Airmasses up to 500 mb level over the Indian summer monsoon trough area

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ABSTRACT. Rao and Desai (1973) have indicated the nature of airmasses present over India and neighbourhood during July—typical monsoon month—on the basis of India Met. Dep. Forecast. Manual Part 1—2. “Climatology of India and neighbourhood—Climate of India (1986)”. In the publication “Upper Air Atlas of India and Neighbourhood” (India Met. Dep. 1972), are given (i) Normal upper air temperature and contours and (ii) Normal upper winds from which one can draw inferences about airmasses over the area. Ramage and Raman (1972) have given 850, 700 and 500 mb charts for July in Vol. 2, Upper Air Meteorological Atlas of the International Indian Ocean Expedition (110E) from which also inferences can be drawn about airmasses over the area in question. It is seen from India Meteorological Department (1972) upper winds charts and charts of Ramage and Raman (1972) that the axis of the monsoon trough, which extends from near Delhi to Calcutta at the surface and slope southwards with height, has on both sides the air of continental origin while according to Rao and Desai and India Meteorological Department (1972) normal upper air temperature and contour charts, the axis of the monsoon trough at 850 and 700-mb levels has moist air of oceanic origin on both sides.

The chart showing distribution of rainfall over India during July would not appear to support the inferences about airmasses drawn from charts of Ramage and Raman and India Meteorological Department upper wind charts.

1. Introduction

On the basis of temperature and wind data published by the India Meteorological Department (1968), Rao and Desai (1973) have given boundaries between different airmasses over India and neighbourhood in July which can be taken to represent a typical monsoon month. Since then India Meteorological Department (1972) have brought out the Upper Air Atlas of India and neighbourhood in two parts, the first part contains normal upper air temperatures and contours with winds at standard levels and the second containing upper wind data with streamlines and isotachs at 0-9, 1-5, 3-0, 6-0 km etc. levels. Ramage and Raman (1972) have given circulation patterns and streamlines for different standard levels. It is proposed to discuss in this note the position of the boundaries between different airmasses at different levels on the basis of the data in the above publications and to see how far they agree with the normal climat temp. data 1951-1970 published by India Meteorological Department (1972) and similar data given by Ramage and Raman in their
publication. An attempt has also been made to
discuss the normal rainfall for July with reference
to the airmass boundaries mentioned above.

2. Discussion

2.1. Rao and Desai (1973) have given bound-
daries between different airmasses over India and
neighbourhood during July at different levels in
their Fig. 8, which is reproduced in this paper as
Fig. 1. The details of different airmasses at differ-
ent levels are as under.

2.1.1. Surface

The continental air is to the north and west of
the boundary and the deflected trades—monsoon
airmass—to its south and the east. The Gangetic
valley trough axis extending from near Delhi to
near Calcutta through Allahabad and Gaya has
moist southeasterly to westerly warmer air to its
north and southwesterly to westerly cooler air
to its south. The E'ly to SE'ly airmass to the
north of the monsoon trough axis is actually the
SW'ly to W'ly monsoon airmass which has been
deflected by the Burma coast and Assam mountains
and the Himalayas and it is warmer than the latter
airmass due to travel over land where there is
little rain but some moisture might be added due
to evaporation.

2.1.2. 850 mb (1.5 km)

There is warmer continental air to the north and
west of the boundary line and cool deflected
trades—monsoon airmass—to its south and the east.
The monsoon trough axis is of the same
type as at the surface and extends from near
Jabalpore to near Balasore, there being moist
air on both the sides of this trough.

2.1.3. 700 mb (3.0 km)

To the north of the boundray line there is con-
tinental air and the monsoon airmass to its south
and the east. At this level the monsoon airmass
does not consist of the deflected trades but less
moist airmass with nearly saturation adiabatic lapse,
its origin being in the south Atlantic (Ramage and
Raman 1972)—the westerly winds having backed
to SW to S'ly near Madagascar area under the pre-
vailing pressure pattern and crossing the equator
move to the west coast of the Indian Peninsula.
On both the sides of the monsoon trough axis
extending from near Surat to near Puri, there is
moist airmass as at 850 mb.

2.1.4. 500 mb (6.0 km)

The southwesterly to westerly monsoon airmass,
its origin being the same as at 700 mb is to the
south and the west and the southeastly to easter-
ly tropical airmass to the north and east of the
boundary line which passes through near Bombay
to Puri. The boundary between dry continental
airmass and the easterly tropical airmass is indicated
by the line passing through near Delhi.

