

An 8 Million-Year-Old Mysterious Date with Monsoon

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The book is an attempt by weather scientists, writers, historians and academicians to explore India's most intimate yet least understood climate phenomenon – the Monsoon.

The Indian monsoon spans the rural-urban divide as well as that between the rich and the poor. The farmers await it to determine their sowing cycle while the urbanites hope for respite from the scorching heat and dust, and for the recharge of reservoirs that supply water to their cities. "This is perhaps the only time when the entire country is one in desperation. It cannot exhale till it rains," says Sunita Narain, Director General, Centre for Science and Environment.

India's relationship with the monsoons is not limited to our survival alone. Monsoons have also had a profound influence on our art, music and culture. However, despite its importance in all realms of our lives, we barely know about the 'whys' and 'hows' behind this complex phenomenon. From the global dimensions of monsoon, to the scientific squabbles over its very definition – how much do we really know? "Do we even know India's monsoon scientists and how they are desperately learning to chase this unpredictable and variable event better?" asks Narain.

One of the biggest takeaways from the book is how nature uses its weak forces to accomplish this work. It is a small difference in temperature that helps carry billions of tones of water from ocean surfaces over thousands of miles to dump it as rainfall. If we understood the ways of nature, we would shift to weaker sources of energy like solar or move to using rainfall, not wait till rainwater reaches rivers and aquifers. This, the book points out, is in stark contrast to how we have created enormous problems like local air pollution and global climate change by making use of energy sources such as coal and oil. "Late environmentalist Anil Agarwal used to say that humans have come to rely much more on concentrated water sources like rivers and aquifers in the past 100 years. But heavy use of these sources is leading to their overexploitation," adds Narain.

The book tries to convey that an increased understanding of the monsoon will lead us on a developmental trajectory that is more sustainable and equitable. As we increasingly become a water-stressed country, the answer does not lie in moving away from the monsoon. In fact it requires a deeper engagement with it and celebrating this interdependence. For a country like India where the bulk of agriculture still remains rain-fed, Narain underscores that, "The monsoon is and will remain India's true finance minister. I believe, instead of wanting to reduce dependence we should celebrate and deepen our engagement with the monsoon. Our monsoon lexicon must expand so that we harvest the rain – every drop of it where and when it falls. This must be the national obsession, treasuring the value of each raindrop."

- For more information on the book, or to purchase it, go to the following link:
<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/reviews/monsoon-55459>
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