Extremism and Military Intervention in South Asia: Indian Muslims and Sri Lankan Tamils*

by

Manus I. Midlarsky and Elizabeth R. Midlarsky
Department of Political Science and Department of Counseling and Clinical Psychology
Rutgers University, New Brunswick Teachers College, Columbia University
midlarsk@rci.rutgers.edu

*Paper prepared for delivery at the 21st World Congress of Political Science, Santiago, Chile – July 12-16, 2009
Why is it that for all the communal violence that has plagued Hindu-Muslim relations in India, that violence had virtually no influence on international conflict? On the other hand, the Sinhalese-Tamil disturbances yielded an Indian intervention in Sri Lanka, ultimately resulting in the suicide terror assassination of the Indian leader Rajiv Ghandi by a Sri Lankan Tamil militant.

Significant here is the absence of any religious motivation for that attack; both perpetrator and victim were Hindus. Also notable is the fact that a large Muslim population has not engaged in widespread terrorist activity, while a predominantly Hindu population in neighboring Sri Lanka has done so, even when the targets were Hindus. A major conclusion of this study is that in understanding the etiology of South Asian terror, religion plays at most a minor role, and as we shall see, given certain benign interpretations, can even play a positive role in fostering communal cooperation. Thus, this chapter suggests an important limitation on the use of religion as an explanation of terrorist activity. While many acts of violence have been cloaked in the language of religion, confessional faith itself may be irrelevant when the force of historical trajectories and psychological reactions to them take hold. Understanding these processes will require an examination of the historical trajectories of both India and Sri Lanka, especially in regard to their contending communities.

The explanation of political extremism in South Asia is a goal of this inquiry. To that end, both the presence and absence of extremism need to be analyzed. Accordingly, political extremism is understood as the will to power by a social movement in the service of a political program typically at variance with that supported by existing state authorities, and for which individual liberties are to be curtailed in the name of collective
goals, including the mass killing of those who would actually or potentially disagree with that program. Restrictions on individual freedom in the interests of the collectivity and the willingness to kill massively are central to this definition; note also the importance of the state.

First, I will present the model of ephemeral ascendancies that has been used to explain the origins of political extremism across a wide variety of cases (Midlarsky, n.d.). Second, the Indian historical record is reviewed suggesting the nonconformity of the Indian Muslim population to that model. I also include the potential influence of Indian Muslim thinkers. They are important, for in the relative absence of extremist violence, we need to also understand ideational sources of that absence. Concrete instances of communal cooperation between Hindus and Muslims are given, based in part on principles suggested by these thinkers. Next, I turn to the historical trajectory of Sri Lanka, emphasizing the Jaffna Tamil community that has given rise to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an extremist group liberally utilizing suicide terrorism. Reinforcing ephemera are found that indicate the theory’s applicability. Finally, the danger to regional, even international stability in the form of military intervention is suggested by these ephemera, especially if they are reinforcing.

An ephemeral ascendancy occurs when a severe loss (territory, population, livelihood), typically perceived as a catastrophe, is preceded by a period of societal gain, which in turn is preceded by a period of subservience. Ephemeral ascendancies are reinforced when they occur in successive time periods.

**Surprise, Vividness, and a Diachronic Model**
Emotional reactions to a sudden loss or the threat of imminent loss can yield extremist consequences. As shown in Figure 1, the diachronic model is based on a loss (often territorial and almost always surprising) that is preceded by a gain, which followed a still earlier period of subservience. Territorially-based authority spaces are frequently encountered as in the distance from a central (capital) city that its authority extends. However, other forms of authority also exist, especially in colonial contexts that do not allow indigenously organized territorially based authority.

A stark contrast and surprise at the sudden change in fortune is important because of a consequence in the form of vividness. Both emotional pain and satisfaction can be multiplied substantially by the experience of surprise (Elster 2004: 160). Or, as Loewenstein and Lerner (2003: 624) suggest, “people respond with greater emotional intensity to outcomes that are surprising – that is, unexpected.” The emotional intensity associated with surprise therefore can lead to vivid information – that which is most likely to be acted upon rapidly (Mele 2003: 165). Because of the emotional intensity and consequent vividness, a sense of urgency is imparted, or as Nico Frijda (1986: 206) puts it, “Urgency is the irreflexive counterpart of felt emotional intensity.” Urgency is demanded without the contemplation and introspection associated with reflexivity (Frijda 1986: 186-87). Anger can also independently lead to a sense of urgency (Elster 2004: 154).

In the case of a previous loss prior to the existing one, an individual can explain the current circumstance by referring to the earlier one: perhaps a syndrome of loss stemming from episodic battles against overwhelming odds. Effectively, nothing different had really happened in the second instance that requires explanation. But in the
case of an earlier gain prior to the current loss, especially if substantial, then the present loss becomes puzzling, even frightening and then angering, for there must be a special reason for its occurrence. Urgent action is then required against the putative offender to redress the loss, or at least to act quickly to prevent further loss.

Figure 1 maps the changes in authority space, both increase and decrease, over time. Authority space is understood as the proportion of society over which governmental influence legitimately extends. Most spectacular were the contractions of authority space occurring after World War I when the Austro-Hungarian Empire disintegrated and Imperial Germany was truncated. But important varieties of authority space exist in which societal groups have “captured” a particular governmental authority space, and based on long custom, expect to continue occupying an authoritative position within a governmental sector. As we shall see, the traditional increased Tamil dominance of the Ceylonese British civil service is a case in point, and its loss constituted a major contraction of that authority space.

Equally telling in its ultimate impact is the period prior to the increase in authority space. This period is not frequently considered, but is nevertheless important. If the period before the increase consists of a long decline or remains at a consistently small or nonexistent national authority space, then reversion to that condition may be a major fear. The subsequent ascendant portion of the trajectory can then be seen to be an exceptional blip in national history, if in turn, followed by the downturn. Note that the figure here is not a smooth one, in order to signify that the increases or decreases in authority space take place abruptly at a war’s end or independence of a colony, and not as the result of a continuous process of change. The dashed line represents a constant period
of subservience that can have the same consequence as a steady decline. The figure does not show small changes in authority space that indeed can occur, but are dwarfed by the changes in authority space resulting from expansions or contractions of territorial domains, or changes in sovereignty.

Finally, an important buttressing of the diachronic model emerges from prospect theory. This theory tells us that losses are more highly valued than gains, or put another way, that the lost entity is psychologically more valued than an entirely identical entity that is gained (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 2000; Levy 2000). Experimental evidence has consistently demonstrated the asymmetry between losses and gains, even to the extent that, in contrast to gains, losses can generate extreme responses. Losses as the result of a shrinking spatial environment, therefore, may have a magnified role in human consciousness, out of all proportion to their real-world consequences. When we add this asymmetry between gains and losses originating in prospect theory alone to the surprise, vividness, and emotional intensity stemming from the contrast between earlier gains and later losses, then these losses can be deeply consequential. Losses also are associated with risky behavior, often associated with extremist movements.

