



## **Deviation in Occurrence of Climatic Drought Over Western Zone of Tamil Nadu**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Drought is the major precipitation anomaly that has greater impact on water resource management, ground water table and agricultural production. The WASP index (Weighted Anomaly of Standardized Precipitation Index) was estimated for a period 1901-2019 (119 years) – four time scales (12 months, 9 months, 6 months and 3 months) based on the IMD precipitation dataset to analyse the dry events. Analysis over different time scales is necessary to find out the impact of the slowly evolving drought on the agricultural production as well as water resources. The numbers of moderate dry events were 276, 256, 188 and 100 for WASP<sub>12</sub>, WASP<sub>9</sub>, WASP<sub>6</sub>, and WASP<sub>3</sub> respectively for the whole of 119 years data. The number of extreme dry events with WASP<sub>12</sub>, WASP<sub>9</sub>, WASP<sub>6</sub>, and WASP<sub>3</sub> were 0, 4, 29 and 59, respectively, for 119 years. There was no specific trend in number of dry events over the study region and 1991-2019 was found to have higher number of dry events when compared with the other tri-decadal periods.

*Keywords: WASP; drought; dry months; precipitation deficit; historical data.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In Tamil Nadu about 70 per cent of the area is under rainfed agriculture which experiences a

higher uncertainty in production due to variations in rainfall events. This precipitation regime is characterized by large intra and inter-annual variability causing higher probability of

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occurrence of droughts and floods [1,2]. Drought is one among the most destructive extreme weather events affecting agricultural production [3]. The rising population and intensification of water leads to higher demand for water [4]. Dry events and droughts not only affects crop production, hydroelectric power generation, and in turn food security and standard of living [5]. Consequently, drought monitoring is of utmost relevance, since the money spend on drought relief is more and also the time to overcome the damage is also more. Drought is a phenomenon that develops slowly and needs sensitive monitoring system. Also, in the changing climate, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are expected to increase.

There are several indicators and indices used to assess the severity, duration and magnitude of drought [6]. There is no index that could fix for all the situations and needs. As the way, none of the drought index that are calculated based on the quantitative weather parameter of a particular region could detect the prolonged or intensive dry spells. One of the widely used indices is the Weighted Anomaly of Standardized Precipitation (WASP) and have used it for assessing impact of hydrological event on economy of the people [7,8], assessing the drought event on global scale [9], identify the inter annual variability on crop [10].

WASP is a simple index that can be calculated using rainfall data alone (single variable) to measure the relative anomalies of rainfall on different time scales. But it requires at least 25 years of historical data for the analysis. The significance of this index over the other is that it gives weightage for individual months ( $P/P_A$ ), so that the cumulative impact of averaging would be eliminated. This leads to highlighting of the anomalies in the mid of the rainy season neglecting the large standardized anomalies due to little rainfall quantities that happen during the start or termination of the rainy season [11]. This index considers the seasonality of the rainfall in determining the magnitude of drought. Similar to SPI, WASP also depends only on the precipitation data, hence WASP over short scales (like 3 to 6 months ) can be used to key out the impact on agricultural crops, over a period of 9 months or higher can be used to describe the water resource management and depicting the groundwater level. Moreover,  $WASP_{12}$  appears to be a good proxy for soil moisture variability on shorter time scales being

well correlated with other drought indices such as the Palmer Drought Severity Index (PDSI) [12]. Hence the WASP-Index is computed and the intensity and frequency with long term precipitation data for a time scales of 3 months, 6 months, 9 months and 12 months are discussed in this paper.

## 2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Coimbatore is a district situated in the western zone of TamilNadu between latitudes 10.13'4"N and 11.24'5" N; longitudes 76.39'25" E and 77.18'26" E. Monthly observed data for 119 years (1901-2019) obtained from IMD was used for analysis of Weighted Anomaly of Standardized Precipitation (WASP). The temporal variability of droughts was evaluated using the WASP presented by Lyon and Barnston [11]. The WASP-Index is attained summing the weighted standardized monthly precipitation anomalies as follows:

$$WASP_N = \frac{SUM_N}{\sigma_{SUM_N}}$$

$$SUM_N = \sum_{i=1}^N \left( \frac{P_i - \bar{P}_i}{\sigma_i} \right) \frac{\bar{P}_i}{P_A}$$

in which

$P_i$  is the observed monthly precipitation,  $\bar{P}_i$  is the precipitation baseline climatology (1901–2019) for the  $i$ th month with respect to the month/year that is actually being computed,

$\sigma_i$  is the monthly precipitation standard deviation and

$P_A$  is the mean annual precipitation for a given grid point.

The  $SUM_N$  for a given  $N$ th month is obtained considering the preceding  $N$  months

(where  $i=1$  is the first,  $i=2$  is the second, ...,  $i=N$  is the current month). The WASP-Index allows a qualitative classification of dry and wet severity through its values, as described in Table 1. The time frequency of droughts affecting Coimbatore district will be assessed for four tri-decadal time periods.

**Table 1. WASP-Index values and their corresponding classifications**

WASP	Interpretation
WASP $\leq$ -2	Severely dry
-2 < WASP < -1	Moderately dry
-1 $\leq$ WASP $\leq$ 1	Near Normal
1 < WASP < 2	Moderately wet
WASP $\geq$ 2	Severely wet

### 2.1 Intensity and Frequency of Dry Events

Intensity is defined as the average index value per month, which is high and has a severe impact when a large magnitude occurs over a short period.

