CHAPTER III

AN OVERVIEW OF BUYERS’ BEHAVIOUR AND PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

INTRODUCTION

Buyer/Consumer behaviour is comparatively a new field of study which evolved just after the Second World War. The seller’s market has disappeared and buyers market has come up. This led to paradigm shift of the manufacturer's attention from product to consumer and specially focused on the consumer behaviour. The evaluation of marketing concept from mere selling concept to consumer-oriented marketing has resulted in buyer behaviour becoming an independent discipline. The growth of consumerism and consumer legislation emphasizes the importance that is given to the consumer. Buyer behaviour is a study of how individuals make decision to spend their available resources (time, money and effort) or consumption related aspects (What they buy? When they buy? How they buy? Where they buy? How often they buy?). The heterogeneity among people makes understanding buyer behaviour a challenging task to marketers. Hence marketers felt the need to obtain in-depth knowledge of buying behaviour of individuals and others. Finally this knowledge acted as an imperative tool in the hands of marketers to forecast the future buying behaviour of customers and devise some marketing strategies in order to create long term customer relationship.

Buyer Behaviour

It is broadly the study of individuals, or organizations and the processes consumers use to search, select, use and dispose of products, services, experience, or ideas to satisfy needs and its impact on the consumer and society.
Need to Study Buyers’ Behaviour

The study of buyer behaviour helps everybody as all are consumers. It is essential for marketers to understand consumers, to make long term survival of the organizations and to get success in this competitive marketing environment. The following reasons highlight the importance of studying buyer behaviour as a discipline:

- **Day to day life linked with products**

  The reason to study buyer behaviour is because of the role it plays in the daily lives of human beings. Most of the people spent time in the market place for shopping or engaging in other activities. The extra time is usually they spent in knowing and thinking about products and services, discussing with friends about the products, and watching advertisements related to products. All these reasons influence the people to change their buying behaviour and become accustomed to the changing environment. Hence, it suggests the need for buyer behaviour study. However, the purpose may be to attend immediate and tangible reasons.

- **Helps in Decision Making**

  Buyer behaviour is said to be an applied discipline as some decisions are significantly affected by their behaviour or expected actions. The micro perspectives involve understanding consumer for the purpose of helping a firm or organization to achieve its objectives. The people involved in this field try to understand consumers in order to be more effective at their tasks. The behaviour of consumer has significant influence on the quality, level of the standard of living and effective decision making.
BUYERS’ BUYING BEHAVIOUR (BBB)

The wealth of products and services produced in one country make countries economy strong. Products which are available in the market usually the buyer will get lot of choices to buy the products. A buyer makes a purchase of a particular product or a particular brand and this can be termed “product buying motives” and the reason behind the purchase from a particular seller is “patronage motives”. When a person gets his pay packet, and if he is educated, sits down along with his wife and prepares a family budget, by appropriating the amount to different needs. It may happen that after a trip to the market, they might have purchased some items, which are not in the budget, and thus there arises a deviation from the budgeted items and expenditure. All the behaviour of human beings during the purchase may be termed as “buyer behaviour”. Therefore a seller most of his time, seeks buyers and tries to convince them to buy their products. In order to be successful, a seller is concerned with finding the solution for the following questions; Who is the prospects? What do buyers buy? When do they buy? How do they buy? Where do they buy? Why do they buy?

Common reasons for Buying Products/Service

People make purchases in order to satisfy needs. Some of these needs are basic and must be filled by everyone on the planet (e.g., food, cloth and shelter) while others are not required for basic survival and vary depending on the person. It probably makes more sense to classify needs that are not a necessity as wants or desires. In fact, in many countries where the standard of living is very high, a large portion of the population’s income is spent on wants and desires rather than on basic needs. For example, in planning for a mobile phone purchase father may spend money but others in the family may have input on the mobile choice. Similarly, a mother may purchase snacks at the grocery store but his young child may be the one who selected it from the store
shelf. So understanding consumer purchase behaviour involves not only understanding how decisions are made but also understanding the dynamics that influence purchases.

**TYPES OF BUYERS BUYING BEHAVIOUR**

Consumers are faced with purchase decisions nearly every day. But not all decisions are treated the same. Some decisions are more complex than others and thus require more effort by the consumer. Other decisions are fairly require little effort. In general, consumers face four types of purchase decisions:

- **Minor New Purchase** – these purchases represent something new to a consumer but in the customer’s mind is not a very important purchase in terms of need, money or other reason (e.g., status within a group).

- **Minor Re-Purchase** – these are the most routine of all purchases and often the consumer returns to purchase the same product without giving much thought to other product options (i.e., consumer is brand loyalty).

- **Major New Purchase** – these purchases are the most difficult of all purchases because the product being purchased is important to the consumer but the consumer has little or no previous experience making these decisions. The consumer’s lack of confidence in making this type of decision often (but not always) requires the consumer to engage in an extensive decision-making process.

- **Major Re-Purchase** - these purchase decisions are also important to the consumer but the consumer feels confident in making these decisions since they have previous experience purchasing the product.

For marketers it is important to understand how consumers treat the purchase decisions they face. If a company is targeting customers who feel a purchase decision is difficult (i.e., Major New Purchase), their marketing
strategy may vary greatly from a company targeting customers who view the purchase decision as routine. In fact, the same company may face both situations at the same time; for some the product is new, while other customers see the purchase as routine. The implication of buying behaviour for marketers is that different buying situations require different marketing efforts.

BUYERS BUYING BEHAVIOUR DECISION PROCESS

Need Recognition

The buying process starts with need recognition. Need recognition is the first and crucial stage of consumer decision-making process because if the need is not recognized, then the purchase will not happen (Lee.2005). At this stage, consumer recognizes a problem or need (e.g. when consumer need a new products), or responses to a marketing stimulus. The consumer can be triggered by either an external or an internal stimulus.

Search for Information

After recognizing the problem or need, consumer search for more useful information about the various alternatives in order to satisfy their need. The stage of information search can be classified as internal and external search. Internal search refers to the process of recalling information from consumer’s knowledge or previous experiences with a product or service. While external search refers to the information from the outside environment such as advertising and WOM sources (e.g. family, friend, and salespeople) and/or e-WOM sources (e.g. e-mail, online forum, Instant Messaging, blog, and web pages).
Evaluate Options

After getting information of alternative products or services, the consumers’ compares among alternatives such as various factors like (brand, design, price, and special features). The capability of solving problems among various aspects is then identified. The products or services which can fulfill needs or motives, which initiated the decision-making process will be selected. Brand that consumer decided to purchase brand as group purchase option, will be considered during the evaluation process (Hawkins, Roger; & Kenneth. 1998: 150).

Purchase Decision

This stage is the stage where consumer decides to purchase a product or service. Engel, Black, and Miniard (1993) identified purchase decision into three categories: fully planed purchase (the product is chosen before visit the store); partially planed purchase (there is an intention to buy the product but the selection is deferred until shopping); impulse purchase (the product is chosen at the store). In addition, these three purchase types may overlap due to situational factors, such as product promotion, store atmosphere, weather, and others.

Post-Purchase Behaviour

The final stage of decision-making process is the outcome of the purchase, which refers to the consumer’s post-consumption evaluation of the purchasing decision. The satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the purchase will influence the consumer’s decision process for their next similar purchase, especially, at the stage of need recognition and information search.
BUYERS BUYING BEHAVIOUR DECISIONS PROCESS AND ITS COMMON IMPLICATIONS

Nothing is more difficult and therefore, more precious, than to be able to decide is quoted to be the words of Napoleon. This is amply true in the case of consumer too. It is for this reason that the marketers are bound to have a full knowledge of the consumer buying decision process. However, it should be remembered that the actual act of purchasing is only one stage in the process and the process is initiated at the several stages prior to the actual purchase.

Secondly even though we find that purchase is one of the final links in the chain of process, not all decision processes lead to purchase. The individual consumer may terminate the process during any stage. Finally not all consumer decisions always include all stages. Persons engaged in extensive decision making usually employ all stages of this decision process. Whereas those engaged in limited decisions making and routine response behaviour may omit some stages. The consumer decision process is composed of two parts, the process itself and the factors affecting the process.

