

The Monsoon of the sub continent
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WHEN the first drops of rain kiss the ground, the smell of wet earth permeates the atmosphere. It is my favorite smell, rain on the sun-baked earth. Moods change with the first few drops of rain. Longfellow's words have remained with me since I learnt them in school:

*"How beautiful is the rain!
After the dust and heat,
In the broad and fiery street,
In the narrow lane,
How beautiful is the rain!"*



Rain is beautiful around the world, but in the sub continent it has a divinity of its own, hence it is celebrated, even venerated and described as the link between heaven and life.

The South West Monsoon winds are called "*Nairutya Marut*" in India. The reason for the bountiful rains is described in the '*Kerala Kalpam*' whose authorship is ascribed to the legendary Lord Parasurama. In days of yore, a great drought wrecked havoc in the kingdoms of Chera, Chola and Pandya. All forms of life were getting destroyed. The kings of the three kingdoms resolved to do penance to Indra, the God of rain. Pleased with their penance, each of them were blessed with rains for four months in a year. However, discontentment emerged as the Cheran kingdom had not enough of rain, while the other two suffered due to excess rainfall. They again approached Lord Indra with their grievances, whereupon it was directed that two months of rainfall from the Chola and Pandya kingdom would get diverted to the Cheran kingdom. This arrangement was satisfactory to all and thus the Cheran kingdom got eight months of rainfall while the other two kingdoms got two months of rainfall. The Cheran kingdom (present day Kerala – Malabar region) receives the South West Monsoon in June. Soon it unfolds across the plains of India, affecting the lives of over half the world's population. These monsoon rains have dictated wars, famines, disasters, and prosperity over centuries and are a very special phenomenon.

It all starts with the farmers, taking to the fields with their ploughs in early June. As the rains descend in voluminous cascading sheet, the fields get transformed from brown to green, it is lush green everywhere, rivers are full, water pouring down from the heavens

look so romantic. Moods change with the first drops of rain, the joy of getting soaked in the first rains is amazing.



The green fields drenched in seeking rain, becomes a wonderful sight to behold. Sitting on my verandah, listening to the sound of rain, savoring monsoon delicacies, fresh hot pakoras made with green chillies, onion rings, sliced potatoes and cauliflower and hot cups of tea, tastes so goods and invigorating, these are the great pleasures of rain. It is time to ruminate and deliberate about the monsoon.

Ritu means '*season*' in the Hindu calendar and there are six ritus. The word is derived from the Vedic Sanskrit word *Rtu*, a fixed or appointed time especially the proper time for sacrifice (yajna) or ritual in Vedic Religion; this in turn comes from the word Rta as used in Vedic Sanskrit literally means the '*order or course of things*'

The monsoon has always courted interest - from farmers to economic planners in the country. Indian economy is often called the "Monsoon economy". Over 60% people in India depend on agriculture for their livelihood. And, so, timely rainfall is crucial to their livelihood. About 60% of cultivable lands are rain-fed, which directly rely on the monsoon. Even the 40% odd irrigated areas need rainfall to have standing water.



Agriculture directly contributes 22% to the GDP of India. The agriculture sector also provides raw materials for a fifth of the industry. Rice and tea are some crops that depend on the monsoon. Dairy farms, which help make India the largest milk producer in the world, also depends on the monsoon. Are Industries affected by the monsoon? Rural India is a huge market for industrial goods. About 40% of the manufactured goods depend on them. This in turn affects the GDP directly.

A deficit monsoon results in a shortage of agricultural raw material and also affects all industries that supply inputs to the farm sector. The inflationary impact reduces general disposable income and poor agricultural produce wipes out completely the disposable income in the rural sector, meaning the buying capacity of the rural sector becomes negligible. This results in a loss of market for various industries – from automobiles, FMCG and durables to fertilizers and even construction. The automobile sector also stands to lose much of its market in a bad monsoon as sales of tractors, two-wheelers and other commercial vehicles will plummet. Even the sales graph of cars is attributed to the monsoon by the industry.

Poor monsoon also has a dampening effect in the housing and construction sector, especially rural housing. Besides all this, India is dependent on hydroelectricity for its power needs. They supply approximately 55% of India's power requirement. A delayed or inadequate amount of rainfall can lead to power shortage across the country. Monsoon is also the primary delivery mechanism for fresh water in the sub-continent.

Heavy summer monsoons can cause great damage. The recent and still ongoing devastation in the State of Uttarakhand is an apposite example of how terrifying the monsoons can be.



We mindlessly ravage Nature in the name of "development". Marauders are busy excavating and mining indiscriminately. Massive dams are being constructed at every nook and corner on the fragile Himalayan mountain ranges. The story on the other side of the border is the same. The **World's most powerful dam, the Three Gorges dam, opened in China as gushing water generated 22,500 MW - the same power as FIFTEEN nuclear reactors.**



Ancient wisdom has a word of caution for man. The sacred Yajur Veda advises us to live in harmony with Nature and its elements. The Shanti Shloka stresses the need for peace in Outer Space, the skies, on the earth, in the oceans, forests, in animal and plant life, in all the eight directions, peace with oneself and with others. It seeks even peace with fire.

Development does not mean degrading our environment. Let us not forget that several generations are waiting to inhabit this planet, we have a responsibility to hand it over to posterity in the same pristine condition that it was bequeathed to us.



Coming generations also need to enjoy monsoons, feel raindrops on their bodies, enjoy the economic benefits and venerate the monsoons during its arrival and departure. The economic significance of the monsoon can be aptly summed up in the statement of the Hon'ble President of India, Shri.Pranab Mukherjee that "monsoon is the real finance minister of India".

(The views expressed are strictly personal. The author is Commissioner (Appeals), Customs and Central Excise, Goa.)

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