

CHAPTER – FIVE

5.0 Natural Vegetation (Forest)

North Bengal is gifted with a large area of forest in its mountainous terrain and adjacent valleys. Table 5.01 shows the area and percentage of forests in North Bengal.

Table 5.01
Area and Percentage of Forest in North Bengal, 2002

District	Total area according to D.L.R., W.B.	Forest area according to state forest deptt.	Percentage of forest to total area of the district
Darjeeling	325.470	1245.75	38.27
Jalpaiguri	622.70	179.00	28.74
Cooch Behar	331.38	3.15	0.95
Uttar Dinajpur	312.467	0.579	0.18
Dakshin Dinajpur	221.908	0.932	0.41
Malda	371.05	16.8	0.45

Source: Directorate of Agriculture Govt. of W. B., 2002.

In the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri 38.27 percent and 28.74 percent of the geographical area to the total area of the respective districts are under forest cover. Fig. 5.1 depicts the forest areas of North Bengal.

The forests of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts, which comprise the forests of Dooars and Terai consist of North tropical moist deciduous forest. In the hilly areas, northern tropical wet hill forests and Himalayan moist temperate forests and their various sub-types are found. The following diagram 5.2 showing the percentage of forest in different districts of North Bengal.

NORTH BENGAL FOREST AREA



Fig. 5:1

These forests are covered with valuable trees such as sal, simul, panisay, paccasy, gamari, oodal, lali, kadam etc. Such forests, a bounty from nature to the mankind provide fuel and raw material for several industries. Valuable timber available in the forests of North Bengal are mainly used for the manufacture of furniture and plywood. Plywood is used in manufacturing of tea chests packing boxes.

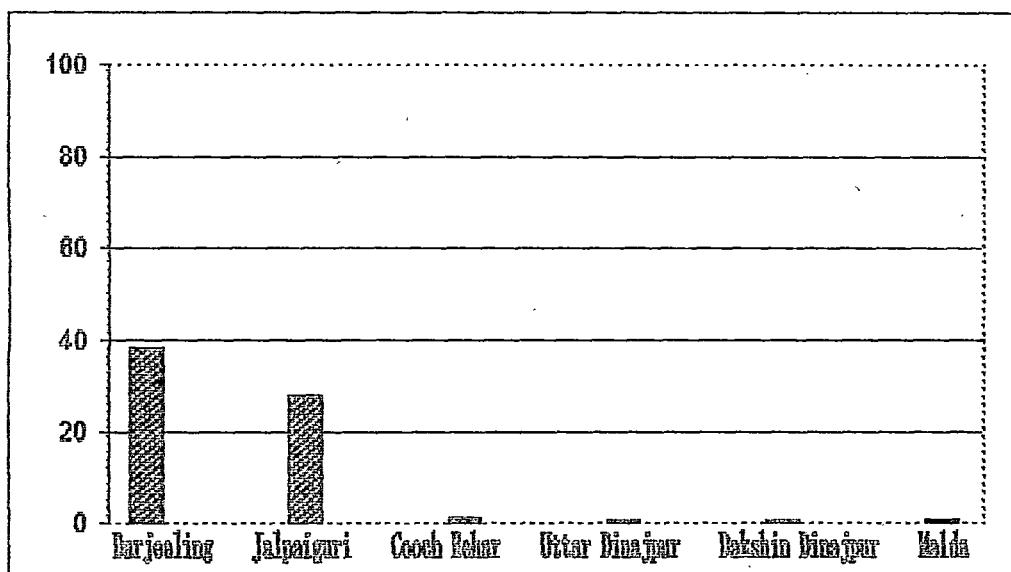
Prior to independence more than 63 percent of total area of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts were covered with dense forests. But due to pressure of population and large-scale immigration after independence from the bordering states forests covers are rapidly decreasing. There is no forest worth mentioning in the district of Cooch Behar. The area under forest cover is only 0.95 percent of the total area of the district. In Malda, Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur forest area is 0.45, 0.18, 0.41 percent respectively. Table 5.02 shows classification of forests in North Bengal.

This vast forest area is not uniform in nature in all the tracts of the district of Darjeeling. There exists wide variation in the types of forests. The variation is mainly due to the variation of altitude and climate. The most remarkable feature of the forests of Darjeeling is the wonderful variety of species that they contain. There are in fact probably few places in the world in which so many different types of the forest exist within so small area.

Table 5.02
Classification of Forest Area in Six Districts of North Bengal (2001-2002)
 (area in hect.)

District	Reserved forests	Protected forest	Unclassed state forest	Khas forest	Other
Darjeeling	104373.00	1752.30	5759.87	-	
Jalpaiguri	138784	18313	5779	1421	
Cooch Behar	-	4127.43	340	16.14	2847.14
Uttar Dinajpur	349.96	66.37	162.85	-	517.12
Dakshin Dinajpur	549.34	157.31	145.11	-	245.25
Malda	806.50	378.00	284.62	-	509.80

Source: Divisional Forests Office, Raiganj, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Malda, D.F.O., Kurseong, Kalimpong.



Percentage of forest in North Bengal
Fig. 5.2 (area in p. c) (2001-02)

Forests of North Bengal are classified into (1) reserved forest, (2) protected forest, (3) unclassed forest, (4) Khas forest, (5) Vested waste land forest, owned by corporate bodies and (6) forests owned by private individuals. Jalpaiguri has 138784 hectares of reserved forests and Darjeeling has 104373.00 hectares. Cooch Behar does not have reserved forest. The area of reserved forest in Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda are 349.96, 549.34, 806.50 respectively. Protected forest covers 18313 hectares in Jalpaiguri district. Protected forest covers 1752.30 and 4127.43 hectares of Darjeeling and Cooch Behar district other southern districts have very less protected forests. Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda have 66.37, 157.31, 378.00 hectares of protected forest respectively. Darjeeling has 5759.87 hectares of unclassed state forests followed by Jalpaiguri 5779 hectares. Cooch Behar has 340 hectares of unclassed state forest. The district also contains 16.14 hectares of Khas forest. Jalpaiguri district also has 1421 hectares of Khas forest are. Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda have 162.85 hectares, 145.11 hectares and 284.62 hectares of unclassed state forests respectively. There are some private forests and corporate forests in the districts of Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda.