

# UNIT III

## ***CLIMATE, VEGETATION AND SOIL***

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*This unit deals with*

- *Weather and climate – spatial and temporal distribution of temperature, pressure, winds and rainfall; Indian monsoons: mechanism, onset and variability – spatial and temporal; climatic types*
- *Natural vegetation – forest types and distribution; wild life conservation; biosphere reserves*
- *Soils – major types and their distribution, soil degradation and conservation*

## CLIMATE

### CHAPTER

# 4

**W**e drink more water during summers. Your uniform during the summer is different from the winters. Why do you wear lighter clothes during summers and heavy woollen clothes during winters in north India? In southern India, woollen clothes are not required. In northeastern states, winters are mild except in the hills. There are variations in weather conditions during different seasons. These changes occur due to the changes in the elements of weather (temperature, pressure, wind direction and velocity, humidity and precipitation, etc.).

Weather is the momentary state of the atmosphere while climate refers to the average of the weather conditions over a longer period of time. Weather changes quickly, may be within a day or week but climate changes imperceptively and may be noted after 50 years or even more.

You have already studied about the monsoon in your earlier classes. You are also aware of the meaning of the word, “monsoon”. Monsoon connotes the climate associated with seasonal reversal in the direction of winds. India has hot monsoonal climate which is the prevalent climate in south and southeast Asia.

### UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE MONSOON CLIMATE

The monsoon regime emphasises the unity of India with the rest of southeast Asian region. This view of broad unity of the monsoon type of climate should not, however, lead one to ignore its regional variations which differentiate

the weather and climate of different regions of India. For example, the climate of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the south are so different from that of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the north, and yet all of these have a monsoon type of climate. The climate of India has many regional variations expressed in the pattern of winds, temperature and rainfall, rhythm of seasons and the degree of wetness or dryness. These regional diversities may be described as sub-types of monsoon climate. Let us take a closer look at these regional variations in temperature, winds and rainfall.

While in the summer the mercury occasionally touches 55°C in the western Rajasthan, it drops down to as low as minus 45°C in winter around Leh. Churu in Rajasthan may record a temperature of 50°C or more on a June day while the mercury hardly touches 19°C in Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh) on the same day. On a December night, temperature in Drass (Jammu and Kashmir) may drop down to minus 45°C while Thiruvananthapuram or Chennai on the same night records 20°C or 22°C. These examples confirm that there are seasonal variations in temperature from place to place and from region to region in India. Not only this, if we take only a single place and record the temperature for just one day, variations are no less striking. In Kerala and in the Andaman Islands, the difference between day and night temperatures may be hardly seven or eight degree Celsius. But in the Thar desert, if the day temperature is around 50°C, at night, it may drop down considerably upto 15°-20°C.

Now, let us see the regional variations in precipitation. While snowfall occurs in the Himalayas, it only rains over the rest of the country. Similarly, variations are noticeable not only in the type of precipitation but also in its amount. While Cherrapunji and Mawsynram in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya receive rainfall over 1,080 cm in a year, Jaisalmer in Rajasthan rarely gets more than 9 cm of rainfall during the same period.

Tura situated in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya may receive an amount of rainfall in a single day which is equal to 10 years of rainfall at Jaisalmer. While the annual precipitation is less than 10 cm in the north-west Himalayas and the western deserts, it exceeds 400 cm in Meghalaya.

The Ganga delta and the coastal plains of Orissa are hit by strong rain-bearing storms almost every third or fifth day in July and August while the Coromandal coast, a thousand km to the south, goes generally dry during these months. Most parts of the country get rainfall during June-September, but on the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu, it rains in the beginning of the winter season.

In spite of these differences and variations, the climate of India is monsoonal in rhythm and character.

### **FACTORS DETERMINING THE CLIMATE OF INDIA**

India's climate is controlled by a number of factors which can be broadly divided into two groups — factors related to location and relief, and factors related to air pressure and winds.

#### **Factors related to Location and Relief**

*Latitude* : You already know the latitudinal and longitudinal extent of the land of India. You also know that the Tropic of Cancer passes through the central part of India in east-west direction. Thus, northern part of the India lies in sub-tropical and temperate zone and the part lying south of the Tropic of Cancer falls in the tropical zone. The tropical zone being nearer to the equator, experiences high temperatures throughout the year with small daily and annual range. Area north of the Tropic of Cancer being away from the equator,

experiences extreme climate with high daily and annual range of temperature.

*The Himalayan Mountains* : The lofty Himalayas in the north along with its extensions act as an effective climatic divide. The towering mountain chain provides an invincible shield to protect the subcontinent from the cold northern winds. These cold and chilly winds originate near the Arctic circle and blow across central and eastern Asia. The Himalayas also trap the monsoon winds, forcing them to shed their moisture within the subcontinent.

*Distribution of Land and Water* : India is flanked by the Indian Ocean on three sides in the south and girdled by a high and continuous mountain-wall in the north. As compared to the landmass, water heats up or cools down slowly. This differential heating of land and sea creates different air pressure zones in different seasons in and around the Indian subcontinent. Difference in air pressure causes reversal in the direction of monsoon winds.

*Distance from the Sea* : With a long coastline, large coastal areas have an equable climate. Areas in the interior of India are far away from the moderating influence of the sea. Such areas have extremes of climate. That is why, the people of Mumbai and the Konkan coast have hardly any idea of extremes of temperature and the seasonal rhythm of weather. On the other hand, the seasonal contrasts in weather at places in the interior of the country such as Delhi, Kanpur and Amritsar affect the entire sphere of life.

*Altitude* : Temperature decreases with height. Due to thin air, places in the mountains are cooler than places on the plains. For example, Agra and Darjiling are located on the same latitude, but temperature of January in Agra is 16°C whereas it is only 4°C in Darjiling.

*Relief* : The physiography or relief of India also affects the temperature, air pressure, direction and speed of wind and the amount and distribution of rainfall. The windward sides of Western Ghats and Assam receive high rainfall

during June-September whereas the southern plateau remains dry due to its leeward situation along the Western Ghats.

### Factors Related to Air Pressure and Wind

To understand the differences in local climates of India, we need to understand the mechanism of the following three factors:

- (i) Distribution of air pressure and winds on the surface of the earth.
- (ii) Upper air circulation caused by factors controlling global weather and the inflow of different air masses and jet streams.
- (iii) Inflow of western cyclones generally known as disturbances during the winter season and tropical depressions during the south-west monsoon period into India, creating weather conditions favourable to rainfall.

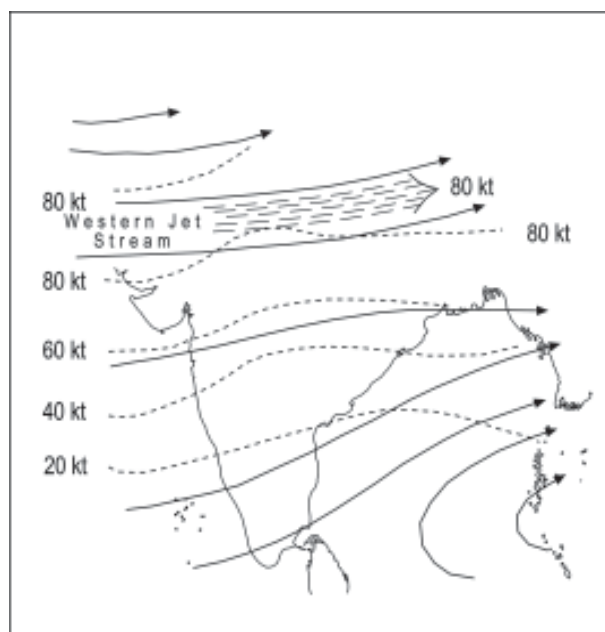
The mechanism of these three factors can be understood with reference to winter and summer seasons of the year separately.

### Mechanism of Weather in the Winter Season

**Surface Pressure and Winds :** In winter months, the weather conditions over India are generally influenced by the distribution of pressure in Central and Western Asia. A high pressure centre in the region lying to the north of the Himalayas develops during winter. This centre of high pressure gives rise to the flow of air at the low level from the north towards the Indian subcontinent, south of the mountain range. The surface winds blowing out of the high pressure centre over Central Asia reach India in the form of a dry continental air mass. These continental winds come in contact with trade winds over northwestern India. The position of this contact zone is not, however, stable. Occasionally, it may shift its position as far east as the middle Ganga valley with the result that the whole of the northwestern and northern India up to the middle Ganga valley comes under the influence of dry northwestern winds.

**Jet Stream and Upper Air Circulation :** The pattern of air circulation discussed above is witnessed only at the lower level of the atmosphere near the surface of the earth. Higher

up in the lower troposphere, about three km above the surface of the earth, a different pattern of air circulation is observed. The variations in the atmospheric pressure closer to the surface of the earth have no role to play in the making of upper air circulation. All of Western and Central Asia remains under the influence of westerly winds along the altitude of 9-13 km from west to east. These winds blow across the Asian continent at latitudes north of the Himalayas roughly parallel to the Tibetan highlands (Figure 4.1). These are known as jet streams. Tibetan highlands act as a barrier in the path of these jet streams. As a result, jet streams get bifurcated. One of its branches blows to the north of the Tibetan highlands, while the southern branch blows in an eastward direction, south of the Himalayas. It has its mean position at 25°N in February at 200-300 mb level. It is believed that this southern branch of the jet stream exercises an important influence on the winter weather in India.



**Figure 4.1 : Direction of Winds in India in Winter at the Height of 9-13 km**

**Western Cyclonic Disturbance and Tropical Cyclones :** The western cyclonic disturbances which enter the Indian subcontinent from the west and the northwest during the winter months, originate over the Mediterranean Sea and are

brought into India by the westerly jet stream. An increase in the prevailing night temperature generally indicates an advance in the arrival of these cyclones disturbances.

