

CREATION OF NEW ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT FOR TAMIL SPEAKING PEOPLE IN AMPARA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Introduction:

Administrative decentralization is a strategy for addressing a number of critical governmental needs. Foremost among these are strengthening governance, increasing transparency and accountability, and more effective and efficient production and delivery of public goods and services. Administrative decentralization seeks to redistribute authority, responsibility and financial resources for providing public services among different levels of government (*Henry, 1963:45-46*).

This is a research paper based on the study carried out under the objective of looking at the context and considering the possibilities of creating a new administrative district in the coastal areas of the Amparai district, covering Sammanthurai, Kalmunai, and Pottuvil electorates as administrative benefits for Tamil speaking people. This demand for creating a separate coastal district has emerged among the Tamil speaking people ever since the creation of Amparai district in 1961, by separating the southern part of the Batticaloa district (*Fernando, 1973*), due to preventing administrative barriers and accommodating needs of the citizens. During the colonial and independent period, district administrative mechanism was limited in the Eastern Province. The Kacheri was set up in both districts, Trincomalee and Batticaloa, and it provided administrative services for the entire citizens of the eastern people. Especially, the district Kacheri located in Batticaloa township extended its administrative functions upto present Ampara district. It means the Batticaloa district included territory of both Batticaloa and Ampara district before the separation of Ampara district in 1961. The separation of Ampara administrative district was possible due to continued administrative burdens of the government and citizen needs.

New districts and provinces have been created in due times to make easy to implement the administrative tasks of the central government of Sri Lanka. In this backdrop, in 1833, there were five districts created first time in Sri Lanka, namely, Galle, Puttallam, Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticaloa (*Gunawardena, 1982:79*). In 1889, the number of the districts became to increase into eight. In due time, there were number of districts created. Today Sri Lanka has divided into 25 administrative districts; the last district which was created on this basis was Kilinochchi in 1984 (*Fernando, 1973*). Even though many proposals and demands were put forwarded to create more new districts in many parts of Sri Lanka for multiple purposes, no governments in the last 26 years were in favor of creating new administrative districts.

The proposal demanding for creating a new administrative district in the coastal area of Amparai district has been a contested political demand for the last two decades. At the beginning it was put forwarded as a rational, non-ethnic and non political demand. However, later on, it became to reshape as a political and ethnic oriented demand which was mostly favored by the Muslim community of the particular area.

This research pays special attention on how was the demand originated and put forwarded for the last two decades and why the demand became rational on the discourse of administrative decentralization and ethnic conflict resolution in Sri Lanka? This research is interpretive in nature. A field survey has been conducted in the research area for the purpose

of collecting data with desk analysis of existing literatures. Comparative statistics have been used in developing arguments for and against the proposed demand.

Administrative Decentralization:

According to Aristotle, the father of politics, man is a social animal. Therefore, he can not live alone. He needs to depend on others to fulfill number of his needs and tasks. In this backdrop, public administration, as an organized institution, emerged. However, it is difficult to identify when the administration has emerged. But it is undoubtedly broad that it may have originated or emerged when people become to live together, collectively, shared by interests and needs (*Baker, 1992*).

The term administration became from the words 'ad' and 'ministrare'. Meaning of these two words is 'serving to people' (*Baker, 1992*). In modern states, the importance of administration is obvious in relation to resolving social and political issues and accommodating public interests and objectives, and to initiate development process. However, when state become big in terms of size of territory and population and the state's intervention became popular day to day life of people, public administration became to face number of challenges because of the decentralization character of it (*Ameerdeen, 2001:1-12*). Therefore, the 'decentralization' concept became to emerge and influence in resolving administrative issues and making administration so easy.

Administrative decentralization is a process which insists establishing or extending the departmental / administrative activities from center to periphery for the purpose of local people participation and for making easy of administering public affairs. Decentralization denotes the transfer of authority from center to periphery. The central idea of the concept is 'away from center' (*Macmohan, 1961:15*). The importance of administrative decentralization has been realized as an important one in big and multi-ethnic states to accommodate the different kinds of people and their interests in administration.

In modern governance, the decentralization of administration has been identified as an important aspect and being an element of 'good governance'. The United Nations and other international organizations and donor agencies are also insisting the importance of administrative decentralization when they become to support development process, administrative reforms, and good governance (*Kumar, 2006:13*). It is in modern world, the decentralization of administration has become as one of the means for multi-dimensional development and to accommodate multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic population of a country. Majority of the country in the world have adopted number of strategies and structures in implementing features of administrative decentralization for the above purposes.

