p. 35). Prasad (1949) has written that, "Mahatmaji desired to see the condition of the village" (p. 106). Gandhi discussed several things with his companion in this village and reached another village named Chandrahia (Tendulkar, 1957, p. 35). Prasad (1949) has mentioned the statement of Gandhi when he was leaving Chandrahia, "India would get Swaraj only when the condition of these people would improve" (p. 104).

Reform and Methods of Investigation in Champaran

Initially, Gorakh Babu's residence was the centre of primary investigation in Motihari for recording the statements of tenants. At the first stage in Champaran, Gandhi resumed his investigation on the complaints of the raiyats by hearing and recording them. Through this method of investigation, Gandhi openly challenged the government in Champaran as the government was avoiding the issues being faced by indigo tenants. Although open space was required to continue the inquiry on a large-

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scale, the peasants' community of Motihari was not able to provide such a place. As a result, Brajkishore Prasad arranged for a competent open space and the investigation site was shifted from Gorakh Babu's residence. Choudhury (1963) has written that Gandhi's work of hearing and recording grievances of the tenants started in Champaran from here (p. 56).

Both capital and place were important to Gandhi to sustain the struggle in Champaran. In this aspect, money was required to complete the work, since without money it was not possible. However, Gandhi could not appeal for such work in Champaran of raising public funds. Choudhury (1963) has written that most of Gandhi's co-workers were lawyers and they received a proper fee for attending the case of tenants in the court (p. 117). Gandhi wanted contributions in the form of funds either from himself or from his friends. Furthermore, Gandhi's co-workers could either contribute money themselves or collect it from their friends. Yet, Gandhi did not want to collect money from tenants due to their poverty. As a result, Gandhi made the decision not to take anything from the Champaran people, fearing that a misunderstanding might arise. Additionally, an appeal for funds from the country would also be understood as equivalent to the misunderstanding in Champaran. Moreover, Gandhi did not accept the offer of funds worth ₹15,000 of his friends from Bombay. Gandhi intended to enlist the aid of Brajkishore Prasad and P. J. Mehta of Rangoon as much as possible (Tendulkar, 1957, pp. 45-46).

- **The Investigation: Gandhi and British Administration**

Gandhi was to meet Mr. W. Maude, who was scheduled to visit Patna on May 10th, according to a telegraph from the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bihar and Orrisa. In the meeting of the LG, Mr. Cox and Mr. Jameson questions were raised on the official recognition of the inquiry being undertaken to settle disputes by Gandhi. Mr. Cox accused Gandhi of an unfair investigation in terms of the European question, which aroused fear among the planters. In the course of investigation in Champaran by Gandhi, a system of passive resistance against exploitation was developed. The tenants refused to pay the rent and provide their labour and cart facilities to the factory. It spelt ruin to the indigo planters (Tendulkar, 1957, p. 55).

On the morning of May 9, 1917, Gandhi left for Patna along with Brajkishore Prasad to meet Mr. W. Maude. People had heard of Gandhi's tour and he was greeted at every location. Prasad (1949) has mentioned that, "there was a crowd of people waiting to see him raising the usual cry of *Jai* and showering flowers on him" (p. 131). He reached Patna and the meeting with Mr. Maude lasted for about two hours. Mr. Maude stipulated Gandhi to remove his pleader assistants from the inquiry of Champaran. Gandhi denied, "those who were associated with him were not in any way against the Government or likely to cause any disturbance and he altogether refused to comply with this desire of the Government" (Prasad, 1949, p. 132).

Announcement of the Champaran Agrarian Enquiry Committee

The Anglo-Indian Press and the EDA were advising the government to appoint a commission of inquiry into the case of the tenants of Champaran. The unrest of the planters against Gandhi's Champaran investigation in the case of tenants was also putting pressure on the government to themselves investigate into the matter (Prasad, 1949, p. 155). Meanwhile, on May 29, 1917, Gandhi was summoned to appear before the LG, Sir Edward Gait, in Ranchi on June 4, 1917. This alarmed Gandhi's assistant and he expressed apprehension about Gandhi's return from Ranchi. The district authority had not yet given any comment on Gandhi's investigation into the grievances of tenants. Even though, the Anglo-Indian Press was now supporting the demand for an inquiry commission in Champaran, but on the other hand, it was also involved with the planters and their supporters, who were constantly demanding Gandhi's removal from Champaran. Furthermore, the local authorities were sending alarming reports to the government over the developments taking place in the district that undermined their abilities (Tendulkar, 1957, p. 78).

Gandhi discussed this summon to meet with the LG with his co-workers. In this context, Madan Mohan Malaviya was called to Patna for a discussion, and Rajendra Prasad went to consult the leaders. On June 2, 1917, Gandhi reached Patna with Brajkishore Prasad to discuss the issues with prominent leaders. Mazharul Haq, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Dr. Ansari, and Rajendra Prasad decided to go with Gandhi against the action of the Government (Prasad, 1949, p. 155).

Gandhi divided his associates into two groups, one for Bettiah and the other for Motihari. After this, Gandhi left for Ranchi with Brajkishore Prasad. Gandhi discussed the situation in Champaran with LG over the course of two days. Thus, after a discussion with the LG the government agreed to form an official inquiry commission in the matter of the tenants of Champaran, of which Gandhi also became a

member (Prasad, 1949, p. 162). However, Gandhi agreed to act as a member during the investigation of the commission with his co-workers working independently (Tendulkar, 1957, p. 79). In the process of investigation, Gandhi refused to separate himself from his lawyer friends (Choudhury, 1960, p. 277).

Conclusion

Gandhi examined India's political and social circumstances after returning from South Africa. In which, along with participating in the political activities, Gandhi also traveled India in order to understand the larger prevalent social condition. Ultimately, Gandhi reached onto the conclusion that the salvation of India would only come through the peasants. The Champaran Satyagraha provided Gandhi with this opportunity to plug himself into India's freedom struggle. Gandhi firstly challenged the government by introducing his private investigation into the matter of indigo cultivation. The Champaran peasants accepted his leadership because of his image as being an outsider who was sacrificing himself and most importantly, the local leadership of Champaran could not provide the government with a challenge as was being done by Gandhi. The method of Gandhi's investigation always involved mobilisation of tenants, which was the most worrying situation for the planters as well as the local administration.

Amidst these conditions, Gandhi always continued to keep dialogue with the prominent leaders of India as well as the British authority through the medium of letters wherein he apprised them of the political developments of Champaran. Meanwhile, his focus always lay on leadership, as he did not want to let the inquiry stop even after his arrest. Therefore, he divided his colleagues into different groups so that in case of arrest of one group, the next team could continue with the investigation. Consequently, the Government of Bihar and Orissa announced establishing of a committee to investigate into the matters related to Champaran agriculture as well as indigo cultivation.

In fact, Gandhi's arrival in Champaran and his methods of engagement of local peasants and leaders for finding out the real socio-economic conditions of peasants had been unique that in turn challenged the British exploitative policies regarding indigo cultivations. Gandhi had been successful in finding out the truth and bringing the British policies down through his Satyagraha movement which had foot print on his entire journey of freedom struggle in India. Therefore, the final main chapter "Gandhian Politics and Freedom Struggle in India" investigate how Gandhi used his Champaran Satyagraha in the freedom struggle and converted it as the political tool for the achievement of independent of India.

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