The Salience of Loss

Anger has been found to be associated with loss (Stein et al. 1993). Equally important, anger has been shown to be a significant emotional response to injustice (Haidt 2003). Aristotle in his Rhetoric (Bk2, Ch2) defined anger as, “an impulse, accompanied by pain,
to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or toward what concerns one’s friends”. Commenting on Aristotle’s definition, Jonathan Haidt (emphasis in original; 2003: 856) notes that “anger is not just a response to insults, in which case it would be just a guardian of self-esteem. Anger is a response to unjustified insults, and anger can be triggered on behalf of one’s friends, as well as oneself.” Thus, anger is categorized by Haidt (2003: 853) as one of the “moral emotions”, those “that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent.”

People in a state of anger are “more apt to blame others for mishaps that occurred” (Berkowitz 2003: 816). Further, persons of an ethnicity different from one’s own are more likely to be targeted (Bodenhausen et al. 1994, DeSteno et al. 2004). Anger in response to loss also has been associated with the desire to obtain restitution or compensation (Stein et al. 1993), or revenge (Frijda 1994, Nisbett and Cohen 1996).

Following this normative theme, Frijda (1986) amplifies: Anger is provoked by a violation of what “ought to be” in the agent’s view. Thus, a normative order has been violated, which justifies a challenge to this changing of the rules by the offending party. That normative order could be based on religion in which, for example, Osama bin Laden and his followers perceive a gross violation of Islam in the presence of Christians and Jews in proximity to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina at the time of the 1991 Gulf War.

“Anger implies nonacceptance of the present event as necessary or inevitable; and it implies that the event is amenable to being changed” (Frijda 1986: 199). Or as a consequence of loss, “anger often carries with it a desire not only to reinstate the goal, but
also to remove or change the conditions that lead to goal blockage in the first place” (Stein et al. 1993: 291-4). Thus, loss (or the threat of imminent loss) generates anger at the injustice of the loss, which in turn can be mobilized by extremist groups that seek not only to redress the loss (or counter the threat), but also can direct their anger at helpless civilian targets who are somehow implicated, often in the most indirect fashion, in the origins of the loss (Midlarsky 2005a, b). Recent findings indicate that even routine partisan activity as in an American presidential election can generate emotional responses. When subjects were confronted with information that was inconsistent with their partisan leanings, M.R.I. scanners indicated that the “cold reason” regions of the cortex were relatively quiet. Instead, emotions guided their reactions (Westen et. al. 2006).

There is an additional element that suggests near universality for an authoritarian response to normative threat. Defining an authoritarian predisposition as a human characteristic akin to a personality trait, and an authoritarian response as an expression of the intolerance of difference, Karen Stenner (2005) finds that normative threats to the unity of a collectivity activates the authoritarian predisposition.

Among all of the variables she considered, authoritarianism was found to explain by far the largest percentage of the variance in intolerance of difference (Stenner 2005: 131). More generally, she concludes that “much intolerance of different races, beliefs, and behaviors is driven…by a fundamental and overwhelming desire to establish and defend some collective order of oneness and sameness. In short, the entire defensive arsenal is fueled by the need to identify, glorify, privilege, and reward ‘us,’ and whatever beliefs and behaviors make us ‘us,’ and to differentiate, denigrate, disadvantage and
punish ‘them,’ and whatever beliefs and behaviors make them ‘them’” (emphasis in original; 2005: 277-278).

Fear can easily be generated by loss. Following Kim Witte (1992: 331), fear is understood as “a negatively-valenced emotion, accompanied by a high level of arousal, and is elicited by a threat that is perceived to be significant and personally relevant.” When the loss and consequent fear entail a likely reversion to an earlier period of subservience, then they can be even more consequential.

**India**

Let us now examine the tendencies toward extremism, or lack of same, among the upward of 130 million Muslims of India, the third largest population of Muslims after those of Indonesia and Pakistan. The question immediately arises: excluding the unique circumstances of Kashmir, why has not this Muslim population engaged in terrorism as have those from Saudi Arabia (al Qaeda), Egypt (Muslim Brotherhood and Egyptian Islamic Group), Algeria (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat [G. S. P. C.]), or even Britain (al Muhajiroun).

An immediate answer lies in the obvious non-conformity of Indian Muslim history to the pattern of Figure 1. The Muslim population, although subservient under the British, has continued in a minority status, in certain respects (e.g. economically) also subservient to the majority Hindus after Indian independence in 1947. Certainly there has been no Muslim ascendancy, ephemeral or otherwise, and losses have been incurred but on a sporadic basis such as the 1984 intrusion of the Indian Supreme Court in Islamic personal law, the riots and Muslim deaths after the destruction of the Babri Mosque in
1992 (Sikand 2004: 41-42), or the rise to power of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The workings of Indian democracy have mostly reversed these losses as in the limits imposed on the government’s ability to regulate personal Islamic law, the prevention of additional attacks on Muslim holy places, and the decline in the political fortunes of the BJP. Communal strife still exists (Varshney 2002), but it is generally local in nature and does not reflect state policy, the most dangerous condition for threatened minorities.

Certainly all is not well in the political and especially economic circumstances of Indian Muslims, but little or no evidence exists for ephemeral ascendancies in the recent past. The closest intimation of such a condition was found in the somewhat greater proportion of Muslims relative to Hindus in the early colonial Indian civil service. But after the great mutiny-rebellion of 1857 instigated in part by Muslim sepoys, quotas were established in the governmental service that began eliminating that disproportion (Robb 2002: 189). By the turn of the twentieth century that disproportion had largely disappeared. Thus, little memory exists of this more than century-old small advantage over Hindus. Even more important, there were no later such advantages for Muslims that could call to mind that earlier condition.

Pre-Independence

The roots of the relative passivity of the Muslim community go deeper still and suggest two different paths for the Hindu and Muslim communities. The first of these is state centered. While Mughal (essentially Muslim, while strictly meaning Mongol) power was in rapid decline beginning in the early 18th century, the Marâthâ (Hindu) kingdom was in its ascendancy. The last of the great Mughal leaders, Aurangzeb (ruled
1658-1707), expanded the empire and imposed a much more stringent Islam than had his predecessors, but some of his conquests were transitory (Assam), and his brutality as well as attempts to convert large numbers of Hindus led to insurgencies that would sap the imperial power. By the end of his reign, the Mughal empire was on the verge of a long and steady decline. By 1739, the government was so weak that it was virtually powerless to prevent the invasion by Nāder Shāh, an Iranian adventurer (Kulke and Rothermund 2004: 214). He inflicted defeat after defeat on the Mughals, sacked Delhi, massacring 30,000 in the process, and annexed Kabul province to Iran. Ultimately, the much diminished Mughal successor of Oudh in northern India succumbed to British power in 1801.

