

IN HIS OWN WORDS

[The Champaran Satyagraha – 1917]

The stain of Indigo :

Champaran is the land of king Janaka. Just as it abounds in mango groves, so used it to be full of indigo plantations until the year 1917. The Champaran tenant was bound by law to plant three out of every twenty parts of his land with indigo for his landlord. This system was known as the tinkathia system, as three kathas out of twenty (which make one acre) had to be planted with indigo.

I must confess that I did not then know even the name, much less the geographical position, of Champaran, and I had hardly any notion of indigo plantations. I had seen packets of indigo, but little dreamed that it was grown and manufactured in Champaran at great hardship to thousands of agriculturists.

Raj Kumar Shukla was one the agriculturists who had been under this harrow, and he was filled with a passion to wash away the stain of indigo for the thousands who were suffering as he had suffered.

This man caught hold of me at Lucknow, where I had gone for the Congress of 1916. ‘Vakil Babu will tell you everything about our distress, he said, and urged me to go the Champaran. ‘Vakil Babu’ was none other than Babu Brajkishore Prasad, who became my esteemed co-worker in Champaran, and who is the soul of public work in Bihar. Rajkumar Shukla brought him to my tent. He was dressed in a black alpaca achkan and trousers. Brajkishore Babu failed then to make an impression on me. I took it that he must be some vakil exploiting the simple agriculturists. Having heard from him something of Champaran, I replied as was my wont: ‘I can give no opinion without seeing the condition with my own eyes. You will please move the resolution in the Congress, but leave me free for the present.’ Rajkumar Shukla of course wanted some help from the Congress. Babu Brajkishore Prasad moved the resolution, expressing sympathy for the people of Champaran, and it was unanimously passed.

Rajkumar Shukla was glad, but far from satisfied. He wanted me personally to visit Champaran and witness the miseries of the ryots there. I told him that I would include Champaran in the tour which I had contemplated and give it a day or two. ‘One day will be enough’, said he, and you will see things with your own eyes.

From Lucknow I went to Kanpur. Rajkumar Shukla followed me there. ‘Champaran is very near here. Please give a day, he insisted.’ Pray excuse me this time. But I promise that I will come’, said I, further committing myself.

I returned to the Ashram. The ubiquitous Rajkumar was there too. ‘Pray fix the day now’, he said. ‘Well’ said I, ‘I have to be in Calcutta on such and such date, come and meet me then, and take me from there.’ I did not know where I was to go, what to do, what things to see.

Before I reached Bhupen Babu’s place in Calcutta, Rajkumar Shukla had gone and established himself there. Thus this ignorant, unsophisticated but resolute agriculturist captured me.

So, early in 1917, we left Calcutta for Champaran, looking just like fellow rustics. I did not even know the train. He took me to it, and we travelled together, reaching Patna in the morning.

This was my first visit to Patna. I had no friend or acquaintance with whom I could think of putting up. I had an idea that Rajkumar Shukla, simple agriculturist he was, must have some influence in Patna. I had come to know him a little more on the journey, and on reaching Patna I had no illusions left concerning him. He was perfectly innocent of everything. The vakils that he had taken to be his friends were really nothing of the sort. Poor Rajkumar was more or less as a menial of them. Between such agriculturist clients and their vakils there is a gulf as wide as the Ganges in flood.

Rajkumar Shukla took me to Rajendra Babu's place in Patna. Rajendra Babu had gone to Puri or some other place, I now forget which. There were one or two servants at the bungalow who paid us no attention. I had with me something to eat. I wanted dates which my companion procured for me from the bazaar.

There was strict untouchability in Bihar. I might not draw water at the well whilst the servants were using it, lest drops of water from my bucket might pollute them, the servants not knowing to what caste I belonged. Rajkumar directed me to the indoor latrine, the servant promptly directed me to the outdoor one. All this was far from surprising or irritating to me, for I was inured to such things. The servants were doing the duty, which they thought Rajendra Babu would wish them to do.

These entertaining experiences enhanced my regard for Rajkumar Shukla, if they also enabled me to know him better. I saw now that Rajkumar Shukla could not guide me, and that I must take the reins in my own hands.