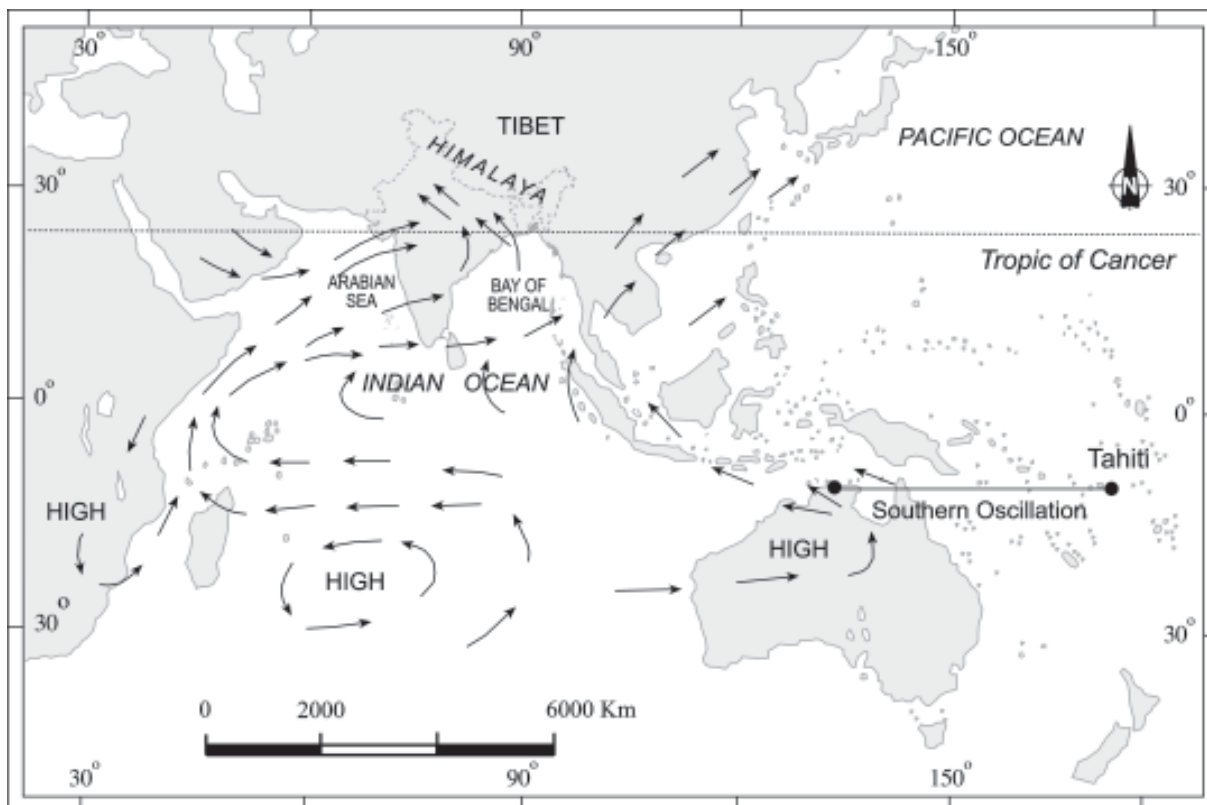
Tropical cyclones originate over the Bay of Bengal and the Indian ocean. These tropical cyclones have very high wind velocity and heavy rainfall and hit the Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa coast. Most of these cyclones are very destructive due to high wind velocity and torrential rain that accompanies it. Have you seen their movement in the weather report in the television?

### **Mechanism of Weather in the Summer Season**

*Surface Pressure and Winds :* As the summer sets in and the sun shifts northwards, the wind circulation over the subcontinent undergoes a complete reversal at both, the lower as well as the upper levels. By the middle of July, the low pressure belt nearer the surface [termed as Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ)]

shifts northwards, roughly parallel to the Himalayas between 20° N and 25° N. By this time, the westerly jet stream withdraws from the Indian region. In fact, meteorologists have found an interrelationship between the northward shift of the equatorial trough (ITCZ) and the withdrawal of the westerly jet stream from over the North Indian Plain. It is generally believed that there is a cause and effect relationship between the two. The ITCZ being a zone of low pressure, attracts inflow of winds from different directions. The maritime tropical airmass (mT) from the southern hemisphere, after crossing the equator, rushes to the low pressure area in the general southwesterly direction. It is this moist air current which is popularly known as the southwest monsoon.

*Jet Streams and Upper Air Circulation :* The pattern of pressure and winds as mentioned above is formed only at the level of the troposphere. An easterly jet stream flows over

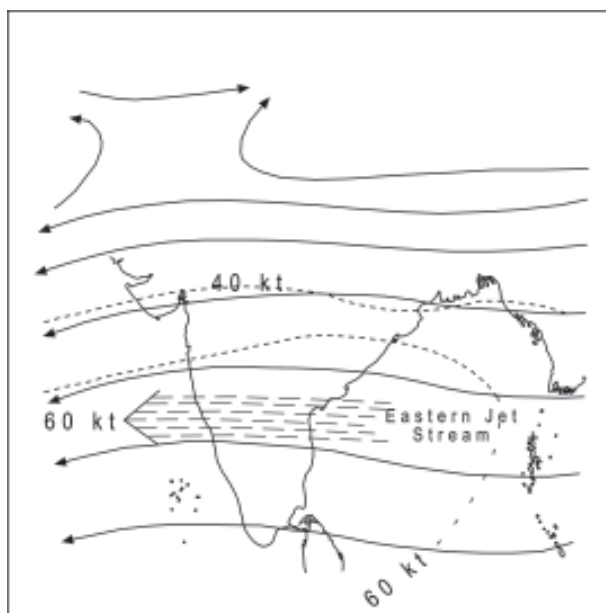


**Figure 4.2 : Summer Monsoon Winds : Surface Circulation**

### Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ)

The Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) is a low pressure zone located at the equator where trade winds converge, and so, it is a zone where air tends to ascend. In July, the ITCZ is located around 20°N-25°N latitudes (over the Gangetic plain), sometimes called the monsoon trough. This monsoon trough encourages the development of thermal low over north and northwest India. Due to the shift of ITCZ, the trade winds of the southern hemisphere cross the equator between 40° and 60°E longitudes and start blowing from southwest to northeast due to the Coriolis force. It becomes southwest monsoon. In winter, the ITCZ moves southward, and so the reversal of winds from northeast to south and southwest, takes place. They are called northeast monsoons.

the southern part of the Peninsula in June, and has a maximum speed of 90 km per hour (Figure 4.3). In August, it is confined to 15°N latitude, and in September up to 22° N latitudes. The easterlies normally do not extend to the north of 30° N latitude in the upper atmosphere.



**Figure 4.3 : The Direction of Winds at 13 km Altitude in Summer Season**

*Easterly Jet Stream and Tropical Cyclones :* The easterly jet stream steers the tropical depressions into India. These depressions play a significant role in the distribution of monsoon rainfall over the Indian subcontinent. The tracks of these depressions are the areas of highest rainfall in India. The frequency at which these depressions visit India, their direction and intensity, all go a long way in determining the rainfall pattern during the southwest monsoon period.

### THE NATURE OF INDIAN MONSOON

Monsoon is a familiar though a little known climatic phenomenon. Despite the observations spread over centuries, the monsoon continues to puzzle the scientists. Many attempts have been made to discover the exact nature and causation of monsoon, but so far, no single theory has been able to explain the monsoon fully. A real breakthrough has come recently when it was studied at the global rather than at regional level.

Systematic studies of the causes of rainfall in the South Asian region help to understand the causes and salient features of the monsoon, particularly some of its important aspects, such as:

- (i) The onset of the monsoon.
- (ii) Rain-bearing systems (e.g. tropical cyclones) and the relationship between their frequency and distribution of monsoon rainfall.
- (iii) Break in the monsoon.

### Onset of the Monsoon

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was believed that the differential heating of land and sea during the summer months is the mechanism which sets the stage for the monsoon winds to drift towards the subcontinent. During April and May when the sun shines vertically over the Tropic of Cancer, the large landmass in the north of Indian ocean gets intensely heated. This causes the formation of an intense low pressure in the northwestern part of the subcontinent. Since the pressure in the Indian Ocean in the south of the landmass is high as water gets heated



**Figure 4.4 : Onset of Monsoon**

slowly, the low pressure cell attracts the southeast trades across the Equator. These conditions help in the northward shift in the position of the ITCZ. The southwest monsoon may thus, be seen as a continuation of the southeast trades deflected towards the Indian subcontinent after crossing the Equator. These winds cross the Equator between 40°E and 60°E longitudes.

The shift in the position of the ITCZ is also related to the phenomenon of the withdrawal of the westerly jet stream from its position over the north Indian plain, south of the Himalayas. The easterly jet stream sets in along 15°N latitude only after the western jet stream has withdrawn itself from the region. This easterly jet stream is held responsible for the burst of the monsoon in India.

*Entry of Monsoon into India :* The southwest monsoon sets in over the Kerala coast by 1st June and moves swiftly to reach Mumbai and Kolkata between 10th and 13th June. By mid-July, southwest monsoon engulfs the entire subcontinent (Figure 4.5)

### **Rain-bearing Systems and Rainfall Distribution**

There seem to be two rain-bearing systems in India. First originate in the Bay of Bengal causing rainfall over the plains of north India. Second is the Arabian Sea current of the southwest monsoon which brings rain to the west coast of India. Much of the rainfall along the Western Ghats is orographic as the moist air is obstructed and forced to rise along the Ghats. The intensity of rainfall over the west coast of India is, however, related to two factors:

- (i) The offshore meteorological conditions.
- (ii) The position of the equatorial jet stream along the eastern coast of Africa.

### **El-Nino and the Indian Monsoon**

El-Nino is a complex weather system that appears once every three to seven years, bringing drought, floods and other weather extremes to different parts of the world.

