

## 16. 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 am 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 Sjt. Rajendra Prasad's history of the Champaran *Satyagraha* in Hindi, of which, I am told, an English edition<sup>1</sup> is now in the press.

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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, Brajkishorebabu tactfully secured one with considerable open space about it, and we now removed there.

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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. Brajkishorebabu 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 Brajkishorebabu'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.

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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 kitchens 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.

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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 statements. 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.

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Those who took down the statements had to observe certain rules. Each peasant had to be closely cross-examined, and whoever failed to satisfy the test was rejected. This entailed a lot of extra time but most of the statements were thus rendered incontrovertible.

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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.

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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 a serious nature were made. I met the Planters' 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.

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1. The English edition has since been published by S. Ganesan, Triplicane, Madras.