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**The Long, Broken Road Ahead to
Reconciliation in the Northeast**

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The Long, Broken Road Ahead to Reconciliation in the Northeast¹

Pradip Phanjoubam

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, at the very outset, let me thank the Director, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Mr. Shakti Sinha for considering me worthy to deliver the prestigious Srikant Dutt Memorial Lecture 2017.

I did not know Dr. Srikant Dutt in person, but I do know of him from accounts of many of his close friends, a good number of whom are from the Northeast. All of his friends who I also happen to know, without exception, admire and remember him very fondly. From their stories, for whatever the reason, for a long time, I had developed almost an unexplained and unseen bondage with him. I admired his fabled brilliance as a scholar, his commitment to fighting injustice, his immense energy and capacity for hard extended work at his desk, his love for readings, his virtuosity as a political commentator, his rebellion against oppressive and pretentious social norms, and above all his concern and love for the Northeast. So much was my admiration for him, that though I did not know him personally, when the story came to the unfortunate episode of his untimely death in a motorcycle accident, I remember feeling a personal sense of loss. So it was disbelief and a good measure of bewilderment that struck me when I, out of the blue, received a mail from the director of this institute to deliver this lecture. When I decided to accept the invitation, the first thing that I told myself was that I must get to know more of Dr. Dutt, and I am lucky to find a book, posthumously published, along with some articles written by him from one of his friends in Manipur, and read them. When I browsed the internet and searched his name, the first article listed was an obituary of him in the Economic and Political Review which among others called him a virtual encyclopaedia of world affairs.

I must say that NMML has been kind to give me the liberty to choose the subject I would speak on. It did not take time for me to decide that my tribute to Dr. Dutt should be about the conflict situations in the Northeast and an exploration of how they may be resolved. I have tried to do this keeping in mind that an honest and accurate diagnosis of the problem must be the beginning of the journey towards any lasting resolution. I have no illusion the journey ahead will be easy. I have therefore chosen to title my lecture today as ‘The long, broken road ahead to reconciliation in the Northeast’. The region has had a traumatic modern history, marked by the entry of the British on its stage in a prominent way in the early 19th century. Much of what is the Northeast today, the good and the bad, are indeed a legacy of this chapter of its modern history, though I am not presuming things could have been any better or worse if this chapter had not happen. However there can be no doubt things could and probably would have been radically different had things been otherwise. The colony had its ways of getting itself going was not always sinister, but all the same with profound impacts on the lives and history of the place. These are the ‘what ifs’ of history, and they do not matter much now. History is concerned with only those that happened, but the ‘what ifs’ do provide valuable lessons. Therefore I am also reflecting on some of these counterfactual possibilities as lessons for the present and the future.

¹ Srikant Dutt Memorial Lecture, delivered on 27th March 2017 at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Unpacking the past

The British of course did not walk into a political vacuum when they entered the Northeast region. There were several principalities already in existence with their peculiar brands of frictions and fraternities. However, the entry of a European colonial power did bring about a paradigmatic change, understandably upsetting the existing world order, and ultimately yoking them all together to serve the commercial interests and security outlooks of the colonial power. Let me then begin with a scan of this modern history of the Northeast, which, as I have just contended, resembling so much with the rest of the world outside Europe, began with the arrival of the European colonisers, in this case the British. Let me also begin with another caveat. When I say history, I do mean it in the sense E.H. Carr defined it as ‘a chronicle of the state’.² By his definition, not all ‘past’ is necessarily ‘history’ and likewise not all ‘facts’ are necessarily ‘historical facts’. While everybody must have a past, not everybody’s past makes history. Carr’s famous example of how Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon in 49 B.C. makes history but other crossings of the same stream by millions of ordinary men and women is not an illustration of definition. This understanding is important. A good deal of my argument here is that the Northeast problem is also of previously non-historical communities coming into the era of history, and the major marker in this transition was the arrival of the British. To reiterate the point, there can be little doubt that much of what is the Northeast today, good and bad, are a legacy, direct and indirect, of the British administration and the new era of modernity that came along with it, disrupting the old world marked by its own peculiar struggles and contests for livelihood, survival and identity.

Before this epochal event, the world that once was in this region can best be represented by what Willem van Schendel and James C. Scott called Zomia, constituting much of the mountainous massif of South East Asia, where States of varying sizes and influences emerged in fertile valleys, nurtured by the surplus generated by gradual advancement of techniques and technology of wet rice agriculture. The emergence of these ‘paddy states’ as Scott calls them, also meant the beginning of a new era of friction between these newly emerged state spaces with the prevalent non-state spaces, primarily in the mountains that surrounded these valleys where tribes lived whose economies were confined to primitive slash and burn agriculture of very meagre productivity, substituted by hunting and gathering from the forests they inhabited. With no surplus to manage, these tribes had little use for any centralised bureaucracy that represented a state. Scott also says the non-state bearing people of the mountains were state evaders and to avoid the influences of the Paddy States continually receded to the higher and more remote reaches of the mountains.

However, this last assertion has been contested by many scholars because while the friction between these two spaces was a reality, the communities did evolve means for coexistence and conflict resolution. The *posa* system in Assam is one such where Ahom kings reached agreements with hill tribes, who habitually raided the more productive villages in the foothills during the lean seasons, to stop these raids and instead be allowed to levy a form of tax from the foothill villages to meet their needs, and in the process, be also spared of punitive retaliations of the Ahom State. In Manipur, myths and legends of the inhabitants of the hills and the paddy state in the valley tell of their past as brothers inhabiting the hills together while the valley was inundated with floodwaters, and of how as the valley dried up, one brother descended to settle there and soon became prosperous reaping the bounties of the fertile, well irrigated and agriculturally productive alluvial flat land. This drying up process of the valley is

²Carr E.H, 1961, *What is History*, Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom.

still happening, and wetlands continue to be reclaimed and converted to paddy fields. The hill to valley migration is also still very much an ongoing phenomenon.

