Securitization Theory and Internal Ethnic Conflicts: Interrogating Select Cases from India and Sri Lanka.

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Introduction

Internal ‘ethnic’ conflicts have been a subject of extensive concern, theoretical expositions and statistical analysis in the discipline of International relations (IR) since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Civil wars, internal conflicts or internal wars spawn ‘within states’, and IR has systematically endeavoured to theorize their tendencies, causes, dynamics and possible redressal. Ethnic identity and allegiances have emerged as a prominent function of such conflicts, attracting extensive research. India has grappled with the burning threat of internal ethnic conflicts since the immediate post-independence era. Zones of prolonged turmoil in Kashmir, parts of Northeast, Punjab and Maoist belts have crucially impinged on national security policy as well as external strategizing, especially in the sub-continent. While these have been rooted in various socio-economic, psycho-social and political factors, their festering and persistence through decades have only spawned multiple dimensions, entrenching the sense of ‘self’ (as an ethnic community or group) versus the state. India’s strategically located neighbour Sri Lanka remained mired in one of the bloodiest conflicts and terrorist sieges for almost three decades, till the government was successful in stamping it out through planned and phased military offensives in May 2009. India’s political and military intervention in the Sri Lankan civil war during the 1980s ended in a disaster, but also exposed the fear of the two countries that the vulnerability of the Tamils on both sides of the border could escalate the ‘internal’ conflict into a ‘regional’ war. Their heightened sense of insecurity regarding the potential security dynamics of the sub-continent continues to impact foreign policy stances. Internally, the responses of the state governments to their respective civil-ethnic conflicts have been ‘heavy-handed’, including resorting to military actions to tackle perceived existential threats to their national security. The realities of the conflicts and
their armed handling (in the past as well as ongoing cases) have not only jettisoned domestic stability but also severely compromised the credibility of the countries as two consolidated democracies of South Asia.

The concept of ‘securitization’ as propounded by the ‘Copenhagen School’ii of Security Studies (1998) is hinged on the idea of ‘security’ as survival. It delineates a process of identifying a specific class of threats (military and beyond) as ‘existential threats’ to a referent object (state or other units); their sociological construction into acceptable definitions of threats to the ‘relevant audience’ (people), accompanied by ‘emergency responses’, beyond and above ‘the normal bounds of politics’, utilizing every resource at the disposal of the referent object. (Buzan et.al, 1998; pp.20-21) While this definition establishes the theoretical understanding of securitization as a self-referential practice, which is justified by the very existence of a perceived, inter-subjective understanding of existential threat, it also renders clear that the armed, military action of the state (beyond political negotiations) to tackle internal ethnic conflicts for protecting national sovereignty and security is an act of securitization. Thus, the duty to preserve national security effectively juxtaposes securitization and internal ethnic conflicts for the state. However, the merit of ‘securitization of internal ethnic conflicts’ in India and Sri Lanka is challenged when contextualised and tested in terms of real cases. The continued existence of many these conflict zones for decades, the looming threat of resuscitation of conflicts which have been militarily defeated and the enormous social and ethnic fissures left by the wars indicate that despite active securitization by the states of their respective conflicts, comprehensive resolutions have not been accomplished. The paper substantiates this incongruence and presents it as a theoretical and practical challenge. Also, India’s self-defeating military intervention in Sri Lanka against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) highlights the failure of ‘external securitization’ by India to deal with a perceived common insecurity issue and for reinvigorating Sri Lankan government’s internal securitization. From the perspective of foreign relations, both India and Sri Lanka may have some common lessons to share and learn from each other as plural democratic states which are constantly trying to articulate responses to internal insecurity and domestic violence but rarely rising above the hitherto treaded path of securitization.

The paper is structured in the following manner. The first two sections delineate the theoretical premise of securitization and internal ethnic conflicts, and contextualize the cases of India and Sri Lanka. The third section attempts a critical analysis of the securitization approach of internal
ethnic conflicts by India and Sri Lanka, and exposes its limitations. The fourth section studies
the insecurity interface between India and Sri Lanka and its climax in the peace-keeping
intervention of 1987. The impact of this external securitization effort by India in Sri Lanka is
briefly highlighted. The final section outlines the common security lessons for India and Sri
Lanka and urges initiatives to charter a common approach. The possible scope for theoretical
refinements for securitization and its practical consequences are also suggested.

