

Reading Gandhi and Quit India Movement through *Meri Teri Uski Baat* and *Jug-Jug Jiyo*

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Yashpal's voluminous Hindi novel *Meri Teri Uski Baat* (1974) and Samarendra Basu's four-part Bengali novel *Jug-Jug Jiyo* (1977) can be read together in the context of the Quit India Movement, or the August Revolution. The authors of these two massive political novels - published in the 1970s, roughly three and a half decades after the movement - were active participants in the communist movement. In both novels, the conflict and debate between Congress Socialists (who played an active role in the Quit India Movement) and the communist cadre (who opposed it) center primarily on the concepts of nationalism, independence, and revolution. Additionally, the roles and public perceptions of Gandhi - who issued the "Do or Die" call - and Subhash Chandra Bose - who sought to achieve the nation's independence by aligning with the fascist powers of the Second World War - become subjects of debate among party cadres and the general public. In both novels, the presentation of conceptual debates, the depiction of events related to the movement, and the portrayal of leaders are primarily viewed through the lens of the communist camp.

In *Meri Teri Uski Baat*, Yashpal encompasses the period spanning from the First World War to the Second World War – a period regarded as the "Gandhi Era" of India's freedom struggle. *Jug-Jug Jiyo* chronicles events ranging from the inception of the Quit India Movement to a few years after Gandhi's assassination. It focuses more on events and episodes from the characters' personal and family lives than on political events, with the personal and the political spheres overlapping significantly.

The narrative of *Meri Teri Uski Baat* moves through cities like Lucknow, Allahabad, Banaras, and Ballia during the movement's initial phase, and shifts to Bombay during its second phase. *Jug-Jug Jiyo* is set primarily in Calcutta and its surrounding areas. Midnapore, where the movement was most intense in Bengal, is mentioned intermittently. While *Meri Teri Uski Baat* primarily depicts the activities of Congress Socialists, *Jug-Jug Jiyo* highlights the activities of the Communist cadre. In fact, in *Jug-Jug Jiyo*, the party affiliations of characters supporting or participating in the movement - whether they are Congress Socialist Party workers, Congress activists, or Gandhians - are not as clearly defined as they are in *Meri Teri Uski Baat*.

Meri Teri Uski Baat mentions Indian leaders such as Gandhi, Acharya Narendra Dev, JP, Lohia, Minoo Masani, Usha Mehta, Yusuf Meherally, Subhash Chandra Bose, Nehru, and Jinnah, alongside foreign leaders like Hitler, Churchill, and Attlee. Jug-Jug Jiyo does not mention any socialist leaders; instead, it references figures such as P.C. Joshi, Rajani Palme Dutt, Bose, Gandhi, Hitler, Stalin, Harry Pollitt, and Churchill. In Meri Teri Uski Baat, students are primarily at the center of the action and debate, whereas in Jug-Jug Jiyo, the characters driving the action and debate are Communist and Socialist cadres from diverse walks of life. While the debates in Meri Teri Uski Baat remain verbal, the situation in the fourth part of Jug-Jug Jiyo escalates: when Socialist and Congress activists are released from prison, they engage in physical violence and abusive behaviour against Communist cadres to exact revenge for alleged acts of informing and causing their arrests by the police.

While reading these novels, one can observe a significant difference in how Yashpal and Basu handle their novelistic themes. This can be understood by looking at the portrayal of Gandhi in both novels. In Meri Teri Uski Baat, Yashpal declares Gandhi to be the greatest villain of the Gandhian era. The novel omits the political Gandhi; instead, we encounter a Gandhi who is far removed from the masses - engrossed in the pursuit of truth or repeatedly fasting for self-purification. He is depicted as a 'Pope', 'Prophet', 'Rasool', 'Avatar', or 'Representative of God'. Gandhi's ideology and role are described as a 'fraud', a 'charade', 'an unfathomable riddle', or a form of 'non-violent dictatorship'. To the Communists, he appears as a 'fascist tiger in the guise of a non-violent lamb', the 'Pope of the Hindus', or the 'Kanhaiya of Sabarmati'.

Far from awakening political or social consciousness among the people, he is represented as a spreader of superstitions. Gandhi is also held responsible for Muslims becoming alienated from the Congress and joining the League. He is portrayed as someone who appeases the British - folding his hands even after being kicked by them and begging for mercy so on and so forth. There is no end to the vices attributed to the man named Gandhi. In fact, the entire novel could well be read as a chronicle of Gandhi-bashing!

The novel does not objectively prove Gandhi to be a villain; rather, he is merely declared as such from a Communist perspective. Not a single Gandhian - or even a Congress member - figures among the characters to argue for Gandhi's action and philosophy. It appears that, even after three and a half decades, there is no separation between Yashpal the author of the ideological tract 'Gandhivad Ki

Shav-Pariksha' (The Post-mortem of Gandhism) (1941) and Yashpal the novelist who wrote Meri Teri Uski Baat.

Now, let us briefly consider the portrayal of Gandhi in Jug-Jug Jiyo. There is no place for Gandhi in the plot or the content of this novel. Although Gandhi is mentioned several times in the novel, there is no attempt to separately assess or evaluate him amidst the unfolding events. The novel's protagonist, Tridivesh, is a young painter and a dedicated Communist Party activist. In the fourth part, he creates an eight-foot-tall, colourful portrait of Gandhi. A senior comrade, Nityanand Chaudhary, angrily directed Tridivesh to remove the painting's title - *Daridra Narayan Ke Charnon Mein* (God in the form of the destitute). Tridivesh, however, had chosen the title to signify the proletariat. Unlike other party activists, he does not take offense when P.C. Joshi addresses Gandhi as Father of the Nation in their correspondence. The painting is allowed to remain in the party office for a few days but is eventually removed without Tridivesh's knowledge. The author has created this episode to suggest the opposition to Gandhi within communist circles.

In Meri Teri Uski Baat, Yashpal's concern extends only as far as the life that exists within the ideological framework. For Yashpal, ideology serves less as an inspiration and more as a tether to which he binds the novel's plot, episodes, and characters. Basu regards life and the enduring will to live as superior to ideology. He juxtaposes the myriad international debates and claims surrounding the Second World War - and the Quit India Movement that surged like a turbulent ocean wave in its midst - against the backdrop of the Bengal Famine. Political cadres, entangled in fierce debates over imperialism, fascism, nationalism, independence, and revolution, fail to grasp or even perceive the truth that the famine - which plunged millions into a hell of death, starvation, and humiliation - was a "Clive Street" game plan rather than a natural disaster. The author of Jug-Jug Jiyo does not side-line the complex dimensions of life in order to establish the supremacy of an ideology. That is why Meri Teri Uski Baat does not rise above being a thesis novel; Jug-Jug Jiyo, on the other hand - as stated on its flap - "reveals the supreme truth of life, encompassing the confluence of the obscene and the descent, the ugly and the beautiful, the inauspicious and the auspicious."

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