

The Demand for an Administrative District for the Coastal Belt of Amparai District in Sri Lanka: An Assessment of Its Root Causes

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n4s3p434

Abstract

Both in Sri Lanka's national as well as in Muslim politics in the recent past, the demand for an administrative district in the coastal belt of Amparai district has been one of the contested topics of debate and discourse and has been an influencing subject in electoral politics. This research attempts to explore the major factors that have induced the emergence of the demand in detail. The finding reveals that four major interconnected causes have been severely influencing on the origin and the advocacy of the demand, namely: (1) the domination of an ethnic group (majority) and their language over the administration of Amparai district, (2) the violation of constitutional provisions on language of administration, (3) the marginalization and (4) discrimination of ethno-linguistic minorities and their rights in resource utilization and other aspects of district administration. All these factors have persuaded the people of the area (referred as 'South Eastern region') to claim and advocate a separate administrative district for the region. The study suggests that the proper implementation of the constitutional provisions on minority language and the institutional restructuring of the district secretariat can reconcile the issues facing by the people of the region in the affairs of district administration which also would challenge the demand to a certain extent.

Keywords: Amparai, coastal belt, Tamil-speakers, new district, root causes

1. Introduction

Both governance and administration in post-independent Sri Lanka have been the challenging process due to a number of issues and problems in terms of accommodating the rights and interests of ethnic minorities. The continuous sidetrack of interests and rightful rights of minorities pushed them to claim and advocate for more power and autonomy. One of the major issues that transformed into political demand is the demand calling for the formation of a separate administrative district in the coastal belt of Amparai district. Even though the people of this area (referred as 'South-Eastern Region') have been advocating this demand for the last 50 years, but for the last 15 years, this demand has not only been politically contested and gained huge criticisms from many parties, but it has also accommodated in political agreements by major political parties (before elections) and governments (after elections) as one of the major concerning issues need to be fulfilled. However, most of the agreements made with and the promises assured to the concerning parties have failed to fulfill the demand but the sidetracked stories continue. This study extensively examines the major root causes that prompted the people of the area to mobilize and advocate the demand.

The main objective of this research is to identify the major concerning factors contributed to the emergence of the

demand and their impacts in detail. The rest of the paper is divided into four major parts. The next part gives an introductory note on Amparai district where the territory of the proposed district belongs. In the next part of the article, the basic information on the content of the proposed district is provided followed by the extensive analysis of the factors that prompted the people of this area to advocate for a new district. In concluding remarks, few recommendations are suggested in order to reconcile the issues facing by the people who advocate the new district. This paper is an outcome of a three year research project which extensively analyses the demand in detail. Both primary and secondary data have used in this research paper. Through secondary data, number of policies and projects which are interconnected with the root causes of the demand has critically analyzed in order to assess the impacts of the root causes.

2. The District of Amparai: An Introductory Note

Amparai district is one of the twenty five administrative districts of Sri Lanka and the biggest among the three districts in the eastern province, located in the southern edge of the province and the south eastern region of Sri Lanka. The total area of the district is 4,415 square kilometers which accounts for 6.76 percent of the country's land area and the fourth biggest district in the country (District Secretariat, Amparai, 2013). The territory of the Amparai district lies in the dry zone, where the average temperature is 30 Celsius with the average rainfall of 1,400 millimeters. The district gets rain mainly during the north-east monsoon and used to store rainwater in tanks in order to use for irrigation and other purposes throughout the year. Therefore, the district has been enriched with the agricultural production for a long time.

Amparai district has a population of 649,402, according to the 2012 census which is about 3.20 per cent of the country's total population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2014). The district belongs to the home of Sri Lanka's major ethnic groups, the Sinhalese, the Tamils, and the Muslims. Muslims (281,702) are the majority of the district population who comprise 43.4 percent of the district population while Sinhalese (252,458) constitute as the second largest ethnic group with 38.9 percent in the district population. The third major ethnic group is Sri Lankan Tamils (112,457) who comprises 17.3 percent of the district population. A small number of Indian Tamils, Burgers and Veddas are also living in the district as detailed in Table 1. The settlement pattern of ethnic groups is also getting importance in this district. The Sinhalese largely live in great majority of the interior area of the district while the Tamils and the Muslims are located mainly along the coastal belt of the district, often in close proximity.

