NEXUS BETWEEN LAND AND ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA- REAL OR IMAGINARY: AN ANALYSIS OF LAND, AGRICULTURAL AND IRRIGATION POLICIES IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has many root causes and consequences that are closely interlinked. Given its complexities, it should not be assumed that these causes are part of historical processes where one event led to another. Often many of the issues that may be regarded as root causes arose within a single but extended context and equally as often, simultaneously. This study investigates between ethnic grievances and land, irrigation and agricultural policies in the country using historical data and evidences. It is found that there is no enough evidence to support the argument that land, agriculture and irrigation policies have some impacts on emerging conflicts situation in north and east provinces in Sri Lanka. Though some people argue that land conflict is often linked with the ethnic conflict, a large number of land conflicts in the North and East are found to be common issues for all communities and could be resolved with an appropriate national plan that is prepared by considering the demand of all communities.

Key Words: Conflicts, colonization, irrigation and agricultural policies

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INTRODUCTION

Sri Lankan economy has undergone many changes since the early 1980s. However, agriculture still plays an important role in the economy in terms of its contribution to GDP and providing employment to the labour force in rural area (Ranathilaka 2008). Since agriculture directly affects the livelihood of families in the rural sector, the land, irrigation and agricultural policies have always been a subject and conflict related issues even in post-colonial period. One of the major points of conflict between the communities was state sponsored colonization schemes that had the effect of changing the demographic balance in the North and Eastern provinces in favour of majority Sinhalese that the Tamil nationalists considered to be their traditional homeland. According to some analyses, it has been perhaps the most immediate cause of inter-communal violence. It has been argued that the land colonization program that was implemented in the Eastern and Northern (N&E) provinces affected the demographic landscape of those two provinces in favour of Sinhalese but against Tamils as well as Muslims (de Silva 1986, Suntharalingam 1967, Manogaran 1987) and post settlement schemes fed into the civil war (Muggah 2008). It is evident that a substantial area of cultivable land in those two provinces under colonization program was allocated to Sinhalese population who had migrated from densely populated Western and Southern Provinces of Sri Lanka. This had been continuously raised as an identity-based grievance. Similarly, in the mid-1970s, it is arguably raised that the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Program (AMDP) was redesigned by scraping off some parts of it that were initially intended to provide Mahaweli water to the N&E provinces. The introduction of so-called open economic policies in 1977 by removing restrictions on imports of agricultural commodities was also portrayed as a factor which had an adverse impact on the areas specialized in cultivation of onions, chillies, grape and tobacco. Hence, the discourse on identity-based conflict in Sri Lanka has posited that there was a close correlation between land, irrigation and agricultural policies and the presence of ethnic grievances that in turn led to identity-based armed conflict in the early 1980s.

The armed conflict among Sri Lanka armed forces and rebels (Tamil) ultimately came to an end on 18th of May 2009 making a favourable situation for human as well as physical resources in the country. After Sri Lanka armed forces defeated the rebels under the voluminous pressure and disturbances from some local and international communities, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) re-established its rule throughout the country nearly after three decades. If there was a close correlation between land, irrigation and agricultural policies and the presence of ethnic grievances, it is now imperative for the GoSL to address these issues in order to prevent the possibility of re-emergence of another armed conflict in the island.

This study attempt to investigate whether the relationship between ethnic grievances and land, irrigation and agricultural policies in the country is real or imaginary. The main objective is to examine how government policies had affected the changes of

peoples' attitudes towards more vulnerable aspects in those N&E provinces in Sri Lanka. The study also intends to develop an outline of a policy framework which take into account not only agricultural production and increase peasants' income but also eliminate or minimize ethnically partisan trends. Secondary data and information related to the land, irrigation, agricultural policies and demography in N&E Provinces is used for the main analysis for the period of 1948 and 2011. It further discusses efficiency and effectiveness of the agricultural policy implications which had been implemented by the GoSL during same period. The results will help understand the economic and social issues related to the semi-subsistence agricultural society where different ethnic groups are settled.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There is an extensive volume of literature and sound discussions on conflict and resource allocation in the field of political and environment economics. The development of nuclear weapons during the Cold War marked a great threat to human survival in the world in two decades, the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, a group of pioneers from various disciplines understood the importance of studying conflict as a general phenomenon under newly developed context (Hugh, Oliver and Tom 1999). They observed that conflict may occur on the grounds of international relation, domestic politics, individual relations, communities, families or even between individuals. At the same time they perceived the competency of applying different approaches and finding solutions for the conflicts in above sectors.

