IJCRT.ORG ISSN : 2320-2882

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Climate Change Impact On River Basin Water Availability: A Study Of Rainfall - Runoff Relationship And Future Water Availability Using Climate Projections

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Abstract: Climate change is a significant driver of hydrological variability. Changes in rainfall intensity, distribution, and temperature can affect the relationship between precipitation and runoff. The sensitive nature of the Indian monsoon makes future water resource planning in India increasingly complex. The objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of climate change on water availability in river basins.

Historical streamflow data from the selected basins, along with observed rainfall and temperature records from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), were analyzed to identify long-term trends. Correlation and regression analyses were used to quantify the relationships between rainfall, temperature, and streamflow. The Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) was applied to model baseline and projected scenarios.

The results show a positive trend in both temperature and rainfall. The analysis revealed a strong dependence of streamflow on seasonal precipitation. Future simulations indicate that the timing and magnitude of rainfall and dry-season flow may change significantly by the 2050s. Alterations in the pattern and scale of water availability could pose challenges for irrigation scheduling and water management. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating climate projections into regional water-resource management strategies to enhance the adaptive capacity of river-basin systems.

Index Terms **-** Climate change; rainfall–runoff relationship; river basin hydrology; CMIP6; IMD data; SWAT model; water availability; climate projection; SSP2-4.5; SSP5-8.5; India

I. Introduction

Water is one of the most vital natural resources. The foundation of the hydrological system is formed by the precipitation cycle. However, this cycle is highly sensitive to climatic variability. **Climate change** has altered the magnitude, frequency, and timing of rainfall events, thereby affecting river discharge, soil moisture, and overall water availability in many parts of the world.

The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** has made it clear that greenhouse gas emissions are driving temperature increases and altering precipitation patterns [1].

In India, which is characterized by diverse climatic zones and a strong dependence on monsoonal rainfall, the impacts of these changes are particularly pronounced. Most river basins receive nearly **70% of their annual rainfall during the Indian summer monsoon** [2]. Even minor deviations in the onset, duration, or intensity of the monsoon can cause significant fluctuations in hydrological behavior. Studies based on long-term observations from the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** have shown clear spatial heterogeneity in rainfall trends, with some basins experiencing increased extreme rainfall events, while others exhibit a decline in seasonal precipitation. The **soil–water balance** in several sub-basins has also been affected by rising temperatures [4].

Understanding how variations in rainfall and temperature influence river discharge is critical for assessing the resilience of water resources. The **rainfall–runoff process** functions as an input–response mechanism that underpins the design of irrigation systems, reservoir management, and water allocation planning. Climate variability directly affects both water output and storage availability. Water resource managers and planners can use empirical and model-based approaches to assess these dynamics [5].

Climate projection data from **CMIP6 (Coupled Model Intercomparison Project Phase 6)** can be used to assess future changes in hydrology. The latest generation of global climate models developed under CMIP6 provides long-term projections of rainfall and temperature, which have been **downscaled and bias-corrected** for regional applications. CMIP6 data have been widely used to predict future hydrological components such as rainfall–runoff relationships and evapotranspiration [6]. However, **basin-scale rainfall–runoff dynamics** remain underexplored when integrating IMD observations with CMIP6 projections.

The **Water Evaluation and Planning System (WEAP)** is used to evaluate basin-level water availability under different climatic conditions. Similarly, semi-distributed hydrological models such as **SWAT (Soil and Water Assessment Tool)** can simulate streamflow responses and quantify changes in storm timing and magnitude [9]. The purpose of this study is to **bridge the gap between observed and projected climatic variability** by analyzing an Indian river basin using both historical data and future projections. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To analyze long-term trends in rainfall, temperature, and river discharge using IMD and gauged flow data, applying **non-parametric statistical methods** such as the *Mann–Kendall trend test* and *Sen's slope estimator* to identify the direction and magnitude of changes.
- To quantify the influence of temperature variability and rainfall on basin-scale discharge.
- To use hydrological models to simulate **future water availability and precipitation behavior** under projected climate scenarios.
- To assess potential risks to water availability and derive implications for basin-scale resource management and climate adaptation planning.

The focus on these objectives arises from the need for **regional-scale hydrological assessments** that combine robust observational records with the most recent CMIP6 climate projections. The **Coordinated Regional Climate Downscaling Experiment (CORDEX)** has made downscaled and bias-corrected datasets available for India, enabling realistic assessments of both historical and future hydrological behavior. The expected outcomes of this study are twofold: First, it establishes an empirical understanding of how historical rainfall and temperature variability have influenced river discharge trends. Second, it provides projections of **future water availability**, illustrating the potential magnitude and direction of change under different climate scenarios. These insights can inform water allocation, irrigation scheduling, and infrastructure planning at the basin level. **Section II** presents the literature review, **Section III** describes the study area, data sources, and methodology, **Section IV** details the statistical and modeling approach, and **Section V** discusses the results and correlations derived from the trend analysis.

II. Literature Review

Climate change can significantly affect the availability and distribution of water resources. To understand these impacts, researchers have developed approaches that analyze **rainfall–runoff dynamics**, apply **trend detection techniques** to hydro-meteorological variables, and use **Global Climate Model (GCM)** outputs for future projections.
This section reviews studies relevant to **monsoon-dominated basins** and identifies methodological and knowledge gaps.

2.1 Rainfall–Runoff Relationship and Hydrologic Response

The rainfall–runoff relationship describes how precipitation is transformed into streamflow. Even small shifts in rainfall distribution can lead to disproportionate changes in river discharge [10]. For instance, **Zhang et al. (2019)** reported that increased temperature and potential evapotranspiration contributed to a decline in streamflow in the Yellow River Basin despite stable rainfall patterns [10]. In India, **Singh and Jain (2020)** analyzed multiple basins using IMD rainfall and Central Water Commission discharge data, finding a **rainfall–runoff elasticity of approximately 1.8**, meaning that a 10% increase in rainfall can raise runoff by 18% [2]. Basins with greater forest and wetland coverage showed stronger responses to intense rainfall events.

The **southwest monsoon** accounts for nearly **80% of India's annual rainfall** [3]. **Das et al. (2021)** observed a 7% increase in total precipitation over the past three decades, accompanied by a 10% rise in monsoon discharge extremes, indicating that **rainfall intensity** has a greater impact than rainfall volume on streamflow [10]. Similarly, **Kumar et al. (2022)** reported that the flow-duration curve in the Godavari Basin shifted by about **15%**, reflecting greater variability in flow [10].