The Gentle Bihari

I knew Maulana Mazharul Haque in London when he was studying for the bar, and when I met him at the Bombay Congress in 1915 – the year in which he was President of the Muslim League he had renewed the acquaintance, and extended me an invitation to stay with him whenever I happened to go to Patna. I bethought myself of this invitation and sent him a note indicating the purpose of my visit. He immediately came in his car, and pressed me to accept his hospitality. I thanked him and requested him to guide me to my destination by the first available train, the railway guide being useless to an utter stranger like me. He had a talk with Rajkumar Shukla and suggested that I should first go to Muzaffarpur. There was a train for that place the same evening and he sent me off by it.

Principal Kripalani was then in Muzaffarpur. I had known of him ever since my visit to Hyderabad. Dr. Choithram had told me of his great sacrifice, of his simple life, and of the Ashram that Dr. Choithram was running out of funds provided by Professor Kripalani. He used to be a professor in the Government College, Muzaffarpur, and had just resigned the post when I went there. I had sent a telegram informing him of my arrival, and he met me at the station with a crowd of students, though the train reached there at midnight. He had no rooms of his own and was staying with Professor Malkani who therefore virtually became my host. It was an extraordinary thing in those days for a Government professor to harbour a man like me.

Professor Kripalani spoke to me about the desperate condition of Bihar, particularly of the Tirhut division and gave me an idea of the difficulty of my task. He

had established very close contact with the Biharis, and had already spoken to them about the mission that took me to Bihar.

In the morning a small group of vakils called on me. I still remember Ramnavmi Prasad among them, as his earnestness specially appealed to me.

‘It is not possible,’ he said, ‘for you to do the kind of work you have come for, if you stay here (meaning Professor Malkani’s quarters). You must come and stay with one of us, Gaya Babu is a well know wakil here. I have come on his behalf to invite you to stay with him. I confess we are all afraid of Government, but we shall render what help we can. Most of the things Rajkumar Shukla has told you are true. It is a pity our leaders are not here today. I have, however, wired to them both, Babu Barjkishore Prasad and Babu Rajendra Prasad. I expected them to arrive shortly, and they are sure to be able to give you all the information you want and to help you considerably. Pray come over to Gaya Babu’s place.

This was the request that I could not resist, though I hesitated for fear of embarrassing Gaya Babu. But he put me at ease, and so I went over to stay with him. He and his people showered all their affection on me.

Brajkishore Babu now arrived from Darbhanga and Rajendra Babu from Puri. Barijkishore Babu was not the Babu Brajkishore Prasad I had met in Lucknow. He impressed me this time with his humility, simplicity, goodness and extraordinary faith, so characteristic of the Biharis, and my heart was joyous over it. The Bihar wakil’s regard for him was an agreeable surprise to me.

Soon I felt myself becoming bound to this circle of friends in life-long friendship. Brajkishore Babu acquainted me with the facts of the case. He used to be in the habit of taking up the cases of the poor tenants. There were two such cases pending when I went there. When he won any such case, he consoled himself that he was doing something for these poor people. Not that he did not charge fees for these simple peasants. Lawyers labour under the belief that, if they do not charge fees, they will have no wherewithal to run their households, and will not be able to render effective help to the poor people. The figures of the fees they charged and the standard of the barrister’s fees in Bengal and Bihar staggered me.

We gave Rs. 10,000 to so and so for his opinion, I was told, nothing less than four figures in any case.

The friend listen to my kindly reproach and did not misunderstand me.

‘Having studied these cases,’ said I, ‘I have come to the conclusion that we should stop going to law courts. Taking such cases to the courts does little good. Where the ryots are so crushed and fear stricken, law courts are useless. The real relief for them is to be free from fear. We cannot sit still until we have driven tinkathia out of Bihar. I had thought that I should be able to leave here in two days, but I now realize that the work might take even two years. I am prepared to give that time, if necessary. I am now feeling my ground, but I want your help.

I found Barjkishore Babu exceptionally cool-headed. ‘We shall render all the help we can, he said quietly, ‘but pray tell us what kind of help you will need.’ And thus we sat talking until midnight.

‘I shall have little use for your legal knowledge,’ I said to them. ‘I want clerical assistance and help in interpretation. It may be necessary to face imprisonment, but much as I would love you to run that risk, you would go only so far as you feel yourselves capable of going. Even turning yourselves into clerks and giving up your profession for an indefinite period is no small thing. I find it difficult to understand the local dialect of Hindi, and I shall not be able to read papers written in Kaithi or Urdu. I shall want you to translate them for me. We cannot afford to pay for this work. It should all be done for love and out of a spirit of service.’

