

## Chapter IV

### Muting Mainstream Myths: The Resistance and Resilience Vortex

They [Native Americans] are so often imagined, but so infrequently well understood.

- Anton Treuer

The native people in a colony are not allowed a valid interpretation of their history because the conquered do not write their own history. They must endure a history that shames them, destroys their confidence, and causes them to reject their heritage. Those in power command the present and shape the future by controlling the past, particularly for the natives.

-Howard Adams

Barbara Harlow in *Resistance Literature* points out that the literature which emerges under or as a result of any kind of colonisation or oppression falls under the category of resistance literature. The Spokane characters in Alexie's stories struggle for survival and endeavour for self-definition and self-representation under the ongoing domestic colonisation. Therefore, his works are undoubtedly narratives of oppression, suppression, colonisation and assimilation.

Resistance literature is a revolutionary literary by-product that has evolved along with the armed resistance made against the colonising Western countries, which also have a full reign over the economic, political and cultural conditions of the colonised nations. People's struggle against such oppressive hegemony that has colonized both their internal and external landscapes forms the substance of resistance literature, "[that] particular category of literature [which] emerged significantly organised national liberation struggle and resistance movement in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East..." (Harlow xvi). The Resistance literature thus addresses the issues of colonialism and oppression in all its forms: colonization of the land as well as the mind, displacement, racial discrimination

and marginalization practised against the colonized by the colonizer. All these markers aptly suit the case of Native Americans in the colonized America.

Resistance literature is a politicized literature that vehemently critiques and interrogates colonizing institutions and ideologies. “The term ‘resistance’ (muqawawamah) was first applied in a description of Palestinian literature in 1966 by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his study *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966*” (Harlow 2). Literature that emerges from around the world as a result of armed resistance as well as a means of resistance to particular ideological oppression are acknowledged as resistance literature by Barbara Harlow and this has led to the evolution of a new corpus of literature and a concept for criticism in the twenty-first century. The term resistance literature has become nearly “ubiquitous since the publication of the book” (Rodriguez 63).

Resistance literature is not only considered as a document of a certain period of time or an event that has taken place in the past, but it is recognised for its active role in the struggle in which the people have been involved. Resistance literature is a product of struggle against an imposed hegemony, and therefore resistance “[L]iterature, in other words, is presented by the critic as an arena of struggle” (Harlow 2). Harlow states that, resistance literature “articulated a role for literature and poets [and all writers] within the struggle alongside the gun, the pamphlet, and the diplomatic delegation” (*Resistance Literature* xvii).

According to a Nigerian proverb “Until lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt glorifies only the hunter” is an universal truth with regard to the history of the colonized nations. The Native writers assume the role of indigenous historians who revise and rewrite, from the point of view of the Natives, the history that is generally told from the perception of an unquestioned authority—the colonizer. Since revisioning and rewriting of past history forms one of the major characteristic of resistance literature, “Essential... to the narratives of resistance is the demand they make on the reader in their historical referencing and the burden of historical knowledge such referencing enjoins”

(Harlow 80). Therefore, knowledge of history is essential in order to comprehend the specificity and significance of the event that the author makes use of as a framework for his word. Besides, historical knowledge also functions as a link between the past of their ancestors and the present of their own time which exactly fits the case of the Native American literature. Therefore, resistance literature's use of history is an endeavour to preserve the true history of a people and their culture as well.

The other characteristic of resistance narrative is that it is collective in nature, since it is about the entire community or nation whose land and mind have been colonized. The major concern of resistance literature is to capture the Natives' grappling with the innumerable colonizing forces and it also calls for political and cultural liberation for a better future of the people. Similar to resistance literature, historical trauma narrative is also collective in nature-- which has been dealt elaborately in the previous chapter with regard to Alexie's fictional Spokane Indian community, in which John Smith, Arnold, Victor and many other protagonists represent the whole class of people who undergo similar tragedies and destinies. Native authors focus on the impact of history, while their main motive is to highlight the inherent historical trauma of their community, they also directly revise and rewrite history when their objective is to resist colonial oppression and suppression.

Native American resistance literature has been written both during times of actual armed resistance and since the end of Indian Wars in early nineteenth century. Writers of the early period like Mohegan writer Simon Occom, Sioux writer Charles Eastman and Zitkala Sa and so many others have strongly criticised the white culture, its values, and its hypocrisies, that have definitely placed their work in the literature of resistance, or more specifically, "survance" (Vizenor 15). This portmanteau word is coined from 'survival' and 'resistance' by the twenty-first century Chippewa writer and literary critic Gerald Vizenor. According to Vizenor, Native American writers must resist the simulation of Indians created by the dominant culture that defines Native identity through falsely constructed representations that have no real referent. By moving away from the

Western schema of the conquest and extinction, text such as Vizenor's characterises the survival of the American Indian as robustly adaptive. For Vizenor, survival can only be successful when coupled with "an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (qtd. in *Fugitive Poses* 15). Right from O' Archy Mc Nickle of the early twentieth century many Native authors have demonstrated resistance to colonial discourse and its legacy, which sees Native American as 'noble savage' and also considers him as a 'vanishing Indian'.

Colonial discourse "operates on the assumption of the superiority of the colonizer's culture, history, language, art, political structures, social conventions, and the assertion for the need of the colonized to be 'raised up' through colonial contact" (Ashcroft et al. 42), and therefore seeks to replace indigenous history and culture with its own. Resistance literature rewrites this history to include indigenous people and their perspectives, often in a way that is critical of the unquestioned history of the so called authentic records. Harlow advocates reliance on an actual indigenous history and culture of the community that seeks liberation from the colonizer, to assert its authenticity and legitimacy in the face of colonial discourse that has indulged in erasing the native history. "The historical struggle against colonialism and imperialism of such resistance movements ... is waged at the same time as a struggle over the historical and cultural record" (Harlow 7).

Especially, the works of Native American authors after Native American Literary Renaissance, from 1960's, reflect their contemporary world which abounds in resistance and resilience. These two quality stands testimony to the survival of Native communities without losing their ethnicity amidst five centuries of genocide and forced assimilation. Osage scholar Robert Warrior in his introduction to *Tribal Secrets*, acknowledges the resistance and resilience spirit in Native American literature that is being produced in the literature of Renaissance. This juxtaposition of resistance and resilience attitude of American Indian communities is noteworthy.

Based on Barbara Harlow's notion of resistance literature, it is clear that resistance literature is political in its very nature and an inevitable genre of the twenty-first century. Resistance literature focuses on how writers have resisted the false or one-sided histories and ideologies imposed upon the colonised by the hegemonic white society. It seeks to critique and interrogate those ideologies. Resilience literature as a concept in literary criticism does not exist, but the construct of resilience as theorized in psychological research "extends from the 1800s to the present" (Tusaie and Dyer 3) and focuses on how individuals and communities have adapted, survived, and even thrived despite adversity.

Resilience theory has its roots in the field of psychology and it examines the ways in which individuals and communities have survived hardship or trauma through adaptation. Resilience has been fundamentally defined as "positive adaptation despite adversity" (Fleming and Ledogar 7). The word resilience originates from the Latin verb 'resilire' which means to 'leap back' or 'spring back' or 'jump back'.

Over the past forty years enormous research activities have been carried out in the field of resilience. Masten, Best and Garmezy, the pioneer in the field of resilience define resilience as "The process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances" (429). Since then, there are numerous definitions of resilience proposed in the field of psychology. However, there is a lack of consensus on an operational definition of resilience, because the specific nature of the definition is often influenced by the historical and socio-cultural context within which the research has been conducted.

In the year 2014, The American Psychological Association came out with an official definition for resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress" (para 4). But unfortunately psychologists are dissatisfied with the definition because they consider that "it does not reflect the complex nature of resilience" (Southwick et al. n.pag). In spite of a lot of discontentment in the definition of resilience, it is noteworthy that most definitions of

resilience are based around two core concepts: adversity and positive adaptation. The main “antecedent of resilience is deemed to be adversity and the main consequence is considered to be positive adaptation” (Fletcher and Sarkar 15).

The quality of resilience is not common to everyone but depends on the protective factors that constitutes intrapersonal and environmental factors of an individual. Intrapersonal factors include “optimism, intelligence, creativity, humor and a belief system that provides existential meaning, a cohesive life narrative and an appreciation of the uniqueness of oneself” (Tusaie and Dyer 4). Environmental factors include social support such as family stability, non-abusive parents, positive peers and supportive teachers, sports and cultural factors, spirituality and religion. Risk factors or vulnerabilities include economic, social, environmental, psychological crisis etc.

Contemporary researchers have identified that resilient factors vary in different risk context, and this has contributed to the notion that resilience is a process rather than a trait of an individual. Positive personal traits alone may not contribute to resilience in people but resilience is created when these factors initiate certain process in the individual. “Rutter identified three such processes: building a positive self-image, reducing the effect of the risk factors and breaking a negative cycle so as to open up new opportunities for the individual” (Fleming and Ledogar 12). The article “Resilience, An Evolving Concept: A Review of Literature Relevant to Aboriginal Research” states that “Recent literature had identified two kinds of risk factors that have a significant effect on resilience in Indigenous communities. One is associated with racism.... A second set of risk factors involves historical loss or trauma and unresolved historical grief” (Fleming and Ledogar 13).

Similar to trauma studies which in its infancy confined itself to psychological disorder of the individual, early studies of resilience too “focused upon factors or characteristics that assist individuals to thrive from adversity” (Tusaie and Dyer 4). The study later included external forces like environmental factors that affected or contributed to resilience. Resilience theory attained more sophistication in order to address specific

groups such as children and adolescents, and “to describe resilience in larger systems such as families and communities” (Tusaie and Dyre 6).

Though the construct of resilience has been in use for more than a century in psychology, the concept of cultural resilience is relatively new one. This theory proposes “the use of traditional life ways to overcome the negative influences of oppression” (Strand and Peacock 1). Generally, a theory of resilience when applied to Native American Literature identifies the ways Native American writers adopt concepts from their own tribal cultures in order to instill hope and solidarity in their community. According to Heavyrunner and Morris, “ceremonies and rituals, humour, oral tradition, family and support networks are essential protective strategies... These are the things that have kept us strong... These resources foster our cultural resilience” (8-9). Perhaps, that is why Native American writers have adopted the aesthetics and ethics embedded in their songs, stories, and prayers, and continue them in their contemporary writing.