Conflict resolution (where deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and resolved) has always been controversial not only outside the discipline but also internally among scholars and schools. These critiques spring up from both political and international points of view. The radical thinkers from development studies have the view that ultimate sources for conflict are the power and coercion between antagonistic and irreconcilable groups in the society (Hugh, Oliver and Tom 1999). They mention that the result of decisive military victory might make peace rather than negotiation. The scientific academics' analysis with normative political agenda has intellectually been suspected by radical thinkers. According to them third party involvement in these issues might worsen the existing situation. They believe that all conflicts occur due to the forces of exploitation and oppression in general ideology. However, some development studies show that scientific academics' analysis is unequal and unjust due to its lack of analytical strength with proper global perspectives. Another ideological critique is on the validity of applying classic conflict resolution models to the analysis of current conflicts. Many conflict resolution models were developed before the Cold War but, in the present world, social, cultural and thinking patterns and habits have totally changed. As another important critique suggests, modern conflict analysts need to consider the groups such as warlords, drug barons, mercenaries and militias who benefit from the

war. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to make an effort to resolve conflicts and understand the values between struggle and peace (Hugh, Oliver and Tom 1999). Hugh, Oliver and Tom (1999, p.5) have conglomerated the classical ideas of conflict (pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups) as follows.

“Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change. It is an expression of the heterogeneity of interests, values and beliefs that arise as new formations generated by social change come up against inherited constraints. But the way we deal with conflict is a matter of habit and choices. It is possible to change habitual responses and experience intelligent choices”

Conflict resolution is conceptualized as the methods and processes that involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of some social conflict. According to the classical idea thereof, the conflict theory emphasizes interests, rather than norms and values in a conflict. The pursuit of interests generates various types of conflicts. Thus conflict is seen as a normal aspect of social life rather an abnormal occurrence. The Matthew effect in social science explains the causes of conflict and its relation to resources under three tenets as follows (Hugh, Oliver and Tom 1999). First, different groups in a society compete for resources belonging to the whole society. Second, if there is no cooperation among each and every group, it becomes a continuous power struggle among social groups. Every group pursues its own interests and the most powerful group wins the control over the resources in question and means of production. Finally, the winning group will use the resources to further pursue and strengthen their goals and interests. The group or groups that do not have control over resources will struggle to retrieve the control but the group with the most resources in possession will maintain the power of the society.

As mentioned in classical interpretations, a conflict arises due to heterogeneity of interests, values, and beliefs. The possible outcomes of a conflict among two groups show in Figure 1. Accordingly there are four possible outcomes. Those are: (a) win – lose, (b) lose – win (c) lose – lose (violent conflict) and (d) win – win (ultimate peaceful solution with both parties getting benefits). In accordance with prisoners’ dilemma in game theory, both parties get benefits if they reach a compromise point anywhere from 1 to 2 (See Figure 1). However, the compromise point 3 makes equal benefits for both parties. The point 4 is the collectively rational choice (problem solving) after the cooperation of both parties. This kind of win – win point is where mutual cooperation is obtained and the conflict can be solved peacefully.

To reach the win–win point, the interests and needs of the conflict parties should be understood. Under such a situation the intervention by third party is also significant in understanding the position(s) of interests and needs. Proper understanding of the position(s) will help to change the conflict structure empowering the third party to filter

or reflect back messages, attitudes and behaviors among conflict parties (Hugh, Oliver and Tom 1999). However, third party involvement might make positive or negative inducement among conflict parties. The results depend on the activities of the third party at the conflict resolution process. If it acts as a mere arbiter without much concern to the conflict parties or as a highly influential negotiator or mediator providing needful facilitation might yield different results. Hard power has always been important at a violent conflict but soft power might be more important in resolving it in a peaceful way. However, conflicts are mainly of two kinds namely symmetric and asymmetric. Symmetric conflict is defined as one arising between similar groups. Asymmetric conflict is more complex and chaotic to understand the position(s) of interests and needs of the involving parties because that kind of conflict arises between dissimilar groups such as those of majority and minority, an established government and groups of rebels, an employer and his employees and so on.