Brijkishore Babu understood this immediately, and he now cross-examined me and his companions by turns. He tried to ascertain the implication of all that I had said - how long their service would be required, how many of them would be needed, whether they might serve by turns and so on. Then he asked the vakils the capacity of their sacrifice.

Ultimately they gave me this assurance. ‘Such and such a number of us will do whatever you may ask. Some of us will be with you for so much time as you may require. The idea of accommodation oneself to imprisonment is a novel thing for us. We will try to assimilate it’.

Face to Face with Ahimsa

My object was to inquire into the condition of the Champaran agriculturist and understand their grievances against the indigo planters. For this purpose it was necessary that I should meet thousands of the ryots. But I deemed it essential, before starting on my inquiry, to know the planters’ side of the case and see the Commissioner of the Division. I sought and was granted appointments with both.

The Secretary of the Planters’ Association told me plainly that I was an outsider and that I had no business to come between the planters and their tenants, but if I had any representation to make, I might submit it in writing. I politely told him that I did not regard myself as an outsider, and that I had every right to inquire into the condition of the tenants if they desired me to do so.

The Commissioner, on whom I called, proceeded to bully me, and advised me forthwith to leave Tirhut.

I acquainted my co-workers with all this, and told them that there was likelihood of Government stopping me from proceeding further, and that I might have to go to jail earlier than I expected, and that, if I was to be arrested, it would be best that the arrest should take place in Motihari or if possible in Bettiah. It was advisable, therefore, that I should go to those places as early as possible.

Champaran is district of the Trihut division and Motihari is its headquarters. Rajkumar Shukla’s place was in the vicinity of Bettiah, and the tenants belonging to the kothis in its neighbourhood were the poorest in the district. Rajkumar Shukla wanted me to see them and I was equally anxious to do so.

So I started with my co-workers for Motihari the same day. Babu Gorakh Prasad harboured us in his home, which became a caravanserai. It could hardly contain us all. The very same day we heard that about five miles from Motihari a tenant had been ill-treated. It was decided that, in company with Babu Dharanidhar Prasad, I should go and see him the next morning, and we accordingly set off for the place on elephant’s back. An elephant, by the way is about as common in Champaran as a bullock-cart in Gujarat. We

had scarcely gone half way when a messenger from the Police Superintendent overtook us and said that the latter had sent his compliments, I saw what he meant. Having left Dharanidhar Babu to proceed to the original destination, I got into the hired carriage which the messenger had brought. He then served on me a notice to leave Champaran, and drove me to my place. On his asking me to acknowledge the service of the notice, I wrote to the effect that I did not propose to comply with it and leave Champaran till my inquiry was finished. Thereupon I received a summons to take my trial the next day for disobeying the order to leave Champaran.

I kept awake that whole night writing letters and giving necessary instructions to Babu Brajkishore Prasad.

The news of the notice and the summons spread like wildfire, and I was told that Motihari that day witnessed unprecedented scenes. Gorakhababu's house and the court house overflowed with men. Fortunately I had finished all my work during the night and so was able to cope with the crowds. My companions proved the greatest help. They occupied themselves with regulating the crowds, for the latter followed me wherever I went.

A sort of friendliness sprang up between the officials – Collector, Magistrate, Police Superintendent – and myself. I might have legally resisted the notices served on me. Instead I accepted them all, and my conduct towards the officials was correct. They thus saw that I did not want to offend them personally, but that I wanted to offer civil resistance to their orders. In this way they were put at ease, and instead of harassing me they gladly availed themselves of my and my co-workers co-operation in regulating the crowds. But it was an ocular demonstration to them of the fact that their authority was shaken. The people had for the moment lost all fear of punishment and yielded to the power of love which their new friend exercised.

It should be remembered that no one knew me in Champaran. The peasants were all ignorant. Champaran, being far up north of the Ganges, and right at the foot of the Himalayas in close proximity to Nepal, was cut off from the rest of India. The Congress was practically unknown in those parts. Even those who had heard the name of the Congress shrank from joining it or even mentioning it. And now the Congress and its members had entered the land, though not in the name of the Congress, yet in a far more real sense.