In the case of Alexie who does not tend to explore the specific Spokane tribal culture for resilience, insists on the imaginative power of the individual to survive and thrive, after or amidst adverse conditions. Therefore, he formulates Survival=Imagination x Anger. He believes in the individual’s ability to imagine alternatives to the existing unpromising reservation life rather than depending on “tribal traditions or the way tribal ritual can structure daily life. For, Alexie’s characters such traditions and rituals seem largely inaccessible or irrelevant, eroded by contemporary reservation life” (Heldrich 28) due to the impact of pop culture, the result of five hundred years of Euro-American contact and domination

Alexie, unlike his predecessors and contemporaries consciously refuses to step in to sacred toes, especially when it comes to ceremonies, rituals, and prayers because he is fully aware of cultural appropriation: “that it’s going to be taken and used in ways that you never intended for it to be” (Alexie 50) and he reveals to John Purdy:

...like some of the Navajo stuff and some of the traditional chants, or some of Momaday’s stuff, when rendered into English, means nothing. Means

*nothing*. Our traditions are all about being, about taking place in a specific time and a specific geography. But in a book that goes everywhere to anybody, it's like a travelling road show of Indian spirituality.(Alexie 50)

He feels that as an Indian writer it is his responsibility to protect the sanctity of the traditional practices of his culture. So, in the absence of authentic Spokane Indian tribal culture, as already said, and along with the responsibility of avoiding chances for cultural appropriation, Alexie's texts avoid to bank on cultural resilience. Based on his own experience, his resilience narratives depend on the individual's adoptive ability for success despite adversity and this positive adaptation based on once mental ability purely falls under psychological resilience. Therefore, it is more appropriate to apply psychological resilience to Alexie's work than cultural resilience. With this theoretical background we may venture into the select works of Sherman Alexie in order to understand and expound the resistance and resilience as exhibited by his Spokane community.

Native American scholars from many academic disciplines have constantly raised their voice against the European and Euro-American misrepresentation of Native Americans. Native American Professor Roy Harvey Pearce considers these misrepresentations as the result of the culturally sanctioned European belief in a binary of civilized and savage, of God-fearing and Godless. The most renowned academician and political activist Vine Deloria, Jr., mentions the stereotypical images as "The Indian of the American Imagination" (qtd. by James Cox 52).

In general, Native American literature itself is considered as resistance literature because it is engaged in counter narratives to the misrepresented history as defined by written and visual pop culture narratives of the hegemonic Euro-American society that tell a story of the European conquest of North America. The Native writers are involved in a narrative construction or reconstruction of a Native American identity as opposed to "The White Man's Indian" (Deloria 32). James Cox expresses:

Whether in brief critique, as in Louise Erdrich's, Louis Owens', and James Welch's novels, or in full-scale revision and subversion, as in Sherman Alexie's work, Native American authors write new narratives of self-representation that critically question and often radically revise and subvert the dominant culture's conquest narratives and the mass-produced misrepresentations of Native Americans. ("Muting White Noise" 52-53)

The above mentioned explanation clearly indicates that the process of resistance in Native American literature involves two different processes: one is the revision of history and the other one is the revision of misrepresented Native American identity.

Let us first consider the historic revisions in the select works of Alexie. Of the four works at hand, *Indian Killer* is considered the most revolutionary, because of its vehement resistance to the misrepresented hegemonic narratives. Alexie makes use of the plot of the novel to underscore most of the major issues of the Native communities to reconstruct history from the Native perspective. In this novel Alexie addresses the issues of both revisioning of history and the subversion of dominant culture's misrepresented Native American identity. The novel *Indian Killer* often makes reviewers and interviewers uncomfortable. Alexie defends his novel in his interview with Kelley Blewster by explaining that he wrote the novel intending to make white people uncomfortable. The main motive behind such a controversial novel is to portray how "Indians are culturally, psychologically, physically, and emotionally killed. Still" (Alexie 73).

The great myth behind the discovery and conquest stories of Europeans is "to save the souls of the natives" (qtd. by Peter d' Errico 18). The papal bull of Pope Alexander VI of 1493 proclaims "catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself..." (qtd. by Peter d' Errico 18). So the national myth insists on bestowing the barbarous Natives with civilization and

Christianity, but the consequence has proved apocalyptic to the indigenous population. This forms the core of all literary productions of the Native communities throughout America.

Alexie in *Indian Killer* pokes at this nation building myth by the character of Father Duncan, a Spokane Indian Catholic priest who baptizes John Smith the protagonist of *Indian Killer*. When the adopted Native American child John is six years old, Father Duncan expresses his innermost and secret feeling to the child in the chapel of the North American Martyrs in Seattle. John is bewildered by the stained glass reproduction of Jesuits being martyred by Indians. Those stained glass reproductions depict Jesuits burning alive tied to posts while Indians dancing around; Jesuits being pierced with dozens of arrows, their cassock torn, escaping from evil-looking Indians, being drowned in a river and being scalped. John could not make any meaning out of these glass works but Father Duncan remarks, "Beautiful, isn't it?" (*IK* 14). John could not make out whether Father Duncan considers the art work or the killing of the Jesuits to be beautiful. Little John taken up by the pictures asks the Jesuits Priest "Why did the Indians kill them?" (*IK* 14). The Spokane Jesuit Father replies "They wanted to kick the white people out of America. Since the priests were the leaders, they were the first to be killed." (*IK* 14). John curiously asks why all the whites were not killed, for which Father Duncan replies that "They didn't have the heart for it." (*IK* 14). John asks "But didn't white people kill most of the Indians?" Duncan replies "Yes, they did" (*IK* 14). John, confused and curious, considers Jesus to be an Indian for his pain and crucifixion. When he comes to know Jesus died for the sake of redemption of humans he equates this to the Martyrdom of the Jesuits. When John asks Duncan whether those priests died like Jesus for the redemption of Indians, Father Duncan could not reply. "Duncan was afraid to answer the question. As a Jesuit, he knew those priests were martyred just like Jesus. As a Spokane Indian, he knew those Jesuits deserved to die for their crimes against Indians" (*IK* 15). The ultimate mission of the Jesuits is to take the culture and tradition away from the Natives and to bury it forever and replace it with white men's culture,

tradition and religion. This forms the core of their historical trauma. Anthropologist Denham in his article “Rethinking Historical Trauma: Narratives of Resilience” has recorded the resilience factors of a Coeur d’ Alene Indian Si John’s family, which states that “In a very short period of time Jesuits came in and placed a cut behind the knees of the Couer d’ Alene and we’ve been crippled over since” (19). The Couer d’ Alene is one of the three bands that constitutes the Salish tribe and Sherman Alexie is part Spokane and part Couer d’ Alene. This particular revisioning of history brightly underscores apocalypse brought upon by the Natives in the name of civilization and Christianity.

There is always a nagging moral crisis in the heart of Fr. Duncan who could not reconcile between being a Spokane Indian and a Spokane Indian Jesuit Father. Because he is well aware of the inhuman atrocities carried out against the Natives in the name of Christianity and civilianization by the Catholic priests. The martyrdom images on the Catholic priests on the vivid stained glasses in the chapel is a biased rendering of a multilayered painful, history by the dominating white society. “As a Jesuit, he knew those priests were martyred just like Jesus. As a Spokane Indian, he knew those Jesuits deserved to die for their crimes against Indians” (*IK* 15). Though he resists the biased history of the colonizer, unable to reconcile with his moral crisis his eccentricities become his “liabilities” (*IK* 16) He walks into the desert of Arizona and is never seen again. Fr.Duncan’s open resistance ends up in his vanishment without warning or explanation.

In the short story collection, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* Alexie makes use of Thomas Builds-The-Fire, the community’s story teller to revises and retell the story of conquest, in some of the stories. The “Tonto” in the title *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is a metaphor for a stoic Indian whose chief duty is only to serve the white hero/master, the word ‘Lone Ranger’ and ‘Tonto’ in Spanish means idiot. Alexie, a revisionist of misrepresentations, recreates his Tonto in such way

that they refuse to be a subservient and loyal companion to the white man. The ironic title squarely points the nature of the short stories of the collection.

In the story “A Drug Called Tradition” Victor, Thomas and Junior all the three go on a vision quest with the help of a new drug. Thomas then narrates two historic events—the myth of smallpox blanket and the myth of the Ghost Dance. The disaster brought on the entire continent due to the accidental and intentional spread of smallpox epidemic by the Euro-Americans that serves as a prime source of historical trauma, has been already considered in detail in the previous chapter.

On the reservation of Thomas’s imagination his tribe has been totally reduced until its members have dwindled down to him. While Thomas reiterates, “I’m the last, the very last” (*LRTFH* 17) it may coincide with the dominant culture’s discourse of the ‘Vanishing Indian’. But the moment of despair is only momentarily true because the vision moves from the small pox tragedy to the Ghost Dance:

I’ll dance a Ghost Dance. I’ll bring them back. Can you hear the drums? ... I’m growing, too. My blisters heal, my muscles stretch, expand. My tribe dances behind me... We dance in circles growing larger and larger until we are standing on the shore, watching all the ships returning to Europe. All the white hands are waving good-bye and we continue to dance, dance until the ships fall off the horizon, dance until we are so tall and strong that the sun is nearly jealous. *We dance that way.*  
(*LRTFH* 17)

The dance that Thomas refers to is a religious movement that gained immediate and immense currency among American Indian tribes in 1880s. This movement finds its origin in a Paiute Indian named Wovoka of the Western Great Basin. It is believed that Wovoka has been taken to the spirit world in his dreams and there he witnesses all Native Americans being taken up into the sky and the earth opening up to swallow all white and

to revert back to its natural state. Ghost Dance is a dance, danced continuously in circular patterns which induce a state of religious ecstasy.

“Widespread adherence to the Ghost Dance, many believed could bring the buffalo, restore the land and return the tribe to the patrimony that had been denied to them” (Elliott 987). Since, the Ghost Dance has witnessed many Indians from various tribes coming together and participating in a new and unknown event this religious movement instils fear in the heart of the mainstream white society. When Sitting Bull, one of the Chief Indian warriors, takes part in the dance he is killed by the BIA Police Forces. After the killing of Sitting Bull, the Ghost Dance culminates in the Wounded Knee Massacre on December 29, 1890. The U.S. soldiers have slaughtered nearly three hundred unarmed Lakotas after they surrendered to Custer’s old unit, the Seventh Cavalry.

