The term “Common Property Resources” (CPRs) is broadly defined as natural resources in which a group of people have common user rights (not necessarily ownership rights). These include natural forests, community forests, community pastures, wastelands, common dumping places, threshing and winnowing grounds, watershed, drainage and village ponds, village lands, streams, rivers, groundwater and oceans. These may also include man-made resources like irrigation tanks, community wells and village roads. In India, CPRs contribute between 12 and 25 per cent of the poor households’ income; the poorer the households, the more important is the contribution of CPRs. CPRs contribute to rural equity because they are more accessible to the poor than to the rich. Despite the contribution made by CPRs to the livelihood of the rural poor, these resources have remained one of the most neglected areas in development planning in India. In the Indian context, it is especially important because as many as 78 per cent of the rural people and 30 per cent of the urban population are dependent on fuel wood and chips as their main fuel. In certain pockets of the country, CPRs provide the fundamental basis of income generation for many households with multiple options, quite distinct from their role as providers of subsistence incomes. The heavy dependence of the rural poor links these resources to the dynamics of poverty and to development interventions centered on the poor.

Globalization and economic reforms have brought about dynamic changes in the administrative pattern of these CPRs through centralized control over the general management. The impact of globalization and economic reforms on the commons showed various patterns of ownership, control, use and abuse. The
commons are subjected to degradation as well as conservation in the process of centralized management. Most of the common resources which occur in small-scale societies have a multifunctional role to play. They also have a latent function in meeting the common requirements of the community. Moreover, it is quite common that now-a-days CPRs are mostly used by the dominant sections of the society and the poor people are rarely allowed to enjoy the benefits derived from the CPRs. Against this backdrop, the present study was carried out to study the Common Property Resource use pattern at the micro level in Dindigul District of Tamilnadu with a view to examining the poor people’s use of and access to CPRs with special focus on identifying the contributory factors incapacitating the poor people in using the CPRs in the study area.

The present study is a micro level study based mainly on primary data collected from a sample of 300 households in 12 villages in Dindigul District of Tamilnadu, India. A comprehensive and structured schedule of questions was used to collect the information from the respondents on wide ranging aspects of CPRs and their use and abuse by different social groups in the rural areas of Dindigul District in Tamilnadu, India. The data were analysed by using appropriate statistical techniques including significance tests. The thesis presented in seven chapters: 1) introduction, 2) Common Property Resources: A Theoretical Perspective, 3) Review of Literature, 4) Management of Common Property Resources in West vis-a-vis India, 5) Profile of the Study Area, 6) Analysis and Discussion, and 7) Major Findings, Conclusion, Suggestions and Area for Further Research.

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