ESKIMO

INTRODUCTION

Eskimos or the Inuits are the indigenous people inhabiting parts of the northern circumpolar region ranging from Siberia to Canada. The term Eskimo is slowly being replaced by the Canadian term 'Inuit' or 'Yupik.' Each of these terms is used by different settlements of Eskimos. In Canada, Greenland, and Northern Alaska, the Eskimos identify with Inuit or the subgroup Inupiat while Yupik refers to the Eskimos inhabiting Alaska and eastern Siberia. The term Eskimo is considered derogatory in some areas, especially Canada and Greenland since it is perceived to translate to “eaters of raw meat” in Algonkian languages. There exists a third group known as the Aleut, who inhabit the Aleutian Islands, and who are closely related to the Eskimos. The most closely related group to the Eskimos are the Mongolian people inhabiting eastern Asia. Eskimos inhabit arctic regions which are characterized by extreme cold.

HISTORY OF THE ESKIMOS

Archaeological evidence has suggested that Eskimos settled in North America some 5,000 years ago. This early group evolved in Alaska from people closely related to the Arctic small tool tradition, a cultural entity which developed in eastern Asia. The ancestors of this entity had relocated to Alaska from Siberia an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 years earlier. Artifacts discovered in Alaska have been found to be similar to those found in Siberia, dating as far as 18,000 years ago. At the first extensive contact with Europeans, the Eskimo population totaled about 50,000, and it has remained relatively constant throughout centuries.

LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY THE ESKIMOS

Languages spoken by the Eskimo people are classified in the Eskimo-Aleut family. The Eskimo languages branches into the Inuit and the Yupik languages. The Inuit language is marked by numerous dialects which differ by region and community. The Inuit dialects are:

- Inuktut- This language is one of the Inuit dialects with speakers in Canada and Greenland. In Canada, the language is accorded official status in the Northwest Territories as well as in Nunavut. Its sub-dialects include Inuttitut and Nunavimmiutitut.
**Iñupiaq**- This dialect is spoken by approximately 2,000 people in northwestern and northern Alaska. The language lacks categories for articles and gender, and its dialects are divided into two groups namely Northern Alaskan Iñupiaq and Seward Peninsular Iñupiaq.

**Inuvialuktun**- This dialect consists of several varieties of Inuit spoken in western Canada which are Siglitun, Inuinnaqtun, Uummarmiutun, and Natsilingmiutut.

**Kalaallisut**- This dialect is spoken in Greenland where it boasts about 57,000 speakers. It is an official language in the nation.

The Yupik group of languages is categorized into:

**Central Siberian Yupik**- This language is primarily spoken by the Siberian Yupik people in Siberia, and it also has speakers in St. Lawrence Island which is part of Alaska.

**Central Alaskan Yup’ik**- This language has about 10,000 speakers in southwestern and western Alaska. It has the second largest speakers as far as indigenous languages are concerned in the US.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF ESKIMO**

Eskimo people are culturally and biologically distinguishable from neighbouring indigenous groups including American Indians and the Sami of northern Europe. Studies comparing Eskimo-Aleut Languages to other indigenous North American languages indicate that the former arose separately from the latter. Physiologically, an appreciable percentage of Eskimo people have the B blood type (ABO system), which seems to be absent from other indigenous American groups. Because blood type is a very stable hereditary trait, it is believed that at least a part of the Eskimo population is of a different origin from other indigenous American peoples.

Culturally, traditional Eskimo life was totally adapted to an extremely cold, snow- and icebound environment in which vegetable foods were almost nonexistent, trees were scarce, and caribou, seal, walrus, and whale meat, whale blubber, and fish were the major food sources. Eskimo people used harpoons to kill seals, which they hunted either on the ice or from kayaks, skin-covered, one-person canoes. Whales were hunted by using larger boats called umiaks. In the summer most Eskimo families hunted caribou and other land animals with bows and arrows. Dogsleds were the basic means of transport on land. Eskimo clothing was fashioned of
caribou furs, which provided protection against the extreme cold. Most Eskimo wintered in either snow-block houses called igloos or semi-subterranean houses built of stone or sod over wooden or whalebone frameworks. In summer many Eskimo lived in animal-skin tents. Their basic social and economic unit was the nuclear family, and their religion was animistic.