Thomas finds himself Ghost Dancing and his Ghost Dance is not a site of Native tragedy but a great success, ultimately changing the course of history. Although, the Ghost Dance occurs in a fleeting hallucination, rather than the present time, the revolutionary potential of the dance is apparent because with every step of the Dance a dead kith and kin rises and comes to life, a buffalo comes to earth, which is the prime source of sustenance for the plains Indians; and an ancestor rises from the ashes. These actions symbolize the regaining of the lost Utopia for the Indians. Also Thomas’ vision envisions the disappearance of the whites from their Native soil forever and the whites board onto ships to leave to their European homelands waving goodbye.

Lisa Tatonetti mentions in her article “Dancing That Way, Things Began to Change” that “By analyzing representative pieces from Sherman Alexie’s poetry and fiction, I investigate the way Alexie – whose ancestors did not participate in the Ghost Dance – uses it as an explicit metaphor for Native resistance” (2). She also remarks that Alexie for the first time considers the Ghost Dance “as a site of future possibility rather than historical loss” (9).

Alexie does not end his revisioning with evacuating the whites from their Native soil but the process continues. Victor's next vision initiates an alternative history. Victor envisions Junior wearing a ribbon shirt and carrying a guitar, and being transformed to America's star guitarist. In the vision, Junior the musical genius narrates his success story in all their own Native America where, "Indians get all the best seats and, white folks... have to sit in the back of the theatre because all the Indians get the best tickets for my shows. It's not racism" (*LRTFH* 18). One more thing to be noted is the plight of the whites seated at the backseats of the theatre is not because of reverse discrimination by Natives, but rather it is due to the reversal of population ratio. The Natives have been subjected to racism since the time of their colonization, until the whites left the American soil for good from America in Victor's vision. But in the America that is solely Natives' and where the whites have become minorities, they are not marginalized. Liberty and equality forms the foundation of the Natives' America that has been devoid of in the case of whites' America.

In the drug induced vision of Victor, Junior proudly chuckles "Even the President of the United States, Mr. Edgar Crazy Horse himself, came to hear me once. I played a song I wrote for his great grandfather, the famous Lakota warrior who helped us win the war against the whites" (*LRTFH* 18). In Junior's United States, the potential of Thomas' Ghost Dance "has come to fruition, the racial balance and population statistics are reversed, and Crazy Horse is firmly ensconced as the nation's cultural hero" (Tatonetti 11). This new world seems to Junior "*like a thousand promises come true*" (*LRTFH* 19); because the Natives have been destined to suffer with broken treaties and unkept promises in the white America. In this particular story, Alexie moves forward from revising to:

...imagining alternatives to the dominant culture's narratives of conquest (Columbus' Voyage; the Manifest Destiny conferred by the Christian God on Europe's Children) is a powerful weapon. Imagining alternative histories might not change the present (fragmented Native

American Urban Communities;...), but conceiving of other possibilities, revisioning a history, in which Native Americans write Native Americans back into the landscape, will influence the future. As Alexie explains, imagination is one part of the equation for survival. (Tatonetti 11)

In the story, “The Trial of Thomas Builds-The-Fire” Alexie revises another historical incident, this time more specific to the Spokane tribe. Thomas is imprisoned because he has once held the reservation postmaster hostage for eight hours “with the idea of a gun” and has threatened to make “significant changes in the tribal vision” (*LRTFH* 93). According to a BIA agent, Thomas is dangerous because he is considered as a “storytelling fetish accompanied by an extreme need to tell the truth” (*LRTFH* 93).

Thomas has been silent for nearly twenty years and there has not been any stories since the day of his voluntary surrender. But when he begins to make small noises, they contain more emotion. His ideas are powerful enough to hold people captive and to make them listen to his narrative. Thomas with a receptive audience becomes a reservation power structure, defined by tribal vision that has been distorted and corrupted by dominant media culture. His noises are more meaningful than the entire sentences constructed by the BIA.

In his trial, Thomas decides to represent himself and proceeds stating “Honesty is all I have left” (*LRTFH* 96). Thomas mentally transforms himself as a character in the Spokane tribal history. In the first story he assumes the role of a horse in the Spokane herd that Colonel Wright of the U.S. Army slaughtered in 1858. Thomas narrates his escape story: “They could not break me. Some may have wanted to kill me for my arrogance, but others respected my anger, my refusal to admit defeat. I lived that day, even escaped Colonel Wright, and galloped into other histories” (*LRTFH* 98). Thomas establishes himself as a powerful revisionist of history for his tribe, who inculcates hope and survival at the face of danger and defeat. His narration of history subverts colonial scripts about vanishing Indian myth.

In his second story, Thomas speaks of himself as Qualchan, the son of an Upper Yakima Chief who fought against the U.S. Army. Thomas does not revise this historical event because the point of the story, which the judge demands is “The City of Spokane is now building a golf course named after me Qualchan, located in the valley where I was hanged” (*LRTFH* 99). Thomas brings Qualchan to life transcending time and death to voice his resistance against the abuse of his name. Thomas invokes Spokane tribal history to protest against the Euro-American commercialization and consumption of Native American culture. “The courtroom burst into motion and emotion” (*LRTFH* 99). Thomas though considered half clown and half magician by his tribe his story successfully elicits much desired response from the people, pacified by past and present defeat.

The judge, who sentences Thomas two concurrent life terms in the Walla State Penitentiary, is the representative of the dominant culture, and his judicial decision implies the dominant culture’s idea that has fixed and framed the image of the Native American to be submissive and a loyal Tonto of the white master or to the image of a vanishing Indian. Cox in his article “Muting White Noise: The Subversion of Popular Culture Narratives of Conquest in Sherman Alexie’s Fiction” states that “Thomas is the physical manifestation of a living Spokane history, and his trans-historical, mythological identity makes imprisonment impossible” (60). Thomas’ storytelling benefits the tribe by offering an alternative to Euro-American popular culture’s definitions of what it means to be Native American.

In the novel *Indian Killer*, the historic Ghost Dance movement becomes a metaphor for Indigenous revolution. The Washington State falls under the grip of terrific fear of a serial killer – whitemen are being murdered, found stabbed with eyes torn out and two white owl feathers left on the bodies of dead as an open statement for the identity of killer and the owl stands as the symbol of death in Native Communities.

For many of the characters of the novel, the Indian killer is a product of the Ghost Dance of Wovoka and an instrument to fulfil the Ghost Dance prophecy. Marie Polatkin in one of her arguments with Professor Marther who considers the Indian killer “an

inevitable creation of Capitalism,... a revolutionary construct” (*IK* 245) affirms that “Dr. Marther, if the Ghost Dance worked, there would be no exceptions. All you white people would disappear. All of you. If those dead Indians came back to life, they wouldn’t crawl into a sweathouse with you... They’d get you and eat your heart” (*IK* 314). Marie, the most revolutionary of Alexie’s character who represents the angst and agony of surviving with misrepresented identity, in her testimony to the police officer for the death of John Smith says, “I know that John Smith didn’t kill anybody except himself. And if some Indian is killing white guys, then it’s a credit to us that it took over five hundred years for it to happen. And there’s more... Indians are dancing now, and I don’t think they’re going to stop” (*IK* 418).

The novel *Indian Killer* is generally considered as a crime thriller, but its underlying themes reveal and condemn the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism in the U.S. Within this framework Alexie brings in his allusion to the Ghost Dance which is the central metaphor for Native resistance in the novel. The killer, whose identity is never revealed in the novel returns to his reservation at the end of the novel. Alexie has created the killer as an embodiment of Native rage and resistance. The killer, with a mask, is a victim of colonialism who demonstrates his resistance through series of murders which is justifiable to the Native communities. And that is the reason why they proudly declare that, “This Indian Killer, you see, he’s got Crazy Horse’s magic. He’s got Chief Joseph’s brain. He’s got Geronimo’s heart. He’s got Wovoka’s vision. He’s all those badass Indians rolled into one” (*IK* 219).

Alexie captures the killer’s Ghost Dance in the moon light with poetic beauty which also clearly indicates Native resistance gaining momentum: “The killer is softly singing a new song that sounds exactly like an old one” (*IK* 419) which is a clear reference to the song of the Ghost Dance. Alexie delineates:

The killer spins in circle and, with each revolution, another owl floats in from the darkness and takes its place in the tree. Dark blossom after dark blossom. The killer sings and dances for hours, days. Other Indians arrive

and quickly learn the song. A dozen Indians, then hundreds, and more, all learning the same song, the exact dance. The killer dances and will not tire. The killer knows this dance is over five hundred years old. The killer believes in all masks, in this wooden mask. The killer gazes skyward and screeches. With this mask, with this mystery, the killer can dance forever. The killer plans on dancing forever. The killer never falls. The moon never falls. The tree grows heavy with owls. (*IK* 420)

While it comes to misrepresentation, many of the late twentieth century Native American authors are particularly concerned with stereotypes and myths propagated by films and television--the most consumed form of the dominant culture's mass media--that produce the highly destructive images of Native Americans. Their representation of Indians is romantic and often time conjuring images of hunting buffalos with bows and arrows or guns, wearing feathered headdresses and tailored leather clothing with war paints on their faces. There are also images of tiny villages with tepees where half naked women and children mill about. To construct cinematic Indians, the white film makers, rely on such visible ethnic markers that reduce Native identity and culture to a code of signs. These markers may be correct for about two dozen plains tribes of the late 1800's but they do not fit the case of the remaining five hundred other Native societies of North America.

These Native stereotypes are "an arrested, fixated form of representation" (Bhabha 45) of the other that cannot be dismissed as just created for entertainment because hundreds of millions of people around the world have acquired their knowledge about North American Indians through western films. "The belief that there is an essence of general truth about American Indians in these portrayals is pervasive and persistent in modern North America...even modern American Indians draw heavily from these films in constructing their own views of their cultural heritage" (Price 154). "In *Fantasies of the Master Race: Categories of Stereotyping of American Indians in Film*", Churchill clearly points out the role of Hollywood in "de-contextualization of Native American history and its contribution in the symbolic demolition" (239) of Native American cultural identity.

