

The Maoris of New Zealand and their Women and Children-Part II (a)

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The Maoris were not the first inhabitants of New Zealand (NZ) as amply described in the preceding issue of this journal.¹

It was Patu-Paiarehe (PP) who had dwelled in the land of two NZ islands, thousands of years ago. Some of these first inhabitants had survived till the early times of Maoris. The stories of PP which had passed on from generation to generation of Maoris, were told to the European invaders by the elder Maoris, alive till that time.² It is pathetic to know that while the last few PP had taught their well earned skills to the early Maoris, the latter eventually turned back on the former and not only took over their belongings, like the beautiful green Patu etc, but also ruthlessly annihilated them.¹

Origin of Maoris

The Maoris had their roots in Polynesia, which is one of the three major ethnographic divisions of Oceania, the other two being Melanesia and Micronesia.³

It is of interest to note that Polynesia encompasses a huge triangle of islands, in the eastern, central and southern parts of the Pacific Ocean.³

It was perhaps in 8th or 9th century AD (dates being differently quoted in the literature),^{3,4} that crews of

Canoes or rafts started off from Society Islands of eastern, as well as from central Polynesia,^{3,5} and sailed off thousands of miles southwards across the Pacific Ocean until they encountered two islands, "the land of long white clouds", now known as North and South Islands of NZ.

Over the period of time (800 to 1300 AD)⁶ more seafarers reached these islands, to settle there for life. Thus NZ had 125,000 Maoris immigrants from Polynesia.⁴

Struggle for Survival

They had to struggle for survival in the harsher climate, than their original abodes in Polynesia. Since Northern Island had somewhat less harsh environment as compared to the Southern one and had rich soil, hence these people tried to settle in the former.⁵ There were very few edibles around except berries and fern roots. The only mammals to eat were bats and Moa (wingless birds weighing 20 to 250Kgs), with some swans geese and giant eagles, most of which went extinct. The Maoris therefore had to find subsistence in fish, seals and other marine mammals, leading to their virtual depletion.* They therefore had to bring in some animal species and staple crops from Polynesia to NZ

* Human eating has led to near extinction of Marine life in the Antarctic, thus leading "sooner or later" to the planning of creation of MAJOR MARINE RESERVOIRS, by NZ and USA, out there, to protect Antarctic ecosystem (as reported by recent media report).

(like sweet potatoes, taro, yam) etc etc.^{3,5}

Early Settlements

In the northern island they settled into thousands of Tribes which were divided into sub-groups called “Hapu” and developed strong holds on top of high forests with defined boundaries. There was internal harmony within the Hapus, each one of which was led by a male chief and kinship system existed. However there was no central control over all the tribes.^{3,5}

Maori Culture

Mostly the Maoris had a warring culture, fought with spears or had hand to hand fights with ‘Patu’ the green exquisitely carved club, for the purpose of gaining control over more forests (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Patu, the green (jade) club

(Web link: http://www.gigamyte.com/ancient_web/index.php/explore/country/Newzealand)

A war party “taua”, with their tongues out (typical of Maoris) would sing (cry out) a war song and would dance, carefully inspected by the tribal on Hapu elders.³ War parties were usually composed of males, although **female tribal members were not exempt from this activity.**³

Maori Mythology

It centered around canoes, gods and goddesses, with innumerable beliefs, interesting ones being

that there is woven universe and that women originated from the earth and the men from the sky.^{3,7-10}

Even the Maori tribes were given the names originating from semi-mythical canoes. The Maori Mythology has the idea, that the souls of their dead flee to the white light house of Cape Reinga, at the very north of north island, touching Tasman sea.⁴

Maori Language

It was oral language, called Maoritanga (related to Tahitian and Hawaiian languages).³ They had rich oratorical skills as well as collected interesting legends for narration, ever so often.

Agriculture and tree plantation

They in later times had developed productive agricultural system. They also grew Kiwi*, fern trees, fronds and pohutu kawa trees, for various purposes like eating and many other uses.¹¹

Arts and crafts

The Maoris had particular interest in wood carvings like those on canoes, making ‘meeting houses’ with carvings all over the interior and exterior surfaces. The carved “toten poles” made a significant part.³ The tree often used for carving was swamp Kauri.¹¹ The design of Towhai tree flowers (the National flower of NZ-Northern island) was used on materials made from flax, which served the purpose of making Maori Skirts and so on.¹¹

Tattoo

A Polynesian tradition, based on a myth,³ was done on the men’s faces, thighs and buttocks and **on the women’s lips and chins, but occasionally on the total face of the latter,**^{3,6} (Figure 2).

