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**DEPICTION OF METIS WOMEN STRUGGLE IN MARIA CAMPBELL'S
HALF-BREED**

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Abstract:

Maria Campbell is a native Canadian writer. Half- Breed is an auto-biography of Maria Campbell. The polite term for half-breed is 'Métis. Métis is a French word meaning mixed blood. This novel is a replica of Maria Campbell's real life. The name Half-Breed suggests a person who comes from two different racial backgrounds. Several themes are explained and explored in this novel by the novelist. This paper is an attempt to explore various themes in this novel. Corruption, the impact of colonization, gender differences, marginalization, challenging stereotypes, cultural clashes, alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution and guilt, internalization of colonialism, oral tradition, humor are the major themes in this novel.

Keywords: Corruption, the impact of colonization, gender differences, marginalization

Introduction:

Maria Campbell's biography is a classic, vital account of a young Métis woman's struggle to come to terms with the joys, sorrows, loves, and tragedies of her northern Saskatchewan childhood. But the inspiration of her Cree great-grandmother, Cheechum, gives her confidence in herself and in her people, the confidence she needs to survive and to thrive.

Half-breed begins with an introduction by the author, looking back on her childhood homeland, finding almost all the physical ties to her past have gone. That is the reasoning behind Campbell writing her autobiography, to tell the little known story of the Metis people. The book is broken up by chapters, telling the story of Campbell and her people chronologically from childhood. The novel begins with a historical explanation of the Canadian half-breed's and their continuous historical struggles for land rights and identity, culminating with Battle of Duck Lake

and the Riel Rebellion, a rebellion in which the Metis people and their allies were eventually defeated. After the rebellion, Campbell's ancestors fled into a life of wandering and poverty, a life Maria Campbell was born into. Beginning with her childhood, the book follows Maria through her early life as she comes to terms with her cultural identity and the racial differences between her Metis people and the white and Native American populations that surrounded her. It tells the story of Campbell's family after the Riel rebellion and the meeting of her father and mother and also the story of Maria's birth in 1940 and her especially close bond with her Great Grandmother, Cheechum. The author mentions Maria's early conflicts with racism and the Church and her early experiences with alcohol. Maria writes about her first encounter with white women, scantily dressed in bathing suits, on a family trip to Montreal Lake, and her hellish year in a residential school. And deals with the shame and jealousy Maria felt going to an integrated school with white children, noticing the differences between these societies.

Maria's early experiences with law enforcement, inadvertently leading to her father getting arrested for hunting violations, and her experiences with death and funerals. And with the families' interactions with politicians and the tragic death of Maria's mother, giving her the role of increased responsibility within the family. It delves into the families' state of turmoil and struggles after the death of Maria's mother. Maria's father forces her to stay in school, telling her how important education is for her and her people.

In this paper, the story begins with the family moving into a new house to accommodate her father's job on a farm. Maria has come of age and becoming a young woman, going through the adolescent turmoil of menstruation and crushes. Maria writes about Christmas parties and dresses and experiencing anti-half-breed sentiment. It begins with Maria's summer job as a cleaner, and her first real date with a recently paroled man named Smoky. Maria meeting and quickly marrying a man named Darrel, something that doesn't sit well with the rest of her family. Darrel soon begins to drink heavily and abuse her. Maria gets a job as a waitress. She moves to Vancouver and the slow disintegration of her marriage to Darrel. Maria's descent into drugs, starting with pills and heavy drinking, progressing to needles. Maria meeting other Indians during an ill-fated trip to Mexico, continuing to deal with drugs and depression. Chapter nineteen has Maria getting a job as a cook at a ranch. Maria going to hairdressing school and trying to get her life back on track. Chapter twenty one discusses Maria's fears of homelessness and falling back into her drug habit again, and her continuing problems with alcoholism and depression with the birth of her child, her introduction to AA, and her struggles with rehabilitation.

This paper discusses Maria's emotional homecoming back to Spring River, and the continued importance of Cheechum. And with Cheechum's tragic death and Maria's strength and vows to rise above her struggles and continue on. As she grows older, alcoholism, spousal abuse, and substance abuse began to take over her life, and Maria must struggle to get back on her feet. The Half-breeds who have been living on the land for a long time face new government regulations which require them to work the land for three years before being able to claim it. The Half-breeds fought this legislation and fought for the right to stay on the land that they called home. However, the Canadian government overpowered them with thousands of soldiers and they lost the right to hold onto their land. However, many families were trying to set up a homestead in order to claim some land. Some of Maria's great grandparents fought for the Half-breeds right to keep the land on which they had been living on when the government tried to take it away and give it to white settlers. The government was successful in taking away Half-breed land and created a land act which required that a family work the land to a certain standard to keep it (the homestead). Maria's widowed grandmother tried to get a homestead, but due to poverty and a variety of other circumstances was unable to. Maria's father was very poor, and he married Maria's mother who came from a relatively wealthy family.

At this point in the novel, the author has given background on Half-breed history, Maria's large family, and the Half-breed community in which she resides. The author has established through examples that the government discriminates against Half-breeds through policies such as the land act and that whites in the community look down on Half-breeds. The author has also established that while the Half-breeds are very poor, they also demonstrate a great deal of love for each other in their families and in their community.

Family ties are a running theme throughout *Half-breed*, especially the bond Maria had with her Great Grandmother, whom she calls Cheechum. The respect and love she feels for her father and mother, and the sacrifices they made struggling to keep the family alive are apparent, but it is Cheechum's wisdom and pride that sustained Maria most, through her dark periods of drug and alcohol abuse.

Identity struggling to find herself as a half-breed woman in Canada was a continuous point of adversity in *Half-breed*. Looked down upon by both Native Americans and Whites, the Métis people had very little sense of pride unless they supplied it themselves. Campbell recalls going to school with White Children for the first time and being tormented by jealousy by how

much better the white children ate and dressed, and recalls hating her heritage. Overcoming this sense of shame for her own background is a central theme.

Overcoming Obstacles Drugs, alcohol, and extreme poverty plague Campbell throughout her life. Overcoming her own self-destructive behavior and rising out the slums she grew up in while still remembering where she came from for the sake of herself and her family is another major theme.

Conclusion:

This study presents a story of courageous survival from the perspective of a Metis woman. The reader becomes a part of Maria's journey through life, which begins amongst the Road Allowance People of Northern Saskatchewan. Her story describes a life dominated by basic survival. Hunting, trapping, poaching - if need be - and roasted gophers for a young school child's lunch. Her odyssey leads her through many dark places, one of them the Vancouver skids and life as a junkie. Yet throughout Maria Campbell manages to convey a sense of beauty, and her story, though often tragic, will become vivid in front of the reader's inner eyes. After reading this book, one can feel this woman's willingness to continue the fight that her great-grandmother's people began long ago in Riel country.

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