Administrative Decentralization process and the formation of new Districts in Sri Lanka:

Sri Lanka, a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic country situated in the center of Indian Ocean with its 65610 sq kms land area (*De Silva, 1981:10*). It is obvious that there was a systematic and efficient local administration in the names of *Gambasaba* and *Ratasaba*, during the ancient period in Sri Lanka (*Sivarajah, 2002*). However, this system became unpopular during the colonial administration. The colonial rulers, especially the British who ruled Sri Lanka from 1796 to 1948 destroyed all the ancient systems and established a centralized administrative system in the names of provincial administration, district administration, Assistant Government Agent Division (AGA) and the Village Administrative divisions (*Wijeyaweera, 1988:14-20*).

The government Agents has been in-charged for provincial administration and district administration as agents of central government and all local administrative units were

integrated under them. From 1931, under the Donogmore Reform, administration became so decentralized to the ministries, and to the departments (*Wijeyaweera, 1988:17-20*).

There was an administrative unit called 'district' coming under the provincial administration. Government Agents were in-charged for the administration of each districts which were created in due times for many purposes including making easy of district administration and accommodating ethnic and linguistic groups or minorities in the district administration. The last district which was created on this basis was Kilinochchi in 1984. Today Sri Lanka is divided into 25 administrative districts. The picture-2 shows the present district of Sri Lanka.



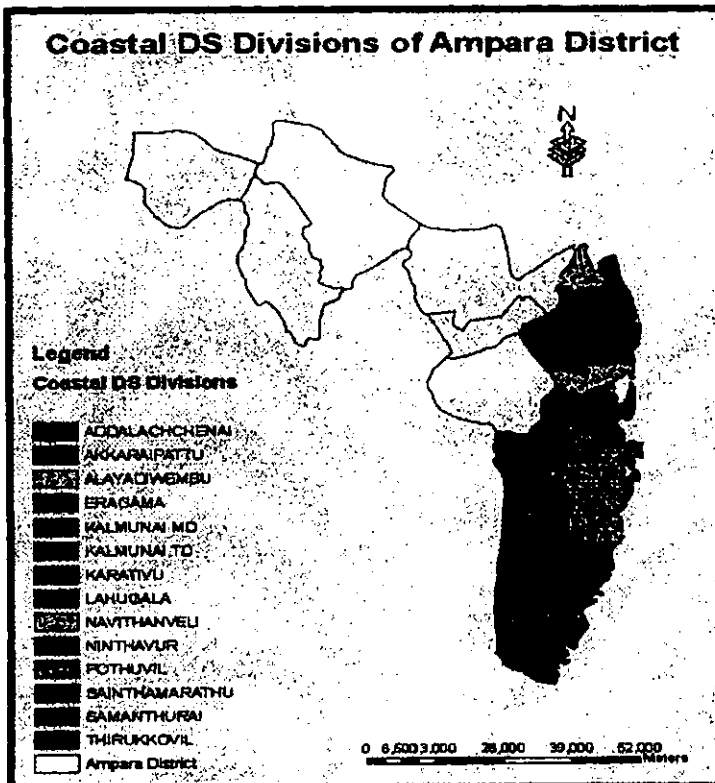
Source: Digitized Map from Sri Lanka Atlas – 2008

The demand for the formation of Coastal Administrative District in Amparai:

The demand for creation a separate administrative district for the sake of Tamil speaking people of that area is a long-term proposal. The Tami speaking people of the particular area in Amparai district became to articulate this demand / proposal from Amparai district formed in 1961. At the first instance the demand was not to create a new district in the coastal areas but to bring the district secretariat in the coastal area (*Veerakesari, 18.06.2002*). Parliamentarians M.S. Kariyappar and E.M.P. Naganathan were advocating the demand at the beginning. Since there was no any political party for Muslims and the Muslims were alliance with the Federal Party, the Federal Party was advocating the demand during 1960s and 70s. However, no attempts were taken by the governments to look at the demand and to create a separate administrative district (*Muneera, 2004:6 – 10*).

