CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

This thesis interrogates decentralisation through the lens of natural resources, which is a good viewpoint for insights into decentralisation at large, not just into natural resource management and use (Kaimowitz and Ribot 2002). This viewpoint is particularly powerful since natural resources as a sector helps augment and highlight decentralisation’s potential for enabling deeper democratisation. This is so because, natural resources are not only crucial for local livelihoods (subsistence and income generation) but also the basis of significant wealth for governments. As such they have historically been a point of struggle between the rural people and the government.

With decentralisation, natural resource transfer is a great opportunity for increasing the relevance of local authorities to local people, yet it is simultaneously a threat to central authorities who fear loss of income or patronage resources (Ribot and Larson 2005, 4). Nevertheless, given their local importance and historical local uses and claims, local knowledge and input are highly relevant to their management – making them good candidates for decentralised management and use.

The central question dealt with in the thesis is simple - how best can natural resources be managed? Over a period of time the answer to this question has differed. The Garrett Hardin (1968) argument is in favour of outside control in the form of either state control or privatisation. The theory was developed further by the ‘scientific management’ school under the guidance of both the IMF and World Bank (Angus 2008). The counter to this argument is given by the community oriented school of thought that argues for more participation at the local level (Kothari, Pathak, et al. 1998) (E. Ostrom 1990). Both these approaches have in turn been reflected both in policy and legislation. The former has been established in India in the form of state control that began with colonisation, a process well documented by the subaltern school of thought and the environmental historians (Guha and Gadgil 1989) (Hardiman 1992) (Rangarajan 1996). The later has manifested in India after the
1990’s under the auspices of decentralisation policies and laws (Lele 2004). It is in this milieu that this work is placed.

Natural resource management (NRM) refers to the management of natural resources such as land, water, soil, forests and animals, in such a manner, so as to fulfil the needs of the present generation without detriment to the interests and aspirations of the generations to follow (Khoshoo and Sharma 1992). Over the past millennium a number of approaches have been adopted to manage resources. They are the utilitarian approach, preservationist approach and the sustainable-ecosystem approach.

These approaches arose from the different strategies of resource stewardship and were differentiated based on the role played by the humans in nature. A thought expressed as far back as ancient Greece, is that nature in the absence of human intervention is in a state of balance, which changes little over long periods of time. This idea contends that the natural world without people is in an equilibrium state and it is this assumption that forms the basis of both the utilitarian and preservationist approach. The utilitarian approach to management strove to maximize the amount of economically valuable products obtained from the natural world. However, the preservationist approach aimed to preserve a substantial fraction of the natural world by protecting it from human use. These two were extremes on a continuum (Weddell 2002, 4) but the underlying assumption of exclusion of humans from the ecosystem remained. The utilitarian assumption was that people are superior to nature and entitled to manipulate and improve upon it; while the preservationists portrayed the natural world as pure and good and it is people who taint it.

But both these approaches suffered from drawbacks; utilitarian foresters created communities that were biologically and physically simple in comparison to forests that result from more natural regeneration. Such a habitat supported relatively fewer species of animals or plants and destroyed the bio-diversity of the area. The preservationist approach on the other hand by following the policy of eliminating people and letting nature take its course ironically instead of perpetuating a stable community as managers had envisioned, resulted in the dramatic detrimental alteration in landscape and its wildlife.
Given the limitations of the previous two approaches, a third approach of sustainable-ecosystem has arisen. In this approach an emphasis is placed on the integration of ecological considerations with socio-political and economic factors. It has been realised that natural resource cannot be managed in a social vacuum. People are a part of ecosystems, and the social context of natural resources must be considered if management is to be effective.

1.2. Focus of the study
Natural Resource Management covers a vast ambit of resources, but the focus of this study is on forest governance. The challenge then is to understand the complex interaction between the various stakeholders and natural resource habitats - the forests. This is crucial as the actions of all stakeholders tend to determine the success or failure of Natural Resource Management. These stakeholders among others are, national and state government institutions and officials that enforce the laws, local communities that either comply with or filter or ignore the government’s rules, local institutions that generate their own rules and guidelines (Gibson, McKean and Ostrom 2000, 3) local non-governmental organisations, local tribes that live within the forest and are primary users of forest products. They all form a part of this complex interaction that makes up forest governance. These aspects shall be the focus of this study.

1.3. Need for the Study
This listing of approaches is but another way of classifying the move from state control of forest management to a more people-oriented approach in the management of forest resources. Nevertheless, they show the marked move towards the underlying concern for social justice in relation to Forest Resource Management (FRM). The policies and laws have reflected this changing perception. A critical study of the history of forest resource management in India illustrates how this debate has unfolded and points to the lacunae of these efforts that necessitate this study.

1.3.1. State Control over Forest Resource Management
Some scholars have argued for greater state control over natural resources to prevent their destruction. It is an understanding that coincides with the utilitarian and preservation approaches to NRM. Garrett Hardin (1968) in his famous article titled, “The Tragedy of the Commons” in Science portrays a bleak picture of community
owned land being inevitably overused and degraded if unregulated by the state. The colonial foundations of FRM in India show an adherence to this view as the state had assumed an overwhelming role.

From what we know, in the pre-colonial period state control over common resources, mainly the forests, was highly limited and oriented towards specific ends, like the reservation of elephant forests in the Mauryan period, but the colonial take over differed greatly. The British brought with them technologies and an alien culture which consequently changed the traditional modes of societal governance. Colonial power led to increasing intensity of natural-resource use which in turn was accompanied by a dramatic change in the form of its management and control. By far the most significant of these was the takeover of forest lands by the state (Guha and Gadgil 1989, 141).

In the early decades of its rule, the colonial state was indifferent to forest conservation and it overexploited the natural resources available. With the depletion of oak forests in England and Ireland, they extracted wood from India for commercial purposes like shipbuilding, for which the teak forests of the Western Ghats were utilized. But they came to realise that India's forests were not inexhaustible and steps needed to be taken to conserve what was available. Faced with impending shortage, the colonial government established the Forest Department in 1864.

The result was a Hobbesian dominance by the state over forests and this control aimed at commercial exploitation of species such as teak and sandalwood. State control was extended over large tracts of woodland throughout the subcontinent. It was a utilitarian approach to the management of natural resources dictated more by the commercial and strategic utility of different species than by broader social or environmental considerations. The colonial regime asserted formal rights of ownership over various natural resources through top-down control by means of a highly formalised administrative infrastructure to govern the workings of state forestry.

The state’s monopoly power over forests was safeguarded by the stringent provisions of the Indian Forest Act of 1878 which curtailed the exercise of user rights by the village communities. This was a comprehensive piece of legislation which in one
stroke attempted to obliterate centuries of customary use of the forest by rural populations all over India (Guha and Gadgil 1989, 145).

This colonial legacy carried into the post-independence era mainly in the sphere of forest policy. However, a change in orientation was seen from 1970 onwards, where a marked shift in government policy from utilitarianism to a preservationist approach was observed. The growing global environmental awareness in the early 1970s (Chhatre 1996) informed and affected this shift in orientation. Over the next three decades strong governmental control was seen as a means to ensure the conservation of forests but, true to the preservationist approach, the process continued the alienation of local people from decisions regarding natural resource use. The spate of legislations in these decades from the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, followed by the 42nd Amendment in 1976 whereby forests were shifted to the concurrent list from the state list, the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980, the withdrawn Forest Bill 1982, the Forest (Conservation Amendment) Act 1988, and the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act of 1991 were all based on the preservationist approach. These legislations were characterised by greater control, greater centralisation and increasing concentration of decision-making powers at the centre (Chhatre 1996, 1084).