As a variant of these metaphoric tales of migration and brotherhood, there is a festival called *Mera Wa-yungba* amongst the Meitei valley dwellers during the Meitei lunar month of Mera, coinciding with the laid back post-harvest season of October for the agrarian society, when they erect a tall bamboo pole in their courtyards and every nightfall hoist a lamp atop it to be left lit for the rest of the night. This, legend interpreters say is the replay of an archetypal memory of the parting of the brother from his mountain home to settle in the valley. The valley dwellers are therefore, telling their relatives in the hills, that all is well with them and they will be well provided for in the coming year. Later in the same month, another related festival called *MeraHouchongba* is celebrated, where chiefs from hills and the king of the Meitei kingdom meet and exchange gifts, essentially the produces from their fields. These festivals of ancient fraternal bondages have come to be revived as official state celebrations by the Manipur government in recent times in the hope that moderation will result amongst warring communities by the annual reminder that everything was not as bad as it seems today.

While Scott's hill-valley friction in Zomia is a reality, what he seems not to have noticed is that unlike what he contends, the non-statehill people were also not always averse to the state, and behind the overt show of dislike for the state and its authority, there definitely were also evidences that they were in awe, and envied the much better organised and administered prosperity of the Paddy States in the valleys. Long before Scott, colonial writer Edward A. Gait for instance wrote of how many communities on the fringes of the Ahom State mimicked the latter to become autonomous power nodes. As for instance 'the Bhutias in the north, so also the Khasis, in the south of Kamrup, had gradually established themselves in the plains; and the Ahom viceroy of Gauhati, finding that he was unable to oust them, had contended himself with receiving a formal acknowledgment of the Ahom supremacy.'³ Quite interestingly, in one of Srikant's essays in his posthumously published book -*Viewpoints on the Third World*⁴, a writing on the Indo-China region, he mentions of such frictions between these states and the non-state communities, predicting in the mid-1980s Scott's important work *Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchic History of Upland South East Asia*, 2013.

Exclusion to protection

One of the many things of interest about the legacy of the British administration in the Northeast region is the manner in which many policies, which under the British were exclusionary measures, have now come to acquire just the opposite meanings. The Inner Line Permit System, the 6th Schedule, Article 371-A in the case of Nagaland and Article 371-C in the case of Manipur etc, which are directly or indirectly inherited from British administrative ingenuity of separating the state spaces from non-state spaces, or revenue spaces from non-revenue spaces by including the former and excluding the latter from everyday administration, have now come to be seen as provisions for protection of the latter from the former. This perhaps, is not surprising. This is only another important evidence of how the meaning of any text is vitally dependent on the context against which it is placed, and therefore, even when colonial texts come to be separated from the colonial context and placed against a democratic setting, they will acquire different meanings, sometimes radically different ones.

³Gait, Edward A, 1933, *A History of Assam*, Thacker Spink & Co., Calcutta p. 365.

⁴Dutt, Srikant, 1988, *Viewpoints on the Third World*, Allied Publishers Private Limited, Bombay.

The continuity of policies and their gradual transformations through the decades is therefore, fascinating. For instance, the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873, created the Inner Line, separating the revenue space in Assam plains from the non-revenue wild hills that surrounded it. This policy approach conforms to the general colonial administrative outlook of segregating the ‘fiscal’ from the ‘absent’ subjects.⁵ Hence, the Government of India Act 1919, designated the spaces beyond the Inner Line as Backward Tracts and left them un-administered, under the broad gaze of the Governor of the province. Then came the Government of India Act 1935, by which the Backward Tracts were categorised into Excluded Area and Partially Excluded Area. The Excluded Areas were left un-administered and were also not given representation in the local government. The Partially Excluded Areas were given some representation, but by nomination of the Governor. After independence, these Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas were given a different interpretation and dispensation, also helped by some influential but nonetheless romantic interpretation of this state of colonial exclusion by men such as Verrier Elwin, a prolific writer and researcher, who no doubt had genuine concerns for the tribal populations of the Northeast, but nonetheless also ended up endorsing these isolationist policies. As it has been pointed out by scholars of the Northeast, obviously influenced by Elwin’s views, the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in the foreword to one of Elwin’s books, *The Philosophy of NEFA*, that the Northeast tribals ‘should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.’⁶

Reid Plan

This romanticised vision of the Northeast as needing to be a separate entity was pretty widely prevalent amongst the British colonial administrators in the decades ahead of their departure from India. This is visible most pronouncedly in the Reid Plan, often erroneously referred to as Coupland Plan. Although the plan was conceived by the then Governor of Assam, Robert Reid, in his lengthy 22-page note that he prepared under the title *Notes on the Future of the Present Excluded, Partially Excluded and Tribal Areas of Assam* was first published confidentially in early November 1941.⁷ Scholars of Northeast can be thankful that the content of this note is reproduced in a compilation of four similar notes on the matter by four British officers in David R. Syiemlieh, helpful *On the Edge of Empire: four British plans for North East India 1941-1947*. Reid had argued the future of this region should be decided by the British Parliament. He said that ‘It cannot be left to Indian political leaders with neither knowledge, interest nor feelings for these areas’.⁸ Reid’s note, through official channels, ultimately landed in the hands of Reginald Coupland, the then professor in Oxford with the permission to use the idea in the project he was working on⁹. He did so liberally in the third volume of *The Future of India*.¹⁰

The idea was to have a new Protectorate or Crown Colony, constituting of the tribal areas of the Northeast and the adjoining regions of Upper Burma as a separate state, unaffiliated to either independent India or Burma. It is also interesting that the map of this proposed Crown Colony bears quite a fascinating resemblance to the Indo-Burma region that a federation of

⁵Cederlof, Gunnell, 2014, *Founding and Empire on India’s North-Eastern Frontier 1790-1840: Climate, Commerce, Polity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

⁶Wouters, Jelle J. P., *Land Tax, Reservation for Women and Customary Law in Nagaland*, EPW, Vol. 52, No. 9, March 4, 2017, p. 20-23.

⁷Syiemlieh, David R., 2014, *On the Edge of Empire: four British plans for North East India 1941-1947*, Sage, India, p.6.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

underground insurgent organisations in the Northeast, Indo Burma Revolutionary Front, (IBRF), once wanted to jointly liberate. This map also bears striking resemblance to a big chunk of Scott's and Schendel's Zomia.