A survey conducted by the marketing team of Shoppers Stop Ltd. reveals the psychograph of the modern shopper. Accordingly the survey classifies customers into the four segments namely convenience shoppers, value shoppers, image shoppers, and experience shoppers.

- **Convenience shoppers** for instance, people who consume relatively less amount of time while shopping. Also they look out for the width and depth of the range they purchase and conduct their annual shopping at one shot.
- **Value Shoppers** always hunt for value for money; Prefer quality reassurance and benchmark offerings among other related attributes.
- **Image Shoppers** are fashion conscious and look out for the latest trends and labels.
• **Experience Shoppers** are attentive and prefer personalized services look out for the right ambience, prefer giving personal advice on products at the time of purchase and prefer not to buy at one sold.

**BUYERS BUYING BEHAVIOUR DECISIONS PROCESS AND ITS MARKETING IMPLICATIONS**

It was during 1960’s that a number of theories to explain the consumer’s decision process started appearing. The three leading theorists were Howard-Sheth, Engel Kollat- Blackwell and Nicosia. Since then a considerable research on the marketing implications of the process has been developed and tested the applications of many elements of marketing. Many of the marketing strategies and tactics will have to be developed in relation to consumer attitudes. Marketing strategies, if effectively used, will go a long way in initiating and developing consumer attitudes in favor of the products.

**Buying Motives**

An individual has a motive for purchasing a particular product; motive is a strong feeling, urge, instinct, desire or emotion that makes the buyer to make a decision to buy. Buying motives thus are defined as those influences or considerations which provide the impulse to buy, induce action or determine choice in the purchase of goods or service.

For instance, some of the important motives those influencing the ultimate buying behaviour of buyers are:
Fear : To overcome theft, you may purchase a burglar alarm.

Desire for money : Purchasing when the price falls down.

Vanity : Getting costly items to be admired by others.

Pride : Possessing luxurious items for high position in the society.

Love and affection : When you purchase toys, dresses for your sister, it is out of affections.

Sex and romance : Spending much on dresses & ornaments, etc.

Fashion : Imitation motives; Old people dress like young ones.

Possession : This refers to collection of stamps, coins, etc.

Health and Physical Well being : Purchasing health foods, vitamins etc.

Comfort and Convenience : Purchasing equipments like refrigerator, pressure cookers, etc.

Apart from the above said motives there are some internal and external factors that influence the buying behaviour of buyers are psychographics (lifestyle), personality, motivation, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and feelings, demographics, economic, culture, sub-culture, locality, royalty, ethnicity, family, social class, reference groups, and market mix factors. A simple model of buyer behaviour is shown below.
ECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING BUYERS BEHAVIOUR

- Disposal personal income - The economists made attempts to establish a relationship between incomes and spending. Disposal personal income represents potential purchasing power that a buyer has. The change in income has a direct relation on buying habits.
- Size of family income - The size of family and family income influence the spending and saving patterns. Generally large families spend more and short family spends less, in comparison.
- Income expectations - The expected income to receive in future has a direct relation with the buying behaviour. The expectation of higher or lower income has a direct effect on spending plans.
• Propensity to consume and to save - This goes to the habit of spending or saving with the disposal income of buyers. If the buyers give importance to present needs, then they dispose their income and buyers spend less if they give importance to future needs.

• Liquidity of Fund - The present buying plans are influenced greatly by liquidity of assets i.e., cash and assets readily convertible into cash, e.g. bonds, bank balances, etc.

• Consumer Credit - “Buy now and pay later” plays its role effectively in the rapid growth of markets for products.

CULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING BUYERS BEHAVIOUR

Cultures, which only goes on to make the marketer's job tougher. Some of the few cultural factors that influence buyer behaviour are:

• Product (color, size, design, and shape) - There are many examples that support this point. A good example would be Philips audio systems. Urban area looks at technology with the viewpoint of “the smaller the better”. However, in rural area, the viewpoint is totally opposite. That is the main reason for the large acceptance of big audio systems. Thus Philips makes audio systems, which are big in size and get accepted in rural area by their sheer size.

• Social practices - There are so many different cultures, and each culture exhibits different social practices.

• Decision-making by male head - The male in Eritrean culture has always been given the designation of key decision maker.

• Changes in saving and investment patterns from Gold, Land, Radios, LCD TVs etc.
FAMILY FACTORS INFLUENCING BUYERS BEHAVIOUR

There are many underlying influences both internal and external from the social environment. The combination of these inputs and internal factors can never be complex indeed. Yet, the tools of market research can assess motivation and behaviour with considerable accuracy. Perfect prediction of behaviour is never possible, but properly designed research efforts can significantly lower the risks of the types of product failure. While the consumer cannot knowingly be induced to act in a way contradictory to his or her own goals, motivation and behaviour can be influenced by outside sources. This influence is understood through research.

Reliability of Husband / Wife influence

Advertising Managers are particularly interested in knowing which spouse has greater influence while making buying decisions. So that promotional strategy can be oriented accordingly and the ways and means devised to arouse hopes and expectations. Research of husband/wife decision making consistently indicates that relative influence of a spouse depends in part on the product or service being studied. For instance, some early studies revealed that the purchase of automobile, home appliances and some luxury items were strongly husband dominated, while food, cosmetics and some other minor financial decisions were wife-dominated.

Decision Making process in a Family

All the purchases made by a family follow a certain decision making process. The character and the extent of interaction between a husband and wife present an extremely important dimension in the decision making process. No sale can be effective unless a favorable decision is made by a buyer towards a particular product of a company.
Dynamics of husband/wife Decision Making

The dynamics of purchase decision making of husband/wife for different consumer durables, include, wife-only, the wife more than the husband, both the husband and the wife exactly the same, the husband more than the wife, the husband only pattern. A very important aspect of the purchase process is the actual activity of making the purchase, who actually goes shopping are something that reveals the aspects of consumer behaviour.

Decision making capacity of wives in different types of households

Every decision of consumer behaviour has some idea and factors underlying both motivation and action. Four major decision variables are those relating to work conditions, family maintenance including household expenditure, leisure and recreation and those relating to health, education, travel and others. Changes in employment seeking and work condition will have an impact on the income structure of the household. Decision in this regard may centralize, whether to seek work or not, the choice of work, the nature of environment of working, members of a family, and other variable relating to working conditions. Usually the head of the household might take major decisions individually or jointly along with other working or non-working members.

BUYERS BUYING BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS ELECTRONIC DURABLES

Today’s consumer is well informed about the latest happenings around the world. For example, even before the iphone was launched in Eritrea, many youth already knew about this new phone and its features. The internet has been an important enabler in this process helping people to be better informed and educating them in this process. This also makes consumers in creating a pull for a product which is helpful for the consumer durables industry. Price is
a significant influence on purchase behaviour but is not always the most important factor. Consumer age, brand, type of product, current product diffusion, and lifecycle stage of a product must be viewed in concert with price to understand purchase process behaviour. For example, buyers of certain products, including high definition television, high-definition DVD players, washing machines, and laptops, are more likely to consider product features and capabilities over price. Endorsed by opinion leaders – excellent reviews in magazines, TV shows, internet blogs, word of mouth by existing consumers, etc and high quality of product, brand name of product, product durability, etc are influences of buyers’ behaviour. A Consumer Electronics Association (CEA) study has found that women are more comfortable with technology than ever before, are heavy users of CE products, and have a major influence on technology purchases for the household. Female customers are distinct in their beliefs about technology, in what they desire from consumer electronics, and in the way that they shop for these products, the study indicated. Women are less enamored of gadgets and technology for its own sake. But the CEA study indicated that women are more open to advice, and when shopping they focus on portability, functionality, reliability and simplicity.

