
Voices of the Dead: Spectacle of War and Trauma in Tribal Literature

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Literature is documented war, violence information of life, and culture of man. Among many assumptions of the basic features of literature, the one most prominent is that it gives a spectacle of war and a chronicle of war experiences through the ages. It is a reservoir of documented experiences of chivalry, bloodshed and inhuman actions on fellow beings. A sweeping survey of literature through the ages from the periods of unrecorded history to the present gives the picture of treasured archives of atrocities, violence, genocide and massacre. Such activities of human beings are reflected in literature for generating aesthetic sensibility and rhetorical appreciation. Is it that one loves the tragic or that literature aims at a cathartic effect in reading or rereading of a text? Is it that literature is simply fact and fiction mixed or remixed in human imagination? Most of the literariness of war literature is in a way maladjustment to satisfy the ingenious and inherent war-mongering instinct of human kind.

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Introduction

History has documented killings through literature from times immemorial and the animalistic bend of mind of man is commemorated. This generalization is applicable only to a reading of a group of literature called the war literature in any language. War literature -Any kind of research on the subject of war and literature from early times to the present would demand a lengthy study.

It may require a thesis to discuss the nature of national literature of historical and social contexts dealing with the theme of violence, trauma and the related psychological, political and philosophical situations. A concise study of the subject can be listed based on literary texts of the past hundred years or so comprising of English literature and South East Asian English literary writings. War as a literary topic has found its way in many forms and modes in text writings. Many may be literary or partially literary or marginally literary, for example, chronicles,

histories, military, philosophical treatises and other records. Literary writings of war often reflect the experiential dimension of human beings. (Ref) [Johns Hopkins, The content of the form, Baltimore UP, 1987]

Literary expressions devote space to recall the manner and motives of war and how people are used and transformed by war. So there is often a felt experience and a subjective component that readers quite often expect in an imaginative and creative literary construction. It is not simply 'knowing' the facts of a text but to imprint a mark of authenticity and truth that is demanded of in a creative work. A literary piece may appeal the readers' imagination if only it can bring about some sort of authenticity and identification with characters and emotions through a literary language. War literature has also to represent such aspects as moral, philosophical, psychological, political and social that affects a society in general.

A literary work with sublime themes in grand style can be grouped as in the heroic mode. Such types of literature necessarily deal with heroic themes with war heroes and heroines. The old chants and war narratives has a primary purpose of recollecting great military actions in history. The heroic poems and the classics are expected to set the standards of military conduct and war like spirit. So the structure of ancient narratives, plot and its varied elements are rooted in war, hero and hero worship. Ancient war and war fare are basically implanted in the social collective conscience that led to the creation of sublime poems, epics and grand narratives. Modern war literatures act upon the imagination of the young people creating and recreating the spirit of nationalism, war mongering and terrorism as well.

Literature has also set forth certain creative ideologies to demystify war and its heroic ambience. Modern writers impart a mode of narrative style which is detached, objective and anti-conventional to collapse the patriotic traditions of the past. Examples are many, but to cite a few we may refer to Hemingway as he tries to debunk the glories of war in *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* etc. Such writers never believe in valorization of individual bravery for the benefit of a cause. Too many of the modern writers' literature is a mode of resolving or attempting to resolve war experiences and war trauma.

Such writers James Dickey, Randall Jarrel etc. are making art from life and rewriting their own experiences and culling out demons of fear and guilt from human life. Modern writers are reconstructing the experiences of battle. "War writers write for their comrades, dead and alive, and for those of similar minds or experience who come after them, but they also write for a larger, anonymous audience for whom the values supported or rejected in their writing must have significance. [Jules Roy, *Servitude* etc. grandeur militaries (1835) quoted in *The Functions of War Literature* jstor.org, Sat, 21Nov2015]

There are many traditional and contemporary thoughts about the origin and nature of war. In almost communities and groups war and violence existed. In the Neolithic cultures approximately thirteen thousand years ago, evidences of warfare among various groups were recorded. Philosophers and social thinkers come up with different thoughts about war. Many could not answer whether war is a product of nature or nurture. Ethnologists and socio biologists speak of the innate human urges and collective behaviour. According to them, war

motif is innate and inherent in human beings.