David Syiemlieh compiled the works of three more British officers besides Reid – Andrew G. Glow, Reid's successor and Governor of Assam during 1942-1947, James P. Mills, the advisor to the Government of Assam for the Tribal Areas and States, and his successor Philip F. Adams. Interestingly all their choices for a capital of this proposed Crown Colony were Imphal. This is despite the fact that Shillong was the capital of Assam at the time, and Assam virtually meant the entire Northeast with the exception of Tripura and Manipur. The Crown Colony of course did not include the Brahmaputra and Barak flood plains. The fact is, in the geography of the Indo-Burma region, the political centrality of Imphal and the valley it is located in the aftermath of the WWII having six airports, has not failed to strike anyone, even in the colonial times. In pre-colonial times too, this natural centrality would not have been any different.

Other sections of the British authorities however foresaw the many reasons how this proposed Crown Colony would have faced endemic existential problems. One of these was what we are witnessing today in the Northeast, every single community, even those with a few thousand population see themselves as unique, and would have felt unrepresented if any of them did not have direct representation in the government in equal measures. There were many more anticipated problems raised by these sections of the colonial administration both from the Indian as well as the Burmese side, all of which ultimately contributed to the still birth of this Crown Colony. Not the least of these was a general disinterest and even objections from the newly emerged elite amongst the communities in region. For one, many of them had become accustomed to the Indian or Burmese systems, and for another, they too foresaw the fallacy of such an arrangement that depended on a romance of universal fraternity amongst the communities in the region. Intuitively they knew that the myriad ethnic communities shared little more other than their common backwardness making them realise that the typical bitter ethnic frictions within the region would render a state which would be ungovernable.

NEC prospect

In retrospect, this stillbirth probably was for the better as the Northeast, especially multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religion Assam and Manipur, can vouch for having lived with bitter divisions within them. But the idea is interesting and may throw light on future administrative strategies in the region. Perhaps if a sublimated version of it can be conceived of, where a larger political union, within which the different states of the Northeast are federal constituents, can receive consensual green signal, all the demands for greater homelands can find some healthy and mutual accommodation. Happily the idea of the Northeast itself is emerging somewhat like this, and although many think the idea has no basis, the reality is that this idea today has a definite identity and a sense of 'peoplehood'. In many ways the North Eastern Council, NEC, can be seen as an institutional response to the idea of the Northeast and whatever was worth salvaging from the earlier idea of the Crown Colony without any compromise to the sovereign space of India. This Central government nodal agency for funding and monitoring development projects in the region, and other similarly conceived institutions may have the answers to some of the vexed Northeast problems. An imaginative exploration of the potentials of such institutions to foster a lasting resolution to the myriad frictions within this conflict torn region may be a good start.

Let me return again into the issue of how exclusionary policies under a colonial regime in the modern times have become democratic safeguards for those once excluded. There are of course other interesting reasons why British legacies have lived on the way they have in India. Noted writer A.G. Noorani has suggested an answer in *India-China Boundary Problem: 1846-1947*. Noorani points out that in the case of India, the end of colonialism was by a transfer of power and not simply by an end of British paramountcy as in Burma.¹¹ In neither of the cases, independence was attained by overthrowing power. Because this is so, whereas Burma had to begin borrowing, mimicking, building, or rebuilding its institutions from scratch, block by block, India inherited the laws and established administrative instruments from the British, and then initiated transition to a new system which carried over much of what was inherited. Perry Anderson in his provocative book, *Indian Ideology* writes that in much of the Indian Constitution is the shadow of the Government of India Act 1935. This includes some of the most draconian features of the constitution such as Article 356, which he points out is Section 93 of GOI 1935 Act in another guise.¹²

If the modern history of the Northeast region began with the entry of the British, then the most important landmark is the Treaty of Yandaboo 1826, signed after the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War, between the victors British and the vanquished Burmese (then Ava kingdom). The British stepped into this arena because of an expansionist thrust of the Ava kingdom during the reign of the seventh Konbaung, King Bagyidaw, and overran much of what is now the Northeast, beginning with the erstwhile Manipur kingdom pushing on to the Ahom kingdom, sweeping whatever resistance came along the way. They thus, reached the edge of British India, on the eastern frontiers of Bengal. The Ahom kingdom, which was in an advanced state of decay at the time was in no position to fight back the Burmese occupation, and appealed to the British for help, and the latter obliged. The British defeated the Burmese in Assam, and they also armed and helped the king of Manipur, Gambhir Singh and his cousin Nara Singh, who were taking shelter at Cachar then, to raise a resistance force which came to be known as the Manipur Levy, which then entered Manipur to end Burmese occupation there as well.

The Treaty of Yandaboo 1826 was then signed. Assam was annexed to become part of the province of Bengal, but Manipur was left as a Protectorate state. Burmese territories adjoining Bengal, namely Arakan and Tenassarim were also annexed by the British. The British in later years waged two more wars on an unwilling Burma, but these were as Alastair Lamb puts it, excuses to annex territories. In his words, the British swallowed Burma in three gulps.¹³ After the second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852, Lower Burma, including Pegu and Rangoon, were annexed. After the end of the three wars in 1885 the British annexed the whole of Burma into British India. This last war is interesting for one more reason. One of the main charges made by the British was that the Burmese were getting too close to the French whose sphere of interest was already well established in neighbouring Indo-China. The Ava court insisted they were not and yet the British still chose to punish the kingdom and at the end of the one-sided war, annexed the rest of the kingdom. Lamb and other scholars are of the opinion that the first Anglo-Burmese war that ended with the Treaty of Yandaboo 1826, was the only real war the British fought with the Ava kingdom.

Curzon's Frontier

¹¹Noorani, A.G., 2011, *India China Boundary Problem, 1846-1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi..

¹²Perry Anderson, 2013, *Indian Ideology*, Verso, London-New York.

¹³Lamb, Alastair, 1968, *Asian Frontiers: Studies in a Continuing Problem*, Pall Mall P, London.

Lord Curzon's Romanes Lecture 2007 titled 'Frontiers' should also provide interesting clues in unpacking the colonial experience of the Northeast. The former Viceroy of India in the lecture reiterated that, 'in Asiatic countries it would be true to say that demarcation has never taken place except under European pressure and by the intervention of European agents.'¹⁴The idea of the State as Europe knew it was where the administration of the borders were as tight or even tighter than at its centre, were unknown outside of Europe at the time. Borders here were far from rigid and precise, and were instead notional. They were also seldom artificially created, but conformed to natural barriers such as lakes, rivers, mountains, valleys, deserts, marshes and forests etc.

