1. I must at the outset express my gratitude to the India League of America for having invited me to participate in this meeting held to commemorate the birthday of probably the greatest man produced by the non-white world within the last century. I regard this invitation not merely as a personal honour, but as a recognition of the practical interest which Mahatma Gandhi took in the welfare of the inhabitants of the Cinderella of the Continents—Africa. In that last refuge of colonialism where millions of dependent peoples are slowly but surely beginning to raise awkward questions about their status and their fundamental freedoms, the name of Gandhi is held in the highest regard.

2. It is traditional among all peoples, not least among the African people to whom I belong for all forms of greatness but especially greatness in human personality to be approached with a due sense of awe and reverence. On an occasion such as this it would be unworthy of the memory of the great man to whom we have met to pay humble tribute if we were to indulge in tawdry sensationalism and cheap propaganda for this or that cause in which he had to be interested. Rather is it an occasion when putting aside the distracting affairs of the troubled world in which we live, we can experience, however momentarily, the sense of elation and upliftment that such a life was lived in our midst. We can remind ourselves, with the poet, that the lives of all great men remind us that we can make our lives sublime.

3. Gandhi belonged not to India alone. He was in every sense of the word that rare and much desired type of individual—a world citizen in whose achievements every nation and every race can justly take a pride. In his dealings with people he looked beyond the accidents of birth, race, culture, and station in life and saw and respected their common humanity. Equally at home with princes and untouchables, with rich and poor, with black and white, he practised as well as preached the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God. What for so many of us is an article of faith to which we give but lip service he made the basis of action and daily behaviour.

4. The association of the country—South Africa—with the name of Gandhi in the topic for this evening is no mistake. It is common knowledge that for a number of years Gandhi made his home in South Africa, at Phoenix, Natal. Close to his home lived one of our greatest African leaders in South Africa, John L. Dube, who received his college education in this country and afterwards returned to his homeland to become the founder of one of the best known educational institutions for the African people—Ohlange Institute—and the first President-General of the African National Congress when it was established in 1912. Dube and Gandhi
had much in common in the problems which confronted them in their labours for the underprivileged groups to which they belonged. Both have passed on, but Manilal Gandhi, the son of the Mahatma, still lives in South Africa. He was an honoured guest at the annual conference of the African National Congress in December, 1951 when that body took the historic decision to embark upon the civil disobedience of which we have heard so much in recent weeks. As a guest he took no part in the deliberations which led up to that decision, but on the invitation of the conference he later addressed that gathering on the implications of the momentous decision taken that day. In fact in order to attend that conference he became the first defier of "unjust laws", because the conference was held in the Free State, a province which Indians are not allowed to enter without a permit. Manilal announced beforehand that he would attend the Conference without procuring the necessary permit, and when he reached Béecemfontein, the venue of the Conference, he used a railway bridge set aside for 'Europeans only'. Both at the Conference and afterwards Manilal did not hesitate to express his doubts as to whether the non-whites, especially the Africans, were ready for a peaceful, non-violent passive resistance campaign; but recently, nearly three months after its commencement, he has said, "I am simply amazed at the non-violent spirit and the discipline the Africans in the present struggle are showing. No one had dreamt that they could keep so calm, cool and collected. Father's spirit seems to be watching and guiding them". That is a significant tribute to the indigenous inhabitants of the country in which Gandhi first won his spurs in the political battle. It was in South Africa that he learnt some of the lessons which matter stood him in such good stead when he later transferred his activities to the wider stage of India where he brought to a successful denouement one of the greatest political dramas of all time.

What are some of the lessons which Gandhi learnt, applied and tried to pass on directly or indirectly to his followers and to others during his brief sojourn in South Africa?

First, he learnt that the hard crust of imperialism, with all the injustices and the humiliation which it invariably implies for those who are subject to it, could not be penetrated by 'sweet reasonableness'. A master in the art of mediation, the protracted negotiations which he had from time to time with the powers—thenceforward particularly with General Smuts, taught him that those who benefit from keeping others in subjection will not forego their gains, however obtained, without a bitter struggle, and that appeals to them to bring their sense of justice and fairplay to bear upon the situation seldom produce the desired results.

