

The maori religion and rituals of various cultures religion essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This essay discusses the Maori religion and variety of culture of the indigenous Maori community. It also discusses the death rites and the rituals of various Maori cultures, for instance, the marriage, death and birth rites and rituals among others.

Starting with the rich Maori religion Russell (2006) points out, that the Maori people believe in the existence of spiritual beings and a supreme supernatural being called Io. They believed that Io is only revealed to those who have reached a particular level of class preferable the most learned in the Maoris' society. But all of them regardless of class or age believe in the existence of eight gods whose parents are called Rangi and papa. There is gods of the forests and the forefathers called Tane. There is the god of sea called tangaroa. There is the god of agriculture and peace known as rongo. They also have god of weather and god of the uncultivated food known as Tawhitimateo and Haumia respectively (Keith, 1980). The Maoris also have god for earthquakes that is called Ruaumoko . Their belief in the existence of darkness and evil makes them to believe in the existence of the god that caused the same known as Whiro (Russell, 2006). There is also a special god for war who is also responsible for the invention of the snares and digging sticks.

On the other hand, each Maori tribe had a special god for war. The gods for war were useful when the tribes went for war. Apart from the war gods, each Maori family had family gods and spirits. The family spirits had their origin from the dead, abortions or miscarriages (Siers, 1976).

In the Maori religion there is association with the visible symbols that has a natural phenomenon. These symbols are the rainbow, the comets, trees and even stones. Living creatures such as birds, fish and lizards also have a connotation in their religion. There is also carving of gods either from sticks or stones that are worshipped. The Maori have god families.

Another important aspect of the Maori culture is on the death and funeral rituals. The dead body that is known as tupapaku is traditionally preserved and kept in a special meeting place called marae. The body has to stay for three consecutive days in this house and the body is never to be left alone even though the coffin is usually left open till the burial day. The mourning period is occasioned by wailings from the women and speeches are made in Maori language (Keith, 1980). Orupa that is the cemetery is adjacent to the marae. According to Siers (1976) those who view the body are required to wash their hands afterwards using water or bread that is usually at the exit

In Maori culture the burial and funeral rituals of important people are carried with pomp as they believe that these people will send protective spirits afterwards. For example, the death and funeral ritual of a chief is characterized by immense decoration of the body using feathers. The skulls of the enemies are placed at the feet, while all the remains of the ancestors are put at the head. On the poles next to the body there is heads of the enemies.

During the mourning period, relatives of the dead are not allowed to touch food using their hands but they are fed by their relatives, friends or members of the tribe. They just have to open their lower jaws and food tossed into it.

In showing their sorrow people cut their bodies using shells and the profound bleeding is symbolic for the immense loss incurred by the bereaved (Russell, 1996).

According to Keith (1980), on the burial day the chief have to be buried with all things that are valuable in the Maori community. He also points out that, the burial of the dead does not end with the first burial but there is the second burial known a secondary burial. In the second burial, the remains of the dead are removed from their primary burial place. These bones are then cleaned and painted with red ochre. The remains are then taken from village to village for a second mourning and later buried this time round in a sacred place (Keith, 1980).

Another important culture among the Maori is the welcoming culture that is characterized by a number of rituals. This culture was called marae by the Maori people (Siers, 1976). During this ceremony women perform oratories called karanga. According to Keith (1980), the karangas are done in Maori language and these oratories are both educative as well as entertaining. Russell (1996) says that, after the karangas there are formal speeches from the host. These speeches are known as whaikorero. A song called waiata is sung by various groups immediately after the speeches.

Gift giving is another important occasion during the welcoming culture. The gifts also known as koha are given out followed by karanga. Russell (2006) points out another symbolic ritual in the welcoming culture as the pressing of the noses, also known as hongis which is a sign of appreciation. To mark the end of the ceremony, a meal called hakari is usually shared (Siers, 1976)

According to Keith (1980) the third culture with rituals in the Maori community is the marriage and wedding ceremony. In choosing partners members of the opposite sex can either choose their partners or the partners chosen for them by the elders. But the female can turn down the advances of the opposite sex by putting a mark on their forehead called atahu. Courtship generally varied in the Maori culture in that, some tribes simply proposed by capturing the potential bride. This tactics sometimes turn violent.

In Maori marriage, adultery was heavily punishable. The punishment was in form of plundering the homes of the couple. Divorce was not ruled out. It was ritually carried out using water (Siers, 1976).

The wedding usually takes place in the marae and during this ceremony a relative of the groom challenges the father of the bride to come forward for a fight. The father of the bride approaches the relative of the groom as if he is ready for a fight but instead stretches his hand and greets the challenger (Keith, 1980).

Another culture of the Maori is the birth culture and the rituals that accompany it. Russell (1996) says that, the Maori women control the birth process but it is the midwives known as the tohunga who have control on the conception, abortion, birth and parenting. The women has to follow strict guidelines from the tohunga and during the delivery time, women deliver either in squatting or standing positions with minimal support offered on request. The Maori women either gave birth in an open place away from the main dwelling or in a temporary structure made for the same and were burnt

at the end of it. This temporary structure was called whare kohanga or simply the nest place (Keith, 1980). The nest place was meant for high ranking women on their first deliveries. The placenta is usually buried.

According to Siers there is an important ritual rite called tihe that is usually performed during child birth. It is a form of baptism that resembles the modern mode of baptism in Christianity. In most cases, there is chanting and singing to welcome the newborn baby. Gifts are also given out by the family members.

Giving the Maori culture without giving the type of food, their economic activities, clothing and the traditional Maori culture will not make the discussion on the Maori culture, religion and rituals complete, therefore these aspects will be mentioned on the preceding paragraphs.

Keith (1980) points out that, the economic activities of the Maori culture vary with the location. He says that they are hunters, gatherers, and farmers. They hunt birds such as pigeons, ducks, and rat among others. Those that live along the coastal lines hunt grubs, earthworms, fish, shellfish, and sometimes whales. The Maoris use dogs for hunting purposes and the Maori are said to be cannibals thus they also survived through eating each other (Keith, 1980).

Russell (1996) says that on art, the Maori has paintings and weavings mostly done by women. The indigenous Maori is characterized by group performance called kappa haka. There is also oratory that is authentic and has both entertaining and educative influence. The clothing is accompanied with tattooing of faces where women tattooed their lips and chins a method <https://assignbuster.com/the-maori-religion-and-rituals-of-various-cultures-religion-essay/>

called ta ngutu. The tattooing was done either through piercing or pigmentation of various body parts (Keith, 1980)

Siers (1976) says that in the traditional Maori culture, society is segregated into small villages called kainga. These villages contain members of one of more members of a tribe usually called hapu. The kainga varies in sizes depending on productivity and population density of the regions. There are also villages that are fortified called pa. Each village has a store called pataka where war weapons, fishing gear and preserved foods are stored. The villages also have well decorated houses called whare whakairo which were for indoor meetings and entertainment of guests

In conclusion the rich indigenous culture of the Maori has been greatly influenced by modernity leading to some aspects being eroded. Has a result the Maori culture and religion has changed in the recent past (Keith, 1980).