GLOBAL CONSUMER ELECTRONIC MARKET POSITIONS

Even if you might have asked it a decade back, situation would’ve been noticeably diverse; yes, I’m talking about the situation of consumer electronics. When compared to those bygone days, today be consumer electronics industry has succeeded to such a position in which innovation runs the motivator, the gas behind everything that is instinctive and sophisticated. We now inhabit an era of extreme gadgetry pleasures with music systems, cell-phones, audio players, iPods, desktops, plasma televisions, and others. Honestly put, existence without these items would end up in chaos! What’s the specialty for these products and services? Would it be really difficult to exist without having these? Contemplate! Would you live without these? Absolutely not! Today’s
technology has advanced at such an amazing speed that we don’t have any idea when and just how we submit to them in the process. Items are constantly being developed every day, keeping in mind what buyers desire. Be it in your new kitchen or maybe your living room, in your telecommunications routine or perhaps entertainment necessities, the existence of consumer electronics now can be experienced anywhere. Credit goes to the key consumer electronic product developers that leave no stones unturned to give the best in the market industry to their clients. Aided by the advent of cyberspace, it is less difficult for consumers to get the merchandise of their choice instantaneously. By simply browsing on the internet you can end up with a lot of information about your specific products. Another highlight is consumer electronic news reports to aid you on the net that will keep you up to date regarding the latest happenings around the world of consumer electronics. Consumer Electronic updates also can be very therapeutic for you in enlightening you about the most recent releases by means of similar manufacturers.

**TOP FIVE EMERGING NATIONS IN ELECTRONICS MARKET**

The top five emerging countries (Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa) contributed $37.6 billion to the global consumer electronics industry in 2007, with a CAGR of 10.9% between 2003 and 2007, in 2012 the market is forecast to have a value of $51.2 billion, with a CAGR of 6.4% over the 2007-2012 periods.

**Chinese Electronic Products - Booming in International Markets**

China is the leading country among the Top five emerging nations, with market revenues of $21.6 billion in 2007. In last couple of years, the Chinese electronic market has witnessed some dramatic increase in demand and sales chart of electronic items. The country has turn out to be the world's major producer of consumer electronics and other high tech products than any other
country. Starting from digital cameras, mp3 players, computer accessories to cell phones, and other electronic goods that are manufactured in China is gaining tremendous popularity. In recent times Chinese electronic products industry has been dynamic in contributing in international trades as well. All china wholesale electronic goods feature good quality that is far better in comparison to other electronic products available in international market. The recent studies of the technological capability of the China electronics industry also states that the China is likely to equal South Korea, Taiwan, and even Japan as a major Asian force in the world electronic consumer goods industry in twenty-first century. Besides this, amongst the E7 developing countries, China is ranked as the most eye-catching consumer electronics market from investment point of view. Moreover, its consumer electronics market has increased at a CAGR of 11.71% during 2002-2006 and is further increased at a CAGR of 12% during the period (2007-2011). The electronic items made in China products are exported in huge amount all over the world, especially in countries like United States of America, different European countries and all other parts of Asia. In fact the way the demand for the Chinese electronic products are increasing day by day, it seems that China is already on the way to become the leading exporter of electronic products in international market. China has now been tagged as the world's factory as they produce almost all types of electronic products at extremely lower cost than anywhere else in the world. The major highlight of Chinese electronic industry is that almost everything is in low cost, starting from low human resources cost to a low corporate tax burden. This in turn helps every leading production centres in China employ cheap labor and still produces superb quality products. Apart from all this, on the consumption front, the constant declining cost of consumer electronics together with increasing disposable income are playing important role in attracting consumers select Chinese electronics products. Moreover, looking at the present scenario, China's youth are spending freely on Chinese made consumer digital products and the trend will continue to rise with the
growing middle class. They are creating a multi-billion dollar market for electronic products and services. These few factors certainly indicate a booming future for the consumer electronics industry in China. Today, the electronic items of China are far more reliable than ever before. The manufacturers are now providing a whole new range of China electronic products with trendy new features. In addition to this, the Chinese electronic markets are also providing consumers and re-sellers a quick and profitable resource to build sales. The trend is gaining its popularity and expected to boom in coming years.

**Pakistan’s consumer electronics market**

Pakistan’s consumer electronics market has resulted worth about US$1.6bn in 2011. This is expected to increase to US$2.6bn by 2015, driven by a rising population and growing affordability. The report analyses consumer electronics market dwells on international trade and provides industry forecast scenario.

**Taiwan’s consumer electronics market**

In 2011, Taiwan’s domestic video, audio and gaming device market is resulted a value of US$3.4bn. The market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 4% between 2011 and 2015 to a value of US$3.9bn in that year. The report discusses Taiwan’s consumer electronics devices market and provides information on consumer electronics spending. The computer hardware CAGR for the 2011-2015 periods is forecast at about 9%, in the context of a currently low PC penetration rate of about 14% and which is expected to pass 25% by 2015. The report delivers into industry forecast scenario and uncovers the industry developments. The study reveals information on the competitive landscape …

**Malaysia’s consumer electronics market**
Malaysia’s consumer electronics devices market, defined as the addressable market for computing devices, mobile handsets and AV devices, were projected at about US$9.3mn in 2011. This is expected to increase to US$11.7bn 2015. The report provides comprehensive analysis of the competitive landscape and uncovers domestic market electronic devices sales forecasts …

**Hong Kong’s consumer electronics market**

Hong Kong computer hardware sales are resulted about US$2.2bn in 2011, and segment CAGR for the 2010-2015 period at about 5.7%. Apple’s iPad sales were strong in the peak Christmas holiday season. Wireless networking will be an important driver of computer sales, with increasing demand for connectivity.

**SWOT Analysis of Electronics market**

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<th><strong>Strengths</strong></th>
<th><strong>Weaknesses</strong></th>
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<td>Presence of well-known brands in the market and organized sector has increased its share in the market than the unorganized sector.</td>
<td>Demand is seasonal and is high during festive season and it is dependent on good monsoons. Poor government spending on infrastructure and low purchasing power of consumers.</td>
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<th><strong>Opportunities</strong></th>
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<td>In Eritrea, the penetration level of white goods is lower as compared to other developing countries. Unexploited rural market and increase in income levels will increase in purchasing power of consumers</td>
<td>Higher import duties on electronic products as well as higher government regulations in marketing of products.</td>
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PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

INTRODUCTION

Eritrea, independent state in Africa, bounded on the east by the Red Sea (Red Sea, narrow, inland sea, separating the Arabian peninsula, western Asia, from northeastern Africa. It extends northwest from the strait of Bab el Mandeb to Suez, Egypt, for a distance of 1,900 km (1,200 mi). The maximum depth of the sea is 3,040 m (9,970 ft), and its maximum width is 350 km (220 mi). The northern extremity is divided by the Sinai Peninsula into the gulfs of Suez and Aqaba), on the southeast by Djibouti, on the south and west by Ethiopia, and on the north and northwest by Sudan. Formerly under Italian and British control, Eritrea was taken over by Ethiopia in 1952, provoking a long war of liberation that culminated in Eritrean independence in 1993. Asmara (Āsmara) is Eritrea’s capital and largest city.

HISTORY

The earliest food-producing inhabitants of Eritrea are thought to have moved from the Nile valley into the Mereb-Setit lowlands in about 4000 BC. Over the next several thousand years, Eritrea experienced migrations of Nilotic, Cushitic, and Semitic-speaking peoples (Semitic Languages, one of the five subfamilies or branches of the Hamito-Semitic or Afro-Asiatic language family (see Afro-Asiatic Languages). Of the Semitic languages, Arabic was carried beyond its original home in the Arabian Peninsula and spread throughout the Arabian Empire and is spoken across North Africa to the Atlantic coast, and Arabic and Hebrew are used by Muslims and Jews in other parts of the world. The other Semitic languages are centred in a region bounded on the west by Ethiopia and on the north by Syria and extending southeast through Iraq and the Arab Peninsula, with some “islands” of Semitic speech farther east in Iran) into what became one of the earliest regions of crop and livestock domestication in Africa. From as early as 3000 BC, Eritrea was involved in
trade on the Red Sea. In the 4th century AD Eritrea was a part of the ancient Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum. It flourished as a semi-independent state under nominal Ethiopian sovereignty until it was annexed in the 16th century by the expanding Ottoman Empire.