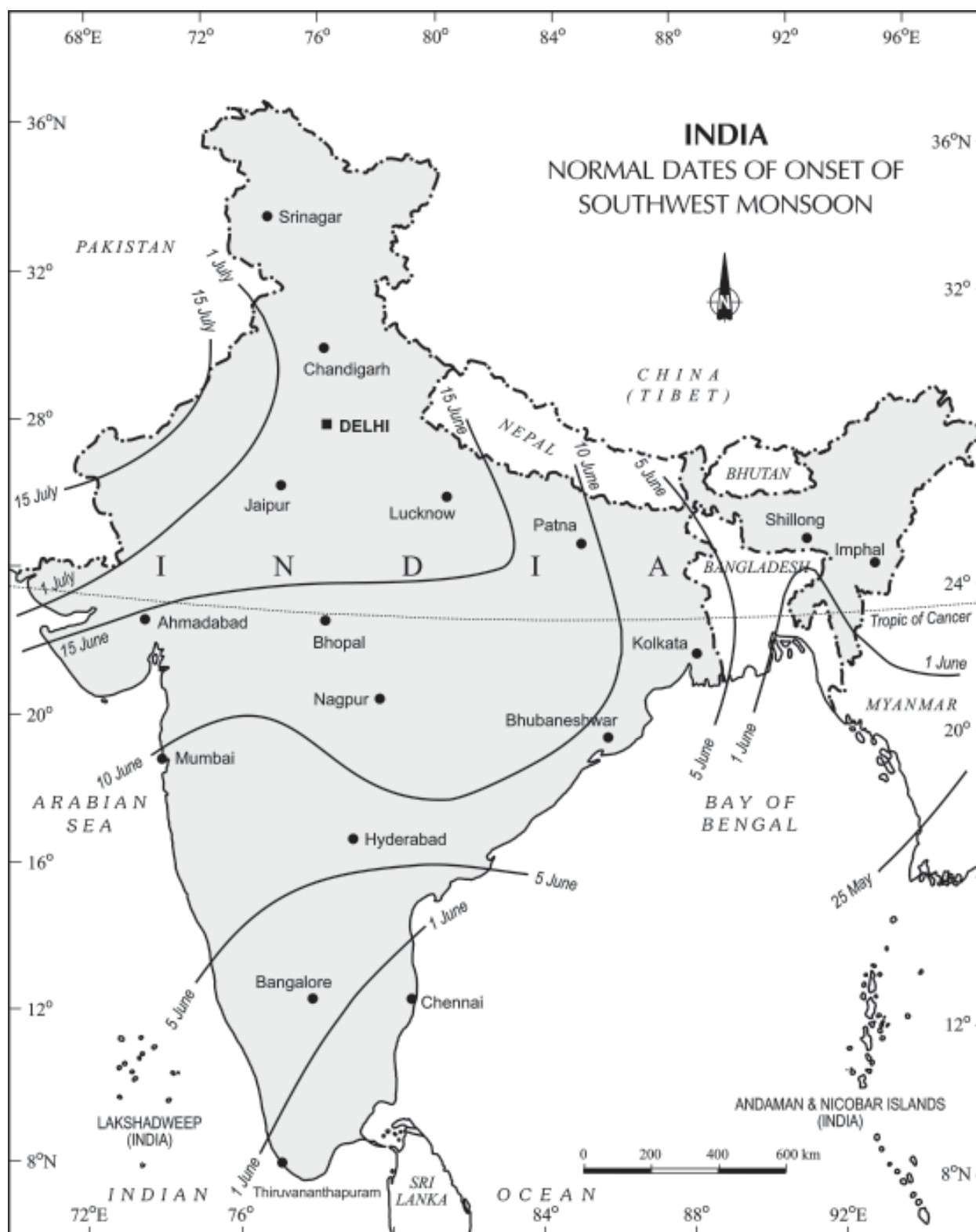
The system involves oceanic and atmospheric phenomena with the appearance of warm currents off the coast of Peru in the Eastern Pacific and affects weather in many places including India. El-Nino is merely an extension of the warm equatorial current which gets replaced temporarily by cold Peruvian current or Humbolt current (locate these currents in your atlas). This current increases the temperature of water on the Peruvian coast by 10°C. This results in:

- (i) the distortion of equatorial atmospheric circulation;
- (ii) irregularities in the evaporation of sea water;
- (iii) reduction in the amount of planktons which further reduces the number of fish in the sea.

The word El-Nino means 'Child Christ' because this current appears around Christmas in December. December is a summer month in Peru (Southern Hemisphere).

El-Nino is used in India for forecasting long range monsoon rainfall. In 1990-91, there was a wild El-Nino event and the onset of southwest monsoon was delayed over most parts of the country ranging from five to twelve days.





**Figure 4.5 : India : Normal Dates of Onset of the Southwest Monsoon**



The frequency of the tropical depressions originating from the Bay of Bengal varies from year to year. Their paths over India are mainly determined by the position of ITCZ which is generally termed as the monsoon trough. As the axis of the monsoon trough oscillates, there are fluctuations in the track and direction of these depressions, and the intensity and the amount of rainfall vary from year to year. The rain which comes in spells, displays a declining trend from west to east over the west coast, and from the southeast towards the northwest over the North Indian Plain and the northern part of the Peninsula.

### Break in the Monsoon

During the south-west monsoon period after having rains for a few days, if rain fails to occur for one or more weeks, it is known as break in the monsoon. These dry spells are quite common during the rainy season. These breaks in the different regions are due to different reasons:

- (i) In northern India rains are likely to fail if the rain-bearing storms are not very frequent along the monsoon trough or the ITCZ over this region.
- (ii) Over the west coast the dry spells are associated with days when winds blow parallel to the coast.

### THE RHYTHM OF SEASONS

The climatic conditions of India can best be described in terms of an annual cycle of seasons. The meteorologists recognise the following four seasons :

- (i) the cold weather season
- (ii) the hot weather season
- (iii) the southwest monsoon season
- (iv) the retreating monsoon season.

### The Cold Weather Season

**Temperature :** Usually, the cold weather season sets in by mid-November in northern India. December and January are the coldest months in the northern plain. The mean daily temperature remains below 21°C over most parts of northern India. The night temperature

may be quite low, sometimes going below freezing point in Punjab and Rajasthan.

There are three main reasons for the excessive cold in north India during this season :

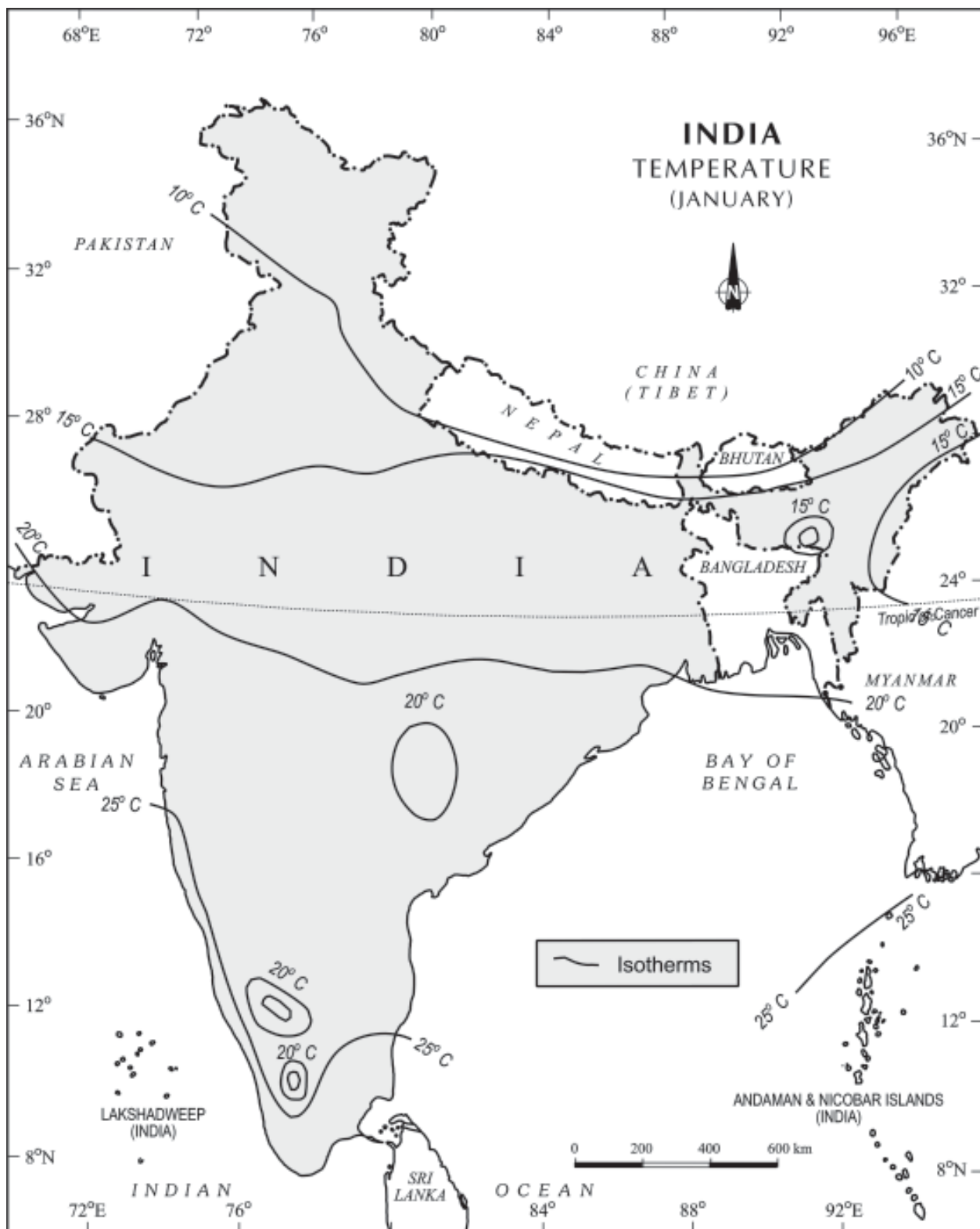
- (i) States like Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan being far away from the moderating influence of sea experience continental climate.
- (ii) The snowfall in the nearby Himalayan ranges creates cold wave situation; and
- (iii) Around February, the cold winds coming from the Caspian Sea and Turkmenistan bring cold wave along with frost and fog over the northwestern parts of India.