The historical evidences ratify that the territory of Amparai (but historically referred as 'Digamadulla' or 'Deegawapi' Kingdom) was considered as a vital wealthiest resource of Ruhunu Kingdom prolongs up to the period of the Lord Buddha. The region was mostly under control of many Sinhalese Kingdoms but in the course of time, it became abandoned. The evidences of significant settlement and political control, with numerous Buddhist temples and religious sites throughout the east, most notably the temple complex at Deegawapi, dating from 150 BC justify this argument (IGC, 2008). However, as McGilvray (2008) indicates, the collapse of the Sinhalese dry zone Kingdoms in the thirteenth century has opened the way for the slow 'Tamilisation' of the east. The region became populated with the Muslims in the 17th century BC during the Dutch rule. It is recorded that the Kandian kings settled a large number of Muslims who were the victims of the Dutch persecution, in Deegawapi area of Batticaloa to revive the paddy cultivation. Some records reveal that the King Senerat himself settled about 4,000 Muslims in the southern part of Batticaloa district. (See: Ali 2001; McGilvray & Raheem 2007; Imtiyas 2009). The Sinhalese population became concentrated in this region only after the starting of irrigation-based land settlement projects in the name of Gal Oya, introduced in 1949. Later, the turning of Mahaweli development project has also induced the state-aided settlement of Sinhalese in the region. However, most of the Sinhalese settlements are located in the interior and in the southern tip of the district.

Table 1. Population of Amparai district by ethnic groups (2012)

Ethnic group	2012	Percentage
Sri Lankan Moor (Muslim)	281,702	43.4
Sinhalese	252,458	38.9
Sri Lankan Tamils	112,457	17.3
Burgers	1,036	0.2
Indian Tamils	846	0.1
Malays	187	-
Sri Lanka Chetty	05	-
others	711	0.1
Total	649,402	100

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2014.

The Muslims and the Tamils live juxtaposed in the coastal belt of the district historically. They have deep and longstanding cultural ties and share the same matrilineal clan structure and marriage patterns, as well as other cultural and religious practices. There are also long-established practices of joint paddy cultivation and other forms of economic cooperation and interdependence between them. However, there has been a marked erosion of these good relations because of increasing mistrust and misunderstanding between the communities in the recent past, especially after the escalation of violent ethnic conflict from the beginning of 1980s (See: Hasbullah et al, 2005; Rameez Abdullah, 2005).

Amparai district is formed on 10th April, 1961 by carving out the southern part of the Batticaloa district and merging some parts of Moneragala district. The district is further divided into 20 Divisional Secretariat (DS) divisions and 503 Grama Niladari (GN) divisions. Among the 20 DS divisions, 8 are Muslim majority divisions, 7 are Sinhalese majority divisions and 5 are Tamil majority divisions. Amparai district is also one of the 22 electoral districts in Sri Lanka in the name of 'Digamadulla.' Further, the district is subdivided into 20 local government divisions. Among them, 2 are Municipal Councils, 1 is Urban Council and 17 are Divisional Councils (namely, Pradesiya Sabha).

3. Background Note on the Demand for a Separate Administrative District in Amparai

The people living in the coastal belt of the Amparai district have been demanding for a separate administrative district covering the coastal DS divisions for their sake as a mechanism to facilitate the functions of public administration and for other reasons for the last 50 years. Historically, the southern part of the Batticaloa district had been concentrated with the Tamil-speaking Muslims and Tamils including a small portion of Sinhalese. During the Second World War period, with the purpose of accelerating food production to cater the food scarcity, the colonial government had chosen the southern region of the Batticaloa district and established an Emergency Kachcheri in Kalmunai town in April 1942. Mr.M.A.M Azeez (a Tamil-speaking administrative officer) was transferred to this Emergency Kachcheri as the Assistant Government Agent (AGA) with specific orders of accelerating the food production (Anes, 2007 & Jameel, 2009).

Even though the Kalmunai Emergency Kachcheri was closed in 1946, from that period onward the people of this region had been demanding a separate administrative district and Kachcheri for their administrative easiness. However, the demand came to be politically articulated only after the formation of Amparai district in 1961. Initially, people and politicians of this area had been requesting the government to form a new district and to establish its secretariat (Kachcheri) in one of the populated towns of coastal area of the region. This was justified based on three major reasons: (a) majority of the region's population concentrated in the coastal belt of the region, (b) an emergency Kachcheri was functioning in Kalmunai from 1942-46, and (c) administrative easiness of the people of the region because they wanted to travel from 110 Kilometers to 40 Kilometers to reach Batticaloa Kachcheri to fulfill their administrative works and needs. In order to facilitate the administration and the development initiatives of the southern region of the Batticaloa district, a Circuit Kachcheri was open on 20th February 1961 in Akkaraipattu by the then AGA of the Batticaloa district, Mr. D.R.Dewarajan (Jabbar, 2013). However, considering the request of Sinhalese MP, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party led government headed by Mrs. Srimavo Bandaranaike declared a new administrative district for this area in the name of 'Amparai' in April 1961 and established its secretariat in Uhana, a Sinhalese predominant area in the western part of the district (Athavan, 22.7.2001 & Noorul Haque, 2002).