From the position of the boundaries between
different airmasses given in Fig. 1, it would appear
that the hot continental air spreads over the cool
monsoon air southeastward over the Arabian
Sea from the surface up to about 700 mb, but it is
again near about surface position at 500 mb level.
Over land the triple point, where the warmer
continental, cool moist westerly and less cold
and moist easterly airmasses meet, is displaced
southeastward from the surface to 850 mb level
and southwestwards from 850 to 700 mb levels.
At 500 mb there is no triple point and the boundary
between the dry and moist airmasses is near about
its position as at the surface. Thus as a result of
the continental air being warmest and the monsoon
air the coldest at the surface and a difference in
the lapse rates in the two airmasses, the continental
airmass becomes colder than the moist monsoon
airmass above a certain level—reversal level. Thus
over the Arabian Sea the dry continental air
spreads over the moist air up to the reversal level
near about 600 mb, above which level the latter
flows over the former. Over land the SE'ly to E'ly
air being warmer than the W'ly air at the surface,
the boundary between the two moist airmasses
slopes southwards with height up to about 500
mb. Over the subcontinent north of latitude
about 19°N, the moist SE'ly to E'ly air spreads
over the W'ly to NW'ly dry continental air above
about 900-mb level, the latter rising over the
former up to that level.

Miller and Keshavamurthy (1967) have mention-
ed that at times intense mid-tropospheric cyclones
develop between 700 and 500-mb levels in the
trough over northeast Arabian Sea and that these
cyclones are of the subtropical type. Referring
to this Rao and Desai (1974) have stated that
with the passage of low pressure waves from the
east, at times cyclonic circulation develops in the
middle troposphere over northeast Arabian Sea
which may strengthen the Arabian Sea monsoon
at the surface and in lower levels and it is gener-
ally the strengthening of the Arabian Sea monsoon
which leads to development of cyclonic circula-
tions higher up as the western end of the trough axis between about 700 and 600-mb levels is nearby, where triple point conditions normally exist. Any fluctuation in the quasi-stationary position of the triple point in the horizontal or in the vertical under the prevailing weather conditions may lead to locally heavy to very heavy rainfall depending on the area of its location both with and without the presence of a depression. Some of the heavy to very heavy rainfall recorded over Gujarat area are due to such triple point conditions (Desai 1946, 1967, 1970a).

The temperature contrasts between different airmasses at the boundary are maximum at the surface and decrease with height and disappear at the reversal level; above which they are only slight or even sometimes not noticeable, but the humidity in continental air is much less than in moist monsoon air which makes the latter rise over the former airmass.

The rise of the continental air above the moist air gives rise to a low level airmass inversion both over the Arabian Sea and also over the subcontinent north of latitude 20°N and west of about longitude 70°E (Desai 1970-b and c). During breaks when the continental air extends further south and eastward, the inversion is found even over Bombay and Goa; the base being higher at Goa than at Bombay and higher at Bombay than at Ahmedabad and Veraval and higher at the latter two places than over Karachi, north Arabian Sea and west Arabian sea. The IIIOE period soundings as well as the sounding data over the subcontinent support the above inferences.

2.2. The boundaries between different airmasses at different levels on the basis of the temperature and contour charts published by the India Meteorological Department (1972) are given in Fig. 2. It would appear that they generally agree with the boundaries given in Fig. 1 except for the fact that boundary between the moist monsoon airmass and the dry continental air at 850-mb level is displaced northwards and passes through Karachi and Bikaner and in view of this the triple point seen near Jabalpore in Fig. 1 at this level is shifted northwards to near Pilani.

In Table 1 are given the normal temperature and humidity data at 850, 700 and 500-mb levels for the stations Bombay, Ahmedabad, Nagpur, Calcutta, Lucknow, Delhi and Jodhpur taken from the normal climatic temperature data for the period 1951-1970 published by India Meteorological Department (1972). The humidity values in Table 1 generally support the boundaries between different airmasses given in Figs. 1 and 2 although the boundary between cold monsoon and dry continental airmasses at 850-mb level in Fig. 1 would require slight northward displacement.

2.3. In Fig. 3 are given the boundaries between different airmasses at 0-9, 1-5, 3-0 and 6-0 km a.s.l. based on the upper wind charts published by the India Meteorological Department (1972). In drawing the boundary, the convergence of streamlines is taken into account as defining the boundary between different airmasses. Some of the significant features noticed in Fig. 3 are mentioned below:

(i) The boundary between the monsoon air and the continental airmass is further south at 0-9 km than at 1-5 km. This cannot be accepted as the depth of the monsoon airmass decreases with height from north to south.