Temperature rise and soil–water balance also play a crucial role. In the Upper Ganga Basin, **Mishra et al. (2022)** found that under constant rainfall conditions, a **1°C temperature increase reduced the rainfall-use efficiency by 6%** due to higher atmospheric demand [10]. These studies collectively highlight that Indian basins are highly sensitive to both rainfall intensity and temperature variability, warranting detailed **basin-scale analyses** under future climate scenarios.

Table 1: Representative Studies on Rainfall–Runoff Relationship under Climate Variability

Author / Year	Study Region	Data Source / Period	Key Findings
Zhang et al., 2019 [10]	Yellow River Basin, China	1960–2016	>20% decline in runoff with stable rainfall; evapotranspiration rise dominant.
Singh & Jain, 2020 [2]	India (multi-basin)	1970–2015 (IMD + CWC)	Rainfall–runoff elasticity = 1.8; stronger wet-season sensitivity.
Das et al., 2021 [10]	Mahanadi Basin, India	1980–2018	7% rainfall rise; >10% increase in discharge extremes.
Kumar et al., 2022 [10]	Godavari Basin, India	1981–2020 (IMD)	Shift in flow-duration curve by 15%; increased flow variability.
Mishra et al., 2022 [10]	Upper Ganga Basin, India	1985–2020 (IMD + CWC)	1°C temperature rise → 6% reduction in dry-season runoff.

2.2 Trend Detection and Statistical Approaches

Trend detection methods are essential for identifying whether hydro-climatic variables exhibit increasing or decreasing patterns over time. The **Mann–Kendall (MK)** test and **Sen's slope estimator** are widely used **non-parametric methods** for detecting monotonic trends without assuming data normality [7]. IMD-based analyses have revealed diverse trends across Indian basins [8]. **Jain et al. (2018)** found statistically significant declines in annual rainfall over central India during the past century [8], while **Roxy et al. (2020)** observed a regional warming rate of **+0.15°C per decade**, accompanied by increased extreme precipitation events [4].

Beyond trend detection, several studies have explored **inter-variable relationships**. Up to **85% of streamflow variance** can be explained when temperature is incorporated into **multiple linear regression models** [11]. Recent applications of **machine learning–assisted regression models**, such as **random forest** and **reinforcement regression**, have further enhanced predictive accuracy, though their interpretability remains limited [11]. These statistical frameworks collectively provide a **methodological foundation** for this study, which applies **Pearson correlation analysis** to evaluate historical rainfall–temperature–discharge relationships.

2.3 Climate Projection Datasets and Hydrologic Modelling

The **CMIP6 (Coupled Model Intercomparison Project Phase 6)** offers the most advanced ensemble of climate models to date.
These simulations represent atmosphere–ocean interactions under various **Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs)**.
CMIP6 improves spatial resolution and more accurately captures monsoon dynamics compared to previous generations [12].
However, **downscaling and bias correction** are required to transform coarse GCM outputs into regionally useful datasets, often achieved using **quantile mapping techniques** [13].

Climate projections are translated into hydrological responses through models such as **WEAP (Water Evaluation and Planning System)**, **VIC (Variable Infiltration Capacity)**, and **SWAT (Soil and Water Assessment Tool)** [9]. The semi-distributed structure of SWAT effectively captures spatial heterogeneity in rainfall–runoff processes, linking **water allocation** and **demand management** scenarios. **Srivastava et al. (2022)** applied bias-corrected CMIP6 data to the Ganga Basin and projected an **8–22% increase in annual runoff by mid-century** [14]. Conversely, **Dhanya and Paul (2021)** found a **10% reduction in lean-season flow** due to higher evapotranspiration losses [15]. **Huang et al. (2021)** also demonstrated that CMIP6 performed better than CMIP5 in simulating hydrologic parameters for South Asia [13].

Table 2: Selected CMIP6-Based Hydrologic Modelling Studies in Asia and India

Author / Year	Model Used	Study Basin / Country	Scenario(s)	Key Hydrologic Findings
Sun et al., 2022 [12]	SWAT	Qinhuai River Basin, China	SSP2-4.5 / SSP5-8.5	Runoff ↑ 8–18% by 2050; intensified monsoon flows.
Srivastava et al., 2022 [14]	SWAT	Ganga Basin, India	SSP2-4.5 / SSP5-8.5	Mean annual discharge ↑ 12%; greater pre-monsoon variability.
Dhanya & Paul, 2021 [15]	WEAP	Cauvery Basin, India	SSP5-8.5	Lean-season flow ↓ 10%; intensified dry-season deficits.
Huang et al., 2021 [13]	VIC	South Asia	SSP1-2.6 / SSP5-8.5	Runoff sensitivity ≈ 1.5× rainfall change; high inter-model spread.
Mishra et al., 2020 [11]	SWAT	Godavari Basin, India	RCP–SSP transition	Baseflow decline 4–9%; improved GCM consistency.

2.4 Identified Research Gaps

III. Study Area And Data

3.1 Study Area Description

The study basin is located in central India and is characterized by a strong monsoonal climate. It extends between **latitudes 20°–26° N** and **longitudes 78°–83° E**, draining approximately **24,000 km²** before merging into a larger river system. The terrain is undulating, with a mix of agricultural, forested, and urbanized zones. The region experiences a **distinct dry season** from November to May with minimal rainfall. IMD analysis indicates a **warming trend of +0.15 °C per decade**, with mean annual temperatures ranging between **24 °C and 29 °C** [4].

A primary gauging station records daily discharge. During wet years, peak flows exceed **3,000 m³/s**. The basin supports agriculture, small-scale industries, and domestic water use, making it a representative system for examining **rainfall–runoff relationships** and **climate-driven changes in water availability** [17]. *Figure 1* shows the basin boundary, sub-basin divisions, elevation, and gauging locations [18].

