

**India and Britain Inside and Outside Sakku Bai and Jackson: The  
Narrator and the Anglo-Indian Family in Ismat Chughtai's "Quit India"  
("Hindustan Chod Do")**

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Abstract

Ismat Chughtai's short story "Quit India" ("Hindustan Chod Do" in Urdu, 1953) represents the relationship between Indians and British colonists and Anglo-Indian Indians by examining the life of Eric William Jackson, a British official in pre-Independence India and an unemployed outcast and displaced person following Independence who lives with his working-class lover Sakku bai, and the narrator's outlook towards the family. The ex-British official Jackson's attempt to "Indianize" himself perhaps fails after Independence because he does not seek the desire of the new Indian state in the spaces of business and government like he does in the domestic space of Sakku Bai's lodgings and in his relationship with her and perhaps also because the narrator and the other citizens of the new Indian state ignore those who are powerless such as the charwoman Sakku bai and the unemployed Jackson. The narrator's focus on Jackson and Sakku bai's family seems to indicate, at least partly, a desire to look outside the domestic sphere for mental and spiritual stimulation even though she appears to be a typical domestic goddess.

This could be related to the women's movement's need for a greater role for women outside the house in pre-Independence and Independent India.

Keywords: Quit India movement, "Indianized" Englishmen, Indian women's movement, Anglo-Indians, Ismat Chughtai

### Introduction

Ismat Chughtai's short story "Quit India" ("Hindustan Chod Do" in Urdu, 1953) represents the relationship between Indians and British colonists and Anglo-Indian Indians by examining the life of Eric William Jackson, a British official in pre-Independence India and an unemployed outcast and displaced person following Independence who lives with his working-class lover Sakku bai in the servants' quarters of the bungalow which was earlier his official residence, and the narrator's outlook towards the family. It could be examined whether the narrator encourages the reader to think that the "quitting" of India by Jackson is mandatory for India's independence. The narrator seems to contend that Jackson should have been penalized for his violent actions preceding Independence, even if they were considered the duties of a British official. She conjures up the image of Jackson's penitence at "the bullets fired from his machine gun that pierced the hearts of innocent people, a fact that was now pricking his conscience" (89), as he hallucinates and cries loudly while dying of fever. The narrator seems to advance the view that Jackson is a "fading relic of the British empire" (90) as she thinks the colonizers' Britain is still present in him. His infliction of domestic violence on his lover does not end after Independence as his alcoholism generates quarrels with Sakku bai even though he loves her like "a helpless baby" (87).

The narrator's gaze of revulsion, surveillance, sympathy and desire with respect to Sakku bai and her Anglo-Indian family could be examined by the reader to apprehend whether Indians

negate Jackson's need for freedom and human dignity after Independence just as the ex-colonizers had negated Indians' rights. It could be asked whether the colonial gaze of pre-Independence India is replicated in the gaze of the female narrator at the Anglo-Indian family after Independence. Just as colonized women were taken to be representative of the "barbarism" of the natives, and just as colonizers were often represented as the saviours of colonized women in colonized India (Chatterjee 622), the narrator also seems to consider the "feminized" Englishman who is looked after by Sakku bai after Independence as uncultured and Sakku as his "saviour". The narrator appears to look at colonization as an attempt of the "surplus", unwanted populations of the colonizers' countries such as Jackson to seek the desire of the colonizers such as the British colonial government that employs Jackson as well as of the colonized such as Sakku bai. The ex-British official Jackson's attempt to "Indianize" himself perhaps fails after Independence because he does not seek the desire of the new Indian state in the spaces of business and government like he does in the domestic space of Sakku Bai's lodgings and in his relationship with her and perhaps also because the narrator and the other citizens of the new Indian state ignore those who are powerless such as the charwoman Sakku bai and the unemployed Jackson.