In consultation with my co-workers I had decided that nothing should be done in the name of the Congress. What we wanted was work, and not name, substance and not shadow. For the name of the Congress was the *betenoire* of the Government and their controllers – the planters. To them the Congress was a byword for lawyers wrangles, evasion of law through legal loopholes, a byword for bomb and anarchical crime and for diplomacy and hypocrisy. We had to disillusion them both. Therefore we had decided not to mention the name of the Congress and not to acquaint the peasants with the organization called the Congress. It was enough, we thought, if they understood and followed the spirit of the Congress instead of its letter.

No emissaries had therefore been sent there, openly or secretly, on behalf of the Congress to prepare the ground for our arrival. Rajkumar Shukla was incapable of reaching the thousands of peasants. No political work had yet been done amongst them. The world outside Champaran was not known to them. And yet they received me as though we had been age-long friends. It is no exaggeration, but the literal truth, to say that in this meeting with the peasants I was face to face with God, Ahimsa and Truth.

When I come to examine my title to this realization, I find nothing but my love for the people. And this in turn is nothing but an expression of my unshakable faith in Ahimsa.

That day in Champaran was unforgettable event in my life and a red-letter day for the peasants and for me.

According to the law, I was to be on my trial, but truly speaking Government was to be on its trial. The Commissioner only succeeded in trapping Government in the net which he had spread for me.

Case Withdrawn

The trial began. The government pleader, the Magistrate and other officials were at a loss to know what to do. The Government pleader was pressing the Magistrate to postpone the case. But I interfered and requested the Magistrate not to postpone the case, as I wanted to plead guilty to having disobeyed the order to leave Champaran, and read a brief statement as follows :

With the permission of the Court I would like to make a brief statement showing why I have taken the very serious step of seemingly disobeying the order passed under Section 144 of Cr. P.C. In my humble opinion it is a question of difference of opinion between the Local Administration and myself. I have entered the country with motives of rendering humanitarian and national service. I have done so in response to the pressing invitation to come and help the ryots, who urge they are not being fairly treated by the indigo planters. I could not render any help without studying the problem. I have, therefore, come to study it with assistance, if possible, of the Administration and the planters. I have no other motive, and cannot believe that my coming can in any way disturb public peace and cause loss of life. I claim to have considerable experience in such matters. The administration, however have thought differently. I fully appreciate their difficulty, and I admit too that they can only proceed upon information they received. As a law-abiding citizen my first instinct would be, as it were, to obey the order served upon me. But I could not do so without doing violence to my sense of duty to those for whom I have come. I feel that I could just now serve them only by remaining in their midst. I could not, therefore, voluntarily retire. Amid this conflict of duties I could only throw the responsibility of removing me from them on the Administration. I am fully conscious of the fact that a person, holding, in the public life of India, a position such as I do, has to be most careful in setting an example. It is my firm belief that in the complex constitution under which we are living, the only safe and honourable course for the self-respecting man is, in the circumstances such as face me, to do what I have decided to do, that is, to submit without protest to the penalty of disobedience.

I venture to make this statement not in any way in extenuation of the penalty to be warded against me, but to show that I have disregarded the order served upon me, not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience to the higher law of our being, the voice of conscience”.

There was now no occasion to postpone the hearing, but as both the Magistrate and the Government pleader had been taken by surprise, the Magistrate postponed judgement. Meanwhile I had wired full details to the Viceroy, to Patna friends, as also to Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and others.

Before I could appear before the Court to receive the sentence, the Magistrate sent a written message that the Lieutenant Governor had ordered the case against me to be withdrawn, and the Collector wrote to me saying that I was at liberty to conduct the proposed inquiry, and that I might count on whatever help I needed from officials. None of us was prepared for this prompt and happy issue.

I called on the Collector, Mr. Heycock. He seemed to be a good man, anxious to do justice. He told me that I might ask for what every papers I desired to see, and that I was at liberty to see him whenever I liked.

The country thus had its first direct object-lesson in Civil Disobedience. The affair was freely discussed both locally and in the press, and my inquiry got unexpected publicity.

It was necessary for my inquiry that the Government should remain neutral. But the inquiry did not need support from press reporters or leading articles in the press. Indeed the situation in Champaran was so delicate and difficult that over-energetic criticism or highly coloured reports might easily damage the cause which I was seeing to espouse. So I wrote to the editors of the principal papers requesting them not to trouble to send any reporters, as I should send them whatever might be necessary for publication and keep them informed.