Curzon also at length elaborated on the role of buffer states in British frontier management. These ranged from simple agreements on 'no man land' strips of land between neighbouring states, to extremely sophisticated political and administrative arrangements between two rival states to keep another in between them as neutral. The Tibet case is often cited as an example of the latter variety of buffer States. A treaty between Russia and Britain in 1907 sought Tibet to be kept under the suzerainty of a lesser neighbour of the time, China, but out of any direct influence of either Russia or Britain.

The St. Petersburg Convention 1907, which Britain literally forced on Russia, already weakened by a humiliating naval defeat at the hands of Japan in 1905 and also an ally of Britain by then in Europe, was meant to ensure that the latter will have no excuse whatsoever to nurture territorial ambitions in Tibet. But as Alastair Lamb notes, in this treaty the Russians, though the weaker side as in judo, used the opponent's weight to floor him.¹⁵ Indeed, the manner in which the British tied themselves up in knots was witnessed during the Simla Conference of 1913–14, with rather tragic consequences for India long after its independence. If not for the treaty obligations of the St. Petersburg Convention 1907, India could have settled its northern boundary in the Northeast sector without much problem with a bilateral agreement between India and Tibet during the Simla summit. Britain instead had to make the Simla Conference a tripartite one, and invite China to be party of the negotiations. China it is known walked out of the conference, putting the legality of the agreement reached at the conference in doubt. An agreement was indeed reached between British India and Tibet on the boundary, creating what we now know as the McMahon Line, but even this agreement could not be published immediately, again because of British apprehension that Russia would object as it contravened the St. Petersburg Convention 1907. It was finally published only in 1938, after Communist Russia abrogated in 1921 most international treaties concluded by the Tsarist regime they overthrew. The damage however has been immense, and there are some who claim the McMahon Line never existed and that the actual international boundary between Indian and China (Tibet), should be where they say an Outer Line existed at the southern base of the Arnuachal Pradesh mountains.¹⁶ This, we however know is where the Inner Line is. I will touch on the politics as well as the administrative necessities which led to the drawing of the Inner

¹⁴ Curzon, Lord., Romanes Lecture, *Frontiers*, This lecture was given by Curzon in 1907 at Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford and it was published in 1908 by Clarendon Press, Oxford, United Kingdom.

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/ibru/resources/links/curzon.pdf>

¹⁵ Lamb, Alastair, 1966, *The McMahon Line, A Study in Relation Between India, China and Tibet 1904-1914*, Routledge, London, vol. II, p.113.

¹⁶ See for instance, Maxwell, Neville, "Olaf Caroe's Fabrication of the McMahon Line", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 51, Issue No. 32, 06 Aug, 2016, p. 100-105.

Line in 1873, which has since its creation been often mistaken as the Outer Line.¹⁷The entangle over the boundary in this sector, as we know, is still far from settled.

Protectorates

There were also other more straightforward Protectorate States. These are frontier principalities which the British have subordinated but not completely taken over. They were left to be as they were before British intervention, but with a long leash. This was so because they served better purposes this way in frontier management than they would have been as British administrated regions. In Curzon's words again, a protectorate or a 'buffer State is an expedient more or less artificial, according to the degree of stability which its government and institutions may enjoy, constructed in order to keep apart the Frontiers of converging Powers.'¹⁸ Also clear from Curzon's lecture is that the security concerns of colonising European powers were never so much determined by threats from local principalities but by the possibilities of other European powers entering their spheres of influence and spheres of interests.¹⁹Hence much of the Tibet policy of the British was determined by their apprehension of the Russians during the Great Game in the late 19th and early 20th Century. As part of this Great Game, Curzon describes how in the Western frontier in Afghanistan a multi-buffered frontier was built: '(1) the administrative border of British India, (2) the Durand Line, or Frontier of active protection, (3) the Afghan border, which is the outer or advanced strategical Frontier.'²⁰ The colonial government also became able to create such a three layered buffer in the east. To understand this, a closer look at the British administrative policy of the 'Inner Line' is essential.

Inner Line

After the British annexed Assam, one of the outlooks of the British administration was of building buffers against the French sphere on interest just across Burma, in Indo-China. Curzon has some useful insight on this too. Outlining the policy of protectorates of the Indian Empire he elaborates that the first concern is to surround 'its acquisitions with a belt of native states with whom alliances were concluded and treaties made.'²¹Such a policy resulted in a chain of protectorates including Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. To this list other British officers, in different contexts have also added Manipur.²²

Related to this, one of the British colonial administrative mechanisms which India has inherited with little or no dilution is the Inner Line Permit System. The line served a very definite and important function during the colonial days, and continues to be important, though not for what was originally intended. In recent times, the ILPS has been on very contentious ground. Two Northeast states, Meghalaya and Manipur, which do not fall within its purview, want it extended to them so as to restrict influx of migrants into these states which, those demanding the ILPS say, has come to threaten to reduce their small indigenous ethnic populations to hopeless minorities. In Meghalaya the demand has somewhat been subdued, but in Manipur it

¹⁷For a detailed discussion on this mistaking of the Inner Line as McMahon Line, see my reply in the EPW to Neville Maxwell., Neville Maxwell's "'Facts' and Silences", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 51, Issue No. 46, 12 Nov, 2016, p. 62-66.

¹⁸Curzon, Lord., Romanes Lecture *Frontiers*, 1907, *ibid*.

¹⁹*Ibid*.

²⁰*Ibid*.

²¹ Curzon, Lord., Romanes Lecture *Frontiers*, 1907, *ibid*.

²²For instance, Mackenzie, Alexander, 1999, *History of Government Relations with the Hill Tribes of North-Eastern Bengal*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi. This was first published as a book in 1884 by The Home Department Press, Calcutta.

became explosive, causing a multi-dimensional conflict situation, with a section of the hill tribes opposing the demand claiming these restrictions would put them at a disadvantage. The issue is still far from being resolved in either state, particularly in Manipur.