1.3.2. Limitations of State Control

However, it is observed that the state has not been uniformly successful in enabling individuals to sustain long term productive use of natural resource systems. In Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India, Madhav Gadgil and Ramachadra Guha’s (1995) description of the fate of India’s common lands under the British occupation bring out the lacunae in state control. The British had converted communally owned resources to open-access resources. For centuries peasants allowed their cattle to graze on communal lands. These communally held lands also provided fuel wood for cooking as well as materials for constructing dwellings and implements. They were managed cooperatively; users were required to contribute to maintenance, and there were restraints on individual usage. Some areas were also demarcated as sacred groves, ponds, or pools. But as seen above, after the British arrived in India grazing lands and forests were taken over by the state, and community control of these lands ended with traditional uses being prohibited. They

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1 Gadgil and Guha challenged the claim in the ‘Tragedy of the Commons’ as they contended that Hardin had not differentiated between open-access resources and communally owned resources.
were converted to open-access lands which resulted inevitably in resources often being over utilized (Weddell 2002, 306).

Once the traditional link between local people and nature was broken, it made existing informal rules that guaranteed sustainability redundant. The formal rules that attempted to replace them were highly ineffective as they were imposed from above rather than developed from below. The state had imposed a new system of forest management whose priorities sharply conflicted with earlier systems of local use and control (Guha and Gadgil 1989, 147). For example, village common land was treated as ‘surplus’ and traditional rights ignored (Sengupta 2008).

Thus state reservation and changes in the traditional pattern of resource utilization led to a number of conflicts. A case in point is in the Madras Presidency where villagers based on their traditional rights over the forest, continuing to adhere to informal boundaries. This led to an escalation in forest offences (averaging 30,000 per annum) and the killing of forest personnel became a frequent occurrence. A committee formed to investigate forest grievances, commented on the widespread hostility towards state forest management, saying that "the one department which appears at one time to have rivalled the Forest Department in unpopularity is the Salt Department, which, like the Forest Department is concerned with a commodity of comparatively small value in itself but an article for daily use and consumption.” (Report of the Forest Committee, Madras, 1913 in (Gadgil and Guha 1995, 159))

The erosion of traditional institutions that regulated communal property that continued in the post-independent era under the preservationist approach also had a ruinous impact on conservation. An example that substantiates this claim can be found in the Keoladeo National Park in India which was a winter visiting habitat for birds like the waterfowl and a breeding ground for herons, stokes, ibises, and egrets. Prior to Independence it was controlled by the Maharaja of Bharatpur and used as a hunting ground. It is reported that thousands of birds were killed in a day. However, local villagers were also allowed to graze their buffalo and cattle in the wetland. After independence hunting was banned but in the early 1980’s a ban on grazing was also instituted. This resulted in the destruction of the bird’s habitat. Without the buffalo grazing, the grass had overgrown the wetland and choked the shallow bodies of
water, rendering the habitat inhospitable to wintering geese, ducks and teals (Weddell 2002, 313).

Further, state control does not guarantee prudent resource use due to many other reasons as well, like bureaucratic inefficiency, political pressure from interest groups, lack of prioritisation of conservation by state, a lack of understanding of the existing ecological relations etc. Due to these lacunae in state control, the focus shifted towards the potential of decentralisation as a means of FRM.

1.3.3. Decentralised Control Over Forest Resource Management

The positive outcomes in decentralised environmental governance, it was argued, would be popular participation in local government decision making, local governments being downwardly accountable to resource users, the technical capacity of the local unit being utilised in management of resources and governance being held responsible to the people directly (Andersson, Evans, et al. 2010). In such an administrative structure the agency of community was seen as being significant (Chhatre 2008) to achieve success in natural resource management. An increasing number of scholars have, therefore, focused on the role of community groups and indigenous voices that function based on micro-institutional structures and their positive impact on resource conservation (A. Agrawal 2000). This reflects a growing recognition of the fact that the local population and users of natural resources are capable of managing resources in a sustainable manner.

However, the question then arises as to what regulates such individual’s action in their interactions with nature? It is here that the role of local informal institutions comes into play wherein individual action and the market, technological, demographic, or political factors that affect it are in most cases filtered by local institutions (Gibson, McKean and Ostrom 2000). Given certain institutional arrangements, individuals may forgo or utilize resources based on cultural acceptability. Complying with local informal rules and norm, individuals may ignore government regulations that contradict their daily pattern of resource use or conversely may even engage formal institutions in protecting their resources. Thus rules created and enforced by local informal institutions guide the daily consumption of forest resources. Elinor Ostrom (1990) in the book Governing the Commons describes how self-governing institutions
effect individual incentives and behaviours in field settings in the case of Common-Property Resources (CPR).

It is crucial to note that there is no attempt here to suggest that all traditional means of resource utilization are benign for the environment. One has to establish if any and all types of NRM are sustainable. This theme, hence, depends on the concept of ‘sustainability’ or ‘sustainable development’ which is defined as, “... development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) 1987, 43). When resources are used sustainably it means that use does not exceed productivity, resource use does not compromise ecosystem functioning or cause biodiversity loss. If use of a resource is truly sustainable, then it can be continued indefinitely. Non-sustainable use erodes the resource base and adversely affects biodiversity.

Nevertheless, the change of focus to the local level also marked a shift from the preoccupation with centralized and overarching methods of governance to a more decentralised means of granting power to the people at the local level in planning and implementing forest resource management (Gibson, McKean and Ostrom 2000, 227-242).

In India, there was a surge of interest towards decentralised governance in 1992 subsequent to the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution that gave local governments - panchayats and municipalities - constitutional status and permanency. This thrust towards decentralisation was also reflected in the management of forest resources and the Indian government adopted a number of policies and laws in this direction. They were moves towards joint forest management, co-management and participatory development. These attempts by the government have been broadly categorised into three groups (Lele 2004, 1):

1. State initiated partnerships include joint forest management, participatory canal and irrigation tank management, and participatory watershed development programmes.
2. State-initiated efforts by means of devolution of governance, through the setting up of Panchayati Raj institutions in general and the special efforts in tribal areas.

3. Community and NGO-initiated efforts, with or without state recognition.

These efforts at decentralisation aimed at opening up spaces to encourage citizen engagement through inclusive participation and therein giving agency to the local people. But the decentralised institutions created by these policies and laws were lacking as they were often designed to build capacity in ways that overlook the traditional sources of pre-existing capacity and agency available, this invariably created tension (Chhatre 2008, 12). Further these institutions favoured a top heavy approach thus increased the probability of conflict at multiple levels of the administrative structure. This was apparent in the fact that these institutions were also subject to increased bureaucratisation and state control (Lele 2004). They lacked in actual power sharing with communities and followed an exclusionary perception that left the local communities that they aimed to empower out of the decision making process (A. Kothari 2003).

Thus in spite of a move by policy makers towards including people in the management of natural resources, most of the institutions created did not harness the existing local knowledge and there is a lack of local agency in decentralisation policies (Chhatre 2008) hindered these initiatives and prevented them from achieving the ideals that were envisioned in this form of administrative setup.

Hence, in forest resource management in India, in spite of decentralisation laws and policies being enacted, in a number of instances the institutions created have not allowed for community agency and do not acknowledge the role of the local resource users. This necessitates a study that looks into the functioning of these institutions and the ways in which they form complex relations on the ground with the community, as well as, their role as natural resource managers.

1.4. Literature Review

The following review of literature has been split into two parts: the first is on decentralisation per se and the second is on decentralisation and forest resource management.
1.4.1. Literature on Decentralisation

The classical understanding of decentralisation is summarised by Rondinelli et al., (1989) as; the devolution by the central government of specific functions, with all of the administrative, political and economic attributes that these entail, to local governments which are independent of the centre and sovereign within a legally delimited geographic and functional domain. Adding to this understanding Smith (1985, 1) talks of decentralisation as the process of devolution of power from top to down involving ‘the delegation of power to lower levels in a territorial hierarchy’. It is an attempt to facilitate more participation at the grassroots in terms of holding office and voting, which would facilitate redistribution of power. Berkhout (2005) therefore calls decentralisation as a means by which power can be most ideally redistributed by way of a state apparatus and is an emancipating force to address empowerment issues.

