

**LAND TENURE SYSTEMS IN THE SETTLEMENT SCHEMES: A  
CASE STUDY FROM MAHAVELI SYSTEM 'H'**

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Scholars have expressed various viewpoints with regard to the land ownership and property rights. Bromley has demarcated land ownership/ property rights as common property, state property, individual property and open access (Bromley, 1989). These ideas are relevant to Sri Lankan land tenure systems only to a certain extent. During the ancient times, land ownership was vested with the King but today it is confined to state or individual ownership. Traditional land ownership pattern changed dramatically during the British period. The British had given priority to the plantation sector of the wet zone. However, during the first quarter of the twentieth century, measures have been taken to distribute land to landless people.

One of the main problems in the developing countries is the scarcity of land relative to the increasing population. Problems with regard to fragmentation of land and the poor productivity of land have aggravated the above problem. The main objective of this study is to examine the existing land tenure pattern in the context of the land policy of the government. The Mahaveli System 'H' in particular, shows various inconsistencies in land use. The data for this research was obtained from the hamlet of '*Thehriyawa*' located in the Thambuththagama of the System 'H.'

The results obtained, through a questionnaire survey in this village depicts several interesting facts. The first is the inconsistent nature of land ownership and usage, in relation to the government land policies. Some of the villagers also practice different types of land tenure such as leasing; *Ande*, pawn, illegal transferring of land and encroaching reserved lands. Although land deeds such as '*Swarnabhumi*' and '*Jayabhumi*' were granted by the State during the past decade, it appears that some settlers resorted to other means of land tenure, leading to further fragmentation of land. These facts suggest that there are serious issues regarding the land tenure in this hamlet.