

3. Indigo Blue- History

The importance of blue The Champaran Satyagraha (1917) marked Gandhi's first civil disobedience in India, successfully dismantling the exploitative 'Tinkathia' indigo system through non-violent resistance. While the indigo industry faded, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar later reclaimed the color blue, transforming it from a symbol of forced labor into a political emblem for the Dalit identity and the Republican Party of India.

Context- The Dual Significance of "Indigo Blue"

Historical Origin- The color blue is rooted in the history of Indian independence through the Champaran Satyagraha (1917), which arose from the exploitation of indigo cultivators.

Symbolic Evolution- While the indigo dye industry faded, the color re-emerged with lasting political and social meaning through B.R. Ambedkar, becoming a symbol of Dalit identity and resistance.

1. Champaran Satyagraha (1917)

This movement holds the distinction of being Mahatma Gandhi's first civil disobedience movement in India. It is considered a watershed moment in the Indian Independence Movement.

Geographical Context

Location- Champaran is a district located in North-Western Bihar.

Background and Causes

The Tinkathia System- Originating in the early 19th century, this system forced peasants to cultivate indigo on 3/20th of their land holdings. This mandatory cultivation was a condition of their land tenure.

Economic Shift (German Synthetic Dyes)- Towards the end of the 19th century, German synthetic dyes flooded the market. This invention drastically reduced the global demand for natural indigo, rendering its cultivation unprofitable for European planters.

Planters' Exploitation- Despite the market collapse, European planters did not release peasants unconditionally. They demanded enhanced rents and illegal payments (*sharahbeshi* and *tawan*) as the "price" for releasing cultivators from the obligation of growing indigo.

Early Resistance- Peasant resistance against this oppression began as early as 1908, but their grievances remained unresolved for years.

2. Gandhi's Intervention

The Catalyst- Raj Kumar Shukla

Persistence- Raj Kumar Shukla, a local peasant from Champaran, played a pivotal role.

Persuasion- He persistently followed Gandhi across the country (from Lucknow to Kanpur and Ahmedabad), eventually persuading him to visit Champaran to investigate the farmers' plight.

Arrival and Leadership

The Team- Gandhi arrived in Champaran accompanied by a team of prominent leaders who would become key figures in Indian history-

1. Rajendra Prasad (Future First President of India)
2. Mazharul Haq
3. Mahadev Desai
4. Narhari Parekh
5. J.B. Kripalani

The Act of Civil Disobedience

The Order- Upon arrival, the colonial district administration ordered Gandhi to leave Champaran immediately, citing threats to public order.

The Defiance- Gandhi openly defied the order. Unlike previous leaders who might have protested but complied, Gandhi expressed his willingness to face imprisonment for disobeying the order.

Comparison with Earlier Leaders

Earlier Approach- Leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant had previously complied with similar expulsion orders while organizing public protests against them.

Gandhi's Approach- His refusal marked a new method of political struggle—Passive Resistance or **Satyagraha**—effectively challenging the moral authority of the colonial state.

Investigation and Outcome

Government Retreat- Faced with the threat of mass unrest and Gandhi's firm stand, the government withdrew the expulsion order.

Inquiry Committee- A formal committee of inquiry was appointed to investigate the issue. Crucially, Gandhi was made a member of this committee.

Evidence Collection- Gandhi and his team collected detailed testimonies from nearly 8,000 peasants, creating an undeniable body of evidence against the planters.

The Settlement

Abolition- The Tinkathia system was formally abolished.

Compromise- Gandhi agreed to a compromise where planters would refund only 25% of the illegally extracted money.

Rationale- Gandhi argued that the amount of money was less important than the fact that the planters had been forced to bow to the law, marking a moral victory over their prestige.

Long-term Impact- Within a decade of this movement, European planters abandoned their estates in Champaran.

3. Historical Significance

First Experiment- It was Gandhi's first decisive experiment with Satyagraha on Indian soil.

Shift in Focus- It shifted the focus of the national freedom movement from urban elites to rural peasant issues.

Precursor to Larger Movements

1. It set the stage for the Ahmedabad Mill Strike (1918) and Kheda Satyagraha (1918).
2. It inspired the nationwide protests against the Rowlatt Acts and the subsequent Non-Cooperation Movement.

4. Ambedkar and the Return of the Colour Blue

While the indigo industry faded, the color blue found new political life through Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

Symbolism and Identity

Visual Identity- Ambedkar's public image famously featured him wearing a blue suit, often holding the Constitution. This established a visual link between the color blue and modern Dalit identity.

Institutional Adoption- Ambedkar adopted blue as the flag color for the All India Scheduled Castes Federation (1942). This tradition continued with the Republican Party of India (1956).

Textual & Cultural Roots

Scriptural Reference- In his work *Riddles of Hinduism*, Ambedkar analyzed the link between *varna* (caste) and color.

Interpretation- He noted that in traditional scriptures, Shudras were assigned dark colors, often described as black or blue.

Reclamation- By adopting blue, Ambedkar effectively reclaimed a color associated with marginalization and transformed it into a symbol of empowerment and political assertion.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-importance-of-blue/article70506412.ece>