Eskimo life has changed greatly because of increased contact with societies to the south. Snowmobiles have generally replaced dogs for land transport, and rifles have replaced harpoons for hunting purposes. Outboard motors, store-bought clothing, and numerous other manufactured items have entered the culture, and money, unknown in the traditional Eskimo economy, has become a necessity. Many Eskimo have abandoned nomadic hunting and now live in northern towns and cities, often working in mines and oil fields. Others, particularly in Canada, have formed cooperatives to market their handicrafts, fish catches, and tourism ventures. The creation of Nunavut, a new Canadian territory, in 1999 helped to support a revitalization of traditional indigenous culture in North America.
The Maasai are an indigenous ethnic group in Africa of semi-nomadic people settled in Kenya and northern Tanzania. Due to their distinct traditions, customs and dress and their residence near the many national game parks of East Africa, the Maasai are among the foremost African ethnic groups and are known internationally because of their links to the national parks and reserves.

**Language** - Maa, a language derived from Nilo-Saharan, related to Dinka and Nuer. They also speak the official languages of Tanzania and Kenya. Swahili and English.

**Population** - The Maasai population is now estimated 900,000

**MASAI SHELTER**

The Maasai, historically a nomadic people, have traditionally relied on readily available materials and indigenous technology to construct their unusual and interesting housing. The traditional Maasai house was designed for people on the move and thus their houses were very impermanent in nature. The Inkajjik (houses) are either circular or loaf-shaped, and are made by women.

Their villages are enveloped in a circular Enkang (fence) built by the men and this protects their cattle at night from wild animals.

**MASAI CULTURE**

Masai society is firmly patriarchal in nature, with elder Maasai men sometimes joined by retired elders, determining most major matters for the Maasai tribes. The Maasai people are monotheistic, and their God is named Engai or Enkai.

For Maasai people living a traditional way of life, the end of life is virtually without a formal funeral ceremony, and the dead are left out in the fields for scavengers. Burial has in the past been reserved for great chiefs only, since it is believed by the Maasai that burial is harmful to the soil.

Traditional Maasai people's lifestyle concentrates on their cattle which make up the primary source of food. Amongst the Maasai and several other African ethnic groups, the measure of a man's wealth is in terms of children and cattle. So, the more the better.
A man who has plenty cattle but not many children is considered to be poor and vice versa. A Maasai myth says that God afforded them all the cattle on earth, resulting in the belief that rustling from other tribes is a matter of claiming what is rightfully theirs, a practice that has now become much less common.

**MASAI CLOTHING**

Clothing varies by sex, age and place. Young men wear black for several months after their circumcision. Although, red is a favoured color among the Maasai. Black, Blue, checkered and striped cloth are also worn, together with **multicoloured African garments**. In the 1960s the Maasai began to replace sheepshin, calf hides and animal skin for more commercial material. The cloth used to wrap around the body is the called Shúkà in the Maa language.

**INFLUENCE OF THE WESTERN WORLD**

Government policies focusing on the preservation of their national parks and reserves, with the exclusion of the culturally rich Maasai tribe, have now made the **traditional Maasai way of life** increasingly difficult to maintain and preserve for coming generations to experience and learn about.

During recent years, projects have been implemented to help Maasai tribal leaders find a way to preserve their traditions and way of life while also trying to balance the education needs of the Maasai children for the modern world.

Many Maasai people have stirred away from the nomadic life to positions in business commerce and government roles. Yet despite the modernized urban lifestyle they lead, many Maasai’ still happily head homewards clothed in designer brands, only to emerge **from the traditional lands** wearing their traditionally colourful shuka, cowhide sandals and with a wooden orinka in their hand- at ease with themselves and the world.

**MAORI**

**INTRODUCTION**
The ancestors of the present-day Maori created an outpost of Polynesian culture on the North and South islands of New Zealand. They remained relatively isolated from external contact until 1769. In that year, English navigator and explorer Captain James Cook (1728–79) initiated a permanent European presence in New Zealand. As a result, Maori culture would be dramatically changed in less than a century.

In 1840, some 500 Maori chiefs signed the so-called Treaty of Waitangi with the British government. The treaty promised the Maoris that they would keep their lands and property and have equal treatment under the law as British subjects. However, the British later seized Maori lands and made the people move to reservations. As a result of war and disease, the Maori population fell drastically by 1896. Since World War II (1939–45), the government's policies have been more favorable to the Maoris. In recent years, the government of New Zealand has acknowledged its responsibility to the Maoris after a series of protests and court rulings. In October 1996, the government agreed to a settlement with the Maoris that included land and cash worth $117 million, with the Maoris regaining some traditional fishing rights. The Maori have been striving to revive aspects of their traditional culture, reclaim artifacts of their cultural history from foreign museums, and regain their ancestral homelands.

