The Polar Regions

The northern part of the continents within the polar region is known as the Tundra. Tundra means very cold. Since the Tundra region gets very little sunlight, it has a unique type of vegetation known as the 'Tundra Vegetation'.

Seasons in the Tundra

In the Tundra region it is extremely cold. It is difficult to even imagine the cold in the Tundra. In our country, the sun rises and sets everyday. But this does not happen in the Tundra. It is almost dark throughout November, December and January, since the sun does not rise at all. This is the winter of the Tundra, and it is bitterly cold during these months. You know that when it is extremely cold, water freezes to become ice. In this extreme cold, the water of the rivers, lakes, seas freezes. Strong cold winds blow and there is snowfall. Due to the severe cold, dark and icy conditions, all the plants die. Even birds and animals leave this region and migrate elsewhere. The whole region becomes dark, deserted and desolate.

Summer

The sun begins to shine in the Tundra around February-March. In the beginning, the sun shines for a maximum of an hour and a half and then sets. Gradually, it lengthens to 2 hours, 6 hours, 8 hours, 16 hours, and finally 24 hours! Then for all most three months from May to July, the sun never sets, it shines all 24 hours. But the sun does not rise overhead, it just hovers a little above the horizon (The horizon is the place where the earth appears to meet the sky). Since the sun does not go high up in the sky, it is never very warm. Even in the three months of summer, it is cold. But it is comparatively less cold than the winter months. Due to the relatively warm weather, some of the ice melts. The rivers which are frozen during the winter melt and begin to flow. The lakes fill up, and huge chunks of ice break off and float into the ocean as icebergs.

The People: Eskimos

The Arctic is a region of vast, treeless plains, icy seas, and barren, rocky islands. This harsh, cold land is the home of the Eskimos. They live in the scattered settlements in Greenland, Canada, Alaska, and Siberia. For thousands of years, the Eskimos were isolated from other people. They lived by hunting and fishing and they developed a way of life well suited to their homeland.

The Eskimos’ traditional way of life developed to meet the challenges of the Far North. This section describes that way of life, which the Eskimos followed until recently.

The most commonly accepted meaning of ‘Eskimo’ is “snowshoe-setter”. There are two main groups referred to as Eskimos: Inuit and Yupik. Inuit in their language means “the people” or “the real people”. The Eskimos are descendants of Siberia, now a part of the Russia in northern Asia.

Eskimo languages have been spoken for thousands of years, but they were not written down until modern times. There are three main languages - Aleut, Yupik, and Inupik. Inupik, spoken from northern Alaska to Greenland, has the most speakers, and it has many dialects. The differences among the dialects are small. Dialects of Yupik are spoken in south-western Alaska and Siberia.

The Eskimos first entered North America about 5,000 years ago, crossing the Bering Straits from Asia. They moved rapidly across the Canadian North to Greenland. Some Eskimo groups then moved westward again, to the Bering Sea area. Today the Eskimo population is not large, but it is growing. About 2,000 Eskimos live in Siberia, 30,000 in Alaska, 22,500 in Canada and 43,000 in Greenland. Some Eskimo communities are on the edge of the forests of the Far North. But most are on the tundraless, or Arctic plain that lies north of the forests.
hunt caribou and large sea mammals such as whales. Some activities are carried out by individuals and small family groups - tracking bears, fishing with nets and gathering berries.

**Hunting and Fishing**

Because they depend on hunting and fishing to live, Eskimos are highly skilled at these activities. Caribou hunting is essential for nearly all Eskimo groups. Caribou are hunted in the inland during summer and early autumn. In some places caribou are driven by lines of people into lakes or narrow streams, where they are speared, shot with bows and arrows, or even harpooned. Sometimes, Eskimos set up piles of stones in long lines. To the caribou, the stones look like people in the distance. The caribou would turn away from the lines of stones and be caught.

For some groups, fishing is as important as hunting. Fish are netted in deep muggy waters or through holes in the ice. They are speared in shallow, clear waters at their winter - low dam of stones placed across streams. Fish are chased into the weir by people wading in the stream and are caught by skilled hunters with three pronged spears. Eskimos also use barbell bone hook on short lines to fish through holes in the ice in winter or from the edge of the ice in spring. Seals are harpooned from the edges of ice floes or from kayaks (kayaks are small canoes like boats made of animal skins stretched over a wooden frame).