Eritrea was established as an Italian colony on January 1, 1890. Italian rule lasted until World War II (1939-1945) when British forces conquered the territory. British military administration lasted from 1941 until 1952 when the United Nations decided to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia as a compromise between Ethiopian claims for annexation and Eritrean demands for independence. Once in control, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie moved to end Eritrean autonomy, and by 1962 Eritrea was transformed into an Ethiopian province. Aksum, Kingdom of ancient kingdom that flourished in northeastern Africa from the 1st century BC until the early 7th century AD. Its capital was the city of Aksum, which lies in the northern part of present-day Ethiopia. A powerful trading centre, Aksum controlled the highlands of northern Ethiopia and the Red Sea coast of present-day Eritrea. Culturally, it was closely associated with the people of southern Arabia, who spoke related languages and followed similar traditions. Aksumite kings built massive stelae (stone pillars) to adorn their tombs, and some of these stelae still stand today. The kingdom of Aksum developed from a group of smaller states in the region. The most important of these states was Da’amat, which had existed since the 5th century BC and had its capital to the east at Yeha. Aksum is first mentioned in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, a Greek guide to shipping in the Red Sea that was written probably in the 1st century AD. By this time Aksum was a fully developed state trading through its Red Sea port of Adulis, where many ships of neighboring countries anchored. The first known Aksumite king was Zoskales. He is mentioned in the Periplus, which suggests that he reigned some time before AD 100. Inscriptions at a temple at Ma’rib in Yemen indicate that a king known as Gedarat reigned in about 200. These inscriptions show that
Aksumite armies had occupied parts of southern Arabia by this time. In the middle of the 3rd century another Aksumite king, Azeba, was allied with Arabian rulers. A Greek inscription from a site north of Aksum in Eritrea refers to another king, Sembrouthes, around this same period. This inscription describes Sembrouthes as “king of kings,” implying that he reigned over a number of subordinate states whose rulers paid him tribute. The earliest known Aksumite coins, from about 270, bear the name of King Endubis. From this time on, a series of coins provides the names of rulers until the early 7th century. Aksumite kings of the 3rd and 4th centuries conducted military campaigns on both sides of the Red Sea and erected the large stone stelae for which Aksum is famous. One of the most important Aksumite kings was Ezana, who ruled for several decades in the mid-4th century. Several inscriptions describe his extensive military campaigns. At least one of these campaigns was directed west towards Kush, a Nubian state in what is now southern Egypt and northern Sudan. Some scholars believe that Ezana was responsible for the destruction of Meroë, the ancient capital of Kush, in the middle of the 4th century. The discovery of fragments of two Aksumite inscriptions and one coin in the ruins of Meroë strongly supports this view. Ezana also converted to Christianity in 333, which would profoundly affect Aksumite culture. (For more information on his conversion to Christianity, see the Religion section of this article). Little is known of the kings who reigned after Ezana until Kaleb, in the early 6th century. Kaleb reasserted Aksumite control over areas of southern Arabia, claiming that he was protecting Christians from persecution by a local Jewish ruler, Yusuf Asar. Prior to Kaleb’s invasion in about 520, there had been sporadic Aksumite military activity in southwestern Arabia since the time of Gedarat in the mid-3rd century. While treaties and alliances had been made with local rulers, it does not seem that Aksumite kings before Kaleb had ever established permanent rule in the area. Aksumite control in Arabia did not last long, however, and over the next hundred years the kingdom’s military power and trade
connections in the Red Sea area diminished rapidly. The spread of Islam in the 7th century isolated Aksum, confining Aksumite influence to its immediate surroundings. By the mid-7th century Aksum was no longer a powerful state, and the kingdom finally disintegrated in the 10th century. Some scholars believe that Aksum’s collapse was hastened by overexploitation of the area’s natural resources, which led to soil degradation, erosion, and food shortages.

The power of Aksum was based largely on trade. The Red Sea was an important thoroughfare for trading vessels at the time. Merchants from the Roman Empire traveled up and down the sea, trading in harbors along both the African and Arabian coasts, and sailing with the favorable monsoon winds on to India. Aksumites exported local products such as ivory, tortoise shell, hippopotamus hide, spices, incense, gold, obsidian, emeralds and other precious stones, and slaves. These items were exchanged for manufactured goods from the Mediterranean, including iron weapons, articles made of precious metals, glassware, cloth of great variety, garments, pottery, wine, and olive oil. Excavated Aksumite tombs contain many of these foreign objects, particularly glassware.

For the first few centuries of the kingdom’s existence, trade was conducted by barter and direct exchange of commodities. In about AD 270, during the reign of King Endubis, Aksum began minting coins in the style of Roman coins. Coinage made the exchange of products and tax collection more convenient, facilitating Aksumite trade. Aksumite coins were made of gold, silver, and bronze, and carried the name of the ruler in whose name they were issued. The coins are therefore important to historians’ understanding of the history of Aksum, providing royal names and a rough chronology of events. As in most ancient societies, the internal economy of Aksum was based mainly on agriculture. The kingdom produced enough food to be self-sufficient. The main cereal crop may have been wheat, since a head of wheat is shown on coins.
Aksumites most likely also grew teff, an indigenous cereal grain widely used in the region today.

*War of Independence*

The dissolution of federation called forth a militant nationalist resistance from a people subjected to continued colonial domination. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), founded in 1958, had proclaimed an armed struggle in September 1961 in favor of independence from Ethiopian control. The war with Ethiopia proved long and destructive. Since 1970, much of Eritrea has experienced famine conditions on several occasions, the result of drought and the disruption of war. Organizational and ideological differences produced splits and civil strife within the ELF, culminating in the late 1970s with the emergence of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) as a disciplined and effective military challenge to the Ethiopian government. Following the Ethiopian revolution of 1974, its new regime continued attempts to defeat the EPLF militarily, now with Soviet and Cuban assistance. Nevertheless, Ethiopian forces controlled only the main urban centres, and from 1980 the EPLF increasingly gained the upper hand. In 1990 the EPLF captured Massawa, and in the following year it took control of Asmara. Accepted internationally as a provisional government, the EPLF agreed to hold a referendum on independence that was also approved by the new Ethiopian government. The referendum in April 1993 provided a virtually unanimous vote in favor of independence. On May 28, 1993, the United Nations formally admitted Eritrea to its Council.

*Independent Eritrea*

Since independence, Eritrea has frequently been at odds with neighboring Sudan. Shortly after independence Eritrea accused Sudan of supporting radical Islamic groups in Eritrea, and Sudan accused Eritrea of harboring Sudanese rebel groups. In late 1994 Eritrea claimed Sudan was
training terrorists to overthrow the Eritrean government, while Sudan made the first of a series of accusations that Sudanese rebels, assisted by the Eritrean army, were invading Sudan from Eritrea. The two countries severed diplomatic relations in December 1994.

In December 1995 Eritrea invaded the Yemeni-held island of Hanish al Kabir (Greater Hanish Island), claiming ownership of the strategically located Hanish Islands at the southern mouth of the Red Sea. After a brief skirmish, in 1996 the two countries agreed to submit the question of ownership of the islands to international arbitration. In 1998 the arbitration panel awarded the Hanish Islands to Yemen, and Eritrea withdrew its forces.

In mid-1998 clashes broke out between Eritrea and former ally Ethiopia along the countries’ border, each country accusing the other of seizing territory. Hundreds of thousands of Eritrean and Ethiopian troops were sent to the border, which had not been precisely delineated when Eritrea became independent from Ethiopia in 1993. By early 1999 the dispute had become a bitter war. Tens of thousands of soldiers were killed in the fighting before the countries declared a ceasefire in June 2000. In December Eritrea and Ethiopia signed a peace agreement that formally ended the war and established a commission to demarcate their border.