* Kiwi in our markets is still coming from NZ.



Figure 2. Total Facial Tattoo on a women`s face.

Courtesy of Łukasz Tarka, lukasz.tarka@wikidot.com
Web link: <http://janaecampbell.wikidot.com/start>

Occupational Specialization and Technological advancements

This however was relatively limited on account of the isolation of Maoris, in the far off land.⁵

Maori Social System

This was by and large patriarchal, but women did have a loud voice in the house hold and family affairs and some chances in the wars, as mentioned above. Moreover the men respected the women.¹² Thus it was by and large a healthy social system.

The Extended Family

The tribes or Hapu, villages or subgroups had fundamental expression of blood kinship, which determined extension of help to each other. The young people highly respected the elders and cared for the children of their community, (what a great setup, as perhaps in our Northern or Tribal

areas or elsewhere). This amounted to a community generated relationship, so called "Brother Hood". The value of these relationships will be touched upon, under Maori Child rearing, later.¹²

The Women and Children

The Women

- The usual Maori mythological story of Hineahuone (Earth formed women), was that she had procreated many children and then went into hiding and died. Later she was found and brought to life by Tane, a man, who was her father also, therefore she rejected his intimacy and went into hiding again for ever etc etc.^{8,9}
- The role of the women in the Cosmos was the same as men, on the whole.¹⁰

Social Status of Women

While the men were primary protagonists, the Maori women were assigned domestic duties, like elsewhere. During the day they left home and children to forage food, while the children were taken care of by the extended family (grandparents, uncles and aunts living with them, as well as elder siblings, if they had any). Otherwise the Maori women were good mothers and showed affection towards their children. Occasionally they carried fire wood, when the slaves were not around.¹² They also went fishing at times. At other times however the women excelled the men e.g. Hinepare, a Maori Noble woman who came in contact with the Europeans³ (Figure 3). Moreover women could become mediums of the family gods, but no more. Such gods and spirits were believed to have arisen

from abortions and miscarriages or were ghosts of the dead.⁶

Maori women on the other hand as already stated, enjoyed full control over their female functions.



Figure 3. Hinepare, A Maori noble woman.³

(Web link: http://www.gigamye.com/ancient_web/index.php/explore/country/Newzealand)

Marriages

If lasting peace was desired with a former enemy, to avoid revenge, an intertribal marriage between the families of aristocrats or chiefs was arranged to ensure lasting peace through a pact.³

Polygamy

At times a man had several wives and many children, but the head wife (Matua Wahine) ruled over the other wives, but with peaceful inter relationships.¹²

Domestic Violence In A Peaceful Society

Sometimes it did occur and the affected wife sought protection of her brother(s). [Here is a les-](#)

son to learn that in our setup, when such violence takes place, ever so often in our society, then the brother(s) of the victimised woman must come forwards to protect their sisters from their abusive husbands or other people living in the house hold.¹²

Health Affairs: Healing Process

For providing health advice and care, Maori Cultural values and beliefs (Tikanga and Karakia) needed to be known and abided by in order to avoid stress created by the healers own beliefs, on the patients.⁷

Procreation

The women with the help of midwives (Tohunga) enjoyed full control over conception, abortion, births and nursing etc. Their husbands however cooperated.

Pregnancy

It is a special time for women all over the world. When high ranking women conceived, there was rejoicing in the village and community, with special gifts being given, to mark the continuity of Chieftain line. In ordinary families there was less civic display.¹²

Prenatal Care

The Maoris believed that the mothers (Whaea) and the babies (Peepi) should be comforted and relaxed, as the unborn baby is fully aware of what is going on in the environment. 'Haputanga' is a special Maori approach, utilizing gentle belly massage, body alignment and pressure points activation, which serves the purpose of benefitting both the mothers and the babies. For the latter it is sup-

posed to provide more room, in the relaxed womb, allowing more comfortable movements and unhampered growth in the well balanced fluid (amniotic fluid).^{6,12}

Role of the Fathers (Nga matua)

In Maori culture fathers to be were taught pregnancy massage, to comfort their wives frequently to relax them, as well as to develop a close bond between the three of them (i.e. the mother, the father and the baby).⁷

