

PRINT: ISSN 0972-639X ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6799

STUDIES OF TRIBES AND TRIBALS

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Stud Tribes Tribals, 18(1-2): 1-11 (2020)

PRINT: ISSN 0972-639X ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6799

DOI: 10.31901/24566799.2020/18.1-2.418

Socio-ecological and Religious Perspective of a Sacred Grove in the Traditional Way of In Situ Plant Conservation

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KEYWORDS Biodiversity. Conservation. Ethnobotany. Kalua Sarnd Than. Sacred Grove. West Bengal

ABSTRACT Sacred groves are socio-culturally protected patches of plants mainly maintained by tribal communities. These groves are generally considered as abodes of gods, goddesses, spirits or supernatural objects. They are worshipped, managed and protected by mainly tribal communities with religious zeal. Such groves serve as less disturbed benchmarks for vegetation. Taboos and societal prohibitions defend the sacred groves from destruction as a result of human activity. From sacred groves, several relics, endemic and endangered species have been reported. Based on this premise, this paper highlights the conservation and cultural values of a sacred grove of Jhargram District in West Bengal. The study reveals that in addition to conserving 150 species of angiosperms, the grove provides some direct and indirect socio-economic benefits. Therefore, there is an urgent need not only to protect the sacred forest but also to revive and reinvent such a traditional way of plant conservation.