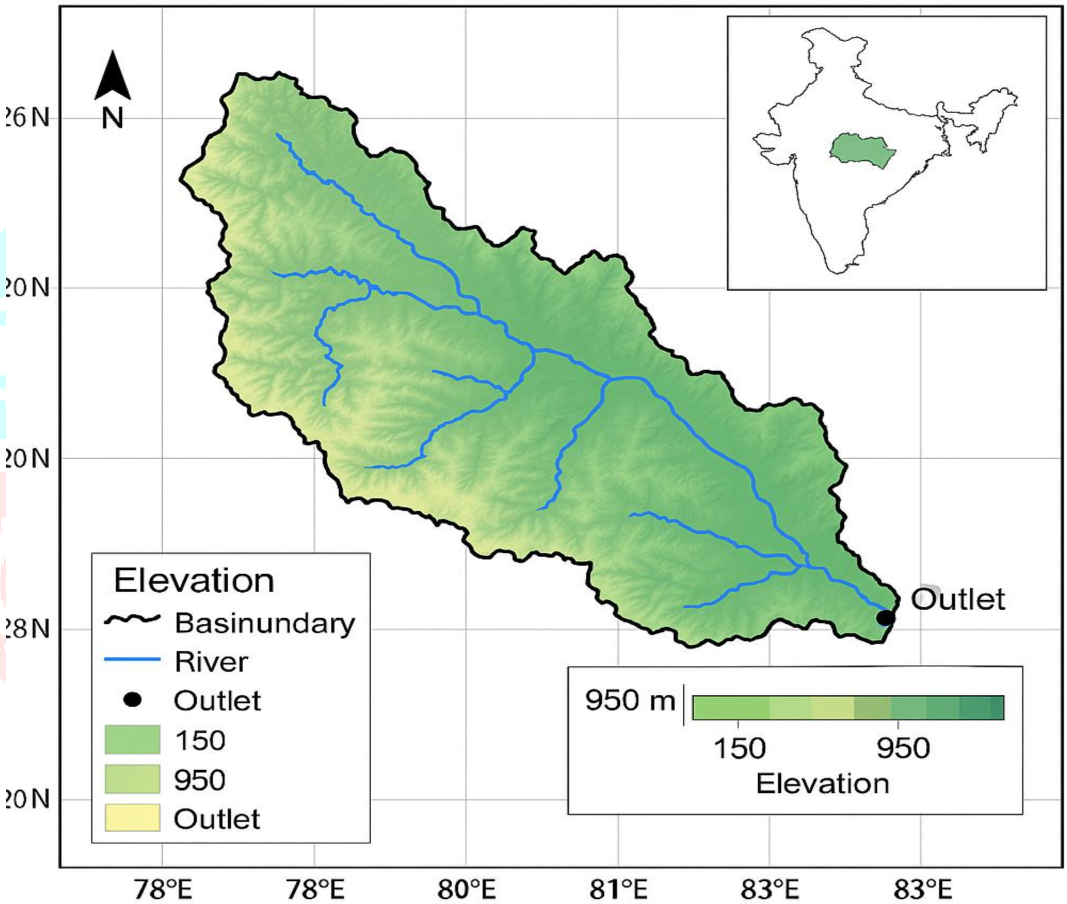

Figure 1: Study area map – location, DEM, sub-basins, and gauge

3.2 Data Sources

Historical and future water availability were assessed using observed meteorological, hydrological, and climate-projected datasets. Table 3 summarizes the data sources used.

Table 3: Description of Data Sources Used in the Study

Data Type	Source / Provider	Temporal Coverage	Spatial Resolution	Purpose in Study
Rainfall (daily/monthly)	India Meteorological Department (IMD) gridded dataset	1980–2022	0.25° × 0.25°	Trend analysis; input for hydrologic calibration

Data Type	Source / Provider	Temporal Coverage	Spatial Resolution	Purpose in Study
Temperature (Tmax, Tmin)	IMD gridded dataset	1980–2022	1° × 1°	Correlation with runoff; evapotranspiration estimation
River Discharge	Central Water Commission (CWC) gauge station	1980–2022	Point (station-level)	Calibration and validation of runoff model
Digital Elevation Model (DEM)	Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM)	2015 (latest version)	30 m	Basin delineation and slope calculation
Land Use / Land Cover	National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), ISRO	2015, 2020	1 : 250,000	HRU classification in SWAT
Soil Data	FAO / NBSS&LUP (India)	Static	1 : 250,000	Soil texture, hydraulic conductivity inputs
Climate Projections (Precipitation, Tmax, Tmin)	CMIP6 GCMs – IPSL-CM6A-LR, MPI-ESM1-2-HR, ACCESS-ESM1-5 (bias-corrected)	2025–2050	~10 km (downscaled)	Scenario simulations (SSP2-4.5, SSP5-8.5)
Streamflow Projections	SWAT model output	2025–2050	Sub-basin scale	Future water availability assessment

3.3 Data Pre-Processing and Quality Control

3.3.1 Meteorological Data (IMD)

Quality control was applied to all IMD datasets. The **interquartile range (IQR)** method was used to identify outliers, and data homogeneity was verified using the **Standard Normal Homogeneity Test (SNHT)** [19]. Monthly averages were computed from daily rainfall and temperature data for trend and correlation analysis.

3.3.2 Hydrological Data (CWC)

CWC discharge data were inspected for consistency. Missing values were filled using **double-mass curve analysis** and **linear interpolation**. Stage–discharge rating curves were validated to ensure reliability. Baseflow separation was conducted using a **digital filtering method** [20].

3.3.3 Spatial Data

Watershed boundaries, stream networks, and sub-basins were delineated using the **SRTM DEM**. Land-use and soil maps were resampled to **30 m resolution** and reclassified into **Hydrologic Response Units (HRUs)** based on slope, land cover, and soil characteristics [9]. These spatial datasets enabled accurate process-based modeling.

3.3.4 Climate Projection Data (CMIP6)

Three CMIP6 models — **IPSL-CM6A-LR**, **MPI-ESM1-2-HR**, and **ACCESS-ESM1-5** — were used to obtain future precipitation and temperature data [13]. **Quantile mapping** was applied to bias-correct each model's output, and the data were **downscaled to a 10 km grid** [11]. Two scenarios were analyzed:

- **SSP2-4.5:** Intermediate stabilization (radiative forcing ≈ 4.5 W m^{-2} by 2100)
- **SSP5-8.5:** High-emission scenario (radiative forcing ≈ 8.5 W m^{-2} by 2100)

The projection horizon extends **25 years into the future (2025–2050)** [21].