From the earliest days of cinematic history in the United States, the popularity of the film on Natives is based on the conventional plots that strongly establish the Euro-American superiority and the stereotyped images of savage warrior, the noble companion Tonto, the wise medicine man Shaman, the modern stinky drunk Indian and seductive female squaws. Native authors are fully aware of and respond to these devastations brought about by the mass media on their communities.

Alexie in an interview with Dennis West and John M. West says, right from the era of silent movies to the recently successful film on Native Americans by the whites like *Pow Wow Highway* 1989 and *Dance with Wolves* consists of “Every stereotypical touchstone of a contemporary Indian art film...” (Alexie 61). He also adds that “our expectations of movies about Indians were so low that we embraced a movie like *Pow Wow Highway* simply because there was no other option” (Alexie 62). While commenting upon Kevin Costner's Academy Award-winning, commercially successful 1992 film *Ward Churchill* (Creek/Cherokee/Metis) explains that the main motive of the films is to mediate the racist mythology so important to the conventional justification for America's “winning of the West” (“Lawrence of South Dakota: *Dance with Wolves* and the Maintenance of the American Empire” 244).

Sherman Alexie enters Hollywood for co-producing and writing script for *Smoke Signals*. The first full length feature film based on his short story “This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona” from the short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. The historical and notable fact about the film is that it is the first ever film written, directed and co-produced by Indians and so it is a film on Natives by Natives. Therefore “the film contains neither a conventional Hollywood narrative about Indians nor conventional role for the Indian characters” (“This Is What It Means to Say Reservation Cinema” 75). In *Smoke Signals*, Alexie's Victor and Thomas and other male characters are neither stoic warriors, wise Shamans nor buffalo hunters and his female characters are neither princess, squaws nor papoose. The key factor of the film is a concrete registration of a strong resistance to the stereotyped representation and the

vanishing Indian myth, which serves as a contrast to the typical Hollywood movie that mainly produces stereotypes and a visual version of the vanishing Indian myth.

Author Sherman Alexie's screen play successfully adopts the popular Hollywood genre of the buddy and road-trip films to tell a Native story that focuses on the journey of Victor Joseph and Thomas to Arizona to recover the ashes of Victor's long absent father Arnold Joseph, whom Victor hates since he has deserted his family long ago. Though Thomas-Builds-the-Fire and Victor Joseph have been childhood friends, they are no longer in good terms, but Thomas financially helps for the journey to bring back Victor's dead father from Arizona, which provides chance for separated friends to come together. Victor throughout the film is irritated with Thomas, the storyteller, whose stories the Spokane community is uninterested in. But in the course of the film, Thomas' story particularly about Victor's father, whom Thomas portrays as a father figure, brings about a change of perception in Victor. He discloses his father's message to "*Take care of each other*" (LRTFH 69). Victor who has his own grudges against his father forgives him and obtains a far more complex understanding of his father. Victor, who draws his identity heavily from the romantic image of the Hollywood Indian, breaks down his false identity in order to free himself from the menacing stoic warrior of Western, with an alternative model of Native masculinity. Cox opines that the film ends in redemption rather than doom. "Victor is twice redeemed: from the grief losing his father and his captivity within Hollywood definitions of who must be as an American Indian man" ("This Is What It Means to Say Reservation Cinema" 90).

Similarly, his fictional characters of the Spokane reservation struggle for self-definition and self-representation against the colonial discourses of radio and television programs too that invade their reservation life everyday. A white noise infiltrates the "one-room apartment in the cable television reservation" (LRTFH 149) that has been successful in assimilating the Spokane people into the popular culture. First the pop culture along with the English language finds its way into the HUD houses, slowly captures their thought and life and replaces their tribal language. The Spokane language

Salish is replaced by English by its unchecked entry into their houses through television, the only widespread and common entertainment of the reservation community. While the cable TVs pump in pop culture programmes into every household their Native language and culture, that has been systematically devastated until twentieth century through various assimilation policies like boarding schools, relocation and termination policies are further weakened and thwarted.

The protagonist of “Imagining the Reservation” worries, “How can we imagine a new language when the language of the enemy keeps our dismembered tongues tied to his belt? How can we imagine a new alphabet when the old jumps off billboards down into our stomachs?” (*LRTFH* 152) white noise that infiltrates the fictional Spokane reservation in several of Alexie’s stories is the oppressive images and ideologies of the white mass produced films and programmes that aim at propagating dehumanising stereotypes and false propaganda of the Natives. The villainous savage stereotype or the images of the stories of archetypal Tonto or the warrior chief are highly seductive and powerful negative influences, both on Natives and non-Natives. The image of the cinematic savage brings about whites hating the Indian and self-loathing among Natives.

A stereotype strongly held by non-Indians is that Indians receive special privileges that other American citizens are not privileged of. Walter C. Fleming in his article “Myth and Stereotypes about Native Americans” quotes the editorial of the electronic edition of the Findlay (Ohio) Courier that states:

It’s long been apparent that the laws granting Native American tribes sovereign nation status were a huge mistake. Rather than improving the lives of native people, the laws have created a state of dependency in which the tribes are neither truly sovereign nor fully a part of the larger nation. They are essentially wards of the federal government. They receive some special privileges designed to advance their welfare or maintain their native culture, but for the most part, the laws have made

dependent victims of people who should have been integrated into the larger culture. (214)

Alexie highlights the irony of the above mentioned myth through the notorious talk show host Truck Schultz, in *Indian Killer*. He is considered as the worst kind of racist whose provocative narratives invariably dehumanize and sabotage the dignity of the Natives. He reiterates the false one-sided history of the dominant white society that fuels enmity and violence among Natives and non-Natives. Truck Schultz deliberately misleads his audience in the case of David Roger, a student of the Washington State University who disappears after his visit to Tulalip Tribal Casino.

Even before arriving at any authentic clue on David Rogers missing, Schultz attributes it to the Spokane Indian tribe. Mr. Schultz who has a biased notion of history manipulates it saying that, “We have offered our hands in friendship to the Indians, but they insist on the separation from normal society. They are an angry, bitter people, and treat the rest of us with disdain and arrogance. May be this whole Indian gambling thing is about revenge on the white man” (*IK* 118). He goes to the extreme of exaggerating it as “The Indian tribes of Washington State have declared a cultural war on us and the weapon they’ve chosen is the casino” (*IK* 119). He philosophizes against the establishment of gambling casinos in reservations.

The fact is that the Indian reservations are separate nations that are dependent on federal government based on treaties. The U.S. has made land treaties with the American Indian tribes that promise various means of support like food supplies, weapons, agricultural tools and also protection from other tribes for exchange of huge acres of tribal lands. Based on treaties casinos are set on reservations in order to improve the financial flow of the poverty stricken reservations. In his interview to Tomson Highway, a first nation Canadian playwright, Alexie mentions:

... on my reservation unemployment was about 90 percent before the bingo hall and casino; now it’s about 10 percent. They worry about Mafia coming in and taking over the casino. I say, Indians couldn’t tell the

difference between the Mafia and the United States government. Even if the Mafia did come in and did take over, we'd welcome them, because we'd be better organised and the government wouldn't mess with us. And we'd have much better pasta! No more Kraft macaroni and cheese.(Peterson 22)

Such terse reply reflects both on the poverty level of the reservation and the antagonism of the Natives against the United States because of its centuries of deceit.

While the city of Seattle is stormed by the serial murders of the Indian killer, Truck Schultz makes use of the opportunity to narrate the dominant version of history that glorifies the colonisers and degrades the colonised. Truck, the white man says "Citizen, I am outraged. What is our society coming to when good men cannot safely walk the streets of our cities?" (*IK* 207). It is ironic when the white man talks about the danger of being a white because only minorities like Spokane constantly faces danger and discrimination amidst white which Alexie highlights at many instances in his work – the troubles that Arnold's father faces because of his racial identity, the same with James Many Horses and Norma ("The Approximate Size of My Favourite Tumour"), the degrading insult of the hero of the short story "The Lone Ranger And Tonto Fistfight In Heaven", the painful memory of Victor's grandfather being spit while waiting for a bus in Spokane ("Every Little Hurricane"). It is understood that generations of discrimination and insecurity is part of the everyday life of the Spokanes.

When Truck laments of Mark Jones kidnap "from the safety of his own home" (*IK* 207), ironically the readers are reminded of the irony when the "thin man in a big hat who took the Indian children away from their parents" (*LRTFH* 194). Truck's propaganda includes "White males built this country. White males travelled here on the Mayflower, crossed the Great Plain on horseback, brought light to the darkness, and tamed the wilderness. This county exists because of the constant vigilance and the ingenuity of the white males" (*IK* 207). But the conversation between homeless Carlotta and John Smith in *Indian Killer* brings out the irony in these authentic narratives. She

recollects how the Natives have been good to white people when they arrived on the shores of the continent. It is the Natives who taught them to cultivate, to adapt to the environment of the new world playing the role of the good host. Carlotta also remarks “and then what did they do? They killed us” (*IK* 253).

As per the white society the standard of life of the Indians is elevated than their pre-colonized state because of their contact with the whites, the civilized and the superior race. The Natives are also provided with benefits of technological comforts and above all “They have God” (*IK* 208) who have been earlier “Godless heathens” (*IK* 208).

In reality the fictional Spokane community is haunted by poverty and hunger. Their basic needs like food and shelter are not met. Empty refrigerators, empty stomach, empty wallets, dependence on the worst standard of commodity food supplies, one room HUD houses and trailer houses are everyday nightmares of the community. The U.S. government that has made treaties with Natives to compensate for the land and the gaming, in reality has failed to keep up its promises. Their lives are “Surrounded by five hundred years of convenient lies” (*LRTFH* 150).

Amidst a disillusioned and devastated reservation life the narrator of “Jesus Christ’s Half - Brother is Alive And Well On The Spokane Indian Reservation” expresses his dilemma of religion and God: “I don’t know anything about religion and I don’t confess my sins to anybody except the walls and the wood stove and James who forgives everything like a rock” (*LRTFH* 123). In an utterly hopeless present and all the more uncertain future the narrator who longs for emotional comfort and moral support is badly in need of a God to pray who could redeem him from the inferno of the reservation condition but sadly he is still looking for God: “I pray but I don’t know who I’m praying” (*LRTFH* 125).

