



# Implementation of Constructive Programme in Champaran Satyagraha and its Implications in the Indian Freedom Struggle

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## Abstract:

Gandhi introduced himself in the freedom struggle through the Champaran Satyagraha and Champaran Satyagraha became the first movement of Gandhi in India. However, within a short period, the *tinkathia* system was abolished through the Champaran Agrarian Act-1918. Although, the peasants were struggling for a long time against inhuman exploitation. Gandhi understood the real cause that was the ignorance and helplessness of the peasants. Gandhi believed that without the development of moral and mental conditions, the peasants would not be able to struggle with any such kinds of exploitation. Therefore, Gandhi started the constructive programme that led to the foundation of the new approach in the freedom struggle. The Champaran Satyagraha introduced the nation to the constructive program and attracted prominent leaders of India to Champaran. In this context, this research paper emphasised the significance of constructive programmes through the Champaran Satyagraha. Gandhi's writing has proceeded as the primary source for this research paper. Along with this, other writing incorporated as secondary resource. The analytical and explanatory are the nature of the research paper.

**Keywords:** *M. K. Gandhi, Champaran Satyagraha, Constructive Programme, Social Work, Constructive Work*

## Introduction

“I was born for the constructive programme. It is part of my soul.”

Speech at Gandhi Seva Sangh Meeting- II, February 21, 1940

The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Voll-077 (374)

Gandhi commenced constructive programme in Champaran to uplift the community by eliminating the social evils. Although, these programmes were active for a very short period. In addition, his followers continued the constructive programme in the village after the departure of Gandhi from Champaran. The constructive programme during the Champaran Satyagraha influenced Gandhi and he felt about the implementation of the programme in other parts of the country. However, after twenty-four years of Champaran Satyagraha,

Gandhi conceptualised the constructive program in 1941. Expressing the concept of the constructive programme, Gandhi considered it as the basic mantra of Swaraj to achieve complete independence.

In his book, “Constructive Programme: It’s Meaning and Place” written in December 1941, Gandhi conceptualised the idea of the constructive programme, and three years later, Gandhi revised it again. During the freedom struggle, the comprehensive idea about the constructive programme was upheld in the mind. However, the constructive programme was initiated in the South African Satyagraha which can be seen as Tolstoy Farm and Phoenix Settlement. Nonetheless, the implementation of the constructive programme in the Indian freedom struggle through the Champaran Satyagraha was an experiment of Gandhi. It was not only the social service for Gandhi but, of course, it was the way of achieving Swaraj through *Truth* and *Non-violence* which would lead to truly complete independence.

Gandhi designed the constructive programme for nation-building from below so that people connect with civil disobedience for complete independence. Complete independence of society was Gandhi’s aim which could not be achieved without *Truth* and *Non-violence*. Through the practice of constructive programmes, Gandhi expanded the objective of independence to Poorna Swaraj and Poorna Swaraj was the inherent objective of the constructive programme. Importantly, Gandhi emphasised the responsibility of leaders and suggested achieving complete freedom through constructive programmes.

### **Meaning and Place of Constructive Programme**

The conversation between Gandhi and his co-worker at the Sevagram Ashram is the mainstay of the constructive programme. This conversation is a reflection of Gandhi’s ideology for civil disobedience and constructive programme to work in future. Gandhi did not intend to implement it but, according to him, it was significant work to shape the aspiration of the freedom struggle in future. Interestingly, these ideas were parts of the freedom struggle that was first implemented in India through the Champaran Satyagraha. Gandhi (1941) explained his views on constructive programmes and civil disobedience, “For my handling of Civil Disobedience without the constructive programme will be like a paralysed hand attempting to lift a spoon” (36).