Figure 1: Zero-sum and non-zero-sum outcomes
Source: Hugh, Oliver and Tom (1999, P7)

The majority of conflict resolution theories were developed on symmetric conflicts but at present in the world asymmetric conflicts are dominant. Thus, Francis (1994) developed a conflict transformation model as depicted in Figure 2 in order to explain

the contemporary conflict situation. According to this analysis, the situation of unbalanced power and unsatisfied needs of the conflict parties can be reduced by increased awareness, mobilization and empowerment leading to open confrontation which are the most important elements before moving to negotiation and changing attitudes. If negotiation and attitude changes bring positive results, they could lead to a situation of the peaceful balance of power between straggling parties plus political and social change.

Figure 2: Transforming asymmetric conflicts
Source: Francis, 1994

The conflict in Sri Lanka had been nearly a four decade-long dialogue. It was always taken to be a major issue faced by the government, policy makers, political parties as well as the civil society. However, its gravity was fluctuating in accordance with the short-term local issues emerged from time to time. According to numerous local as well as international academic and policy dialogue, there are numerous views on the root(s) of the ethnic conflict and its development in Sri Lanka. In a broader context, reasons can be political, cultural, economic, government policy, ethnic and religious (Peebles 1990, Peiris 1996, Perera 1999, Aberatne 2005, Fernando 2002, Razeen 2006). Sri Lanka's conflict can be put into a narrow category of armed conflicts in which both parties (armed force and rebels) used force to reach individual goals by all-out war with

massive casualties¹. Darby (1998) noted that this type of conflict can be specified as an “ethnic conflict” because such a conflict occurs due to communal groups' struggle for access to autonomy, for secession or for control of the power or resources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Land Settlement

Among the agricultural development policies during the early few decades of independent Sri Lanka, new land settlement policy was one of the major policy goals. From 1935 the colonial government had implemented land settlement programs under Land Development Ordinance but progress was not impressive. That program was mainly impeded by malaria epidemic in the dry zone (Sanderatne 2004). After obtaining the independence in 1948, it was observed that land settlement through colonization program in the dry zone was necessary both for the relief of land hunger and for the production of food stuffs (Farmer 1957). Therefore, under 16 colonization schemes, 10,426 settlers were settled by 1953 (Farmer 1957). Each settler was given eight acres of agricultural land holdings consisted of five acres of allotment for paddy cultivation (wet land) and three acres of allotment (highland or dry land) for building a house and other agricultural crops cultivation such as *Chena* cultivation (slash and burn). However, starting from 1953, the size of land allotment was gradually reduced due to two reasons; (a) eight acres being too large to be handled solely by family labour and (b) the unavailability of wet lands to fulfil the demand of the settlers. Therefore, after 1953, the land holding given was three acres of wet paddy land allotment and two acres of dry land allotment. In 1956, under the “*advanced alienation program*”, the allotment to each was further reduced to two and one acres of wet paddy and dry land respectively (Sanderatne 1974). Moreover, the regular practice of facilities provision for settlers was also changed along with the advanced alienation program. The settlers were provided only a land not developed for suitable cultivation and without constructed house. Most of those settlers received irrigation facilities after two or three years of their settlement.

The data of land alienation in settlement in the dry zone show that approximately 10,854 families were resettled under British administration (See Table 1). Just after the independence it can be seen that the number of resettled families in the dry zone significantly increased. Just after ten years of independence, the total of resettled families was 46,165. However, the colonization program in the dry zone was disturbed by many reasons including Tamil grievance over the resettlement of Sinhalese in Tamil-Speaking areas or so-called Tamil Homeland. Within the duration from 1959 to 1978,

¹According to conflict typology, conflict can be divided into two groups *viz.* interstate and non-interstate. Further, non-interstate conflict is subdivided into three categories as (a) revolution/ideology, (b) identity/secession and (c) factional. Sri Lanka's conflict belongs to the category of identity/secession (Hugh, Oliver and Tom 1999).

less than 50,000 families were resettled for an average of 2,500 families per year. This amount was accelerated again after the introduction of the AMDP depending on immense foreign aid and loan in 1979 by the newly elected government that implemented liberalized economic policies in the country. Under the AMDP, a great numbers of peasant farmers for an average of 8,000 families per year from the wet zone as well as farmers who had lost their land due to the said project were resettled in the dry zone, mainly in the Eastern province (See more details under section 4.1). Bandara (1998) calculated that total land alienation by the State from 1953 to 1985 had been 830,833 ha, mainly in Dry Zone under different categories among approximately 150,000 families (See Table 2).