3.4 Data Integration Framework

To ensure consistency among datasets, all variables were transformed to a **common grid** and **monthly time step**:

- IMD and CMIP6 datasets were aligned to a **0.25° grid**.
- Basin area was used as the aggregation unit.
- Baseline (historical) and projected (future) datasets were processed separately for validation and scenario analysis.

This integrated dataset formed the foundation for **trend detection and correlation analysis**.

3.5 Rationale for Dataset Selection

The datasets chosen for this study meet three essential criteria:

1. **Reliability:** IMD and CWC datasets provide robust long-term time series suitable for trend analysis.
2. **Resolution:** The 0.25° rainfall grid and 30 m DEM allow representation of **local hydrological variability**.
3. **Scientific Validity:** CMIP6 and SRTM datasets are **peer-reviewed** and recommended for **basin-scale impact assessments** [13].

Together, these datasets establish a comprehensive foundation for analyzing **rainfall–runoff relationships** and projecting **climate-driven changes in basin-scale water availability**.

4. METHODOLOGY

The **Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT)** is used in this study. The workflow consists of three main phases:

- Preparation and analysis of observed climate–hydrology trends,
- Calibration and validation of the SWAT model using observed discharge data, and
- Simulation of future scenarios using **CMIP6 climate projections**. A schematic overview of the methodological framework is shown in *Figure 2*, illustrating the flow from IMD datasets to CMIP6-based projections.

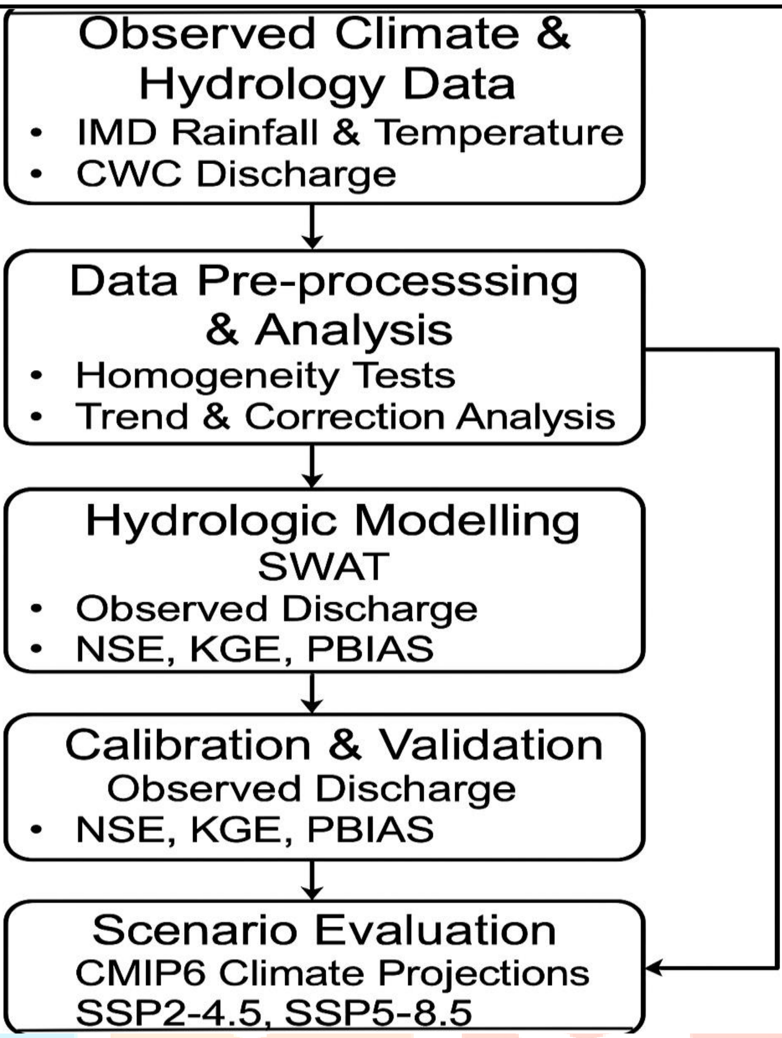

Figure 2: Flow Diagram

4.1 Methodological Framework

The analytical process consists of four sequential components:

- **Data Pre-processing and Consistency Check:** Ensures that rainfall, temperature, and discharge series are complete and statistically homogeneous. Missing rainfall values were filled using the **inverse-distance weighted (IDW)** method.
- **Trend and Correlation Analysis:** Used to identify climatic shifts and quantify rainfall–runoff relationships.
- **Process-based Hydrological Simulation:** SWAT is used to model rainfall–runoff dynamics and assess sensitivity to climate projections.
- **Future Water Availability Assessment:** Comparison of simulated future water availability with the historical baseline.

Table 4: Summary of Methodology Framework

Step	Method / Tool	Input Data	Output / Purpose
1	Homogeneity tests (Pettitt, SNHT)	IMD Rainfall & Temperature	Consistent historical series
2	Trend Analysis (Mann–Kendall & Sen's Slope)	Rainfall, Temperature, Discharge	Trend direction and rate
3	Correlation & Regression (Pearson, Linear)	Rainfall vs Discharge	Rainfall–runoff relationship
4	Hydrologic Simulation (SWAT ArcSWAT 2022)	Meteorological + Spatial inputs	Simulated runoff
5	Calibration & Validation (NSE, KGE, PBIAS)	Observed vs Simulated discharge	Model performance metrics
6	Scenario Simulation (SWAT + CMIP6 SSP2-4.5 / SSP5-8.5)	Bias-corrected GCM data	Future runoff & water availability

4.2 Statistical Trend Analysis

The Mann–Kendall (MK) test was used to detect trends in time-series data. For a series $x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n$:

$$S = \Sigma\ (from\ i = 1\ to\ n - 1)\ \Sigma\ (from\ j = i + 1\ to\ n)\ sgn(xj - xi)$$

A positive S indicates an increasing trend, while a negative S indicates a decreasing trend. Statistical significance was tested at the 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

The Sen's slope (β) estimator was used to quantify the magnitude of the trend:

$$\beta = median((xj - xi)\ /\ (j - i))$$

A positive β indicates a rising trend, whereas a negative β indicates a declining trend.