However, when the ethnic conflict became severe and posed number of challenges to the Tamil speaking people of the Amparai district, they became to revise and re-advocate their demand for creating a new administrative district for them. However, during 1980s the Tamils were not much more involved in this process. Majority of the Tamil parties were against the proposal. The reason may be the Tamil-Muslim conflict in the region (*Veerakesari, 14.06.2001*). Further majority of the Muslim politicians who were in pursue of the major Sinhala parties also strongly against the proposal (*Mohideen, 1993:15*). However, the Muslim civil society was in pursuing of the demand and collectively worked to make it as an input to the political system. The Sri Lanka Muslims Congress (SLMC) which emerged as a social and political force for the Muslims in the discourse of ethnic conflict have come to articulate the demand and propagated and put forwarded it as a political demand in the electoral bargaining. From 1994 onward, the SLMC, being at the government site and opposition site in the parliament has strongly advocating the demand. There were many agreements with major political parties with regard to the creation of coastal administrative district. However, due to the strong opposition by any parties both inside and outside the parliament it the demand could not achieve. However, the demand has been still posed by the SLMC and civil society of Tamil speaking people in the coastal area of Amparai district as a rational and justifiable one in the discourse of administrative decentralization process (*Ibrahim, 2002:6*).

The demand or proposal for creating a new administrative district for Tamil speaking people in the coastal area of Amparai district articulate that the coastal electorate areas should be brought under a separate administrative district and be decentralized the administrative authorities of central government. The land area of the proposed district is 1867.7 sq km with 392,097 populations (*Statistical Report of Amparai District Secretariat, 2007:6*).



Source: Digitized Map from Sri Lanka Atlas - 2008

Possibility or Justifying Factors of the demand for creating new administrative district for Tamil speaking people in Amparai:

There are number of factors which justify or making possible of creating a separate administrative district for Tamil speaking people in the coastal area of Ampara. When we look at the rational of these factors we could found that those are not only justifying factors to create a separate district but also challenging factors in getting benefits of district administration or administrative decentralization. Following are some of them.

- **Language issue / blockade**

The major justifying factor in strengthening the demand for creating a separate administrative district for Tamil speaking people in the coastal areas of Amparai district is the language issues or blockades. The linguistic set up/ practice of Amparai district has clearly shows the fact that the entire population of coastal areas has been traditionally speaking Tamil as their mother tongue and Tamil has been playing a vital role in day by day activities of their life and in the administrative affairs of that areas. Likewise majority or entire population of the Western part of the Amparai district speak Sinhala as their mother tongue and administration of the local and national level of that area has been conducted in Sinhala language (*Veerakesari, 18.06.2002*). Further it is noticeable that the majority of the entire district population speaks Tamil as their mother tongue. However, most of the district administration has been conducted in Sinhala; the administrative heads and the departments of central government are conducting their duties in Sinhala language. And more Sinhala speaking officials have been dominating the administration of the department and district secretariat. It is counted that nearly 80 percent of the total employees of the district department and district secretariat are Sinhalese (*Accountant Unit, 2008*). Moreover, it is obvious that the majority of the district population is Tamil speaking community, no one has been appointed as a government agent of Amparai district from its inception. All these contexts automatically made Tamil speaking people more troubles and they became to face number of issues and challenges in terms of language when they go to these administrative departments and secretariat to fulfill their administrative needs.

Even though the Sixteenth Amendment to the constitution clearly indicates that the administrative language of a district should be the speaking language of majority population of the particular district (*Sixteenth Ammendment, 1988:1-2*). However, this provision of the constitution has not been followed or implemented in Amparai district. Since more than 80 percent of the employees are Sinhala speaking officers in the district secretariats and departments, they were not in favour of implementing the provision (*Accountant Unit, 2008*). All these factors posed the Tamil speaking community of the coastal areas to demand for the creation of separate administrative district to perform their administrative functions in their own language. Therefore, based on the above arguments, it is justifiable to create a new administrative district in the coastal areas of Amparai district for the benefit of Tamil speaking people.

- **Location of district administrative secretariat and departments**

It is the distance of the location of the district administrative secretariat and department also make necessity and justifying the proposal of creating the new district in the coastal areas of Amparai district. The demographic set-up of Amparai district shows us a clear division between the East and the West coast populated areas of the district by nearly 20 kms paddy lands. However, the district secretariat and the departments of central governments have located in the Western area. Therefore, the publics in the coastal areas wanted to travel more than 20 kms to complete their administrative works. This made them more expensive and other difficulties. Further more there was communication gab between the two wings. The publics from the coastal areas need to go early morning or one day before and stay in

Sinhala area (Amparai town) to finish or complete their administrative needs as early as possible in the working days. Further, this distance makes administrative difficulties in communication, commanding, and coordination of subordinate administrative units and departments (*Thinakaran, 15.11.2001*).

