

## **Natural Vegetation of West Bengal**

Natural vegetation covers only 16% of total area of West Bengal. Much of it has been disappeared due to heavy density of population and clearing forest land for cultivation to feed this population. Few districts have only scattered forest. It can be divided into six classes according to their distribution, growth and expansion (Fig 3.5). They are as follows:

1. Himalayan Moist Temperate Vegetation
2. Tropical Moist Deciduous Vegetation of Tarai
3. Tropical Moist Deciduous Vegetation of Plain
4. Dry Deciduous Vegetation of Upland
5. Tropical Semi Evergreen Vegetation of Coastal Areas
6. Mangrove Swamp Vegetation of Sundarban Areas

### **1. Himalayan Moist Temperate Vegetation**

These forests are related to higher altitude. In mountain areas different types of trees and plants grow at different heights. Temperate evergreen forests consisting of trees such as Oak, Poplars and Maples are seen between the height of 900- 2500 metres. Between 2500 and 3500 metres coniferous trees such as Pine, Deodar, and Fir are found. Above this altitude Birches and Rhododendrons are grown.

### **2. Tropical Moist Deciduous Vegetation of Tarai and Plain**

At the foot of the Himalaya, tropical mixed evergreen and deciduous trees are found. Deciduous trees which include for example Sal, Teak and Simul, Sisham trees shed their leaves once a year. But in between 1000 and 1500 metres, sub-tropical forests such as Celdera, Micherin and Bamboos are found. A broad belt of tree forest stretches along the entire length of the northern district. Duars region are found with low levels of tea gardens.

### **3. Tropical Moist Deciduous Vegetation of Plain**

Tropical moist deciduous vegetation of plain extends from south of the tarai deciduous region to almost entire West Bengal except southern coastal portion. Such forests have a mixture of evergreen and moist deciduous trees. The under growing climbers provide an evergreen character to these forests. Main species are white Cedar, Hollock and Kail.

### **4. Dry Deciduous Vegetation of Upland**

These forests are found in the western parts of West Bengal covering the districts of Puruliya, Bankura, Bardhaman, Birbhum and Medinipur, scattered and isolated patches of Howrah and

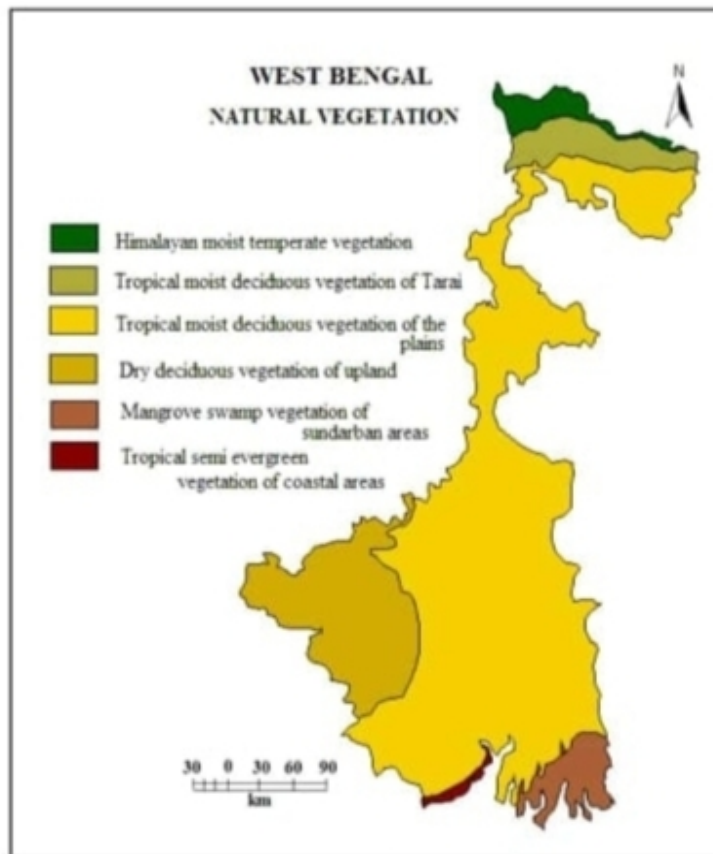
Hugli districts. The important trees of these forests are Sal, Simal, Haldu, Bamboos, Mahogani, Mahua, Palash etc. These trees shed their leaves in the dry winter. High temperature, dry climate and poor lateritic soil in this region is not favorable for the growth of trees. At present much of the land is used for mango orchards and mulberry cultivation.

**5. Tropical Semi Evergreen Vegetation of Coastal Areas**

Southern coastal area of Medinipur district is under the vegetation cover of tropical semi evergreen vegetation. Tropical semi evergreen vegetation includes typical canopy broad leaf trees of both category of evergreen along with deciduous. The species diversity is high but many of the typical evergreen species are absent.

**6. Mangrove Swamp Vegetation of Sundarban Areas**

These forests covering the Sundarban Delta are the most extensive forest land of West Bengal. The forest is situated at the mouth of the Ganga river in southern part of the South 24 Parganas districts. The name 'Sundarban' comes from the fact that these forests mostly contain one type of mangrove trees called 'Sundari'. Mangrove vegetation is influenced by the salty sea water due to rise and fall of the tide of Bay of Bengal. Mangrove trees have breathing roots which are usually very large to stand in deep mud. The most common vegetation is Keya or Kewra bushes which grow in extensive clumps (Singh, 1971).



Source: NATMO Maps, DST, 2010.

Fig 3.5