While the Mughal empire was being humiliated by Iranians, the Marāthās were reaching the zenith of their ascendancy. The great Marāthā hero Śivajī (1627-80) waged successful war against the Mughals, among others, establishing the basis of Marāthā power in western India (Kulke and Rothermund 2004: 208-14). By 1740 and the death of Bājī Rāo, the last of the great Marāthā leaders, the kingdom had spread all over India. In 1785, the Marāthās even captured the Mughal capital, Delhi, which with a small territory surrounding it, was all that remained of the once extensive empire. Ultimately, the Marāthās also were too weak to successfully oppose British military force and finally succumbed in 1818, but only after two wars that taxed the limits of the British army in India.

This differential trajectory between Hindu and Muslim states is reflected in the second of our two paths, the formation of organized political action under the British Raj. The Indian National Congress had its first meeting in December 1885 in Bombay,
significantly a principal city of the old Marathā lands (McLeod 2002: 76-99). Also significant, perhaps much more so, was the predominance of Hindu delegates. While 54 of the delegates were Hindu, only 2 were Muslim, the remainder mainly Parsi and Jain. In the Muslim view, Hindu dominance of the Congress movement would continue even after strenuous efforts of Hindus such as Ghandi to eliminate or at least attenuate that perception. Ghandi even adopted as his own the All-India Khilafat movement (Niemeijer 1972: 83-84; Minault 1982), a Muslim effort to revive the Caliphate that was eliminated in 1924 by Kemal Atatürk, but to no avail. This initial perception of Hindu dominance was to yield the formation of the All-India Muslim League in 1906 (McLeod 2002: 97-98). Of course, the Congress movement was to result in the formation of a secular Indian government that would later have strong Hindu overtones, while the Muslim league would eventuate in the formation of a nominally Muslim Pakistan under Mohammed Ali Jinnah, which would later become increasingly fundamentalist under his successors.

Crucial here is the relatively powerless state of Muslims within India beginning at the end of the 18th century and continuing throughout the British Raj. The formation of Pakistan was intended to ameliorate that subservient condition, and was partially successful within the borders of Pakistan despite the lost wars with India. But within the borders of India, notwithstanding the striking accomplishments of individual Indian Muslims (richest man in India, leading movie stars), communal subservience persists to this day.

One could leave it at that and assert that the absence of a principal antecedent of political extremism, an ephemeral ascendency, explains the absence of that extremism. But that would be too cavalier an approach, for we also need to understand why any sort
of generalized extremism is not expected even among Islamist elements of the Indian population.

As a first cut, we must note a key difference between Indian Muslims that collectively do not govern a state, and others such as Arabs or Persians that do. Indeed the origins of Islamic theology that claims no distinction between politics and religion are coterminous with the rise of Arab (or Arab/Persian) states in the form of the Umayyad and Abbâsid empires (Hodgson 1974). Islamic jurisprudence was developed mostly within the context of Muslim political supremacy. Thus, according to Zaki Badawi, a leading Muslim scholar residing in Britain, “‘Muslim theology offers, up to the present, no systematic formulations of the status of being in a minority’” (quoted in Sikand 2004: 8).

Clearly, British Muslim extremist groups such as al Muhajiroun had set as their goal the Islamization of Britain, or at least the conversion to Islam of the Queen and royal family (Witkorowicz 2005), but they have been a tiny minority of British Muslims, without any widespread support. For most Muslims existing in the relatively recent status of minorities without direct political power, the expectation of Islamic governance is virtually nonexistent. India offers up a wide range of potential responses to this minority status, all of them short of governmental domination. And here lies the crux of the matter. Without the realistic expectation of state governance, there is little connection with one of the principal tenets of current Islamic radicalism — restoration of the Caliphate, dissolved in 1924 by Kemal Atatürk (Habeck 2006: 151). Once, as we have seen, the Caliphate or Khilafat movement was strong in India, but that was before establishment of an Islamic state in the region, Pakistan, and the independence of India.
With these emergent states, one of them explicitly Islamic, the Khilafat movement, already in decline, virtually disappeared. Removing “apostate” Muslim rulers in predominantly Islamic countries like Egypt or Saudi Arabia, is another goal of these Islamist movements, but again has little salience for the majority of India’s Muslims.

Figure 2 depicts the contraction of authority space during the Mughal decline of the eighteenth century, and the subsequent relatively powerless condition of India’s Muslims during the period of the British Raj and contemporary India.

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Indian Muslim Thinkers

What does concern the majority of India’s Muslim thinkers and writers? As might be expected, the confrontation between tradition and modernity, is of major importance today, as it once was at the time of the 19th century writings of Sayyed Ahmad Khan who attempted to reconcile Islam with the demands of contemporary life (Brown 2000: 94-5). He argued that Islam was compatible with reason and with “nature.” Khan was very much an advocate of science and positivism. In 1877, he created a Westernizing Muslim College at Aligarh, now the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) (Brown 2000: 95).

A contemporary Indian public intellectual is Asghar ’Ali Engineer who interprets the Qur’an in liberal ways. He understands the Qur’an not to be a book of specific laws, but “above all, a call for a just social order based on a new value system, and the institutional forms that express these values can, and indeed must, radically differ across
space and time” (Sikand 2004: 15). Engineer understands that the fundamental values of the Qur’an are eternally valid, but specific laws do not possess that validity, for they are more than anything a reflection of societal need at a given point in space and time. Legal context-specificity is a cornerstone of his approach. Hence, the pronouncements of the traditional ’ulama (Islamic legal scholars) or fiqh (Islamic legal rulings) represent a “fossilized religion” and had given rise to a “feudalized Islam” incapable of dealing with modernity.

A significant component of modernity is pluralism, especially in the Indian context. Instead of the monochromatic Islam of the Arabian peninsula as Islam rose to power, and which gave rise to much of the body of Islamic law, the religious diversity of the contemporary period must be addressed. Hence, interpretive dialogue is essential. Moreover, all religions are to be addressed as equals, for the Qur’an is clear on the lack of “compulsion in religion” and that people vie with each other “in virtuous deeds” (quoted in Sikand 2004: 21). The fact that religious diversity exists must be part of God’s plan and must be respected, for he must have ordained its presence on this Earth. Accordingly, “he [Engineer] writes that, while Islam stresses justice, Buddhism stresses non-violence and Christianity love. By dialoguing with Buddhists and Christians, then, Muslims can gain new insights that can be used to evolve new interpretations and understanding of their own religion” (Sikand 2004: 22).