(ii) The monsoon trough axes at 0-9, 1-5 and 3-0 km levels are in the continental airmass. This will not be supported when one considers the humidity values at 1-5 and 3-0 km levels given in Table 1. It is also observed that more rain generally occurs to the south of the axis which will not be possible unless the air to the north of the monsoon trough is also moist and rises above the air to its south, the former being warmer than the latter.

(iii) At 6-0 km the airmass between Mangalore and Ahmedabad would appear as the same prevailing to the south of Mangalore, the latter having backed to SE'ly  to E'ly under the circulation pattern indicated in their analysis. It is however considered that the boundary between different airmasses at 6-0 km given in Fig. 3 cannot be accepted in view of the data given in Table 1.

2.4. The boundaries between different airmasses at different levels on the basis of the charts of Ramage and Raman (1972) are given in Fig. 4. the same being drawn considering the confluence of streamlines as done for Fig. 3. Given below are some of the significant points in respect of Fig. 4.

(i) The monsoon trough axes at 850 and 700-mb levels lie in the continental airmass. This will not be supported by the temperature and moisture data given in their own charts as well as those given in Table 1.

(ii) The flow patterns in the north Arabian Sea are based on aircraft data presumably collected during IIIOE period and particularly in 1963 when
there were definite synoptic patterns over north-east Arabian Sea and neighbourhood as discussed by Desai (1970b) and Rao and Desai (1974). This is also apparent from the data given in Table 2 taken from the charts of Ramage and Raman for those levels. It may be seen from this table that the aircraft data are only a few in number when compared with the data over Karachi, Veraval and Bombay which extend over a number of years. It is felt that combining such data in a single chart is completely misleading and no experienced Indian Meteorologist can accept the flow pattern of Ramage and Raman at those levels as depicting the normal conditions during July.

(iii) The boundary of the westerly monsoon airmass at 500-mb passes near Socotra, Cochin and Car Nicobar, the airmass to the north of this boundary being the easterly tropical airmass, the winds having backed to westerly to the south of Bombay latitude as per their flow pattern. The 500-mb level chart of Ramage and Raman cannot thus
### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level (mb)</th>
<th>Bombay</th>
<th>Nagpur</th>
<th>Calcutta</th>
<th>Lucknow</th>
<th>Ahmedabad</th>
<th>Jodhpur</th>
<th>Delhi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TT</td>
<td>TdTd</td>
<td>R.H. (%)</td>
<td>TT</td>
<td>TdTd</td>
<td>R.H. (%)</td>
<td>TT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>850</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>20.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>700</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>-9.8</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>-6.8</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TT** = Dry bulb temperature (°C),  
**TdTd** = Dew point temperature (°C),  
**R.H.** = Relative humidity (%).

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level (mb)</th>
<th>Aircraft</th>
<th>Karachi</th>
<th>Veraval</th>
<th>Bombay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lat. (°N)</td>
<td>Long. (°E)</td>
<td>No. of obsns.</td>
<td>dd (°)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>850</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TT** = Air temperature (°C),  
**TdTd** = Dew point temperature (°C),  
**dd** = Resultant wind direction,  
**ff** = Resultant wind speed in knots.
be taken to represent normal conditions during July.

2.5. Fig. 5 represents the normal rainfall during July with isohyetal analysis as published by India Meteorological Department (1971). If one considers the July rainfall over different parts of the country with reference to the monsoon trough axis given in Figs. 3 and 4, one cannot explain the same if the monsoon trough axis is considered to be in the continental airmass. The July rainfall distribution can be understood with reference to the airmass boundaries given
in Figs. 1 and 2, keeping in mind at the same time the effect of orography and the track of monsoon depression (Rao and Desai 1973).

3. Conclusion

From the foregoing examination of the upper air charts published in 1968 and 1972, it would appear that the flow pattern given in upper wind charts published by India Meteorological Department of 1972 and the upper wind charts of Ramage and Raman cannot be accepted. In fact they are against the prevailing boundaries between different airmasses as inferred from the temperature and contour charts, also published by the India Meteorological Department (1972) which generally agree with the humidity data published by the India Meteorological Department (1972) as well as the temperature and moisture data for the land stations given by Ramage and Raman.

Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank Dr. A. K. Mukherjee, Director, Regional Meteorological Centre, Bombay for all the facilities provided for this study.

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