#### Understanding the Monsoon

Attempts have been made to understand the nature and mechanism of the monsoon on the basis of data collected on land, oceans and in the upper atmosphere. The intensity of southwest monsoon winds of southern oscillation can be measured, among others, by measuring the difference in pressure between Tahiti (roughly 20°S and 140°W) in French Polynesia in East Pacific and port Darwin (12°30'S and 131°E) in northern Australia. Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) can forecast the possible behaviour of monsoons on the basis of 16 indicators.

The Peninsular region of India, however, does not have any well-defined cold weather season. There is hardly any seasonal change in the distribution pattern of the temperature in coastal areas because of moderating influence of the sea and the proximity to equator. For example, the mean maximum temperature for January at Thiruvananthapuram is as high as 31°C, and for June, it is 29.5°C. Temperatures at the hills of Western Ghats remain comparatively low (Figure 4.6).

**Pressure and Winds :** By the end of December (22nd December), the sun shines vertically over the Tropic of Capricorn in the southern hemisphere. The weather in this season is characterised by feeble high pressure conditions over the northern plain. In south



**Figure 4.6 : India : Mean Monthly Temperatures of the Day in January**

India, the air pressure is slightly lower. The isobars of 1019 mb and 1013 mb pass through northwest India and far south, respectively (Figure 4.7).

As a result, winds start blowing from northwestern high pressure zone to the low air pressure zone over the Indian Ocean in the south.

Due to low pressure gradient, the light winds with a low velocity of about 3-5 km per hour begin to blow outwards. By and large, the topography of the region influences the wind direction. They are westerly or northwesterly down the Ganga Valley. They become northerly in the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta. Free from the influence of topography, they are clearly northeasterly over the Bay of Bengal.

During the winters, the weather in India is pleasant. The pleasant weather conditions, however, at intervals, get disturbed by shallow cyclonic depressions originating over the east Mediterranean Sea and travelling eastwards across West Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan before they reach the northwestern parts of India. On their way, the moisture content gets augmented from the Caspian Sea in the north and the Persian Gulf in the south. What is the role of Westerly Jet Streams in steering these depressions in India?

**Rainfall :** Winter monsoons do not cause rainfall as they move from land to the sea. It is because firstly, they have little humidity; and secondly, due to anti cyclonic circulation on land, the possibility of rainfall from them reduces. So, most parts of India do not have rainfall in the winter season. However, there are some exceptions to it:

- (i) In northwestern India, some weak temperate cyclones from the Mediterranean sea cause rainfall in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and western Uttar Pradesh. Although the amount is meagre, it is highly beneficial for rabi crops. The precipitation is in the form of snowfall in the lower Himalayas. It is this snow that sustains the flow of water in the

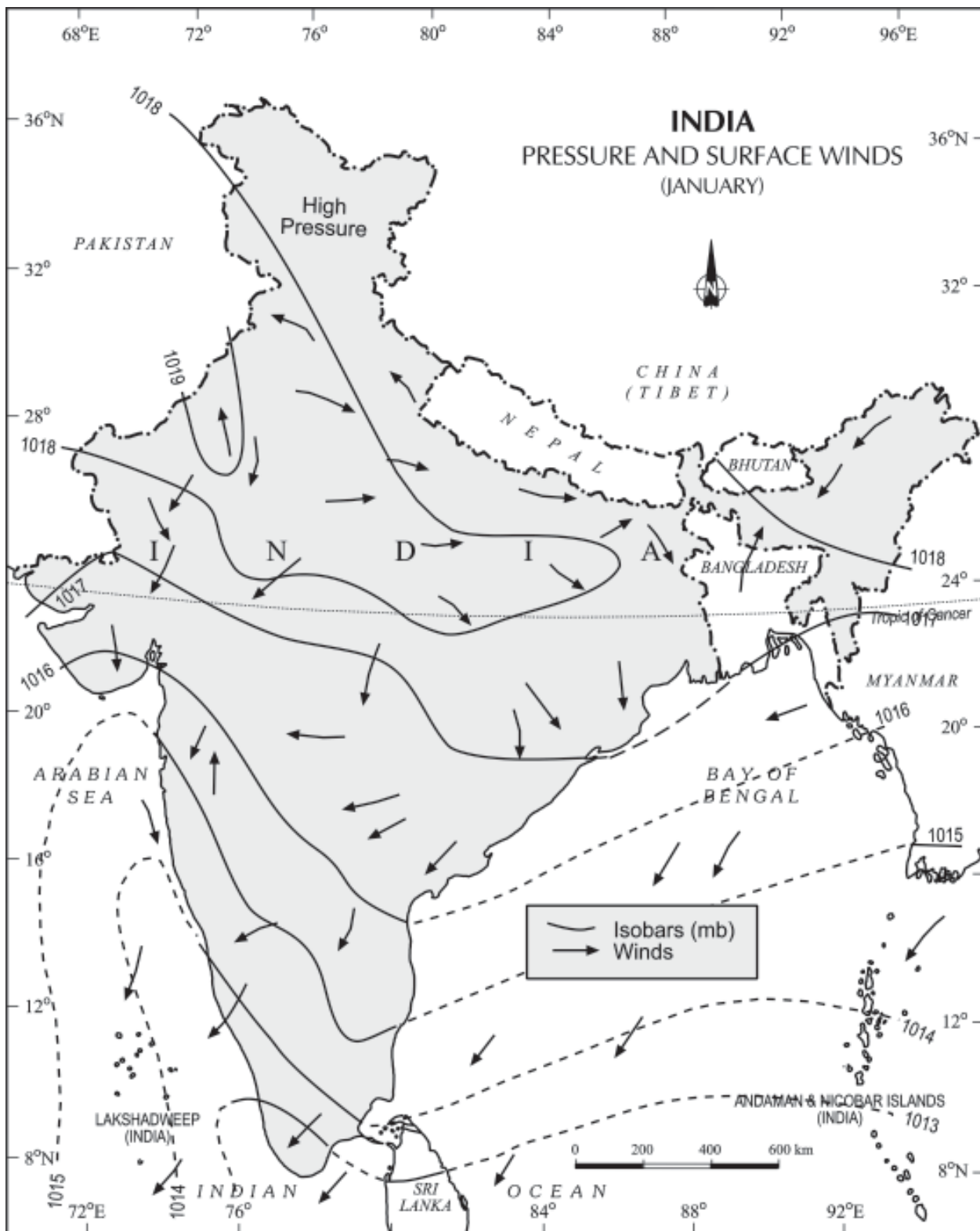
Himalayan rivers during the summer months. The precipitation goes on decreasing from west to east in the plains and from north to south in the mountains. The average winter rainfall in Delhi is around 53 mm. In Punjab and Bihar, rainfall remains between 25 mm and 18 mm respectively.

- (ii) Central parts of India and northern parts of southern Peninsula also get winter rainfall occasionally.
- (iii) Arunachal Pradesh and Assam in the northeastern parts of India also have rains between 25 mm and 50 mm during these winter months.
- (iv) During October and November, northeast monsoon while crossing over the Bay of Bengal, picks up moisture and causes torrential rainfall over the Tamil Nadu coast, southern Andhra Pradesh, southeast Karnataka and southeast Kerala.

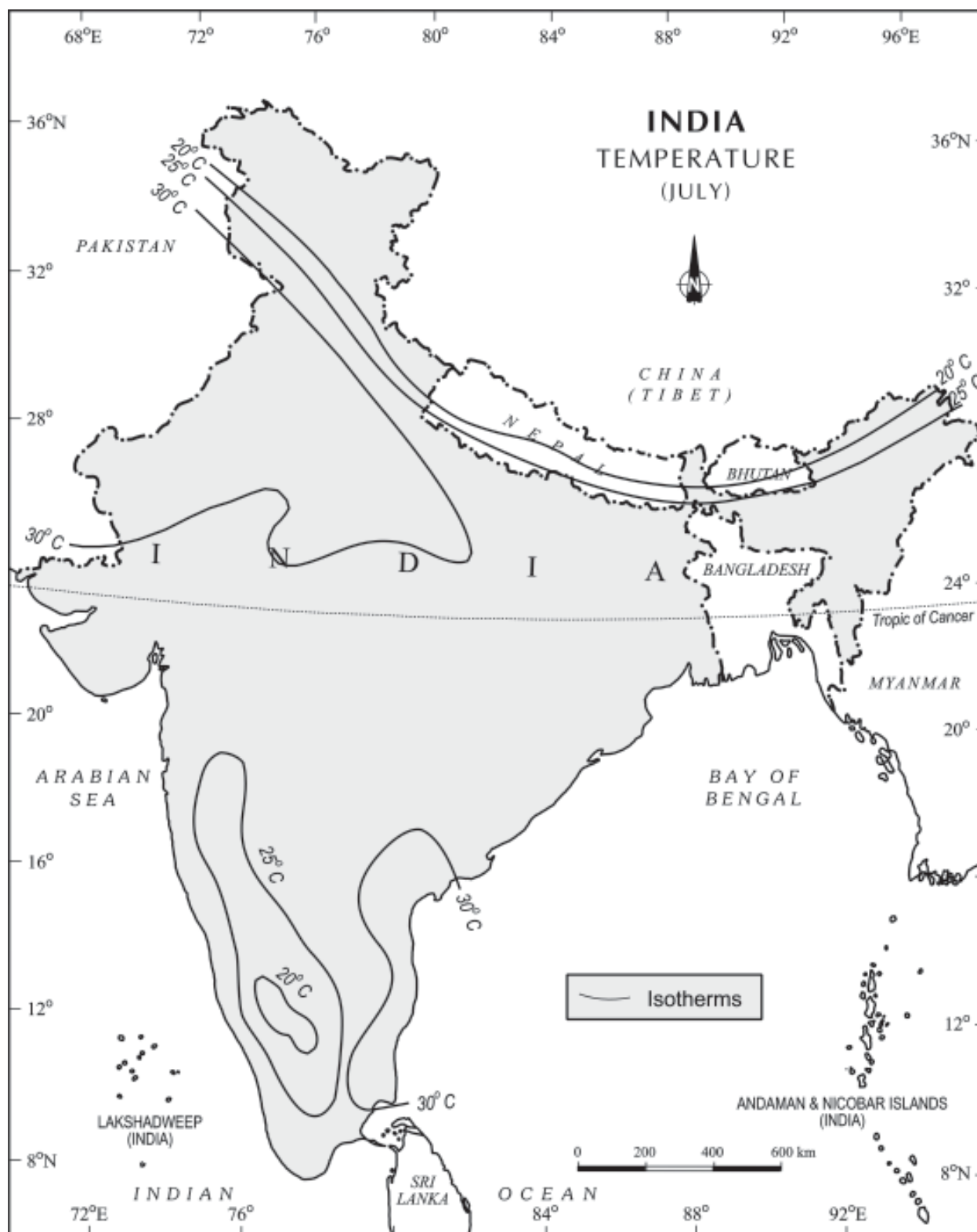
### **The Hot Weather Season**

**Temperature:** With the apparent northward movement of the sun towards the Tropic of Cancer in March, temperatures start rising in north India. April, May and June are the months of summer in north India. In most parts of India, temperatures recorded are between 30°-32°C. In March, the highest day temperature of about 38°C occurs in the Deccan Plateau while in April, temperature ranging between 38°C and 43°C are found in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. In May, the heat belt moves further north, and in the north-western part of India, temperatures around 48°C are not uncommon (Figure 4.8).