Schultz’s version of history as well as contemporary conditions is ironic because he narrates exactly the opposite of the actual conditions. They are neither ‘super citizens’ nor technological benefitters. Above all, it clearly reflects their deracination from their

own spirituality and white man's religion that has made their life disillusioned and chaotic with a big spiritual void.

Truck Schultz pontificates that white America has "Coddled Indians too long" (*IK* 209) and "This country is full of welfare babies giving birth to welfare babies" (*IK* 243). His solution is to sterilize girls with IQ less than one hundred so that "Indian women will not give birth to Indian Killers" (*IK* 243).

All that Schultz's considers as privileges for the Natives have not brought about any changes in the lives of the Natives. What Schultz, the representative figure of the white society, in the novel fails to understand is that many of these privileges are treaty obligations by the federal government that it has signed, with the tribes for obtaining millions of acres of tribal lands. Since, the government has failed to honour the treaties, the Natives have been economically and socially deprived of the 'broken treaties'. Such biased pop culture narratives of history and culture of the Natives have reduced them to the most misunderstood of the ethnic minorities of the United States. This is brought to the fore by Truck Schultz in the *Indian Killer*.

Alexie's male and female protagonists – Victor, Junior, Thomas Builds - The-Fire, the numerous nameless narrators, Arnold Junior, Rowdy, Fr Duncan, Jackson Jackson, Marie Polatkin, Corliss, Mary Lynn, and Norma Many Horses - resist stereotyped images in order to firmly establish their identity through self-definition and self-representation against the oppressive and spirit stealing pop culture narratives. Alexie's fictional Spokane Indian characters can be divided into three categories with regard to their attitude towards the main stream myths and stereotypes. The first category is those who exhibit resistance to the main stream imposed stereotypes but lack resilience. The second category is those who are unaware of the difference between the real identity and imposed stereotyped identity and therefore fall prey to the temptations of defining themselves in relation to stereotypes. The third category who actively resists all

pop culture myths and stereotyped identity with resilience to redefine their identity in order to reconstruct their lives.

Alexie's trio Victor, Thomas Builds-The-Fire and Junior Polatkin, who are the protagonists of the stories in the short story collection *The Lone Ranger And Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, show their resistance strongly by disowning the stereotypes of the subservient Tonto, a stoic Indian. Tonto, an Indian whose prime duty is to serve the white master the Lone Ranger is the white man's imagination. The twentieth century Tonto an alternate to the 'noble savage' is no more interested in assuming a docile role and therefore refuses to be loyal to the white master. Because, the Tonto has determined to redefine his identity by liberating himself from the subordinate social space assigned to him by the dominant culture – the eternally doomed condition of their reservations, alcoholism, illiteracy, violence, the ongoing domestic colonization which denies opportunity and hope, ever persistent racism, the genocide of racial identity through harmful myths and stereotypes.

In the short story "Imagining The Reservation" Victor explicitly demands for imagining alternatives for their long and bitter history:

Imagine Crazy Horse invented the atom bomb in 1876 and detonated it over Washington, D.C. Would the urban Indians still be sprawled around the one-room apartment in the cable television reservation?... Imagine Columbus landed in 1492 and some tribe or another drowned him in the ocean. Would Lester Falls Apart still be shoplifting in the 7-11?  
(LRTFH149)

Alexie's mentioning of 1876 refers to The Battle of Little Bighorn, which is considered as the pinnacle of Indian victory against the renowned 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry led by Colonel George Armstrong Custer against the Native war heroes Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull. Further, he develops the idea of Native resistance to the encroachment of the Native land and

mind by imagining Crazy Horse to bring about everlasting disaster by inventing and detonating the atom bomb on Washington, D.C. which would have invoked the greatest fear on Indians. If the Indians had been successful in instilling a deadly fear in white men their Westward expansion would be restricted. Concomitantly, the western tribes of the so-called United States might have not been colonized and restricted to their reservations. Their cultural identity and their life world might not have been doomed. They might not have been refugees on their own land, confined to one-room HUD houses that are invaded by pop culture narratives bent on justifying the America's winning of the West and the Manifest Destiny.

The shameful defeat at Battle of Little Bighorn culminated in the Wounded Knee Massacre in the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, where US army soldiers of the seventh Cavalry opened fire on the Sioux indiscriminately massacring hundreds of men, women and children. Very unfortunately this marked the definitive end of the Indian Wars. After Wounded Knee, the remaining Indian tribes are either subdued or forcibly assimilated into mainstream US society. The Native Indian has become invisible in the American society and he is no more feared. John Smith, the protagonist of the *Indian Killer* is displeased and infuriated by the thought, "white people no longer feared Indians" (*IK* 30).

Such evocation for alternate history exposes the pain and angst that is hidden in the heart of the Natives as well as calls for fellow Spokanes' to ruminate upon the alternate lives that the tribe might be living. The life of the Natives must have not lost its ethnic purity and identity- culture, language and spirituality. The people might have escaped the treachery of genocide and assimilation policies that have become the source of their soulwound. Lester Falls Apart like many Natives would not be burdened with a treachery of a poor economic condition that forces him to shoplift to lead his life at the cost of his self-esteem: "The Natives, indigenous to a place, might not be searching for their identity which is pretty ironic" (Alexie 96) says Alexie in an interview with Jessica Chapel.

Columbus, who is mythologized as the Amer-Europeans who has been felicitated on his 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1992 for his discovery of the new world by the then-president George Bush Sr. as the “Great navigator” who “opened the door to a new world, set an example for us all” (qtd. by Treuer 32), is unimaginable as a hero at least for the Natives. For, he is considered as a culprit responsible for the beginning of a colonial regime that killed millions.

The hatred for Columbus that is deep in the psyche of Alexie’s fictional characters surface at the most critical and frustrating of moment in their lives in the short story “All I Wanted To Do Was Dance” Victor an insomniac and a drunkard haunted by the absurdity of reservation life “was underwater drunk staring up at the faces of his past. He recognized Neil Armstrong and Christopher Columbus, his mother and father, James Dean, Sal Mineo, Natalie Wood” (*LRTFH* 84). Victor, who has intoxicated himself to the extent that could make the “entire tribe numb” (*LRTFH* 90) is painfully remembered of Euro-American cultural heroes. These iconic personalities are certainly not his heroes and the pop culture narrative and history that glorify these heroes has either distorted or completely excluded him from the history of the nation.

Alexie revises history through Thomas Builds-The-Fire the community’s story teller whose stories are considered as “strange shit” (*LRTFH* 20) by his own community. Since, revisioning of history is the major characteristics of resistance literature, Thomas Builds-The-Fire naturally becomes the embodiment of resistance—who often revises history through his stories. Earlier in this chapter Thomas’s revision of the smallpox epidemic, Ghost Dance movement, the massacre of 799 ponies of the Spokane tribe that took place in the year 1858, the most cunning act of hanging of Qualchan by Colonel Wright, invokes Spokane tribal history to protest how Euro-American culture commercializes and consumes Native America. He is the community’s storyteller who subverts the image of Tonto constructed by the dominant culture.

Thomas stories remind the gory past and unearth the past personal and collective horrors that nobody wanted to revisit. The members of the Spokane community avoided

Thomas for the “damn stories over and over again” (*LRTFH* 62). But in the short story “The Trial of Thomas Builds-The-Fire” his historical narratives provoke the desired response from his community in the court room. At the end of the historic revisioning of the slaughtering of the 799 horses “Thomas opened his eyes and found most of the Indians in the court room wept and wanted to admit defeat” (*LRTFH*98). Neither the intention of the story teller nor the purpose of historic revisioning is to weaken their spirit, but rather it is to make them understand actually who they were and what they are at present. So, Thomas closed his eyes and continued the story:

But I was not going to submit without a struggle. I would continue the war. At first, I was passive, let one man saddle me and ride for a while. He laughed at the illusion of my weakness. But I suddenly rose up and bucked him off... they could not break me. Some may have wanted to kill me for my arrogance, but others respected by anger, my refusal to admit defeat. I lived that day, even escaped Colonel Wright, and galloped into other histories. (*LRTFH*97-98)

When Thomas opens his eyes after such a provocative narration he finds his people with confidence, grace and kind of “Indian abandon” (*LRTFH*98). In the short story “The Trail of Thomas Builds-The-Fire” Alexie’s protagonist Thomas is successful in rebuilding his relationship with his community, which has understood the power of stories. “The narratives that he shares revitalize his community and reconnect its member with heroic figures from the past whose stories official histories have silenced and concealed behind upscale neighbourhoods and golf courses” (Archuleta 58). Thomas’s stories bring to light many historic crimes that have evaded the memory and conscience of the nation that is callous in naming a golf course after a victim of Native war hero. His counter narratives when juxtaposed along with narratives of United States that embraces Manifest Destiny and Winning of the West, it “challenges the United States belief in itself as a just nation” (Archuleta 59). Thomas Builds-The-Fire is Alexie’s trump card to

unravel the true history and to bridge the gaps between the official narratives and the counter narratives.

The condition of the Spokane reservations in the works of Alexie continues to be the same for generation after generation for the past five centuries. Alexie's heroes and their fathers and forefathers have lived under the same desperate reservation condition that has been eroded by social, economic, psychological and political conditions. Success, progress and hope have never been part of their life. The national statistics are the proof for their unemployment, poverty and alcoholic rate that is quite higher when compared to the national average. The Spokane community is highly dysfunctional and static. Alexie's reservation heroes Victor, Thomas, Junior James Many Horses, Jimmy, including the homeless urban Indians like Jackson and the team of homeless Indians are dysfunctional or unsuccessful in their life. They lead the same old unproductive life of their forefathers never striving or even imagining an alternate life that could save them out of their generational toil. They never aspire for a successful life.