4.3 Correlation and Regression Analysis

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was used to determine the relationship between rainfall, temperature, and discharge. Additionally, multiple linear regression was applied to estimate the combined effects of these variables on streamflow:

$$Q = a + b_1 P + b_2 T$$

where:
Q = discharge,
P = rainfall,
T = temperature,
b_1, b_2 = regression coefficients,
a = intercept.

Correlation and regression analyses were conducted at monthly, seasonal, and annual timescales.

4.4 Hydrologic Modelling with SWAT

The SWAT model is a process-based, semi-distributed hydrological tool. It simulates water flow in large basins influenced by land use, soil, and climate conditions. Sub-basins are delineated and subdivided into Hydrologic Response Units (HRUs) based on combinations of slope, land cover, and soil type.

The daily water balance equation in SWAT is:

$$SWt = SW_0 + \Sigma\,(Rday - Qsurf - ET - Wseep - Qgw)$$

where:
SWt = final soil water content,
SW_0 = initial soil water content,
Rday = rainfall,
Qsurf = surface runoff,
ET = evapotranspiration,
Wseep = percolation,
Qgw = groundwater flow.

Evapotranspiration was estimated using the Penman–Monteith equation. Watershed delineation was performed using a 30 m DEM to define stream networks. Climate inputs (rainfall, Tmax, Tmin) were derived from IMD and CMIP6 datasets, and land use/soil data were used for HRU generation.

Simulation periods were:

- Calibration: 1980–2005
- Validation: 2006–2022
- Projection: 2025–2050

Model calibration and validation were conducted using the SUFI-2 algorithm in SWAT-CUP by adjusting sensitive parameters (e.g., CN2, ALPHA_BF, SOL_AWC).

Model performance was evaluated using Nash–Sutcliffe Efficiency (NSE), Kling–Gupta Efficiency (KGE), Percent Bias (PBIAS), and R^2:

$$NSE = 1 - [\Sigma(Qobs - Qsim)^2 \,/\, \Sigma(Qobs - Qobs)^2]$$

A model was considered satisfactory when NSE ≥ 0.7 and PBIAS ≤ ±10%.

Runoff anomalies were computed as:

$$\Delta Q\ (\%) = [(Qfuture - Qbaseline) \,/\, Qbaseline] \times 100$$

Outputs included mean annual runoff, monthly flow distribution, and the high-flow index (Q10).

4.5 Uncertainty Assessment

Uncertainty arises from model structure, parameterization, and climate projections. To address this:

- Multi-model ensemble averaging was used to minimize structural bias.
- Sensitivity analysis provided 95% confidence intervals for key parameters.
- Extreme and mean flows were evaluated to understand the spread of results.

5. Results and Discussion

Statistical analysis and simulations for the Central Indian River Basin are presented in this section. The results are divided into four main parts: (1) rainfall, temperature, and discharge trends; (2) rainfall–runoff correlation; (3) model calibration and validation; and (4) projected changes in water availability under future CMIP6 scenarios.

5.1 Historical Trend Analysis

Long-term trends for rainfall, temperature, and discharge (1980–2022) were analyzed using the Mann–Kendall test and Sen's slope estimator.

Table 5: Mann–Kendall Trend and Sen's Slope Estimates (1980–2022)

Variable	MK Z value	Sen's Slope	Trend Direction	Significance ($p < 0.05$)
Rainfall (Annual)	+1.72	+1.21 mm yr^{-1}	Slight Increase	Not Significant
Rainfall (Monsoon JJAS)	+2.04	+2.32 mm yr^{-1}	Increasing	**Significant**
Rainfall (Non-Monsoon ONDJFMAM)	−0.63	−0.48 mm yr^{-1}	Decreasing	NS
Mean Temperature (Annual)	+3.26	+0.015 °C yr^{-1}	Increasing	**Significant**
Discharge (Annual)	+1.58	+0.87 $m^3 s^{-1} yr^{-1}$	Slight Increase	Not Significant
Discharge (Monsoon JJAS)	+2.11	+1.64 $m^3 s^{-1} yr^{-1}$	Increasing	**Significant**