As of 1997, the Maori of New Zealand numbered close to 525,000 people, or about 15 percent of New Zealand's total population. The term "Maori" refers to a number of different tribal and subtribal groups that view themselves and each other as very distinct.

LOCATION

The islands of New Zealand are the present-day homeland of the Maori. New Zealand consists of two islands: the North Island and the South Island. The North Island is hilly with areas of flat, rolling terrain. The South Island is larger and more mountainous. Prior to the arrival of humans, both islands were densely forested.

Archaeologists refer to two branches of Maori: the archaic, and the traditional. The archaic Maori were probably the original inhabitants of New Zealand. They relied on the moa, a large, flightless bird that they hunted into extinction. Their culture dates back to around AD 1000. The traditional Maori are believed to have migrated to the North Island around the fourteenth century. The original homeland of the traditional Maori was in the Society Islands of Polynesia. Maori migrants left there to escape warfare and the demands of excessive tribute (taxes).
LANGUAGE

Maori belongs to the Tahitic branch of the Eastern Polynesian language group. (Eastern Polynesian is, in turn, a branch of the larger Austronesian language family.) Prior to European colonization of New Zealand, there were two distinct Maori dialects: North Island Maori; and South Island Maori, which is now extinct. The Maori of today speak English. Preschools that offer instruction in Maori language have sprung up all over the country at a rapid rate as a result of Maori activism.

RELIGION

Like other New Zealanders, many Maori today are Christian (primarily Anglican, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic). Before contact with outside cultures, Maori religion was based on the important concepts of mana and tapu. Mana is an impersonal force that can be both inherited and acquired by individuals in the course of their lives. Tapu refers to sacredness that was assigned by status at birth. There was a direct relation between the two: chiefs with the most mana were also the most tapu. The English word "taboo" derives from this general Polynesian word and concept of a mysterious superhuman force. Ancestor worship was important in traditional religion.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Today, 80 percent of the Maori live in the urban areas of New Zealand. However, until the 1920s, they lived almost entirely in rural areas. Maori housing today therefore typically reflects that of other urban New Zealanders.

Traditionally, Maoris in coastal areas relied on travel by canoes. These included single-hulled canoes as well as large double-hulled canoes. Waka taua were large Maori war canoes that were powered by both sail and paddles. As with other New Zealanders, travel today is by modern road, rail, water, and air transport.

CLOTHING

Maoris typically wear modern Western-style clothing. However, they still wear their traditional clothing for special occasions. Traditional Maori clothing was some of the most elaborate in
Polynesia. Intricately decorated cloaks were an important item of dress for individuals of high status within Maori society.

Tattooing among the Maori was highly developed and extremely symbolic. Maori facial tattoos were created by two methods. One was by piercing and pigmenting the skin with a tattooing comb. The other was by creating permanent grooves in the face with a chisel-like instrument. Male facial tattooing, called *ta moko*, was done in stages in a male's life through adulthood. Females were also tattooed in Maori society. Female facial tattooing was known as *ta ngutu*. Designs were placed on the chin and lips. There is a growing revival of this art among younger Maori women nowadays.

**FOOD**

Maoris typically eat the same kinds of foods as other New Zealanders. Breakfast consists of eggs, sausage, and bacon. Lunch may be a meat pie or sandwich. Dinner is a full meal with a meat dish as the main course. The traditional Polynesian foodstuffs of taro (a starchy root), yams, and breadfruit were not well adapted for cultivation on the temperate islands of New Zealand.

The most famous Maori culinary tradition is the *hangi*. The hangi is a feast that may only be prepared in the regions of the country where there are hot springs. A pit is dug in the ground and filled with rocks. Meat and vegetables are placed on top of the rocks in the pit. The food is left to steam for several hours.

**SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

The vast majority of all contemporary Maori are urban dwellers. The Maori continue to suffer the social problems that accompany urban life in conditions of poverty. In some urban areas, Maori unemployment rates exceed 50 percent. The film *Once Were Warriors* (1994) provides a Maori perspective on the social problems of alcoholism, domestic violence, and under-employment or unemployment.