Table 1: Land Alienation in Settlement Schemes of the dry Zone

Number of families settled on farm land			
Period	Average Year	per	Total for Period
Cumulative total at the end of period			
Upto the end of 1938	-		5,596
1939-1948	526		5,528
1949-1958	4,617		46,165
1959-1968	2,747		27,474
1969-1978	2,293		22,399
1979-1988	8,011		80,113
1989-1991	7,800		23,400

Source: Peiris (1996) pp 189.

Note: these estimates are based on data obtained from the Land Commissioner's Department and the Mahaweli Authority.

Irrigation

The establishment of new irrigation schemes in the settlements of peasants in the Dry Zone under the governmental sponsorship for the period of six decades has brought about major changes in physical structure, amount of production, productivity of agriculture, demographic distribution structure and socio-political condition of Sri Lanka. Specially, under irrigation peasant settlement in Dry Zone, both people within the Dry Zone and the people who migrated into that part of the county from highly

populated areas such as Western, Southern and Hill Country were resettled. These irrigation schemes have not only provided water for the settled peasants, but also have created new economic opportunities for settlers resulting in emerging of new town, developing business centres and markets activities (Peiris 1996).

Table 2: Land Alienation by the State between 1953 and 1985 (ha)

Category	Amount of land
Major colonization	175,941
Village expansion	357,239
Higland settlements	13,565
Youth settlement	7,964
Regularisation of encroachments	205,762
Middle class allotments	55,019
Land grants (special provisions)	9,980
Rainfed farming settlements	5,363
Total	830,833

Source: Madduma Bandara (1998)

The government made enormous investments on irrigation schemes aiming at multiple benefits such as alleviation of poverty in rural areas, reduction of unemployment, increasing agricultural production, reducing population density in Wet Zone in the country and establishing prosperous settlements in the Dry Zone (Peebles 1990, Peiris 1996). Meanwhile, Gal Oya project was started in 1949 in the Eastern province. Under this project, 120,000 acres were irrigated and 20,000 people were settled in the catchment areas. Under the colonization schemes in the late 1960's, the government resettled 67,000 Sinhalese peasants providing them with 300,000 acres in the Eastern province in the areas such as Allai, Kantalai and Morawewa (Amerasinghe 1976). Up to 1970 all successive governments had given highest policy priorities to settle Wet Zone landless peasants in Dry Zone (Peebles 1990) who were mainly Sinhalese. Even though the country's history offers little support for Tamils' "Traditional Homeland" concept, Tamil politicians and Tamil nationalist criticised the colonization program as harmful to their "traditional homeland" and identified as a violation of the Land Settlement Ordinance of 1935 (Suntharalingam 1970). Further, they argued that benefits of the

state-aided irrigation projects had been distributed unfairly among Sinhalese. Most of the statistics of the land distribution proved their argument. They also claimed that Sinhalese were provided with land having easier access to water compared to the limited amount of lands provided to Tamil and Muslim communities. In 1956, the Federal Party in the country passed a resolution demanding immediate cessation of colonising the traditionally Tamil-speaking areas with Sinhalese people.

At the same time, Sinhalese nationalists demanded that land in every province in the country including N&E provinces should be equally opened to the all Sri Lankans without considering their ethnic or religious condition. Further, they asserted that there had been hundreds of ancient Buddhist sites and inherited Sinhalese cultural places in the N&E provinces for over 2000 years. It becomes clear that these irrigation schemes, Sinhalese population had increased in the Northern and Eastern provinces after the independence. Report on Sri Lanka's Eastern Province: Land, Development, Conflict (2008) noted that Sinhalese population in Trincomalee district had increased from 21% in 1946 to 33% in 1981. Meanwhile, Tamil population decreased from 45% to 36% in the district within the same period. However, this argument is somewhat valid up to 1981 but in 2007 the proportion of Sinhalese population was 25.4% compared to 28.8% in 1963².