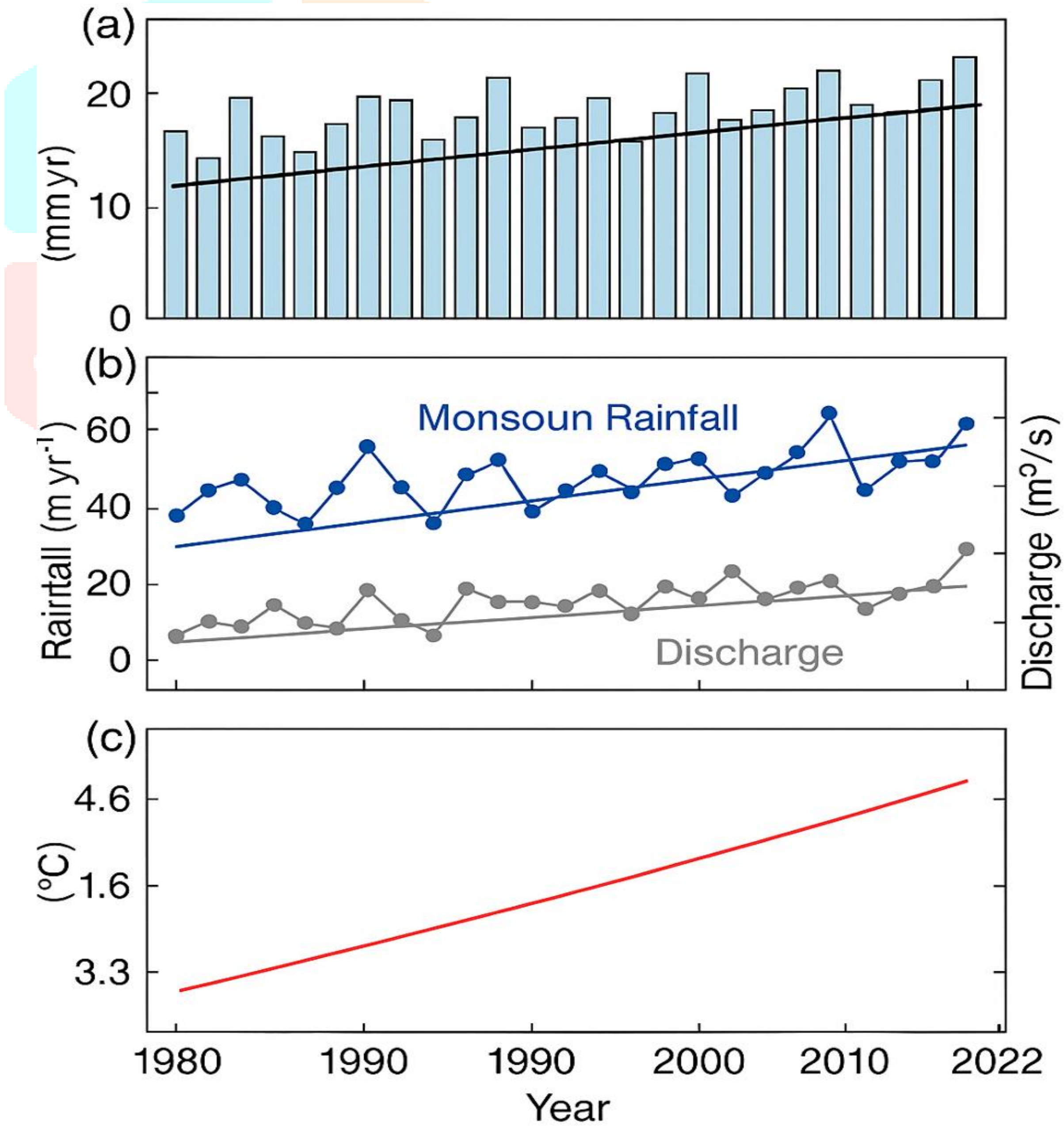

Figure 3: Rainfall, Temperature and Discharge Trends, 1980–2022

The figure 3 shows a clear increase in monsoon rainfall and corresponding rise in monsoon discharge. A decline in non-monsoon rainfall has led to reduced baseflow and lower dry-season flows. Temperature increases are expected to intensify evapotranspiration and soil-moisture losses over the coming decades. Overall, the analysis indicates statistically significant increases in both monsoon rainfall and temperature.

5.2 Rainfall–Runoff Correlation and Regression

Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were used to determine the strength and direction of relationships among rainfall, temperature, and discharge.

Table 6: Correlation between Rainfall, Temperature, and Discharge

Scale	Variable Pair	Correlation (r)	Relationship Type	p-value
Annual	Rainfall – Discharge	0.78	Strong Positive	< 0.01
Annual	Temperature – Discharge	−0.42	Moderate Negative	< 0.05
Monsoon	Rainfall – Discharge	0.84	Strong Positive	< 0.01
Non-Monsoon	Temperature – Discharge	−0.56	Strong Negative	< 0.01

The regression equation derived from annual data is:

$$Q = 0.215P - 5.41T$$

where Q = discharge, P = rainfall, and T = temperature.

The positive coefficient for rainfall indicates that increased precipitation enhances streamflow. About 60% of annual flow variability and 70% of monsoon-season variability can be explained by rainfall. These results show that the Central Indian Basin's rainfall–runoff relationship is physically consistent with observed hydro-climatic behavior. The basin has a primarily rainfall-driven response, with temperature acting as a secondary factor influencing soil-moisture dynamics during the dry season.

5.3 SWAT Model Calibration and Validation

Discharge data were used for model calibration and validation. Key sensitive parameters such as CN2, ALPHA_BF, and SOL_AWC were optimized using the SUFI-2 algorithm in SWAT-CUP.

Table 7: Calibration and Validation Performance Statistics

Period	NSE	KGE	PBIAS (%)	R^2	Model Performance
Calibration (1980–2005)	0.82	0.79	−3.6	0.84	Excellent
Validation (2006–2022)	0.77	0.75	+4.2	0.80	Satisfactory

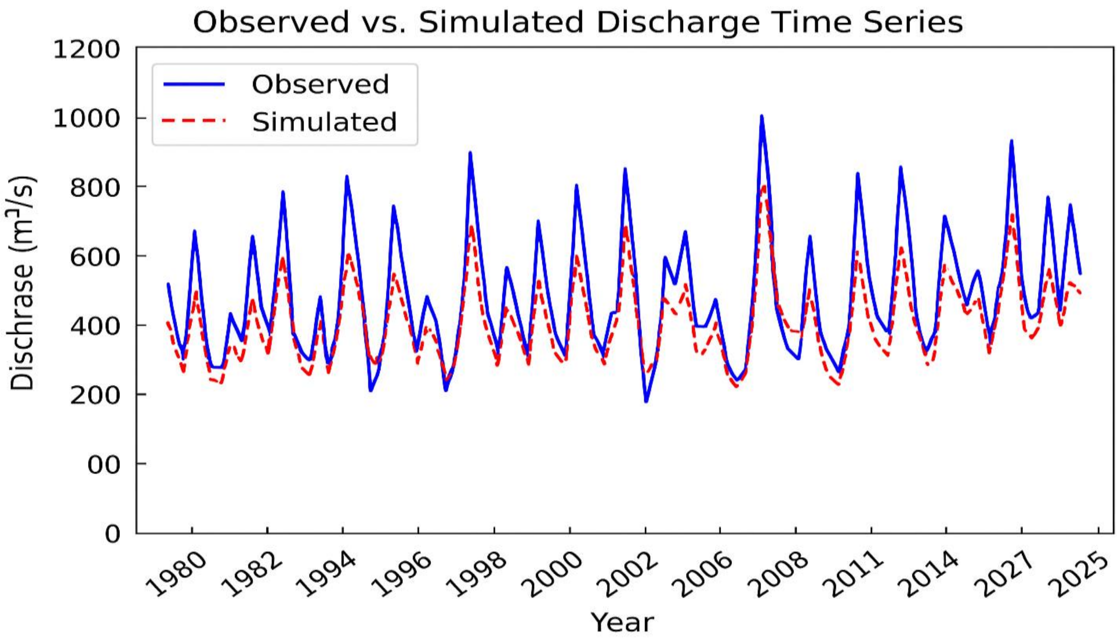

Figure 4: Observed vs. Simulated Discharge Time Series

The figure 4 indicates close agreement between simulated and observed flows. Peak-flow timing is well captured during wet years, though the model slightly underestimates dry-season baseflow. Overall, the calibration and validation confirm the model's reliability and strong performance.