### **Rise of Ideas in Champaran for Constructive Work**

The Champaran Satyagraha held in 1917 against the inhuman system of indigo cultivation. Although the Champaran peasants were struggling for their rights since 1867, this struggle did not succeed. The struggle of indigo peasants was against the exploitation, in which the peasants were raising their voices against the *tinkathia* system (Mittal and Dutt 1976). However, under the leadership of Gandhi, the indigo peasants got rid of the *tinkathia* system very soon. During the Satyagraha in Champaran, Gandhi observed the unique sense of fearlessness and independence among the peasants. In addition, the abolition of the *tinkathia* system inspired the peasants to fight against exploitation. Although, it was not enough for Gandhi because the genuine awakening among peasants against other exploitative forces was obligatory. Gandhi understood that the ignorance of the Champaran peasants was the reason of suffering. Enhancement was impossible without improving the mental and moral condition of Champaran peasants. Rajendra Prasad (2017) has mentioned,

“Gandhiji realised that what he had accomplished would not be clear lasting result unless there was real awakening among raiyats. Without this awakening, he felt they would once again be victimised, if not by the planters, by some others” (82).

Along with the first Satyagraha in India, the investigation into the matter of Champaran peasants was the bold experience with *Truth* and *Non-violence* for Gandhi that was building his ideas every day. Gandhi was getting acquainted with the real cause of Champaran peasants, for that purpose Gandhi started cross verification and adopted on spot observation of cases. He observed the lack of education among the peasants and without the educational approach, it was unimaginable to roll back the permanent nature of the people. Peasants were ignored due to the pathetic vision of the exploiters and deficiency of education among the peasants stimulated a significant role. Therefore, Gandhi, in consultation with his companions, decided to educate the people. To improve the worst condition of the Champaran people, the first step was education. Consequently, several schools opened in Champaran to eradicate the problem on the grassroots level (Gandhi 1927: 385). Shukla has mentioned, “Mahatma had therefore made up his mind at an early stage of his mission” (Shukla 2008: 172).

### **Commencement of Constructive Work**

According to Gandhi, “By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning” (Harijan, 1937, July 31: 197). This idea indicates the all-around progress of a person and the goal of life can be achieved only through true education. Kumar (n.d.) has mentioned, “The pathway to human development goes through the lanes of education”.

Education was a farsighted perspective for Gandhi to the development of Champaran peasants. So, Gandhi in his first step focused on education, that too on the education of children. Gandhi opened three schools in Champaran with the service of teachers of high caliber. He advertised for social service in Champaran even before the work of the inquiry committee started and for this, he also wrote letters to his friends. Along with this, he also communicated to his friends to arrange the volunteers for this constructive work. Unfortunately, he was unable for any initiative until the report was prepared by the inquiry committee (Shukla 2008: 173).

After finalisations of the committee work, Gandhi returned to Champaran again from Bombay with his co-worker. He commenced constructive work on November 8, 1917. In this regard, Gandhi wanted to open one or more schools in the village with the help of each planters’ factory. However, planters neither opened schools nor did provide land for the opening schools in their village. All things considered, the planters were not interested in social work. Consequently, Gandhi resolved to open the schools at independent places (Prasad 2017: 82).

In the first step of the constructive programme, Gandhi endeavoured to open the school at Barharwa on the free land of the ‘Bettiah Raj’. This school was a way of twenty kilometres from Motihari. Babu Shivgulamlal granted his house to accomplish this purpose. Consequently, the first step in the constructive programme was initiated by the opening of the first school at the Barharwa on November 13, 1917. The management of this

school under the leadership of influential people was paramount. This school was under the supervision of Baban Gokhale, his wife Awantikabai Gokhale and Gandhi's youngest son Devadas Gandhi. Baban Gokhale belonged to a European educated engineer from Bombay. Before joining constructive work in Champaran, Awantikabai Gokhale was associated with social work in Bombay. Along with social work experience, she also had experience as a traveller in Europe. Some participants had also come to Champaran from Sabarmati Ashram and attached themselves to educate people in this school e.g. Chhotelal and Surendraji. These participants also contributed other school education (Shukla 2008: 174).

Regarding the progress of constructive work on the education of children, the second school was inaugurated at Bhitiharwa on November 20, 1917. A sadhu of the temple provided rent-free land to open this school. Kasturba Gandhi, Balakrishana Yogeshwar Purohit, and Dr Dev along with Sadashiv Lakshmana Soman (a Gujarati lawyer from Belgaum, Bombay Presidency), associated with social work in Champaran.