On this situation, many public who are living in the coastal areas with number of administrative needs and problems are not in favour of completing their needs and resolving their problems because of the difficulties in terms of distance and other related issues. It is the purpose of district administration is to make people participation and make easy to the public to fulfill their needs. But people of the coastal areas in Amparai district are become to face number of challenges in getting benefits of district administration and administrative decentralization (*Bawa, 2009.05.12*). This situation poses them to demand for a separate administrative district in the coastal areas of the district. On this backdrop, this proposal or demand becomes justifiable.

- **Sinhala domination over administrative affairs**

From its inception, since the administrative secretariats and the majority of the departments of central government have been in the Sinhala majority area (Amparai town) it led to the domination of Sinhala language and Sinhalese over the district administration (*Veerakesari, 14.06.2001*). All Government Agents (G.A) or District secretaries have been appointed only from Sinhala speaking community, by undermining the fact that the majority of the district population is Tamil speaking community. At the same time majority of the administrative orders and procedures are also distributed and maintained in Sinhala language. This made difficulties in understanding administrative orders properly at the district secretariat and departments, and even at the subordinate units in the Tamil speaking areas. In fact, this practice undermined the features of 16th Amendment to the Constitution which impose the language practice in administration according to the majority speaking language of district population (*See: Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution, 1988:1-2*).

Further more, since most of the administrative department of district administration functioning in the Sinhala dominant area, it led to the over percentage of or domination of Sinhala staff in these departments. According to a survey nearly 80 percent of the district secretariat and department staff are Sinhalese who do not understand Tamil and do not willing to work on Tamil speaking environment and do not willing to implement Tamil language policy of 16th amendment (*Askar, 12.03.2009*). This kind of mentality further led to the negligence of Tamil language and Tamil speaking people at district administration. There are number of grievances in relation to Sinhala domination in Amparai district administration which are justifying the need for creating of new administration district for Tamil speaking people in the coastal area of Amparai district.

- **Potential Resources**

It is noticeable that the coastal area of Amparai district has potential resources to administer a district if it is created, which also justifying the creation of separate administrative district in this area. The eastern coast of this area enriched with the Indian Ocean deep sea and the western coast enriched with thousands of acre of paddy land. It has a land area of 1867.7 sq kms with 392,097 populations (*Statistical Report of Amparai District Secretariat, 2007:6*). It includes three electorates. More percentage of the product of Amparai district come from this area since it empowered with rich land and sea areas. The coastal area has also empowered with infra-structure facilities (good road network, water resources, schools and educational institutions, university and technical collages, harbor and other facilities) and other essential administrative structures.

Even though the administration of Amparai district has been under one name, in many affairs, it is the coastal area has been separated and administered with different name. For example, the coastal area of the Amparai district has been separated and given a spate telephone code number (067), considered as a separate educational district (Kalmunai), created a separate Regional Health Service center (Kalmunai) etc. They indicating and justifying that there is a need for separate both areas and administer them separately.

It is the land of coastal area also justifying as resource to create a separate administrative district. It has 1867.7 sq kms land with sea resource and other natural resources. This area is divided into 14 local government units including one Municipal council and 13 Pradesiya Shabas (*Statistical Report of Amparai District Secretariat, 2007:6*). Further it is divided into 14 local administrative divisions (D.S Divisions) which are more than double in size of the D.S.Divisions of Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Mannar and Matale districts. Therefore, if this coastal area be created as a new district, there are number of possibilities for the socio, economic and cultural development of this area by using these potential resources within few years.

The following table indicate the potential resources that the coastal area of Amparai district enriched with which justifying the proposal or demand for creation a new administrative district in this area.

Table 4.13 Statistical Summary of Potential Resources of Coastal Area of Ampara District – 2007

