

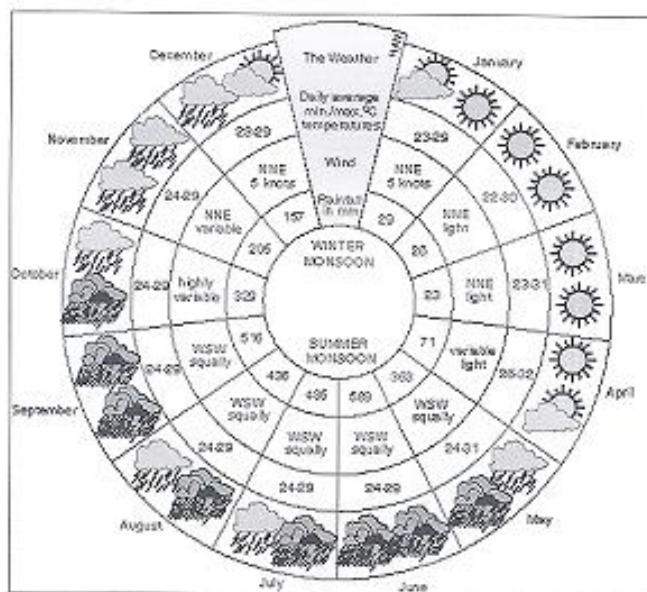
## ***Chapter II***

### **THE GEOGRAPHY**

The monsoonal climate of the islands is generally hot and always humid, often oppressively so. Heavy though, rainfall can be, and is quite unpredictable from year to year and can fall most unevenly within a small area. On islands with few perennial streams a lack of fresh water can quickly become a serious problem. During December to March temperature and humidity tend to be lower and there is less rain but it would be an exaggeration to call it a "dry" season. Violent thunderstorms occur during the wet South West monsoon from mid May to end September while tropical revolving storms usually form to the south, west and north of the Andamans, moving towards India without directly affecting the islands.

Despite their coral reefs most Islands themselves are not of coral origin, instead they are the peaks of a drowned mountain range. While there is only a narrow littoral there are

some shallow banks off the coasts of the Andamans, especially to the North West and South East.



Geologically the Andamans and Nicobars represents the highest peaks of an under water mountain range which is itself an extension of the Arakan range in Burma and the Sumatran Barisan ranges to the South. The islands lie parallel to a geological fault line to the east passing the Andaman Sea from north to South. The line marks two tectonic plates rubbing against each other. The eastern plate, an extension of the huge Eurasian plate, is stationary, while the Indian plate to the west is moving north to north east at the rate of a few centimeters a year, taking the Andaman Islands with it. This slow but steady movement is still pushing up the Himalayan Mountains and causes earthquakes and volcanic activity in and around the islands. India's only active volcano is on Barren Island while Narcondam Island is an extinct volcano sitting directly on the fault line.

Despite the abundant greenery, the soils are not fertile, with low capacity to hold moisture. They are mostly soft, deep sandy loams with acidic or slightly acidic reactions and are rather deficient in calcium.

There is little variety in mammal life. Most noticeable is the absence of the large carnivores with only 19 land-living species of small mammals sharing the islands with humans. The seas, on the other hand, teem with large mammals. There are sea cows (dugong), dolphins and whales. Among non-mammalian groups there is rather more variety: there are 72 kinds of reptiles such as snakes, lizards, turtles and crocodiles and no less than 255 kinds of birds.