

Ethnomedicinal Plant Conservation Through Sacred Groves

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ABSTRACT Many indigenous communities all over the world protect forest patches by dedicating them to local deities. Such forest pockets, referred to as sacred groves, are pieces of forests and or clusters of trees maintained on socio-religious grounds. Irrespective of their size and origin, all sacred groves are islands of biodiversity protecting a host of plant species including medicinal plants. These groves in general act as repositories and nurseries for many of the local unani, ayurvedic, tribal and other folk-medicines. Owing to protection offered on socio-religious grounds, these groves also harbour many of the regionally and locally disappearing forest-based medicinal plants. With this background, this paper deals with an account of protective role played by three (3) sacred groves maintained by *Lodhas* of West Midnapore district in West Bengal towards conservation of ethnomedicinal plants. The study for the first time records occurrence of thirty (30) sacred grove based species of which few are becoming rare and rarer in the adjoining forest areas due to fragmentation of their populations. This study, therefore, calls for the protection of the sacred groves and also draws attention towards immediate need to revive and reinvent such a unique Indian way of *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. It also recommends to explore other *ex-situ* conservation initiative for the better management of regionally vanishing precious medicinal plants.