I knew that the Government attitude countenancing my presence had displeased the Champaran planters, and I knew that even that officials, though they could say nothing openly, could hardly have liked it. Incorrect or misleading reports, therefore, were likely to incense them all the more, and their ire, instead of descending on me, would be sure to descend on the poor fear-stricken ryots and seriously hinder my search for the truth about the case.

In spite of these precautions the planters engineered against me a poisonous agitation. All sorts of falsehoods appeared in the press about my co-workers and myself. But my extreme cautiousness and my insistence on truth, even to the minutest details turned the edge of their sword.

The planters left no stone unturned in maligning Barjkishore Babu but the more they maligned him the more he rose in the estimation of the people.

In such a delicate situation as this I did not think it proper to invite any leaders from other provinces. Pandit Malaviyaji had sent me an assurance that, whenever I wanted him, I had only to send him word, but I did not trouble him. I thus prevented the struggle from assuming a political aspect. But I sent to the leaders and the principal papers occasional reports, not for publication, but merely for their information. I had seen that, even where the end might be political, but where the cause was non-political, one damage it by giving it a political limit. The Champaran struggle was a proof of the fact that disinterested service of the people in any sphere ultimately helps the country politically.

Methods of Work

To give a full account of the Champaran inquiry would be to narrate the history, for the period, of the Champaran ryot, which is out of the question in these chapters. The Champaran inquiry was a bold experiment with Truth and Ahimsa, and I giving week by week only what occurs to me as worth giving from that point of view. For more details the reader must turn to Rajendra Prasad's history of the Champaran Satyagraha in Hindi, of which, I am told, an English edition is now in the press.

But to return to the subject matter of this chapter. The inquiry could not be conducted in Gorakhababu's house, without practically asking poor Gorakhababu to vacate it. And the people of Motihari had not yet shed their fear to the extent of renting a house to us. However, Brajkishore Babu tactfully secured one with considerable open space about it, and we now removed there.

It was not quite possible to carry on the work without money. It had not been the practice hitherto to appeal to the public for money for work of this kind. Brajkishore Babu and his friends were mainly vakils who either contributed funds themselves, or found it from friends whenever there was an occasion. How could they ask the people to pay when they and their kind could well afford to do so? That seemed to be the argument. I had made up my mind not to accept anything from the Champaran ryots. It would be bound to be misinterpreted. I was equally determined not to appeal to the country at large for funds to conduct this inquiry. For that was likely to give it an all-India and political aspect. Friends from Bombay offered Rs. 15,000, but I declined the offer with thanks. I decided to get as much as was possible, with Brajkishore Babu's help, from well to do Biharis living outside Champaran and, if more was needed, to approach my friend Dr. P.J. Mehta of Rangoon. Dr. Mehta readily agreed to send me whatever might be needed. We were thus free from all anxiety on this score. We were not likely to require large funds, as we were bent on exercising the greatest economy in consonance with the poverty of Champaran. Indeed it was found in the end that we did not need any large amount. I have an impression that we expended in all not more than three thousand rupees, and as far as I remember, we saved a few hundred rupees from what we had collected.

The curious ways of living of my companions in the early days were a constant theme of raillery at their expense. Each of the vakils had a servant and a cook, and therefore a separate kitchen, and they often had their dinner as late as midnight. Though they paid their own expenses, their irregularity worried me, but as we had become close friends there was no possibility of a misunderstanding between us, and they received my ridicule in good part. Ultimately it was agreed that the servants should be dispensed with, that all the kitchen should be amalgamated, and that regular hours should be observed. As all were not vegetarians, and as two kitchens would have been expensive, a common vegetarian kitchen was decided upon. It was also felt necessary to insist on simple meals.

These arrangements considerably reduced the expenses and saved us a lot of time and energy, and both these were badly needed. Crowds of peasants came to make their statements and they were followed by an army of companions who filled the compound and garden to overflowing. The efforts of my companions to save me from darshan-seekers were often of no avail, and I had to be exhibited for darshan at particular hours. At least five to seven volunteers were required to take down statements, and even then some people had to go away in the evening without being able to make their statement. All these statements were not essential. Many of them being repetitions, but the people could not be satisfied otherwise, and I appreciated their feeling in the matter.

