

Reply to Krishna Gandhi

GSR

September 2, 2025

I shall be as brief as possible. Here is my reply.

- 1 I think Gandhi has entirely missed the point of the debate. It is not whether Man is superior to all living beings (perhaps He is!). It is about the claim that Swaraj is natural to Man and all living beings. My contention has been that it is a human construct or socio- cultural. There is nothing 'natural' about it, just as there is nothing ' natural' about so many things spoken about as natural to man. Man is said to be pugnacious, gregarious, selfish, greedy, etc etc,. Anthropology has shown that most of the claims about human nature are false, and are only 'culturally' specific. One has to read some works like Robert Louis or James Frazer or Margaret Mead to know how cultural are the alleged human traits.
- 2 Why do I say all this? Not because Man is superior to all other creatures. It is because Man alone has culture, which once created, governs his behaviour more than the instincts that he has like any biological being. I have already said only we have 'right and wrong', 'good and bad', 'legal and illegal', 'moral and immoral' and so on. We don't have bastards in the animal world, nor do we have democrats and fascists among them.
- 3 We have been saying that it is a Western view to look at Man as the crown of creation. More specifically everyone who has been anti-colonial at sometime in their life hold this view. It has also been called a Judeo-Christian view. The great saint-poet of Tamil, Avvaiyar, who is supposed to have lived during Sangam age and also around the 12th century CE (!), says in a remarkable stanza that it is a great privilege to be born as a human being! She further says it is a further privilege to be born without infirmities such as being blind or lame. Therefore one should use this birth as human being properly and lead a moral-spiritual life. (Incidentally, do we speak of 'spirituality' of animals?) The Kannada saint-poet of the 15th century, Purandara Dasa, sang 'manava janma doddadu' and therefore one shouldn't waste it in the pursuit of petty things. We must stop accusing the West of considering human beings as superior to all other beings. Nor is the theory of evolution only Western or Darwinian. Jainism has a theory of evolution which says that everything, including inanimate rocks and stones, ultimately becomes Enlightened or Jina (except that it takes millions of years for a piece of rock to attain that state while human beings can attain it in their own life !)
- 4 That we should treat all life as sacred, etc, is a normative stand. That we have not lived up to this norm is very clear from it being reiterated so often by so many of us. Non violence similarly may be a great virtue, followed more in violation than in its practice.
- 5 Khalil Gibran, writing on Children, says that, "Your children are not your children, they are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself." Similarly, Krishna Gandhi wants us to believe Swaraj is a longing of all living beings. It is fine so long as it is only poetic.