Section I: Securitization: Theoretical scope and Limitations

National security itself has been largely conceived in terms of military security in traditional
security studies or strategic studies and a brief glance at the evolution of its discourse within the
pedagogy of international relations would be instructive in explaining this emphasis. Security
studies as a disciplined attempt to explain and analyse security developed its orthodoxy during
the paradigmatic reign of political realism. Thus, most of the literature and mainstream
understandings of security evolved around the realist approaches of rational choice theory and
neo-realism, prioritising the role of the state and its military power. Stephen Walt offered the
neo-realist definition of security studies as the study of the use and control of military force.
(Walt, 1991; pp.212-213) Barry Buzan observes that strategic studies often took military threats
as ‘given’, seeing them largely as products of material conditions in the military sector. (Buzan,
2000, p.2) However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and liquidation of bipolarity, there
were radical changes in the strategic environment which weakened the exalted supremacy of the
‘military’ concerns of security and allowed space for political, social, economic and
environmental issues. This ‘broadening’ of security agenda was mainly ushered by the
ascendancy of post-modernism and constructivist security discourses which paid attention to a
wide range of threats in trying to maintain security of not just the state but also the individual
and the international system. As is well known, Buzan and Ole Waever played a pioneering role
in this widening of the scope of security and forming the Copenhagen School through their
critical conceptions of security. (Smith, 2005, p. 32)

As stated before, security, for the Copenhagen school, is defined in opposition to a conception of
‘ politicization’ or ‘normal politics’ that is prescribed by the rule of law, political deliberations,
and is ultimately suggestive of a Western liberal democratic state. The ‘securitization approach’
was carved out from this conceptualisation of securitizing existential threats by Buzan, Waever
and Wilde in the early 1990s. (Buzan et.al, 1997; 1998) At this juncture, dual observations could
me made; first, securitization presents itself as a characteristic framework which defines the idea
of state security and its maintenance by adopting a sociological construction of threat and insecurity. This marks a radical shift from the traditional, purely militaristic characterisation of security. Secondly, and as a continuation of the first argument, by legitimising the use of ‘emergency measures’ the securitization approach in effect prescribes military action by the state on a short-term, unilateral basis to counter the threat to security and sovereignty. In the vein of the theory, an actor declares a particular issue, dynamic or another actor to be an ‘existential threat’ to a particular referent object. If accepted as such by a relevant audience, it legitimises the suspension of normal politics and the use of emergency measures in responding to that perceived crisis. (Buzan et al, 1998, p.21; emphasis not in original)

Waever and Buzan further argue that the articulation of threat themselves come in the form of ‘speech acts’. By using the language of security and threat ‘a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it.’ (Mc Donald, 2008, pp. 68-71) Based on a clear idea of the nature of security, securitization studies aims to gain an increasingly precise understanding of who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions (that is, what explains when securitization in successful). (Buzan, 1998, p.32) A successful securitization has three components-existential threats, emergency action, and effects on inter-unit relations by breaking free of rule. (Ibid) Securitization thus, has a certain modality (a general pattern of operation) that is constant and identifiable, even if the context in which securitizing speech acts occur may vary. In a later work, Waever argued (borrowing from Austin) that there are certain ‘felicity conditions’ which can increase the likelihood of successful securitization; the presentation of the existential threat, legitimizing the use of extraordinary measures for security; the securitizing actor being in a position of authority and having enough social and political capital to convince an audience of the existence of an existential threat; and, objects associated with the security issue carrying historical connotations of threat, danger and harm or hostility in sentiments. However, Waever added that no single condition is sufficient to achieve securitization on its own, nor are they entirely assured of achieving securitization. (Waever, 2000; p.252)

As internal ethnic conflicts directly impinge on national security, a clear case is made for a concomitant state response to protect sovereignty. However, an overwhelming military response seems to sit oddly with the complex, sociologically and politically layered nature of internal conflicts, stemming from actual or perceived sense of deprivation and marginalisation of ethnic groups.
Section II: Examining Internal Ethnic Conflicts: Theory and Realities

In 2015, the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK) counted 74 interstate conflicts, 280 intrastate (between non state actors and the national government) conflicts and 55 sub-state (only between non state actors) conflicts. 61 percent of all intrastate conflicts (172/280) were violent. The HIIK also observed three new intrastate conflicts in 2015. (Global Conflict Panorama, 2015, p.15) A total of 108 conflicts concerned autonomy and secession, with the latter accounting for 48 cases. While only one conflict in the Americas dealt with secession, it appeared more frequently throughout Asia and Oceania (19), Europe (15), Sub-Saharan Africa (8), and the Middle East and Maghreb (5). Conflicts regarding autonomy, i.e. the achievement or extension of political autonomy of a non-state group or dependent region without claiming independence, amounted to a total of 62 cases. In total, 24 autonomy conflicts took place in Asia, 13 in Europe, twelve in Africa, eight in the Middle East and Maghreb, and five in the Americas. Of the 62 Autonomy conflicts, 26 included the use of violence, with twelve cases in Asia and Oceania, five in both Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and Maghreb, and three in the Americas. One of the 13 conflicts in Europe concerning this item was conducted violently. (Ibid, p.16)