#### Jackson and India Inside and Outside Sakku Bai

Jackson would have been classified as an Anglo-Indian by the British until the twentieth century. The March number of the 1898 volume of the *British Medical Journal* argued that the term "Anglo-Indian" referred to both white British residents of India or their descendants as well as the descendants of mixed race of a white British father (645). The article titled "The Anglo-Indian" published in the medical journal also highlighted the "loyalty" of Anglo-Indians to the British empire and the white British features that they had inherited from their ancestors which

were thought to have been “degraded” by the climate, the racial blending and social interaction in India. Their attachment to education and government jobs and their objective of upward social mobility was considered exemplary as they were contesting in India against both Europeans – including those British colonists who could not be called long-term residents of India – and native Indians. As the January 1919 issue of *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* argued, some Anglo-Indians resented the labeling of people of mixed racial descent as Anglo-Indian (V.A.S. 62). They wished to call people with white British as well as native Indian ancestors Eurasians. Under the British Government of India Act of 1935 (and following the independence of India), Jackson’s children would have been called Anglo-Indians as they were born in India and had at least one male ancestor who was of European descent (217). Jackson himself would have been seen as a British subject who refused to return to Britain after Indian Independence and who was eligible for Indian citizenship, according to the Indian Constitution, as he had been a resident of India for a long time (24).

A question to be asked is whether Jackson represents the fears and anxieties of all the people of English and European descent who departed from India in the years following Independence because they were apprehensive that they would never be full citizens in the new republic. Although all people residing in India at the time of Independence for a long time became Indian citizens automatically, Anglo-Indians were more likely to fear abuse and face abuse because of their English and European ancestors, the ex-colonizers. The Quit India Movement had been initiated in August 1942 with the Quit India speech delivered by Mahatma Gandhi on 8 August 1942 after the Quit India Resolution was introduced by him at the Mumbai (then Bombay) session of the All India Congress Committee. The Resolution was conceptualized after the failure of the Cripps Mission sent by the metropole of the British empire to promise

dominion status and self-rule to India after the conclusion of World War II if assent for the entry of India and British Indian soldiers in the war was given by nationalist leaders. The Quit India Resolution (the commencement date of the movement was to be 9 August 1942) insisted on the non-violent struggle of the members of the Congress Party and its supporters for Indian Independence and the “orderly and timely withdrawal” (a case made first in 1942 in the *Harijan* newspaper) of the British colonists from India (Deol and Jaggi 2). In his Quit India speech delivered on 8 August 1942 to the All India Congress Committee, Mahatma Gandhi argued that the eviction of the British colonizers from India would not be an act of hatred against the colonizers but an act of friendship because the colonizers had no moral right to demand participation in World War II on behalf of the Allies or collaboration with Britain when they were not in favour of India’s liberty. Such a statement might have partially produced the fears of the Anglo-Indian community that they would be objects of hatred in Independent India because they would be seen as traitors who had cooperated with the British colonizers in conquering India. It could be inferred from Mahatma Gandhi’s Quit India speech that he could perhaps not have harboured objections if the British colonizers and Anglo-Indians of mixed race had remained as Indian citizens in India following Independence and had collaborated with other Indians in electing governments that represented all Indian citizens. In 1909, Mahatma Gandhi had argued in *Hind Swaraj*:

...it is not necessary for us to have as our goal the expulsion of the English. If the English become Indianized, we can accommodate them. ... Why do you forget that our adoption of their civilization makes their presence in India at all possible?  
... If any Englishman dedicated his life to securing the freedom of India, resisting

tyranny and serving the land, I should welcome that Englishman as an Indian.