Victor, a recovering alcoholic, drives truck for the BIA, Junior the only hero of Alexie in *The Lone Ranger* goes to Gonzaga University but drops out later as a repudiation to the false history taught in the American university. He returns to the reservations very well knowing that his life in reservation will be "a new and painful sequel to the first act of his life" (LRTFH242) Jackson of "What You Pawn I Will Redeem" is a drunkard and an homeless urban Spokane Indian who is flunked out of college. He is wise, sentimental and crazy. He is homeless, penniless, hopeless but loving and sharing. He philosophizes about himself and his homeless condition "I am living proof of the horrible damage that colonialism has done to us Skins. But I 'm not going to let you know how scared. I sometimes get of history and its ways. I'm a strong man, and I know that silence is the best way of dealing with white folks" (*Blasphemy* 439). But he never feels sorry for his condition or aspires the posh urban life around him.

The homeless Indians of downtown Seattle – King the failed college student, Joseph the recluse who sings tribal songs with a hand drum, Crazy Robert a onetime reporter for Seattle Times, Agnes the lover of stray dogs and scavenge birds, the green eyed Kim, Annie the singer “despite all their pain and suffering...held onto one another” (*IK* 377) They are satisfied with their Indian identity and therefore no grudge for their homeless condition. The hero of the short story “Protest” in *Blasphemy* is a half-blood who becomes a rebel and resists anything and everything white. His resistance is “all weird and fundamental” (*Blasphemy* 104) that he gives up shoes and shirts rejecting them as white man’s invention. He challenges any white man in uniform and at last ends up in jail for a racist provocation against white cops. Though, Jimmy resists literally all things white he has internalized the ‘warrior’ stereotype a most common typecast on Indians which is evident in racist nick name like ‘chief’, ‘Crazy Horse’ and ‘Geronimo’. He considers him a “pale warrior” (*Blasphemy* 104), and feels uneasy of his nicknames “salt or vanilla or snow white” (*Blasphemy* 103) which is due to his pale complexion because of his mixed-blood status.

Jimmy dreams of auto repair garage after graduation because he believes that it is a “super traditional Indian thing” (*Blasphemy* 104). Such false belief of considering specific profession to be the most Indian thing to do is one of the influences of pop culture myth. Because the pop culture always propagates the Native male to be robustly masculine, whose physical power achieved great physical efforts at ease. John Smith, in *Indian Killer*, is the most influenced of such stereotypes chooses the profession of a construction worker in a skyscraper, since he considers it to be an identity of an Indian. He reads about it in a magazine that “Indians like to work construction” (*IK* 32). In New York city, the Mohawk construction workers story has “passed from ordinary story into outright myth” (*IK* 132). John a very strong man influenced by such myths carries heavy building supplies at ease and also climbs up the sides of building like “Spiderman’s bastard sons” (*IK* 132).

In *The Diary* Arnold's best friend Rowdy, a teenage boy, like many of his community members resists the white world. When Arnold decides to leave the rez school in order to receive a valid education that is designed for white kids to succeed in life, he invites Rowdy to accompany him to all – white school in Reardan in his pursuit of hope and future, but Rowdy who first refuses to believe Arnold's idea later gets wild and spits on the floor. Reardan, is a nearby small, white town with racist cops and rednecks. He replies "I don't even drive through that town. What makes you think I want to go to school there?" (*ATDPI* 49). Rowdy screams in pain for his best friend's decision to leave the rez school which according to him is a perfidious act of leaving one's own community and of becoming white. Most of the Native American think, "you have to act white to make your life better. Some Indians think you become white if you try to make your life better, if you become successful" (*ATDPI* 131). Success is identified as something specific to whites alone and failure and stasis to be an Indian identity. According to Treuer "Today in Indian country, there is an incorrectly but widely held view that to suffer in poverty is to be authentically Indian" (Treuer 47). He explains while poverty is a common experience it is given a negative cultural dimension which is at odd with the real traditional views of self and community.

So far, all positive experiences like happiness, hope, success, prosperity and progress are denied to the Natives and they never have tasted the fruit of any of the above life experiences. On the other hand, they have watched the white society forever winning, succeeding, progressing, happy and all positive human experiences are enjoyed by the colonizers and therefore 'success' in life is concluded as white identity by the Natives and they never aspire for it.

One thing that clearly surfaces out is the utter hatredness of the Natives against the whites. They resist even life defining positive and essential human experiences at the cost of their own precious lives and that of their community's for the past five hundred years. For the white society, Native community's resistance to assimilate into the

mainstream society seems as an adamant choice of self-destruction. This forms the reasons for the Natives to be stereotyped as self-defeating. In one of his interviews Alexie explains to Matt Dellinger that, “I think it can be seen from the outside as self-defeating and the end result might be self-defeating, but I think a lot of Indians view their separation and their refusal to belong as an open act of defiance. So, even as they might go down in flames, they’re proud of themselves. They’re cultural kamikazes in some sense” (Alexie 124)

Alexie’s heroes are self-actualized persons who dare to question their colonizer: “What do you believe in? Does every Indian depend on Hollywood for a twentieth-century vision? (*LRTFH* 151). They defy fitting into any of the stereotypes that is imposed upon them and subvert the mainstream myths at the cost of their own lives. But the major flaw with Alexie’s otherwise clever protagonists is that they fail to temper their unappeasable anger and resistance with a positive approach which would have helped them to break the negative history of the Spokanes protagonists. Instead of choosing resilience they have opted for self-defeating approaches like alcoholism and indiscriminate resistance, which leads them ultimately to the path of vanishing. However justifiable their rage and resistance may be, it ultimately captivates them in an utterly hopeless and a bitter past. It is ironic to note that by their irrational resistance to pop cultural stereotypes and myths they fall prey to the stereotype of the drunken Indian and the vanishing Indian myth.

In spite of active resistance to pop culture myths and stereotypes, one can also note that certain stereotypes are imbibed by Alexie’s heroes as authentic Native identity. The stereotype of considering Indian men, as ‘a war chief’ or a ‘savage warrior’ is very common stereotype of Native men. This particular positive stereotyping is very significant because it has entered into the psyche of all Native men that they consider themselves as warriors. Right from “Geeky and weak” (*ATDPI* 63) young Arnold to the most “cinematic warrior” (*IK* 32) looking John Smith, Alexie’s heroes are invariably

called 'chief'. Even in their vision quest they visualize themselves to be warriors. In a guilt provoked thought the hero of "Breakfast" imagines his father to rebuke him that, "What kind of warrior are you? Put on the war paint, you faggot, and ride your pony into battle" (*Blasphemy* 240). The influence of this warrior stereotype makes the teenage narrator of "Because My Father Always Said He Was The Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Handrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' At Woodstock" to feel sorry for not having any battle to fight, unlike the generation of his fathers and grandfathers who have had World Wars, Vietnamwar and Gulf war.

Alexie's heroes, except a very few always desired to be Crazy Horse, the star Native war chief of the past. Though they did not literally have to fight in the twenty first century their inheritance of the warrior stereotype and a hatred for white community makes them involve in twentieth century vandalism, which is appreciated and enjoyed by the family and community. Alexie's heroes identified themselves as great warriors in their dreams, visions and thoughts. It is very obvious that Alexie's heroes who consciously resist and subvert pop culture myths and stereotype have also unconsciously fallen prey to the pop culture propagated 'warrior' stereotype a testimony for the success of five centuries of colonizing their interior landscape.

There are few characters like Arnold of *The Diary* and the narrator of "War Dances" who openly resist being stereotyped as warrior. They have always felt the need to "put a stop to it eventually" (*ATDPI*64) either by entering into a fistfight as in the case of Arnold of *The Diary* or as in the case of the narrator of "War Dances" who throws a basketball "in the guys face" (*Blasphemy* 61) who calls him chief.

John Smith is the most exceptional of Alexie's characters, who unaware of his real tribal roots falls prey to the pop culture propagated stereotypes. John is an American Indian child adopted by white parents Daniel and Olivia, a good intentional parents who embrace socially accepted right things. They feel that it is their responsibility to initiate John into Native American culture and therefore, expose John to Native American culture

through available “books, western movies, documentaries” (*IK* 12) on Native American culture. This gives John untrue pictures of Indians and their culture, and to internalise the stereotypes as authentic Indian identity.

The books and films on Natives by whites mainly engages in romanticised portrayal of Natives with certain fascinating ethnic markers and myths “that are correct for about two dozen plains tribes in the late 1800’s, but they are fake for the remaining over 500 other Native societies in north America”(Price 153). The white society has failed to acknowledge the Native American tribes as diversified ethnic groups with their own cultural specification and it is callous of its misrepresentation of them in a very generic style.

John, and his parents are denied of access to authentic Indian culture and identity by the pop culture narratives that are mediated through both visual and print media, that “subscribe to the ideas of the cultural majority without really thinking anything through” (Grassion 298). As a result, John misinterprets and romanticises Indians as well as their identity. John Smith, who has built his stoic Indian identity based on colonial script of Native identity is being mocked by Marie Polatkin, a reservation Indian, and a student of the Washington State University. She wonders, “the strong silent type? All stoic and stuff, huh? How long you been working on that Tonto face? You should try out for the movies” (*IK* 36).

As misguided by the pop culture narratives, John’s idea of Indians is generic. This puts him into shock when he witnesses “So many Indians, so many tribes, many sharing similar features, but also differing in slight and important ways. (*IK* 21). In the Indian heritage gym, he witnesses Indians laughing loudly, cracking jokes, reacting mightily to each basket, moaning and groaning to each mistake which is far from his idea of stoic, humourless Indian. John who has acquired his stoic, cinematic warrior identity from the pop culture narratives just knows that he is an “Indian in the most generic sense”. (*IK* 31).

He caters to the taste of whites by pretending to be a “Sioux” (*IK* 32) and to the Natives by being a “Navajo” (*IK* 32).

John, the twenty-seven years old, is six feet, six inches tall and heavily muscled young man with a perfect features of a cinematic Native warrior holds on to the warrior stereotype. He believes in the magical powers that Indians possessed in the movies and stories on Natives. It is the pop culture influence that works on John to choose the profession of a construction worker.

John Smith feels simple, shallow and even at time like a fraud amidst real Indians. Unable to reconcile between his stereotyped identity and the identity of real, John feels “betrayed” (*IK* 22). When he is unable to recognize these Indians, who are nothing like the Indians he has read about, John cries. The absence of authentic Indianness for access and the inculcation of stereotyped Indian identity paves the way for John’s psychological problems, that ends in his madness and suicide.