However, due to up-rising demand and protest, ruling parties had acknowledged Tamil concerns over new agricultural settlement policies by Bandaranayake-Chelvanayagam Pact in 1957 and Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact in 1965. A special right was given to the Tamils in colonization schemes in N&E provinces (Manogaran 1987). According to the calculation of Peebles (1990), the Sinhalese population in the Eastern Dry Zone increased by about five times from 1946 to 1976. Further, the Sinhalese population in Tamankaduwa/ Polonnaruwa was 56% in 1946 but the 1981 census recorded it to be 91%. Sri Lanka's Eastern Province: Land, Development, Conflict (2008) noted that considerable number of majority Sinhalese were settled in and moved to the Eastern province from the Southern and Western provinces under the state irrigation settlement schemes. Meanwhile, the land policy modification in 1970 and the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project in 1978 with economic liberalization and series of development projects further exacerbated the Sinhalese and Tamil relationship over the land policy in the Northern and Eastern provinces (Peebles 1990). However, according to the data of population distribution in the N&E provinces the Sinhalese population in Jaffna, Batticoloas and Trincomalee started to shrink significantly after 1983. Particularly, the Sinhalese population in Jaffna district was zero by 2007 due to being

²According to the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) data the main reason for the decrease of Tamil population in Trincomalee district was the incremental tendency of Moor population within the district.

banished or killed by terrorists within the period of mob violence which had come in to operation since 1983. Those factors had mainly caused to reduce the Sinhalese population in Batticoloas and Trincomalee districts too.

Table 3: Population Distribution in the Northern and Eastern Provinces

District	Ethnicity	Year and population (Percentage)			
		1963	1971	1981	2007
Jaffna	Sinhala	NA	NA	0.7	0.0
	Tamil	NA	NA	86.8	99.9
	Moor	NA	NA	1.4	0.1
Batticoloas	Sinhala	3.4	4.5	3.4	0.5
	Tamil	71.9	70.8	72.0	74.0
	Moor	23.5	23.7	23.0	25.0
Trincomalee	Sinhala	28.8	29.1	33.4	25.4
	Tamil	39.3	38.1	36.4	28.7
	Moor	29.4	31.8	29.3	45.4
Ampara	Sinhala	29.3	30.2	37.8	37.5
	Tamil	23.8	22.8	20.4	18.4
	Moor	46.1	46.4	41.3	44.0

Source: Department of Census and Statistics 2010.

Meanwhile, the data clearly explain that the Moor population in the Eastern province has been increasing for decades except in Ampara District. Mainly it has influenced upon the decline of Tamil population in the same area. Within both the N&E provinces

it can be seen that Sinhalese population had significantly been increasing in Ampara District where Gal Oya project was established in 1949. The Gal Oya settlement program is thus said to be the main reason for the increase of Sinhalese population in Ampara District. However, the available data did not facilitate the popular Tamil argument that a minority ethnic group was oppressed by the cumulative increase of a majority ethnic group under colonization program or that the resentment of the minority Tamils arose against the expansion of the Sinhalese majority into the sparsely populated regions of the N&E provinces.

Economic Liberalization and land, irrigation and agricultural policies

Sri Lanka initiated an economic liberalization programme in 1977 that laid the foundation for far reaching reforms in almost all spheres of economic activity. It marked a radical departure from an inward-looking, controlled-economy approach to a liberalized, export-oriented strategy. The government laid greater emphasis on private enterprise. Economic growth was to be achieved through an export-led strategy rather than one on import substitution. The reforms mainly included the liberalization of trade and exchange controls and the introduction of an economic strategy dependent on private investment and market forces. Foreign investment was encouraged and a greater reliance was placed on exports. The policy programme included many of the standards reforms of a structural adjustment programme, including liberalization of trade and payments, rationalization of public expenditure, de-control of prices and interest rates, promotion of private sector development, foreign investment promotion, and financial sector reforms. Although during the following decade the reforms transformed the Sri Lankan economy moving it away from a predominantly agriculture base to an increasingly industrialised and services base, a second phase of reforms was felt to be necessary in the latter part of the 1980s to rejuvenate a flagging economy.

Most of these economic reforms have affected the agriculture sector in different ways. Under the policies implemented with the liberalization, the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Programme (AMDP) was one of the most important projects when considering agricultural development, employment creation and energy generation as well as the ethnic tension in Sri Lanka.

AMDP and Ethnic Conflict: Criticisms

Development of the Mahaweli Ganga has been a centrepiece of Sri Lanka's development plans for 50 years. Formal work on the Mahaweli Ganga Development Program started in 1958 and a 30-year master plan was formulated in 1964-68. This project expected to provide, employment in construction, land for the landless, food, and electric power, together with an appealing focus for foreign assistance. During the 1970s Sri Lanka's annual growth of agricultural production fell behind that of

population. Real per capita GDP declined by 1.3 percent a year and open unemployment increased. The new more market-oriented government elected in 1977 accelerated the development of the Mahaweli Ganga Development Program as a solution for the existing socio-economic issues in the country. The progress of the development project meant settling farmer families, setting up of new townships, village centres and hamlets. At the same time facilities for vital necessities like education, health and agriculture had to be provided.

