

Play “The Great Trial” depicting Mahatma Gandhi’s seditious trial in 1922 staged at GNLU

Gandhinagar, Oct 01, 2019: On the eve of 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Gujarat National Law University (GNLU) staged a play “The Great Trial” depicting Mahatma Gandhi’s seditious trial in 1922.

Gandhi was standing trial on charges of sedition in 1922. He was being charged with “bringing or attempting to excite disaffection towards the British Government established by law in British India”. This trial, in many ways, shows how the man who was seen as the ‘half-naked fakir’ managed to incite people to rebel against the authority of the state as a way of showing resistance towards colonial rule.

When Mahatma Gandhi entered the Central Hall of the Government Circuit House at Ahmedabad on the March 18, 1922, to face a trial on a charge of sedition under section 124A of the Indian Penal Code about two hundred spectators inside the improvised courtroom stood up as a mark of respect to the frail figure in loincloth. Even the presiding judge, R.S. Broomfield, rose to the occasion. Even while passing the sentence of 6 years of imprisonment, he chivalrously conceded, "It would be impossible to ignore the fact that in the eyes of millions of your countrymen, you are a great patriot and a great leader."

Gandhi bluntly reminded the Government that “affection cannot be manufactured, or regulated by, law”. After the charges were read out, he replied, “I plead guilty to all the charges”. Gandhi pointed out that he had no disaffection towards any particular person or administrator, but he emphasized that he was disaffected towards a government which has done more harm than good in India.

Gandhi then made an extraordinary plea which he alone could have uttered. The only course open, Gandhi said to the judge, is to, “resign your post which I know is impossible for you to do and dissociate yourself from evil if you feel that the law you are called upon to administer is an evil thing and that in reality, I am innocent.” He told the Judge that he was not asking for mercy. He said that, which, according to the law is a deliberate crime, is what appears to him to be the highest duty of a citizen. He, with his impressive oratory skills, tried to sensitize the audience present in the courtroom that day. He said everything that was raging inside him, in his heart, by saying that, “No sophistry, no jugglery in figures can explain away the evidence the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye. I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and the town-dwellers of India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unequalled in history”. It clearly defined the basic issues involved in any revolt against slavery and

injustice. Every word uttered by Gandhi in the whole trial was to defend his countrymen's right of a non-violent non-cooperation movement against an unjust imperialist system.

On completion of Gandhi's statement, the Judge cited the court trial of Lokmanya Tilak, and based on the same ruling announced six years of imprisonment to Gandhi and added that "Nobody would be happier than me the day the Government releases you from the prison". Gandhi accepted the judgment.

The trial indeed is one of the most celebrated incidents of the struggle for freedom. It was a victory for Gandhi and diminished the prestige of the colonial government.

The event was organised by GNLU's Legal History Museum in collaboration with the GNLU Theatre Club and Abhivyakti.

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