In India, our understanding of decentralisation is informed by the reports of the Balwantray Mehta Committee of 1957, Ashok Mehta Committee of 1977 and L.M. Singhvi Committee 1986 (Avasthi and Maheshwari 2005) among others. They saw decentralisation as a framework within the State structure that enabled plurality and engagement of civil society. It presented a means of setting up institutions that enhance the ideals of democracy

Further, decentralisation in India is shaped by the 73rd and 74th amendment of the constitution, 1992, that gave local governments - panchayats and municipalities - constitutional status and permanency. The Constitution mandates setting up of institutions of self-government capable of planning and executing at the local level public works and ensuring welfare of the people including health, environment, education, social justice etc, to ultimately bring about participative governance.

Yet, limiting our understanding of decentralisation to these specific functions would defeat the purpose of the initiative of decentralisation. We need to see it as a process. ‘Decentralisation by delegation’ or a ‘top-down’ approach is a process by which state gives subnational governments power to perform functions and to raise resources according to explicit norms and rules with the understanding that these powers can be changed and revoked at any time by the central authority. The degree of discretion in service provision is often constrained by central or state government rules and often
the authority or discretion to raise taxes is quite limited. On the other hand, the ‘bottom-up’ approach is a process that has local-governments with their own revenue base as well as the discretion to determine the mix of services (Martinez-Vazquez and McNab 1997).

Further, decentralisation is seen as the mechanism through which theorists (Oyugi 2000) (Manor 1999) believe that efficiency and equity should increase by public decisions being brought closer and made more open and accountable to local populations. For this to happen, several authors argue that some form of downwardly accountable local representation is necessary (J. Ribot 1995) (Smoke 2000). Through broad-based local input and influence, decentralisation brings local knowledge into the decision-making process, which should result in better-targeted policies and reduced information and transaction costs (World Bank 1997). Other authors argue that local participation in decision making makes people more likely to have a sense of ‘ownership’ of those decisions (E. Ostrom 1990), such as rules for resource use. Because of this ‘ownership’ they will provide better information and be more engaged in implementing, monitoring and enforcing such rules. In addition, marginalised groups could have greater influence on local policies because of the open nature of decision-making, thus increasing equity (Ribot and Larson 2005).

The transfer of power from central to local authorities has taken administrative and political forms. Administrative decentralisation, or deconcentration, of public services, that is, transfer of power to local administrative bodies, aims to help line ministries, such as health, education, public works and environment, to understand the preferences of local populations and to better mobilise local resources and labour. Political or democratic decentralisation integrates local populations into decision-making through better representation by creating and empowering representative local governments. Democratic decentralisation is premised on new local institutions being representative of and accountable to local populations and having a secure and autonomous domain of powers to make and implement meaningful decisions.

Deconcentration is a weaker form of decentralisation than is democratic decentralisation since the mechanisms by which deconcentrated decision makers are responsive and accountable to local populations are weaker (J. Ribot 2002). If efficiency and equity benefits arise from the democratic processes which encourage
local authorities to serve the needs and desires of their constituents, then democratic decentralisation should be the most effective form of decentralisation (Smoke 2000).

A decentralised system, hence, is one which is characterised by the democratic ideal of empowerment of people at the local level and enabling participation to accomplish the same. It is an initiative from below. While in the Indian context it may be argued that decentralisation as an ideal, as well as, the institutions that define it, were central initiatives, it would not do for us to limit our understanding of how decentralisation functions in today’s reality by this fact. It is too limited an understanding when we condemn an on-going process because of its origin. Instead, if we seek to approach decentralisation as an ever evolving process and therein understand the institutions that enable it, we then have an approach that looks at the present reality.

Democratic decentralisation, therefore, presents the most direct link with democracy, popular participation, downward accountability and empowerment. The term 'democratic decentralisation' emphasises the linkages between the state and the people, and consequently between decentralisation and participation. It refers to the transfer of powers and resources to authorities representative of, and downwardly accountable to, local populations, and can be considered an institutionalised form of participatory development. Participation and decentralisation therefore have a symbiotic relationship. On the one hand, successful decentralisation requires some degree of local participation to ensure the responsiveness of local government to local needs. On the other hand, the process of decentralisation can itself enhance the opportunities for participation by placing more power and resources at a level of government that is closer to the people and therefore influenced more easily. Hence, participation is seen both as a means to and as a goal of (successful) democratic decentralisation.

Hence, to understand decentralisation from this perspective the literature review traces the concept of decentralisation back to its basic meaning. From the above literature we gather that the notion of decentralisation is based on certain basic ideals:

1) Participation
2) Empowerment
3) Deepening Democracy
It should be noted that since these concepts are being taken as the markers to identify the meaning of decentralisation, there is no watertight demarcation between them.

1.4.1.1. Participation

Participatory methods, then, can be important tools for enhancing the inclusiveness of democratic processes. The concept has developed through the ages. Rousseau (1762) idea of participation hinges on the individual participation of each citizen in political decision making and in his theory, participation is very much more than just an institutional arrangement; it is seen to also have a psychological effect on the participants, ensuring that there is a continuous interrelationship between the working of institutions and the psychological qualities and attitudes of individual interacting with them leading to an educative function of participation.

John Stuart Mill (Pateman 1970, 30) further developed the theory of participation and drew a great deal from Rousseau. He declared that a political act, to be done only once in a few years, and for which nothing in the daily habits of the citizen has prepared him, leaves his intellect and his moral disposition very much as it found him. If individuals in a large state are to be able to participate effectively in the government of the ‘great society’ then the necessary qualities underlying this participation have to be fostered and developed at the local level.

G.D.H. Cole’s theory of association on the other hand enriches our understanding of need and features of a participative system. Society as he defined it is a ‘complex of associations held together by the wills of their members.’ If the individual is to be self-governing then he not only has to be able to participate in decision making in all associations of which he is a member but the associations themselves have to be free to control their own affairs (Cole regards the interference of the state as the main danger here). And if they were to be self-governing in this sense then they have to be roughly equal in political power. In Cole’s theory there is a distinction between the existence of ‘institutional arrangements’ at national level and functional democracy. For the latter the individual must be able to participate in all associations with which he is concerned; that is to say, a participatory society is necessary.

Pateman puts the above ideas together and presents the theory of participatory democracy, which is built around the central assertion that individuals and their
institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one and other. The existence of representative institutions at the national level is not sufficient for democracy; for maximum participation by all the people at that level socialisation, or ‘social training’, for democracy must take place at the local level. This will allow necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities to develop. Further, according to Pateman this development takes place through the process of participation itself (Pateman 1970).

In this context, participation in a democracy can be defined as a process of arriving at a general consensus on decisions of importation by critical exchange of views in which the individual joins in active fellowship with others on the basis of his own choice and conviction and with the end of furthering a good life for him as well as others.

This idea is taken forward by Kothari (1988) who characterise participation in a democratic setup as:

1. Participation is not an end itself; it is only a means to an end. The end is to produce a certain quality of mind with which the individual shows the confidence and the capacity to mould his own life in willing cooperation with his fellow beings.

2. Participation is a process, not simply a form. It should not slip into procedural rigidities. It should be more a method of reaching decisions, flexible in its working and producing a certain quality of human intercourse.

3. Distinction between participation which is based on individual self-consciousness and one grounded on a collective ego, is that, the former is built on the democratic principle of individual sovereignty; the latter on the individual’s status in society. It is the former that is considered as conducive in a democratic setup.