Exposing the overwhelming statistics on conflicts based on ethnicity and ethnic consciousness in intra-state discords till 2008, the Peace Research Institute (Oslo) had calculated that between 1946 and 2008, there were 174 internal and internationalised internal conflicts. Importantly, the same data also reveal that of these 174 conflicts, ninety fall into the category of ethnic conflicts. (PRIO 2009; Harboorn and Wallenstein, 2009; cited in Cordell and Wolfff, 2011, p. 3) Quinn’s analysis of violent self-determination conflicts found that from 1950 to 2008, seventy-nine territorially concentrated ethnic groups have waged armed conflicts for autonomy and independence. (Quinn, 2008, p.33; cited in Cordell and Wolfff, 2011, p.3)

Internal conflicts are established following domestic situations of violence, where the people organize themselves into sub-national movements, using terror tactics to wage low-intensity civil wars against the political establishment, demanding secession, regional autonomy or higher political representation in the government. (David, 1998; pp.77-102) The intrinsic essence of these movements encourages rebellion irrespective of the prospects of success. Closely related to this view, is the argument that the incomplete forms of statehood and the development of a ‘nation’ in post-colonial countries facilitate the scope for existing ethnic loyalties and allegiances to be moulded for material gains. Since ethnic identities are inclusive and intolerant
of other ethnic groups within the same political boundaries, the sense of ethno-nationalism and ethnic consciousness encourages intra-state, internal dissension.

Though the nature of ethnic formulations as the basis of sub-national movements are widely debated in theory, Donald Horowitz observed that a powerful affiliation such as ethnicity would certainly attract the interest of those who wish to use it instrumentally, and so ethnic-group behaviour is likely to be both passionate and calculative. The recurrent tendency of groups to cleave from other groups and claim a disproportionate share of rewards fits remarkably well with the incentives to bifurcate that typically obtain in democratic politics. This tendency and these incentives make it both easy for political leaders to mobilize along ethnic lines and difficult to break the centrifugal tendencies that prevail in divided societies. In ethnic relations generally, and democratic politics in particular, maximal inclusiveness is a strongly disfavoured outcome. (Horowitz, 1998)

Surmising a vast range of literature and opinions on this subject, it may be pointed out that there are two broad trajectories of progression from an ethnic group to the state; one, where the ethnic groups coalesces into a nation by the dint of commonality of culture and existence and thereby develops the consciousness and consensus to graduate to the political system of the state, and second, where formation of the state precedes the nation-building process and thus the state boundaries may cut across the existing ethnic groups. Countries in the developing world, like India, are examples of this latter trend and provide a fit case for the eruption of ethnic conflicts.

Contextualising politico-ethnic internal conflicts in modern albeit nascent democracies, Atul Kohli reminds us that the prevailing cultural conditions of most developing countries encourage identities and attachments to be more local than national; authority in such society tends to be dispersed but, within dispersed pockets, quite rigid and hierarchical. As democracy is introduced and competing elites undertake political mobilisation, old identities are rekindled and re-forged. Modern technology hastens the process and festers collision of mobilised identities with each other or with the state. The spread of democratic norms also threaten traditional elites, who then seek to join hands with all those who perceive the spread of individualism as disruptive of traditional lifestyles. A chain of reactionary movements are thus set in motion. An interventionist state in a poor setting controls large proportions of a society’s economic resources, thus, attracting the competitive energies of many of those who seek economic improvement. Intense competition over the state’s resources in turn politicises numerous cleavages adding to the problems of developing country democracies. As this competitive
mobilisation is unmediated by consolidated institutions, power comes to rest in individuals rather than in institutions. Oppositional elites confronting the centralising, personalistic ruling elite, thus mobilise community identities and help them transform into rigid ethnic and group boundaries. (Kohli, 1997, pp.327-328)

Section III: Securitization as State Response to Internal Ethnic Conflicts in India and Sri Lanka

Kohli’s assertions as mentioned above (ibid) seem to find ominous resonance in India’s democratic polity. The ongoing struggle of the ethnic communities in the north-east, the long-standing demand of the Kashmiris for autonomy, the call for Khalistan in Punjab and the violent agitations of the ‘Maoists’ (though fundamentally non-ethnic in nature) have been securitized by the Indian state for consecutive decades now. Yet their continuance and threat of resuscitation have posed formidable challenge to this approach of the state.