Engineer even argues that Hinduism, although polytheistic and filled with statues and images, therefore utterly opposed to Islam’s rigorous monotheism and prohibition of idolatry, nevertheless has theistic cores that must be respected by Muslims. An emphasis on peace, justice, and equality can provide a common framework for dialogue among all
of the major faiths of the Indian subcontinent. The idea of an Islamic state, however, has no place in this dialogue, for it is a product of another time and another place. The best that Muslims in India can hope for is a state, nominally secular, that is neutral regarding all religions. Although reviled by many Islamists, democracy is the best protector against any religion that potentially can be mistreated by the state. Engineer points to the Treaty of Medina between the Prophet and his followers on the one hand, and Jews and pagan Arabs on the other, that defined all of them as part of one ‘umma. The idea of a single Muslim “nationality” (a more restricted meaning of ‘umma) therefore is unacceptable, for people of many different faiths can be part of the same nation, as in the Qur’an. Clearly, Engineer has a very different interpretation of Islam than that of Islamists, especially of the radical variety.

Another addition to this corpus of writing comes from the prolific pen of Sayyed Abul Hasan ’Ali Nadwi. He was descended from a line of Islamic scholars; even his mother had memorized the entire Qur’an. Writing in the colonial period, he analyzed the state of Islam in the Arab world, exhorting Arabs to return to their Islamic roots. He also criticized pan-Arabism, communism, and nationalism as false ideologies seeking to displace the preeminence of Islam. “However, he stood apart from most Islamists by arguing that the Islamic political order could come about in India only in some remotely distant future. Rather than directly struggling for it at the present, he believed that the Muslims of the country should focus their energies in trying to build what he saw as a truly Islamic society, on the basis of which alone could an ideal Islamic political order come into being” (Sikand 2004: 33).
Nadwi also opposed the creation of Pakistan as a separate state for Muslims. Only in a united India could Muslims continue their required missionary activity. Although initially active in the Jama’at-i Islami founded by Maulana Sayyed Abul ’Ala Maududi, Nadwi became disillusioned both with its emphasis on the struggle to found an Islamic state and with the apparent “cult of personality” that grew up around Maududi. “At Maududi’s hands, he [Nadwi] says, ‘God’ (ilah), ‘the Sustainer’ (rabb), ‘Religion’ (din) and ‘Worship’ (ibadat) have all been reduced to political concepts, suggesting that Islam is simply about political power and that the relationship between God and human beings is only that between an All-Powerful King and His subjects. However, Nadwi says, this relationship is also one of ‘love’ and ‘realization of the Truth’, which is far more comprehensive than what Maududi envisages” (Sikand 2004: 36). Instead of this preoccupation with politics, “love” and “the realization of Truth” are to be emphasized. Only a “silent revolution” is conceivable in order to “prepare people’s minds” for a genuinely Islamic government in the distant future.

After Indian independence, in contrast to most Islamists, Nadwi was willing to accept democracy and secularism in the face of potential Hindu extremism that could deprive Indian Muslims of their civil rights, including freedom of worship. He feared “cultural genocide” of the Muslim population in which Islam would disappear. Cooperation with Hindus was a means of preventing this outcome. He became active politically proclaiming that Muslims were indeed the khair ummat (the best community) based on their beliefs and rigorous observance. For this purpose, Nadwi along with other leading Muslim figures established the All-India Muslim Consultative Assembly in 1964. Only in a climate of peace and cooperation could Muslims best make their religion
inviting to the potential Hindu or Christian convert. When the Babri mosque controversy erupted in the early 1990s, Nadwi counseled restraint and dialogue, instead of retaliation and conflict. When Hindu temples were attacked after the destruction of the Babri mosque, he bitterly criticized the actions of these militants.

Summarizing his own views, Nadwi stated, “If you make Muslims one hundred per cent mindful of their supererogatory prayers (tahajjud guzar), making them all very pious, but leave them cut off from the wider environment, ignorant of where the country is heading and of how hatred is being stirred up in the country against them, then, leave alone the supererogatory prayers, it will soon become impossible for Muslims to say even their five daily prayers. If you make Muslims strangers in their own land, blind them to social realities and cause them to remain indifferent to the radical changes taking place in the country and the new laws that are being imposed and the new ideas that are ruling people’s hearts and minds, then let alone [acquiring] leadership [of the country], it will become difficult for Muslims to even ensure their own existence” (quoted in Sikand 2004: 43). At the same time, he exhorted Muslims to observe their faith rigorously and never compromise it for social or political expediency.

The last of our Islamic thinkers to react strongly to the Muslim minority status within India was Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. He, too, was early (in 1941) influenced by Maududi and the Jama’at-i Islami. But like Nadwi, he became disillusioned. According to Khan, Maududi was more influenced by Western imperialism than by any authentic interpretation of Islam. A political understanding of Islam had emerged in his thinking to counter the spread of Western influence. Very much in agreement with the theory offered here, “this understanding of Islam Khan now began to see as a result of a sense of
loss, of defeat suffered by the Muslims at the hands of the West, rather than as emanating from a genuine spiritual quest” (emphasis added; Sikand 2004: 50-51).

Khan became increasingly concerned with Hindu-Muslim relations in India, advocating a personalized Islamic faith and efforts at individual reform. Accordingly, like other faiths, Islam is prepared to welcome modernity, pluralism, and inter-faith dialogue. Muslims must leave their ghettos and shed their “persecution complex” and separatist thinking. Following the Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammed is said to have insisted on “respect for every human being,” and required Muslims to “honour one of another creed” (Sikand 2004: 54). When the Muslim community was small and without much power, the Prophet sought peaceful relations with surrounding communities that would allow the propagation of the faith. The situation of Muslims in India as a minority is directly analogous.

Khan repeatedly refers to what he calls the ‘Hudaibiyah principle’ as a model for Muslims to follow. In the nineteenth year of his prophethood (sic) Muhammad entered into a ten-year no-war treaty with his Meccan Qur’aish opponents at Hudaibiyah, which contained what some of his followers thought were conditions particularly humiliating for the Muslims. The Qur’an, however, announced it as a ‘great victory’ (fateh mubin), and so it proved itself to be. The Qur’aish refused to allow the Prophet to sign his name as ‘the Messenger of Allah’ on the document of the agreement and, instead, forced him to write simply ‘Muhammad, son of Abdullah.’ Further, they did not allow the Muslims to enter Mecca that year to perform the ’umra, and insisted that if any Meccan Muslim was to take refuge in Medina, he would have to be returned to them. Yet the Prophet
accepted these seemingly humiliating conditions, for he had, Khan says, a ‘deep missionary plan’ in mind. Peace with the Qur’aish opened up new possibilities of *daw’ah* [peaceful struggle for the propagation of Islam] work for the Muslims, as a result of which in a few years’ time not just the Qur’aish alone, but, in fact, almost all of Arabia, turned Muslim. This shows, Khan argues, that ‘the power of peace is stronger than the power of violence,’ a valuable lesson for the Muslims of contemporary India to profit from (Sikand 2004: 57).