The establishment of Amparai district was welcomed by the Tamil-speaking people of the district but the positioning of district secretariat buildings in Sinhalese area was mainly criticized by them. Further, the naming of the district was also criticized. According to them, since the majority of the district population was Tamil-speakers and they were predominantly living in the coastal area, therefore, one of the towns' names in the coastal area should be labeled to this new district (Ibrahim, 2002). Therefore, the Tamil-speaking people and the politicians of this area started to demand the government to transfer the district secretariat into one of the towns in the coastal area or otherwise to form a separate administrative district covering the coastal areas for the sake of Tamil-speakers. According to the demand, the proposed district covers an area of 1820.8 square kilometers of coastal belt which is about 40 percent of the total area of the present Amparai district. The proposed district has a population of 409,260 in 14 DS divisions which is about 63 percent population of the present Amparai district, according to 2012 census. Among them, Muslims (280,909) constitute 68.60 percent, Tamils (112,093) 27.40 percent while Sinhalese (14,242) constitute 3.5 percent.

During the early stage, this demand was considerably supported by the Tamil-speaking communities, both the Tamils and the Muslims of this region. However, later on, especially after the escalation of ethnic conflict in the beginning of 1980s, the demand mostly favored only by the Muslims and gained criticisms from other ethnic groups. From 1980s onward only the Muslim politicians, organizations and parties, especially the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), a Muslim political party emerged at the peak of ethnic conflict has been advocating the demand. Occasionally, the demand was accepted by the major political parties to be fulfilled but so far has been sidetracked. On the other hand, advocacy of

the demand has also being occasional.

4. Factors that Motivated the Emergence and Advocacy of the Demand

This study has identified many factors as root causes to the emergence of the demand advocating the formation of a new administrative district in the coastal belt of Amparai district, through reviewing of existing literatures and the field survey. Among them, the following major issues/subjects have been the most influential. The following part extensively analyses these factors to the extent of their impacts on the conceptualization and the discourses of the demand.

Establishment of district secretariat, domination of Sinhalese administrative elites and their language in the daily affairs of district administration are found as one of the inter-connected major root causes that prompted the Tamil-speakers of the coastal belt of Amparai district to advocate for a new district for their administrative easiness and other benefits. This factor has caused severe challenges to the Tamil-speakers who formed the majority in district population and concentrated in the coastal belt of the district. Even though it was about 70 percent of the district population was Tamil-speakers when the district was formed in 1961, but the government placed its secretariat in newly colonized Amparai town, purely a Sinhalese predominated area. As Ibrahim (2004) and Mansoor (2014) report, the establishment of district secretariat in Amparai area instead of coastal area was viewed by the people of the coastal area as a partial and purposive decision of central government on the argument that an Additional Government Agent office of Batticaloa district was functioning in Kalmunai (a major town in coastal area) between 1942-1946, and the town of Kalmunai possessed a status of town council with sufficient government offices at that time. In fact, the people lived in the coastal belt of the district wanted to travel from 30 km to 100 km to reach Amparai district secretariat in order to fulfill their administrative needs. Since most of these areas were vulnerable in terms of basic infrastructure facilities such as road network and transportation, people of this area were victimized to number of difficulties.

In addition to the establishment of district secretariat, the government appointed the Assistant Government Agent (now District Secretary) and their administrative officer to the district secretariat mainly from Sinhalese community. All these automatically led to the domination of Sinhalese and Sinhala language in daily affairs of the district administration. In fact, the Sinhalese population in the coastal belt is very few and the interaction between the Sinhalese and the Tamil-speakers is also limited. Therefore, majority of the population in coastal area are purely Tamil-speakers and are not sound in Sinhala language. This caused them many difficulties in fulfilling their administrative needs at district secretariat. They were compelled to bring an interpreter along with them to the Kachcheri which not only caused them more difficulties but also more financial burdens too.

It is noteworthy to report that from the formation of Amparai district, up to now, 22 administrators had been attached to the post of District Secretary but none of them was from Tamil-speaking communities. It is further identified that even today among the selected higher administrative posts within the Kachcheri and coming under the purview of district administration, only 44 percent of the posts are filled by the Tamil-speaking officers despite the fact that the Tamil-speaking community constitutes more than 61 percent of the district population (District Secretariat, Amparai, 2013). Even today, except little improvement, the daily administration of the district secretariat is controlled by the Sinhalese to a considerable extent. An ordinary public of Tamil-speaker cannot easily fulfill his/her needs at any branches of the district secretariat. Few Tamil-speaking officers are appointed in all branches, but most of them are at clerical positions. Most of the authoritative positions involve in the decision-making process are filled by the Sinhalese.