This line came into existence in 1873 when the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation was promulgated. The Inner Line was, as it has been mentioned earlier, in many ways the British administration's answer to tackle the non-state spaces they encountered in the Northeast region. However, as the administration made it plain, 'this line does not necessarily indicate the territorial frontier but only the limits of the administered area... it does not in any way decide the sovereignty of the territory beyond.'²³ The Inner Line required British subjects to seek a special permission to cross the line and enter the territory beyond. This was necessitated because tea and timber speculators habitually entered the hills and got into trouble with the tribes who live there, often compelling the authorities to take out punitive expeditions. At the time there were petitions from the land hungry tea garden lobby for the British authorities to either abolish the Inner Line altogether and extend the administration's security cover into the hills so they could claim more land or else push the Inner Line deeper into the hills.²⁴ Under the circumstance, the British did take out a survey of the Naga hills to do a cost benefit analysis. The estimate was Rs. 3000 as tax revenue, and the necessary expenditures to set up proportionate police posts, Rs. 16000.²⁵ This being the case, the British authorities decided to keep the Inner Line and advised the tea lobby to keep out of the hills. The British did alter the Inner Line by simple gazette notifications a number of times as a concession.²⁶ The line, as Bodhisattva Kar writes, 'was also supposed to demarcate the Hills from the plains, the nomadic from the sedentary, the jungle from the arable- in short, the tribal areas from the Assam proper'.²⁷

In the east, the line had another purpose. With the protectorate state of Manipur as the yoke to hold together non-state spaces of the Naga Hills to its north and the Lushai Hills to its south, a convenient buffer zone was thus created. Manipur was bound by the treaty of 1762 and then much later by the treaty of 1833 to come to the aid of the British in its expeditions in these hills whenever necessary, and these treaties compelled the kingdom to send its troops during British in expeditions to the Naga hills on numerous occasions. Most important among them were during the Battle of Khonoma in 1879, and to the Lushai Hills in 1871-1872 in the expedition to rescue of a six year old European girl Mary Winchester, abducted by Lushai raiders from a tea garden in Assam. Manipur troops were also tasked to rescue European employees of the Bombay Burmah Company, a logging concern stationed at Kendat in Burma in 1885 when the 3rd Anglo Burmese War broke out.

The second layer of this buffer was Burma which came under the British rule in 1885. Even before this, after the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, the kingdom was more or less a helpless surrogate of the British, as Alastair Lamb implies, waiting to be swallowed by the British. The third layer was, in Curzon's words: 'on the extreme north-east the annexation of Upper Burma has brought to us the heritage of a fringe of protected States known as the Upper Shan States'.²⁸

²³ Gait, Edward, 1933, *A History of Assam*, Thacker Spink & Co., Calcutta, p.387.

²⁴ Guha, Amalendu, 1977, *Planters Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi.

²⁵ Mackenzie, Alexander, 1999, *ibid.* p.105.

²⁶ SanjibBaruah (ed), 2009, Kar, Bodhisattva, *When was the Postcolonial? A History of Policing Impossible Lines*, occurring in *Beyond Counter-insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. P. 52.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 52.

²⁸ Curzon, Lord., *Romanes Lecture 1907*, *ibid.*

Beyond the protectorates of the Shan States and the State of Siam, lay the ‘Spheres of Interest’ of another great European Power, France.²⁹

Independent India and the Inner Line

After independence this British legacy of separate administrations for the hills and valley remained unchanged in multi-ethnic Assam. The divide also came to be accentuated because of a peculiar turn of linguistic politics in Assam. The Inner Line was retained and the territories enclosed by it were accommodated in special political arrangements different from the mainstream. This arrangement is spelled out in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution which seeks to leave these tribal populations of Assam in Autonomous District Councils where they would be given a degree of freedom to govern themselves under their customary laws, but within the larger administrative cover of Assam. The Nagas turned down this arrangement and soon began a struggle for self-determination and secession from the newly independent Indian Union. In the effort to reach a truce with the Nagas, the Naga Hills district of Assam was made a separate state in 1963, christened Nagaland, though this did not end the Naga struggle for sovereignty. When it was transformed into a state, Nagaland was also given special status under Article 371-A, which makes customary laws and land ownership patterns of the Naga tribes virtually off limits of laws made by the Parliament, except with the assent of the state assembly. Meghalaya too was separated from Assam and became a state in 1972, and was followed by Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh which too became separate states in 1986. Though Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills also were once beyond the Inner Line, they continued to remain as Assam districts, though enjoying Sixth Schedule status. Though separate states, Meghalaya and Mizoram still retain their Sixth Schedule ADCs.

Manipur and Tripura were always separate kingdoms. But they too ultimately adopted laws that gave similar autonomy to their hill tribes in the way the Sixth Schedule does. In Tripura it was Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council Act of 1979, passed by the Indian Parliament under the Sixth Schedule following agitation by tribal communities of the state. In Manipur it was The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act of 1971. This Act was passed by the Parliament while Manipur was still a Union Territory. It paved the way for establishment of the six Autonomous District Councils in the state. Today there is a demand in the Manipur hill districts for bringing these ADCs directly under the Sixth Schedule as the latter arrangement is seen as equipped with more power.

The situation of Manipur is interesting. An explanation of the peculiar geography of the state and a revenue management laws that evolved corresponding to this geography will be helpful. When the British took over Manipur in 1891 without actually drawing an Inner Line as of Assam, they tried replicating the well tested system of separating revenue from non-revenue territories. Again as in Assam, this meant putting only the revenue valley districts, the traditional home of by then largely Hindu Meiteis, who by the Indian Constitution do not fall in the Scheduled Tribe category, under the local administration. The non-revenue Manipur hills, inhabited largely by Naga and Kuki tribes, were left largely un-administered but under the charge of a British officer, the President Manipur State Durbar (PMSD). In Assam, as we have seen, the PMSD’s role was taken by the province’s Governor, unlike Assam, the Manipur valley revenue district is far smaller in area. In actuality, it is just about 2000sq km, forming only a tenth of the total area of the state, and is surrounded on all sides by hill tracts, predicating

²⁹ Ibid.

in many ways the state's current peculiar and complex problems of ethnic frictions and demographic pressures.

Manipur did not become part of India immediately after independence. Instead it joined the Indian Union only in 1949 under controversial circumstances. This former kingdom was made a Part-C state and placed under the charge of a Dewan. In 1950, Dewan Maj. Gen. Rawal Amar Singh abolished a permit system that once regulated entry of outsiders into the former kingdom. In 1960, while Manipur was still under a territorial council,³⁰ an Act of the Parliament introduced the Manipur Land Revenue & Reforms Act, bringing the revenue of the districts of the small valley under modern land revenue law. The surrounding hills, however, were left untouched. Settlement and land acquisition in these hills by non-scheduled tribes became prohibited as in territories beyond the Inner Line in Assam. The valley, however, remained open to every Indian citizen to settle at will. This asymmetrical arrangement, and the increasing land pressure in the valley, has been bringing about a social repercussion in the present times. The peculiar nature of the demand for the extension of the ILPS to the entire state and the opposition to this demand from the hill population, amongst whom population influx is already prohibited, is informed by this asymmetry of land laws.

It is in the backdrop of a strong public agitation in 2015 in the valley that the Manipur government introduced three bills which together were meant to do somewhat what the Inner Line Permit System does. Among these bills, only one *The Protection of Manipur People Bill of 2015* was freshly drafted. The other two, namely *The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2015*, and *The Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill* of the same year were amendments to existing Acts. The amendments to the last two bill were necessitated to incorporate the provisions of the first bill which controversially defines 'Manipur People' as domiciles settled in the state on or before 1951, and to extend the land protection only to 'Manipur People' as defined by the first bill. Following violent opposition to the bills from communities in Manipur's southern district of Churachandpur, the Governor of the state withheld the passage of the bills and referred them to the President of India. The President in turn ultimately rejected *The Protection of Manipur People Bill of 2015* and also returned the two other bills for reconsideration. This probably means the removal of all references to the rejected bill, and for these two bills, as noted earlier, only seek minor amendments to existing Acts.

The bills probably caused insecurity amongst sections of the tribal population in the hills for various reasons. But, the least on account migratory lifestyles induced by poor economy of many of them especially in the southern region, defined by unproductive slash and burn agriculture. Many were led to fear this mobility as what was being targeted by the three ILPS bills. Secondly, relating to this lifestyle, there is an apprehension that the cut off year of 1951, sought for deciding which 'Manipur People' are unfair, and would leave many of the tribal communities dispossessed and disenfranchised. Indeed, 1951 as the cut off year for defining domicile status may be legally untenable, and this may be strongest reason why the bill was rejected by the President of India. Furthermore, many also doubted the veracity and accuracy of the records of hill communities and villages in the 1951 census. Third, there was the question of Manipur government skipping consultation with the Hill Area Committee, a statutory within the Assembly formed under Article 371-C, and constituting MLAs of the hill districts, for the 'modifications to be made in the rules of business of the Government and in the rules of procedure of the Legislative Assembly of the State and for any special responsibility of the

³⁰<http://legislativebodiesinindia.nic.in/States/manipur/manipur-w.htm> (last accessed on 20-3-2017).

Governor in order to secure the proper functioning of such committee.’³¹ The government’s explanation was that not all issues related to the hills, in particular money bills, need such consultations. The ethnic frictions in Manipur and the entire Northeast for that matter, is indeed complicated on one hand, but definitely not beyond comprehension or salvation.

The way forward

What then can be the way forward? This probably is the most challenging question. Difficult as it is, a beginning has to be made. In the sketch of the Northeast’s past, and in the dissection of the genesis of some major issues, some of the possible solutions are implicit. What is also required now is the introspection on the part of communities in the Northeast entangled in the many conflict situations, as well as by the Indian State whose policies can, and have, made the difference between peace or its absence in the region in the past as I have tried to sketch. As much as it is important for the region to resolve and get over its insecurities, it is also vital for the Indian state to understand why these insecurities exist.

For one thing, the communities in the Northeast are very small and their fears of being overwhelmed by forces from outside; demographically, culturally, linguistically, economically etc., are not altogether unrealistic. It is important to mention that among the 2540 languages of the world listed by the UNESCO in 2016, on a scale ranging from ‘vulnerable’ to completely ‘extinct’, almost all of the indigenous language of the Northeast, fall in the category of ‘vulnerable’ and a few in the ‘endangered’. Endangered languages are those where children of the respective community have begun to abandon it, as the mother tongue in preference of another. There are also ‘critically endangered’ and ‘definitely endangered’ languages depending on whether this abandoning process began at the parents’ or grandparents’ generations. On the other hand ‘Vulnerable’ languages are those which still spoken as mother tongue by most of the children of the community, but because of the small number of speakers and the restriction of the domain in which the language is spoken, it falls under the category of vulnerable. It must be said it is to the credit of the region that many languages spoken by even a few thousand people have not gone extinct, but the fact is, they are with little exceptions, under threat.³²

Insecure past reflected in constitution

The Indian state too has had its own problems. Its traumatic birth as a modern independent nation as Fali S. Nariman points out in his book *The State of the Nation*, has been a cause for a very fundamental existential insecurity.³³ The character of the Indian state is still replete with features shaped by the extreme circumstances of 1947, and many of these needs to be shed, as India of 1947 and India of 2017 are two very different countries. In 1947, India not only suffered the trauma of Partition but also was unsure whether it would be able to integrate with most of the 560 princely states either because of their unwillingness or indifference about joining the Indian Union. It must be noted that it was at this time the Indian Constitution was written and it was expected that this insecurity would have been reflected in it. This unease is most pronouncedly evident in the avoidance of the word federalism. To name a few others, the role of Governor, who is in office at the pleasure of the President as per Article 156 and is the

³¹ Constitution of India, *Article 371-C*.

³²<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/atlas-of-languages-in-danger/> last accessed December 15, 2016), see also <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/apr/15/language-extinct-endangered> (last accessed December 15, 2016).

³³Nariman, Fali S., *The State of the Nation*, Hay House India, New Delhi, 2013.

eye and ear of the Centre as implied, though Article 163 specifies he acts on the advice of the state cabinet. There is also Article 356 by which on the recommendation of the governor of the state, the Centre can dissolve the state government and take over its administration for a limited but extendable period. Though the stated objective of the provision is to tackle constitutional crises, like all draconian laws, this Act too has had a history of ending up misused by ruling political parties to serve their power interests so many times. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act, AFSPA-1958 is another piece of legislation which reflects this same state of insecure mind and it is not a coincidence that it too came into being during the early years of India's independence.

