

## Myth, Memory and Meaning: An Archetypal Reading of Patricia Grace's

### *Potiki*

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| R. Showmya,                               | Madurai.                                   |
| Ph.D., Research Scholar (Part Time),      | Dr. A. Ramasubbiah,                        |
| Regn No: MKU24PFOL11442,                  | Principal,                                 |
| Red.No.                                   | Associate Professor (Research Supervisor), |
| REGARTS/PT/Regn/Eng/240427145641,         | PG & Research Department of English,       |
| PG & Research Department of English,      | Mannar Thirumalai Naicker College,         |
| Mannar Thirumalai Naicker College,        | Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University,  |
| Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University, | Madurai.                                   |

#### **Abstract:**

This paper attempts to pinpoint the interaction of archetypal criticism in Patricia Grace's novel *Potiki*. Archetypal criticism focuses on illuminating the texts by examining recurring symbols, character types, images, patterns of action, themes and narrative designs. These recurring elements are frequently attributed to universal and elemental patterns in the human psyche, whose effective manifestation in a literary text elicits an intense response from the attentive reader, since the reader shares the psychic archetypes articulated by the author. Patricia Grace's *Potiki* is a novel about the relationship between a tiny coastal community's residents with their ancestral land, which was endangered by land developers, they destroyed their lands; left the Maori people in the state of fear for their survival. By analysing Patricia Grace's *Potiki*, this paper will bring out literary framework of archetypal criticism in it.

**Key words:**

Patricia Grace, *Potiki*, Archetypal criticism, Carl Jung, Collective Unconscious.

Archetypal criticism evolved from the concepts like symbols, images, universal patterns and characters which repeatedly appeared in the literary works because they are profoundly rooted in experience of humans. James G. Frazer's famous work *The Golden Bough* is one of the earliest influenced works in archetypal criticism which deals with myths and rituals from various cultures across the world which share similar patterns; he says these recurring elements reflect human experiences and belief; it is not accidental. Psychologist Carl G. Jung made great influence on archetypal criticism by his concept of archetypes, according to him archetypes are "primordial images" or "psychic residue" come from the recurring experiences of the earliest ancestors of humans.

Jung's emphasis is not on the individual unconscious but on what he calls the collective unconscious, shared by all individuals in all cultures, which he regards as the repository of "racial memories" and of primordial images and patterns of experience that he calls archetypes. He does not, like Freud, view literature as a disguised form of libidinal wish fulfilment that to a large extent parallels the fantasies of a neurotic personality. Instead, Jung regards great literature as, like the myths whose patterns recur in diverse cultures, an expression of the archetypes of the collective racial unconscious. (Abrams and Harpham, 322)

Jung mentioned that these ancient patterns are kept in the collective unconscious, a shared layer of human mind similar to all human. These archetypes can be manifested through myths, religious beliefs, fantasies, dreams and literary works, he also says that the authors unintentionally use this universal imagery which enables the readers from all

background and eras to emotionally and psychologically connect with the literary works. Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934) gave major boost to the field of archetypal literary criticism. Another most important figure in archetypal criticism is Northrop Frye, his book *Anatomy of Criticism* was published in 1957. Frye blended the biblical symbols, the creative philosophy of poet and artist William Blake with archetypal criticism. According to his theory all literary texts collectively constitute a self-contained literary cosmos that the human imagination builds in order to make sense of the natural world.

A great author possesses, and provides for readers, access to the archetypal images buried in the racial memory and so succeeds in revitalizing aspects of the psyche which are essential both to individual self-integration and to the mental and emotional well-being of the human race. Jung's theory of literature has been a cardinal formative influence on archetypal criticism and myth criticism. (Abrams and Harpham, 322,323)

One of the most important archetypal imageries is water, it represents the cycle of purification, redemption, fertility, development, the mystery of creation, birth, death, and resurrection. According to Jung, water is considered as the most prevalent representation of the unconscious mind since it symbolizes the depths of the human thoughts and emotions. The meaning of the water varies depending upon its shape, sea which is considered as the mother of all life, it represents the infinity, eternity, death and rebirth, spiritual mystery, as well as unconsciousness. "Water: the mystery of creation; birth-death-resurrection; purification and redemption; fertility and growth. According to Jung, water is also the commonest symbol for the unconscious" (Guerin et al., 186). River is frequently connected

to divine entities in the mythology and it symbolizes the unceasing passage of time, death, rebirth, human life transitions through ceremonies like baptism.