The continuous appointment of Sinhalese to the higher positions of district secretariat, including the District Secretary not only allowed them to be dominated the daily affairs of the district administration, but also to violate number of constitutional provisions and other legal acts, procedures, circulars, orders and communiqués regarding administering the Tamil language as an official state language. This also has intensified the Tamil-speakers to advocate the demand seriously. In fact, the failure or denial to recognize and admit the Tamil language as a state language equal to Sinhala has not only led to ethnic conflict but also many issues related with decentralized public administration, democratization, minority rights accommodation in Sri Lanka. Especially, in the case of district administration in Amparai, the functioning of district administration in Sinhala was always reported by the advocates demanding the new district 'as a violation of their fundamental and legitimate right.' Therefore, they have been demanding a new district to facilitate the people to communicate with the officers at the district secretariat and fulfill their needs in their own language. Review of the existing constitutional arrangements and circulars adopted to protect the language rights of Tamil-speakers and their application status or implementation justifies this argument (factor) clearly.

There are acts, constitutional provisions and circulars recognizing Tamil as an official state language which should be implemented properly in public administration and other affairs. The major acts among are reviewed here in order to assess the level of violation of the provision in the affairs of district administration in Amparai. The Tamil Language

(Special Provisions) Act, No. 28 of 1958 was the earliest one which equally recognized Tamil as an Official State language like Sinhala. An especial reference need to be given here is the provision regarding the use of Tamil for administrative purpose in north-eastern region of the country. The Act clearly stated that in the northern and the eastern provinces, the Tamil language may be used for prescribed administrative purposes, in addition to the purposes for which that language may be used in accordance with the other provisions of this Act. Correspondence between persons, other than officials in their official capacity, educated through the medium of the Tamil language and any official in his official capacity or between any local authority in the northern or eastern province and any official in his official capacity may, as prescribed, be in the Tamil language (Perera, 2008 & DeVotta, 2004).

The above act was in effective until the adaptation of the new constitution (The First Republican Constitution) in 1972. However, the government failed to follow the provisions of the Act in the affairs of district Administration in Amparai. Violating the provisions of the Act, government appointed the AGA from Sinhalese community to the Kachcheri of the newly formed Amparai district in 1961 and established district secretariat buildings in Amparai area even though the majority (more than 70 per cent) of the district population at that time was Tamil-speakers and were concentrated in the coastal belt. This arrangement clearly justifies that the government has violated the implementation of Tamil language provision through making district secretariat favorable to the Sinhalese. In fact, the initial demands of the people of coastal area were to appoint Tamil-speaking district secretary and to set-up the district secretariat conducive to Tamil-speakers or otherwise to form a new district for the sake of Tamil-speakers. It is worth noting here that the placement of district secretariat in Sinhalese majority area and the appointment of Sinhalese to the higher-level positions of district secretariat automatically led them to conduct the daily administration of the district secretariat in Sinhala language violating all the constitutional provisions on conducting administration in Tamil language. It is further identified that even now most of the administrative communications to the offices and the individual public in the coastal area come in Sinhala.

In order to respond to the agitations made by the Tamil-speakers with regard to recognize and implement Tamil as an official language, the central government adopted further provisions through the 13th and the 16th amendments to the present constitution certified in 1987 and 1988 respectively. The provisions relating to the use of Tamil language in administration found in the 13th amendment signifies a marked departure from the policy followed by the successive governments since 1956. Through the 13th amendment, Tamil was also decreed as an Official State Language in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the section 18(1) states that the Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala. And the section 18(2) states that the Tamil shall also be an official language (Parliament Secretariat, 2011:9). Similarly, the 16th amendment to the constitution also recognizes Tamil as official language and requested the government officials that the Tamil be implemented equally with Sinhala in state affairs. According to the section 22, 23 & 24 of the 16th amendment, Tamil too is now an official, administrative and court language while English is the link language. The revised articles 22 (1) of the Constitution states that Sinhala and Tamil shall be the languages of administration throughout Sri Lanka and Sinhala shall be the language of administration and be used for the maintenance of public records and the transaction of all business by public institutions of all the provinces of Sri Lanka other than the northern and the eastern provinces where Tamil shall be so used. Section 25 of the Chapter IV further states that the state shall provide adequate facilities for the use of the languages provided for in this Chapter (Parliament Secretariat, 2011:10).