The strongest alibi of this insecurity however is Article 3 of the constitution as it is argued by Nariman. This article gives the Centre the power to not only alter the boundaries or change the name of any state but also to create new states out of existing ones, with or without the consent of the concerned states. When this article was conceived of, this was in all likelihood meant as a warning to the princely states that if they did not fall in line, the Centre has the power to tear them apart or even obliterate their identities completely. Though it is understandable the compelling circumstances of the time would probably have made any nascent nation think of an asymmetrically powerful Centre as a safeguard, the truth is those conditions are long gone. India is a confident and powerful nation now and there is no longer the need to continue to suffer from the same paranoia which was once forced on it. Nariman, however, recommends that these features of the Constitution of India, though cannot be dropped altogether easily now, should be archived, never to be used again.³⁴

Cultural container, look East

One of the fallacies in most studies of the Northeast region in the postcolonial era has been, to see the region exotically as a cultural and geographical island, long insulated from the rest of the world, and therefore happy in a uniquely untouched and unspoilt world of its own till the advent of the modern times. This probably is also the most pronounced weakness of the notion of Zomia that I have discussed earlier in this essay, important though this imagined regional profile is in unravelling the past of the region. No community can or has lived in complete social vacuum, and even neighbouring communities which are hostile to each other have understandably shaped each other's defining characters. This notwithstanding, and in particular in Indian scholarship, seldom has the Northeast region been looked upon as possibly a product of the larger environment within which it exists, which by the very nature of its physical geography would transcend national boundaries. Often this outlook is determined by an inherent possessive hubris of a national community wanting to see all territories and peoples within its political geography as essentially a part of the national organic being. 'Every part of India therefore must belong to the India story alone, or the Indian historical mainstream, and any other narrative that does not conform to this standard of national imagining, thereby, becomes deviant and alien, and must ultimately be brought into the mainstream.'³⁵ The flaw of such nationalistic historiography is obvious. As is the case with any other part of the world, the Northeast cannot also be honestly understood in its wholeness, except alongside those of the countries, or regions of those countries, which straddle it on practically all sides. This then is the problem of the story of Northeast at its essence, defined by a core contradiction between what is projected as the Indian national mainstream and the different cultural and political streams that the region expectedly has always also belonged to.³⁶

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵ Phanjoubam, Pradip, 2016, *The Northeast Question: Conflicts and Frontiers*, Routledge, India.

³⁶Ibid.

The nation in this context becomes akin to a cultural container.³⁷ Nothing is expected to spill outside it and conversely, nothing from outside is expected to spill into it. Any historical stream that tends not to fit perfectly into this container becomes problematic. Furthermore, it is another characteristic of the state to be suspicious of these deviant and non-mainstream histories and peoples. The Indian State has been no exception. India's first home minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's letter of 7 November 1950, to the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru is just one alibi of this. In this letter, the leader reverentially referred as the Iron Man, is unambiguous of an irredentist suspicion of the 'non-mainstream' Northeast.³⁸

Indeed, the conceptualisation of nation as a cultural container becomes extremely problematic in the context of a multi lingual, multi ethnic, multi religion country like India. Especially in dealing with peripheral provinces such as the Northeast, an approximate 98 percent of the physical boundary of which are international, there can be no other way of studying the place, its histories, and peoples, without doing so in consonance with those of territories and peoples beyond these international borders.³⁹

From this standpoint, the Look/Act 'East Policy' acquires deeper relevance. This project should no longer be just about commerce, but equally of psychologically freeing the Northeast region from its claustrophobic landlocked mentality. If only commerce were to be the goal, as indeed it seems to be the thrust currently, a maritime project to link the richer South East Asian countries and ports in the eastern coasts of the Indian subcontinent would be the preferred option. True to anticipation it is coming to be precisely this, and so while India's trade volume with ASEAN is growing respectably, the contribution to this growth by trades through the Northeast land routes is still negligible. The Look/Act 'East Policy' then perhaps should have two components. One that takes advantage of the commerce potential with ASEAN and East Asia through sea routes, and the other should be about linking up the natural economic and cultural sub-region of Northeast India, North Myanmar, North Thailand, and Laos, etc. It is not a coincidence that this map too somewhat resembles Zomia, reinforcing the contention that geography predicates war and peace. This project could be modelled on the Asian Bank's ambitious Greater Mekong Sub-region initiative with its motto of reaping peace dividends through promotion of connectivity, competitiveness and community. Without compromising national sovereignties of any of the countries involved, the idea should be to soften borders to give space for growth of natural economic regions broken up and fractured in the dawning of modern post-colonial nation states in the mid-twentieth century.

Moderating ethnic homelands and identity

If these are some problem areas on the larger canvas of the Indian State, there is also much to be settled on the smaller conflict arenas within the Northeast. One of these, and perhaps the thorniest, has had to do with the idea of exclusive ethnic homelands, and the question of ethnic identities being inalienably linked to this notion of homeland. Since the territories which constitute these ethnic homelands are seldom inhabited by any particular ethnic group alone,

³⁷ Peter J. Taylor, 1994, "The State as Container: Territoriality in the Modern World-System, University of Newcastle", *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 18, No.2p. 151-162.
<http://www.sagepub.com/dicken6/Sage%20articles/Chap%206/CH%206%20-%20Taylor.pdf> (accessed 30 December 2014).

³⁸The text of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's letter available at <http://www.friendsoftibet.org/main/sardar.html> (accessed 30 December 2014).

³⁹ Phanjoubam, Pradip. 2016, *The Northeast Question: Conflicts and Frontiers*, Routledge, India.

very often many groups separately end up claiming same stretches of land as not just their homelands, but their exclusive homelands, thus the conflict becomes more potential. Again it is Assam and Manipur which have witnessed some of the most deadliest of these conflicts in the recent past, and the worst part is that, the potential for more conflicts have hardly been put to rest. Much of the territories claimed as homelands by these ethnic groups are largely uninhabited and therefore these homelands are notional, rather than an ownership determined by actual physical occupation. This being so, it becomes even more easy for geographies of homelands to overlap.