Those who took down the statements had to observe certain rules. Each peasant had to be closely cross-examined, and who ever failed to satisfy the test was rejected.

This entailed a lot of extra time but most of the statements were thus rendered incontrovertible.

An officer from the C.I.D. would always be present when these statements were recorded. We might have prevented him, but we had decided from the very beginning not only not to mind the presence of C.I.D. officers, but to treat them with courtesy and to give them all the information that it was possible to give them. This was far from doing us any harm. On the contrary the very fact that the statements were taken down in the presence of the C.I.D. officers made the peasants more fearless. Whilst on the one hand excessive fear of the C.I.D. was driven out of the peasants minds, on the other, their presence exercised a natural restraint on exaggeration. It was the business of C.I.D. friends to entrap people and so the peasants had necessarily to be cautious.

As I did not want to irritate the planters, but to win them over by gentleness, I made a point of writing to and meeting such of them against whom allegations of the serious nature were made. I met the Planter's Association as well, placed the ryots grievances before them and acquainted myself with their point of view. Some of the planters hated me, some were indifferent, and a few treated me with courtesy.

Companions

Brajkishore Babu and Rajendra Babu were a matchless pair. Their devotion made it impossible for me to take a single step without their help. Their disciples, or their companions – Shambhu Babu, Anugrahbabu, Dharanibabu, Ramnavmibabu and other vakils – were always with us. Vindhyababu and Janakdhari babu also came and helped us now and then. All these were Biharis. Their principal work was to take down the ryots statements.

Professor Kripalani could not but cast in his lot with us. Though a Sindhi he was more Bihari than a born Bihari. I have seen only a few workers capable of merging themselves in the province of their adoption. Kripalani is one of those few. He made it impossible for anyone to feel that he belonged to a different province. He was my gatekeeper in chief. For the time being he made it the end and aim of his life to save me from darshan – seekers. He warded off people, calling to his aid now his unfailing humour, now his non-violent threats. At nightfall he would take up his occupation of a teacher and regale his communions with his historical studies and observations and quicken any timid visitor into bravery.

Maulana Mazharul Haque had registered his name on the standing list of helpers whom I might count upon whenever necessary, and he made a point of looking in once or twice a month. The pomp and splendour in which he then lived was in sharp contrast to his simple life of today. The way in which he associated with us made us feel that he was one of us, though his fashionable habit give a stranger a different impression.

As I gained experience of Bihar, I became convinced that work of a permanent nature was impossible without proper village education. The ryots' ignorance was pathetic. They either allowed their children to roam about, or made them toil on indigo plantations from morning to night for a couple of coppers a day. In those days a male labourer's wage did not exceed ten pice, a female's did not exceed six, and a child's three. He who succeeded in earning four annas a day was considered most fortunate.

In consultation with my companions I decided to open primary schools in six villages. One of our conditions with the villagers was that they should provide the teachers with board and lodging while we would see to the other expenses. The village

folk had hardly any cash in their hands, but they could well afford to provide foodstuffs. Indeed they had already expressed their readiness to contribute grain and other raw materials.

From where to get the teachers was a great problem. It was difficult to find local teachers who would work for a bare allowance or without remuneration. My idea was never to entrust children to common place teachers. Their literary qualification was not so essential as their moral fibre.

So I issued a public appeal for voluntary teachers. It received a ready response. Sjt. Gangadharrao Deshpande sent Baba Saheb Soman and Pundalik. Shrimati Avantika Bai Gokhle came from Bombay and Mrs. Anandibai Vaishampayan from Poona. I sent to the Ashram for Chhotalal, Surendranath and my son Devdas. About this time Mahadev Desai and Narahari Parikh with their wives cast in their lot with me. Kasturbai was also summoned for the work. This was a fairly strong contingent. Shrimati Avantikabai and Shirmati Anandibai were educated enough, but Shrimati Dugra Desai and Shrimati Manibehn Parikh had nothing more than a bare knowledge of Gujarati, and Kasturbai not even that. How were these ladies to instruct the children in Hindi ?

I explained to them that they were expected to teach the children not grammar and the three R's so much as cleanliness and good manners. I further explained that even as regards letters there was not so great a difference between Gujarati, Hindi and Marathi as they imagined, and in the primary classes, at any rate the teaching of the rudiments of the alphabet and numerals was not a difficult matter. The result was that the classes taken by these ladies were found to be most successful. The experience inspired them with confidence and interest in their work. Avantikabai's became a model school. She brought her exceptional gifts to bear on it. Through these ladies we could, to some extent reach the village women.