The above two legislative amendments on Tamil language rights were supplemented by the Official Languages Commission Act (No. 18) of 1991, as well as government directives through gazette notifications and Public Administration Circulars. The objectives of the setting up of Official Language Commission were to recommend principles of policy, relating to the use of the official languages; and to monitor and supervise compliance with the provisions contained in chapter IV of the constitution; take all such actions and measures as are necessary to ensure the use of Sinhala, Tamil and English; promote the appreciation of the official languages and the acceptance, maintenance, and continuance of their status, equality and right of use; conduct investigations, both on its own initiative, and in response to any complaints received; and to take remedial action in accordance with the provisions of the Act (Shanthakumar, 2010). Apart from the above constitutional provisions, there are many public administration circulars which emphasized on the importance of implementation of Tamil language provision in administration. Public Administration Circular Number 22/9, Public Administration Circular Number 36/92 (of 18th December 1992), Public Administration Circular No. 28/97 (of 27th January 1998) are some of the most important circulars which ordered the ministries, secretariats, and relevant authorities to make necessary arrangements and facilities in order to fully implement the official language policy and provisions. Further, many letters have also been issued to the ministries and other relevant authorities from the President Secretariat directing them to facilitate and monitor the fully implementation of the language policy. But, in practice, none of these circulars and acts was followed by the district secretaries in Amparai and they did not ensure the proper implementation of Tamil language provisions in district administration. At present, more than 61 percent of the population

is Tamil-speakers (Tamils and Muslims) in Amparai district, but district secretariat continues the administration in Sinhala, quite contrary to the constitutional requirements of conducting administration in Tamil in the north-eastern region, as reviewed above. It is worth noting at this juncture that the proper implementation of any act, circular or directive will be meaningful only under the proper institutional set-up and its rational functioning. Failure of strengthening the implementing agencies or institutions with sufficient personnel and other facilities would definitely challenge the objectives and outcomes of any initiative.

Since the District Secretariat was set-up favored to ethnic majority (Sinhalese), and the majority of the district administrative elites was also selected from the same group and favored their ethnic belonging, the district administration begun to discriminate and marginalize the Tamil-speaking ethnic minorities and their rights and share in the matters of resource allocation and utilization, and development initiatives within the district. This is also identified as one of the major root causes that driven the Tamil-speakers to demand and advocate the creation of a new district for their sake. The district administration with the support of central administration and political elites had been instrumental in marginalizing the Tamil-speakers living areas in development initiatives. The review of the past development projects reveals that almost all major development projects implemented in Amparai district have been designed favoring Sinhalese. One of such major projects was the irrigation based land settlement projects in the name Gal Oya. The Gal Oya project centered on the construction of the Senanayake reservoir along the Gal Oya river and the subsequent clearing of land and irrigation of sparsely populated areas on the western edge of the present day Amparai district (IGC, 2008). The project was initiated by the first post-independent government under the leadership of D.S Senanayake, the then Prime Minister with the strong support of the politicians of the coastal area. Mr. M.S Kariapper, parliamentarian representing the southern part of the Batticaloa district of that time was one of the prominent figures behind the initiative and success of the project.

When Gal Oya project was inaugurated, D.S. Senanayake promised that the new lands that were to become cultivatable under the project would be distributed on a 50:50 basis between the local citizens of the Batticaloa district (at that time, this region was under Batticaloa district) and the colonists selected from outside (Ibrahim, 2001; Mohideen, 2013). Since the region had a Muslim population of about 70 percent at that time, Muslim politicians also welcomed the project and worked behind the success of the project. But, contrary to the promises made, only in 6 villages Muslims and Tamils were settled, out of 44 new settlement villages formed under this project. Studies reveal that even the 6 villages suffered a lot due to the shortage of water during the dry season which prompted some settlers to leave the settlement (Hasbullah et al, 2005 & Mohideen, 2013). The Gal Oya project also involved in the creation of state-owned plantations in the region to cultivate new cash crops, particularly sugar cane. Sinhalese settlers were the primary beneficiaries of the sugar cane production, which was sold at a state-guaranteed price. At the same time, the sugar cane cultivation reduced water supplies for less lucrative paddy cultivation owned by the Tamil and the Muslim farmers (Thangarajah, 2003:25). As IGC (2008:5) reports, due to the layout of existing settlements and land use, the bulk of Sinhalese farmers over the years were settled to the western part of existing Tamil and Muslim communities and thus closer to the water sources. These Sinhalese have generally received more and more consistent water remains, a frequent complaint among the Tamil and the Muslim farmers of the district (crisisgroup.com). The opening of the Gal Oya settlement scheme was a great boon to the Sinhalese but the Muslims viewed it as a device to deprive them to live and own lands in the district (Mohideen, 2008). According to the minority version of this history, the colonists were selected overwhelmingly among the Sinhalese rather than the Muslims and the Tamils, who were the majority in the region as well as in the district at that time, and, as a result, Muslims became to face severe land shortage in the district on one hand and the ethnic balance of the district was also disrupted, on the other hand.