Each of the ethnic communities embroiled in the conflict zones mentioned above had raised their political demands immediately after independence in 1947, and were identified as ‘anti-state’ by the government of the day. In Kashmir and Nagaland, the army was moved in by proclaiming these as ‘disturbed areas’. While this can be identified as a securitizing move, the compulsions of restoring democratic order necessitated the use of political negotiations with dissident leaders, immediately afterwards in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Thus, the state remained officially committed to political resolution of the conflicts. From the perspective of securitization theory, this could be marked as a reversal to politicization. However, administrative concessions failed resolve the conflicts; they were considered paltry or irrelevant in most cases, provoking a reversal to agitational politics against the state.\(^{(Leaf, 1985, pp.478; Sharma, 1996; p.19)}\)

Kashmir had been securitized as early as in 1947, owing to Pakistan’s military invasion. While the military remained positioned, political efforts to reconcile their unique ethnic status with the rest of India began in the 1950s. However, as Navnita Chadha Behera observes, despite being given special constitutional status in the Indian Constitution, the central government’s persistent short-sighted policies of bull-dozing the constitutional and political integration of the state, increasingly through coercive measures eclipsed the original objective of socially and emotionally integrating the Kashmiris with the rest of the Indian Union. Denied political rights and deprived of a due share in the centre-aided, state-sponsored economic development, the Kashmiris grew alienated from the Indian state. Seeing their
autonomy fast eroding, they were lured into Sheikh Abdullah’s movement for the demand for complete autonomy and self-determination.” (Behera, 2007, p.43) As the radical wing gained strength against the state and their call for ‘azadi’ climaxed in the Valley in 1990, attempts at politicization were abandoned for full-scale securitization. Sumantra Bose points out that massive superiority in numbers and firepower of the Indian armed forces was supplemented by the implementation of ‘the catch and kill policy’, which simply wiped out large numbers of Kashmiri youth and compelled others to go on a run. (Bose, 1997) Scholars like Paula R. Newberg commented at the height of confrontations that while the Indian government may be able to wear down the insurgency, it cannot obliterate the sentiments that have propelled many Kashmiris to support the insurgency and the rest to tolerate its effects. (Newberg, 1995) Ali Ahmed notes in a recent work that the state failed to be ‘accountable for its instruments’. No disciplinary action was taken against personnel from the police forces who had committed egregious violence or professional lapses. Thus, not only violence was met with violence, the yardsticks of reasonableness and good faith were not applied. (Ahmed, 2010, p.310) Taking cognizance of repeated political disappointments which had incited insurgency in the Valley, the leaders continued to incline more towards the military responses rather than actual political negotiations with dissident leaders. Today, Kashmir as an internal and international security problematique (with Pakistan and China) refuses to die down. Huma Baqai, writes that the particular attitude of the state to resort to more and more force creates hurdles in the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Moreover, it manifests how complicated is the ethno-political dispersion of the region. (Baqai, 2004; p.65)

Insurgent activity for Greater Nagaland in the North-east of India continues for more than sixty years. The first region to be securitized as early as in the 1950s under the Assam Disturbed Areas Act, it has witnessed a prolonged bloody armed conflict between the Naga freedom fighters and the Indian armed security personnel. Though the Indian government had relevant data to ascertain that the radical Naga were consistently getting military training in East Pakistan, it decided to steer the moderate wing of leaders to execute the discourse of ‘maximum autonomy within the Indian Union’. In a triumph of politicization efforts, the state of Nagaland was created in 1963 following three conventions and agreements with the moderate Naga. Violence resurfaced as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) were created in the 1980s, provoking securitization once again. The ceasefire which was brokered with the radical NSCN (I-M) and the Indian government with
great difficulty in 1997 was ‘indefinitely extended’ by middle of 2007 and in this first-ever peace parley held in Nagaland, it was decided that monitoring mechanisms would be strengthened as there were several instances of ceasefire ground-rules being violated. According to the status paper on internal security of Ministry of Home Affairs, there were no significant variation in civilian and security forces casualties between 2005 and 2006. However, inter-factional clashes led to increase in militants’ casualties from seventy to one hundred sixteen, resulting in a sharp increase in violence in the state. (Singh, 2007, p.3) By July 2014, the ceasefire had held for nearly seventeen years. Yet, a mutually satisfactory solution remains out of sight. The government of India wants to discuss fullest possible autonomy for the Nagas within the framework of the Indian Constitution. But the NSCN (IM) insists that any solution must acknowledge must the Naga sovereignty. The ambush on a military convoy in Chandel district bordering Myanmar in Manipur on June 4 2015 by the NSCN (K), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) and Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) left at least 20 soldiers of the Indian Army’s 6 Dogra Regiment dead. A retaliatory transborder raid was immediately led by the Indian para-commandos under twenty one Para-Regiment (Special Forces in Myanmar) on June 9. (Roy, June 2015a) The central government in India directed security forces in Nagaland and Manipur to be put on high alert to prevent any attempt by the militants to cause any more havoc. (The Firstpost, June 2015a) Three militants, including two NSCN (K) insurgents were arrested in Manipur which include the self-styled 'chairman' of NSCN (K)'s 'Amamchat region', Khumlo Abi Anal; NSCN(K) activist Pammei Kakilong alias Kaling 9310; and another activist of the outlawed Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP-MC) outfit. (The Hindustan Times, June 2015a) Judged through ground level realities therefore, it is clear that while the securitization approach has not offered sustainable resolutions; yet, the government has had to fall back on it repeatedly to rein in the virulent conflict.