**LAND AND RESOURCES**

Eritrea covers an area of 121,144 sq km (46,774 sq mi). Its topography consists of four types of land surface: the Red Sea coastal plain; the south central plateau highland, which forms the core of the nation; the hill country of the north and midwest; and the broad western plains. The Red Sea coast stretches more than 1,000 km (600 mi), and it is from this body of water that the country derived its name (Erythraea, Greek for “red”). The narrow coastal plain receives little rainfall and is extremely hot. The Denakil Depression in the southeast falls below sea level and has been the site of some of the highest
temperatures recorded on earth. To the west, the coastal plain rises sharply to the highland plateau, where altitudes range from 1,830 to 2,440 m (6,000 to 8,000 ft) above sea level and annual rainfall is significantly higher than at the coast. The hill country north and west of the core plateau ranges from about 760 to 1,370 m (about 2,500 to 4,500 ft) above sea level, and it generally receives less rainfall than the plateau. The broad plains lie to the west of the Baraka River and north of the Setit River. A number of rivers drain the plateau and highland regions. The Mereb (or Gash), the Baraka, and the Anseba flow from the plateau west into Sudan, while the Falkat, Laba, and Alighede flow from the northern highlands to the Red Sea. Eritrea’s resources have supported a largely agricultural way of life. The nation possesses potentially valuable potash deposits and possibly gold, iron, and petroleum, but exploration and exploitation of its mineral resources were severely hindered by three decades of war. Eritrea’s environment suffers from frequent droughts and from the effects of the country’s decades-long war of independence. Only 22 percent (1990-1998) of the people in Eritrea have access to safe drinking water. Much of the country’s highland forests have been destroyed for fuelwood, and only 2.8 percent (1995) of Eritrea’s total land area is forested. Marginal lands have been cultivated and overgrazed, leading to soil erosion and desertification. The Eritrean administration has planted millions of trees in recent years to help stop erosion and desertification. In addition, the administration has designated 5 percent (1997) of the country’s total land area as protected. The government has ratified international environmental agreements pertaining to biodiversity, climate change, desertification, and endangered species.

**POPULATION**

Eritrea’s population is diverse, reflecting many languages, cultures, and religions. The most widely used languages are Tigrinya, Tigre, and Arabic. Approximately half the population is Tigrinya-speaking Christians who traditionally inhabited the core plateau. Half the population is Muslims, but
these are divided among several ethnic and linguistic groups. Muslim Tigre speakers inhabit the northeastern coastal plains and western lowlands, and the Saho live near Massawa and in the foothills of the coastal plain. The majority of the Bilen -speaking people around Keren are Muslims, as are the Afar or Denakil who speak Afar and inhabit the southeastern portion of the coastal plain and the Dahlak Archipelago. The Hedareb nomads of the northwest and northeast are predominantly Muslim. The Baria and Kunama of the southwest are also Muslim, although they speak Nilotic languages. This distinguishes them sharply from the majority of Eritrean peoples, whose languages fall within the Afro-Asiatic group (see African Languages). Despite ethnic diversity, friction between Eritrean groups has not been a major problem because most groups remained united during the three decades of war against Ethiopian control. The war with Ethiopia and the famines that hit the entire region in the 1970s and 1980s caused a great deal of disruption and population movement, especially in the rural areas. At the time of independence approximately 20 percent of the population within Eritrea was displaced, while an estimated 500,000 Eritreans were living as refugees in Sudan. In addition to problems of food shortage, poverty, and illiteracy, the new nation faces a huge task in resettling those people uprooted by war and famine. In 2004 Eritrea had an estimated population of 4,447,307, giving it a population density of 37 persons per sq km (95 per sq mi). An estimated 80 percent of Eritrea’s population lives in rural areas, subsisting through agriculture and livestock rising. The major cities of Eritrea include the capital and largest city Asmara (pop. 435,000); the seaport city Massawa (pop. 25,000); Åseb (pop. 28,000); Keren (pop. 57,000); Tessenie (pop. 25,000); Mendefera (pop. 25,000); Dekemhare (pop. 20,000); Adekeieh (pop. 15,000); Barentu (pop. 15,000); and Ghinda (pop. 15,000). With this, in 2010 Eritrea had population of 5.6 million.
RELIGION

Little is known about Aksumite religion before the conversion of King Ezana to Christianity. The names of some of the gods who were worshipped have survived. The chief god was Astar, associated with the Greek god Zeus. Mahrem was a war god, like the Greek god Ares, and a patron of the royal family. It is not known how the gods were worshipped, though the remains of a number of religious buildings still exist. The largest such structure still standing is in Yeha. In these buildings, archaeologists have found objects such as pottery animal figures, perhaps placed there as offerings. Stone altars were used for the burning of incense. According to traditional accounts, two Christian Syrian boys, Aedisius and Frumentius, introduced Christianity to Aksum in the early 4th century. Aksumites captured the boys when they put their ship into port to obtain supplies during a voyage in the Red Sea. They were taken to the capital and employed at the royal court where Frumentius, due to his education, became secretary to King Ella Amida. When the king died, Ezana, who was still a child, assumed the throne, and Frumentius became his teacher and adviser. Frumentius used his position to convert the royal family to Christianity in 333 and to encourage Christian missionaries to spread the religion to the rest of the kingdom. The coins from Ezana’s reign carry a representation of the Christian cross in place of the earlier pagan emblem of a disc and crescent. Frumentius traveled to Alexandria, in Egypt, to ask Saint Athanasius, the head of the Coptic Church (the Egyptian Christian church), to appoint a bishop for the developing Christian community of Aksum. Athanasius appointed Frumentius bishop and sent him back to Aksum to continue his missionary work. All subsequent heads of the Aksumite church were appointed by the Egyptian patriarch of Alexandria and were Egyptian Copts.

In the 5th century the Coptic Church, including the church of Aksum, split off from the main Christian churches of Rome and Constantinople. Coptic Christians embraced the doctrine of Monophysitism, the belief that Jesus Christ
possessed only one, divine, nature and no human nature. This doctrine went against the orthodox Christian doctrine that Christ was both divine and human. The Council of Chalcedon condemned Monophysitism in 451, and since that time the Coptic Church has been independent of other Christian churches. After the Council of Chalcedon, priests who continued to teach Monophysitism were persecuted in the eastern Roman Empire, and many migrated to Aksum. The influx of priests, along with the support of the royal family, strengthened missionary efforts in Aksum. Many churches and monasteries were founded after 451, some of which are still in use today. The Aksumite church developed into the Abyssinian Church, the church of Ethiopia. While similar to that of the Coptic Church, the ritual of the Abyssinian Church contains many features different from those of other Christian churches. These may be derived from Aksum’s pre-Christian religion or from ancient Jewish practices, as Aksum’s people were often in contact with Jewish communities in southern Arabia. The Coptic patriarch of Alexandria continued to appoint the head of the Abyssinian Church until the 1950s, when the Ethiopian church became independent from the Coptic Church.

**LANGUAGE**

The Tigrinya language belongs to the Semitic family of the Afro- Asiatic linguistic grouping. It is closely related to Amhara, the main language of Ethiopia, and to Tigre, the second most common language in Eritrea. Tigrinya speakers live primarily in the central highlands of Eritrea and in northern Ethiopia. Their ancestors’ descendants of indigenous Cushitic peoples and Semitic peoples from the Arabian Peninsula probably settled this region more than 2000 years ago. The Tigrinya language most likely evolved from Ge'ez, the language spoken in the ancient kingdom of Aksum. Unlike Ge'ez, however, early Tigrinya appears to have been primarily a spoken language (see also Ethiopian Script and Language). The oldest existing document in Tigrinya is a law code from the 19th century. The Tigrinya people have long been settled
agriculturalists, though many also keep livestock. Along with the Amhara, the Tigrinya consider themselves descendants of the people of Aksum, and until the 20th century they have historically accepted as legitimate the rule of Ethiopia's Amharic emperors. Both Tigrinya and Amhara speakers are adherents of Coptic Christianity, which became the religion of Aksum in the mid-4th-century. Relatively few Tigrinya speakers converted to Islam, which was brought by Arab traders beginning in the 8th century. When the Italians began their colonial conquest of the Horn in the 1880s, the highland regions were suffering through a period of poor harvests and food shortages and the Tigrinya people initially put up relatively little resistance. Shortly after Italy declared rule over Eritrea in 1890, however, the colonial administration began a massive land expropriation campaign in the highlands, intending to create an Italian settler colony. An 1894 uprising in Tigrinya-speaking areas forced the administration to scale back these plans, but many Tigrinya remained landless and became laborers either on Italian settler farms or in the industrializing cities of Asmara and Massawa. Tigrinya peasants participated in the colonial economy as producers of export crops such as coffee.

