
"The Power of the Pen: The Matriarch as a Form of Literary Resistance."

Shri Krishan, Pursuing PhD in English from Central University of Himachal Pradesh Dharamshala.

Article Received: 20/09/2024

Article Accepted: 22/10/2024

Published Online: 23/10/2024

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2024.6.10.86

Abstract

The present study exposes the cruelty of European settlers on the Maori people of New Zealand. It revolves around the colonization, marginalization, cultural suppression, and displacement. The current research investigates the spiritual roots, indigenous identity, land confiscation, and economic trauma. The current research chiefly examines how Witi Ihimaera exposes the colonizers through his novel *The Matriarch*. Writing has long been the strongest weapon for resistance, nurturing a podium for marginalized voices to inspire, defy oppressions, question dominant forces, and encourage collaborative action. Literary works play a vital role in forming social movements and rigorous change.

Key Words: Colonization, marginalization, oppression, resistance, expose, suppression.

Introduction:

The novel *The Matriarch* by Witi Ihimaera is a magnificent piece of writing. It communicates the devastating effects of European colonialism on the indigenous people of New Zealand. Witi Ihimaera presents a huge historical harsh reality represented by many Indigenous people in New Zealand. The Indigenous means the original inhabitant of a certain place. Māori are the genuine inhabitants of New Zealand. The author of *The Matriarch* belongs to the Maori indigenous community of New Zealand. He exposes the cruelty of European settlers and Britishers in his fiction. Britishers are called pakea by the Maori people. For them, pakea means white people or outsiders. Being outsiders' European people and Britishers had extended their territory in New Zealand and colonized Indigenous people mentally, emotionally, physically, economically, and spiritually.

First, the British government confiscated the land of Maori people under the New Zealand Settlement Act in 1863. The present study sheds light on how British settlers tried to confiscate the land without the compensation and consent of the Maori people. Furthermore, in 1873, the native land act was passed; according to this act,

Maori individualized their landholdings. Consequently, it had become easy for Britishers to purchase the land from the Maori. After that, Britishers took land from Maori people on lease for a small amount of money. Later, they never returned those lands to them. Because of this, Maori people were displaced from their own places to another place. In this way, the Maori people lost their link to ancestral lands. Numerous Maori people necessitated to forsake their traditional land and displaced to urban areas. Losing land led to economic hardship and forced them to live on the periphery. Because of this, Maori people have faced economic depression throughout their lives. After losing the land, the Maori people lost their multiple rights, such as fishing rights, forest rights, agriculture rights, and so on. Maori had inherited these rights from their ancestors before colonization. Fishing rights were the chief source of their earning. They dealt in fishing. They had the right to fish from the coastal waters. After that, Europeans came into the center while Maori people were thrashed from the center. This led to economic trauma. Because of this, Maori people were living in unhealthy conditions, which meant the advancement of many diseases. Suppression of fishing rights meant losing their sources of food and survival, too. After that, they faced starvation at a tremendous level. Simultaneously, they have lost the ability to accomplish their needs. Riripiti is the chief character in the novel. She expresses her grudges against the white people. Once her son gets married to a white girl, she becomes furious about this marriage. She separates her son and daughter-in-law from her. The present study also exposes how Ririperi (Matriarch) is against the White settlers. She is angry because of the supremacy of White people in their land. After the birth of her grandson, Riripiti accepted her son and daughter-in-law. She faces dominant forces bravely and teaches her grandson Tamatea how to resist supreme powers.

Apart from that, Maori people's spiritual places and cultural identity are damaged by the White people. The present study also focuses on the sacrilege of urupa (burial site) by European settlers, who always constructed homes, farms, and roads over there. Because of this, they ran away. Sacred sites are called Wahi Tapu by the Maori people. These sacred sites are mountains, forests, and rivers. These holy places were demolished by Europeans in New Zealand due to colonial enlargement, such as mining, logging, and urbanization. On the other hand, the meeting grounds of the Maori are called Marae. It is an integral part of the Maori people. It is often disregarded, dismantled, and occupied by European settlers.

Whakapapa is the basic concept of Maori traditions, associating individuals with their identity, land, and ancestors. Whakapapa (Genealogical Sites) literal meaning is "to chant ancestry" and "to recite genealogy." It is the Maori way of linking the individual to their forefathers' origins. This means that Whakapapa provides individual identity, associating them with their forefathers, land, and tribe. Whakapapa confirms that individuals belong to specific tribes, likewise, iwi (tribe) and hapu (sub-tribe). Because of Whakapapa, the stories of their ancestors, cultural traditions, and histories are preserved. Whakapapa nurtures the spiritual association between the dead and the living. It also ensures the perpetuation of Maori traditions

and cultural practices. But after the advancement of White settlers, their cultural identity and cultural practices as well as Whakapapa, were suppressed.

Conclusion:

The present study is chiefly concerned with the issue of colonialism in Witi Ihimaera's *The Matriarch*. The indigenous people of New Zealand were forced to relinquish their ancestral land, which led them to poverty and diseases. The existing research highlights that the novel criticizes culture eradication, land acquisition, and subjugation. The themes of the novel migration and culture suppression are based on real historical context. *The Matriarch* is the witness to Indigenous people's genuine history and ongoing challenges in their lives. The current research presents such issues through many characters in the fiction. *The Matriarch* is not only the mouthpiece of colonialism; it also manifests the necessity to preserve cultural identity, ancestral lands, spiritual places, and rituals through storytelling as resistance.

References:

- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 1963. Print.
- Henare, Manuka. "Whakapapa: A Framework for Understanding Māori Genealogy". *Journal of Māori and Indigenous Education*, vol. 2, 2007, pp. 1–10.
- Ihimaera, Witi. *The Matriarch*. Heinemann, 1986.
- Mead, Hirni Moko. *Naga Pepea a Naga Tipuna: The Saying of the Ancestors*. Read Publishing (NZ) Ltd, 2001.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 1979. Print.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Columbia University Press, 1988. Print.
- Walker, Ranguini. *Ka Wahawahi Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End*. Penguin Book (NZ) Ltd, 1990.
- Wright, Alexis. *Plains of Promise*. University of Queensland Press, 1997. Print.