Therefore, land related issues have been contributed in many ways to the emergence of the separate administrative district demand among minorities in Amparai district. Muslims in Amparai district, as in the rest of the eastern province have been facing a serious shortage of available lands. It is worth noting here that about 43.4 percent of the district population in Amparai is Muslims, but only 17.2 percent of the total lands in the district are allocated for Muslims-majority Divisional Secretariat (DS) divisions in the district. Similarly, the Tamils share 17.3 percent of district population, but Tamils-majority DS divisions share only 9.2 percent of district lands. On the other hand, about three quarters of the lands in Amparai district are belonging to the D.S divisions that are almost entirely Sinhalese populated. Table 2 illustrates the fact that about 73.6 percent of the total district land is allocated for the Sinhalese-majority DS divisions, even though the Sinhalese constitute only 38.9 percent of the district population. It clearly justifies that the delimitation process was done discriminating the minorities' rights of sharing land to the extent of their percentage in the district population.

Table 2. Land allocation based on the DS divisions dominated by the ethnic group in Amparai district (2012)

DS Divisions predominated by ethnic groups	Share in district population (2012)		Allocated lands for DS divisions predominated by ethnic groups	
	Amount	%	Amount(km ²)	%
Muslims	281,702	43.6	759.4	17.2
Sinhalese	252,458	38.7	3248.5	73.6
Tamils	112,457	17.4	407.1	9.2
Others	2785	0.3	-	-
Total	649,402	100	4415	100

Source: District Secretariat, Amparai 2013 & Department of Census and Statistics 2014.

Even though the majority of the district population is Tamil-speakers, the land distributed through land policies, and land settlement programs were mostly favored the Sinhalese (who constituted the minority in the district population) and marginalized the minorities. When Amparai district was formed in 1961, not only majority of the population was Tamil-speakers but also majority of the lands were owned by them. The present day western part of the Amparai district was the *Chena* (supplementary crops) cultivation area which was mainly [owned and] cultivated by Tamils and Muslims. But, in the name of Gal Oya settlement project, most of their lands were seized by the government and were transformed into cultivatable lands with irrigation and other facilities and given Sinhalese settlers. According to Hasbullah et al (2005:34), more than 160,000 acres of paddy land were provided with irrigation water to the settlers of Gal Oya project. Further, a part of land area in Amparai was allocated for sugar cane cultivation. Thousands of acres of paddy lands owned by Muslims and Tamils were acquired by the state authorities for sugar cane cultivation. Most of those farmers who lost their lands were not properly compensated. Mohideen (2008) claims that the Sugar Corporation at Hingurana, Tile Factory at Irakkamam and the River Valley Development Board — the successor to the Gal Oya Development Board — took over the fertile paddy fields of the Muslims without any regard to the provisions of the law relating to acquisition of land. As Mohideen (2008) further indicates, this had seriously affected the economy and the political strength of the indigenous Muslim population and induced number of land based conflict within ethnic groups in the district.

When comparing the land area of the Sinhalese majority Lahugala DS division with the Muslim majority Kalmunai DS division, the Sinhalese majority divisions having 10 times more than the land area of the Kalmunai division. This clearly justifies the argument that the Tamil-speaking Muslims and Tamils were discriminated in the matter of land allocation to the local administrative and political units. Zuhair (2007) reveals the reason for anxiety stem from state-initiated demographic changes of the past in Amparai district through the land settlement projects is to prevent the formation of a clearly Muslim-majority district. This calculated discrimination not only created land shortage in the Tamil-speaking areas but also has influenced in the allocation of other resources (especially budgetary allocation) to these areas. From Tamil-speakers point of views, the discrimination and marginalization of minorities in benefitting the land settlement and colonization projects could have not been happened if there was an institutional set-up and environment conducive to the Tamil-speakers at the district secretariat.