With the aid of Seth Ghanshyamdas, the third school of Champaran opened in Madhuban on November 17, 1918. Many well educated and trained co-workers joined this school and participated in the constructive work. For instance, Narahari Dwarkadass Parikh (a Gujarati professor of Satyagraha Ashram Sabarmati), Maniben Parikh (wife of Narahari Dwarkadas Parikh), Mahadev Haribhai Desai (Secretary of Gandhi), Durgabai (wife of Mahadev Haribhai Desai), and Anandibai (sister of Divekar, the registrar of the Women's University of Poona). In addition to these volunteers, Acharya Kripalani and Vishnu Seetaram Randive later connected with the constructive work. Gandhi aimed to completely rid the peasants of Champaran from exploitation so that the people could be ready for struggle in the future. This was in itself a new kind of experiment and implementation in the struggle for freedom.

The volunteers from Bihar in particular were not more interested in participating than the other volunteers. In the volunteers from Bihar, Babu Dharnidhar was the only volunteer who was running the school. According to Shukla (2008), "for some time not one man was found in the whole prominence to take up this social work" (174). Teachers among volunteers were mostly associated with Gujarat and Maharashtra. The volunteers associated with the school of Champaran belonged to a highly educated and respected society. Most of the Gujarati volunteers were connected with Sabarmati Ashram and volunteered for social work.

### **Schooling in Champaran under Constructive Work**

Gandhi started schooling in the constructive programme in India during Champaran Satyagraha. However, it was widely launched in the constructive programme of his South African Satyagraha. The objective of education was decided on the basis of Gandhi's thought. He presented a new world to the neglected people of Champaran and provided a new life for people. It was always stated during the inquiry, "He was doing the work of Swaraj" (Prasad 1949: 201). Shukla (2008) also mentioned, "It was real work of Swaraj" (178).

Teachers associated with the schools were mostly from Gujarat and Bombay. It was a problem in teaching to the students in the mother tongue. The teachers of Gujarat and Bombay had a fundamental problem with the Hindi script in teaching the students of Champaran in their mother tongue. Therefore, Gandhi emphasised teaching more about cleanliness and good behaviour to the students despite subjective knowledge. Hence,

due to not much difference between Gujarati, Hindi, and Marathi script, alphabets and numbers were introduced in the teaching method later. However, Prasad (2017) has mentioned that the students were learning the lesson of morality along with the learning of the alphabet and numbers (83). The people of Champaran could understand their problems so that they could solve them, Gandhi implemented the necessary education system in Champaran. Shukla (2008) has quoted Gandhi, "We can get Swaraj only when we improve the lot of these people" (178). Consequently, Gandhi considered it important to implement the constructive programme for reform among the people of Champaran (Shukla 2008: 178).

### **Programme of Sanitation and Cleanliness in the Constructive Work**

Gandhi's constructive work in Champaran was aimed at making people self-reliant. This would not have been possible without development consciousness among elders even though the children were being educated. In this context, Gandhi included the work of cleanliness and sanitation in the constructive programme to sensitize the elder of Champaran. Additionally, the village wells were clogged with mud and stench, and the condition of the courtyards was unbearable and unhygienic. Therefore, along with the children, the elderly also required cleanliness education which was essential to transform the condition of the village and the way of living. Gandhi observed that the general ability to organise the village had been lost and the joint action among the villagers had also been destroyed. In these conditions, it was necessary to develop the concept of being organised among the peasants of Champaran. As per Gandhi's understanding, the constructive programme was a transformative aspect for the advancement of Champaran peasants and the constructive work would shape the matter of organising and develop the matter of living.

The mud and stench had made the condition of Champaran unbearable and unhygienic. Therefore, the people of Champaran were suffering from skin infections and other diseases due to filth. Consequently, to promote awareness among the people, Gandhi organised sanitary work. It was a participatory action and the process was pervading every part of life. Sanitation work for skin diseases would not have been possible without a doctor. Accordingly, Gandhi approached the *Servants of India Society* to serve doctors in Champaran. *Servants of India Society* send Dr Dev for this service and he served six months in Champaran. All volunteers worked under him for sanitation and cleanliness (Gandhi 1927: 387).