The Great Mother archetype, which represents the mysteries of the life, death, metamorphosis and the feminine force connected to the moon. There are three variations of this type of archetype; Birth, affection, fertility, protection, plenty and sustaining force of the nature are symbolized by the Good Mother, this positive element is exemplified by the characters like Ceres and Demeter. The destructive aspect of womanhood is symbolized by the Terrible Mother, she manifests as sorceresses, sirens, witches or female fatales, who stands for the danger, terror, sensuality, darkness, the scary parts of the unconscious and death. The Holy Mother, a princess or ideal women are frequently used to symbolizes the third form which is termed as Soul Mate, she represents love, spiritual fulfilment, inspiration, and purity.

The Wise Old Man, who manifests as a guru, teacher, saviour or guide is another significant archetype, according to Carl Jung, he is considered as the embodiment of moral virtues, knowledge, insight, sense and introspection. He typically shows up when the hero is up against an insurmountable obstacle and is unable to resolve it on their own, during that time the Wise Old Man helps the protagonist to grow psychologically and spiritually by offering advice, testing the moral character of the hero and providing information which he need in order to overcome the obstacles. “The old man always appears when the hero is in a hopeless and desperate situation from which only profound reflection or a lucky idea can extricate him” (Guerin et al., 188).

The universal story structures known as archetypal motifs or patterns are found in religions, myths, literature and folklore from many civilisations, these are the recurring story patterns that represent common human experiences and the collective unconscious in contrast

to the archetypal imagery which are discrete symbols and using these patterns authors can convey the basic concepts like life, death, creation, transformation, redemption and sacrifice. The first and foremost basic archetypal motif is the creation, almost each and every mythologies start with an account of how a supernatural entity or divine power created the universe, humanity and the nature. Generally, the creation myth tries to explain the origin of the world, life, and humanity's place; even their specific cultures. This creation myth serves as the basis for the numerous literary and religious traditions due to its widespread existence.

Hero archetype stands for the metamorphosis, atonement and the personal development, the journey of the hero typically entails remarkable encounters that are advantageous to the person as well as the greater community. The quest, which the hero embarks on the protracted and perilous journey to complete a crucial task is considered as the most prevalent hero patterns. The hero must face the insurmountable challenges, vanquish formidable foes, solve the perplexing puzzles and finish the demanding tasks during his way. Hero's bravery, tenacity, intelligence and moral character are put to the test during the challenges, hero protect the civilisation, reinstates order and vanquishes the evil by finishing the quest.

Initiation represents the ignorance and immaturity to the wisdom and adulthood is considered as another important hero archetype, hero undergoes a number of agonising the physical, psychological or spiritual difficulties during the initiation process which results in the personal development. It includes three important steps: separation in which the person departs from the familiar environment; transformation in which the hero experiences the hardships with learning and the third step is return in which the transformed person re-enters the society as a mature and accountable individual. The hero voluntarily endures the hardship or perishes for the good of the community, through the hero's sacrifice, the sin and sufferings

of the peoples will be forgiven, the land once again get fertile, prosperous and peaceful, this archetype highlights the notion that the individual sacrifice can result in community redemption and renewal.

Patricia Grace is the writer of novels, short stories and children's books. She was born in Wellington in 1937, educated at St Anne's School, St Mary's College and Wellington Teacher Training College. She published her first book – short story collection *Waiariki* in 1975 and first novel *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* in 1978 and had recognition as first novel published by a Maori women writer. Her other novels includes *Potiki* (1986), *Cousins* (1992), *Baby No- Eyes* (1998), *Dogside Story* (2001), *Tu* (2004), *Chappy* (2015), Nonfiction includes *Ned and Katina: A true love story* (2009), *From the Center: A writer's life* (2021), Short story collections includes *The Dream Sleepers* (1980), *Electric City and Other Stories* (1987), *Selected Stories* (1991), *The Sky People* (1994), *Collected Stories* (2001), *Small Holes in the Silence* (2006), *Bird Child and Other Stories* (2024), and she published six children's books. She received prestigious honors like the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in 2006, and Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for her services to literature in 2007. Most of her works deal with the depiction of Maori culture and the challenges faced by Maori people to retain their lands.

Patricia Grace's *Potiki* was published in 1986; it tells the story of the Maori people in New Zealand and their fight to retain their land from the land developers. The novel begins with a prologue, that tells a tale about a carver who is carving a meeting house for the community, and he carved himself in the wood, rather than his ancestor. This novel is divided into three sections, each with a different narrator. Roimata began the part I of the novel; she introduced her family members to the readers, Roimata gets back home shortly after twelve years of absence, and she tells the birth story of Toko, Mary's special child, who possesses

the gift of foresight, with his foresight he warns Roimata that something will happen to their community in the future. After losing his job Hemi began farming the land, which he earlier forcibly gave up. This part comes to a conclusion with the account of Toko, about the land being taken from the nearby tribe Te Ope for the government project. Part II begins with the meeting between Maori people and the property developer Mr. Dolman about getting their own ancestors land like meeting house, burial ground by persuading them. However, the Maori refused to give up their lands, young people began to protest. The construction of a dam by the developers caused the Maori people to face a flood in their burial ground, the developers then attacked them by setting their meeting house on fire, which caused the Maori to lose their sacred building. Readers learn about the death of Toko at the beginning of Part III, he was murdered at the meeting house, and his brother James came up with the conclusion that Toko is the person who had the right to have seat beneath Poupou in the meeting house. Maori people became a potent symbol of resistance and their unshakeable connection to their ancestral land as evidenced by the construction of a new meeting house with the assistance of their neighbour Te Ope people.