1.4.1.2. Empowerment

Power when conceived in narrowly constitutional terms does not adequately cover the whole ambit of power relations within a locality. In this regard, Michel Foucault’s (1977) (1978) theory of power offers a framework for rethinking empowerment issues in decentralisation. In his lecture on Governmentality Foucault spoke of the double movement of a state centralisation and dispersion. In his opinion it is when the
government tries to accommodate these two tendencies simultaneously that problems occur. Decentralisation is seldom able to clearly define where exactly power emanates from; at the centre or the periphery or an amalgamation of decentralisation and centralisation tendencies (Berkhout 2005). It would seem that this confusion arises when we focus our attention solely on the state apparatuses. The analysis of power according to Foucault has to be done at the “grass roots level, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power. This was where the concrete nature of power became visible, along with the prospect that these analyses of power would prove fruitful in accounting for all that had remained outside the field of political analysis.” (Foucault 1977, 202).

To Foucault, power is essentially power relations, that is, it has multiple forms, and can be at play in family relations or within institutions. It is not present in only one unique instance (McGowen 1994). In his opinion, if power is studied as being dependent on the state apparatus alone, it essentially becomes repressive. The state is important but the relations of power and its analysis must necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State. Foucault gives two reasons; firstly the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the State can only operate on the basis of other actually existing power relations. The State is super-structural in relation to a whole field of actual power networks that operate in sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth. ‘Meta-power with its prohibitions can operate only where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the basis for the great negative forms of power’ (Foucault 1977).

Foucault calls for a conception of power in which the privilege of the law is replaced by "the viewpoint of the objective, the privilege of prohibition with the view point of tactical efficacy, the privilege of sovereignty with the analysis of a multiple and mobile field of force relations, wherein far-reaching, but never completely stable, effects of domination are produced" (Berkhout 2005, 320). Foucault says, "power …produces things … forms of knowledge and discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the social body” (Sivaramakrishnan 1995, 3).

For Foucault, therefore, power is manifest in everyday mutual relationships. His theory can function as a meaningful approach to study the dimensions of this complex
and unstable process that functions at the local level of government. Discourses that embody meaning in social relationships and other relations constitute power relations that ultimately are crucial to understanding the reality of any process. Further, such discursive practices "are embedded in technical processes, in institutions, in forms of transmission and diffusion" (Foucault 1977, 199-200). The empowerment objectives of decentralisation, hence, have to be widened or redefined from its narrower understanding. When politics and administration is centrally driven, the process of top-down decentralisation becomes more alienated from the roots and does not empower. It has resulted in a situation in which the mass of the people are not at the centre of the democratic process but made peripheral to it.

1.4.1.3. Deepening Democracy

Rajni Kothari (1988) believed that issues like greater federalism and decentralisation to lower levels within the states were institutional devices that can be used as instruments for empowerment because inherent in them is a transfer of power to lower levels. However, an expansion of the term beyond empowerment is required as decentralisation when seen in these restrictive terms accentuates structure of inequity in which those with access to opportunities and privilege are able to retain and increase their power. The limited understanding of decentralisation hence violates the empowerment intent of decentralisation. While empowerment plays a very important role in political interaction, it should be seen in terms of participative democracy. That is participation by way of governmental institutions at the sub-national level which aims at bringing about such redistribution of power, so as to bring the ideal of democracy into empirical reality. This ideal he terms as ‘Democratic Decentralisation’ which makes empowerment feasible at the local level. It would follow a bottom-up process that he saw as not just a slogan but our only hope for a collective human framework of thought and action. However, he has stated that the decentralised process gets side-tracked by the fact that it is expressed in a simplistic manner, essentially along the regional dimension (state rights) or the dimension of territorial decentralisation to lower levels of the polity (panchayat raj). While this is no doubt a necessary and vital direction of institutionalising citizen participation in the developmental process, it is by itself too limited an approach which is also, in the absence of a socio-political movement at the grassroots, subject to manipulation by entrenched interests.
Replicating and superimposing the modern State at the local level, even where it leads to real transfer of power and of resources, will not by itself arrest distortions of the development process. For this to happen it is necessary to not just restore democratic institutions at different levels, but to make such restoration an instrument that can substantially change the social context.

Kothari’s vision of democratic decentralisation meant that decentralisation was not just from the national to State to district to still lower levels. He was also talking of decentralisation from governmental to nongovernmental bodies, from public administration to community action, from State to civil society. There is a need, according to him, to build on the grassroots initiatives and strategies, on movements from below, on the role of women and the youth, on the accumulated as well as spontaneous cultures of the lower castes and tribes.

Kothari in his Rethinking Democracy (2005) goes on to develop an interesting perspective that seeks to transform the concept of democracy into a democratic way of life or into 'an agenda of transformative politics, and social and cultural emancipation' (ibid, 176). He believes that it could be a tool of social and economic transformation by extending its concerns from functional institutional arrangements to an emancipatory force. Democracy is effectively seen to be a combination of contradictory processes. There are two movements in today’s world they are; one, the centralisation of power, resources and opportunities, and two a resurgence in democratic faith among the people, which is clearly evident in the grass-roots movements of ecologists, feminists, tribal groups (R. Kothari 2005, 148-149) and even the anti-corruption movement of the middle class. It is this grassroots phenomena that he wishes democratic decentralisation to tap into.

Blair (2000) based on a six-country study (Bolivia, Honduras, India, Mali, the Philippines and Ukraine) analysed democratic decentralisation. He explored the idea that democratic local governance at the local level can become more responsive to citizen desires and more effective in service delivery. He defines democratic decentralisation as ‘meaningful authority devolved to local units of governance that are accessible and accountable to the local citizenry, who enjoy full political rights and liberty. It thus differs from the vast majority of earlier efforts at decentralization
in developing areas, which go back to the 1950s, and which were largely initiatives in public administration without any serious democratic component’ (Blair 2000, 21).

Democratic local governance comprises of a number of aspects in addition to participation and accountability – performance in service delivery, resource allocation and mobilisation and degree of power devolution are among the most important. Blair also finds that both participation and accountability show significant potential for promoting democratic decentralization.

Thus, decentralisation can be defined as a system of institutions that allow for participation and empowerment of the people, which in turn helps them realize their democratic rights as citizens of the country.

1.4.2. Literature on Decentralisation in Forest Resource Management

With a mix of factors and forces shaping decentralisation, we now focus on the role of decentralisation in a natural resource perspective.

1.4.2.1. Literature Based on International Empirical Studies

From an international perspective, India has a lot to learn from the experience of decentralisation in countries in South America and South Asia, which is why studies from these areas have been listed here. But first Ostrom’s Nobel wining study has been reviewed as it is cited in most of the literature in the field of decentralised Natural Resource Management.

Elinor Ostrom’s (E. Ostrom 1990) book ‘Governing the Commons’ is central to the understanding of community participation in natural resource management. Ostrom defines Common-Pool Resources (CPR) as a natural or man-made resource system that is sufficiently large as to make it costly to exclude potential beneficiaries from obtaining benefits from its use. She illustrates the limitations of both centralization and privatisation, and thereafter proposes a third approach to resolving the problem of the commons: the design of durable cooperative institutions that are organized and governed by the resource users themselves. CPR groups of this kind that can successfully govern themselves in certain circumstances. For groups of CPR users who are in remote locations, the conditions are: a small, stable group of relatively similar people, in terms of expectations and discount rates, who share generalized norms of reciprocity and trust, and who are able to achieve low governance costs. For
CPRs that are not remote, there is an additional factor: the contribution of the surrounding political system in terms of supplying and supporting appropriate local governance institutions.

