Chapter 5: Indigo

CONTENTS

4 exercises · 9 questions

5.1	Understanding the Text	4 Q
5.2	Talking about the Text	2 Q
5.3	Working with Words	1 Q
5.4	Thinking about Language	2 Q

Exercise 5.1 — Understanding the Text

Q1 Why do you think Gandhi considered the Champaran episode to be a turning-point in his life?

SOLUTION

Gandhi considered the Champaran episode a turning-point because it was the first time in modern India that civil disobedience was successfully practised to challenge British authority. When served a notice to quit Champaran, Gandhi openly defied the order, wrote on the receipt that he would disobey it, and pleaded guilty in court — declaring he was caught in a 'conflict of duties' between obeying the law and rendering humanitarian service.

The episode proved that the might of the British, hitherto dreaded and unquestioned, could be challenged by Indians. The spontaneous gathering of thousands of peasants around the courthouse marked the beginning of their liberation from fear. The case was ultimately dropped, signalling the first victory of civil disobedience in modern India.

Beyond politics, Gandhi himself explained the turning-point thus: 'What I did was a very ordinary thing. I declared that the British could not order me about in my own country.' Champaran also showed him that his politics had to be rooted in the concrete, day-to-day problems of the millions, not in abstractions — a principle that would guide the rest of his life.

Answer: The Champaran episode was a turning-point because it was the first successful use of civil disobedience in modern India; it proved British authority could be publicly defied, liberated peasants from fear, and shaped Gandhi's conviction that politics must serve the practical needs of the poor.

Q2 How was Gandhi able to influence lawyers? Give instances.

SOLUTION

Gandhi influenced the Champaran lawyers primarily through his personal example of selfless commitment and by appealing to their conscience. When prominent lawyers from Bihar — Rajendra Prasad, Brij Kishor Babu, Maulana Mazharul Huq and others — arrived and Gandhi asked what they would do if he were sent to jail, they initially said they would go home since there would be no one left to advise. Gandhi immediately turned the question back to the injustice being suffered by the sharecroppers.

Faced with that challenge, the lawyers consulted among themselves. Rajendra Prasad records their conclusion: they felt it would be 'shameful desertion' if Gandhi, a total stranger, was ready to go to prison for the peasants while they — residents of adjoining districts who claimed to have served those very peasants — simply left. Shamed into action, they returned and told Gandhi they were ready to follow him into jail.

Earlier, Gandhi had also chided the Muzzafarpur lawyers for charging large fees from the impoverished sharecroppers, arguing that taking such cases to court did little good and that 'the real relief for them is to be free from fear.' This candid criticism, coming from someone willing to sacrifice his own freedom, carried weight that a mere argument could not.

Answer: Gandhi influenced lawyers by personal example (his readiness to go to jail) and by confronting them with the moral responsibility they owed the peasants; shamed by his sacrifice, the Bihar lawyers resolved to follow him to prison, and he also persuaded Muzzafarpur lawyers to stop extracting large fees from the poor.

Q3 What was the attitude of the average Indian in smaller localities towards advocates of 'home rule'?

SOLUTION

In smaller localities, the average Indian was afraid to show sympathy for advocates of home rule. This is illustrated by Gandhi's stay in Muzzafarpur: he lodged in the home of Professor Malkani, a teacher in a government school, and Gandhi himself noted that it was 'an extraordinary thing in those days for a government professor to harbour a man like me.'

The word 'harbour' is significant — giving shelter to a nationalist agitator was seen as a risky act. Government employees especially feared association with those who challenged British authority, as it could cost them their positions. Ordinary people in smaller towns, lacking the anonymity of large cities and dependent on British goodwill for their livelihoods, kept their distance from the freedom movement even when they privately sympathised with it.

Answer: The average Indian in smaller localities was afraid to show sympathy for advocates of home rule; even sheltering such a person was considered extraordinary and risky, as Gandhi observed when Professor Malkani, a government school teacher, hosted him in Muzzafarpur.

Q4 How do we know that ordinary people too contributed to the freedom movement?

SOLUTION

The text provides several instances showing that ordinary, unnamed people played a vital role in the Champaran movement. First, Rajkumar Shukla — an illiterate, poor sharecropper — was the catalyst for the entire episode. His dogged tenacity in approaching Gandhi at the Lucknow Congress, following him to Cawnpore, back to his ashram near Ahmedabad, and then waiting patiently in Calcutta until Gandhi was free, was what brought Gandhi to Champaran at all.