Further, Khan argues for abandoning the “Islam of pride” and recovering the “Islam of humility and balance.” A position of modesty is desirable. In this way, like the Prophet in Mecca, Islam would turn out to be ultimately victorious. Opposed to an Islamic state like Pakistan, Khan argued that the focus of Islam should be the “inner transformation” of the individual. Then and only then, as a gift from God, an Islamic state may come into being. To attempt to establish such a state by force is effectively to usurp a privilege for God alone. According to Khan, “This principle of peaceful ‘gradualism’ tempered with ‘pragmatism’ is seen as being in complete contrast to the efforts of Islamist groups to establish an Islamic state by force. Religiously sanctified violence, Khan believes, has only given Islam, a “religion of peace and mercy,” a bad name, making it synonymous for many with violence and terror, thus gravely damaging the cause of Islamic da’wah” (Sikand 2004: 64). Science and scientific rationality also should be part of Islam, although revelation is always superior to reason.

Clearly, these Indian Muslim thinkers establish a paradigm for majority-minority relations when Muslims are in the minority. The most important element here is the absence of a realistic expectation of state formation without some sort of cataclysmic
outcome. Failing the “Armageddon” alternative, gradualism is required. Even if this program were to fail in its ultimate purpose of converting all non-Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, still the goal would continue to exist as a major preoccupation of the Muslim community. In the collective view of these thinkers, this alternative is vastly preferable to the mass political violence effectively advocated by radical Islamists.

**Communal Violence and Cooperation**

Although radical Islamism has not taken strong hold in the Indian subcontinent, with the possible exception of Kashmir, nevertheless, violence has occurred principally in the form of Hindu-Muslim communal rioting. This is not to say that this violence is trivial, nor that political extremist tendencies in the form of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), or the Jama`at-i-Islami do not exist. (The August 2007 bombings in Hyderabad killing at least 42 people was said by unnamed Indian security officials to be the work in part of Harkut-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, a Bangladeshi organization seeking to establish Islamic rule in Bangladesh. In the past, Indians have been targeted by this group [Farooq, 2007]. In the radical Islamist view, these attacks are justified where Muslims had formerly ruled, as did the Nizam of Hyderabad prior to independence [Stein 1998: 367].) Instead, even when communal violence has been on the upswing as Ahutosh Varshney (2002: 95-102) chronicles in great detail, it is generally not the result of extremist tendencies but of intercommunal relations, often of a routinized political nature.

The state is crucial, not so much in daily practice, but in the imagination of the potential perpetrators of violence. In the case of al-Qaeda or other radical Islamist groups, the Caliphate as the sovereign political expression of authentic Islam must be recreated. And when Osama bin Laden called Mullah Omar of the Taliban a “Caliph,” it
was his recognition that Taliban rule in Afghanistan was an incarnation of authentic Islamic governance that hopefully could be extended to other Muslim societies. In India, on the other hand, there is little room for Muslim speculation on the existence of a future Caliphate. That expectation had already been manifested in the Khilafat movement of 1919-24 (Hasan and Pernau 2005) that petered out without significant immediate consequence. A long-term consequence may have been the movement to found Pakistan as an independent state begun in the 1930’s (Niemeijer 1972: 178), but having established one such state, it was extremely unlikely that another could be founded.

More important is the not uncommon perception of Muslim neighborhoods in India as mini-Pakistans. According to Rowena Robinson (2005: 13), “In the north Indian plains, it is common to hear a man going to the toilet—that impure sandas often outside or behind the home—refer to his visit as ‘going to Pakistan’. In the brutal communal discourses we have been made to countenance, more so over the last decades, the Indian Muslim is a Pakistani, a scorned being who should ‘go to Pakistan’. Indeed, as the social geography of Indian cities manifests, the Muslim in fact lives in Pakistan, many Pakistans, mini Pakistans.”

And the space allotted to Muslim neighborhoods has been contracting, especially after communal riots involving Hindus and Muslims. In many areas of India, Muslims have experienced a contraction of space, especially after the occurrence of communal strife. The following example is taken from Jogeshwari (East) where, “Muslims have been systematically pushed, over the last two decades, into a smaller and smaller settlement area at the peak of a hill, surrounded by Hindu settlements all around and having almost no access routes out of their pocket except through these Hindu areas. In
the 1970s, Muslims and Hindus were interspersed throughout the area as a whole, though there were larger and smaller religion-based pockets here and there. Each riot has, however, led to the further concentration of Muslims. As Muslims tried to move inwards from the boundary line with each bout of violence, the boundary itself shifted further towards the interior, thereby reducing considerably the space available for habitation. Today Muslims are largely ghettoized in Prem Nagar which is, of course, East Jogeshwari’s “Pakistan” and the road that divides it from the Hindu area is, ironically enough, Gandhi Market road” (Robinson 2005: 51-52).

Another limitation on Muslim neighborhoods is the heightened police presence after each riot. Thus, the area of habitation is increasingly circumscribed, and the police further limit the movement of Muslims. Given this processual loss of territory, one might expect an extremist response. However, in the absence of an ephemeral ascendancy in the recent past and even a remote expectation of state formation for Indian Muslims, the only option is fortitude (e.g., Nadwi, see above) or the occasional act of revenge (e.g., the Gujarat train fire killing some fifty Hindus) that yields many more Muslim deaths after the subsequent more intense communal violence. “Given the minority position and the geographical dispersion of Muslims, ‘devotion for political ends’ has, right from the outset, very little potential of fulfillment regardless of the ambitions of individual persons or particular sub-groups” (Robinson, 2005: 156).

Constructive approaches have included proactive networks of cooperation between Hindus and Muslims in locations where riots have been largely absent (e.g., Calicut in Kerala in southern India), in contrast to the absence of such networks where riots have typically occurred (e.g., Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh in northern India; Varshney:
The presence of the AMU in that city may be thought to heighten Muslim consciousness thereby increasing the probability of violence. However, Calicut also has its respected Muslim institutions. According to Ashutosh Varshney:

although they restrain politicians in the short and medium run, the intercommunal civic networks in Calicut were *politically* constructed in the long run. Caste injustice within Hindu society rather than communal antagonism between Hindus and Muslims has historically formed the master narrative of Kerala politics. Caste was more central to the ascriptive hierarchy in Kerala than was religion. Hence ethnic conflict historically took the idiom of caste. Hindu-Muslim politics functioned within a larger context of intra-Hindu caste differences. In Aligarh, the reverse has been true. Communalism has been the dominant political narrative for a century, and caste politics within Hinduism has historically functioned within the larger framework of Hindu-Muslim antagonisms (emphasis in original; Varshney 2002: 122).