John Smith unaware of and away from his tribal roots is a “racial orphan” (qtd. by Berry 53). In the urban Seattle he is only aware of his skin phenotype. John is also impacted by the urban world similar to the urban Indian youths away from their reservation communities and ancestral roots that receive its protocols and admonitions from mass media. He grows up confused and deluged by media messages that promote negative stereotypes and romanticized self- images.

Being a racial orphan, it is illogical to expect John Smith to resist the malevolent media stereotypes. He is unaware of the existence of an authentic identity and therefore concedes to stereotypes, the only reality, he is aware of. In such a condition, there never arises the idea of resistance and John readily submits to media promulgated colonial scripts and ends up as a perfect paradigm of the vanishing Indian myth.

The other such character is Jack Wilson who is portrayed as a counterfeit Indian, despite the fact that he has a distant Indian ancestry. He is a middle-aged, ex-cop turned

into a fiction writer on Native American culture. In his childhood he grows up as an orphan who dreams of being Indian: “Lying in strange beds, Wilson read about Indians and recreated himself in the image he found inside those books. He saw himself as a solitary warrior on horseback, crossing miles of empty plains, in search of his family” (*IK* 157).

Like selective amnesia, Wilson suffers from what can be termed as selective appropriation of pop culture narratives. Even from his childhood he resists the negative myths of Indians. He refuses to accept negative stereotypes and myths but adores positive ones that TV and movie said about Indians. The mass media’s false propaganda reiterates that Indians are evil, tough, mean and vicious: “That they raped white woman and ate white children. Indians were said to worship devils” (*IK* 158). Even the same idea is reinforced by his teachers that Wilson always has to fight against.

Jack Wilson, who readily fights against malicious myths about Indians, willingly embraces romanticized myths about Indians and is obsessed with fantasies on Native American culture. He is a white man with a remote Native ancestry who feels “proud of his Indian blood”(*IK* 180), and claims to be a Shilshomish Indian. But the Indians never accept him as Indian. He is “Casper the Friendly Ghost” for them (*IK* 180). Wilson, makes a career as murder mystery writer out of his self-claimed Indian identity, constructing stereotypical Native American hero Aristotle little Hawk, who embodies the romantic Indian warrior hero.

Marie strongly protests against Jack Wilson’s books in the reading list of Native American Literature. She finds lots of inconsistencies in the background of Jack Wilson and seriously doubts his ethnicity. She calls him “fraud” (*IK* 265) and “Vulture” (*IK* 232). Because, hack books written by ‘pretending to be Indians’ like Jack Wilson are considered “dangerous and violent”( *IK* 264). The pulp novels by fake Indians are detrimental in a way that leads to psychological internalization of false images of Indian for both Natives and non-Natives. These books romanticize and mythologize Indian

culture. Natives, like John Smith lost in the urban wilderness as well as reservation Indian youths who are constantly under the impact of pop culture brainwashes succumb to stereotype.

John betrayed by misrepresentation finally realizes the truth that false propagandist like “Wilson was responsible for all that had gone wrong” (IK40). He slashes on Wilson’s face with a knife and makes a mark. “No matter where you go, John said to a screaming Wilson, people know you by that mark. They’ll know what you did” (IK 411).

Unrealistic, highly sensationalised stories like “*Savage Revenge* or *Apache Vengeance*” (IK 263) has always been easier to market since it caters to the expectation of the white public and reiterates the same old myths and stereotypes. Marie’s questions, “How can Wilson present an authentic and traditional view of the Indian world if he isn’t authentic and traditional himself?” (IK 66). She exposes the ignorance of the academia, in prescribing books that are not written by genuine Indian writers but the books written by whites in the guise Indian authors in the curriculum of Introduction to Native American Literature in Washington State University. Marie is not even ready to consider Wilson as a “Cannibal” (IK 267) that eats its own kind. For her, Wilson is a “Scavenger”, a Maggot (IK 267).

There is no chance of Wilson resisting stereotypes since, he is all obsessed with it. He has not even come to realize the fatal consequences of sensational books like his own, which leads to the literal death of John in front of his own eyes and metaphorical death of many Native American youths all over the country. But Jack Wilson, who been struggling to complete the murder mystery thriller on Indian killer until his encounter with John Smith, successfully completes it with the misrepresentation of John as the Indian killer.

Alexie's main purpose of creating Jack Wilson is to expose the damage done by such fake Indians through their "wish fulfillment books" (Purdy 43) to both Native and white psyche. They romanticize the idea of Indians as stoic, emotionless, ancient people who go on vision quest; spiritually superior with magical powers; and nature loving which is far removed from reality. In one of his interviews with John Purdy he says most of the Indian literature is not written by traditional Indians, these books are "about the kind of Indians they wish they were, not the kind of Indian they are" (Alexie 43). He asserts to Jassica Chapel "non-Indians should quit writing about us" (Alexie 98). He calls the literature written by non-Indians on Indians as "colonial literature" (Alexie 98). Alexie's rage seems justifiable when he adds, "what happens is that anybody can write these kinds of books about Indians, but the same does not hold true with any other group. Indians have so little political power, so little social and cultural power, that this happens to us all the time" (Alexie 98).

Another important message that Alexie wants to drive home is that "Hate happens when we romanticize or vilify people. As soon as we humanize people, it is hard to go to war against them. You start to identify yourselves with their strengths and weaknesses" (Harris 133). But writers like Wilson never realise the ruthless messages of their works that lead to myriad offenses against the Indians who struggle to retain their identity against innumerable undertows. If it has not been for the stereotypes, the protagonists of the Spokane community need not resist to the hegemonic version of Indians and Indianness at the cost of their lives.

The next category of characters is remarkable because of their positive approach to life that sets them apart from other members of their community. Their well-defined resistance to false myths on Indians and Indianness alongwith a smart adaptation of resilience elevates them to be iconic characters of Alexie: Marie, the female protagonist of *Indian Killer*, Corliss, the female protagonist of "The Search Engine" from the short story collection *Blasphemy*, Arnold Jr. the teenage protagonist of *The Diary*. There are

no resilient characters in his first short story collection *The Lone Ranger And Tonto Fight In Heaven* with his famous trinity Victor, Junior and Thomas Builds-The-Fire who embrace active resistance.

Resilience focuses upon positive outcomes, and not illness. The theory of resilience strongly insists on two essential components for a person to be identified as resilient. The existence of an adverse situation like trauma, tragedy, threats or even a greater degree of stress in an individual's life along with the presence of positive traits or protective factors such as intelligence, humour, creativity, optimism, self-actualization, introspection, etc. The presence of all these positive factors in the absence of an adverse situation is not considered as resilience but “resiliency”, (qtd. by Fleming and Ledogar 7). The additional risk factors or vulnerability for indigenous people include historical trauma, which encompass all the problematic issues identified as adversity, including generationally inherited maladaptive social behaviours and learned helplessness, along with oppressive racism.

The three resilient fictional characters Arnold Jr., Marie Polatkin and Corliss are indigenous young people who belong to the Spokane community and live in the reservation that is plagued by social problems like acute poverty, violence, illiteracy, unemployment, alcoholism and substance abuse, racism and lack of opportunities; and the additional burden of historical trauma with a psychological adversity of higher level of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, nightmares and guilt behaviour. Hence these three young Native American Indian people need to be equipped with amazing level of protective factors to fight against the risk factors that are present from within and without.

Arnold Jr. the teenage protagonist in *The Absolutely True Diary Of A Part-Time Indian* from the Spokane Indian reservation, he is a born hydrocephalus with a strange physical appearance of “big feet and pencil body” who looks like a “Capital L” (*ATDPI* 3) and still more stranger physical deformities like “Forty-two teeth” and “nearsighted in

one eye and farsighted in the other” (*ATDPI 3*). He naturally becomes an odd one out among his group and he is a target of constant bullying and also branded as “retard” (*ATDPI4*).

The personal psychological traits of Junior are his creativity, intelligence, smartness and humour along with a great love for books and knowledge. He identifies cartoons as a means to communicate with the world because of his stutters and lisps and because of words that are “too unpredictable” and “too limited” (*ATDPI 5*). At a very young age he is smart enough to identify ways to become rich and popular. According to him “Almost all of the rich and famous brown people are artist. They are singers and actors and writers and dancers and directors and poets” (*ATDPI 6*). The most surprising and noticeable thing about Arnold Jr., is that he has identified his creativity as the “only real chance to escape the reservation” (*ATDPI 6*) condition and he is very much determined in his decision.

Arnold a bright kid of the reservation tribal school feels the pain of a “nuclear bomb” (*ATDPI31*) attack, when he finds out he is reading from the same old book read by his parents. He is absolutely frustrated by the outdated curriculum and weird and hopeless teacher. Mr.P, the Maths teacher, who is very well aware of Arnold’s potentials insists Junior to pursue “hope” (*ATDPI43*) in the white men’s world.

Arnold Jr. amazed at Mr.P's advice, questions “where is hope?” And “who has hope?” (*ATDPI 43*). Mr.P a white man discloses the ongoing racism hidden behind the mechanism of reservation schools that are the modern version of Carlisle Industrial Schools bent on killing the potentials of the Native children and their culture.

A life changing guidance from Mr.P provokes Junior to make a first attempt of his innermost desire to escape the reservation “death camp” (*ATDPI 217*) and a “prison” (*ATDPI 216*). He makes a bold move by leaving his reservation school and joining an all-white school in Reardan, a racist white town, close to this reservation border.

Marie and Corliss are female protagonists of Alexie, who possess both resistance and resilience to make successful attempts to redefinethemselves in the world outside their reservation, that has only assigned them a subordinate role to play. Marie is the revolutionary of all characters of Alexie beyond gender variations. She is a student of Washington State University enrolled in Native American Literature. She is identified as bright and smart from her childhood and her parents “knew their bright daughterbelonged in that larger world” (*IK* 33) and educate her in English. Bright kids in rez schools are severely tackled to give up their ambition and hope by the rez school teachers. This ismade evident in the statement of Polatkin Jr’s experience which show how his artistic ability and spelling proficiency fetches him punishment. On the other hand, academically bright kids “endured constant bullying and taunting” (*IK* 34) from their own peer group too. Racism an additional, inescapable risk factor for Native youth acts like a double-edged sword where the racist attitude of their own community is placed in one end and the racismof the world outside take the other end. Arnold Jr. loses his friendship with Rowdy, his best friend because of his decision to get enrolled in a white school which according to Rowdy is an act of treason to his community. Jr shares his frustration with his white friend and classmate Gordy: “The people at home... A lot of them call me an apple” (*ATDPI* 131). “They call me an apple because they think I'm red on the outside and white on the inside” (*ATDPI* 132).

