

Social Life

Except in the extreme west and extreme east, where permanent villages were inhabited for a long period of the year, the Eskimo of Canada were organized into nomadic bands that split into small hunting groups during much of the year but re-assembled during the winter at snowhouse villages set on the sea ice. These *band assemblages* averaged about 100 persons, and the hunting groups of the summer period averaged perhaps 15 to 20 persons. Among the Caribou Eskimo the largest aggregation took place in summer and autumn at the sites of caribou drives.

In some areas the hunting groups of each band were made up of men and their families who were related by close ties of kinship, with the pattern of relationship extending mainly through the male line. Elsewhere, as in the Copper Eskimo area, the nomadic hunting groups were more fragmented and the ties between members were less regular.

When the bands assembled each individual family usually found that it could trace close relationships with several others in the group. It was these ties of kinship that formed the basis of personal interaction, for each type of relationship called for an appropriate kind of behaviour: respect, obedience, or avoidance. This network of specified behaviour helped to organize groups into work forces and, in most areas, regulated distribution of food, arranged marriages and adoption, and provided the basis for mutual aid.

The circle of kinship was extended first by marriages, secondly by frequent adoption, and thirdly by exchanging spouses. The children of couples who were exchanging spouses regarded one another virtually as brothers and sisters

and, in turn, the offspring of each of these regarded one another as cousins.

A number of partnerships existed that either reinforced kinship ties or extended associations outward from the kinship network. Among the sorts of partnerships known were those established in dancing and a special rough joking relationship, which served to ease tensions inherent in a society where avoidance and reserve characterized many human relationships. A special set of partnerships was developed among the Copper and Netsilik Eskimo with respect to partitioning the seal. This system allowed for the wide circulation of meat through the winter village and beyond the immediate ties of kinship. Among the Copper Eskimo, at least, these various partnerships appear to have had as much importance as relationships based on kinship.

Strong leadership was unknown among some nations, and men related to each other on an equal basis. Elsewhere, as among the Netsilik and Iglulik Eskimo, kinship position outlined leadership, with the oldest male assuming authority over the extended family (father and grown sons with their wives and children or brothers and their families). This man was called *isumataq* or *ihumataq*. Among some Eskimo nations the local group, whether the band assemblage or hunting group, also had an overall *isumataq* whose position was determined both by the size and productiveness of his extended family and by his personal qualities. His judgment was followed in division of food, settlement of disputes, arrangement of marriage, adoption, and the hunt.

In a society without courts, judges, or a police force, regulation of conduct was, by our standards, rather poorly