Second, when Gandhi was in trouble with the authorities in Motihari, the town filled with

peasants overnight. The text notes: 'Morning found the town of Motihari black with peasants.' These thousands of unnamed men and women spontaneously demonstrated around the courthouse, and their collective presence made the officials feel powerless. That demonstration, the text says, was 'the beginning of their liberation from fear of the British.'

Third, sharecroppers from across Champaran walked on foot or came by conveyance to see Gandhi — their champion — and ten thousand of them gave depositions during the subsequent inquiry. Their willingness to step forward and testify was itself an act of courage in a climate of fear. All these ordinary people, acting together, made the Champaran movement possible.

Answer: Ordinary people contributed crucially: Rajkumar Shukla's persistence brought Gandhi to Champaran; thousands of unnamed peasants filled Motihari's streets to support Gandhi when he faced arrest; and ten thousand sharecroppers gave depositions for the official inquiry — collectively demonstrating that the freedom movement was a mass effort, not the work of leaders alone.

Exercise 5.2 — Talking about the Text

Q1 "Freedom from fear is more important than legal justice for the poor." Do you think that the poor of India are free from fear after Independence?

SOLUTION

Gandhi's insight in the text is that where peasants are 'crushed and fear-stricken, law courts are useless.' The real relief, he argued, is freedom from fear — only then can legal justice become meaningful. In Champaran, the mere presence of thousands of peasants around the courthouse marked, in Fischer's words, 'the beginning of their liberation from fear of the British.'

After Independence, legal safeguards — the Constitution, fundamental rights, free legal aid, and independent courts — have significantly expanded the poor's access to formal justice. In that sense, the institutional framework has improved vastly. However, in practice, the poor in India still face many forms of fear: fear of powerful landlords and employers, fear of police harassment, fear of losing daily wages if they pursue a legal case, and fear of social reprisals in caste-ridden or communally sensitive areas.

The gap between legal entitlement and lived reality remains wide. A poor person who has the law on her side may still hesitate to approach a court because of cost, delay, intimidation, and dependence on those very people who wrong them. In this sense, while formal fear of a colonial power is gone, subtler, structural forms of fear persist. Gandhi's observation therefore retains its relevance: without genuine freedom from fear, legal justice remains out of reach for the poor.

Answer: While India's poor have formal constitutional rights and legal protections after Independence, many still live under subtler forms of fear — economic dependence, social intimidation, and the high cost of litigation — making Gandhi's insight that freedom from fear must precede legal justice as relevant today as it was in Champaran.

Q2 The qualities of a good leader.

SOLUTION

The Champaran episode illustrates several qualities of a good leader through Gandhi's conduct. First, he combined courage with non-violence: when ordered to leave Champaran, he openly defied the order, signed a receipt acknowledging it, and pleaded guilty in court — all without aggression. He asked for his own penalty rather than seeking escape.

Second, he was empathetic and grounded in the real needs of the people. He did not limit himself to political negotiations; he set up schools, attended to health conditions, and asked Kasturbai to address the women's sanitation concerns. His politics were, as Fischer writes, 'intertwined with the practical, day-to-day problems of the millions.'

Third, he led by personal example. He was ready to go to jail himself before asking others to follow. It was this readiness that shamed the Bihar lawyers into joining the struggle. Fourth, he believed in building self-reliance among his followers. When the lawyers suggested keeping

C.F. Andrews in Champaran because he was an Englishman, Gandhi firmly rejected it, saying they should not 'seek a prop' in Andrews and must rely on themselves — thereby teaching a lesson in self-reliance.

Finally, he was a skilled negotiator: rather than demanding full repayment from the landlords, he accepted 25 per cent, judging correctly that breaking the landlords' moral dominance mattered more than the exact monetary amount. These qualities — courage, empathy, integrity, and pragmatic wisdom — define effective leadership.

Answer: Gandhi's conduct in Champaran illustrates key leadership qualities: personal courage and non-violent defiance, empathy rooted in people's everyday needs, leading by example, building self-reliance in followers (refusing to depend on C.F. Andrews), and pragmatic negotiation — accepting 25% rather than full refund to break the landlords' moral dominance.

Exercise 5.3 — Working with Words

Q1 List the words used in the text that are related to legal procedures. For example: deposition. List other words that you know that fall into this category.