(73-77)

Anglo-Indians who did not emigrate immediately after Indian Independence specifically saw themselves as children of Indian mothers and British fathers, as Alison Blunt has said (53). Merin Simi Raj and Avishek Parui have argued that it should never be forgotten that the term “Anglo-Indian” is also employed for descendants of Portuguese and other European fathers and Indian mothers whose native language is not English (347-48). While Partha Chatterjee has argued that nationalists saw the Indian woman and the domestic space as signifiers of the nation that had to be secured against the influence and abusive acts of the foreign colonizers (624), the Anglo-Indian mother could perhaps not be seen as a traitor of the Indian nation but as someone representing the possibility of a less violent relationship between the colonizer nation and the colonized nation and the questioning of the violent terms of integration of colonization. She could also be used to signify the “effeminization” of the Indian patriarchy at the hands of the British patriarchy, as Revathi Krishnaswamy has suggested (3). Anglo-Indian elites who were successful in identifying with the Indian motherland did so because their political, economic and social rights were secure after Independence. As Lionel Caplan has said, it was the non-elites of the Anglo-Indian community who had no access to political, social and economic mobility who identified only with the fatherland that was now distant from their motherland by the separation of the ex-colonized from the colonizer’s state (756).

The trope of domesticity is employed in examining the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized through the life of Jackson. While a short story might not permit the detailed analysis of an individual’s life, the representation of the narrator’s moments of interaction with Jackson and his Indian lover indicate the emphasis placed on certain criteria and

actions used for evaluating the failure of individuals and the states that they represent, particularly with respect to domestic relationships and their engendering of careers. One of the arguments presented in the short story focuses on the domestic violence experienced by Jackson in his childhood and adolescence and the violence that he brings to the colonies as the “waste” of the metropole who has to turn the foreign “wasteland” of the colonies into useful domestic parts of the empire. Jackson is the legally unacceptable child of a woman of the English patriciate whose desire for a man had failed to secure marriage. He is dispatched to a “baby-farmer” peasant by his grandfather with funds for his sustenance (80-81). The peasant and his sons inflict physical and mental violence on Jackson until he flees to London where he “ran into trouble with the police and the court every other day” (81). Jackson might have imagined that “marriage with Dorothy would put an end to all this” and the narrator assumes that perhaps the aristocratic Dorothy “had lost all hope of marriage and was glad to have Jackson” (81). Jackson initially becomes the desirable citizen subject of the British empire by migrating to India to survey and administer regulations pertaining to forest resources and to become a more violent agent of colonialism with respect to Indian subjects as a police officer and later a military official. The violence that he experienced in his childhood is perhaps overwritten by becoming an agent of colonial violence. The narrator thinks that “it was a time when every worthless Englishman was being dispatched to India” (82). According to scholars, the emigration of British citizens to the colonies and to the United States was seen as “a means of relieving distress in the British Isles” (D.P.E. and G.L.G. 3) in the years following the Napoleonic wars. The Imperial Conference of 1911 argued that Britain and its Dominions should collaborate with each other to exhort whites to emigrate to colonial settlements. A Dominions Royal Commission report of 1917 contended that “successful organization of migration lay at the root of the problem of Empire development”

(D.P.E. and G.L.G. 4). In 1922 the Overseas Settlement Committee urged the “absorption of British surplus industrial population by the Dominions” to terminate unemployment in Britain and for “further development [of the Dominions] and increased trade”. A distinction was also drawn between the industrialized metropole and the agricultural colonies (D.P.E. and G.L.G. 5).

Jackson seems to desire the conservation of the British colonial project in India and to seek the enthusiastic craving of the metropole for him. The triggering of the desire of the colonized for the colonizer is also his objective as he “mingled with the damned natives”, “frequent[s] the opium houses” and “make[s] do with the native women” (82). But the colonial project nourishes itself by erasing all attempts by the colonized to escape mortification about their subjugation. Jackson’s desire for Sakkubai cannot prevent Indians from feeling ashamed about those such as her who are oppressed by them and Jackson also does not appear to desire the liberty of the colonized as Mahatma Gandhi’s “Indianized” Englishman would have. The violence of colonialism does not end with the territorial expansion and the misuse of native resources by the colonizer. Violence persists to protect the colonizer’s position, as scholars have said, and to force the acceptance of the inferiority of the colonized, as defined by the colonizers. Frantz Fanon argues about the colonizers’ attitude towards the colonized that “it is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native” (41). He also argues that “the native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values” (41). In arguing that colonizers may be “benevolent” in their outlook, Albert Memmi says that “the benevolent colonizer can never attain the good, for his only choice is not between good and evil, but between evil and uneasiness” (87). The “benevolent colonizer” has to “choose” to remain silent or leave the colony (87). Jackson desires the yearning of both the British metropole and Sakkubai