Under the programme a few major dams were built and it was estimated that 390,000 acres of new irrigated land of which the majority were in the Eastern province would benefit. Nearly 140,000 families were settled in while deteriorating the relationships between Sinhalese and Tamil communities (Peebles 1990). Meanwhile, Tamil politicians and Tamil nationalist, particularly in the N&E provinces, believed that the AMDP would create only a Sinhalese constituency. For example, to provide facilities to Vitoria dam project, 5,925 families were evacuated with a total of about 35,000 people including approximately 85 of Sinhalese Buddhist, 6% of Hindu Tamil and 7% of Moor Muslims. Among those families, the majority of Sinhalese families were resettled under colonization schemes but Tamil and Muslim families were not given any priority (Peebles 1990). According to the master plan of the AMDP, the bulk of the settlements were in the Tamil-speaking Eastern province. In addition, 233,760 acres were irrigated in the North Central province mainly in Polonnaruwa district that belongs to the ancient civilization.

The issue of ownership over and access to land in Mahaweli areas has been a consistent area in which ethnic politics in Sri Lanka have manifested. When post-independence governments decided to settle poor Sinhalese farmers from the densely populated wet zone areas of the country, many Sinhalese politicians and people in general viewed the process as a “reclamation and recreation in the present of the glorious Sinhalese Buddhist past.” The so-called “colonization schemes” became an integral aspect of Sinhalese Buddhist ‘nation-building’ (World Bank, 2008). Tamils had a completely different perception of the colonization of the dry zone. The notion of the ‘traditional Tamil homeland’ became a potent component of popular Tamil political imagination. Since Sinhalese irrigation settlements in the North Central and Eastern Provinces occurred under direct state sponsorship, it appeared to many Tamils as a deliberate attempt of the Sinhalese-dominated state to marginalize them further by decreasing their numbers in the area. However, only in 1986, as a result of continuing Tamil agitations, did the government agree to allocate the remaining land under the Mahaweli Program on the basis of the ethnic distribution of each ethnic group in the total population (World Bank, 2008). Between 1977 and 1981, the movement called Gandhiyam was set up by resettled Tamil people in Vavuniya district in the Eastern province against the encroachment of land by Sinhalese people. At the same time, the government backed a private group who also similarly made Sinhalese settlements in the Northern and

Eastern provinces against the above movement (Wilson 1988, Peebles 1990). Wijesinha (1986) noted that the government's armed forces had removed by force the settlers settled by the Gandhiyam movement. Ultimately that tension became an ethnic issue and widespread mob violence between Sinhalese and Tamils. The guerrillas who gained opportunity from this situation and got upper hand in the N&E provinces raiding isolated Sinhalese settlements and killing settlers thereby forcibly evicted the Sinhalese people (Peebles 1990). The ethnic conflict worsened after Tamil military had grown in terms of strength from the early 1980's onward and after the implementation of the AMDP in the Dry Zone. Some writers mentioned that some controversial settlements in the Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts under the AMDP such as Weli-Oya had been scheduled primarily for military purposes to face soaring violence rather than development or agricultural purposes.

The historical written evidence in the country shows that the N&E provinces belong to ancient kingdoms in Sri Lanka but due to many epidemics such as Malaria (*upsagga* disease), South Indian invasion (Chola conquests) and subsequent decline of the irrigation system, those Kingdoms were shifted to the Wet Zone. A Tamil Kingdom in Jaffna Peninsula first appeared in the thirteenth century and survived in a destabilized status. From time to time, it either remained independent or paid taxes to Kandyan or Kotte Kingdoms until being conquered by the Portuguese in 1619. The Portuguese and Dutch captured the coastal region of the country and administered the Tamil-speaking areas as a separate region so as to avoid administrative difficulties due to the disparity of language used there (Portuguese 1505 - 1640 AD and Dutch 1640 – 1796 AD). The British ruling since 1796 brought the entire country, including the Kotte, Kandyan and Jaffna regions, under a centralized system of administration based in Colombo in 1833 (Howard 1960, Collins 1951). Due to the land encroachment by the English was introduced a Crown Land Ordinance (1840) that placed “unused and unoccupied” lands in the hands of the crown, which in turn could lease them out to plantations. As a result Wet Zone inhabitants lost their lands and income sources.