Secondly, he discovered that the struggle for freedom which confronted the subject peoples of the world was one which could not be fought with material weapons such
as spears and guns. Not only because the subject peoples of empires are as a rule systematically deprived of every weapon of offence or defence, but also because the issues involved in that struggle are moral and spiritual issues which cannot be settled by the arbitrament of arms. He saw that it was only to the extent that the non-whites succeeded in placing their fight on a spiritual as against a purely materialistic basis that they could hope to sustain their effort.

Thirdly, he learnt and later taught oppressed peoples that non-violence is not an easy form of struggle. It requires a degree of self-discipline and self-control surpassing that required of the man who fights behind the shield of modern armour. The only shield of the non-violent resister is moral principle coupled with personal conviction, a shield which is impervious to modern instruments of coercion but is not sufficient to protect the body from pain and suffering.

Finally, Gandhi learnt and taught that the struggle for right against might must and can be carried on without bitterness. The dictum that if one's enemy is in trouble one should heap coals of fire on him by going to his aid, he applied in the Boer War by raising an Indian ambulance corps which was of material assistance to the British forces, and also in the famous Zulu rising of 1906. The anti-whiteism which is so readily levelled against those who fight against imperialism was of course against him, but he constantly reminded his followers that they must not harbour any feelings of ill-will or hatred against their oppressors.

Did the people of South Africa learn anything from Gandhi? It is regrettable, but I think that it is fair to say that the rulers of South Africa do not appear to have benefitted from the fact that this great life was lived in their midst. On the contrary. Their determination to pursue a policy of political subjugation and racial discrimination against the non-whites is greater than ever. They take special pride in what is described as the traditional policy of South Africa, and the world at large is expected to acquiesce in the perpetuation of this system on the specious grounds that other nations harbour similar skeletons in their cupboards or that in any event questions of domestic jurisdiction are involved. It is but poor consolation to those who are denied human rights and fundamental freedoms to have to be satisfied with the legalistic jugglery of international forums. Injustice cannot be converted into justice because it happens to be carried on under the cloak of domestic jurisdiction, especially when those subject to it are denied all access to the normal channels of working for its removal.

It is this failure to obtain redress of their legitimate grievances by the
normal democratic methods which has led to the present civil disobedience campaign in South Africa. In this campaign the non-whites under the leadership of their national organisations have joined hands in a nation-wide peaceful non-violent campaign against the "unjust laws" and the political plan of the South African government for rigid segregation of the non-whites, their total disfranchisement, colour bars in employment, irksome restrictions on freedom of movement and denial of property rights, especially as far as land is concerned. The decision to embark upon this campaign was not taken hastily or lightly. It was only after the matter had been discussed in local, provincial (state) and national meetings held by non-white groups that the decision was finally taken at the national conference of the African National Congress in December, 1951 followed by that of the South African Indian Congress at a later date. The Campaign was actually launched on June 26, 1952. Since that date over 4000 volunteers, including 26 of the top flight leaders of the non-white organisations have been arrested. A number have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment with hard labour, varying from one month to six months, while some have been punished by means of flogging. Participation in the movement is on an entirely voluntary basis. All volunteers are required to undergo a period of training and to observe the discipline code adopted for the campaign in which they are instructed. None of those arrested, men and women, have offered any resistance to the treatment they have received. The spirit in which the Campaign is carried on was well summed up by Dr J.L.Z. Njongwe, Acting President of the African National Congress(Cape) when he said to an African audience:—

"In the conduct of our struggle, do not allow yourselves to develop race hatred because if you do, when we have got this Africa, we shall have to fight race hatred again which is something we do not desire".

Attempts have of course been made to discredit this campaign by characterising it as communist-inspired or Indian-inspired or anti-white, but the non-whites have refused to be diverted from their course by these diversionary tactics.

In any case, if by Indian-inspired is meant that the Africans have caught the spirit of Gandhi, they have nothing to be ashamed of. Would that in a world which is yearning for peace and harmony between its peoples, more of them might catch his spirit and emulate his example! An admirer of the Mahatma has recently reminded us that "it is not without significance that movement of resistance to this doctrine (of racial discrimination) which can still show respect, and even forgiveness, towards its proponents, was initiated by Gandhi in a country which was named Natal after the Nativity of Jesus Christ".