

## Rain of Life and Death

India's monsoon is widely celebrated for the life it brings to forests and farm fields. But the rains are also feared for the death and destruction that floods can bring to the communities in their paths.

"The fate of India is bound head and tail to the course of the monsoon," says monsoon expert David Stephenson, of Meteo-France, a research institute in Toulouse, France. "If the rains come too late, farmers will sow few or no seeds, fearing a drought. If there is a lack of continued showers or breaks in the rain, plant seedlings may not survive. If the rains are too hard, young plants and seedlings can be washed away. All these factors can greatly increase the price or decrease the availability of food in India."

But the worst disaster occurs when the rains do not come at all. In the drought year of 1770, for instance, an estimated 10 million people died in the Indian state of Bengal in a famine; one million perished in Orissa in 1865-66. "The failure of the rains is the first link in the chain that leads to famine," Stephenson says. Today, however, he notes that improved storage facilities and irrigation systems have reduced the chance of famine.

On the other hand, the chance of receiving too much rain still remains a threat, particularly to people living in India's lowlands. In recent years, monsoon floods have killed up to 1,000 people a year and damaged millions of acres of crop land. Often the culprit is a flash flood, produced without warning by the monsoon's fickle and dramatic storms, which remain difficult to predict.

Despite the threat, however, Indians still celebrate the arrival of the monsoon -- fully aware that it can both sustain and end life.

*PBS Online; Nature – Making of a Monsoon*

1. According to the article, why is the summer monsoon so important to the people of India?

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2. According to the article, what are the consequences if the rains come too late or not at all?

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3. According to the article, what are the consequences if the rains are too heavy?

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