

Free religious studies: chiricahua and mescalero apache essay example

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Out of the many fears for the newcomers and nomads residing in the Southwestern United States, most terrific was the tribe known as Apache. Apaches were infamous for raiding the settlers to protect their land. Two major modern-day surviving groups among various apaches are Chiricahua and Mescalero. In this report, we highlight some factors and similarities between these two groups, particularly over their social and religious beliefs and practices.

The apaches are primarily known for their combatant skills. But that's for men. Men are considered to be brave and valiant. According to a popular belief, the men of the society were believed to be in the image of the two sons of White Painted Woman (a goddess), who killed the monsters of the earth. Women in Chiricahua and Mescalero tribes, on the other hand, are treated as secondary to men. The role of men and women in these tribes can be understood by different beliefs, one of which being any girl, who is found to be unchaste, is said to bring disgrace to her family. Hence, in order to prevent girls from having extra marital or pre-marital sexual relations, it is better to keep the people of same sex in their own spheres, except for the times when with their marital partners or other family members. While men are warriors, raiders and protectors of land, women are considered as the safe keepers of family and heritage. Men are supposed to handle the economic department of the household, which means hunting deer, raiding settlers and fighting wars is for them. Women, on the other hand, are considered more appropriate for doing other " supporting" jobs like gathering and storing fruits and vegetables. Storing is for the days, when going out is difficult, especially during winters. Apart from that, the food

brought by the men through hunting is also trusted to be cooked well by the women only. Any man letting a woman participate in his work is certainly a subject to mockery.

In these cultures, marriages were more of a financial arrangement, instead of a romantic companionship. A man, who can prove himself to be responsible to shoulder the responsibilities towards his family is considered fit for marriage. A marriage is only meant to make a man more accountable and responsible. On the other hand, for women, they have to get married to men, sometimes older to them, if the men are economically and financially strong.

In spite of presumably more male-minded gender roles, a married woman has considerable respect. If she experiences misconduct from her husband, she is allowed to escape to her father's home and the father's family will allow her to stay. The man then must beg for his wife back. Though wives have independence of taking part in economic activities in the family, it is not considered as an honorable activity. However, they have independence to speak their minds and express their feelings to their husbands and the husbands must respect their wives' thoughts. In spite of this cultural freedom, apache women and men are not known to express emotions and any romantic bond between husband and wife is rarely seen.

Divorce or as they say walking away from each other is literally a walk away. If any of the marital partners want a divorce, they just take their valuable possessions and leave. However, if a man leaves for divorce, the possession of the house and the utensils is given to the woman. Here also, a woman cannot oppose a divorce while if she herself wants one, the husband can

forcefully stop her. Accusations of unfaithfulness in marriage, sterility, disrespect etc. are the prime reasons for divorce.

As far as property rights for women are concerned, their possessions mainly include items hand made by them like baskets, carry bags, etc. Anything made by the wife automatically become her possessions. Even after divorce, she can keep what belongs to her. Also, as mentioned before, it is believed that the house is raised by the wife; hence it is her property unless she leaves it herself for divorce.

Superstitions and beliefs over various human conditions are common in Mescalero and Chiricahua Tribes. Just as sneezing is considered to be a bad omen by some while some believe it to signify that “ someone is thinking of you”, muscular tremors are also considered to be caused by an unknown force. Each person has his own effect of these tremors. Twitching of feet might indicate that the person needs to travel somewhere or it may also mean he should not walk at all for some time. During female menstrual cycle, the girl’s used clothes are kept away from men’s reach as they are believed to cause paralysis. Beliefs about truthfulness of dreams are also noticeable. Dreams are considered as guides. However, skeptical practices are also seen in these tribes for medical conditions. Therapies like massage for fatigue, bloodletting for rheumatism, etc. are popular among the others. Violence against women is not a rare sight in these tribes. It is considered as “ unmanly” if the husband shows no anger on discovering adulteration by the wife. However, the elderly try to settle things but to show his manliness the husband needs to be aggressive over the issue. Harsh punishments are seen for women even suspected to be unfaithful in their marriages.

Chiricahua and Mescalero Apaches mainly worship the Goddess known as the White Painted Woman. She is worshipped during many rituals, the most considerable among which is the Girl's Puberty Rite. It is a ritual performed for a girl who has just entered the womanhood. Not only the girl, but the practitioner, who conducts the ceremony, is also believed to be blessed with long life. As mentioned above, the White Painted Women raised two sons who defeated the monsters of earth. When her sons returned from their victory, the White Painted Women made a loud cry of applause. This cry is hence treated as the first and most significant cry of applause. So, to signify applaud for such an occasion, the practitioner gives out the similar cry. As it can be seen, the societies in these tribes have been more patriarchal since generations. However, women are respected and cared by the people but inequality in the opinions over the two genders is what raises the fingers. The strange fact is that religiously, these tribes worship women, while culturally they are treated to be lower than men. So, in conclusion, Chiricahua and Mescalero tribes have an interesting and rich tradition. Their religious views and opinions may seem strange to normal people, but they have successfully let these tribes to survive for centuries. They have loud and peculiar rituals and ceremonial practices, which help them to praise each other's achievements, help in problems and celebrate their happiness. After all, religion teaches a way to live.