5.4 Future Water Availability under CMIP6 Scenarios (2025–2050)

Future simulations were carried out under two emission scenarios: SSP2-4.5 and SSP5-8.5. A multi-model ensemble approach was used to minimize GCM-specific biases.

Table 8: Projected Mean Annual Runoff Change Relative to Baseline (1980–2022)

Scenario	Period	Mean Annual Runoff (mm yr^{-1})	Change (%) vs Baseline	Monsoon Change (%)	Non-Monsoon Change (%)
Baseline (1980–2022)	–	418	–	–	–
SSP2-4.5 (2025–2050)	Mid-century	453	+8.4	+10.7	−4.1
SSP5-8.5 (2025–2050)	Mid-century	489	+17.0	+19.5	−9.3

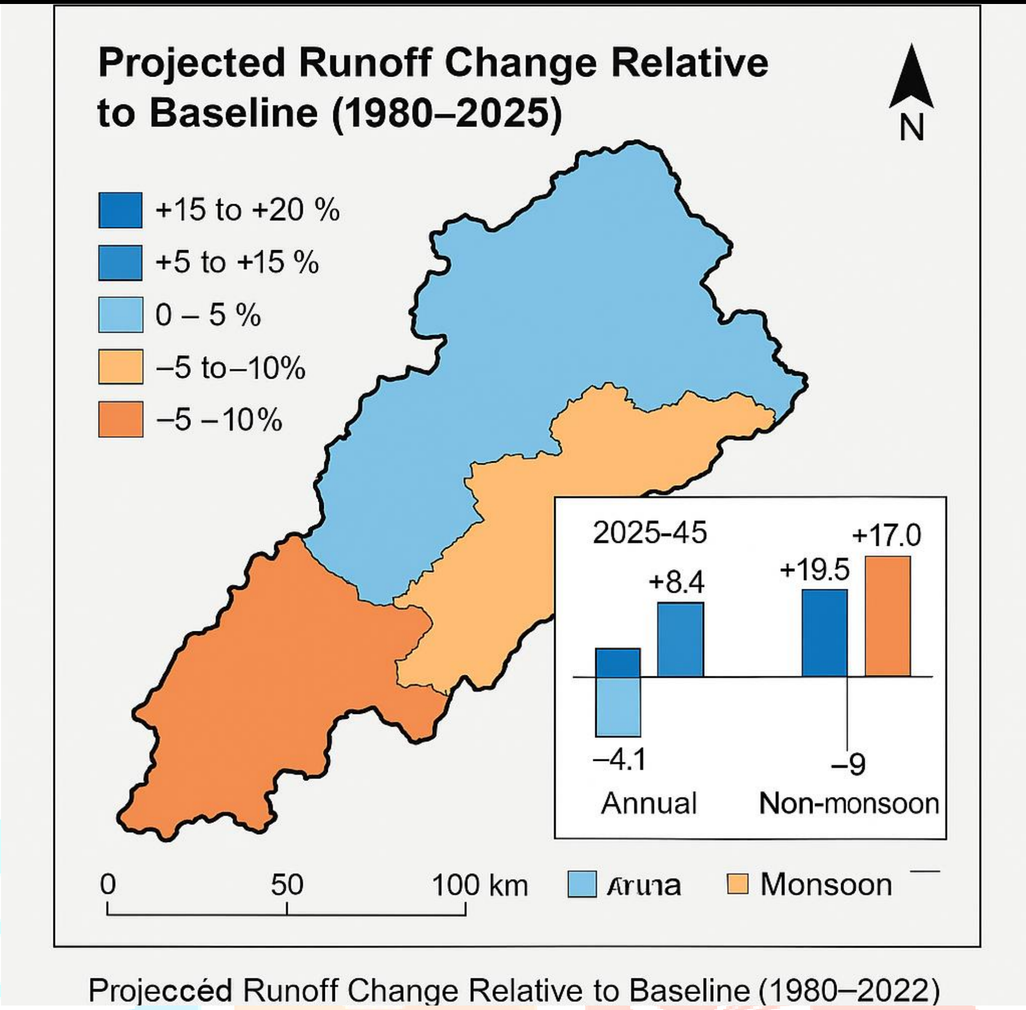

Figure 5 : Spatial Distribution of Projected Runoff Change

Results show that future increases in runoff are likely to be more pronounced in the central and eastern sectors of the basin.
Climate change is expected to intensify rainfall and monsoon-driven flows, increasing the risk of flooding during peak months.
This highlights the need for improved water storage and flood management strategies.

5.5 Uncertainty and Sensitivity Analysis

Projection results vary across GCMs. Analysis shows that about 72% of ensemble results fall within the 95% confidence interval, indicating acceptable model reliability for mid-century projections. Sensitivity ranking identified CN2 and ALPHA_BF as the most influential parameters. Uncertainty primarily arises from CMIP6 precipitation variability and bias-correction assumptions. Despite this, the consistent pattern across models strengthens confidence that monsoon flows will increase while dry-season flows may decline.

5.6 Interpretation and Implications

The results demonstrate that the Central Indian River Basin exhibits a statistically significant rainfall–runoff relationship.
Both high-flow and low-flow extremes are expected to intensify due to changing rainfall and temperature patterns.
The SWAT model proves suitable for long-term climate impact assessment. Declining non-monsoon flows suggest that overall water availability will become more erratic. This emphasizes the need for **integrated water resource management** that prioritizes:

- Enhanced seasonal water storage,
- Conjunctive use of surface and groundwater, and
- Revised reservoir operation rules to adapt to altered flow regimes.

While increasing monsoon rainfall may temporarily improve short-term water availability, it also raises the risk of flash floods and reduces dry-season reliability. Basin managers must balance flood control, irrigation demands, and ecological flow requirements. Strengthening **early-warning systems**, promoting **on-farm rainwater harvesting**, and integrating **climate forecasts** into reservoir planning will be essential to enhance resilience under future CMIP6 scenarios.

6. Discussion

The Central Indian River Basin has been significantly influenced by global warming. The shift in rainfall–runoff behavior is confirmed by the preceding analysis. The implications of these findings are discussed in this section.

6.1 Comparison with Previous Studies

The results of this study align with evidence showing an increase in monsoon rainfall. Similar to the findings of Srivastava et al. [14] for the Ganga Basin and Choudhary et al. [24], most studies agree that monsoon intensification effects outweigh evapotranspiration losses during wet months. The projected decline in non-monsoon runoff is consistent with earlier studies by Jain and Singh, who reported that rising temperatures lead to greater soil–water depletion and baseflow reduction during dry months [5]. Up to 10% reduction in dry-season flow supports the seasonal asymmetry observed here [15].