Agrawal and Ostrom (2001) analysed political coalitions that prompt decentralization and the role of property rights in facilitating the implementation of decentralized decision making especially where environmental resources are concerned. They do so by comparing decentralization in four cases in South Asia - Forest Councils in Kumaon in India, Joint Forest Management in India, the Parks and People Program in Nepal’s Terai, and Community Forestry legislation in Nepal. Through their empirical studies in India and Nepal, they find support for their argument that decentralization is likely to be implemented more successfully when local users are mobilised to support it and when they gain at least proprietorship right. They conclude that active participation of local actors is not a prerequisite for decentralization programs to be launched but if decentralisation efforts are to be effective then active participation of local groups is essential. When it comes to property regimes, they find that for continued existence of decentralized control over resources, active participation of local actors is necessary.

Krister Andersson, Tom Evans, Clark. C. Gibson, and Glenn Wright (2010) have studied decentralisation and deforestation in Latin America. They conducted a comparative analysis using a longitudinal data set on environmental decision making from 300 local governments located in three countries with varying degrees of formal decentralization: Guatemala, Bolivia and Peru. In Guatemala, forestry decentralization is extensive; in Bolivia, forestry decentralization is limited and in Peru, there is no decentralization of forest governance. Their general hypothesis was that strong local governance arrangements (a variable that was operationalized by using local capacity for generating local tax revenues) generate positive incentives for protecting local collective goods, such as forest resources. They controlled for known drivers of forest change, such as road density and topography, and tested their hypothesis.

The authors concluded that local governments have an important role to play in efforts to protect forests and that it would be a mistake to centralize decision making about forest conservation efforts. Their work also showed that constraining local
governments’ ability to raise their own taxes and service fees may be counterproductive to local empowerment and responsible local governance. Finally, they state that municipalities with stronger capacity to raise their own public revenues also are more effective in protecting their forests.

1.4.2.2. Literature Based on Empirical Work in India

Jodha (1985) (1997) studying India (specifically Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh) says that Common Property Resources constitute a significant component of the agricultural resource bases in rural areas of developing counties. He defines Common Property Resources (CPR) as those that utilize jointly or individually by members of the community, without any exclusive individual property right on them. He sees a bleak future for CPR and given their social, economic and environmental effects, their loss may imply a national loss. However, he states the village institutions might help in preserving them. He points to the importance of village institutions in managing such resources and says that they should further be strengthened by providing them with grants specifically for this purpose. He calls for better management of CPRs to direct activities away from ‘‘mining’’ of CPRs and towards production-oriented utilisation of these resources. He also stresses the importance of responsible user groups. They are important because, first, they fit well into grassroots democratisation of resource management systems and participatory development processes. Second, they help reduce the cost of policing and subsidising resources and facilitate local resource mobilisation and third, user groups are compatible with notions of equity.

Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha (1995) criticised the centralised environment policies followed by the government of India. According to them, it has resulted in three groups of people, from the ecological viewpoint: omnivores, ecological refugees, and ecosystem people. The omnivores devour resources and form one-sixth of the population; this includes the entrepreneurs, landowners, urbanites and business groups who have benefited most economically. Ecological refugees, who form according to the authors’ one-third of the population, are the displaced peasants and tribal peoples whom the policies of the government have made refugees. The last group, ecosystem people, constitutes four-fifths of India's rural population. These people traditionally depend on the natural resources in their own locality to meet most of their day-to-day needs. To address these lacunae in India’s development policy
they suggest a development strategy based on the Gandhian tradition of strong local communities within a decentralized political system and framework of democratic institutions, private enterprise, and equity.

Arun Agrawal (2005) works from a political economy perspective, theoretically he is informed by Michel Foucault. He studied the Kumaon villagers in the foothills of the Himalayas in North India. Arun Agrawal follows the transformation of environmental identities among the Kumaons over a 150-year period as they relate to politics, technologies, and new forms of knowledge. He deals with events up to 1999 and in some cases 2002. He merges two terms “environmental” and “governmentality” to form the new term “environmentality” that characterizes the changing beliefs of constructed subjects negotiating the space between a hierarchical power structure and an imagined and idealised forest. He traces the resistance to the centralized colonial forest regime before Indian independence and later this resistance resulting in decentralised community forest councils that emerged provide new ways of understanding forest management.

Agrawal traces the decentralisation of power from the sole domain of forest officials to a reliance on what he terms as “localities” for regulation of forests. He traces the changing understanding in local communities of the environment as the bases of change in their behaviour from resistance to cooperation. The headman, the council of elected representatives, the guards, the residents themselves all formed part of this new web of understanding. This partnership, Agrawal concluded, “led to the birth of the environment” in the Kumaon hills (A. Agrawal 2005, 201). By thus dissolving the divide between state and local culture, new environmental identities formed among the Kumaons that turned resistance into participation and partnership. This formed part of a larger movement toward inclusion and community forestry that spread around the world and provides, the author argues, an arresting paradigm for new conceptions of nature that foster better governance and more fruitful narratives of environmentality. The author explores the concept of agency among the local population and the importance of culture that needs to inform environmental regulations.

Dhanagare (2000) looked into the experience of Joint Forest Management (JFM) initiatives in Uttar Pradesh. He stated that sustainable use of land and forest produce
required a change in the attitude of both government departments and the people. He analysed the situation in UP and identifies the major lacunae in the JFM. He states that participation of people, panchayats and women in forest development and management was lacking.

Ashwini Chhatre (2008) speaks of the new institutions created through decentralisation policies and scrutinizes their democratic content. He states that new policies for decentralised natural resource management have transferred powers to a range of local authorities, including private associations, customary authorities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). He develops the concept of political articulation to characterise the relationship between citizens and elected representatives, and contextualises accountability and decentralisation within it. Political articulation is defined as the degree to which citizens and citizen groups can influence policy through democratic institutions (Chhatre 2008, 13). Chhatre focused his attention on the democratic potential of decentralisation reforms, and the politics of institutional choice in community-based natural resource management.

Lele and Menon (2014) have edited a book that looks at democratisation in forest governance in India. They state that the forest sector in India is currently going through an unprecedented churning. Every dimension of forest-related decision-making, including rights of local communities, conversion of forests to non-forest uses and setting aside forests for wildlife conservation, has become the subject of intense scrutiny, debate and change. The involvement of multiple actors, from local communities to the Supreme Court, marks a shift in the discourse from forest management to forest governance. Questions of forest rights, responsibilities, regulatory structures, transparency and accountability have increasingly become central to the discourse. The need to democratize all these components of forest governance is being repeatedly articulated. This book highlights this shift in the discourse and analyses the complex issues involved in bringing about democratic governance of forests in India. The essays in this book review developments over the last two decades along four dimensions: forests for local management, forests for wildlife conservation, conversion to non-forest purposes, and the wider socio-economic context and how it poses challenges to the idea of democratic governance. The themes range from the relevance of the Joint Forest Management programme, the
contribution of the Forest Rights Act, the complexities of the Godavarman case and the changes in the Wildlife Act to challenges posed by shifting cultivation, scientific versus traditional knowledge, and the effect of economic growth on forest dependence.

1.4.2.3. Literature Based on Empirical Studies in Tamil Nadu

Balikie, Harriss and Pain (1986) found in their study that common property resources (CPR) play a part in the agricultural systems throughout the State of Tamil Nadu. The most important application of CPR management was found in the use of surface water and ground water for irrigation. However, they found that in this sphere, as in others in south Indian villages it seems that the long standing attempt by the state to exercise close supervision over land use has actively discouraged collective choice and actions at the local level. Utilization of Common Property Resources such as fodder, firewood etc, is extremely controlled in principle by the local officials of several government departments. In practice, the system is subject to manipulation by those with local power and generally works in their favour.