Having transformed from a ‘model colony’ to an independent state under the Soulbury constitution (1946-1972) Sri Lanka peacefully consolidated its democracy for a decade under the leadership of the legatees of the British, the United National Party, before plunging into a subsequent era of conflict, premised fundamentally on the precise nature of the balance of power and authority between the Sinhala majority and the other minorities, especially the Tamils. As is well known, the island has one of the most complex plural societies in any part of the world, with three important ethnic groups and as many as four of the world’s major religions (De Silva, 1998: 7) The country’s descent to political instability came in three
stages, beginning first of all with the period of mid 1955 to 1961. Then after a period of quiescence and political negotiations (politicization) in the mid and late 1960s, there was a second phase of confrontation or securitization leading to sporadic violence in the 1970s and culminating in the riots of 1977. This period of quiescence was followed by the most violent relative period of ethnic conflict, beginning in 1983 and the outbreak of the anti-Tamil riots that year. While throughout the 1990s political efforts were interspersed with securitization moves by the government, President Mahinda Rajapakse finally launched complete securitization in 2006. The culmination of the twenty six year (1983-2009) long brutal civil war into military victory of the state and the end of immediate preoccupation with securitization has exposed a society with deep scars on its socio-political and economic fabric and a formidable trust deficit between the ethnic communities. Though the war has been drawn to a conclusion, research by Jayadeva Uyangoda (2002) and Shyamika Jayasundara (2003) revealed that during most stages of the civil war, the Sri Lankan government remained unyielding and continued to allocate higher resources to fight the Tamil Tigers. The latter, in turn, remained well-armed and comfortably resourceful thereby denying scope for negotiated political settlement of the conflict. According to recent estimates, the civil war killed more than 70,000 people, including civilians. In the final military crackdown against the Tigers in 2009, 15,000 civilians were trapped in the war zone. (Singh, 2001a) Yet, the initiative of both the government and the rebels to negotiate or conduct dialogues (politicization) remained contingent on the prevailing ground level military situation; any burst of violence would immediately witness suspension of talks and resumption of securitization.

Having witnessed intense securitization from 1983 to 1991 (The Punjab and Chandigarh Disturbed Areas Act 1983, The Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1983, Operations Bluestar, Wood Rose and Black Thunder in 1984, Operations Rakshak I and Rakshak II in 1991) and its conclusion with democratic elections in the February 20, 1992, Punjab is mostly considered as a case of successful state’s military intervention. However, even after more than two decades, the memories of the Punjab debacle and its core idea of ethnic autonomy continue to be refreshed by the supporters of the idea of Khalistan as a separate Sikh state, and radical factions like the Khalistan Tiger Force and Dal Khalsa. They occasionally create political disturbances and revive slogans for the creation of an independent state. Additionally, the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 remain an extremely sore point against the Indian state and on its anniversary, families of victims publicly demand punishment for all those responsible for the carnage, and express their ire for incomplete
judicial probes by the government. (NDTV, 2012) In a recent article, a member of the Sikh diaspora who has personally lived through the tragedy of 1984 writes,

‘Remember that urbanized, educated Sikhs in or outside India were not fond of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale until 1984. That attack on the Harmandir Sahib and the aftermath made him into a martyr. .. I would personally have no problem letting go of Bhindranwale’s memory if a credible and honest inquiry convicted him of the charges against him. But I have one condition: I would like a similarly honest and credible investigation on the conduct of and charges against Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and many other senior politicians and officials of the Indian government.’ (Singh, 2014, p.51)

The Sikh diaspora maintains its presence through such occasional observations in the media and internet websites dedicated to the idea of Khalistan. (Websites titled Khalistan, Sikh Lionz) Sikh immigrant communities are quite prosperous in certain parts of the United States, particularly California, and they can still influence Congressmen through donations during electoral campaigning. In 2014, two groups clashed inside the Golden Temple premises on the anniversary of Operation Bluestar, leaving twelve persons injured. The situation took an ugly turn when one of the Akali Dal factions led by Simranjeet Singh Mann along with his supporters tried to raise pro-Khalistan slogans from the rostrum of Akal Takht. (The Statesman, 2014, p.1) (Khalistan, Sikh Lions) The Dera Sacha Sauda and its leader Baba Gurmit Ram Rahim have also been inflaming the SGPC and pro-Khalistan groups for a while now. with such deep-rooted sentiments, the scope for resuscitation of ethno-nationalism cannot be ignored.