The hot weather season in south India is mild and not so intense as found in north India. The Peninsular situation of south India with moderating effect of the oceans keeps the temperatures lower than that prevailing in north India. So, temperatures remain between 26°C and 32°C. Due to altitude, the temperatures in the hills of Western Ghats remain below 25°C. In the coastal regions, the north-south extent of



**Figure 4.7 : India : Pressure and Surface Winds (January)**



**Figure 4.8 : India : Mean Monthly Temperature of the Day in July**

isotherms parallel to the coast confirms that temperature does not decrease from north to south rather it increases from the coast to the interior. The mean daily minimum temperature during the summer months also remains quite high and rarely goes below 26°C.

**Pressure and Winds :** The summer months are a period of excessive heat and falling air pressure in the northern half of the country. Because of the heating of the subcontinent, the ITCZ moves northwards occupying a position centred at 25°N in July. Roughly, this elongated low pressure monsoon trough extends over the Thar desert in the north-west to Patna and Chotanagpur plateau in the east-southeast (Figure 4.9). The location of the ITCZ attracts a surface circulation of the winds which are southwesterly on the west coast as well as along the coast of West Bengal and Bangladesh. They are easterly or southeasterly over north Bengal and Bihar. It has been discussed earlier that these currents of southwesterly monsoon are in reality 'displaced' equatorial westerlies. The influx of these winds by mid-June brings about a change in the weather towards the rainy season.

In the heart of the ITCZ in the northwest, the dry and hot winds known as '*Loo*', blow in the afternoon, and very often, they continue to well into midnight. Dust storms in the evening are very common during May in Punjab, Haryana, Eastern Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. These temporary storms bring a welcome respite from the oppressing heat since they bring with them light rains and a pleasant cool breeze. Occasionally, the moisture-laden winds are attracted towards the periphery of the trough. A sudden contact between dry and moist air masses gives rise to local storms of great intensity. These local storms are associated with violent winds, torrential rains and even hailstorms.

#### Some Famous Local Storms of Hot Weather Season

- (i) *Mango Shower* : Towards the end of summer, there are pre-monsoon showers which are a common phenomena in Kerala and coastal areas of Karnataka. Locally, they are known as mango showers since they help in the early ripening of mangoes.
- (ii) *Blossom Shower* : With this shower, coffee flowers blossom in Kerala and nearby areas.
- (iii) *Nor Westers* : These are dreaded evening thunderstorms in Bengal and Assam. Their notorious nature can be understood from the local nomenclature of '*Kalbaisakhi*', a calamity of the month of *Baisakh*. These showers are useful for tea, jute and rice cultivation. In Assam, these storms are known as "*Bardoli Chheerha*".
- (iv) *Loo* : Hot, dry and oppressing winds blowing in the Northern plains from Punjab to Bihar with higher intensity between Delhi and Patna.

#### THE SOUTHWEST MONSOON SEASON

As a result of rapid increase of temperature in May over the northwestern plains, the low pressure conditions over there get further intensified. By early June, they are powerful enough to attract the trade winds of Southern Hemisphere coming from the Indian Ocean. These southeast trade winds cross the equator and enter the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, only to be caught up in the air circulation over India. Passing over the equatorial warm currents, they bring with them moisture in abundance. After crossing the equator, they follow a southwesterly direction. That is why they are known as southwest monsoons.

The rain in the southwest monsoon season begins rather abruptly. One result of the first rain is that it brings down the temperature substantially. This sudden onset of the moisture-laden winds associated with violent thunder and lightening, is often termed as the "break" or "burst" of the

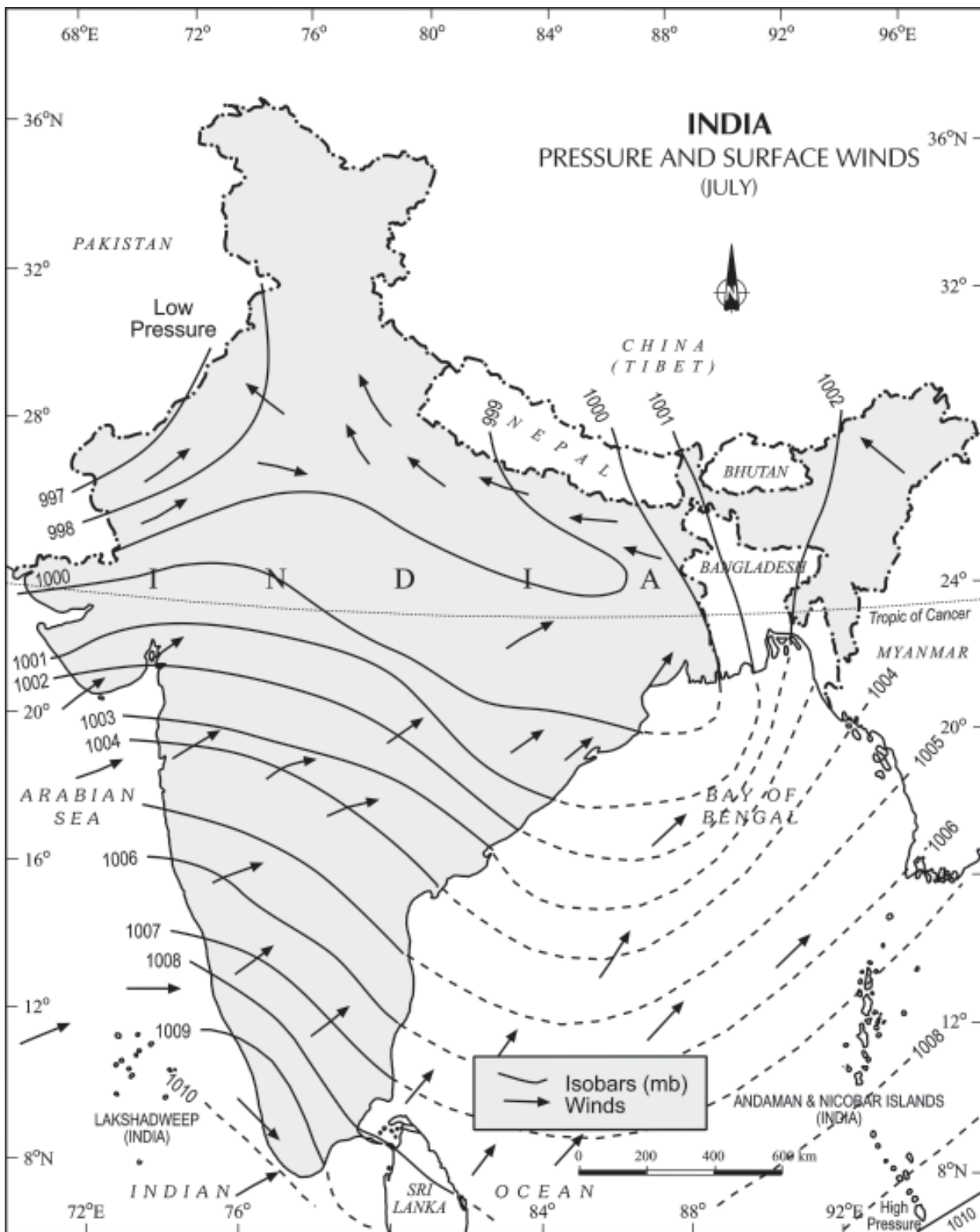


Figure 4.9 : India : Pressure and Surface Winds (July)



monsoons. The monsoon may burst in the first week of June in the coastal areas of Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra while in the interior parts of the country, it may be delayed to the first week of July. The day temperature registers a decline of 5°C to 8°C between mid-June and mid-July.

As these winds approach the land, their southwesterly direction is modified by the relief and thermal low pressure over the northwest India. The monsoon approaches the landmass in two branches:

- (i) The Arabian Sea branch
- (ii) The Bay of Bengal branch.