SOLUTION

Words related to legal procedures found in the text:

- deposition — a formal written or oral statement given under oath, used as evidence
- summons — an official order to appear before a court
- bail — a sum of money or security given to release an accused person pending trial
- judgment — the official decision of a court
- prosecutor — the lawyer who presents the case against the accused
- trial — the formal examination of a case in court
- sentence — the punishment decided by a court after a guilty verdict
- notice (to quit) — an official legal direction or instruction
- commission of inquiry — an official body set up to investigate a matter
- civil disobedience — the deliberate, non-violent refusal to obey unjust laws as a form of protest

Other legal/judicial terms not in the text but related to the same category:

- affidavit — a written statement sworn before an authorised officer
- plaintiff — the party that brings a case to court
- defendant — the party against whom a case is brought
- verdict — the decision reached by a judge or jury
- acquittal — a formal declaration that someone is not guilty
- petition — a formal written application to a court or authority
- subpoena — a writ ordering a person to attend court
- injunction — a court order requiring someone to do or refrain from doing something
- jurisdiction — the official authority of a court to hear cases
- magistrate — a judicial officer who deals with minor cases

Answer: Legal-procedure words from the text include: deposition, summons, bail, judgment, prosecutor, trial, sentence, notice, commission of inquiry, civil disobedience. Additional related terms: affidavit, plaintiff, defendant, verdict, acquittal, petition, subpoena, injunction, jurisdiction, magistrate.

Exercise 5.4 — Thinking about Language

Q1 Notice the sentences in the text which are in 'direct speech'. Why does the author use quotations in his narration?

SOLUTION

Louis Fischer, writing as a journalist-biographer, uses direct speech extensively — quoting Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad, Reverend Hodge, and others — for several interconnected reasons.

First, direct quotations lend authenticity and historical accuracy. Since Fischer is recounting real events he witnessed or researched, the actual words of the participants carry greater credibility than a paraphrase. When Gandhi says 'I have come to the conclusion that we should stop going to law courts' or when he explains his 'conflict of duties' to the judge, the reader hears Gandhi's voice directly and trusts the account.

Second, direct speech reveals character more vividly than reported speech. Gandhi's statement to the lawyers — 'You should not seek a prop in Mr. Andrews because he happens to be an Englishman' — immediately shows his commitment to self-reliance and his clear-headedness. Rajendra Prasad's recorded reflection on why the lawyers stayed shows their moral reckoning in their own words.

Third, quotations mark key turning-points and add dramatic force to the narrative. The exchange 'The battle of Champaran is won' is far more powerful as a direct quotation than as indirect speech. Overall, the use of direct speech transforms what could have been a dry historical account into a vivid, credible, and humanly engaging narrative.

Answer: Fischer uses direct speech to lend historical authenticity (quoting real participants), to reveal character through the speakers' own words, and to add dramatic immediacy to key moments — transforming biography into vivid narrative.

Q2 Notice the use or non-use of the comma in the following sentences.
(a) When I first visited Gandhi in 1942 at his ashram in Sevagram, he told me what happened in Champaran.
(b) He had not proceeded far when the police superintendent's messenger overtook him.
(c) When the court reconvened, the judge said he would not deliver the judgment for several days.

SOLUTION

The sentences illustrate a grammatical rule about comma use with subordinate clauses:

In sentence (a), the subordinate clause 'When I first visited Gandhi in 1942 at his ashram in Sevagram' comes BEFORE the main clause 'he told me what happened in Champaran.' When a subordinate clause precedes the main clause, a comma is used to separate them. Hence the comma after 'Sevagram.'

In sentence (b), the subordinate clause 'when the police superintendent's messenger overtook him' comes AFTER the main clause 'He had not proceeded far.' When the subordinate clause follows the main clause, no comma is used. Hence there is no comma before 'when' in this

sentence.

In sentence (c), the subordinate clause 'When the court reconvened' again comes BEFORE the main clause 'the judge said he would not deliver the judgment for several days.' Following the same rule, a comma appears after 'reconvened.'

Rule: Use a comma after an introductory subordinate clause that precedes the main clause. Omit the comma when the subordinate clause follows the main clause.

Answer: The rule: a comma separates a subordinate clause from the main clause when the subordinate clause comes first (sentences a and c); no comma is used when the subordinate clause follows the main clause (sentence b).