Subjects	Divisional Secretariat Area														Total
	Addalatchenai	Akkarapattu	Alayadivembu	Kalmunai (MD)	Kalmunai (TD)	Sainthamaruthu	Karaitivu	Nintavur	Pottuvil	Sammanthurai	Navithenveli	Irakkamam	Thirakkovil	Lahugala	
Population	39,010	38,057	24,039	44,395	30,318	25,727	17,230	27,180	31,355	56,047	19,095	13,059	26,155	8,324	39991
No. of Villages	24	12	18	9	9	1	6	9	32	30	16	14	11	19	210
No. of GN Divisions	32	28	22	29	29	17	17	25	27	51	20	12	22	12	343
No. of Voters	24,486	23,935	14,593	47,797		16,522	11,163	18,403	20,059	35,053	12,522	7,551	17,418	5,546	255048
Local Governments	1PS	1PS	1PS	1M			1PS	1PS	1PS	1PS	1PS	1PS	1PS	1PS	12
No. of Local Government Members	9	11	9	19		-	5	7	9	16	7	-	9	11	112
Employees	22,320	-	6,669	6,091	9,763	8,816	4,271	9,019	10,344	15,310	6,039	2,920	10,617	3,385	115564
Government Servants	889	-	908	1,643	975	936	2,582	978	1,248	1,942	202	270	1,028	788	14389
No. of Schools	23	20	11	13	14	7	10	13	23	34	17	11	21	-	217
No. of Teachers	459	471	236	474	364	254	171	299	316	730	169	129	254	-	4326
No. of Students	8,980	7,779	8,152	12,332	8,031	6,631	4,055	6,156	4,919	15,107	6,192	3,246	5,836	-	97416
Land Area (KM)	52.05	102.2	1,27.5	66.09			31.3	55.6	367.5	256.7			190.6	616.9	1738.94
Paddy Harvesting (Hectare)	5.5	5.5	5.5	4.8	-	-	4.75	5.5	4.8	5.0	5.0	5.5	-	4.5	56.35
Paddy Stores	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	2
Compost Stores	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1

Farmer Organizations / No. of Members	19/1,748	24/3,909	22/2,444	19/855	-	3/110	3/263	15/1,082	40/4,585	44/3,418	11/1,207	14/868	26/2,726	14/882	
Sammurdhi Beneficiaries	5,828	4,478	4,203	6,568	4,567	3,179	2,868	3,869	5,840	8,863	4,298	1,866	4,221	1,558	62206
Fisheries Families	3,080	1,550	1,000	2,615	710	-	1,100	1,450	3,530	430			1,300		16765
Fisheries Population	18,050	10,500	1,050	11,68 0	3,550	-	4,260	5,250	14,910	2,100			8,030		79380
Fisheries	3,800	1,810	1,999	3,810	500	-	1,140	2,060	3,240	420			1,340		2019
Fisheries Organizations / No. Members	15/1,100	5/400	6/400	27/2,425	10/500	-	6/450	7/600	15/1,500				7/700		98/8075
Resettled Families	1,571	1,596	296	14	3,328	6	2	4	1,722	1,594	114	5,216	677	30	16170
No. of Houses	8965	8923	5569	1001 0	7747	5549	3594	5850	8270	15036	5141	2881	8057	2166	97758
Housing Scheme / No. of Houses	2/50	1/134	4/400	12/442			3/259	1/30	3/55	49/1962			4/207	1/30	
Total Vehicles	2628	3827	1764	5764	660	2516	1412	2869	1793	4157	785	946	1408	223	30752
Revenue	967893	860337	616431	3132770	284178	505096	87665	1204557	708193	1963255	340155	32747	500569	87665	11291511
Government Health Organizations	6	2	1	4		1	1	3	3	4	3	1	3	1	33
DCB Allocation (000)	4750	4655	1050	7504		2710	1575	4390	25850	2850	2510	1190	1180	1170	61384000
CDAIP	160.55	204.93	30	177.87	89.41	46.17	34.42	97.84	148.79	111.72	77.43	28.53	419.53	53.81	1681

Source: District Statistics, District Planning Secretariat, Ampara -- 2007

- **Making easy of district administration and other benefits (Development and ethnic harmony)**

It is the main purpose of creating new administrative district is to make district administration easy one. On this backdrop, many new districts have been created even after the independence. Even though the demand for creating a new administrative district for Tamil speaking people in the coastal areas of Amparai district have more rational and justification, the main argument and rational behind the demand or proposal is making easy of district administration. It is the ration behind the proposal is without facing any challenges and difficulties; all public should involve in district administration and fulfill their administrative needs. Therefore, as seen earlier, the people in the coastal areas of Amparai district are facing number of challenges and difficulties in different ways as indicated earlier when they go for district secretariat and departments to fulfill their administrative needs. On this backdrop, if it is created a new administrative district in the coastal areas, the district administration will become easy and people of this district will fulfill their administrative need without any difficulties as early as possible. This administrative easiness in many ways will lead to the multi-dimensional and multi-sectored development of this district and building strong ethnic and social harmony in many ways (*Mohideen, 2008.05.04*). If the administration created then the central government will allocate money directly to the district secretariat and it will allocate the local administrative units. And there are more chances to the ministerial allocations to this district too. So, using all these money, with the consensus of district people, there are more possibilities for building development and ethnic and social harmony in the district (*Anantharajah, 24.10.2008*).