### **Monsoon Winds of the Arabian Sea**

The monsoon winds originating over the Arabian Sea further split into three branches:

- (i) Its one branch is obstructed by the Western Ghats. These winds climb the slopes of the Western Ghats from 900-1200 m. Soon, they become cool, and as a result, the windward side of the Sahyadris and Western Coastal Plain receive very heavy rainfall ranging between 250 cm and 400 cm. After crossing the Western Ghats, these winds descend and get heated up. This reduces humidity in the winds. As a result, these winds cause little rainfall east of the Western Ghats. This region of low rainfall is known as the rain-shadow area. Find out the rainfall at Kozhikode, Mangalore, Pune and Bengaluru and note the difference (Figure 4.10).
- (ii) Another branch of the Arabian sea monsoon strikes the coast north of Mumbai. Moving along the Narmada and Tapi river valleys, these winds cause rainfall in extensive areas of central India. The Chotanagpur plateau gets 15 cm rainfall from this part of the branch. Thereafter, they enter the Ganga plains and mingle with the Bay of Bengal branch.
- (iii) A third branch of this monsoon wind strikes the Saurashtra Peninsula and the Kachchh. It then passes over west Rajasthan and along the Aravalis, causing only a scanty rainfall. In Punjab

and Haryana, it too joins the Bay of Bengal branch. These two branches, reinforced by each other, cause rains in the western Himalayas,

### **Monsoon Winds of the Bay of Bengal**

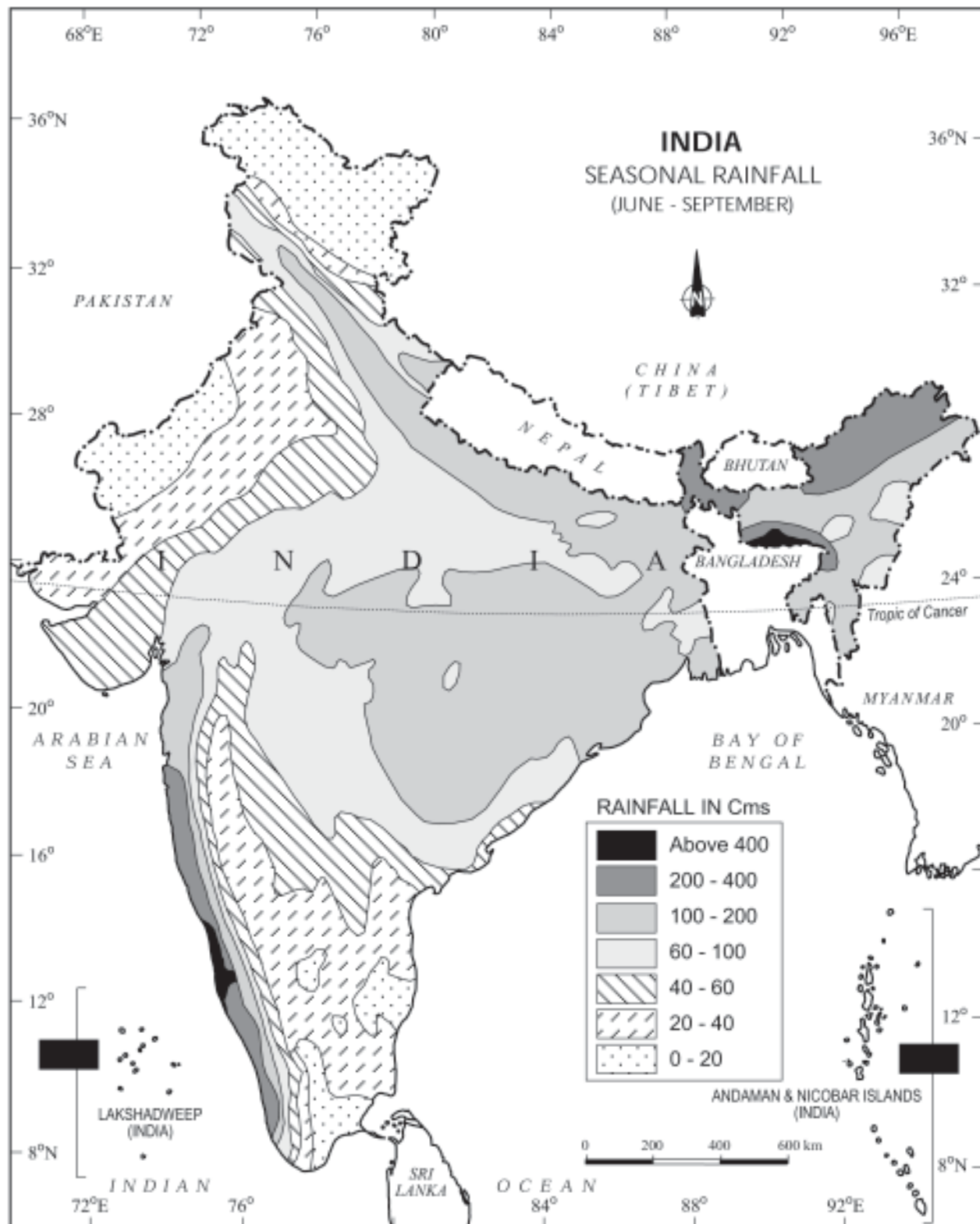
The Bay of Bengal branch strikes the coast of Myanmar and part of southeast Bangladesh. But the Arakan Hills along the coast of Myanmar deflect a big portion of this branch towards the Indian subcontinent. The monsoon, therefore, enters West Bengal and Bangladesh from south and southeast instead of from the south-westerly direction. From here, this branch splits into two under the influence of the Himalayas and the thermal low is northwest India. Its one branch moves westward along the Ganga plains reaching as far as the Punjab plains. The other branch moves up the Brahmaputra valley in the north and the northeast, causing widespread rains. Its sub-branch strikes the Garo and Khasi hills of Meghalaya. Mawsynram, located on the crest of Khasi hills, receives the highest average annual rainfall in the world.

Here it is important to know why the Tamil Nadu coast remains dry during this season. There are two factors responsible for it:

- (i) The Tamil Nadu coast is situated parallel to the Bay of Bengal branch of southwest monsoon.
- (ii) It lies in the rainshadow area of the Arabian Sea branch of the south-west monsoon.

### **Characteristics of Monsoonal Rainfall**

- (i) Rainfall received from the southwest monsoons is seasonal in character, which occurs between June and September.
- (ii) Monsoonal rainfall is largely governed by relief or topography. For instance the windward side of the Western Ghats register a rainfall of over 250 cm. Again, the heavy rainfall in the north-eastern states can be attributed to their hill ranges and the Eastern Himalayas.



**Figure 4.10 : India : Seasonal Rainfall (June-September)**

- (iii) The monsoon rainfall has a declining trend with increasing distance from the sea. Kolkata receives 119 cm during the southwest monsoon period, Patna 105 cm, Allahabad 76 cm and Delhi 56 cm.
- (iv) The monsoon rains occur in wet spells of few days duration at a time. The wet spells are interspersed with rainless interval known as 'breaks'. These breaks in rainfall are related to the cyclonic depressions mainly formed at the head of the Bay of Bengal, and their crossing into the mainland. Besides the frequency and intensity of these depressions, the passage followed by them determines the spatial distribution of rainfall.
- (v) The summer rainfall comes in a heavy downpour leading to considerable run off and soil erosion.
- (vi) Monsoons play a pivotal role in the agrarian economy of India because over three-fourths of the total rain in the country is received during the south-west monsoon season.
- (vii) Its spatial distribution is also uneven which ranges from 12 cm to more than 250 cm.
- (viii) The beginning of the rains sometimes is considerably delayed over the whole or a part of the country.
- (ix) The rains sometimes end considerably earlier than usual, causing great damage to standing crops and making the sowing of winter crops difficult.

### Season of Retreating Monsoon

The months of October and November are known for retreating monsoons. By the end of September, the southwest monsoon becomes weak as the low pressure trough of the Ganga plain starts moving southward in response to the southward march of the sun. The monsoon retreats from the western Rajasthan by the first week of September. It withdraws from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Western Ganga plain and the Central Highlands by the end of the month. By the beginning of October, the low pressure covers northern parts of the Bay of Bengal and by early November, it moves

over Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. By the middle of December, the centre of low pressure is completely removed from the Peninsula.

The retreating southwest monsoon season is marked by clear skies and rise in temperature. The land is still moist. Owing to the conditions of high temperature and humidity, the weather becomes rather oppressive. This is commonly known as the 'October heat'. In the second half of October, the mercury begins to fall rapidly, particularly in northern India. The weather in the retreating monsoon is dry in north India but it is associated with rain in the eastern part of the Peninsula. Here, October and November are the rainiest months of the year.

The widespread rain in this season is associated with the passage of cyclonic depressions which originate over the Andaman Sea and manage to cross the eastern coast of the southern Peninsula. These tropical cyclones are very destructive. The thickly populated deltas of the Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri are their preferred targets. Every year cyclones bring disaster here. A few cyclonic storms also strike the coast of West Bengal, Bangladesh and Myanmar. A bulk of the rainfall of the Coromondal coast is derived from these depressions and cyclones. Such cyclonic storms are less frequent in the Arabian Sea.

### TRADITIONAL INDIAN SEASONS

In the Indian tradition, a year is divided into six two-monthly seasons. This cycle of seasons, which the common people in north and central India follow is based on their practical experience and age-old perception of weather phenomena. However, this system does not match with the seasons of south India where there is little variation in the seasons.

| Seasons  | Months<br>(According to the<br>Indian Calendar) | Months<br>(According to the<br>Indian Calendar) |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Vasanta  | Chaitra-Vaisakha                                | March-April                                     |
| Grishma  | Jyaistha-Asadha                                 | May-June                                        |
| Varsha   | Sravana-Bhadra                                  | July-August                                     |
| Sharada  | Asvina-Kartika                                  | September-October                               |
| Hemanta  | Margashirsa-Pausa                               | November-December                               |
| Shishira | Magha-Phalguna                                  | January-February                                |

### Distribution of Rainfall

The average annual rainfall in India is about 125 cm, but it has great spatial variations (Figure 4.11).

*Areas of High Rainfall* : The highest rainfall occurs along the west coast, on the Western Ghats, as well as in the sub-Himalayan areas in the northeast and the hills of Meghalaya. Here the rainfall exceeds 200 cm. In some parts of Khasi and Jaintia hills, the rainfall exceeds 1,000 cm. In the Brahmaputra valley and the adjoining hills, the rainfall is less than 200 cm.

*Areas of Medium Rainfall* : Rainfall between 100-200 cm is received in the southern parts of Gujarat, east Tamil Nadu, northeastern Peninsula covering Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, eastern Madhya Pradesh, northern Ganga plain along the sub-Himalayas and the Cachar Valley and Manipur.

*Areas of Low Rainfall* : Western Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, eastern Rajasthan, Gujarat and Deccan Plateau receive rainfall between 50-100 cm.

*Areas of Inadequate Rainfall*: Parts of the Peninsula, especially in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra, Ladakh and most of western Rajasthan receive rainfall below 50 cm.

Snowfall is restricted to the Himalayan region.

Identify the pattern of rainfall after consulting the rainfall map.

