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**Utilization and Conservation of Natural Resources in the Semi-Arid Region of Rajasthan, India: Mainstream views and local realities.**

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**Abstract:** The dissertation critically examines the mainstream view that claims that fuelwood and fodder extraction by households are the reason for deforestation. The case from Sariska Tiger Reserve located in the semi-arid region of Rajasthan, India, is presented and analyzed. The evidence suggests that the mainstream view, which links deforestation to fuelwood and fodder extraction by local households, is questionable. The natural resource management in Sariska is dominated by state priorities. This regime which aims at conservation of wildlife by closing the natural setting from human use, has failed to properly address resource use conflicts. One reason is the neglect of social factors that are responsible for shaping the local people's perspective of the landscape and their interaction with it. Socio-economic changes, e.g. population pressure and market development, are leading to privatization of common property, thus supporting the main tenets of the Property Rights theory. However, common property regimes still exist alongside state and private property regimes in several villages. Evidence suggests that common property regimes governed by local institutions are able to cope with environmental uncertainty in the semi-arid region.

A main conclusion emerging from these results is that a pluralistic approach, incorporating multiple perspectives in the form of a joint or "co-management approach", is more appropriate for natural resource management in the region. But the reluctance on the part of the Forest Service to part with their powers, and the lack of the flexibility within the new joint forest management approach initiated by the government, is creating hurdles in its implementation. It is not an easy task to carry out joint management of forests without giving ownership of the resources to the communities and involving them in decision-making. The costs involved in joint forest management may be high and negotiations difficult under conditions of high population growth and increasing market demands. However, decentralization may improve forest management, especially in places where effective state management has resulted in "open access" situations.