

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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DROUGHTS IN INDIA

In the years 917-18 there was a drought in Kashmir. A contemporary description of its effects says: "One could scarcely see the water in the Vitasta (Jhelum), entirely covered as the river was with corpses soaked and swollen by the water in which they had long been lying. The land became densely covered with bones in all directions, until it was like one great burying-ground, causing terror to all beings." There is a tradition among the Hindus that their country experienced a drought and famine at the end of the fourteenth century that lasted continuously for twelve years. The great famine of 1769-70 destroyed one-third of the population of Bengal.

The famine of 1865-66 cost a million lives in the province of Orissa out of a total population of three million. In that of 1868-69, in northwestern India, more than 1,500,000 perished. The novelty of a failure of crops attended by only insignificant loss of life was witnessed in 1873-74, when the drought-stricken ryots of Bihar were kept alive at a cost of \$30,000,000 to the Indian Government. In 1876-78, however, during the most extensive drought that has befallen in modern times, relief measures broke down and five million people perished.

No wonder the hymns of the Rig-Veda are filled with prayers for rain!

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