**Religious Beliefs**

Eskimo religion shows deep concern for life, health, sickness, starvation and death. The Eskimos believe that spirits control these things. All Eskimo groups believe in a supernatural power called Sila and spirits (such as Sedna, the goddess of death. The Eskimos believe that spirits and animals as well as weapons and tools.

**Food**

Meat, fat and fish make up a large part of the Eskimo diet. Vegetables are scarce. Food is not wasted. But as the Eskimos depend on hunting and fishing, hunger and even starvation are common when fish and game are not plentiful. Meat and fish caught in summer are stored as shaved, soft body. These pits are dug down to permafrost and covered with piles of stones to keep out hungry animals.

Wood to make fires for roasting or baking is scarce in most of the Eskimo area. Meat and fish are often eaten raw. Raw meat or fish are frozen and cut into thin strips, which are dipped in whale or seal oil. Some meat, especially meat from large sea mammals, is eaten in a partly decayed state (the tough meat becomes tender and easy to digest). If food is cooked, it is almost always boiled, using the heat from oil lamps.

**Shelter**

The Eskimo word igloo means shelter. It can refer to any kind of house, not really the dome shaped snow houses that many people associate with the word.

In summer, most Eskimos live in tents made of animal skins. In western Alaska, very large winter tents are made by placing heavy waduk skins over wood frames. On the northern coast of Alaska, dome-shaped houses are built of logs and whale ribs. The dome is raised over a depression in the ground and is covered with frozen turf. In Greenland homes are built of stone slabs.

Snow houses are used only in the eastern and central regions. They are made from blocks of packed snow (not ice), built into a dome. Small snow houses with short tunnel entrances are used while travelling. Larger snow houses are used as winter residences. Long tunnel entrance provide storage space in these larger homes. The entrance tunnel opens into the house below the floor level.

The rear half of the house and on both sides of the door, there are snow benches about one metre high. The rear bench is covered with animal skins and is used for sleeping. The side benches support racks for drying clothes, food supplies, and seal-oil lamps that provide light and heat. Sometimes, two large snow houses are joined together by tunnels. Some snow houses are lined with sealskins that are sewed together and suspended from the top of the dome.

- In what ways are the resources available in their surroundings used for making houses?
- How is the house impacted by the climate?

**Clothing and Crafts**

The Eskimos wear boots called mukluks, trousers and hooded jackets called parkas - all made of animal skins.

There are differences in details of clothing for men and women. The man’s parka has long flaps in front and behind. In winter, the Eskimos wear two layers of clothing. Caribou fur skin is preferred in winter because it is soft and warm. Coastal groups rocked by smallpox and yellow fever. Eskimos are highly skilled at these activities. Caribou hunting is essential for nearly all Eskimo groups. Caribou are hunted in the inland during summer and early autumn. In some places caribou are driven by lines of people into lakes or narrow streams, where they are speared, shot with bows and arrows, or even harpooned. Sometimes, Eskimos set up piles of stones in long lines. To the caribou, the stones look like people in the distance. The caribou would turn away from the lines of stones and be caught.

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1. Do you think lives of people in Tundra have changed for better or worsened because of their interaction with outside world? Give reasons for your answer.

2. Look at the pictures in this chapter. How has that dress and hunting changed?

Key words

1. Arctic circle
2. Tundra vegetation
3. Icebergs
4. Eskimos
5. Kayaks
6. Igloo

Improve your learning

1. Re-write the false statements with correct facts:
   a) Animal body parts were used only in clothing.
   b) Major part of the food includes vegetables.
   c) Popular games amongst the people in Tundra are closely related to their daily lives.
   d) Contact with people from outside impacted their health.

2. Based on what you studied about equator regions in Class VII how is polar region different?

3. What are the ways in which life of people in Tundra are dependent on climate of the region? Describe in the context of following aspects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Dress</th>
<th>Travel</th>
<th>Shelter</th>
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4. In this chapter there are many aspects that are very different from the place where you live. Look at the subheadings in this chapter and make a list of them. Now create a wallpaper with illustrations and descriptions comparing life in your location with that in the Tundra.

5. Imagine one entire day (24 hours) when the sun does not set and another day when there is no sun. What changes will you make in your daily lives? Write a short note on them.