Medical relief and sanitation work were both going on simultaneously and volunteers were engaged together. It was very difficult to work, people were not willing ready to do it themselves. Even the field workers were not prepared for themselves. In this context, the awareness programme among the people became necessary to make people more conscious about the constructive programmes. Therefore, Gandhi and Dr Dev put more emphasis on cleanliness awareness programmes among the people, so that people could voluntarily join the constructive work (Gandhi 1927: 388).

The constructive programme focused not only on men but also included women. Under the constructive work, some programmes were initiated keeping in mind the women in Champaran. Under the programmes, women learned the art of beautifying the kitchen, pathways and walls of the house. Kasturba Gandhi engaged in this work and took up the work related to the kitchen. She inspired women for cleanliness and also made them aware of the cleanliness of the kitchen and house. Instead of this, she questioned wearing dirty clothes.

The colonisation drastically affected the indigenous structure of India during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Gandhi recorded in his autobiography the conversation of a woman wearing a dirty sari with Kasturba and it represents the current condition of India and Indians, “Look now, there is no box or cupboard here containing other clothes. The *sari* I am wearing it the only one I have. How am I to wash? Tell the Mahatmaji to get another *sari*, and I shall then promise to bath and put on clean clothes every day (Gandhi 1927: 388)”.

Compassion developed among the people and the volunteers through the school, sanitation programme and medical relief. It played an important role in developing trust among the people and had a good impact on the future struggle for freedom struggle. However, according to Gandhi, “But I must confess with rerate that my hope of putting this constructive work on a permanent footing was not fulfilled” (Gandhi 1927: 389). Cleanliness of the well around the village was the most significant work in the constructive programme and it was commendable efforts of Gandhi for the betterment of Champaran. It also became ‘a programme which latter become the programme of the whole country’ (Prasad 2017: 82).

### **Freedom Struggle: Constructive Programme and Volunteer Service**

The volunteers initiated their service in Champaran as per the direction of Gandhi and Dr Dev. Champaran had become the centre of the implementation of the constructive programme. During the freedom struggle, along with the movement to get rid of the problem, remedial action was started through the constructive programme. Therefore, the action process in the Champaran Satyagraha attracted prominent leaders toward Champaran. Under the constructive work, the condition of roads, courtyards, wells of Champaran improved with the help of the volunteers. The volunteers treated the villagers with great affection so that they agreed to live together for social work (Gandhi 1927: 388).

Some volunteers dedicated the rest of their lives in Champaran to the cause of the country. During the Non-cooperation Movement, the people of Champaran participated with great enthusiasm and seeing their enthusiasm, Gandhi visited Champaran again during the movement. The integrity of the constructive work of Champaran paved the great value for service to the nation. Therefore, Gandhi always used to say during Champaran Satyagraha, “We were engaged in genuine work for Swaraj... There is no doubt that a great work for Swaraj was done in Champaran” (Prasad 2017: 82).

This type of public service was a new approach in the getting process freedom struggle and Champaran became the beginning of this outlook. The central politics of the Indian National Congress was essentially limited to attending the annual conferences and passing resolutions on issues related to problems. Even the provincial unions of the Indian National Congress were confined to the centre politics and were following the centre’s path. The members of the Legislative Council of Indian National Congress were raising questions on the issues of the country, presenting their views, but was not in many positions to do something. These methods were considered to serve the country from beginning to end (until Gandhi became the prominent leader of the Indian National Congress) in the context of Indian Nationalism. At the same time, the people of the country were not able to connect with the political method adopted by the Indian National Congress. Its leadership had nothing left to connect themselves to the people. The language of politics was English and English savvy people were participating in the session of the Indian National Congress. Language and politics

became the separation among the masses and the propitiations. Language and politics had become the foremost cause of separation between the politicians and the people. In these circumstances, “Gandhiji’s visit to Champaran breathed a new life among the masses: there was great awaking among them” (Prasad 2017: 83).

### **The Aspect of Constructive Work on Equality**

While reaching Champaran, Gandhi’s main predicament was inequality among people. This disparity was also existing between politicians and people. Therefore, Gandhi first tried to unite these people for a common cause. He succeeded in doing so when the service of the servant was abolished and the common kitchen was adopted. This was the first step in this process and the second step was accomplished through the constructive programme.