In addition to the above facts, the coastal region of Amparai district had been marginalized in the regular projects of government intended to community and regional development during the first phase of civil war in the country, referring the insecurity situation prevailed in the area. One of the good examples on this regard is the *Gam Udawa* (village reawakening) program which was implemented by R.Premadasa, the then Prime Minister during the JR Jeyawardena regime (1977-1988). *Gam Udawa* conceptually refers to the total process of reawakening of villages concentrating both economic and cultural aspects of life. This program was designed to provide housing for poor sector, and to enhance the basic infrastructure facilities such as roads, electricity, and other services to less developed areas in the country. Therefore, the objectives of *Gam Udawa* can be identified as a blend of both human welfare cum community development and regional development (Hennanayake, 2006:141). The program was held annually and a remote area was chosen for the implementation of the program. An especial reference to the *Gam Udawa* program in this research context is that the first such a program was conducted in Amparai area in 1980. Even though there were many populated areas but vulnerable in terms of community and infra-structure facilities and development in the coastal belt of the district, the government with the support of district administrative elites chosen a Sinhalese area to conduct the program. Due to this program, majority of the Amparai town area were developed while the most of the most populated areas of the district were abandoned in terms of development. It is worth noting that only after the SLMC formed a coalition government with the People's Alliance (PA) in 1994, the entire villages of the coastal region were given priority concern in infra-structure and community development with modern facilities and networks. But, after M.H.M.Ashraff, the founder leader of the SLMC, died in 2000, the domination of Sinhalese politicians in the district administration became prominent once again.

Number of decisions made by the central government, District Coordinating Committee and the GA of Amparai district were found to be discriminative and marginalizing the Tamil-speakers. All these incidents induced the advocates of the new district to forward it as one of the hot demands on the political platform. In fact, only after 2000 general election, the demand became to be a national-level political debating theme.

Paralleled to the above initiatives, there were many attempts to downgrade the percentage of minorities in the district population through number of discriminatory political actions. Following the colonization of more Sinhalese in the district, electoral boundaries were also redrawn to make it as a Sinhala majority district. Many areas from the other district were amalgamated with Amparai district during the 1970s and 1980s. Mahaoya, Pathiyatalawa of Batticaloa district were merged with the Amparai electorate district after 1978, and Dehiattakandia, Srimapura, Kiranthurukodde — the waste areas fully predominated by Sinhalese — were also annexed with Amparai after 1988 and the district was named as "Digamadulla" electoral district. Digamadulla was the part of Sinhalese ancient Ruhunu Kingdom. Since the name symbolized Sinhalese only, it was very much criticized by the Tamil-speakers as favored to the Sinhalese. All the above attempts downgraded the percentage of Tamil-speakers in one hand, as detailed in the Table 3, and strengthened and benefitted the electoral politics of Sinhalese, as noted in the Table 4, on the other hand. A review of electoral politics of Amparai district reveals that the Sinhalese have been elected more than their percentage in most of the parliament from 1989, after the introduction of Preferential Representative (PR) electoral system in Sri Lanka.

Table 3. Change of ethnic balance in district population, Amparai (1963-2012)

Census Year	SL Muslims		Sinhalese		SL Tamils		Others		Total no.
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
1963	97,621	46.11	61,996	29.28	49,185	23.23	2,930	1.38	211,732
1973	126,365	46.35	82,280	30.18	60,519	22.20	3,441	1.26	272,605
1981	161,568	41.45	146,943	37.78	77,826	20.20	2,633	0.67	388,970
2007	268,630	43.99	228,938	37.49	111,948	18.33	1,203	0.20	610,719
2012	281,702	43.40	252,458	38.90	112,457	17.30	2,785	0.40	649,402

Source: Department of Census and Statistics 2007 & 2014.

Table 4. Voters and ethnic-based representation in Parliament elections in Digamadulla electoral district (1989-2010)

Year of Election	Voters per Polling Divisions					Elected Members on ethnic basis*			
	Amparai	Kalmunai	Pottuvil	Sammanthurai	Total	S	M	T	Total
1989	92,901	43,579	82,231	44,453	265,768*	4	1	1	06
1994	112,046	50,248	97,721	51,991	312,006	4	2	0	06
2000	124,504	56,513	113,519	58,100	352,537	3	3	1	07
2001	126,660	57,653	116,710	59,474	360,497	2	4	1	07
2004	132,371	60,456	123,051	63,166	379,044	2	4	1	07
2010	145,479	66,135	137,779	71,442	420,835	3	3	1	07

*Included the postal votes of 2604. * S-Sinhalese M-Muslims T-Tamils

Source: Department of Elections 1989; 1994; 2000; 2001; 2004 & 2010.

The Table 4 clearly illustrates that in Amparai district, the Sinhalese has been enjoyed over representation in parliament on the cost of Muslims and Tamils representations from 1989 to 2000. This also has caused the Muslims to actively and politically advocate the separate district demand during this period (Athambawa, 2011 & Aliff, 2014). However, during coalition politics, especially after 2000, Muslims and Tamils have been gaining a rational representation in parliament. This may prompted the Sinhalese to criticize and to advocate against the concept of new district. In fact, there is an electoral politics behind the advocacy for and agitations against the demand calling for the establishment of new administrative district in the coastal belt of Amparai.