PEOPLE

Afar People

Afar (people) also known as Danakil, Denakil, and Adal, an ethnic group found in parts of Djibouti, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. Approximately 800,000 people belong to the Afar ethnic group, mostly in the Denakil plain, which includes parts of northern Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti. Apart from the Aussa oasis and the Djibouti coastline, the territory of the Afar is among the most arid on the continent. The Afar speaks Safo, an Afro-Asiatic language (part of the Eastern Cushitic language group). The first known written references to the Afar appeared in the 13th century in the work of Arabic geographer Ibn Said. He called them the Danakil, a name that the Afar now consider offensive but
one that is still used widely by neighboring Arab groups. The Somali people mostly use the term Adal or Udali. The Afar have traditionally lived as pastoral nomads, raising sheep, goats, camels, and cattle. Some work as salt miners on the Denakil plain, where temperatures regularly reach 50° C (120° F). Most Afar are Sunni Muslim, although some practice Sufism, an Islamic religion that emphasizes mysticism. Some—especially the nomads—adhere to traditional beliefs. Little is known about the origins of the Afar. They are generally believed to have migrated from the higher elevations of southern Ethiopia to the desert regions that most now inhabit. Historically, the Afar political structure rested on a system of sultanates, a type of centralized rule found in some Muslim countries. Each sultanate was subdivided into federations ruled by local chiefs. Of the sultanates, the most powerful was probably the Aussa, which dominated the Awash River region (in what is now eastern Ethiopia) starting in the 16th century. The sultanate retained its independence until it fell to Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) in 1944, after more than 50 years of Italian colonial support. Considered by their neighbors and early European explorers to be violent and warlike, the Afar have a complex social system that distinguishes between the Asaimara, or red men, and the Adoimara, or white men. Asaimara families hold nobility status and receive tributes from the Adoimara, who are considered lower-class tenants on Afar land. The family structure is patrilineal, meaning that ancestral descent is traced through male family members. Afar tradition allows multiple marriages. With their nomadic lifestyle only slightly affected by colonialism, the Afar have maintained many of their traditions into the postcolonial era.

**Beja**

Beja (people), also known as Bega or Bujah, an ethnic group comprising several smaller subgroups of people who live mostly in Sudan, Eritrea, western Ethiopia, and southern Egypt. Inhabiting the area between the Nile River and the Red Sea, the Beja are one of the largest non-Arabic ethnic groups in Sudan.
Although exact numbers are difficult to ascertain, most experts estimate the Beja population at about 3 million people, approximately 10 percent of Sudan’s population. They are thought to descend from people who lived in the area from the 4th century b.c.e. The Beja mostly speak Bedawiyi, part of the Northern Cushitic language group. Many also speak Arabic as a second language. One Beja subgroup, the Beni Amer, speaks Tigré, an Ethio-Semitic language. Some still live as pastoral nomads, traveling with portable tents and living on the meat and milk of their cattle and camels. Many Beja, however, have settled into villages and raise sorghum and cotton. Historians believe the Beja were Christians during the 6th century, but Islam has been the dominant religion within the population since about the 13th century. As with other nomadic pastoralists in the region such as the Afar, the Beja combine their Muslim beliefs with traditional religious practices. Beja social structure is based upon patrilineal family ties, meaning that ancestral descent is traced through the male line of the family. Multiple marriages for men are permitted, but the expense of supporting two households makes this practice rare. Regional conflicts over Eritrean independence in the 1970s and 1980s drove many Eritrean Beja into Sudan. This led to major lifestyle changes, including some migration into urban areas such as Port Sudan and Khartoum, where Beja often work in the railroad and port industries. Still, fewer than ten percent of the Beja live in cities. Perhaps a greater modern influence on the Beja has been governmental demand for tax payment, forcing even the nomadic Beja to enter the cash economy. In the late 20th century, the increasingly settled Beja of the Sudan called for an independent nation—Bejaland—and formed a political entity, the Beja Congress.

Bilin

Bilin (also known as Bilen, Belen, Bogo, and Gabra Tarqwe Qur), ethnic group of the Horn of Africa. The Bilin primarily inhabit western Eritrea and the Tigray Province of Ethiopia. Large numbers of Bilin refugees also settled in
Sudan during the Eritrean secession wars of the 1970s and 1980s. They speak an Afro-Asiatic language (see Languages, African: An Overview: The Afro-Asiatic Family) and are one of the Agaw peoples. Approximately 200,000 people consider themselves Bilin.

CUSTOMS OF ERITREA

Marriage and Family

In Eritrea, nearly all marriages are arranged by families. Among the Tigrinya, parents suggest marriage partners to establish family alliances. The couple involved usually makes the final decision to marry, although some couples in rural areas may not be acquainted before they wed. The bride is often some ten years younger than the groom; in cities she will most likely have completed secondary school before getting married. The wedding celebration involves at least a week’s food preparation and requires a month to brew suwa, a beer, and miyess, honey mead. The bride’s female relatives provide food for a banquet that follows the morning ceremony. After the gifts have been received and displayed, the couple enters the banquet to share a meal with their guests. In urban areas, some couples also cut a tiered wedding cake. For two or three weeks, the couple stays at home while relatives provide their meals. After marriage, a couple usually lives with the husband’s parents for at least two years before establishing their own home. Among Muslims, wedding festivities include the bride’s arrival on a camel and a feast at which guests sit on mats to eat from bowls. Muslim men may have up to four wives if they can provide for each equally. Due to the economic burden of looking after several wives, the practice of polygamy is diminishing. The family is more important than any of its individual members, who will sacrifice personal needs for the good of the group or for future generations. Typically a family will have four or more children, and it is common for grandparents to share the same home. Respected for their wisdom, the elderly are cared for by their adult children.
Village men are usually farmers. Women work on the farm and do all household work. Some women in urban areas work outside the home and employ house servants. Village homes, usually made of stone, have thatched or metal roofs and concrete or dirt floors. City dwellings, made of stone or brick, have metal roofs, tiled floors, water, and electricity. Nomadic and seminomadic peoples (the Afar, Hedareb, Rashaida, and Tigre) have different lifestyles from the settled population. Accordingly, their homes are portable or built with whatever materials they find when they settle temporarily. Regardless of the style, homes are kept clean and neat.

Food Habits

Years of drought, famine, and war have greatly affected the diet in Eritrea. The preferred meal is meat (chicken, goat, mutton, or beef) cooked with onion, garlic, red pepper, spices, and clarified butter. Shuro, a typical meal of garbanzo bean flour and spices, is cooked similarly. Lentils or other vegetables are served. Spicy main dishes, eaten for lunch or dinner, are complemented by injera (also called taitah), a sour pancake bread made of millet or maize flour fermented in water. Breakfast may include honey and k’itcha (unleavened bread), yogurt and fit (bits of sauce-covered injera), and ga’at (a thick barley porridge), or leftovers; tea sweetened with sugar is usually served. Copts do not eat dairy products or meat on Wednesdays and Fridays. Many Christians often abstain from dairy products during Lent. Muslims abstain from pork and alcohol. Among highlanders, adults and children eat separately. Among other Eritreans, families eat together, although children eat separately when guests are present. In such cases, the hostess serves the guests and eats later with the children. To begin each meal, the oldest man takes a piece of bread, blesses it, and offers some to each person. It is customary to eat with the right hand from a large communal tray set on a low table. Each person eats only the portion directly in front of him or her. In Christian homes, mealtime etiquette is stressed because it is believed that God is watching.
Restaurants offer traditional as well as Italian foods, which became popular when Eritrea was an Italian colony.