Inter-communal dependence exists in Calicut but not in Aligarh where violence has been endemic (Varshney 2002: 128). Lest geography appear to be compelling as in the proximity of Aligarh to Pakistan, but the remoteness of Calicut from Pakistan, the case of Ajmer in central Rajasthan close to Pakistan but peaceful in its relations between Hindus and Muslims belies this assumption. “Over time it became a major nucleus for Hindu and Muslim pilgrimage and for the activity of numerous tribes, castes, and sects that have been classified as Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Christian, Sikh, Parsi, and others” (Mayaram 2005: 150).
Among the sources of ethnic coexistence are a shared mythico-religious space. A Sufi shrine, for example, has served as a locus for the expected healing of the sick of virtually all sects in Ajmer. Historically, both Mughal and Hindu princes patronized the shrine (Mayaram: 154).

Everyday life reinforces the significance of this essentially multicultural shrine. The market near the shrine has both Hindu and Muslim traders; the prosperity of both hinging on the steady flow of pilgrims. According to Shail Mayaram, “The Sindhi-Muslim interface derives from the activity centred on the shrine. Sindhi traders dominate the Dargah Bazar and benefit considerably from the annual Urs turnover of something like Rs 80-100 million. Their post-Independence economic prosperity is, hence, dependent on the continuous flow of pilgrims” (Mayaram 2005: 159). Thus, the rapid settlement of disputes is in the interests of both Sindhis (local Hindu population) and Muslims. Further, it is the “unheroic quality of everyday life” that reinforces pluralism (D.R. Nagaraj, quoted in Mayaram 2005: 159). And “Muslims remark on the marked absence of ideas of purity—pollution among Sindhis” (Mayaram 2005: 159) that further sustains these cooperative relationships, as one might expect given the emphasis on purity as a major accelerant of political extremism (Midlarsky n.d.).

Sri Lanka

A stark contrast with that of Indian Muslims is the trajectory of Jaffna Tamils in the neighboring island state of Sri Lanka. Since the passage of the Language Bill of 1956 designating Sinhalese as the official language of Sri Lanka, thereby relegating Tamil to the limbo of official non-existence, communal relations between the two principal ethnicities have deteriorated. Currently according to Patrick Peebles (2006: 5), the
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) “has created an authoritarian quasi-state in the northeast. It governs under permanent wartime conditions with heavy-handed propaganda, universal conscription (even of children and elderly people), and ruthless suppression of dissent.”

How did this extremist, terrorist organization evolve to the point of governing a portion of Sri Lanka under these conditions? In particular, the resort to suicide bombing by the LTTE with its potential for mass murder requires explanation. The theory of ephemeral ascendancies, especially the fear of merely a transitory governance will go far to explain this extremist behavior. To do this effectively, the political histories of the two communities need to be addressed even in pre-colonial times. As we shall see, a political substitutability (Most and Starr 1989) during the colonial period will be encountered that will do much to set the stage for Sinhalese nationalism and Tamil extremism.

**Pre-Independence**

The history of the earliest periods prior to the arrival of the Europeans is murky, but certain basic facts are known. During this time, there were indigenous Sinhalese and Tamil Kingdoms vying for control of the island. This process settled into a Tamil-governed kingdom in Jaffna in the northern portion, and one governed by the Sinhalese in the southern sector, and especially the interior of the island. But the Portuguese arrived in 1505 and displaced Muslim merchants who had earlier dominated regional trade. Through a process of gradual expansion, the Portuguese began to dominate the northern region and expanded beyond it. By 1519, the Jaffna kingdom, although still independent was substantially reduced in strength. In 1591, after a Portuguese invasion of the Jaffna peninsula, a local puppet monarch was installed under their tutelage. After a revolt of
Christian subjects and an attempted suppression of that rebellion by the Tamil authorities, in 1619 the Portuguese annexed the kingdom outright (Peebles 2006: 36). This kingdom now lost its independence, never to be revived until some facsimile of that earlier condition was restored after 2000.

After 1621, the only surviving indigenous polity was that of Kandy, situated in the interior. Earlier, in 1581, upon an invasion by a neighboring indigenous opponent, the kingdom lost its sovereignty for a decade. After independence was reestablished, the Portuguese attempted to conquer the Kandyan kingdom, weakening it. It was the British arrival in the 19th century (after the Dutch expulsion of the Portuguese), that would end the independence of Kandy for good. They raided Kandy in 1803 but were unsuccessful at that time. In 1815, however, a convention was signed between the British and the Kandyans that preserved local autonomy for Kandy while recognizing British sovereignty. A rebellion of highland Sinhalese (the backbone of Kandy) in 1818 was suppressed, leading to limitations on Kandyan self-governance, and “The suppression of the Kandyan Rebellion unified the entire island under a single government [for a long time period] for the first time in its history” (Peebles 2006: 53).

As K.M. de Silva (1995: 75-76) suggests, “There had been a long and successful tradition of Sinhalese resistance to Western colonial powers, Portugal first, then Holland and Britain itself. The years 1815-18 when the British established their control over the whole island constitute, in every way, a decisive turning point in the country’s history. This time was the first since the early and mid-fifteenth century, when a Sri Lankan (Sinhalese) ruler had effective control over the whole island for about fifty years, that the process of unification had been successfully introduced.”
A reorganization of the island colony in 1832 that effectively ended a Buddhist religious hegemony, also allowed Christian missionary activity. American missionaries were to be critical in this effort and, “The best schools in the island—some say the best schools in Asia—were in the Jaffna peninsula. American missionaries supported education as means to convert students; the people of Jaffna responded enthusiastically to the opportunity. Jaffna Tamils used education to move into the English-speaking occupations in government, the private sector, and the professions. Many Tamils migrated to the southern and central regions for employment, leading to Sinhalese protests and the British favored Tamils over the majority Sinhalese” (Peebles 2006: 63). Hereafter, English-language education was controlled largely by Christian missionaries. “The gap in prestige and income between the English-educated and the swabasha-educated was immense” (Peebles 2006, 63), and “The biggest beneficiaries of British colonialism were those who speak English” (Peebles 2006: 65).

In addition to the Dutch Burghers, left over from the colonial period, missionary-educated Jaffna Tamils were to constitute an administrative elite. An additional consequence was the study of Jaffna history and culture by English-speaking Tamils; the sense of a unique Jaffna Tamil identity was enhanced. Although as of 1938, Indian civil servants comprised 25% of all government workers in Ceylon (as the colony was called under the British), by 1941, they were reduced by more than half. Correspondingly there was a net emigration of some 65,000 people of Indian origin to India. Increasingly, the English-speaking Jaffna Tamils assumed many of these vacated positions so that by 1957, when the effects of the 1956 Language Bill had not been felt as yet, the percentage of government employees identifiably Jaffna Tamil was approximately 50% (De Votta
Patrick Peebles, probably calculating on a different database, indicates that 30% of the jobs in the “administrative services” at that time were occupied by Jaffna Tamils; “by 1975, that number had fallen to 5%” (2006: 113), a substantial reduction, whatever the initial estimate.