Apart from the above initiatives, in many aspects, the majority population of the district, Tamil-speakers was also marginalized in discriminatory manner in the process of district administration. Even though they form the majority in district population and have historic records of their existence, it is noticed that the district secretariat has failed/avoided reporting the history, origin and culture of these ethnic groups in its annual reports submitted to central line ministry and parliament. Normally, the annual reports prepare with the collection of data from the DS offices, but the officers at the

district secretariat have failed or neglected to incorporate many aspects of ethnic information of the coastal area (See: District Secretariat, Amparai, 2013).

The domination of Sinhalese in the district administration easily allowed the administrative bureaucracy to make decisions and act in favor of Sinhalese and marginalize the Tamil-speakers, while violating their due rights and share in resources and working against them in a discriminatory manner. Since electoral politics has also helped these bureaucrats, they became stronger and the voices of the Tamil-speakers became to be undermined. From 1970 onwards, during most of the period, district political leadership was a Sinhalese who helped the district administrative elites for making authoritative decisions against Tamil-speakers in the matter of land allocation, selecting villages and beneficiaries for development program, allocating funds for divisional levels, and demarcating divisional boundaries. It was noticed during the field visits that many politicians, administrators and the public of the coastal area expressed their concerns about the Sinhalese and Sinhalese dominance of district administration. According to them, it is a violation of their fundamental rights — the right to communicate and to fulfill their administrative tasks in their own language which is guaranteed in the constitution. Despite many requests from the public and commands from the government authorities, up to now the district administration conducts the District Coordinating Committee (DCC) meetings in Sinhala language while the majority of the participants are Tamil-speakers who cannot understand Sinhala and even cannot pass any message to the committee. All these factors have motivated the Tamil-speakers to demand and advocate the concept of separate administrative district for the coastal belt of Amparai district in the course of time.

5. Conclusion

As analyzed above, from the inception of the Amparai district number of factors has been contributed to the emergence of the demand calling for the formation of a new district for the coastal belt of Amparai. Among them, the establishment of district secretariat and the domination of Sinhalese and Sinhala language in administrative affairs were the prominent factors which initially led to number of issues and challenges to the majority of the district population — Tamil-speakers — living in the coastal area which later pushed them to demand and advocate for a new administrative district for their living area. The above factors were identified by the Tamil-speakers as the violation of their right, especially the right to fulfill their administrative needs in their own language, ensured in constitution. The establishment of district secretariat in Sinhalese-majority area was also viewed by them as a planned project favoring Sinhalese. Similarly, the post-independent land settlement and irrigation-based development programs implemented in Amparai district have also induced the Tamil-speakers living in the coastal stretch to advocate for a new district for their area. These development programs have not only attempted to settle more Sinhalese in the district, but also reduced the percentage of Tamil-speakers in the district population. On the other hand, the domination of Sinhalese elites in the district administration has automatically led to the discrimination and marginalization of ethnic minorities, the Tamils and the Muslims in the affairs of district administration, especially on land allocation and delimitation of the boundaries of local political and administrative units. All the above analyzed factors induced the Tamil-speakers to the status of frustration that was further deepened by the intense civil war in the middle of 1980s. Therefore, the Tamil-speakers living in the coastal belt of the Amparai district compelled to demand and advocate for forming a new district by carving out the Tamil-speaking majority areas of the Amparai district.

Even though the successive governments and parties accepted this demand and promised to be fulfilled, but no meaningful initiatives were taken to cater the needs of the people and to fulfill the demand. As viewed earlier, it is the establishment of district secretariat and the domination of Sinhalese and Sinhala language in district administration have been the major influencing factors causing all related administrative issues facing by the Tamil-speakers in this region. Therefore, if government and concerning parties attempted to make necessary reforms or alternative arrangements to resolve these issues, the opportunity to suppress/reduce the issues facing by the Tamil-speakers would possibly be increased. Advocates of this demand have been requesting the government for the appointment of a Tamil-speaking district secretary and a considerable number of Tamil-speaking higher officers to Amparai Kachcheri or the establishment of coastal administrative Kachcheri with the appointment of an Additional District Secretary and empowered with decentralized fiscal and administrative powers and authorities as an alternative relief to the establishment of a new district. In fact, these arrangements would be helpful to reconcile the administrative issues facing by the people of this area to a great extent. If people satisfy with these arrangements, the necessity of advocating a new administrative district would also become questionable.

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