

WITH MAORI – THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF NEW ZEALAND

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“Kia Ora.” Speak up, “Kia Ora”, the guide said. None of us understood what the guide was saying! Still we all repeated after the guide: “Kia Ora”. Then the guide explained the meaning of “Kia Ora”. It means in English “Hallo.” We the Maori people welcome our guests with the words “Kia Ora”, explained guide while calling a beautiful Maori young lady closer to him.

Then the two guides in turn explained to us the 3 hours to spend together like music and dance, social life, sight-seeing in the village, etc. Then they said together: “Thank you”. We thank you all because our village is financially strong, thanks to the tourists like you. We have all taken tickets. But there was no check or verification.

Of the 11 days I spent in New Zealand 2 days were spent at Whakarewarewa. When I landed at Auckland airport my nephew Shaju and his daughter Rosmi had come to welcome me. When I was taking tea and snacks with them in their new bungalow, Shaju explained to me the 11 days’ programme he and his wife Mini had prepared for me with minute details.

“Uncle, you had told us that you are coming to meet us and rest and do not arrange any long trips. Still we have arranged just one overnight trip for you to see something unique in the world. We are going to the village and town of the Maori aboriginal people. We will visit their wonderful thermal village. You will remember for life the visit to Whakarewarewa thermal village.

New Zealanders believe that about 1000 years before they migrated from Europe the aboriginal people had reached and settled there on the sea coasts and jungles. Today 14% of the populations like the Maoris are aboriginals. But the effect of the Maori aboriginal culture is experienced in the whole of New Zealand. At Auckland I used to go for Mass in the close by Christ the King Church. On a Sunday the Church was full with about 600 worshippers. The Mass began in Maori language “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.....”

I was surprised because Shaju had told me that the Mass would be in English. But the Priest greeted the people and welcomed the congregation in Maori language expressing solidarity with the aboriginal people. He then continued the rest of the Mass in English. But the greeting and good bye were again in Maori at the end of the Holy Mass. The congregation like in the beginning responded perfectly in Maori.

The influence of Maori people and their culture is felt in the whole of New Zealand. I did not interact with any Maori person. Still I know that there is no difference whatever between the aboriginal people and the European migrant people. But New Zealand history records a lot of fights and enmity in the past between the two populations. When Europeans came to New Zealand they forcefully occupied the Maori people’s settlements. Then, there were many agreements or contracts between the aboriginal people and the European migrants. Today there are constitutional provisions protecting the Maori people and their culture. Both the Maori

aboriginals and European migrants live in peace and harmony.

During my short stay I had the opportunity to experience the life and culture and also read a lot about the Maori people and their way of life especially during my two day long trip to Rotorua town and the thermal village of Whakarewarewa with the geysers, hot springs and mud pools.

One day very early morning Shaju drove me and Mini to Maori town Rotorua. After 3 hours drive we reached Rotorua. Shaju had already booked 2 rooms there in Silver Oak Heritage Hotel. After refreshing in the hotel rooms and taking breakfast we set out to see the Maori cultural programme at 11 AM for which Shaju had purchased 3 tickets in advance. We reached near the entrance of the Maori village Whakarewarewa. We found there a well build young man and a beautiful young lady waiting for the group to gather.

After waiting 5 minutes the young robust guide called the people standing around him near the board Whakarewarewa and said “Kia Ora”... Then he called our attention to the name written in English alphabets and said in “Whakarewarewa” is the name of our Maori village.

“About 3 centuries back an aboriginal war leader gathered around him fighters from his tribe. His name was Wahiao from his name the people here called the name of the village Whakarewarewa. Its shorter form is “Whakarewarewa” the guide explained.

Then the guide introduced himself and the co-guide the young lady. “Now my companion will tell you about the interesting things as well as the culture programmes we have prepared for you for the next 3 hours”, he said.

The young lady spoke to us about the Maori aboriginals, their language and culture, and a number of unique things about Whakarewarewa village. Then, she asked, “Do you have any question? Do you need any clarification or explanation about the things I said?” we were all eager to cross a small bridge near by and enter the Whakarewarewa village. So no one asked any question.

All of us tourists were divided into two groups. One group followed the young lady guide while the second group with me included followed the robust guide and entered the Whakarewarewa village passing through the archway built in the shape of a bow in memory of the Second World War heroes. As we entered the village we saw the geysers-the strange sight of rather foul smelling smoke coming out the earth at different places.

Close to the entrance is a dilapidated hunt- the house of Tuhourangi-Nagati-Wahiao tribes built by Maori tribes much before the arrival of the Europeans. The roof of the hurt is covered with tree-leaves. The aboriginals lived the place to take advantage of the warm atmosphere. At some places in the village there is warm hot springs. The local people use the hot water for cooking as well as for bath. In one place an young man was lowering maize in a steel net into the hot water pond and distributing thus cooked maize to tourists.

There is a hundred year old Catholic Church built in 1905. There are houses around the Church of Catholic Christians of Nagati Wahiao tribes. The guide told us that there is also an Anglican

Church in another part of the village. In 1886 Tarawera volcano erupted destroying many villages around the Tarawera Mountain region. The people escaped from the place and took refuge in Whakarewarewa. All those people were Anglican Christians.

In a big house in the village we saw many small children. The guide explained to us as the play school or kindergarten of Maori tribes. Children are taught Maori language and culture as their heritage.

A special attraction of the Maori village was the cultural programme of dances and with music and songs. The local Te Pakira cultural artists enthralled the tourists like me with their traditional dances and songs as well as with modern music. There was also a frightening war dance by name 'Haka'. The tourists like me enjoyed also their action song.

New Zealand is a welfare state. There is 100% literacy in the country. But the aboriginal people are behind in pursuing higher studies. Consequently the unemployment is higher among them than the non tribals. But all unemployed people get unemployment allowances enough to live well without luxury. As my nephew said, among the aboriginals there is lack of motivation to pursue higher studies and secure well paid jobs. Then according to Shaju due to drinking and drug problems some among the tribal people are starving at the end of the month.

But the good news is that the number of aboriginals pursuing higher education is steadily increasing. I can also say after visiting their Whakarewarewa village that the aboriginals are a very hospital people. (લેખક સાથેનો સંપર્ક: cissahd@gmail.com; Mo. 09428826518)

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