Criticism over the proposal of creating new Administrative district for the Tamil speaking people in Amparai:

Even though the proposal for creating a new administrative district in the coastal area of Amparai district become rational and justifiable under many reasons and conditions, the proposal has been vitally criticized by many parties for number of reasons and being a contested one in the discourse of administrative decentralization process in Sri Lanka.

One of the major criticisms posed by the majority Sinhalese in the district and the country was that the proposal is an ethnic oriented one. They show the proposal as the first attempt / mean for achieving Muslim autonomy unit in the Eastern province (*Mohideen, 1993:15*). Therefore, they look at the proposal only through ethnic layer. They do not go beyond the layer and look at the rational behind it. In fact, majority of the text payers and the high amount of Inland Revenue are coming from the coastal areas of the district but, when we come to resource allocation and decentralization budget for the district, the major amount is go to the Sinhala dominated areas. Therefore, Sinhalese are getting more benefit in the united Amparai district. On this backdrop, their criticism for the proposal was based on this argument.

Another major criticism was that of Muslim domination on the administration of coastal area of Amparai district / or proposed new district. This criticism has been posed by the Tamil community living in the proposed district and the Tamil politicians. The Tamil community has comprises nearly 29 percent of the total coastal population. In fact, they have scattered through out the coastal areas. Since they can not influence or dominate in the district administration, they fear that they will be marginalized or they will be minority within minority in the new district and in district administration (*Veerakesari, 14.06.2001*). This fear posed them to criticize the proposal. But when we look at the rational behind the history of this proposal we will realize that the Tamil community also severely affected by the present district administrative setups dominated by the Sinhalese and at the same time this proposal is to create a new district not for Muslim community but for Tamil speaking people.

However, since there was an understanding and agreement between the main Tamil and Muslim political parties to work on a consensus manner, the Tamils also agreed to work together on the matter of creating new administrative district for Tamil speaking people in Amparai (*Navamani, 16.06.2001:1,7, Veerakesari, 16.06.2001*)

This proposal was mainly criticized by the political parties as a party oriented proposal. To some extent this criticism was rational. Even though the proposal has emerged among and put forwarded by the Tamil speaking civil society, the proposal became as a demand and well popularized by and articulated only by politicians and political parties. Especially, the SLMC, a Muslim distinct political party emerged in the discourse of ethnic conflict in the middle of 1980s has been advocating and put forwarding this proposal as a political demand in its political bargaining with major Sinhala parties and governments (*Navamani, 16.06.2001*). However, the SLMC never put forwarded it as a proposal for/of Muslim community or never propagated that the proposal will give benefits only for the Muslim community in the area. It always has been articulating the proposal as a mechanism to accommodate minorities' grievances in the ethnic conflict resolution process and in the process of administrative decentralization.

However, majority of the other political parties looked at the proposal through their party ideology, beliefs and agendas. These parties must understand the fact that the majority of the people's grievances and demands are put forward as inputs to the political system through political parties; therefore, a party had been played a vital role in articulating the proposal to form a separate administrative district for Tamil speaking people in Amparai.

Conclusions:

Administrative decentralization seeks to redistribute authority, responsibility and financial resources for providing public services among different levels of government. It is the transfer of responsibility for the planning, financing and management of certain public functions from the central government and its agencies to field units of government agencies, subordinate units or semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, regional or functional authorities. When considered the district administrative decentralization in Sri Lanka, in 1833 British ruler has consolidated to form central, provincial and district administrative system in Sri Lanka. Based on Commissions report provinces and district were increased in Sri Lanka on due times. The last district which was created on the rational of administrative decentralization and making easy of district administration was Kilinochchi in 1984.

The proposal of forming a new administrative district for Tamil speaking people in the coastal area of Amparai district has emerged immediate after the formation of Amparai district in 1961. The proposal articulated that the coastal electorate areas should be brought under a separate administrative district and be decentralized the administrative authorities of central government. The land area of the proposed district is 1867.7 sq km with 392,097 populations (2007).

Even though there are number of justifications and rationals behind the proposal, and even though there is no any barrier to create new districts in the constitution and in the political system (actually the provisions of the constitution are promoting to form new district by separating areas from the existing districts for the purpose of administrative decentralizations and other needs), this proposed district not yet formed. The major reason for this delay, according to this research, is the negligence of governments on the basis of looking at the proposal through ethnic and party layers. However, this research has identified the rationals and justification behind the proposal. It is, by this research try to