According to the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) in 2010, the total population in Sri Lanka was 20.6 million and the ethnic composition was 74% Sinhalese, 18% Tamil, 7% Muslim and 1% others. However, the DCS report indicated that in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, Sinhalese population out of the total population was higher than their present percentage. Therefore, policy makers had considered that land settlement need to be based on the ethnic composition of the national ratio rather than district ratio. Data clearly says that only 55% of resettled families would be Sinhalese from the total land grants under the colonization programs including North Central and N&E provinces (Marga 1985). Further, Tamil-speaking districts (N&E) covered 25% of the island land but Tamil population in those areas was only 5% of the total population in the country (Marga, 1985, Department of Census and Statistics 2002). Meanwhile, more than 165,000 Sinhalese had been added to the population of the N&E provinces

under colonization programs between the years 1953-1981 (Manogaran 1987) which roughly equalled the number of Sri Lankan Tamils in Colombo district before 1983 while this number grew up to 247,739 (Department of Census and Statistics 2002) in 2001. Furthermore, 24,821 of Indian Tamil population had been living in Colombo district. At present this number has increased more than 300,000 but Sinhalese grievance over this development did not emerge.

Agricultural policies and agricultural commodities in open economy

The agriculture sector is the cornerstone of Sri Lanka's economy. With more than 70 per cent of the population living in rural areas depending on agriculture for their livelihoods, this sector contributes to about 18 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 30 per cent of the employment. The agricultural productivity has remained relatively stable, except for rice which has reached near self-sufficiency in the recent years. However, the agricultural policy and political oscillations during the post-independence developmental history of the country are blamed for causing the long term ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Since 1977, the GoSL had adopted several agricultural policy implementations to achieve the target of domestic food demand as well as the growth of agricultural export sector. However, the food sector had been given much more attention. Among the expected goals were an increased contribution of agricultural sector to the GDP, production of essential food for the nation maintaining calorie intake, reduction of the expenditure on importing food, and improvements in farmers' living conditions. The government who implemented agricultural policies, however, undermined their progress toward the goals (The World Bank Group 2000). This is because the government had spent limited investment in some sectors such as marketing, irrigation, roads, research and extension which are highly important complimentary sectors in agricultural diversification and development. Private sector had been given more opportunities to invest in agricultural based industries and supplementary services but they invested only in few sectors which they had thought would make more profits such as marketing, importing and exporting agricultural inputs and outputs respectively. Since the 1980s up to now, private sector has been dominating marketing of agricultural inputs and outputs as well as agriculture related import and export markets in the country. Therefore, entire activities such as price determination, wholesale, quantity, quality, transport, storage and availability of agricultural inputs and outputs are prominently decided by wholesalers and importers in private sector.

The staple commercial agricultural products in the N&E provinces are paddy, onion, chilli, grapes and tobacco. Thus, an immense proportion of the county's needs for onions, chillies etc. had been produced in these two provinces until mob violence started. In particular, the farmers of the said crops had enjoyed an almost monopolistic marketing power due to the tightening control over importation trade and foreign

exchange payment policies during the period between 1970 and 1977. The newly introduced so-called open economic policies were also portrayed as the policies which had an adverse impact on the areas specialized in cultivating onions, chillies, grapes and tobacco (Tilakasiri 2010).

After 1977, dramatic changes in agricultural sector in the N&E provinces could be observed. Those two provinces had lost their dominant power over the aforementioned agricultural products and had faced severe difficulties to market their agricultural products especially under fair and stable prices. The World Bank Group (2000) noted that farmers as a whole in the country were deprived not only of fair price but also of access to credit, water, appropriate inputs, and technical assistance due to the lack of governmental investments. Meanwhile, it was believed that new trade liberalization policies had been implemented by the Sinhalese government against Tamil farmers and Sinhalese traders had been privileged to import low cost but low quality rice, onions, chillies and grapes mainly from India and Pakistan instead of purchasing domestic products. Further, social groups in the N&E provinces believed that these policies had violated their equal rights to access the resources and opportunities enjoyed by the other parts of the country. Those beliefs thus caused to raise tension over the new policies and challenged the government. However, although open economic policies had adversely affected the crops like rice and potato grown by Sinhalese and Moor farmers as well, no conflict situation in those areas could be traced.