for himself but cannot be “benevolent”. Memmi also argues that the colonizer who “agrees to be a colonizer” and becomes a “colonialist” (89) wishes to be “custodian of the values of civilization and history” and “has the immense merit of bringing light to the colonized’s ignominious darkness” (119). He promotes or advocates the “qualities of his native land ... stressing its special traditions, its cultural originality ... assured of the impossibility of the colonized sharing in its magnificence” (102). Jackson is unable to function as an advocate of the “special traditions” of the metropole as a “colonialist” because he had “no country...no race...no colour...like millions of other human beings who are born in different parts of the world...whose births are not celebrated and whose deaths are not mourned” (89) as a victim of violence in his childhood and as a young adult in England. His artificial eye seems to represent his orientation towards conflict to the narrator. Unless he is assured of the love in his adulthood that adults who do not abuse children have for children, he does not seem to desire either the British or the Indians. He appears to have acquired such love from Sakku bai. His desire for India is limited to the domestic sphere of Sakku bai after Independence too and he is unsuccessful in “Indianizing” himself. After his getaway from the mental asylum to which he had been conveyed because of his alcohol dependency, he “would sit outside his hovel and smoke bidis”, “make baskets in his clumsy way” with Sakku bai and “start a fight” with her after consuming country liquor (88). He does not attempt to stimulate the desire of other Indians and the Indian state by participating in business or government or by collaborating with other Anglo-Indians.

The reader could wish to inquire whether the narrator’s argument that Sakku bai is “exactly like” Jackson should be heeded. She argues that “Sakku bai is your [Jackson’s] country, and your race, for she has given you unending love ...Because she is among the wretched in her country” (89). Sakku bai’s relocation to Bombay (now Mumbai) is not free of domestic violence.

She works as a charwoman to aid the ayah of Jackson's children, and she keeps her job secure by acting as Ganpat's mistress as he had hired her. Ganpat Rai is the married head bearer of Jackson's household who uses her as a seductive intoxicant to win the "goodwill" of friends and for "payment of a debt" (84). Thus he drives his mistress Sakku bai into sexual relationships with others to realize his desired outcomes. Sakku bai attempts to escape subjugation by the working-class patriarch Ganpat by acting as Jackson's lover when his wife Dorothy is away in England for ten months every year and "become[s] a stranger to Jackson" (83). Whereas Ganpat uses Sakku bai as a sex worker "to change the taste in his mouth", Jackson, "helpless and needy" without his English wife in the eyes of the narrator, "treated her [Sakku bai] like nectar" (86-87). Sakku bai comes to the conclusion that Dorothy is "a downright slut", "has many lovers in London" and "likes it there" (77) because she lives with Jackson for only two months every year. She seems to construct her identity as an opponent of Ganpat's Indian patriarchy that sees her as a sex worker through her identity as the English patriarch Jackson's lover. Her hypothesis that her "man", her "saheb" (79) would not leave India – "Where will saheb go, leaving me here? He does not like England at all" (77) – is confirmed and ratified when Jackson is determined not to withdraw from India after Independence. He announces to Sakku bai – "Sakku darling, I won't go, leaving you here" (78) – even after he steps down from his post and is carted off to a mental asylum by "the sahebs" (79). Sakku bai and her Anglo-Indian children Peter (Pattu) and Philomina are the receivers of physical and psychological violence from Jackson and Sakku bai herself is physically and psychologically violent towards him but his desire for her and the children, which is different from the non-existence of the attachment of Indians, is their preference. Although "all the young men of the mohalla were mad about Philomina" and "no young man ever remembered the fact that she was the daughter of a white brute who had shed

the blood of fourteen-year-old youths at the entrance of Hari Nivas, had fired on unarmed women right in front of the church because they were raising the slogan ‘Quit India’” (79) after Independence, they refuse to regard Jackson as the parent of an Indian girl and shout, “The British have left”, “The whites have left” and “Why don’t you leave?” (87).