Socializing

Greeting styles vary according to region and ethnic group. Highlanders greet with a handshake. Nudging right shoulders at the same time is common between male former soldiers and villagers. In urban areas, friends or relatives may shake hands and kiss the air while brushing alternate cheeks three times. Verbal greetings depend on the time of day but nearly always involve an inquiry about well-being. Salaam (“Peace”) is a general greeting and leave-taking phrase. Muslims grasp and kiss each other’s right hands, ask Kefelhal? (“How are you?”), and answer Hamdellah or Marhaba (both roughly mean “Fine”). Friends often call one another by nickname. Older people are addressed by their title and name. Some examples of Tingrinya titles are Hawobo (“Uncle” on father’s side), Ako (“Uncle” on mother’s side), Amo (“Aunt” on father’s side), Hatno (“Aunt” on mother’s side), Weizerit (“Miss”), Weizero (“Mrs.”), and Ato (“Mr.”). Professional titles are used in formal situations. A person’s given name is followed by the father’s name, so that Mhret, the daughter of Tesfai, is called Mhret Tesfai. Relatives and good friends visit each other often and without invitation. Guests may be offered food or asked to join the family for a meal, which they may accept or politely decline. Guests are always served tea or coffee. The latter involves a prescribed sequence of roasting and pounding the coffee beans. The coffee is then boiled, heavily sweetened, and served in small cups. Three customary rounds might be accompanied by fresh popcorn. People enjoy the prolonged conversation encouraged by this coffee ceremony. When visiting on special occasions, towns people often take villagers gifts of coffee or sugar; villagers take urban dwellers local produce or food (such as bread), a chicken, or firewood, which is precious due to soil erosion and deforestation. Special events require an invitation and involve women and men socializing separately. Wedding guests
take injera for the feast or they contribute to its cost. Ga’at is served at gatherings to welcome new babies. When someone dies, friends and relatives gather for the burial. For at least 12 days, they attend the bereaved family, cook their meals, divert their attention with games and entertainment, help receive many visitors, and collect money for the family. In Asmara, espresso coffee bars are popular meeting spots, especially for men. Villages have tea shops. Women visit mostly in each others’ homes. They also get together to weave baskets that are used to store and serve food.

Recreation

Men enjoy soccer, bicycle racing, karssa (a game similar to field hockey), and a game that involves throwing stones at a target. Both men and women play gebetta, a strategy game played with pebbles on a playing surface created by making depressions in the ground. Women enjoy drumming and dancing.

Holidays and Celebrations

Eritrea’s holidays include International Women’s Day (8 March), Independence Day (24 May), Martyr’s Day (20 June), and the Anniversary of the Start of the Armed Struggle (1 September). Christian holidays include Christmas (celebrated on 7 January); Timket, the baptism of Jesus, also in January; Easter; and Meskel, the finding of the true cross by Saint Helena, in late September. Muslims celebrate Eid el Fitr at the end of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting in which they go without food and drink each day from dawn to dusk. Forty days later they observe Eid el Adha to mark the completion of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (Makkah) and to honor Abraham for his willingness to sacrifice his son. Whole families take part in annual religious festivals, and urban dwellers often return to their home villages for such celebrations.
Traditionally, agriculture was the norm in the plateau region and in the north and west where rainfall was sufficient. In the drier coastal plain and the arid regions of the north and west, livestock rising predominated. Italian and British colonial policy in the 19th and early 20th centuries favored the production of raw materials for export. During this period, light industry was developed. By most accounts, Eritrea enjoyed a higher level of economic development than Ethiopia at the time of the 1952 federation. Ethiopia’s annexation of Eritrea caused industrial expansion to be curtailed, and many factories were closed and moved to Ethiopia. After 1974, the Marxist government of Ethiopia placed most Eritrean industry under state control. Eritrea’s economy suffered massive damage and dislocation as a result of drought, famine and the war with Ethiopia that began in the 1960s. At the time of independence in 1993, the country’s industrial base was shattered and an estimated 75 percent of the population depended on food aid. After good harvests in 1991 and 1992, the harvest of 1993 was a disaster, with more than 80 percent of the grain crop lost because of pests and the lack of rain. Eritrea’s transportation network was also severely damaged. Most roads are unpaved, and those that were paved received little maintenance. The railway linking the port of Massawa to Asmara and to Keren and Āk’ordat was scarcely functional by the end of the war. Eritrea faces daunting economic problems. Recovering from war, resettling of people, attaining food self-sufficiency, and rebuilding transportation infrastructure all demand careful planning and allocation of scarce resources as well as international assistance. The government pledged to encourage capitalism, and began the process of privatizing the state sector. Eritrea’s unit of currency is the nakfa (7.20 nakfa equal U.S.$1; 1998) and now it is 15 nakfa equal U.S $1. While in the past the Government of Eritrea stated that it was committed to a market economy and privatization, the government and the ruling PFDJ party maintain complete control of the economy. The
government has imposed an arbitrary and complex set of regulatory requirements that discourage investment from both foreign and domestic sources, and it often reclaims successful private enterprises and property.

After independence, Eritrea had established a growing and healthy economy. But the 1998-2000 war with Ethiopia had a major negative impact on the economy and discouraged investment. Eritrea lost many valuable economic assets during the last round of fighting in May-June 2000, when a significant portion of its territory in the agriculturally important west and south was occupied by Ethiopia. During this period, more than one million Eritreans were displaced, although nearly all had been resettled by 2007. According to World Bank estimates, Eritreans also lost livestock worth some $225 million and 55,000 homes worth $41 million during the war. Damage to public buildings, including hospitals, was estimated at $24 million. Much of the transportation and communication infrastructure is outmoded and deteriorating, although a large volume of intercity road-building activity is currently underway. The government sought international assistance for various development projects and mobilized young Eritreans serving in the national service to repair crumbling roads and dams. In 2005, the government asked the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to cease operations in Eritrea.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), post-border war recovery was impaired by 4 consecutive years of recurrent drought that have reduced the already low domestic food production capacity. The government reports that harvests have improved but provides no data to support these claims. Eritrea currently suffers from large structural fiscal deficits caused by high levels of spending on defense, which have resulted in the stock of debt rising to unsustainable levels. Exports have collapsed due to strict controls on foreign currencies and trade, as well as a closed border with Ethiopia, which was the major trading partner for Eritrea prior to the war. In 2006, Eritrea normalized relations with Sudan and began to open the border to trade between
the two countries. Large and persistent transfers from Eritreans living abroad offer significant support to the economy. The port in Massawa has been rehabilitated and is being developed. In addition, the government has begun to export fish and sea cucumbers from the Red Sea to markets in Europe and Asia on a limited basis. A newly constructed airport in Massawa capable of handling jets could facilitate the export of high-value perishable seafood. Agriculture (24% of GDP in 2007): Products--millet, sorghum, teff, wheat, barley, flax, cotton, papayas, citrus fruits, bananas, beans and lentils, potatoes, vegetables, fish, dairy products, meat, and skins. Cultivated land 10% of arable land. Industry (19% of GDP in 2007) types processed food and dairy products, alcoholic beverages, leather goods, textiles, chemicals, cement and other construction materials, salt, paper, matches and also mineral resources like gold, copper, iron ore, potash, oil. Trade: Exports (2005) $12 million: skins, meat, live sheep and cattle, gum arabic. Major markets are Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Yemen), Europe (Italy), Djibouti, and Sudan. Imports (2005) $474 million: food, military materiel, and fuel, manufactured goods, machinery and transportation equipment. Major suppliers are U.A.E., Saudi Arabia, Italy, Germany, and Belgium. As a result, GDP in 2009 is $1.87 billion, annual growth rate in 2009 is 3.6%, per capita GNI (2008, World Bank): $640 (purchasing power parity); $300 (Atlas method), Avg. inflation rate during 2008 is 18%.

GOVERNMENT

Following the liberation of Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1991, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) took over control of administration but agreed to hold a referendum on independence. The electorate approved independence in April 1993, and a four-year transitional period was declared to prepare a constitution. A May 1993 decree set up a formal transitional government under EPLF control. This provided for a National Assembly, a president, and council of ministers. Isaias Afwerki, secretary general of the
EPLF, was formally elected president by the National Assembly in June 1993. A new constitution was approved in 1997. Under this constitution, the National Assembly is the country’s legislature. Its members are popularly elected to five-year terms. A president, elected by the National Assembly to a five-year term, renewable once, serves as the head of state. The Supreme Court is the highest judicial body; its judges are appointed by the president. Eritrea is divided into six regions for administrative purposes. These regions are under the control of administrators appointed by the president. The main political parties in Eritrea are the former EPLF (renamed the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice, or PFDJ) in 1994, the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrea, and the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF).

