

Interface between Biodiversity and Tribal Cultural Heritage: An Exploratory Study*

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ABSTRACT The use of forest products for socio-religious purposes has hardly been brought into focus in the recent studies concerning indigenous forest use patterns in the Indian context. The preliminary findings of this study of five West Bengal tribes has identified all the bio-resources used in ritual performed at both the family and community levels, and has produced an inventory of the flora and fauna which are protected through taboos. The study also reports for the first time the existence of a number of evanescent scared groves in West Bengal. Despite the historical processes causing much attenuation, these sacred groves are still maintained by the tribal villagers. In the face of severe economic hardships of the tribals in the region under study, the persistence of much of the socio-religious ethos of protecting the bio-resources reveal the strength of the conservationist tradition of our indigenous cultures.