Certain philosophers who are in the line of Rousseau think that war is some social artifacts. There are many scholars who work upon human cultures opine that war is a product of destructive or anti- progressive thoughts, called ‘negative creativity’. The impact of war on culture and society has been much debated upon. War may not be simply a military mobilization and strategic manipulation of troops. It may be rooted in human nature and is a key factor in the cultural relations and institutionalized relationships of all societies.

War Narratives

War and culture are related and determining factors of social life and it is within the frame of reference that we have to address the role of state of war narratives [(ref.jstor.or 21.Nov.2015) Kathe Callahan, War Narratives : Framing Our Understanding of the War On Terror”]. War narratives may be discussed in terms of the major elements of grand narratives. The major literary elements of narratives called plot, setting, character, theme, motive may be considered in any basic epistemological study related to literature. So keeping cue with Aristotelian standards the study of the basic literary elements is to be supportive and in war narratives the ‘settings’ claim prominence in the name of ‘landscape or battlefield’. In most of the war narratives the battlefield will be depicted as the setting.

War occurs in a landscape called the battlefield and the purpose of the war is to conquer the landscape. In a narrative the actions of the war will comprise of the plot and the landscape will necessitate its happenings. Often in fiction the relationship between the landscape and the war is narrated and established. In mythology and ancient literature, we find many promised lands as the battlefield such as Babylon, Troy, Kurukshethra etc. Such places always play a collective role and keep an identity of its own in the narratives. Often landscape develops as collective symbols as in Waterloo or Kurukshethra. In effect, literature has a relation between war and landscape and the landscape creates a cultural space in the history of war and its people.

There are two types of Maori Literature –the traditional and the modern. The traditional comprises of tribals’ songs and chants and most of them are not preserved in writing. Like the ancient Vedas they are passed over from generation to generation orally. The traditional literature mostly developed out of the rich source of war experience, chivalry and violence. However, the contemporary Maori literature developed out of the pressures of Europeanization, urbanization and accompanying social problems. Hence, the modern Maori writers struggle to survive amidst their European counterparts provide a rich source of literary material.

The modern writers of Maori include Hone Tuwhare, WitiIhimaera, Patricia Grace and Keri Hulme. Their works occupy the period of published writing by Maori in English from the early 1960s to the present day. Mostly, these writers are occupied on topics of political struggle, spiritual survival and on efforts of recovering and sustaining Maori traditions. These are kernel themes not addressed by the indigenous Maoris before.

Like the traditional Maori writers, occasionally the modern writers also experiment with

the themes of blood and violence. The Matriarch, a novel by Ihimaera and the poems “Skulls & Cannibals” exploit the theme of Maori political thought from warrior passions to dispassionate observations of human life. Alan Duff, the author of *Once Were Warriors* exhibits the spectacle of poverty and violence. Duff’s characters often use the jargon of the prisons and the vocabulary of the prisoners.

Maori Tribal Literature

Maori literature may be selected as a case in point. Maori is a tribal group and forms a mindscape sharing a single culture, tradition and rituals and is distributed in the landscape of the Pacific in New Zealand, Indonesia, Fiji and some other smaller islands that bridge the people with its literature. Maori literature is mainly the product of a multicultural group of people in the countries in South East Asia and is now literarily termed as Oceania literature. New Zealand is the central nation in which the tribes thrive.

Maori literature constitutes an oral tradition of formal speeches, songs chants and a variety of long and short narratives. A flux of language occurred under the influence of European music, religion and material culture.

The written literature originated in the Maori language in the early part of the 19th century. Maori literature thrives mainly in translations in English in and outside New Zealand in the countries of the Pacific Ocean. As a result, Maori literature has become an important third world literature highlighting Maori authors using English as their main vehicle.

Most of the Maori literature reflects domestic life and domestic conflicts. Mostly, Maori literature is filled with the themes of war, violence and group conflicts. During the 18th and 19th centuries the Maori literature was filled with an insatiable thirst for the representation of violence. Almost all violence revolved round a warrior figure as the protagonist. To be specific, one may say that Maori literature of the period was a true reflection of the ordinary violence of Maori life. There were two parallel cultures in the land of the Maories. One is Maori culture and the other is Pakeha culture. Both cultures accepted aggressiveness as a way of life.