Making an audit of state securitization, the findings from the cases problematize certain claims of securitization. These can be briefly discussed at this juncture. First, securitization is an act of the last resort, when a threat cannot be tackled within the normal bounds of politics. However, the cases witnessed early securitizing moves by the state to suppress initial bursts of dissensions, and then a reversal to politicization. But its failure and inability to make acceptable concessions to the ethnic groups reinstated state securitization approach, only to be tempered by random intrusions of politicization. Thus, there was no linear movement from politicization to securitization; they remained in a cyclical bind. Secondly, securitization aims at removing the existential threat. But in the cases discussed above, as stances hardened and the grievances assumed sweeping communal overtones, securitization resulted in festering of the conflict, thereby belying the causality. Communal tensions, excesses of police action, human rights abuses and religious desecration (as witnessed in case of Punjab), triggered a
severe backlash by the radical ‘militants’. This in turn resulted in the spiralling of extremism with sporadic support of the people and their continued grievances against the state.

**Section IV: (In)security Interface between India and Sri Lanka: Historical Overview**

We may now discuss that particular episode in South Asian history, which witnessed India’s military intervention in Sri Lanka’s securitization against the LTTE. It may be considered as a type of ‘external’ securitization undertaken by India to secure its own interests in the region.

Following the ethnic riots between Tamils and Sinhalas in July 1983, President J.R Jayawardane government’s serious apprehensions about the development of rising militancy encouraged expanded military presence of the United States, Israel, and Pakistan. While comprehensive measures to tackle domestic security situation remain the sole prerogative of any sovereign state, the perilous proximity of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu (18-20 miles across the Palk Strait), the ongoing political environment of secessionist demands and autonomy in different parts of India and the influx of almost three lakh Tamil refugees after the riots of 1983 compelled a convergence of the insecurity dynamics of the two neighbours. The fact that the first state of India which had threatened to secede from the Union was Tamil Nadu, unnerved Mrs. Indira Gandhi and affected her political decision at this moment. There was a perception that if India did not support the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka, and if the Government of India tried to question the political and emotional feelings of Sri Lankan Tamils, Tamil Nadu would witness a resurgence of separatism. (Dixit, 1998; 161) New Delhi, under the iron-hand leadership of Mrs. Gandhi now demonstrated a shift from an erstwhile ‘regional ambivalence’ to an increased willingness to assert India’s greater power directly and dramatically in South Asia. An Indian doctrine of regional security was articulated through the pronouncement of the ‘Indira Doctrine’ on 5 August 1983. (Gupta, 6 August 1983, pp. 20-21). Addressing the Parliament on the situation in Sri Lanka she asserted that India will neither intervene in the domestic affairs of any states in the region, unless requested to do so, nor tolerate such intervention by any outside power. If external assistance is needed to meet an internal crisis, states should look first within the region for help. Mrs. Gandhi expressed willingness to mediate between the Sri Lankan government and its Tamil citizens to evolve a realistic compromise. In a tragic linking of events, Mrs Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh security guards in the aftermath the violence in Punjab. Rajiv Gandhi assumed charge as the elected Prime Minsiter and executed a phase of prolonged
negotiations from March 1985 to December 1986. India sought to persuade the Sri Lankan Tamils to move back from their extremist demands for a separate Tamil state and to give up violence and extremism. India’s advocacy to them was to accept a compromise which would substantially meet their aspirations and also give them devolved authority to manage their own affairs within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. India also tried to persuade the Sri Lankan government to give up its xenophobic ethnic approach towards its own Tamil citizens and to restructure their political system. (Dixit, 1998:183-184). However, continuous political deadlocks and obfuscations heightened security concerns and compelled a phase of military operations by the Government against Jaffna in January 1987, accompanied by a blockade of the Jaffna peninsula. The Indo-Sri Lanka peace accord was signed in July 1987 whereby the Indian army pledged to guarantee and enforce the cessation of hostilities and to ‘take all necessary steps to ensure that the Indian Territory is not used for activities prejudicial to the unity, integrity and security of Sri Lanka.

However, as is well known in history, the Indian intervention proved to be an irreversible debacle for the internal ethnic situation as well as foreign relations with Sri Lanka. Heavy fighting broke out between the Indian Army and recalcitrant Tamil insurgents in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka. Also, Indian presence produced heavy backlash among radical Sinhalese nationalists in the southern part of the island. (Hagerty, April 1991:353). In September 1989, under heavy pressure from Colombo, New Delhi withdrew the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and the process was completed by March 1990. This period was marked by continued bloodshed in every region of Sri Lanka and the gradual disengagement of Indian forces from the fighting. At the time of the withdrawal agreement, official estimates put Indian casualties at 1,100 dead and 2,800 wounded. (Hagerty, April 1991: 353).

