

**CHANGES IN WOMEN'S ROLE IN FAMILIES IN  
MAHAWELI RESETTLEMENTS OF SRI LANKA:  
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF SYSTEM 'C'**

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This study examines the change in the role of women within the context of families in Teldeniya, a Mahaweli resettlement unit in system 'C' of Sri Lanka. In this study, the role changes of women in the settlement have been examined in comparison to the original villages of the settlers. Intra-community variations of role changes within the settlement were examined in relation to the three family types (allottees, sub-families, and encroachers) and gender. The data were collected using standard anthropological and sociological methodologies involving case studies, observations, interviews and a survey. The study was conducted during the 'Maha' season of October, 1998 to March, 1999.

The study found that the women have undergone tremendous change in their roles within the families in the areas of irrigated rice farming, highland cultivation, household chores, activities outside the house, and non-agricultural economic activities. In rice farming, the women work in different types of activities, which outnumbers the activities of the men. This has implications for traditional forms of division of labour. In highland farming, the work becomes the total responsibility of the women, who therefore perform almost all the activities. The women in the settlement perform those activities in addition to what they do at home (household chores), in a context of secluded family, which has tremendously expanded the work 'field' of women from what it has been in the original village. The role changes of women vary with family type, showing that the women in allottee families have undergone most of the changes described above.

The study argues, using Bourdieu's concepts of 'field' and 'habitus' that the women in Mahaweli resettlements, although undergoing change in their role within the family, have been much more introvertly structured within the family 'field' than was in the original village. It also refutes the assumption that with the increase in the workload and responsibility, the women in Mahaweli resettlements have liberated themselves. The change in their role within the family has brought in new perspectives of gender relations, which have implications for the occurrence of family crises in Mahaweli settlements.