Whose land?

In the land tenure system of a modern state, all land within the territorial boundary of the state is deemed to belong to the state. Individual land owners are only tenants leasing the little plots of land their homesteads or farms sit on from the state with certain rights of ownership over them and for a specified amount of tax depending on the size and category of land they take possession. This ownership however is not absolute. The state can if it considers necessary in the interest of public good, acquire the land back from its tenants by the legal principle of eminent domain after paying fair and due compensation. Obviously, different states have different land laws, but the basic principle defining this relationship remains the same. The modern system is pretty clear cut and there is hardly any chances of dispute within its jurisdiction which cannot be settled by plain application of the rule of law. It is when we enter the world of customary indigenous laws that things get a little nebulous and messy. This is because, first, there are as many different customary laws as there are indigenous ethnic communities and many of these customs are opposed to each other. In most of the cases of Northeast, these ethnic communities literally rub shoulders, so antagonistically placed outlooks to indigenous rights have big potential for causing conflicts. Second, often these customary laws transgress modern notions of justice and jurisprudence. This often is the case in areas of gender rights and equality of citizens. The ugly tension in Nagaland in 2016 over the implementation of the national norm for reservation of seats in urban local self-governing bodies for women is evidence of these discords embedded within. While it is universally acknowledged now that indigenous peoples cannot be unthinkingly put at the mercy of modern laws that they are not prepared for yet, the indigenous customary laws themselves need plenty of moderation within. The United Nations adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on September 13, 2007, reflects this. As UN declaration, it is still not a legally binding instrument under international law, but this Declaration ‘represents the dynamic development of international legal norms and it reflects the commitment of the UN’s members to move in certain directions’⁴⁰

All mixed population of Northeast states, Assam and Manipur in particular, have both these notions of land and land ownership coexisting. While there has been little or no problem settling dispute within the land administered by modern law, this is not so in what are considered traditional lands. Here boundaries are sought to be demarcated on intangible notions such as ancestral land. In Manipur for instance, the conflict situation arising out of the demand for Greater Nagaland, the demand and opposition to the ILPS or the creation of new districts by the state government in 2016 which resulted in a prolonged blockade of the state by Naga groups in Manipur are just some examples. The question is, in case of this demarcation becomes absolutely necessary, what would be the criterion that defines ancestral land? Would

⁴⁰<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>.

it be in terms of actual physical occupation of a particular tract of land for a particular length of time? As mentioned earlier, a majority of the lands in Manipur hills would be physically unoccupied, and if modern law were to be applied, these would be government land. Or would it be defined in terms of occurrences in myths and legends of the communities? In this case too, much of these tracts of land and mountains would occur in the ancient myths of many different communities. The psychological demarcation of territories between hills and valley, and the association of each of these geographical regions with different ethnic communities in absolute terms, as has been argued earlier, is as recent as the drawing of the Inner Line in Assam in 1873. The truth is, the nomadic herder, the shift cultivator, the settled agriculturist, the hunter gatherer, the Zomian paddy states, all will have different notions of homeland, and in physical terms, these homelands can be the same stretch of land. For instance, for the nomadic tribesman, wherever he moves and pitches his tent his land and for the Zomian feudal state, its boundaries extend till as far as its domains enter the spheres of interest of other feudal states which challenge and stop it from gazing any farther. Arbitrating claims of homelands in such a scenario thus becomes only a matter of privileging one outlook over the others. This being so, if at all there has to be a demarcation of boundaries between these homelands, it would have to be by modern parameters of justice aimed at safeguarding the survival needs of all. The resolution could also be in terms of a shared homeland based on an aggregate of the different concerns and notions of the contesting groups. Coexistence in this sense should be about sharing and not segregating.

In arriving at this equilibrium, all stake holders have equal responsibility to shoulder. The danger has always been, in such situations, victims and victimisers can reverse positions easily. Indeed, both can also end up with a sense of being the victim in the same bargain. Coexistence must have to be about a shared sense of destiny compelled by geography and existential essentials predetermined by it. The challenge is also about having to come to terms with the changing times. Hence it is about discarding anachronistic and problematic old paradigms that could explain past challenges but not the new and modern ones. It is also about evolving working formulas whereby each can have the most, without infringing into the other's legitimate and private spheres. It also further entails that the understanding of what is legitimate will have to be periodically negotiated and renegotiated to keep it sharply tuned to the needs of the changing times. There is no other way to begin this journey of self-discovery than to first come to terms with the reality of the Northeast as a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religion society. Let it also be remembered that if the ethnic world continues to hang on to redundant symbols to define their identities, their identities too would be in danger of becoming redundant sooner than later for no other reason that the fact that the context against which identity is defined is always in a flux. The battles of the present cannot possibly be fought with any hope for success on the slogans of half a century ago.

Conclusion: The Cesar Millan lesson

The author concludes with a piece of wisdom on conflict resolution from a very unlikely source. There will not be many who keep dogs as pet who have not watched Cesar Millan's incredible series *Dog Whisperer* show. Millan's understanding of dog behaviour is incredible and his consistent message is that problem-dogs are more often than not a reflection of the owners' own inhibitions and misconceptions. Millan provides therapy for homes with aggressive dogs and he insists that it is not just the problem-dogs which must undergo therapy, but also their owners. The attitude he recommends for dog owners is to see in terms of: 'This is my house and I share it with my dog' and not 'This is my house and I keep a dog'. The house becomes not an exclusive space of the owner, but equally the dog's territory. He also says the equation

is not as simple as expecting a reciprocation of the love and affection the owner showers on the dog, on the other hand, what works is giving the dog the space it needs as a territorial and pack animal. He also says primacy must be given to respect rather than love in this equation. The latter is necessary, but the former is what the dog reciprocates. Many owners end up devastated because of the failure to understand this equation. There are of course pathological cases, where a dog is innately aggressive, therefore beyond rehabilitation and have to be put down, and Millan's self-professed mission is to save problem dogs from falsely being classified thus.

There is obviously much to take away from Millan's lessons not just in dog rearing, but in any project of fostering social harmony.