But I did not want to stop at providing for primary education. The villages were unsanitary, the lanes full of filth, the wells surrounded by mud and stink and the courtyards unbearably untidy. The elder people badly needed education in cleanliness. They were all suffering from various skin diseases. So it was decided to do as much sanitary work as possible and to penetrate every department of their lives.

Doctors were needed for this work. I requested the Servants of India Society to lend us the services of the late Dr. Dev. We had been great friends, and he readily offered his services for six months. The teachers – men and women – had all to work under him.

All of them had express instructions not to concern themselves with grievances against planters or with politics. People who had any complaints to make were to be referred to me. No one was to venture out of his beat. The friends carried out these instructions with wonderful fidelity. I do not remember a single occasion of indiscipline.

Penetrating The Villages

As far as was possible we placed each school in charge of one man and one woman. These volunteers had to look after medical relief and sanitation. The womenfolk had to be approached through women.

Medical relief was very simple affair. Castor oil, quinine and sulphur ointment were the only drugs provided to the volunteers. If the patient showed a furred tongue or complained of constipation, castor oil was administered, in case of fever quinine was given after an opening dose of castor oil, and the sulphur ointment was applied in case of

boils and itch after thoroughly washing the affected parts. No patient was permitted to take home any medicine. Wherever there was some complication Dr. Dev was consulted. Dr. Dev used to visit each centre on certain fixed days in the week.

Quite a number of people availed themselves of this simple relief. This plan of work will not seem strange when it is remembered that the prevailing ailments were few and amenable to simple treatment, by no means requiring expert help. As for the people the arrangement answered excellently.

Sanitation was difficult affair. The people were not prepared to do anything themselves. Even the field labourers were not ready to do their won scavenging. But Dr. Dev was not a man easily to lose heart. He and the volunteers concentrated their energies on making a village ideally clean. They swept the roads and the courtyards, cleaned out the wells, filled up the pools nearby and lovingly persuaded the villages they shamed people into taking up the work, and in others the people were so enthusiastic that they even prepared roads to enable my car to go from place to place. These sweet experiences were not unmixed with bitter ones of people's apathy. I remember some villagers frankly expressing their dislike for this work.

It may not be out of place here to narrate an experience that I have described before now at many meetings. Bhitiharva was a small village in which was one of our schools. I happened to visit a smaller village in its vicinity and found some of the women dressed very dirtily. So I told my wife to ask them why they did not wash their clothes. She spoke to them. One of the women took her into her hut and said : Look now there is no box or cupboard here containing other clothes. The sari I am wearing is the only one I have. How am I to wash it? Tell Mahatmaji to get me another sari, and I shall then promise to bathe and put on clean clothes every day.

This cottage was not an exception, but a type to be found in many Indian villages. In countless cottages in India people live without any furniture, and without a change of clothes, merely with a rag to cover their shame.

One more experience I will note. In Champaran there is no lack of bamboo and grass. The school hut they had put up at Bhitiharva was made of these materials. Some one – possibly some of the neighbouring planters men – set fire to it one night. It was not thought advisable to build another hut of bamboo and grass. The school was in charge of Soman and Kasturbai. Soman decided to build a pukka house, and thanks to his infectious labour, many co-operated with him, and a brick house was soon made ready. There was no fear now of this building being burnt down.

Thus the volunteers with their schools, sanitation work and medical relief gained the confidence and respect of the village folk, and were able to bring good influence to bear upon them.

But I must confess with regret that my hope of putting this constructive work on a permanent footing was not fulfilled. The volunteers had come for temporary periods, I could not secure any more from outside, and permanent honorary workers from Bihar were not available. As soon as my work in Champaran was finished, work outside, which had been preparing in the meantime, drew me away. The few months work in Champaran, however, took such deep root that its influence in one form or another is to be observed there even today.

When a Governor is good

Whilst on the one hand social service work of the kind I have described in the foregoing chapters was being carried out, on the other the work of recording statements of the ryots' grievances was progressing apace. Thousands of such statements were taken, and they could not but have their effect. The ever growing number of ryots coming to make their statement increased the planters wrath, and they moved heaven and earth to counteract my inquiry.