In the post-IPKF period, though India’s concerns for regional and national security and Tamil integration continued to remain pressing, a clear stand for unity and integrity and ‘negotiated political settlement’ was assumed in the foreign policy articulations with Sri Lanka. As the Eelam wars unfolded from one phase to the other, India displayed a definite reluctance to re-intervene. Scholars characterized the approach as non-interference, excessive caution and ‘policy of pronouncements’ or a ‘do nothing policy’. Another school of thought also believes that the policy of ‘masterly inactivity’ pursued by India at this juncture was indeed a diplomatic move to safeguard national interest from external tensions. (Abhyankar, 2013). As the War climaxed in 2009, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee voiced a demand for political solution and devolution of power to minority Tamils. It is also noteworthy, that throughout the
1990s, India maintained limited defence relations with Sri Lanka, restricting itself to activities like raining officers, intelligence sharing on LTTE’s maritime movements, defensive and non-lethal weapons supply.

Political relations have of course taken a turn in the present times with Prime Minister Modi’s four city tour of Sri Lanka in March 2015, which witnessed the inauguration of the reconstructed Northern Province railway line. He emphasized on India’s support for a united Sri Lanka but paid a historical visit to Jaffna, striking a chord with the Tamil communities. He also stressed the need to go beyond the Thirteenth Amendment in terms of the political empowerment of the Tamil minority. (The Hindu, March 2015a) However, as far as security cooperation is concerned, bilateral engagements on defence cooperation have only been restricted to joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean region.

**Section V: Common Lessons in Security/Insecurity: Concluding Comments**

There is no doubt that the operational political systems of India and Sri Lanka differ considerably. While India practises a parliamentary democracy, Sri Lanka’s presidential system had assumed acute streaks of unaccountable unilateralism in governance during Mahinda Rajapakse, though it is now taking steps to sway towards becoming a parliamentary democracy under President Maithiripala Sirisena. For the purpose of the paper, it can be argued that the thrust of ethnic demands is exclusively based on linguistics and territory in Sri Lanka while it posits itself on a variety of religious, socio-political and economic factors in India. However, differences must not be overemphasised where there is a veritable rationale for cooperation based on commonalities of security concerns. Both are essentially post-colonial states that opted to consolidate their political structures as democracies and have been successful so far on an index of conducting periodic elections based on universal adult franchise and allowing smooth transfer of power. But as the case studies reveal, ethnic grievances marked colonial transfer of power in both the countries. The groups were either administratively marginalized as in the case of the Sikhs in India and Tamils in Sri Lanka, or forcefully assimilated as in the case of Nagas and Kashmiris in India. In both the countries, first generation of political leaders at the Centre adopted policies which had grave repercussions and fomented resistance to the state, breeding violent alienation. Securitization followed failed attempts in negotiations (politicization) and continued either as the dominant state approach or the complementary tactic to negotiations and police actions, control low-level violence in the regional interiors.
In the South Asian context, the historical unmaking and re-making of borders, territorial and political avenues of inter-state conflict and subsequent efforts at cooperation through bilateral talks and multilateral institutions have in effect, rendered internal and external security as coterminous. As India and Sri Lanka continue to grapple with similar political insecurities, terrorism and the repeated threats of secessionism, the overwhelming empirics of human rights abuse, casualties, lapses in the implementation of justice, an incomplete sense of nationhood gets reiterated regularly, thereby problematizing the fundamental claim of protecting national security through the securitization of internal conflict. There is a permanent suspicion concerning underlying intentions of the majority government and the latter needs to resort to self-justification to the minority communities, which are fast evolving into ethnocracies. Power structures as dominant at the level of the nation-state are being replicated within the ethnic communities themselves, with clear emphasis on ethnic affiliations, further complicating the demands of the insecure groups from the state machinery.

It is in the light of these realities that it becomes imperative to recognize that the instruments to securitize must go beyond the military measures as the complex dynamics of the conflict situation are played out. The use of force will suffer from limited impact unless there is a sustainable mitigation of the sense of threat which fuels the persistence and resuscitation of internal conflicts in a democracy. In India, despite the management of the state through the post-conflict development measures, insecurities have prevailed, leaving scope for radical movements to foster. The continuance of the Naga demand for autonomy even after the creation of Nagaland and the political violence and instability in Kashmir are symptomatic of the fact that securitization has in fact failed to ensure security of the communities and instead, compelled them to be seen in a versus relationship with national security. In the Sri Lankan case, scope for resuscitation of the conflict between communities cannot be eliminated, much less so because of a strong Tamil diaspora which continually foments the sense of marginalization of this disgruntled minority. Any meaningful resolution of the internal conflict situation thus renders in imperative to bring about fundamental changes in the constitution to include greater accountability of the President, grant devolution of power to the Tamil representatives at the local levels and rebuild the sense of trust between the ethnic communities which have been brutally eroded and lost in the ravages of the war and the unilateral, authoritarian style of governance. Even though the country has the tradition of a plural democracy, the government wants disciplined mono-focused polity with economic development, akin to the East Asian model.
The overlap of security concerns between India and Sri Lanka and its domestic implications owing to the Tamil element cannot be overemphasised following the walk-out of the Dravidra Munnetra Kazagham (DMK) from the ruling coalition in India in 2013. As the DMK walked out of the government, the UPA said they wanted to send a "resolute" message. Briefing reporters later, the former finance minister P Chidambaram said that India wanted the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCR) to adopt a "strong" resolution on Lanka. (The Times of India, 2013) But the pressure from the international community, especially the United Nations must not be allowed to sour the benefits that India and Sri Lanka can reap in articulating common approaches to internal insecurity and safeguarding not merely territorial integrity but national security, with the well-being of the constitutive ethnic communities. As the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India, His Excellency Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam observed, it is crucial that the two neighbours do not get ‘bogged down by the current turmoil in their efforts towards diplomatic reconciliation’. (Keriyaswamy, 2013)