Sreedharan (2002) studies the impact of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) Schemes intervention on the ecological status, hydrological status and socio-economic status of the people in Tamil Nadu. The period study was from 1997 to 2000. It was found that there was a visible change in the vegetative status of the forests showing encouraging signs of regeneration. Social fencing has had the desired effect. Dependence on forests has been largely controlled. The people have been sensitised on protection and conservation. Indifference has given way to participatory management. Villagers have responded positively in reducing the goat population. Participatory fire protection has succeeded in eliminating the harmful effects on regeneration and vegetation by forest fire. Artificial regeneration has been successful as evidenced by a high rate of survival recorded in the regeneration areas. Alternate employment has been accepted and adopted well among the dependents and poor and they have not reverted back to their old profession. The catchment forest area has benefitted from moisture retention, erosion control and prevention of sedimentation. Rainwater harvesting through micro-reservoirs and percolation ponds has immensely improved the ground water table. The socio-economic scenario in the villages had improved. Hence, the paper found that the policy was successful in Tamil Nadu.
Matta and Kerr (2007) in their paper draw on discussions with Forest Department officials to examine the influence of these forces on the outcomes of Joint Forest Management (JFM) in Tamil Nadu, India. Whereas past research has treated co-management of Common Pool Resources as if villagers and project implementing authorities were the only relevant actors, numerous external factors beyond the control of these two partners create barriers to successful co-management. An empirical inquiry into the operational aspects of JFM indicates the important roles of political parties, powerful people, and other state institutions and functionaries as well as the flow of foreign funding. Further, the strong demand by local people for socio-economic development interventions as opposed to improvement of degraded forests belittles the role of the Forest Department relative to other departments. Numerous other conditioning factors and relationships are explored. The authors call for reforms in public governance to allow better participation of all the actors involved for this participatory management approach to succeed and sustain.

Deborah Sutton (2009) in her book titled ‘Other Landscapes: Colonialism and the Predicament of Authority in Nineteenth-Century South India’ addresses several themes that relate to the conception and experience of landscape in the Nilgiri Hills. It investigates the interfaces between indigenes, European settlers and the colonial state on the Nilgiri Hills, focusing on land disputes, regulation of land sales, regimes of forest management and ethnographic projects of cultural preservation. It examines the landscape as it was configured in the Imperial imagination, explores the corruption and manipulation of local administration and argues that rarely, if ever, did official intent correspond to the systems of reform, regulation and invigilation imposed over the local agrarian landscape. The role of forest management and the imposition of new views of "scientific" forestry are outlined in chapter 5. The hills lacked good sources of timber, a necessity for the British settlements in the region, and the indigenous populations were again seen as destructive to proper forest management, whereas supposedly scientific endeavours, such as the introduction of acacia and eucalyptus trees, were encouraged despite their later failure and damage to the ecosystem.
1.5. Issues and Gaps Identified From the Above Review

From the above literature we gather that people’s participation in Forest Resource Management (FRM) is *sine qua non* with successful conservation efforts, as forest resources cannot be governed in a social vacuum. People are a part of the ecosystem and hence a holistic approach that takes into consideration the social and political context of forest resources must be considered in its management, if it is to be effective. However, this understanding fails to be reflected when it comes to deciding who shall manage forest resources. The trend that emerges is that FRM is understood as a dichotomous choice between either an omnipresent state or ambivalent state support for participation that tends to fall short in its implementation. This problem is accentuated by policies and laws that see the state as the main player and disregard the knowledge and wisdom of the people on the ground and also their right to decide for themselves.

The gap in the literature lies in the failure to recognise that governance in environment is peopled by a number of actors, all of whom have a crucial part to play. The action of all actors in the management of resources needs to be understood and acknowledged for true decentralisation to manifest. It is complicated by the lack of understanding of decentralisation *per se* from the perspective of participation, empowerment and its ultimate goal of deepening democracy. The literature fails to view decentralisation holistically in this regard.

Another issue that is acknowledged in the literature on decentralisation in forest resource management is that for effective implementation of decentralization programs local mobilization is critical. It has been proved that environmental policies developed at the local scale through a participative process of informed decision making are most effective. Such decentralised policies create the space for demands from below and empower local authorities that can attract the attention of citizens for engagement.

But the gap in this regard is the lack of focus on institutional choice in decentralisation that includes governmental, non-government and traditional institutions. For effective management, the divide between state and local needs to be bridged as it turns resistance into participation and partnership. It is the task of systematically understanding the phenomenon of decentralisation in this respect that
is lacking and is a chasm that this study addresses. Further, the literature assumes effectiveness of decentralisation over centralisation, but does not question it. The studies also do not dwell into whether decentralisation truly leads to more effective management of the resource or not. This study will address these aspects as well.

1.6. Research Questions

1. Is the decentralisation discourse being legislated into FRM laws and implemented in practice? What are its effects on the ground, in terms of institutions created?

2. What is the relationship between the type of FRM institution and the extent of people’s participation, empowerment and deepening democracy?

3. Who have been the key stakeholders in FRM and how have these different stakeholders perceive and defined the forest resource?

4. Does the presence or absence of community initiated institutions of decentralisation along with state institutions; affect the perception the people/stakeholders have about the forest resources?

5. What affect does decentralization of resource management have on the effectiveness of forest management?

1.7. Objectives of the Study

1. To conduct a critical review of FRM decentralisation laws, policies and programs in light of analysing the type of decentralised institutions they have created.

2. To understand and analyse the institutions involved in decentralised FRM and the inter-linkages between them in the governance of the forest resource.

3. To ascertain how the forest has been defined and perceived by different stakeholders and how their perception on resource use has been affected by the presence or absence of institutions of decentralised FRM.

4. To analyse the effects decentralization of resource management have on the effectiveness of forest management.
1.8. Statement of the Research Problem

This study on decentralisation in forest resource management, and forests in particular is problematised for the following reasons: First, the lives of millions of households are affected by how governments manage forests and admit local claims. Second, the factors that lead to durable decentralization of forests are relevant in other arenas where decentralization is occurring. Third, decentralized decision making can be seen as an inherently important concern of democratic life (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001, 486). Finally, understanding the effectiveness of decentralised forest resource management has a broader impact on issues such as sustainable use of natural resources, climate change, eco-tourism among others.

1.9. Theoretical Framework

This study proposes to draw from two theoretical frameworks – common property theory and political economy.

1.9.1. Common Property Approach

Common property literature is related to the community-based resource management idea that is based on the involvement of local communities in the management of resources (E. Ostrom 1990) (Kothari, Pathak, et al. 1998). The focus in this approach is on institutions, their development and role. The institutions that shall be studied under this framework have been classified in Table 1.1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Decentralised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Initiated Institutions</strong></td>
<td>Central Forest Administration</td>
<td>Village forest councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State Forest Administration</td>
<td>EDC- Eco Development Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PRI’s- Panchayati Raj Institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Initiated Institutions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>NGO’s started by peoples initiatives within the locality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self Help Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional tribal bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Private citizens initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility sponsored programmes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Ostrom (1990), institutions refer to a shared understanding that is used by humans in repetitive situations and organized by norms and rules. The reason this conceptual framework does not go on to differentiate institution using the terms
formal and informal institutions is that we cannot always equate formal institutions with the state (Pacheco et al., 2008) as they can exist both within and outside of formal government, and even within customary systems.

Many scholars have separated formal and informal institutions by placing state regulations enforced by an external authority on the formal side and customary or community rules that are self-enforced or endogenously enforced on the informal side. But the definition taken for formal institutions here is as defined by Chester Bernard, the “Formal Organisations is a system of consciously co-ordinated activities or forces of two or more persons working towards a common objective. (Bernard 1938, 73).” and Helmke and Levitsky define informal institutions as socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are “… created, communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels” (Pacheco, et al. 2008, 6). Hence, given that in this framework institutions are to be differentiated on the bases of who has played a role in setting them up and the extent of decentralisation therein the terms state initiated institutions and community initiated institutions have been used.