Gunasinghe (1984) mentioned that the trade liberalization had swept away the main agricultural activities and that situation had naturally driven farmers to a separate struggle in the N&E provinces. Dunham and Jayasuriya (2000) concluded that diminishing welfare and adverse effects of liberalization had moved the country away from peace and pulled out into insurrection. Further, they mentioned that economic liberalization causes unequal wealth distribution especially among rural farmers due to low return and high cost. Some analysts have inferred as above that the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was mainly a product of trade liberalization. Abeyratne (2004) noted that even though the open economic policy was crucial, it was not the sole root of the ethnic conflict which had roots in social, cultural and political spheres as well. Fernando (2002) pointed out different views between open economy and insurrection in Sri Lanka. Accordingly the open economic system and development of information technology due to the open economic policy have lifted people's expectation especially in the youth not only over employment and higher living standards but also politics, good governance, democracy, human rights etc. These reasons have directly affected to lay out the roots of conflicts in the country

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that colonization of the dry zone had appeared to be necessary both for the relief of land hunger and for the production of food stuffs for the nation. The GoSL had to address them immediately after the independence in 1948. This is because landless peasants, unemployment and poverty were the most crucial prevailing issues in the Wet Zone while high population density and land hunger in South-West and hilly regions needed to be addressed. Therefore, the resettlement of the majority Tamils over the expansion of Sinhalese minority into the sparsely populated regions of the N&E provinces could not be considered as a legitimate fear of a minority ethnic group at the incremental and cumulative increase of the majority ethnic group in the country.

The resultant migration of people from the Sinhalese majority amounting to an alien encroachment into Tamil homeland cannot be justified with the available historical evidence. The historical written evidence in the country shows that N&E provinces belonged to ancient Kingdoms in Sri Lanka which had been ruled by Sinhalese Buddhist kings. Further, historical evidences have proven that, due to many epidemics such as Malaria, South Indian invasion and subsequent decline of the irrigation system, the Kingdoms were shifted to the Wet Zone. Therefore, except the coastal area spared from Malaria epidemic, other parts of the N&E province became isolated regions for over hundreds of years without being used for any productive purposes for the nation. Nevertheless, after the independence, every political party in power had implemented colonization programs in the N&E with lack of awareness and conciliation of Tamil people. Consequently, such programs made major social and political changes in the country up to the ethnic war that ended in 2009 but leaving immensely disastrous effects on human as well as physical resources in the country.

It is clear that policy makers had considered that land settlement should be based on the ethnic composition of the national ratio rather than district ratio. Thus, Tamil peasants were typically thrown out of the schemes in those areas that they had seen as their traditional homelands. However, there is no historical evident to prove this argument. It is clear that after the independence some Sinhalese politicians, with the aim of agricultural development, reducing unemployment, reducing population density and alleviating poverty prioritized several settlement processes in the N&E provinces where Tamils were the majority. There is no enough evidence to bring the argument that settlement schemes worked as a strategy to reduce Tamil population in those areas. The liberalization trade policy implemented in 1977 adversely affected agriculture sector, market activities and social welfare system of the country as a whole. Further, these policies caused to impair the fair wealth distribution especially among rural farmers due to low return and high cost of production. Therefore, those open economic policies have adversely affected not only the Tamil farmers in the N&E provinces but also Sinhalese and Moor farmers growing rice and potato but no conflict situation was found in other

areas of the country. Many researches provide the evidence that trade liberalization had gravely affected the main agricultural activities such as onion, chillies, grapes and tobacco cultivation in the N&E provinces due to imports of the above items under free trade policies and low cost. The impacts are not only for Tamil communities but also other communities as well.

Setting up a proper institutional framework without political influence to reduce ethnic discrimination over land or power, which is vital for future stability and development of the country. Therefore, it is essential to establish a land task force with independent representatives from all three ethnic communities and to form a development agency in order to survey existing land disputes and allegations. This may also include the formation of a National Land Commission with local land committees, authorities and power groups. Then, future process of registering and distribution of state-owned land to three ethnic communities in the country should be done transparently and equally considering the regional ethnic composition ratio as well as national ratio. Meanwhile, it is necessary to ensure that the economic development in the N&E provinces is equitable for, inclusive of and beneficial for all communities and to establish marketing channels with strong linkages among different sectors of the country. Further, increase of economic development activates given comparative advantage in labour-intensive exports in manufacturing, agriculture and services will help to reduce poverty, unemployment and create better standard of life of the people in E&N provinces. The most essential task of all ethnic, religious and political groups in the country is to persuade the people to gather as one nation and a united country.

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