### Variability of Rainfall

A characteristic feature of rainfall in India is its variability. The variability of rainfall is computed with the help of the following formula:

$$C.V. = \frac{\text{Standard Deviation}}{\text{Mean}} \times 100$$

where C.V. is the coefficient of variation.

The values of coefficient of variation show the change from the mean values of rainfall. The actual rainfall in some places deviates from 20-50 per cent. The values of coefficient of variation show variability of rainfall in India. A variability of less than 25 per cent exists on the western coasts, Western Ghats, northeastern

Peninsula, eastern plains of the Ganga, north-eastern India, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh and south-western part of Jammu and Kashmir. These areas have an annual rainfall of over 100 cm. A variability of over 50 per cent exists in the western part of Rajasthan, northern part of Jammu and Kashmir and interior parts of the Deccan plateau. These areas have an annual rainfall of less than 50 cm. Rest of India have a variability of 25-50 per cent and these areas receive an annual rainfall between 50 -100 cm (Figure 4.12).

### Climatic Regions of India

The whole of India has a monsoon type of climate. But the combination of elements of the weather, however, reveal many regional variations. These variations represent the sub-types of the monsoon climate. It is on this basis that the climatic regions can be identified. A climatic region has a homogeneous climatic condition which is the result of a combination of factors. Temperature and rainfall are two important elements which are considered to be decisive in all the schemes of climatic classification. The classification of climate, however, is a complex exercise. There are different schemes of classification of climate. Major climatic types of India based on Koeppen's scheme have been described below:

Koeppen based his scheme of Climatic classification on monthly values of temperature and precipitation. He identified five major climatic types, namely:

- (i) Tropical climates, where mean monthly temperature throughout the year is over 18°C.
- (ii) Dry climates, where precipitation is very low in comparison to temperature, and hence, dry. If dryness is less, it is semi-arid (S); if it is more, the climate is arid(W).
- (iii) Warm temperate climates, where mean temperature of the coldest month is between 18°C and minus 3°C.
- (iv) Cool temperate climates, where mean temperature of the warmest month is over 10°C, and mean temperature of the coldest month is under minus 3°C.
- (v) Ice climates, where mean temperature of the warmest month is under 10°C.

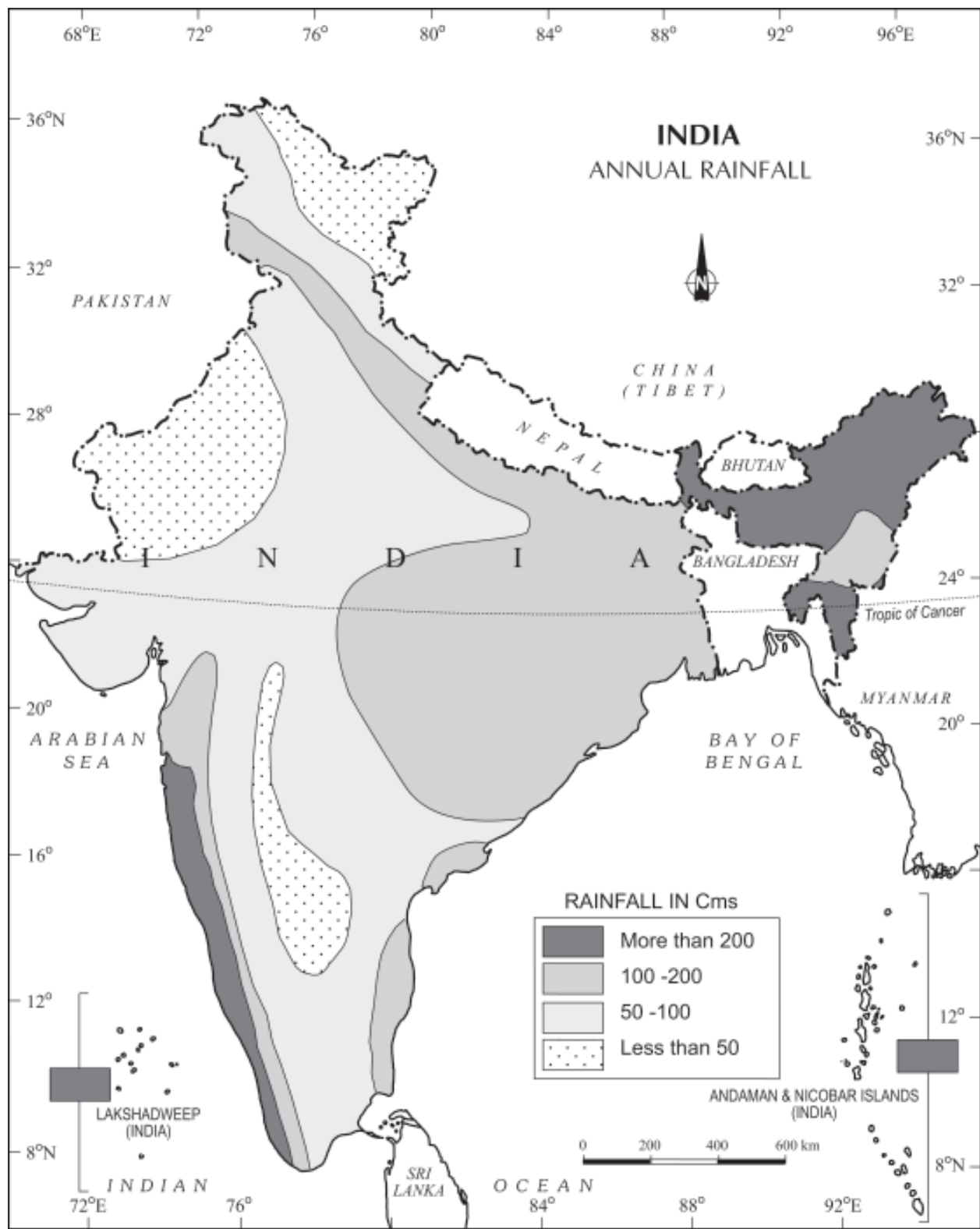
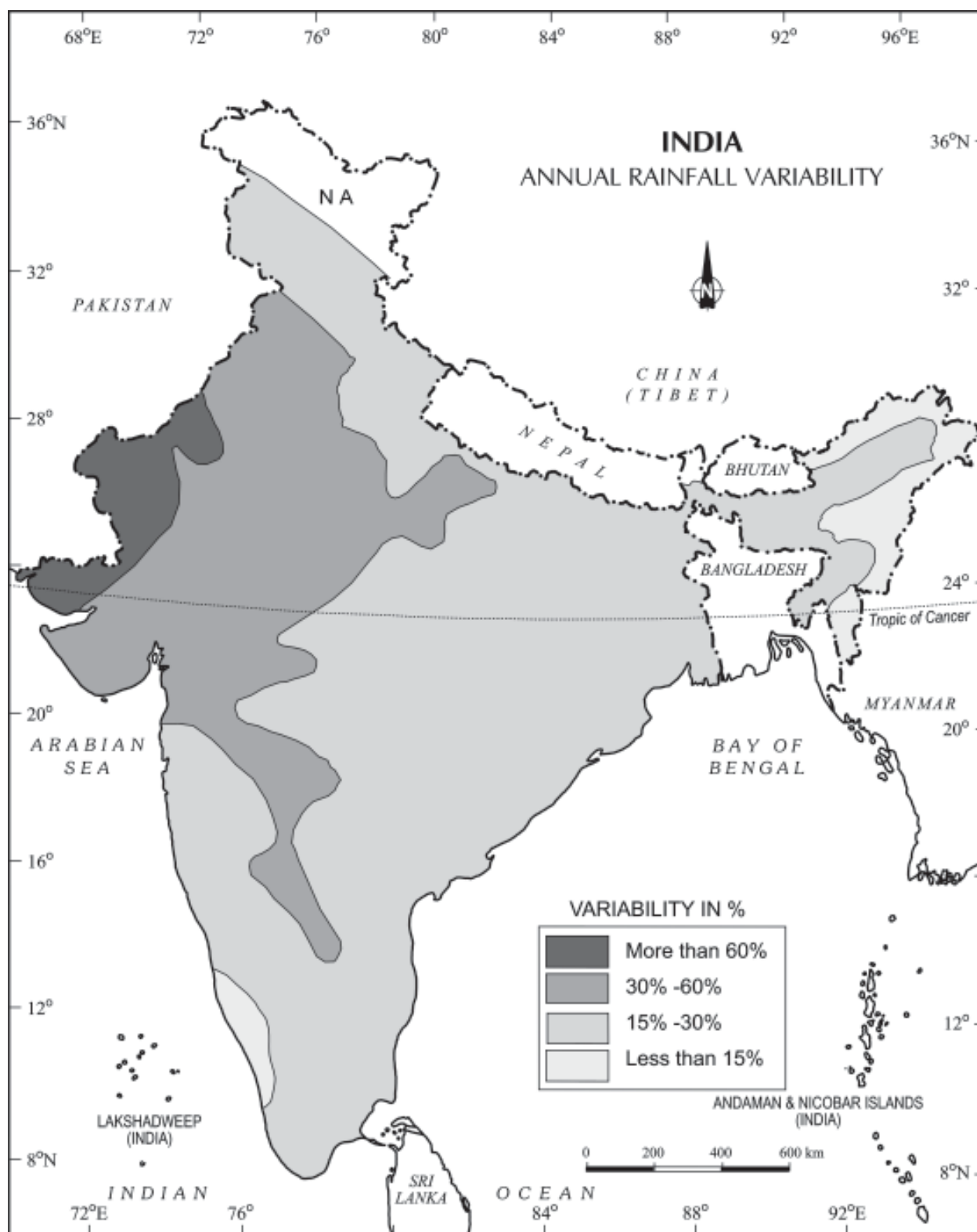


Figure 4.11 : India : Annual Rainfall



**Figure 4.12 : India : Variability of Annual Rainfall**



Koeppen used letter symbols to denote climatic types as given above. Each type is further sub-divided into sub-types on the basis of seasonal variations in the distributional pattern of rainfall and temperature. He used S for semi-arid and W for arid and the following small letters to define sub-types: f (sufficient precipitation), m (rain forest despite a dry monsoon season), w (dry season in winter), h (dry and hot), c (less than four months with mean temperature over 10°C), and g (Gangetic plain). Accordingly, India can be divided into eight climatic regions (Table 4.1; Figure 4.13).