1.9.2. Political Economy Approach

The Political economy theoretical approach has also been adopted. Nadkarni, Pasha and Prabhakar (1989, 19-20) explains why this is an appropriate theoretical method to use in studying forest management. Forests have several uses or functions which often compete with each other. But forests are scarce and are becoming increasingly more so in the face of demographic and economic pressures. This is a political economy problem because, when we put ends of resource use in order from most important to least, it is not done by just the decision maker but also by the struggle between vested interest groups. This struggle may not be equitable and as a result may be cornered by one group, while the environmental cost may be borne by another. Given this rational we use the political economy approach to study this problem.

There is a vast amount of literature covered under this approach beginning with the classical political economy of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and proceeding to take up the criticisms levelled by conservative and Marxist theorists. They all look at the relationship between variables like state, democracy, individuals, market, class to name a few. Methodologically, contemporary political economy is based on a comparative method founded on the historic context. Works in this area have been
dominated by two approaches - system approach and the institutional approach. The systemic approach focuses on what happens because the system wills it too, that is, all occurrences are functional requisites to reproduce society and economy. The institutional approach on the other hand looks at the influence of institutions and what in turn influences them (Andersen 1990). The focus in this thesis is on the role of institutions in forest governance and management.

Hence, combining the two, we look at the institutions of Forest Resource Management, the actors involved and the economic incentives that drive such action in the context of decentralised FRM from a Common-Property Resource management perspective and using the political economy approach take it one step further by questioning how these institutions situate themselves in the cultural-political and ecological reality in which they operate.

1.10. Analytical Framework

This thesis questions decentralisation through the lens of natural resource management. To do so we use a comparative framework to characterise the degree to which natural resource management decentralisation has occurred. The comparative framework guiding the case studies focuses attention on: first, the extent to which central governments have decentralised authority over natural resources to local governments or other sub-national entities; second, the relations between these local-level institutions and the people, and; third, the effects of these processes on local people and the natural resource.

For analytical purposes it is postulated that in a decentralised institutional setup that is characterized by the presence of both state initiated decentralised institutions and community initiated decentralised institutions the level of participation, empowerment and democracy will be relatively high. This in turn will result in more effective natural resource management. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that a decentralised system that includes only state initiated decentralised institutions will rate low on the participation, empowerment and democracy scale and may also result in less effective resource management.

In order to test these claims case studies have been undertaken. The research design for the case studies is depicted below:
Figure 1.1: Research Design

Variability between A and B is in terms of the institutional choice available within the decentralisation system. Hence, they vary based on the presence or absence of community initiated institutions. It is proposed that the extent of participation, empowerment and democratic values allowed in each case be investigated and compared along with exploring where it leads to more effective or less effective forest management. Further, the bonds and linkages between the institutions within case B have been investigated. While comparing case A and B, C acts the control group as it has no decentralised institution of FRM present.

1.11. Area of Study

Tamil Nadu, is one of the southern States of the Indian peninsula, and is spread over 1,30,058 Sq. Km. It lies between 80° 5” to 130° 35” N and 760° 15” to 800° 20” E and accounts for about 4 per cent of the total area of the country. The topography of Tamil Nadu broadly consists of the coastal plains in the east; uplands and hills as one proceeds westwards; the plains account for more than half the area of the state. In Tamil Nadu only 17.5% of the area is under forest cover, of which, a sizeable area is classified as degraded forests. The Nilgiris district has about 56.4% of the total area declared as forest area, followed by Dharmapuri district with 38.0%. Dharmapuri, Erode, Vellore, Coimbatore, Thiruvannamalai, The Nilgiris, Dindigul, Salem, Thirunelveli and Theni Districts account for 79.8% of the total forest area of the state. Nilgiris District has been selected as the area of study (Tamil Nadu Forest Department 2004).

On the whole, India’s existing forests are primarily concentrated in three regions: the Himalayan region; the central forest belt of Orissa, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh and the north-south belt of the Western Ghats. It is in this third section, in the South of India, where the ranges converge, that there rises the hilly plateau called the Nilgiris (Blue Mountains) or the Nilgiris Hills. The Nilgiris District of Tamil Nadu includes the
plateau, the jungle-clad slopes of the uplands, and some adjoining lowland tracts. The people and the terrain of the Nilgiri plateau have unusual characteristics due to the unique development in its history (Mandelbaum 1982) that can be traced through three principal periods - aboriginal, colonial and national independence. The combination of the three makes the Nilgiris District an area that provides the opportunity for a singularly instructive study.

It is clearly distinctive in the sense of having special natural and human characteristics, markedly distinct from those of the surrounding lower lands. Though relatively small in area it has a number of tribes who share a distinct relation to nature, the four main distinct groups being the Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, and Badagas. Each speaks a different Dravidian language. Together they formed a social system that was similar to, and yet very different from, the caste societies of the surrounding plains and their relation to the forest around them has a rich history. The Todas were pastoralists; the Kotas were artisans, musicians, and cultivators; the Kurumbas gatherers and hunters; and the Badagas that became the most populous group by far were agriculturalists (Mandelbaum 1982).

The governance structures that evolved were distinctly unique since the colonial period which began when British officials discovered the plateau and settled there in the 1820s. They quickly transformed the location into an integral part of the British imperial regime. It became, for six months of every year, the seat of the government of the Presidency (province) of Madras (Mandelbaum 1982, 3). An important military base was built and extensive plantations established. Missionary stations were opened. Before long, the plateau area became a principal hill station, the main health and recreational resort for Europeans in South India. It was a central place for major components of the British rule, an administrative, military, societal headquarters (Krishnan 2009).

After independence the hills were given special programme and policies, like; the Hill Area Development Programme, the Watershed Development Programs, Tamil Nadu Afforestation Project, Project Elephant (Tamil Nadu Forest Department 2004) etc. that have been implemented in this area alone in recognition of its unique geographic and demographic setup.
1.11.1. Facts about The Nilgiris District

The Nilgiris District has been divided into six taluks namely Udhagamandalam, Coonoor, Kotagiri, Gudalur, Kundah and Pandalur. There are four municipalities, namely Udhagamandalam, Coonoor, Gudalur and Nelliyalam. The district has eleven special village panchayats and thirty five village panchayats. Wellington is the only Cantonment in this District. According to 2011 census, Nilgiris district has a population of 7,35,394 of which male and female were 3,60,143 and 3,75,251 respectively (Census 2011).

The total area of the Nilgiris is 2543 sq kilometres, out of which 56.4% (around 1,42,577 hectares) is under forest and 30.5% is under plantation or cultivation (Tamil Nadu Forest Department 2004, 87). There are four administrative divisions for the forest area and each division is under a cadre officer. The divisions are - Nilgiris North, Nilgiris South, Gudalur and Mudumalai National Park (including Mukurthi National Park) (Tamil Nadu Forest Department 2004, 70). In National Parks human settlements are not allowed in the core area, hence this division is not part of the study.

1.12. Methodology

A mixed method approach has been adopted in this study. Hence, both quantitative and qualitative tools of enquiry have been utilized and in the analysis, as well, both have been considered. There are very strong arguments in favour of using such an approach; in fact social science research would be enriched by a mixed-method approach as it combines the scientific and hermeneutic approach. The fact remains that the scientific school and the interpretative school are at two ends of a continuum, however a combination of the two would bring about richer research outcomes. In 1985, Thomas Cook in his book Social Science and Social Policy stated, “In a world where one way of conducting research was universally considered to be “correct” scientific practice would be easy. Research would simply do what is correct. It is the current absence of total certainty about what constitutes correct practice that leads to the advocacy of multiplism in perspective and method.” (Greene 2007, 22) Diversity of methods would allow for “cross-validation” and “cross-fertilization” allowing for the development of a “cosmopolitan research strategy” (Brewer and Hunter 1989, 13).
The philosophical underpinning of the mixed method approach has been traced back to the classical pragmatists like Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004), all of whom were pragmatists, who aimed at finding a middle ground between philosophical dogmas. The mixed method is a variant of their pragmatic approach. Jennifer C. Greene defines Mixed Method as, “…social inquiry involving a plurality of philosophical paradigms, theoretical assumptions, methodological traditions, data gathering and analysis techniques, and personalized understandings and value commitments…” (Greene 2007, 13). But at the end of it mixed method entails choosing a combination of methods that best answer the research questions (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

How then would one reconcile the opposite stands of quantitative positivism with qualitative hermeneutics? The advantage of a multi-method approach lies in the fact that one is able to choose the best from both worlds. For example, theorists have held that the narrative approaches on their own fall short, but the findings of the same can be made more robust if they are backed up with findings from statistical models. Therefore the mixed method research does not aim at reconciling differences, but to “gain from each their individual strengths” (Brewer and Hunter 1989, 17).