The frequency of the event is probability of occurrence of the dry event. The frequency of occurrence can be calculated using the formula,

$$\text{Probability \%} = \frac{\text{Number of dry months}}{\text{Total number of months}} \times 100$$

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 WASP<sub>12</sub>

The numbers of moderate dry events were 276, 256, 188 and 100 for WASP<sub>12</sub>, WASP<sub>9</sub>, WASP<sub>6</sub>, and WASP<sub>3</sub> respectively for the whole of 119 years data. The number of extreme dry events with WASP<sub>12</sub>, WASP<sub>9</sub>, WASP<sub>6</sub>, and WASP<sub>3</sub> were 0, 4, 29 and 59, respectively, for 119 years. The occurrence of extreme dry event was found to be nil during all the tri-decadal time slots with WASP<sub>12</sub>, whereas the occurrence of moderate dry event was 276, 177, 0, 1 and 98 for the time periods of 1901-2019, 1901-1930, 1931-1960, 1961-1990 and 1991-2019, respectively. From this it was evident that there was an increase in the extreme dry events with decrease in time

scale. Also, this shows that the study region have not experienced any major extreme droughts that could have affected the ground water levels. The results of the study done by Arul Prasad et al., (2019) have reported 1991, 1995, 2000, 2002 and 2013 the year to be moderate drought years and 2012 as severely drought year. This supports the increase in number of dry events during the period of 1991-2019.

The 9 month time scale WASP was found to be 168 during 1901- 1930, 1 during 1931-1960, 0 during 1961-1990 and 87 during 1991-2019 moderate dry events and only 1 extreme dry event during 1901-1930 as well as 3 during 1991-2019 were identified. This shows that the water resources of the study region might not have effected severely because of deficit in rainfall.

The 6 and 3 month WASP shows that only during the first tri-decadal period (1901-1930) and during the recent tri-decadal period (1991-2019) there were occurrence of extreme dry events. The extreme dry events were identified to be nil with WASP<sub>6</sub> and WASP<sub>3</sub> for the period of 1931 to 1990 and also the number of moderate dry months were also minimal. The data is depicted in the table 2. It was also noticed that there was an increase in the number of dry events during 1991-2019 period.

**Table 2. Number of moderate and extreme dry events and the frequency of occurrence (given in brackets) during the study period of 1901-2019 and the four tri-decadal periods**

		1901-2019	1901-1930	1931-1960	1961-1990	1991-2019
WASP <sub>12</sub>	Moderate dry	276 (19%)	177 (49%)	0	1	98 (28%)
	Extreme dry	0	0	0	0	0
WASP <sub>9</sub>	Moderate dry	256 (17.9%)	168 (46.7%)	1 (0.3%)	0	87 (25%)
	Extreme dry	4 (0.3%)	1	0	0	3 (0.9%)
WASP <sub>6</sub>	Moderate dry	188 (13.2%)	125 (34.7%)	3 (0.8%)	1 (0.3%)	59 (17%)
	Extreme dry	29 (2%)	12 (3.3%)	0	0	17 (4.9%)
WASP <sub>3</sub>	Moderate dry	100 (7%)	57 (15.8%)	6 (1.7%)	9 (2.5%)	28 (8.0%)
	Extreme dry	59 (4.1%)	32 (8.9%)	0	0	27 (7.8%)

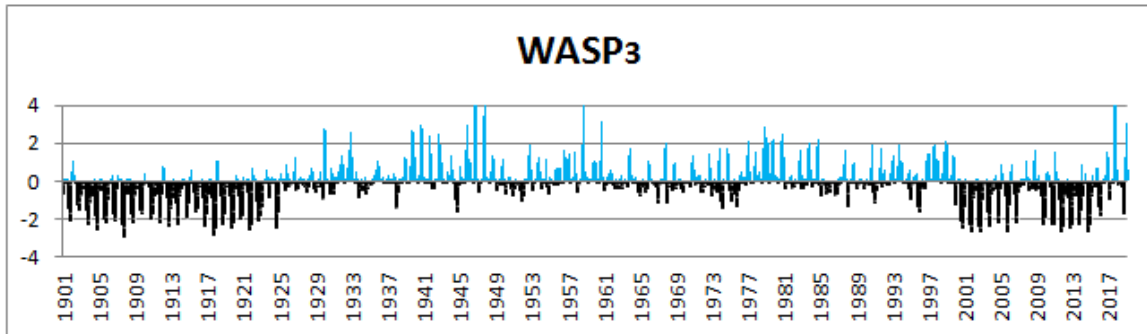


Fig. 1. Dry and wet events using 3months time scale during the study period of 1901-2019

Table 3. Number of moderate and extreme dry events occurrence during the recent three decadal period

		1991-2000	2001-2010	2011-2019
WASP <sub>12</sub>	Moderate dry	0	65	33
	Extreme dry	0	0	0
WASP <sub>9</sub>	Moderate dry	0	55	32
	Extreme dry	0	0	3
WASP <sub>6</sub>	Moderate dry	1	37	21
	Extreme dry	0	8	9
WASP <sub>3</sub>	Moderate dry	5	11	12
	Extreme dry	0	16	11

Analysing the recent three decades separately, it was keyed out that the number of dry events were increased during the recent years i.e. 2001-2010 and 2011-2019 for all the time scale of the index. The highest numbers of events were recorded during 2001-2010 period. The data is presented in the table 3. It is clear from the data that the number of dry events is increasing in the recent years. Similar results have reported by many other authors across the globe.

The outcomes of this study show that this drought index would be a good indicator of the moderate dry events which would have an impact on the rain dependent agriculture [13,14]. Since droughts have deep impacts on water resources, agriculture and the environment, this is particularly relevant [15-17].

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of dry events over 119 years in Coimbatore showed a highest number of dry events as 177 and the highest frequency of 48 per cent for 12 months running period was also noticed. WASP has a higher efficiency in capturing dry events over short period that would have a much higher impact on agricultural crops

production. Harvesting of rainfall is essential for complementing the shortage during dry events.

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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