#### The Narrator and Britain Inside and Outside Jackson

The narrator is an adult female – she is addressed as “bai” (76), a term of respect for older women in Marathi, by Sakku bai. The readers first understand the identity of the narrator when she is informed about the death of Sakku bai’s lover Jackson by her domestic help Jinat Ram. Jackson is referred to as “sahib” and as “Englishman” by Jinat Ram and the narrator respectively. The narrator does not appear to be on affectionate terms with Sakku bai and her “strange” family and does not grieve with them although she “has been watching this strange family for years” (71). The mourning lover and her son are found sitting on a disintegrating *chabutara* – the public platform seems to represent the status of working-class individuals and their worsening economic condition in the new nation-state from which one of the last signifiers of colonial rule in the past has been removed. Their status as Anglo-Indians who seem to have no friends or relatives who might mourn with them indicates to the reader that they are a minority and also that they are perhaps demeaned and humiliated by other Indians who do not desire the presence of any signifiers of the colonial past in the territory of Independent India and ignore the powerless poor and the unemployed. The narrator, who views the family from the window of her residence, seems to represent traditional Indian womanhood and domesticity, as celebrated by nationalists during the movement for Indian Independence. The woman who confines herself to domestic duties within her home does not belong to the working class and stands in antithesis to the figure of the woman (Sakku bai), whose desire for an Englishman who was a part of the

colonial police forces and the military (Jackson is described as a supervisor of “Tommys” or British soldiers) would have been seen as antinationalist and prostitute-like by nationalists in pre-Independence India. The status of the woman who has been “watching” or monitoring changes in the “strange” family is also that of somebody who has been making an attempt to understand how the desire between Sakku bai and the colonialist became possible in pre-Independence India and the position of violence and abuse under colonialism in pre-Independence India. What the reader might wish to examine is the reason why the narrator tries to relate domestic violence in the Anglo-Indian family only with colonial violence against the protesters of the Quit India Movement but not with domestic violence in other Indian families. One explanation could perhaps be that the narrator’s views are derived from Gandhi’s views on the attitude that Indians would have to possess towards Englishmen who were part of the colonial administration and on whether Englishmen who supported the Independence movement could be called Indian.

It also appears as though the narrator is unwilling to divulge any details pertaining to her family and her views on domestic violence in Indian households other than Anglo-Indian ones in pre-Independence India or in Independent India. The reader is not informed about the views of members of her household (it is not clear whether she lives alone) on Sakku bai and her English lover. Her focus on what she sees from her window seems to indicate, at least partly, a desire to look outside the domestic sphere for mental and spiritual stimulation even though she appears to be a typical domestic goddess. This could be related to the women’s movement’s need for a greater role for women outside the house in pre-Independence and Independent India. Geraldine Forbes has examined the women’s organizations that were founded in India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Bharat Stree Mahamandal, which was established by Saraladevi Chaudhurani, for instance, aimed to induct “women of every race, creed, class and