One day I received a letter from the Bihar Government to the following effect : 'Your inquiry has been sufficiently prolonged; should you not now bring it to an end and leave Bihar? The letter was couched in polite language, but its meaning was obvious.

I wrote in reply that the inquiry was bound to be prolonged, and unless and until it resulted in bringing relief to the people, I had no intention of leaving Bihar. I pointed out that it was open to Government to terminate my inquiry by accepting the ryots grievances as genuine and redressing them, or by recognizing that the ryots had made out a prima facie case for an official inquiry which should be immediately instituted.

Sir Edward Gait, the Lieutenant Governor, asked me to see him, expressed his willingness to appoint an inquiry and invited me to be member of the committee. I ascertained the names of the other members, and after consultation with my co-workers agreed to serve on the Committee, on condition that I should be free to confer with my co-workers during the progress of the inquiry, that Government should recognize that, by being a member of the Committee, I did not cease to be the ryots advocate, and that in case the result of the inquiry failed to give me satisfaction, I should be free to guide and advise the ryots as to what line of action they should take.

Sir Edward Gait accepted the condition as just and proper and announced the inquiry. The late Sir Frank Sly was appointed Chairman of the Committee.

The Committee found in favour of the ryots, and recommended that the planters should refund a portion of the exactions made by them which the Committee had found to be unlawful, and that the tinkathia system should be abolished by law.

Sir Edward Gait had a large share in getting the Committee to make a unanimous report and it getting the agrarian bill passed in accordance with the Committee's recommendation. Had he not adopted a firm attitude, and had he not brought all his tact to bear on the subject, the report would not have been unanimous, and the Agrarian Act would not have been passed. The planters wielded extraordinary power. They offered strenuous opposition to the bill in spite of the report, but Sir Edward Gait remained firm up to the last and fully carried out the recommendations of the Committee.

The tinkathia system which had been in existence for about a century was thus abolished and with it the planters raj came to an end. The ryots, who had all along remained crushed, now somewhat came to their own, and the superstition that the stain of indigo could never be washed out was exploded.

It was my desire to continue the constructive work for some years, to establish more schools and to penetrate the villages more effectively. The ground had been prepared, but it did not please God, as often before, to allow my plans to be fulfilled. Fate decided otherwise and drove me to take up work elsewhere.

Whilst I was yet winding up my work on the Committee, I received a letter from Sjts. Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh telling me of the failure of crops in the Kheda district, and asking me to guide the peasants, who were unable to pay the assessment. I had not the inclination, the ability or the courage to advise without an inquiry on the spot.

At the same time there came a letter from Shrimati Anasuyabai about the condition of labour in Ahmedabad. Wages were low, the labourers had long been agitating for an increment, and I had a desire to guide them if I could. But I had not the confidence to direct even this comparatively small affair from that long distance. So I seized the first opportunity to go to Ahmedabad. I had hoped that I should be able to finish both these matters quickly and get back to Champaran to supervise the constructive work that had been inaugurated there.

But things did not move as swiftly as I had wished, and I was unable to return to Champaran, with the result that the schools closed down one by one. My co-workers and I had built many castles in the air, but they all vanished for the time being.

One of these was cow protection work in Champaran, besides rural sanitation and education. I had seen, in the course of my travels, that cow protection and Hindi propaganda had become the exclusive concern of the Marwadis. A Marwadi friend had sheltered me in his dharmashala whilst at Bettiah. Other Marwadis of the place had interested me in their goshala (dairy). My ideas about cow protection had been definitely formed then, and my conception of the work was the same as it is today. Cow protection, in my opinion, included cattle-breeding improvement of the stock, humane treatment of bullocks, formation of model dairies, etc. The Marwadi friends had promised full co-operation in this work, but as I could not fix myself up in Champaran, the scheme could not be carried out.

The goshala in Bettiah is still there, but it has not become a model dairy, the Champaran bullock is still made to work beyond his capacity, and the so-called Hindu still cruelly belabours the poor animal and disgraces his religion.

That this work should have remained unrealized has been, to me, a continual regret, and whenever I go to Champaran and hear the gentle reproaches of the Marwadi and Bihari friends I recall with a heavy sigh all those pains which I had to drop so abruptly.

The educational work in one way or another is going on in many places, but the cow protection work had not taken firm root, and has not therefore, progressed in the direction intended.