**SOCIETY**

Scholars believe that a class of nobles surrounded the king. Beneath the nobles were merchants, artisans, and villagers who grew crops and tended animals. Aksumites owned slaves, many of whom were prisoners of war, but it is not known how they were employed. Wealth was probably derived from ownership of land. The kingdom of Aksum contained a number of important towns in addition to Aksum. The Red Sea port of Adulis was one of the largest. It contained stone churches and houses, the latter probably belonging to prosperous merchants. Other towns were located along the route that led from Adulis to Aksum. Many stone buildings have been found away from the towns; these may have been the residences of rich local landlords. Wealthy Aksumites lived comfortable lives and used luxury domestic items such as ceramics, glassware, and fabrics imported from abroad. The dwellings of town and rural workers were likely round huts made of stone or mud with conical thatched roofs, similar to rural houses in Ethiopia today.

The Aksumite diet would have varied, depending on social class. The staple was likely a cereal dish, but the upper classes also would have had such
imported luxuries as wine and olive oil. The alcoholic honey drink tej (mead), a common beverage in modern Ethiopia, would have been available to everyone. Workers and rural people would have eaten injera (flat, unleavened bread) and porridge made of local cereal, probably wheat or barley. Aksum is said to have imported cloth and ready-made garments, but almost nothing is known of the styles of dress. The cloth was linen, wool, or cotton. Archaeologists have found loom weights in Aksum, suggesting that Aksumites wove their own cloth as well. People in rural areas may also have worn leather.

**REGIONS AND DISTRICTS**

*Regions of Eritrea*

Eritrea is divided into six regions (zobas) and subdivided into districts ("sub-zobas"). The geographical extent of the regions is based on their respective hydrological properties. This is a dual intent on the part of the Eritrean government: to provide each administration with sufficient control over its agricultural capacity and eliminate historical intra-regional conflicts.

The regions, followed by the sub-region, are:

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<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Sub-regions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Berikh, Ghala-Nefhi, Semienawi Mibraq, Serejaka, Debubawi Mibraq, Semienawi Mi'erab, Debubawi Mi'erab</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Adi Keyh, Adi Quala, Areza, Debarwa, Dekemhare, Mai Ayni, Mai Mne, Mendefera, Segeneiti, Senafe, Tserona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Anseba</td>
<td>Adi Tekelezan, Asmat, Elabered, Geleb, Hagaz, Halhal, Habero, Keren City, Kerkebet, Sel'a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Northern Red Sea</td>
<td>Afabet, Dahlak, Ghe'lalo, Foro, Ghinda, Karura, Massawa, Nakfa, She'eb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Southern Red Sea</td>
<td>Are'eta, Central Dankalia, Southern Dankalia, Assab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ASMARA (CAPITAL OF STATE OF ERITREA)

Asmara (capital of State of Eritrea) formerly spelled Asmera - has one of the highest altitudes of all capitals of Africa and the world. Almost 2,400 meters above sea level, it has become a popular training location for long-distance runners from all over the world. Although it would be easy to think of Asmara, the Eritrean capital, solely as an Italian built colonial city, its origins actually reach back some 700 years. Originally, it is said, there were four clans living in the Asmara area on the Kebessa Plateau: the Gheza Gurtom, the Gheza Shelele, the Gheza Serenser and Gheza Asmae. Encouraged by their women, the men united the four clans and defeated the bandits who preyed on the area. After the victory, a new name was given to the place, Arbaete Asmara which literally means, in the Tigrinya language, "The four are united." Eventually Arbaete was dropped and it has been called Asmara, though there is still a zone called Arbaete Asmara. Another legend tells that in this region the Queen of Sheba gave birth to the son of Solomon, Menelik I.

Asmara was made the capital city of colonial Eritrea in preference to Massawa by Governor Martini in 1897. The city therefore bears many traces of the Italian colonial area: in its infrastructure, its architecture and some culinary traditions. Asmara is by far the largest city in Eritrea, with a population of some 600,000. Asmara sits atop (2,350m) the Eritrean highlands on the eastern edge of the escarpment. Unlike many of the other towns in Eritrea it is relatively undamaged, the Ethiopian forces having fled the city without fighting a full-scale battle at the end of the war. Under thirty years of Ethiopian occupation, the city was allowed to deteriorate, but it still retains its essential beauty and since coming under Eritrean control in 1991 it has been undergoing a rapid improvement in infrastructure facilities.
Asmara is possibly the safest African capital for travelers. It is one of the cleanest cities in Africa. The streets are elegantly lined with palms and a string of boutiques, coffee-shops and restaurants reminiscent of southern Italy.

**Administrations of Asmara**

Asmara is divided into 13 administrative areas, called administrations. These administrations have their local offices.

- (SE) Administration of Sembel (Sembel and Sembel Housing Complex)
- (N) Administration of Acria (Acria, part of Edaga Arbi, Adi Nefas, Durfo)
- (SW) Administration of Godaif (Godaif, Bargima, Kahawta)
- Administration of Maakel Katema (Souk, Central Zone, Tab'ah)
- (E) Administration of Tsetserat (Tsetserat, Nda German, Space, Biet Makae, Bilageo, Senita)
- (N) Administration of Edaga Hamus (Edaga Hamus, Haz Haz)
- (NW) Administration of Arbaete Asmara (Arbaete Asmara, Gheza Kenisha, Gheza Tanika, Medeber, Deposito, Biet Geogis)
- (N) Administration of Abbashaul (Abbashaul, Gheza Berhanu, part of Edaga Arbi, Hadish Adi)
- (NE) Administration of Mai Temenai (Mai Temenai, Seghen)
- (NE) Administration of Paradizo (Paradizo, Adi Sogdo, Adi Abeito)
- (E) Administration of Tiravolo (Tiravolo, Kagnew, Campovolo)
- Administration of Gejeret (small Gejeret, large Gejeret)
- (W) Administration of Gheza Banda (Gheza Banda, Forovia, Mai Chehot)
Asmara Education

Education is well organized in Eritrea. Tuition is subsidized by the government and studies relevant to the development of Eritrea are their main focus. In the first ten years of independence, Eritrea has invested heavily in education. School enrollment increased by 270% at the Elementary and middle levels and by 185% at high School level. Education starts at the age of five with two years for social interaction and adjustment of behavioral reaction.

Offices and factories of Asmara

Asmara was once a factory town. The Haile Selassie government gave out propaganda that appeared that they wanted to modernize Eritrea, but at the same time they were taking everything worthwhile out of the country (to Ethiopia). But in spite of sustained aggression and plunder of Ethiopia, the economy of Eritrea grows faster than that of its neighbors.

Banks in Asmara

The local currency of Eritrea is the Nakfa. The Commercial and the Housing bank provide exchange services for various currencies, but many people prefer the shorter lines and better rates provided by the small (but official) exchange offices. Do not attempt to change currency on the streets, since it is not allowed. If you do indulge, you're taking a big risk for a small gain. Banking hours: 8:00 - 12:00 and 14:00 - 17:00 Monday to Friday, 8:00 - 12:00 Saturday.

Asmara public buses

Public transport is well organized in Asmara with new Brazilian, Korean and Italian buses, and Toyota and Mitsubishi mini buses that have specific stops where they can be boarded. The fare is one or two Nakfa (1.50 Nakfa for the mini buses). The fare for a shared cab is 5-10 Nakfa within the
city of Asmara (following the route of the bus). A contracted taxi will charge 20 - 400 Nakfa. Negotiate the price in advance. The buses are operated from 6.00 in the morning until 21.00 in the evening. Long distance buses are operating between Asmara and various other cities in the country.

Markets in Asmara

Not far from the Cathedral is the busling shuq district, with its stalls of fruits and vegetables, bric-a-brac, spices, chickens and eggs, used furniture, ceramics, souvenirs, electronics and clothes. Side by side with the stalls are small workshops and shops. Behind the main mosque of Asmara is the souvenir and household utensils and electronics market, where one can find durable products of different varieties of different price level. In market places a certain amount of bargaining is expected, but prices at shops are usually fixed. Shopping hours: 8:00-13:00 and 14:30-20:30 Monday to Saturday.