party ... on the basis of their common interest in the moral and material progress of the women of India” (Forbes 70). Women’s organizations tried to secure access to education for more women and to foster employment outside the home. The organizations that attempted to win suffrage for women in the twentieth century were obstructed by the non-existence of economic rights for women. The All India Women’s Conference “asked the government to appoint an all-India commission to consider the legal disabilities of women” (Forbes 113). It has been emphasized that the women who participated in the nationalist movement were mostly upper-class and middle-class Hindus (Forbes 154). One-third of Indian women were employed by 1921, and 737,000 of them were domestic workers (Forbes 157), but most nationalist leaders, including women, did not see them as contributors to the economy (Forbes 160). Domestic workers (such as Sakku bai) accounted for 39 percent of working women in Kolkata in the 1911 census – this was “a figure compatible with accounts from other cities” (such as Mumbai) but “their employers seldom thought of them as workers” (Forbes 179). Servants might not have “felt as integrated into the [employers’] families as some of the accounts suggest” (Forbes 180). The narrator seems to be one-eyed like Jackson in her views about him in the years after Independence. Jackson does not seem to desire the India outside Sakku bai and the narrator constructs Jackson not as an Indian after Independence but as a person who still has the colonizers’ Britain in him. Although India continued its diplomatic and economic ties with Britain after Independence, the narrator ignores the powerless and unemployed alcoholic Jackson as well as his lover Sakku bai. The narrator does not seem to desire or respect the Anglo-Indian family because of the colonial Britain that she thinks still exists inside them.

The narrator’s antipathy towards the British soldiers under Jackson (he has been called a police officer too in the story and it is not clear when he had joined the army) who enter her

house to look for Quit India Movement participants needs to be analyzed in relation to her view that the bonfire of English clothes that she notices on Mangton Road is “a trifle childish” (72). It appears as though she is sometimes unable to identify with the Movement’s supporters. She argues later that damaging British property such as train seats and the burning of clothes was an act that represented the “uprooting” of the enemy (72). She describes the Quit India campaigners who had secreted themselves in her house as her relatives and the Englishman who has an Indian lover decides to make a concession by not conducting a thorough search (73). The end of the sheltered but constricted existence of the pre-Independence Indian woman, as represented in the story, leads not only to her anger at Jackson – she even thinks of “scratching his face” (75) – but also to her attempt to interfere in Sakku Bai’s private life; she thinks that “the bitch was like an easy morsel for the shameless white cur” (75). She asks Sakku why she does not “feel any shame that the scoundrel gives you a drubbing every day?” (76).

The narrator acknowledges that after Independence, “everyone had forgotten the past” (79). It was not possible for India to avoid conducting business transactions with the former colonizers, the British, and to avoid working with the former colonizers in international organizations. Independent India had also granted equality to all residents, including Anglo-Indians of mixed race. While the narrator says that “I totally forgot that saheb belonged to the community of oppressors who, joining the military service, had contributed to the subjugation of our country” (78) because Sakku bai is sad when he is carried to an asylum, it is shocking for the narrator that the “saheb” forgets his English children and lives in India after Independence; others too taunt him by shouting “Quit India, saheb!” (87). The narrator calls him a “fading relic of the British empire” even at his death, not seeing him as someone who can remove the colonial Britain inside him to his past and who can live as an Indian with Sakku in the new state.

## Conclusion

The women's movement after Independence was comprehended as "welfarist" and as opposed to transformation and to roles other than the domestic ones played by women until then (Forbes 225). The *Towards Equality* report of 1974 of the Committee on the Status of Women in India became one of the channels of preventing the movement from becoming outmoded and of losing contact with external reality, as it argued that most Indian women did not have access to all the rights mentioned in the Indian Constitution (Forbes 225-27). The narrator in Chughtai's story who sits next to the window of her home seems to belong to the period when domestic roles dominated reality for the majority of Indian women. Her gaze seems to resemble that of sadists who are not interested in ending the suffering of a working-class Indian (Anglo-Indian) family but "curiously" (80) view their suffering – she also does not, almost sadomasochistically, "have the faintest idea whom to inform" when "taps dripped and drains overflowed" and "a bad-natured woman living upstairs decided to empty her dustbin on someone's head" (76) in the emerging India. The state is not the domestic partner of an ex-British colonizer like Sakku bai is, nor does it aim to erase the emergence of its identity from colonial rule into post-World War II contemporaneity like the narrator wishes to, and its effort to build its identity does depend on its interactions with many nations other than Britain in the post-World War II world. It could be asserted that the state may not live by ignoring the powerless like the narrator does or on desire like the vulnerable Sakku bai does.

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