As a result of this attitude of aggressiveness the aboriginals of the land was subjected to fear and anxiety of aggression from a colonial population. So most often their literatures reflected descriptive imageries of violence and displacement. It is during the wake of the threat of foreign invasion that the conflict existed between Maori and Pakeha. The cultural staunch stands of the Maori can be detected in their attitudes and behavior and it is bluntly reflected in their literature. Maoris were not willing to shed their customs and traditions and warfare or anything related to their way of life. This has become symptomatic of their literature and the brand name of Maori was established in the world map of language and literature and human culture.

Maoris are the most war like people on earth is a report found from Captain Cook. Charles Darwin quotes from Cook the phrase “come on shore and we will kill you all with our patoo-

patoos” is said to be a phrase used by the Maoris when they greeted the British ships. A ‘patu’ is a short, flat hand club made of wood. It was worn in a Maori warrior’s belt. “According to Cook war was the Maoris’ principle profession” (112). Colonel James Alexander reported that war was the “daily amusement of many of the tribes” (11). The whole soul of the Maori is absorbed in thoughts of war; every action of his life is influenced by it.

As a result of this attitude and behaviour, the songs and dances of the Maoris exhibited their passion and emotion that is war and love. The vocabulary of their language is enriched with terms of war and warfare. Cook praised the good workmanship of the canoes. Even the vernacular architecture and the design of the villages were structured for war and not for comfort. The Maories practiced martial arts and their cosmology was focused on war. During a particular hour of the night they used to meditate and pray, muttering various words such as Mathe, etc.

The ethos of war is most often applied to the Maori people by social scientists to claim that they are warlike. Maori war likeness is often equated with heroic barbarism found in Homer’s Iliad or in some historical epics of Walter Scott in the modern times. The Europeans often associated the war likeness of the Maori in their texts. At a time of the defeat of the Maori rebels, the warriors were recreated as heroic for the portraiture of characters in poetry and song. The Maori warrior protagonist has attained much currency in European literature. In the novels of Alan Duff often we come across the Maori warrior and the Pakeha warrior. In the literary documents of the Europeans the Maoris are often represented as war like people.

In many of the writings in the mid-19th century the Europeans labeled the Maories as bloody and barbarous. Some of the Maori historians like Pat, Hohepa objected to these types of epithets in historical records. However, the Maori exploited the Europeans’ love for awe and horror and admiration for their own ends. The Maorians wanted them to be considered a group of dangerous people and this image is set in the example of the symbol rangatira. Rangatira is a recreated image of European military culture. Rangatira is a legend in the eyes of Maori and Pakeha tribes alike.

When tracing the war tradition of the Maories, we come across many exciting and terrible war stories. Rev. Samuel Marsden came to New Zealand in the year 1814. He established a Christian mission in the country. Many local chiefs established cordial links with Rev. Samuel. Hongy Hika was described by the Europeans as a great warrior. Within a short period Hongy engaged in gun trade with the Europeans. Hongy visited Europe and on his way back he collected guns and ammunition. Hongy could establish his supremacy over his longstanding rivals by the show of his newly acquired weapons. On his return to New Zealand, his attitude towards the Christian mission changed. He believed the people who preached the gospel of peace were unfit to become warriors.

After his return from England in 1821, Hongy set out on an expedition of war with two thousand warriors, thousand guns and a fleet of more than fifty canoes. This opened the Musket wars which lasted for a ten year period. More than forty thousand Maori deaths were reported and there was a structural reorganization in the tribal society. Hongy’s expeditions were called

as 'arms race' between tribe and tribe. The Musket wars and Hongy's involvement were stated as evidence of innate war likeness of the Maoris. The history of colonialism and experiences of local chief tons contributed to tribal literature especially poetry.

All the features and characteristics of the indigenous writings of the Maoris are encapsulated in by Chadwick Allen in his book *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts*. This is really epoch making writing on the history of the indigenous people. His effort is to confer identity to the Indigenous community all the world wide over. He holds a global perspective and his point of reference is WCIP (World Council of Indigenous People) held in October 1975 at British Columbia.

In this book he speaks about blood, land and memory complex. To him, blood stands for identity and narrative means memory. He speaks about those contemporary indigenous minority writers and activists who developed in the Post-World War II era. The Maori writers under reference come under the group of the resistance writers of settler discourses mentioned by Chadwick Allen.

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