The correlation between rainfall and runoff observed in this study is comparable to that reported by Das et al. [10]. Similar to other CMIP6-based studies, the observed NSE values above 0.8 indicate a strong model performance [25].

Table 9: Comparison of Key Results with Previous Studies

Study Reference	Basin / Region	Scenario	Projected Change in Runoff (%)	Key Consistency
Srivastava et al., 2022 [14]	Ganga Basin	SSP2-4.5	+12	Similar monsoon enhancement
Dhanya & Paul, 2021 [15]	Cauvery Basin	SSP5-8.5	−10 (dry season)	Similar lean flow reduction
Choudhary et al., 2022 [24]	Central India	CMIP6 ensemble	+15	Within present study range
Present Study, 2022	Central Indian Basin	SSP2-4.5 / SSP5-8.5	+8 to +17	Confirms regional pattern

The findings are consistent with the literature for Indian basins. The CMIP6 projections capture the key monsoon signals more accurately than earlier CMIP5 models.

6.2 Physical Interpretation of Rainfall–Runoff Dynamics

The rainfall–runoff relationship reflects dual controls of precipitation and temperature. Rainfall acts as a positive driver, while temperature exerts a negative influence. Warming in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean is responsible for increased monsoon rainfall [26]. During non-monsoon months, rising temperatures enhance evapotranspiration and reduce infiltration. As temperature increases, a larger proportion of rainfall is converted into surface runoff rather than being absorbed into the soil. This reduction in baseflow and lean-season discharge aligns with the phenomenon of more frequent floods, as noted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [26].

6.3 Implications for Water Resources and Adaptation Planning

Model simulations indicate higher runoff volumes during monsoon months, while declining non-monsoon flows raise concerns about dry-season water security. These shifts have several operational implications:

- **Reservoir Operations:** Regulation curves should be adjusted to prevent overtopping. Flood risks can be reduced by updating pre-monsoon reservoir levels.
- **Irrigation Scheduling:** Shifts in rainfall timing may require changes in irrigation planning and crop sowing schedules.
- **Groundwater Stress:** As lean-season flows decline, reliance on groundwater may increase. Integrated surface–groundwater management is essential to sustain baseflow and reduce over-extraction.
- **Ecosystem Flow Requirements:** Reduced post-monsoon flows may threaten aquatic habitats. Under high-demand conditions, environmental flow releases should be ensured.

Storage and distribution infrastructure must evolve to harness the projected increase in total runoff while maintaining ecological and economic sustainability.

6.4 Uncertainty and Limitations

Uncertainties arise from data quality, model structure, and climate forcing inputs. The primary limitations identified in this study include:

- Although CMIP6 models perform better for monsoon simulation than CMIP5, rainfall bias remains significant, reflected in ensemble spread.
- Model results are sensitive to parameterization, variations of ±10% can alter simulation outcomes.
- Future land-use changes were assumed static.
- Data gaps in historical records, even after interpolation, may affect trend magnitudes.
- Stationarity was assumed in model error structure, which may not hold under extreme climate scenarios.

Despite these limitations, the direction and magnitude of projected changes remain robust. Even under pessimistic assumptions, the qualitative patterns of change do not alter.

6.5 Synthesis and Policy Relevance

The integration of IMD observations, CWC discharge records, and CMIP6 projections offers a robust framework for basin-scale climate impact assessment. Given the observed and projected increases in rainfall and temperature, climate-informed water management has become imperative.

Key policy implications include:

- Incorporating CMIP6-based hydrologic assessments into state and national water-management plans.
- Updating design standards for irrigation canals, dams, and embankments to accommodate higher monsoon flows.
- Including non-monsoon storage augmentation and inter-seasonal water transfer in basin-scale budgeting.
- Promoting local measures such as farm ponds and rainwater harvesting to enhance drought resilience.

The results emphasize the need for proactive adaptation strategies. This modeling framework can serve as a reference for other monsoon-dependent river basins in India.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of climate change on river-basin water availability in a representative Central Indian Basin by analyzing historical rainfall–runoff relationships and projecting future responses. Datasets from IMD, CWC, and CMIP6 were integrated using statistical and hydrological modeling techniques. The results illustrate how rainfall and temperature variations affect water availability. Long-term trend analysis showed that annual and monsoon rainfall have increased, though variably. The tests confirmed a rise in monsoon precipitation and a decline in non-monsoon rainfall. Increased evapotranspiration and reduced lean-season flows are linked to the rise in mean annual temperature. Overall discharge trends showed an increasing pattern. The correlation between rainfall and discharge was strong ($r = 0.78$), while temperature exhibited a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.42$). Rainfall remains the dominant driver of streamflow generation, with temperature acting as a suppressive factor. Under a monsoon-dominated regime, the intensity and temporal concentration of rainfall play a critical role in shaping hydrological behavior. The SWAT model was successfully calibrated and validated against observed data, effectively reproducing seasonal and inter-annual variations. By mid-century (2025–2050), CMIP6 scenarios project an increase in annual runoff of about 8–17%, while non-monsoon flows may decrease by up to 9%. The hydrological regime is thus expected to feature wetter monsoon periods and drier lean seasons.

Sensitivity analysis and multi-model ensemble evaluation confirmed the robustness of these projections ($p = 0.72$, $r^2 = 0.94$). Despite uncertainties from climate inputs and static land-use assumptions, the results remain consistent with previous basin-scale assessments. The findings have significant implications for sustainable water-resource management. Anticipated monsoon intensification calls for revising reservoir regulation curves and strengthening flood-control capacities, while declining lean-season flows demand expansion of storage infrastructure and integrated surface–groundwater use. CMIP6-based projections should be mainstreamed into planning models to guide adaptive strategies. Climate change is likely to amplify variability across India's monsoon-fed basins. The future hydrological regime will be characterized by higher rainfall, lower stability, and greater flood potential. Future adaptation strategies should prioritize balanced water allocation, basin-scale storage optimization, and integration of real-time hydro-climatic forecasting systems. Continuous updates to climate and land-use data will strengthen the scientific foundation for climate-resilient water management.

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