Here we see the trajectory of an initial Jaffna Tamil subservience to colonial powers after 1619 (two centuries before the demise of the Sinhalese Kandyan state), followed by a growing ascendancy of Jaffna Tamils within the colonial civil service during the 19th and 20th centuries. Effectively, a substitution of civil service authority — the only kind allowed indigenous peoples within a colonial setting — for political power in an independent state had been achieved by the Jaffna Tamils. Confronted with the widespread English proficiency of the Jaffna Tamils, most Sinhalese could not aspire to that status. But after 1956, when this authority was removed from the Tamils by the Sinhalese only Language Bill, the descent was rapid. As we shall see, economic dominance by Tamils in major cities like Colombo and Trincomalee also would prove to be transitory.

**Rise of the LTTE**

Initially, inter-communal conflict was the protest norm. The Sinhalese character “Sri” was defaced on license plates; in response Tamil language signs were painted over. But soon in 1958, violence took the form of “rape, beating, arson, and murder directed at
Tamils, but Tamils soon retaliated against Sinhalese” (Peebles 2006: 111). By May 26, attacks had become an ethnic war. A state of emergency was finally declared and law and order resumed, especially after a Tamil Language Special Provisions Bill was enacted. 

Along with the “nationalization” of language in favor of Sinhala, many Tamil-owned industries were nationalized. For example, shipping companies owned by Tamils were displaced in 1967 when the port of Trincomalee in the eastern sector was nationalized (Peebles 2006: 116). At around this time, the communal pressure for an independent Tamil state began to grow. Additionally only militarized pressure was deemed to have any chance of success.

In part to palliate Sinhalese nationalists who were dissatisfied with the (minimal) conciliatory alleviation of Tamil grievances, the 1972 Constitution of the First Republic of Sri Lanka “Declared Sri Lanka ‘a Unitary State,’ gave ‘Buddhism the foremost place’ and made it the state’s duty ‘to protect and foster Buddhism,’ instituted Sinhala as the ‘Official Language of Sri Lanka,’ and mandated that the regulations drafted under the Tamil Language Act of 1958 were ‘subordinate legislation’” (DeVotta 2004: 134). 

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, several insurgent organizations were formed. The most important of these were the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization, the People’s Liberation Organization for Tamil Eelam, the Eelam People’s Revolution Liberation Front, and last but certainly not least, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the only one of these organizations to survive. Founded by Velupillai Prabhakaran in Jaffna in the mid 1970s, it became among the most brutal of the Tamil nationalist groups,
ultimately assassinating members of other such groups until the LTTE was the only one remaining (Fair 2004: 18).

Slowly increasing violence became a standard part of the Sri Lankan landscape, but after 1983, it escalated dramatically. (For a graph of violence occurring between 1948 and 1990, see Richardson [2004: 42].) Earlier, in 1977, anti-government activity by Tamil youths sparked riots that were inflamed by the police and armed forces. In May 1978, the government proscribed the LTTE and in July 1982, the Prevention of Terrorism Act that had been enacted on a temporary basis in 1979, now became permanent throughout the island. Essentially, this bill empowered the police and other security forces to violate the civil rights of virtually all persons suspected of committing terrorist acts or simply harboring separatist sympathies. “The new law explicitly contravened the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, to which the country was a signatory, and led to many young Tamils being abused and tortured, which merely deepened their determination to secede. With the police and security forces in the Jaffna Peninsula also continuing to harass, beat, and rape Tamils with impunity, Tamil rebels stepped up their violent acts” (DeVotta 2004: 149).

Violence during a period of contentious elections to District Development Councils in Jaffna led to the destruction of the Jaffna Municipal Library by government forces in 1981. The library contained approximately 100,000 ancient and irreplaceable documents pertaining to that community; virtually all were destroyed in the fire. Sporadic anti-Tamil riots followed the library fire, many sparked by government agents. Inescapably, many if not most Tamils came to the conclusion that in the name of Sinhala
nationalism, the Sinhalese government intended to annihilate their cultural heritage, even their very lives.

But in 1983, riots broke out that effectively transformed the existing ethnic conflict into civil war. In July 1983, the LTTE ambushed a patrol in Jaffna killing 13 soldiers. After the bodies were flown to Colombo for a mass funeral, an anti-Tamil rampage ensued. Shops and businesses owned by Tamils were targeted. According to The Economist, writing in 1983, “Two weeks ago Tamils owned 60 percent of the wholesale trade and 80 percent of the retail trade in the capital. Today that trade is gone” (quoted in DeVotta 2004: 151). The death toll was officially estimated at 367, but unofficial estimates ran as high as 3,000. In addition, 53 Tamil prisoners were murdered in Welikada Prison and 135,000 Tamil refugees were generated, 30,000 of them immigrating to the Indian state of Tamil Nadu (Peebles 2006: 135-36).

Gradually and ruthlessly, the LTTE established its control over Jaffna. A major fillip to their efforts actually came from the Sinhalese dominated government. Reacting to the riots of 1983, the majority Sinhalese party effectively banned members of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) from the legislature. The sixth amendment to the Constitution read “No person shall directly, or indirectly, in or outside Sri Lanka, support, espouse, promote, finance, encourage or advocate the establishment of a separate State within the territory of Sri Lanka” (quoted in Bush 2003: 137). Since the TULF was formally committed to the establishment of a separate Tamil state, its members could not stand for office. Thus, the only non-violent avenue for the expression of Tamil grievances was now closed to them. Tamil youth now flocked to the paramilitary organizations, thereby clearing the path for paramilitary rule in the North (86% Tamil in
1981), and attempted such rule in the East (40% Tamil, 32% Muslim, 25% Sinhalese in 1981; Bush 2003: 41).

Between March 1, 1985 and January 31, 1986, Amnesty International confirmed 2,578 murders, 12,105 arrests, and 547 disappearances. Approximately 55,000 people including 30,000 mainly Muslims from Trincomalee in the Eastern Province were displaced. In November 1984, the LTTE massacred over 80 Sinhalese men, women, and children in the Kent and Dollar Farms in the Eastern Province. Another LTTE massacre, this time of 70-75 Sinhalese (including women and children) occurred in Anuradhapura, presumably in response to the earlier murder of 43 Tamil males in Jaffna. In Vavuniya in August 1985 nearly 100 Tamils were murdered after an army patrol narrowly escaped a land mine explosion (Bush 2003: 139).

By 1986, the LTTE had established effective military control of most of the Tamil areas of northern Sri Lanka by silencing or co-opting the competing paramilitaries and effectively opposing the Sri Lankan Army (SLA). The final stages of this process began in January 1983 when the Sri Lankan government reacted to increasing paramilitary activity by imposing a fuel and economic blockade on all of these Tamil areas. Simultaneously, the SLA began a campaign of air raids and artillery shelling of the Jaffna peninsula. An LTTE response in April 1987 was to stop vehicles on the Colombo-Trincomalee Road and massacre over a 100 Sinhalese passengers. Shortly thereafter, the Colombo bus station was bombed, killing between 100-200 people and injuring hundreds more (Bush 2003: 141). The SLA campaign continued with military thrusts into the region. And on July 5, with its power over Jaffna increasingly in jeopardy, the LTTE
carried out its first suicide bombing in which forty SLA troops were killed in the Nelliyadi army camp. Figure 3 illustrates this historical trajectory.