But there are a whole host of contradictions between the scientific and hermeneutic approach, in terms of generalisation, verifiability, replicability, predictability, interpretation, understanding and experiencing to name just a few. The mixed-method addresses this issue - “in good mixed methods evaluation, differences is constitutive and generating” (Greene 2007, 14). So when we look at on one hand the positivist’s opinion on programmes being predictive and on the other the hermeneutics view that interpretations are understood in their historic context alone, trying to resolving the disputes between the two would be futile. Instead, engaging the two to resolve a social problem would be much more productive. This does not mean we ignore the difference, but instead we embrace the dissonance.

How would this work? Greene (2007) suggests that a social problem be studied as a complex puzzle involving both quantifiable and value loaded facts. Thereafter, Cook’s multiplicity in terms of multiple methods could be applied as one way of approaching the problem. In our case, it is the scientific and the hermeneutic approach, so social phenomena would be studied both objectively with the help of
quantifiable data, as well as, through value-loaded enquiry. The quality of the results and their design can be judged using the extant criteria and standards prevailing for both. Consistency in results would bolster each other’s findings and even inconsistency would be a finding in itself.

Mixed method thus uses the contradictions in methods to look at a problem from multiple and diverse perspectives, increasing the “generative potential” (Greene 2007, 27) of the research. Social issues in today’s world are interdisciplinary, complex and dynamic. Mixed method then becomes the ideal methodology to tackle this diversity as it enables the engaging of all aspects of social diversity. Furthermore, social science is the study of human beings. To borrow from Dilthey (Dilthey 1989), man is a complex fusion of feeling and will who cannot be understood in totality by causality and quantitative analysis alone.

Hence, keeping in view the objectives of the thesis to conduct a critical review of FRM decentralisation laws, policies and programs in light of analysing the type of decentralisation they propose to create, a policy review of the various laws, policies and programmes has been undertaken. To achieve the other three objectives, case studies have been conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods. The villages for the case studies have been selected from the forest divisions. The Gudalur division was not taken for this study as it has been under litigation since 1969 due to conflicts over forests leases in a struggle popularly known as the ‘janman conflict’ that has led to a stand-still on all governance related issues (Krishnan 2009). It is riddled with complexities that are not representative of the rest of the district. The issues pertaining to this division does not help us answer our question on decentralisation and resource management and hence the area has been excluded from this study.

Among the two remaining forest divisions, Nilgiris North and Nilgiris South; the south forest division is centralised and the north has implemented forest related decentralisation policies and programmes, hence providing a natural setting for comparison. All villages in the south were listed and a random selection of three villages was done. In the north, the presence or absence of the two types of institutional setups, namely state initiated decentralisation institutions alone and decentralised institutions with both state and community initiated institutions determined the creation of two lists. A random selection of three villages from each of
these lists was done. This led to the selection of 9 villages from the entire district. In each of the villages the decentralised institutions were identified. Table 1.2 lists the villages selected for this study.

Table 1.2: The Villages Selected for Each of the Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case A: Village name and no of households (HH)</th>
<th>Case B: Village name and no of households (HH)</th>
<th>Case C: Village name and no of households (HH)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bambla Kombei (15 HH)</td>
<td>Neerkasimand and Ghadhimald (15 HH)</td>
<td>Tanrnad Mund (15 HH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attadi (15 HH)</td>
<td>Pudukadu (15 HH)</td>
<td>Belhathi Kombei (15 HH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thepakadu (15 HH)</td>
<td>Anakati (15 HH)</td>
<td>Nedungal Kombei (15 HH)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total no. of villages surveyed – 9  Total no. of households surveyed- 135

Hence, the villages for the case studies were selected from the forest divisions through a stratified random sampling method. Data has been collected using a household survey that captures demographic data and the perception of the resource users. The survey was administered to the head of households. The number of households surveyed was 135. The respondents of the survey belong to an official planning commission category call as ‘Primitive Tribal Groups’ (PTGs). This is a classification under the broader term of Scheduled Tribes. They are characterised as being tribes who are more backward than others with low levels of literacy, declining or stagnant population, pre-agricultural level of technology and economic backwardness. It was in the 9th five year plan (1998-99) that this categorisation came into play. Tamil Nadu has six recognised PTGs (Primitive Tribal Groups) that live in the Nilgiris. They are Kattunaikans, Kotas, Kurumbas, Irulas, Paniyans, and Todas. These PTGs are the respondents of this study and will be referred to, in short, as ‘tribes’ in the thesis.

Focused group discussions were conducted with the following groups – Joint Forest Management (JFM) and Eco-Development Committee (EDC) members, local community initiated institutions – production centres and village level groups, members of SHGs (Self-Help Groups) and the villagers. In-depth open ended interviews were conducted for government officials; JFM/EDC/Panchayat officials; officials, field workers and consultants associated with the different community
oriented institutions; members of SHG’s; leaders of tribal panchayat and experts of forest management like environmental lawyers and activists working in the study area. Data and information was also gathered by way of participatory and non-participatory observation.

Other necessary data required for the research was collected from government documents in the Forest, Agriculture and Revenue Departments and village level records available with forest and panchayat officials. Also, the documents and annual reports of the community initiated institutions were used.

1.13. Limitations of the Study

As a case study method is proposed it comes with certain inherent limitations. There is a trade-off against the advantages of a large-n study so as to achieve richness and deeper understanding of the phenomena of decentralisation. However, this means that we cannot over-generalise the results. The results shall be limited to contingent or typological generalizations (George and Bennett 2005), in other words, theoretical conclusions from the case studies can be generalised only to similar cases but cannot be extend to causally dissimilar cases.

We will first explore in the next chapter, Chapter 2, the laws, policies, programs and judicial pronouncements dealing with Forest Resource Management. The chapter focuses on critically reviewing the central and Tamil Nadu specific laws and policies that apply to field area. Here we list the laws and critically look at how they set down the rules of the game or the parameters within which the various actors work. The third chapter focuses on the institutions of decentralised forest resource management. Two levels of inquiry have been undertaken, one at the institutional level and the other at the household level. Based on data collected, using quantitative and qualitative methods, the chapter looks at the effect the presence of civil society organisations has on the functioning of government initiated institutions. The chapter enquires into the extent of deepening decentralisation. The degree of decentralisation is integrally linked with the management of the forest, which is the focus of Chapter 4. This chapter discusses the multi-institutional setup, with both state centric and community initiated institutions operating in the management of forests. Here, we look at how decentralised institutional setups affect the perception of people to the forest. Also, we enquire into the impact institutions have on the outcome of natural
resource management and conservation attitude of the people. Chapter 5 is dedicated to understanding the effects decentralization of resource management has on the effectiveness of forest management. This chapter looks at the importance of the institutional environment when we try to understand resource governance systems. It shows how relative to centralisation, decentralisation functions better. It opens up the black-box of what we mean by ‘decentralisation’ and highlight the need for a nested structure with plurality of bodies and networking that is crucial. The final chapter 6 brings out the conclusions and recommendations for what can be done to further improve the system.