The principle of *Truth* and *Non-violence* was an inspired method for Gandhi which was reflected on many other occasions as well. *Truth* and *Non-violence* in his political action inspired people to attach with him. Additionally, he needed several volunteers for whom women and men were desirable for constructive work. Therefore, amidst the caste diversity and hierarchy among the people, Gandhi accepted only desirable people. He drew the attention of the volunteers toward the noble ideals to be implemented in society. Therefore, he refused the servant service within a short period. The number of the servant was reduced in the camp of inquiry committee and later the system of servant service completely abolished. This system was a process of maintaining equality among the people so that the feeling of inequality does not arise among the people. Consequently, people came together to do things like bathing, washing, kitchen and cleaning. All the volunteers were on equal policies for everything without any hesitation. The travelling of Gandhi in the third compartment of the train was maintaining integrity with the volunteers. Therefore, Shukla (2008) has mentioned, “The seed of the Indian Swaraj has been truly shown in Champaran” (179).

### **Other Aspect of Constructive Work of Champaran**

Gandhi’s constructive programme in Champaran remained active for a short time. As Gandhi (1927) also considered, “The volunteers had come for temporary periods, I could not secure any more from outside, and permanent harmony workers from Bihar were not available” (389). However, he expressed his intention, “It was my desire to continue the constructive work for some years, to establish more schools and to penetrate the village more effectively. The ground has been prepared, but it did not please God, as often before, to allow my plans to be fulfilled. Fate decided and drove me to take up work elsewhere” (Gandhi 1927: 391). Apart from this, Desai (2009) has mentioned, “The most significant achievement of the Champaran movement was that a people oppressed and crushed into silence for over century experienced fearlessness. Freedom from fear was the key to India’s freedom” (51).

Many of Gandhi’s new allies came out in Champaran Satyagraha and became a part of the freedom struggle with Gandhi’s ideology. Gandhi’s followers learned lessons from the Gandhian method of working which brought harmony in their lives wherever they went. To maintain gender equality, every school was tried as much as possible to have one male and one female in charge. Certainly, this type of thinking was the process

of establishing an egalitarian society. Despite the short life of the constructive programmes, colleagues like Acharya J. B. Kripalani continued the sanitation work and education in Champaran. Hence, the continuation of the constructive work in Champaran was sustainable. According to Prasad (1949), "If this work had been continued for some time, then not only Champaran but the other district of Bihar would have undergone a great change for the better" (201). Gandhi articulated about people's participation in the constructive programmes, "We can get the Swaraj only when the lot of these people" (Prasad 1949: 201).

## Conclusion

On the suggestion of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Gandhi visited places like Champaran to perceive actual conditions of India as well as Indians after his return from South Africa. The understanding of Indians and Indian political circumstances inspired him to do something different. His speech at the Banaras Hindu University in 1916 explicates his decision. Therefore, in the Champaran Satyagraha, Gandhi not only focused on getting rid of the centuries of exploitation but also tries to find a permanent solution through a constructive programme. He was establishing common participation of all individuals in Indian nationalism through the constructive programme which made all the people a participant in the Indian freedom struggle with an initiative. The constructive work for Gandhi in Champaran was an experiment to put forward a good initiative.

The constructive program was not new to Gandhi as he had already done some work in South Africa but India was new to him in the Indian freedom struggle. Champaran was a hinterland of the prominent leader but Gandhi attracted the attention of the people by experimentation with his constructive ideas. The constructive work is a gradual process of development and hence, Gandhi adopted it gradually in his political action.

Additionally, the constructive work in Champaran strengthened the leaders' relationship with the vulnerable and neglected people, thereby strengthening the Indian national movement. The role of people and its impact during the Non-cooperation Movement in Champaran can be seen through the prism of constructive work when a large number of people became part of the movement. After the successful result of the implementation of the constructive programme, Gandhi implemented it in a gradual process in other parts of the country. As a result, the constructive work was varying use in the history of the Indian freedom struggle, drawing public attention to Gandhi as well as establishing a strong relationship between leaders and the public. Ultimately, the experiment of social work in Champaran Satyagraha reflected the constructive programme that Gandhi had conceptualised in 1941 after a gradual process in the freedom struggle.



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