Figure 3 about here

Note the increasing willingness to kill civilians by the LTTE and its first use of suicide terrorism only after the possibility of a major loss appeared on the horizon. The stiffening military opposition of the SLA and the willingness of the Sri Lankan government to establish a blockade of the Jaffna region, suggested that the LTTE might be defeated and perhaps even destroyed if many of its cadres could not escape into the jungle. At the very least, the loss of Jaffna, “the symbol of LTTE power and authority, one that had weathered all SLA attempts to capture” (Fair 2004: 21), would be a crucial defeat. The LTTE had now entered the camp of authoritarian extremism, permitting no Tamil rivals, and engaging in deadly violence against civilians and military alike. When the threat of loss (of Jaffna) followed an earlier ephemeral ascendancy (vast but temporary overrepresentation in the civil service and economy), extremism became much more likely to occur. The earlier ephemeral ascendancy had now been reinforced by the threat of a later one.

Striking in its implications is the absence of any religious or even ideological motivation to the suicide attacks of the LTTE. And suicide bombing has been a much-used tactic of the Tigers. Between 1980-2000 when the LTTE was most active in its terror campaigns, its 168 suicide attacks comprised the preponderance of all such events (Gunaratna 2000; cited in Fair 2004: 41). Since that time, the Palestinian Intifada II and
the Iraq insurgency have added many new suicide bombings (Pape 2005: 253-64), but the LTTE still stands prominent in this activity. According to Christine Fair (2004: 37), “In some ways, the entire LTTE could arguably be declared a suicide force of sorts. Each cadre is required to wear a cyanide capsule, which is distributed by the local commando leader in the celebration that follows the completion of training. LTTE cadres have shown little hesitation in consuming the capsule if their mission is compromised.”

But the elite of all of the cadres are the Black Tigers, the suicide arm of the LTTE. They are the most honored of the Tigers. After applying for admission, they are selected for the Black Tigers only after the most thorough vetting; many applicants are rejected. Every year their sacrifices are honored in a major celebration called Great Heroes Day (often incorrectly translated as “Martyr’s Day”). Black Tiger elite status is signified in their access to Prabhakaran, the LTTE leader, who hosts a meal with them before their final mission. It is not a religion or a specific ideology that motivates the Black Tigers. “Instead, the mythology and reverence attached to the sacrifice of the Black Tigers serve to motivate the cadres” (Fair 2004: 47). According to Suba Chandran (2001; quoted in Fair 2004: 47) “The Black Tigers thus form the backbone of the LTTE which in turn eulogize the former and this overt glorification ensures the continuous inflow Black Tigers have.”

**Indian Intervention**

Given the large Tamil population in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu across the Palk Strait from the Jaffna peninsula, it might seem inevitable that India eventually would intervene in the Sri Lankan violence. Actually, it was the Indian external intelligence agency, the
Research and Analysis Wing, which began training the LTTE and other Tamil rebel groups from Sri Lanka. The Indian government strongly opposed the post-1977 pro-Western policies of the Sri Lankan government and sought to undermine it (DeVotta 2004: 171). The Indian decision to intervene diplomatically, if not yet militarily, was made in the wake of the July 1983 riots between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities (Carment, James, and Taydas 2006: 50).

Training camps were set up in Tamil Nadu, but as hostility to the LTTE increased in India, the Tigers began moving their bases to the Jaffna peninsula. In the midst of the SLA offensive (begun in February 1987) against the LTTE in Jaffna, the Indian air force began dropping food and medicine to the rebels, after a refusal by the Sri Lankan government to allow such shipments by sea. In July, an agreement to allow Indian forces to enter Sri Lanka essentially was imposed upon the Sri Lankan government; soon 6,000 Indian troops of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) were in the Jaffna region (Peebles 2006: 157). Almost immediately, the IPKF and LTTE came into conflict as the former tried to disarm the Tamil rebels, and the violence quickly escalated.

By the time the IPKF withdrew from Sri Lanka in 1990, it had lost 1,157 troops in combat and nearly 3,000 wounded in India’s longest war (DeVotta 2004: 173). Clearly, the initial decision to arm the Jaffna Tamil rebels had become a “blowback” for the Indian government, as had the CIA’s strategy to arm Islamic militants in fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan during the mid-1980s. The role of suicide bombing in the Indian decision to ultimately withdraw all support from the LTTE should not be minimized, for in March 1991 Rajiv Ghandi was assassinated by an LTTE female suicide bomber.
The first suicide bombing by the LTTE occurred just prior to the Indian intervention; LTTE suicide bombing would also put an exclamation point to the end of that action. And the reinforcing ephemera experienced by the Jaffna Tamils would set the stage for that unfortunate intervention. Nothing of that sort has happened internal to India (again excluding Kashmir); violence at this level involving government forces has been avoided. Religion has not been a major factor in Sri Lanka’s violence, as in India religion has not inspired suicide terrorism or other manifestations of extremist behavior beyond communal acts of revenge.

**Conclusion**

Why are ephemeral ascendencies, especially reinforcing ephemera so dangerous for international stability, at least at the regional level, even beyond? Anger associated with these ephemera is intense. As a consequence, the violence that erupts tends to be severe and long lasting in the absence of the massive external force needed to quell the violence. If the ephemera are reinforced as in the Sri Lankan case, then the intensity of the ethnic conflict is increased to the point that external intervention becomes more likely. The histories, literature, folktales, and legends of the earlier ephemeral ascendencies of the past are drawn upon by both politicians and citizens, intensifying the feelings of loss and anger. Another classic instance of this phenomenon is the Serbian aggression after 1991 resulting from three reinforcing ephemera that yielded massive conflict within the former Yugoslavia including genocide at Srebrenica, the only case of this kind in Europe after 1945 (Midlarsky n.d.). Western, especially American intervention was required to end the violence. Alas, the size of the Indian force needed to
decisively defeat the LTTE, and the political will to continue the IPKF mission in Sri Lanka were absent, and so the violence continues to this day.

Reinforcing ephemera in the historical trajectory of Sri Lankan Jaffna Tamils distinguish this case from that of Indian Muslims. The expectation, whether realistic or not, of state formation (or at least significant autonomy) by the LTTE also demarks this instance from that of Indian Muslims. The presence of an already existing Islamic state, Pakistan, precludes the possibility of another such state coming into existence in the Indian sub-continent.

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Figure 1: Changes in authority space over time.
Figure 2: Changes in authority space of Indian Muslims; early 18th century-present*

*Not to scale
Figure 3: Changes in Jaffna Tamil authority space over time, 16th century to 1987*

*Not to Scale