- (vii) Winter rainfall by temperate cyclones in north India is highly beneficial for rabi crops.
- (viii) Regional climatic variation in India is reflected in the vast variety of food, clothes and house types.

### GLOBAL WARMING

You know that change is the law of nature. Climate has also witnessed change in the past at the global as well as at local levels. It is changing even now but the change is imperceptible. A number of geological evidences suggest that once upon a time,

**Table 4.1 : Climatic Regions of India According to Koeppen's Scheme**

| Type of Climate                                                                                                                | Areas                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Amw Monsoon with short dry season<br>As – Monsoon with dry summer<br>Aw – Tropical savannah<br>Bwhw – Semi-arid steppe climate | West coast of India south of Goa<br>Coromandel coast of Tamil Nadu<br>Most of the Peninsular plateaus, south of the Tropic of Cancer<br>North-western Gujarat, some parts of western Rajasthan and Punjab |
| Bwhw – Hot desert<br>Cwg – Monsoon with dry winter                                                                             | Extreme western Rajasthan<br>Ganga plain, eastern Rajasthan, northern Madhya Pradesh, most of North-east India                                                                                            |
| Dfc – Cold humid winter with short summer<br>E – Polar type                                                                    | Arunachal Pradesh<br>Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand                                                                                                                                  |

### Monsoons and the Economic Life in India

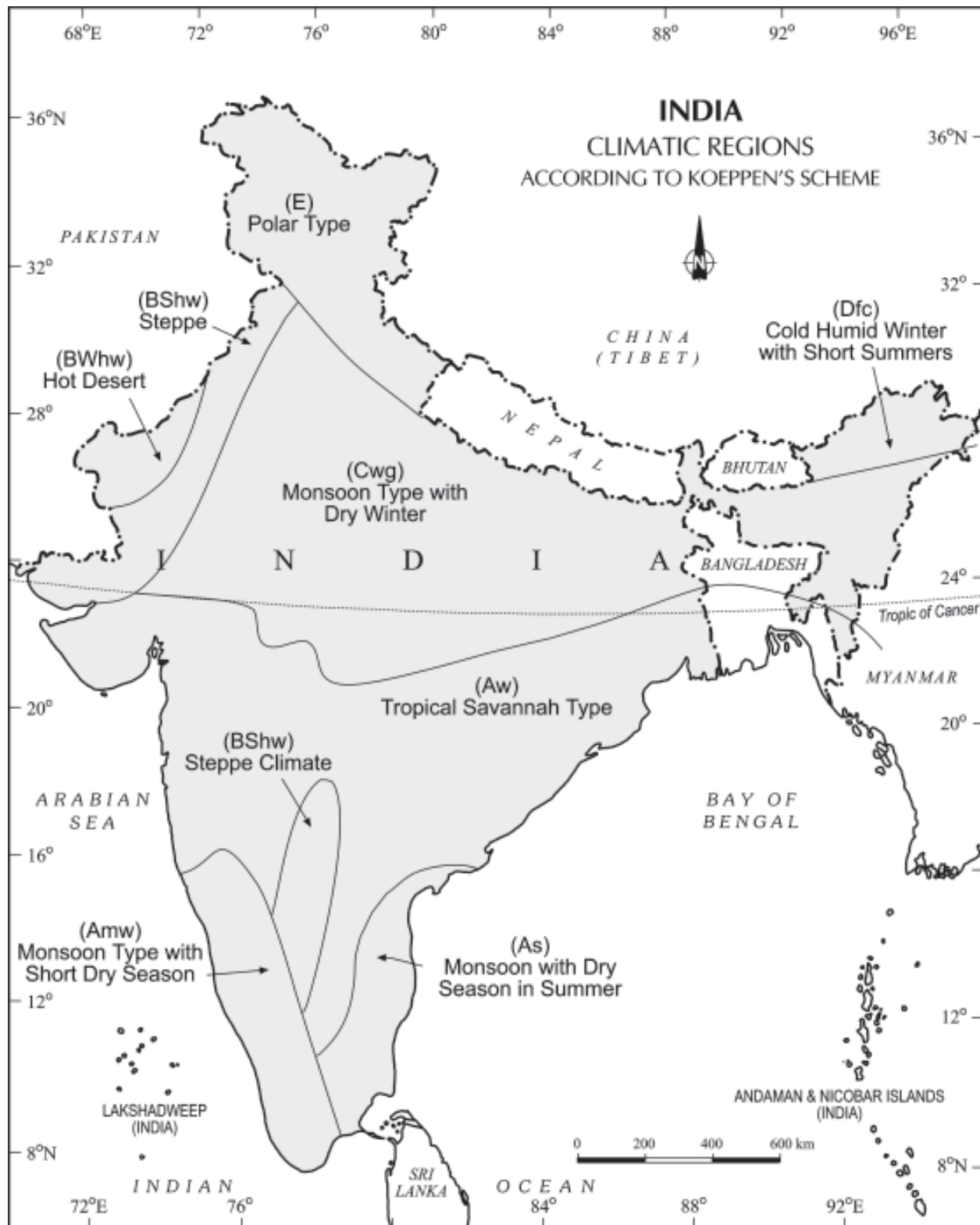
- (i) Monsoon is that axis around which revolves the entire agricultural cycle of India. It is because about 64 per cent people of India depend on agriculture for their livelihood and agriculture itself is based on southwest monsoon.
- (ii) Except Himalayas all the parts of the country have temperature above the threshold level to grow the crops or plants throughout the year.
- (iii) Regional variations in monsoon climate help in growing various types of crops.
- (iv) Variability of rainfall brings droughts or floods every year in some parts of the country.
- (v) Agricultural prosperity of India depends very much on timely and adequately distributed rainfall. If it fails, agriculture is adversely affected particularly in those regions where means of irrigation are not developed.
- (vi) Sudden monsoon burst creates problem of soil erosion over large areas in India.

(see geological time scale in Chapter 2 of *Fundamentals of Physical Geography*, NCERT, 2006) large part of the earth was under ice cover. Now you might have read or heard the debate on global warming. Besides the natural causes, human activities such as large scale industrialisation and presence of polluting gas in the atmosphere are also important factors responsible for global warming. You might have heard about the “green house effect” while discussing global warming.

The temperature of the world is significantly increasing. Carbon dioxide produced by human activities is a major source of concern. This gas, released to the atmosphere in large quantities by burning of fossil fuel, is increasing gradually. Other gases like methane, chlorofluorocarbons, and nitrous oxide which are present in much smaller concentrations in the atmosphere, together with carbon dioxide are known as green house gases. These gases are better absorbers of long wave radiations than carbon







**Figure 4.13 : India : Climatic Regions According to Köppen's Scheme**

dioxide, and so, are more effective at enhancing the green house effect. These gases have been contributing to global warming. It is said that due to global warming the polar ice caps and mountain glaciers would melt and the amount of water in the oceans would increase.

The mean annual surface temperature of the earth in the past 150 years has increased. It is projected that by the year 2,100, global temperature will increase by about 2°C. This rise in temperature will cause many other changes: one of these is a rise in sea level, as a result of melting of

glaciers and sea-ice due to warming. According to the current prediction, on an average, the sea level will rise 48 cm by the end of twenty first century. This would increase the incidence of annual flooding. Climatic change would promote insect-borne diseases like malaria, and lead to shift in climatic boundaries, making some regions wetter and others drier. Agricultural pattern would shift and human population as well as the ecosystem would experience change. What would happen to the Indian sea coasts if the sea level rises 50 cm above the present one?

### **EXERCISES**

1. Choose the right answer from the four alternatives given below.
  - (i) What causes rainfall on the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu in the beginning of winters?
    - (a) South-West monsoon
    - (b) Temperate cyclones
    - (c) North-Eastern monsoon
    - (d) Local air circulation
  - (ii) What is the proportion of area of India which receives annual rainfall less than 75 cm?
    - (a) Half
    - (b) One-third
    - (c) Two-third
    - (d) Three-fourth
  - (iii) Which one of the following is not a fact regarding South India?
    - (a) Diurnal range of temperature is less here.
    - (b) Annual range of temperature is less here.
    - (c) Temperatures here are high throughout the year.
    - (d) Extreme climatic conditions are found here.
  - (iv) Which one of the following phenomenon happens when the sun shines vertically over the Tropic of Capricorn in the southern hemisphere?
    - (a) High pressure develops over North-western India due to low temperatures.
    - (b) Low pressure develops over North-western India due to high temperatures.
    - (c) No changes in temperature and pressure occur in north-western India.
    - (d) 'Loo' blows in the North-western India.
  - (v) In which of the following states in India do we find 'As' type of climate as per Koeppen's classification?
    - (a) In Kerala and coastal Karnataka
    - (b) In Andaman and Nicobar Islands
    - (c) On Coromandel coast
    - (d) In Assam and Arunachal Pradesh

2. Answer the following questions in about 30 words.
  - (i) What are the three important factors which influence the mechanism of Indian weather?
  - (ii) What is the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone?
  - (iii) What is meant by 'bursting of monsoon'? Name the place of India which gets the highest rainfall.
  - (iv) Define 'climatic region'? What are the bases of Koeppen's classification?
  - (v) Which type(s) of cyclones cause rainfall in north-western India during winter? Where do they originate?
3. Answer the following questions in not more than 125 words.
  - (i) Notwithstanding the broad climatic unity, the climate of India has many regional variations. Elaborate this statement giving suitable examples.
  - (ii) How many distinct seasons are found in India as per the Indian Meteorological Department? Discuss the weather conditions associated with any one season in detail.

**Project/Activity**

On the outline map of India, show the following:

- (i) Areas of winter rain
- (ii) Wind direction during the summer season
- (iii) Areas having variability of rainfall over 50 per cent
- (iv) Areas having less than 15°C temperature in January
- (v) Isohyet of 100 cm.