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### Exploration Of Indigenous Insight And Reverberation Of The Voice Of The Voiceless: A Reading Of Patricia Grace's Potiki

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#### Abstract

Literature acts as a perfect medium in showcasing the sufferings of subjugated people to the public. Postcolonial literature perfectly portrays the mental status of the othered or sidelined community. Patricia Grace is one of the well- acclaimed Maori writers. Her first published work, *Waiariki*(1975) was the first collection of short stories by a Maori woman writer. She is undoubtedly one of the key figures in contemporary world literature. She was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2008. One of her most prominent novels, *Potiki*, originally published in 1986, narrates the story of a Maori community in New Zealand and their efforts for survival against the cruel deeds of land developers. In New Zealand literature, Maori literature is commonly considered as a parallel genre which describes a distinctive Maori world view and literary style. The Maori- Pakeha dynamics is clearly explored through the novel. The repression of indigenous population and their struggle for survival is the dominant theme of the novel. The role of mythical stories is vividly made understood. It is remarkable that stories are central to Maori history and its preservation. The novel is noted for its polyphonic mode of narration. The chief intention of this study is to project the impact of European domination. The chief objectives of this article are; to understand the major impacts of Imperialism on indigenous people, to analyse the role mythological stories in preserving the sacredness of Maori culture and to find out if the author emerges successful in echoing the voice of the voiceless.

**Key Words:** Postcolonial, survival, voiceless, imperialism, mythology, identity.

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#### INTRODUCTION

*Potiki* tells the story of the struggle of the Maori community in regaining their land which was lost in the hands of the Europeans. During the First World War, the land was taken to build an airfield and the original inhabitants had to shift to rental houses. The result of it was the total sacrifice of the tradition, culture and identity of the Maori people. The people were broken completely and it became impossible to

get back their possessions. The Maoris had to pay money as reward to the sports grounds and club houses which were built by the Europeans even though they disliked those developments made by the Europeans. They had to give up the return of some part of their land as they did not have any money. This land was used to put up a resort and this is the core theme of the novel. The most important part of Maori culture, Wharenuī or the meeting house plays a key role in the book. This is the space where Maori meetings occur and where the Maoris find solutions to problems. It is the symbol of Maori unity. It is the place where their rituals happen. The developers ask for a passage through the meeting house and this results in the outbreak of fight. Hemi, his wife, Roimata and their children never accept the positive aspects of the developments that happen in their land. The developers are not ready to give up their work. They go on threatening the natives.

The novel narrates the story of Hemi and his family. They belong to the Maori tribe who lived in New Zealand coastal area during the latter half of the twentieth century. Many of the Maori people have lost their jobs. Roimata's husband also has lost his job. Hemi decides to return to farming, realizing that it only will help the people in overcoming starvation and returning to roots. Toko is a malformed boy who was born to Mary, who is the mentally ill sister of Hemi. Toko is compared to God Maui in the novel. He has the power to read people's mind. Toko's life is vital to the whole plot of the book. This is evident through the title itself. Potiki means the last born child or the youngest child in a family. The novel's end never provides a solution to the core problem. But Patricia Grace tries to expose the sufferings of the Maori people as a result of colonialism. The lyrical quality of the work enhances the real emotion that the author tries to convey. Grace, through the novel, tells the people to follow traditional jobs such as farming and become independent. She relies on mythical stories to intensify the situation.

The novel opens with a prologue which narrates the story of a carver who built the Wharenuī, that is, the Maori meeting house. He carves his own body by breaking the job rules. As he does not have a child, he carves incomplete body of him. He tells his people not to complete that carving. It is through the narrator of the first chapter, Roimata, that the readers get an idea of the rest of the characters. Mary's only activity is cleaning the meeting house. She happens to fall in love with the carving. Toko foresees a danger that is approaching his land. He warns about this to Roimata. That danger is the emergence of the Pakeha developers. Hemi loses his job. A meeting is held between the people and Mr. Dolman, who is nicknamed as Dollarman. He wants the people to leave the land. At first the people allows him to build roads. But later, he demolishes the hills to make roads. The people get furious and they start protesting. Hemi in the mean time starts farming to overcome the state of starvation. The people get hope and they also follow him. As part of protest, the people block the roads by holding placards. This never hinders Dolman. As a result of heavy rain, flood occurs. A part of the burial ground is washed away. Matiti and Timoti, two people from Te Ope tribe, who are working for Mr. Dolman inform the Maoris that it happened because of the building of a dam by the developers to transport water. The people move legally. But they cannot submit proofs against the developers. The developers set fire to the meeting house. The people are completely broken by this incident. Mary collects the remains of the destroyed carving. The Maoris seek the help of the Te Ope tribal people and build a new meeting house. Toko is given a place under the carving and he is also given a special entrance. Part three of the novel conveys the death of Toko. In the following chapters, the readers get to know that while searching for his brother Manu who enters the meeting house in his sleepwalk, he gets killed. After this incident, James who knows the skill of carving realizes that Toko is the one who is deserved to be there in the space of Poupou, the ancient carver's body. Thus he carves Toko's body in that place.

It is remarkable that the characters, Mary, Toko and Manu are portrayed as people of disability. Mary is mentally disabled, Toko is physically disabled and Manu is suffering from epilepsy. They are not educated. They can be regarded as representatives of Maori community who are uneducated and are marginalized. But as a gifted human being, Toko is pictured as similar to God Maui. Spiritual elements are predominant in the novel. Hemi decides to follow farming when he is confronted with a crisis, whereas, his elder children desire to embrace new things. Roimata is satisfied with her husband's view. At the same time she understands the reality. Hemi's elder children James and Tangimoana get education and they get better understanding on the present world. That is why they support the acceptance of modernization and development.

The role of myths in connecting tradition with modernity is remarkable. Grace uses different mythical stories to make the public vividly understand the oppressed state of the Maoris. The craving of the Maoris to return to the golden past is clearly conveyed. The inevitable need to get back the lost identity, culture, rituals and way of living is made clear with the help of myth. The novel can be considered as a tool to voice the aftermath of colonialism. The close relation between indigenous literature and postcolonial literature is evident through this novel. The subjugation of indigenous communities by colonial powers is the main focus of postcolonial literature. The discrimination endured by the Maori community over years is narrated in the novel. The novel not only echoes the oppression, injustice and exploitation suffered by the community, but also the phase of survival and willpower to regain the lost identity. The cruelties of capitalism and modernization totally shattered the old values of the indigenous communities. The desire for power as well as money turned man into a villain. This results in the lack of respect towards humanity and traditional values. The real relation between man and nature must not be forgotten. The destruction of nature in the name of development kills the mother nature and breaks the communion of man and nature. So through *Potiki*, Patricia Grace make the world aware of the sufferings of indigenous people as a result of colonization as well as the need to return to the roots to preserve tradition and culture.

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