Jung concepts are reflected in Patricia Grace novel *Potiki* by depicting Maori spirituality, mythology, community, ancestral customs and cultural identity. According to Carl Jung, archetypes begin in the collective unconscious then developed into conscious experiences; the novel begins with the poem which symbolically represent a turn from emptiness to creation of life, this brings out the universal archetype of creation. Creator archetype can be seen through the carver, because he is the one who spent his whole life to carve out the figures in tree; which already existed within the tree; Jung says that archetype is found in the collective unconscious rather than being created, here the carver serves as a creative intermediary, while the tree functioned as a symbolic womb. “He is master only of the skills that bring forward what was already waiting in the womb that is a tree”. (Grace, 9).

One of the most significant archetypes of Jung is the recurrent motif of death and rebirth, death is no longer devastation but as transformation; in the fiction the carver who gave his life after completing the last piece of his work, took spiritual rebirth via the carved figure and through this his life continues. Nature and sea functioned as a Mother archetype, the tree which is mentioned as womb in repeated way, provide shelter, fruits and acted as source for carving ancestor figure; the sea provide nourishment, protection and continuity.

“A life for a life” could mean that you give your life to someone who has already given his to you. I was told not to call out anyone in living memory, but it is done. I was told not to give breath to wood but ... “A life for a life” could mean that you give your life to someone who has already given you his own. (Grace, 13)

The birth story of Toko in the novel represent Divine Child Archetype, Toko is physically disabled child but he had the super power of foreseeing; he symbolizes hope and renewal for their community because he is the one who alarmed their community about the danger that they will face in the future using his special power. Great Mother Archetype can be seen through the character Roimata, according to Jung, Great Mother will play the role of protector and life giver. Roimata not only nourishes her family but also restores the life of the whole community by conserving tradition, cultural memory, as well as educating children. She saved Toko during his birth and she proudly says that he is her own son without any hesitation and her reaction towards Toko implies the maternal care is part of the most profound aspect of human awareness.

Story telling tradition itself a form of Jung concept of archetype, according to him archetype may transform in different time but remains unaltered in human mind; these stories not belonged to the individuals but it passes through generation connecting cultures and



histories. Granny Tamihana and Hemi fulfil the role of Wise Elder Architype through their activities; Granny guides people towards spiritual completeness through maori tradition. After the birth of Toko, she performed the sacred healing rituals and gave sacred name to the baby. “She took a pendant from her ear and put it on the blanket beside him. ‘Tokowaru-i-te-Marama. Ko Tokowaru-i- te-Marama te ingoa o tenei,’ she said.” (Grace, 36). She praised Toko, when he caught a great fish with warm welcome and her words transform his action into symbol of belonging and love; she is the one who brings the people to the normal state after the fire which damaged their sacred house, Granny’s composed demeanour, which demonstrated that wisdom can be found by accepting the hardship as necessary part of life rather than trying to avoid it.

Hemi’s statement “everything we need is here” (Grace, 66) reveals his faith in ancestors and inner wisdoms; it reflects his deep comprehension and genuine richness about his culture, land and community. He says that the true survival depends on memory, land and collective heritage and not by the contemporary jobs; his choice of adopting the cultivation as a job represent unconscious return to the origin. Warrior archetype is reflected in children’s games in the novel; these kids battle with unseen foe in contrast with the previous generation people who mimicked the cinematic and historical conflicts and the absence of the enemy shows the fight is not physical but through spiritual and psychological.

Shadow archetype which stands for dominance, avarice and cultural devastation; this can be seen through the developers and the destructive equipment. The human unconscious impulse to dominate and exploit the nature without having the thought about the spiritual values is symbolised by the yellow bulldozers. Jung says that the people will frequently disown their fears and precariousness by protecting them, a man’s hatred towards the development projects represent this. Fire, water, Toko reflect the death and rebirth archetype;

the land developers caused flood, set fire to the meeting house and killed Toko in order to capture the land from the community peoples, however all these destructions collapse the people but their overcoming represent the spiritual rebirth. The novel *Potiki* is potent tale of survival, cultural identity and community because it blends universal archetype with maori customs.

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