It is thus, time for the two countries to pay heed to the common lessons of insecurity from the internal conflict situations and abandon the weariness to interact meaningfully with one another. Chartering a common approach for sustainable internal ethnic security beyond securitization approach could be a crucial ingredient for stronger bilateral ties and regional peace between the two countries. The neighbours could actively engage in the future through common multilateral forums like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to articulate comprehensive state responses to negotiate existential threats arising out of internal ethnic conflicts. In both the countries, the civil societies believe that the unilateral attitude of the governments breeds further resentment among the people and has a polarizing effect. Thus, human security has to be rendered prerogative over the traditional understanding of military security in the political matrix of the two democratic states to redress the violations of rights, sufferings of the people and uproot the politics of ethnicized violence that has entrenched itself like a multi-headed hydra.

At a theoretical level, it can be argued that it is possible to re-visit the ethnic conflict cases and redefine them in the language of securitization theory. The armed state approach as state securitization can be delineated, identifying particular moments of securitization and politicization, as has been initiated by this paper. The case studies and ground level realities can be used to empirically inform and refine securitization theory and making it more context-sensitive. Moreover, comparative models can be developed between similar cases to understand
the dynamics of the ‘specific contexts’. To analyze the conundrum where national security and security of the ethnic community get juxtaposed, it is important to ask ‘whose security must be protected.’ In other words, the disjuncture between the two kinds of securities has to be mitigated for any meaningful basis of securitization move. As a corollary, a comprehensive delineation of ‘insecurity’ and ‘perception of threat’ has to be undertaken, which lie at the root of subversive ethnic nationalism. There has to be a conscious return to inter-subjective understandings and sociological construction of threats, as was the basic thrust of constructivism and the wideners. This has to find reflection in practised state approaches and policies implemented in internal ethnic conflict situations. Emergency political legislations and sustained dialogues with the aggrieved parties to prevent their radicalisation, and the identification of spoilers in negotiation processes and their marginalization are two more suitable measures which both the countries could fruitfully adopt.

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Among the vast body of literature on the subject, see Brooks and Worhlforth (2000/2001); Gourevitch, Autumn, 1978; Rosenau, 1992; Ruggie, 1998; Zartman, 1995; Kalyvas, 2006.

The term Copenhagen school (CS) was used for the first time by Bill McSweeney in a review of three works by these authors. McSweeney wrote that since the publication in 1983, Buzan’s work (People, States and Fear) had established itself as the ‘canon’ and indispensable reference point for students of security’. He added,
“His book and the revisions of the second edition (1991) have been the stimulus for further exploration of the security problem at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Research in Copenhagen. Together with Buzan, the collaborators have produced several publications on the security theme, sufficiently interrelated to warrant the collective shorthand the ‘Copenhagen school’ of security studies.” (McSweeney, 1996, p.81)

iii Waever draws upon Speech Act theory as formulated in the work of the philosopher John L. Austin (1911-1960). In his book How to do Things with Words, Austin proposes that many utterances are equivalent to actions; when we say certain words or phrases we also perform a particular action. See Peoples, Columba and Nick Vaughan-Williams, “Box 5.2: Speech Act Theory and Securitization”, Critical Security Studies: An Introduction, Routledge, London and New York, 2008, p.77

iv This was apparent when the Sikhs expressed discontentment over nuances of administrative arrangements, which belied their de facto control over river-water resources and the ability to contest Congress domination in the regional politics. The creation of severe socio-economic disparities following the Green revolution added another relevant layer to their frustration.

v Behera notes that there were some dissident voices among the Plebiscite Front leaders. Munshi Mohammad Isahaq, president of the Plebiscite Front, resigned soon after Pakistani raiders infiltrated the state. He complained of being let down by his colleagues for not honouring the commitment with Pakistan to collaborate with the infiltrators and regretted that “on account of selfishness and cowardice of the leaders of Kashmir who were outside the jail, we missed a golden opportunity of liberation of Kashmir”. Originally in Balraj Puri, Jammu and Kashmir: Triumph and Tragedy of Indian Federalism, Sterling, New Delhi, 1981, p.160.