INDIGO by Louis Fischer

Short answer Questions. 30-40 words.

1. Who was Rajkumar Shukla? Why was he described as resolute?
2. Where did Gandhiji stay in Patna? How was he treated there?
3. Why did Gandhiji decide to go to Muzzaffarpur?
4. “It was an extraordinary thing in those days.” What does ‘it’ refer to? Why was it extraordinary?
5. Why did Gandhiji chide the lawyers of Muzzafarpur?
6. What was the share cropping arrangement?
7. Which places did Gandhiji visit in Champaran? How was he treated there?
8. Why was Gandhiji’s support needed to regulate the crowd?
9. What was the result of Gndhiji’s intervention in the peasants’ trial?
10. What part of the money was demanded form the landlords? How much did the peasants ultimately get?
11. What was Gandhiji’s explanation for the 25% refund?
12. Why did Gandhi refuse to take Sir Andrew’s help in Champaran?

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Long Answer Questions. 120-150 words.

1. The Champaran episode was a turning point in Gandhi’s life. Elaborate.
2. How did Gandhi win the battle of Champaran?
3. How did Gandhi try to solve the problems of social and cultural backwardness in Champaran?

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ANSWER KEY

Short Answers.

1. Rajkumar Shukla was a poor, illiterate sharecropper of the indigo sharecropping system. He has been described as being resolute as he continued to wait till Gandhiji fixed an appointment to meet him at Calcutta. Even in Calcutta, he waited till Gandhi was free and accompanied him to Champaran.
2. In Patna, Gandhiji stayed at the house of a lawyer named Rajendra Prasad, who later became the President of The Congress Party and India. The servants mistook him for a sharecropper and treated him like an untouchable. He wasn’t permitted to draw water from the well.
3. Gandhiji decided to go to Muzzafarpur to obtain more information about the conditions of sharecroppers. He was received by Professor J.B. Kriplani along with a large body of students.
4. ‘It’ refers to giving shelter to Gandhi. It was an extraordinary thing as in smaller localities, the Indians were afraid to show sympathy for advocates of home rule and Professors Malkani, a teacher in a government school, had agreed to give shelter to Gandhiji.
5. When Gandhi came to know that the lawyers collected big fee from the share croppers, he stated that taking such cases to the courts didn’t do any good where the peasants were so crushed and fear struck. The real relief for the peasant was to be free from fear.
6. The peasants of Champaran were engaged in sharecropping by the British landlords under long term share cropping arrangements. They were compelled to plant Indigo on 15% of their holdings and surrender the entire harvest as rent. When synthetic Indigo came into the market, the British demanded compensation to free the peasants from the sharecropping arrangement.
7. In Champaran, first Gandhi visited the secretary of the British landlords’ association. The secretary refused to give him information as he was an outsider. Next, Gandhi called on the British official commissioner of the Trihut division and the commissioner bullied him and advised him to leave Trihut. Instead of leaving Gandhi proceeded to Motihari to continue his investigations.
8. When Gandhiji reached Motihari, all the peasants reached the district to support the Mahatma who had come to help them. Their spontaneous demonstration around the courthouse made the officials powerless. Hence, the officials sought Gandhi’s support to regulate the crowd.
9. After Gandhi’s intervention in the peasants’ trial lieutenant Governor appointed an official commission of inquiry into the Indigo sharecroppers’ condition. The commission consisted of landlords, Government officials and Gandhi as the representative of the peasants. Finally the court gave the order to the landlords to repay the money they had extorted from the sharecroppers.
10. When Gandhi was asked about the repayment of extorted money, he asked for 50% only. The planters offered to refund 25%, which Gandhi agreed to.
11. Gandhi explained agreeing to 25% refund of the money as the amount of the refund wasn’t as important as the fact that the landlords had agreed to surrender part of the money. With the money, they also surrendered part of their prestige. The peasants realised that they had rights and learnt courage.
12. When Gandhi’s lawyer friends suggested taking help, Sir Andrews had offered. Gandhi refused to accept the offer as it showed the weakness of Indians. In this way Gandhi taught them the first lesson in self-reliance.

Long Answers:

1. After being informed by Rajkumar Shukla about the irksome arrangement of sharecropping in Champaran, Gandhi reached there to understand the problem in more detail. He found that the estates were owned by British landlords and the tenant farmers had to grow Indigo on 15% of their holding and surrender the entire harvest as rent. Synthetic Indigo in Germany paved way for redundancy of natural Indigo. In order to free the peasants from the sharecropping arrangement of Indigo, the landlords demanded money. After great tussle, Gandhi, compelled the landlords to pay 25% of the money as compensation to the peasants. Farmers realised their rights and learnt courage. The Champaran episode thus became a turning point in Gandhi’s life as he declared that the British couldn’t order him about in his own country.
2. After arriving at Champaran, Gandhi visited the secretary of the British landlords’ association. The secretary refused to give him information as he was an outsider. Next, Gandhi called on the British official commissioner of the Trihut division and the commissioner bullied him and advised him to leave Trihut. Instead of leaving, Gandhi proceeded to Motihari to continue his investigations. When Gandhiji reached Motihari, all the peasants reached the district to support the Mahatma who had come to help them. Their spontaneous demonstration around the courthouse made the officials powerless. After Gandhi’s intervention in the peasants’ trial lieutenant Governor appointed an official commission of inquiry into the Indigo sharecroppers’ condition. The commission consisted of landlords, Government officials and Gandhi as the representative of the peasants. Finally the court gave the order to the landlords to repay the money they had extorted from the sharecroppers. Thus, the battle of Chamaparan was won.
3. After witnessing the social and cultural backwardness in Champaran Gandhi appealed for teachers. Mahadev Desai and Narhari Parikh and their wives volunteered for their work. Devadas, Gandhi’s youngest son and Mrs Gandhi also arrived. Primary schools were opened in six villages. Kasturbai taught the ashram rules on personal cleanliness and community sanitation. In order to improve health conditions, Gandhi got a doctor to volunteer his services. Three medicines were available- castor oil, quinine and sulphur ointment. Malaria patients were given quinine and castor oil, skin diseases were treated with ointment and castor oil and anybody with coated tongue was given a dose of castor oil. Kasturbai taught the women health and hygiene. Gandhi kept a distant watch on the ashram and sent regular instructions. In this way he brought a change in social and cultural conditions of people living in Champaran.