Child Birth and Birthing Rituals

The Maori births were surrounded by myth and superstition. They were considered 'Tapu' and therefore took place either in the open or in special huts, but not in the house. During the last few weeks of pregnancy or at the start of labour the pregnant woman was segregated from the community with her attendants, if well to do, in specially constructed, but temporary Birthing or nesting houses (Where Kohanga). While, for the less well to do these shelters were simpler (Kahu or Kakahu). After completion of the birth rituals both types of shelters were burnt. The high ranking woman had a large group of supporters and care takers with her in these nesting/birthing houses. There were medicine men (Tohunga), midwife (s), her parents, her female relatives and her husband etc.⁶

When the woman felt pain at regular intervals in the small of her back the medicine man started to recite charms to ease the labour. The midwife at a later stage in advanced labour, held the woman's shoulders and pressed her tummy with the knees if so desired to assist birth. The other women sup-

ported and massaged her. **Most deliveries took place in the squatting or standing positions. There was no interference in the natural process.**

In case of complications a specialist midwife (or medicine man) trained in that field was called upon, to resolve the issue.^{6,12}

Chants Karakia for Hineteiwaiwa the Moon goddess (personified form of moon) were recited, to ease birth which were different for normal and complicated labour.⁶

The supporting system for the less well to do women was not that elaborate, but sufficed for safe delivery.⁶

The Cord (Iho orpito): It was cut with a piece of Obsidian and tied with flax fibre and the stump was rubbed with Titoki oil before being banded. During this process babies of both sexes were told, how their special abilities would enable them to lead their lives.^{6,7,12}

The Placenta (Wenua): Was considered life force between the mother and the child like "**Materno-Placento-Foetal supply line**" as I call it. It was taken away by the new mother's mother, aunt or another close relative, to be buried in a secret place.^{6,12}

Postnatal Care

Since the female genitalia were considered 'Tapu', being the house of people, their repositioning, "including that of internal organs" and realignment of the body, after birth by 'haputanga' is thought to

help in all respects, even in the prevention of post-partum depression.^{7,13-16}

Care of the baby (or child i.e. tamariki)

Infant (child) chiropractic and cranio-sacral therapy is considered to remove ill effects of birth trauma and later to help with sleep disturbances (even recurring night mares), colic, allergies, anger and depression.^{7,13-16}

In addition to the celebrations at birth (to be discussed shortly), a special ceremony was held, when the cord fell off (often on the 8th day) called Koringo or Maioha, i.e. "a greeting to the infant". For this ceremony a high born and high status mother would sit in the porch of her houses with the new born on her lap. It was a time when baby welcome songs and chants were recited, linking birth of the child to "creation of universe"- Maori Mythology.

Gifts like food crops were bestowed upon the mother and the child (whether a girl or a boy). After the speeches there was a feast, celebrating the event. The fallen off cord was buried or planted in a rock crevis or a tree secretly.¹⁷

After Birth Ceremonies

Often four ceremonies (one each day) were held after the birth of the child emphasising the special (Tapu) nature of the babies.

Amidst vast literature it can be deduced that in the 4 days ceremonies, specially after the first born child of a High Maori family natives of the tribe would gather and bring gifts and food and would sing to welcome the baby. Poetic Oratories were recited, mostly by the grand parents of the new born child, with desired wishes for its future.

They were meant to convey positive messages for the child's future life achievements. They also carried words of advice for the guidance of the parents of the baby, as to how the child should be reared. "These oratories had lasting impact". Some of the lullabies too, were centred around guidance of the child.¹²

Breast feeding and Contraception

The children were breastfed till their teething or waling time, but occasionally till 3 years to achieve pregnancy interval. For which purpose at times 'crockodile dung cake' was placed over the cervix.^{6,12}

According to Elsdon and Best (1952), the most important ceremony performed over the child was the 'Tohi Rite', which was an ancient form of baptism, they say. This took place on a river bank. Rituals and speeches welcomed the baby. The child being held up in the hands of a priest, was dedicated to a supreme being, while an attendant priest released a bird to fly away.¹⁸⁻²⁰

- Part II (b)- The Maori Child rearing practices.
- Acknowledgment and
- Total Reference of Part II (a) and (b) of The Maoris of New Zealand and their Women and Children, will be given in JSOGP Vol.3, No.4.