Marie is modelled after Yakima's war chief Qualchan’s wife. She is a “contemporary version of a female warrior” (Holloah 162) who protests with passion and devotion for the cause of Indians. Right from her childhood Marie is not ready to accept failure and defeat but she rebels and retaliates to her enemies. “Marie fought fiercely, without control or thought. She tackled people, bit and pinched, spat and kicked. She refused to accept beating. She always wanted revenge and would wait until the perfect moment, which could be months later, to ambush her enemies” (*IK* 34).

Like Jr., Marie too desires to escape the maelstrom of her reservation which she fears “would pull her back and drown her in its rivers” (*IK* 34). “Through her intelligence and dedication” (*IK* 34) to her studies, she manages to be enrolled in Washington State University and finds an escape to the world outside her reservation.

Corliss, another reservation young lady dreams of “a maximum life, an original aboriginal life” (*Blasphemy* 362). Back in her rez, in her school days as a poor student she manages to thrive in her education with the help of her teachers: “Indians and good white people whose whiteness and goodness blended and separated” (*Blasphemy* 363). Corliss could not imagine a reservation life forever which she considers as nothing more than “to confirm Indian fears and insecurities” (*Blasphemy* 368). She feels “Over the last two centuries, Indians had learned how to stand in lines for food, love, hope, sex and dreams, but they didn't know how to step away” (*Blasphemy* 368). Her family and relatives who know Corliss is bright and smart believes that she “is going to save [their] tribe” (*Blasphemy* 374).

She is more interested in poems and literature than in maths, science and politics that her family wants her to study. But, Corliss shapes and determines her future by herself and strongly resists her family's opinion. She wonders, “How can you live a special life without constantly interrogating it? How can you live a good life without good poetry?” (*Blasphemy* 371). She loves her family and her extended family members for their constant support for college education but when it comes to her father and uncles, the male members of her family, she hates them for their “endless nostalgia and quick tempers” (*Blasphemy* 371) and also she hates their “individual fears and collective lack of ambition” (*Blasphemy* 371). She fears they have been instructed to pick up a wrench by authorities and never have thought of why not a pencil or a pen, and she hates their lack of indiscriminate power and their weakness. Corliss who considers herself “eccentric and powerful and great” and is “rarely found comfort from her family and

friends and never from God, but continued to want it and never stopped asking for it” (*Blasphemy* 373).

Arnold Jr., Marie Paltkin, and Corliss are undoubtedly resilient because they are not suppressed by the many risk factor of their community. They have sprung back to life in spite of a highly adverse environment to which they belong to. They are intelligent, creative, quiet optimistic, introspective and retrospective to analyse the demerits of their community and to find a way out of their reservation maelstrom. With a clear determination for self-definition and self-representation combined with intelligence and love for literacy, sets these three protagonists apart from the rest of their community members.

Most of the protagonistsof Alexie are resistive to colonial discourses and therefore defy the role of Tonto and do not want to depend on Hollywood for a twentieth century vision. But Victor, Polatkin Junior, Thomas Builds-The-Fire, Father Duncan, and Jimmy and many others strongly resist the humiliating stereotypes of the hegemonic society, and in the process of resisting stereotyped images and myths they completely fail to recreate a positive self-identity. They are neither optimistic nor creative to think of an alternate, progressive life that redeems them from their socio-cultural, political and psychological death traps which always hold their foot wedged in their traumatic past. They are clever, intelligent and smart along with a justifiable rage but these protective factors are not used for a dynamic development process to redefine their identity and to reconstruct their lives.

Arnold Jr., Marie Polatkin, and Corliss make use of their protective factors like personal traits and the environmental protective factors like their parents, extended family, teachers and friends support to redefine their individual identity and thereby they resist the imposed stereotyped identity. Arnold resists the myth of the vanishing Indian by stepping into the white world to pursue hope and progress. A teenager with a baggage of adversities of a trauma plagued community along with his own physical abnormalities

successfully bounces back to recreate new history or at least an attempt for a new history, by crossing borders both real and imaginary. It is an uphill task for any reservation member. Jr.'s endeavour results in losing the faith of his community which considers him disloyal and an outsider. The very idea of leaving the rez in itself is impossible and strange for him: "I want to go to Reardan, I said again. I couldn't believe I was saying it. For me, it seemed as real as saying, I want to fly to the moon" (*ATDPI*46).

Crossing the border of reservation, which is supposed to be a safe haven for an Indian, needs immense courage because of the inherent racist attitude of the outside world. This very racist attitude sends back Indians to their reservation who ventures out into the white world in search of the opportunities as in the case of Jr. Polatkin in the short story "Junior Polatkin's "Wild West Show", Victor in the short story "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven". The anxious and worried mother of John Smith the protagonist of the *Indian Killer*, warns John, who is about to leave the rez for the city to pursue his pre-medicine education: "They're going to try to stop you. They're going to try to humiliate you. They're going to call you names. They'll want you fail" (*IK* 292). which reveals the reality and the intensity of the reality of racism that remains the greatest threat and unconquerable demon in the path of progress.

Initially Arnold faces the racial humiliations by his own classmates who crack nasty racial jokes and call him by stereotyped names like "chief, Tonto, squaw boy" (*ATDPI* 64) to provoke him for a fight. He, more or less, is considered "idiot" (*ATDPI* 86) by his teachers and his classmates' parents never want their girls to befriend an Indian. In his class, he is received with "stares" and "whispers" (*ATDPI*59). Until Arnold proves his intelligence his initial experiences are that of being a "larger target" (*ATDPI*63) "a stranger in a strange land" (*ATDPI*81), "zero"(*ATDPI*82), "a bigfoot or an UFO" for his classmates. He observes that, "In fact, if you think of everybody with a body, soul and brain, as a human, then I was the opposite of human. It was the loneliest time of my life" (*ATDPI*83).

Another identity that Arnold resists is the stereotype of the drunken Indian. His pain grows immense after his sister and her husband death in a trailer fire accident after a heavy drink, his grandmother dies because of a drunken driver, his uncle Eugen's dies in a bar, and so many other deaths occur due to alcohol. With great moral and realisation of truth he confirms: "I knew that I was never going to drink and because I was never going to kill myself and because I was going to have a better life out in the white world" (*ATDPI*217).

Though Arnold possesses lot of positive factors he also possesses certain negative attitude to life which are quite natural for a reservation Indian. From a very young age he is a pessimist who considers the world to be "a series of broken dams and floods" (6). He also possesses the learned helplessness, one of the symptoms of historical trauma that perceives the individual to be utterly powerless since his or her action or reaction in no way can influence the future. As a result, Arnold believes that Indians are destined to be "poor", "ugly" and "stupid" (*ATDPI* 13) and their life to be "an ugly circle and there is nothing [one] can do about it" (*ATDPI*13). He also suffers from a sense of guilt for leaving his tribe. He hopes he will be forgiven someday "for leaving them" (*ATDPI* 230)

Despite the existence of so many vulnerable factors, Arnold is successful in building a positive self-image rejecting victimhood with the positive traits that he possesses. He identifies himself with the real "old-time Indians" (*ATDPI* 229) who have been nomadic and have never been aware of reservations in any sense and therefore are not confined to reservations of any form. He identifies with "millions of other Americans who had left their birthplaces in search of a dream" (*ATDPI*217). At the end of the novel Arnold Jr. finds acceptance by his peers, teacher and coach and realizes that he is now comfortable as a member of tribe- including bookworm, small-town kids, and cartoonists. In the case of Arnold's embracing of multiple tribal identity does not mean that he is not rejecting his Native identity. It is the healthy incorporation of many identities along with the identity of the old time Indians: "Knowing that switching tribes does not mean the

rejection of previous allegiance, he is happily a hybrid, as he has been from the beginning” (Vogel 123).

Another life changing decision of Arnold is not to yield to alcohol, the only escape that the Spokane community relies on for a temporary escape from their unresolved grief. Alcoholism poses the greatest risk factor for any youngster in a reservation and by rejecting this maladaptive social behaviour, Arnold escapes the risk of failure. He breaks a negative cycle of victimhood, and boldly knocks down the stereotype of a drunken Indian and the myth of vanishing Indian by strongly asserting his presence and individuality.

The all-time protesting protagonist Marie of *Indian Killer* is known for her resistance and protest ceremonies inside and outside the university in which she is enrolled in Native American literature. Marie confronts and resists racism and stereotypes and mythologizing of Native culture by actively challenging her professor Dr. Marther, and the faculty Head by highlighting the discrepancies in the course curriculum and the teachers handling the course. Her main reason to enrol in the Native American Literature class is “to challenge Dr. Marther’s role as the official dispenser of Indian education at the university” (*IK* 58). Dr. Marther is a “white man who wanted to be Indian” (*IK* 58). He is another whiteman like the ex-cop changed detective writer, Jack Wilson who is attracted by falsified images of Indians and Indianness. Marie, a Spokane Indian, cultural insider constantly challenges the romanticized philosophies of Dr. Marther. She finds an “Emotional outlet in the opportunity to harass a white professor who thought he knew what it meant to be Indian” (*IK* 64). She aggressively confronts Dr. Marther’s knowledge: “You think you know more about being Indian than Indians do, don’t you? Just because you read all those books about Indians, most of them written by white people” (*IK* 247). Marie subverts his role of authority and resists “the idea of a knowledge hierarchy, one where dominant mainstream learning is considered more valuable than others” (Hollrah 163).

Marie is very well aware that she is “protesting this, protesting that” (*IK* 265). She protests against cultural imposters like Dr. Marther and Jack Wilson. She points out the flaws in the curriculum of her course and questions Dr. Faulkner, the Head of the Department, “Why isn’t an Indian teaching the class?” (*IK* 312). She argues that a chemistry course, is handled by a chemist, Women's Literature is taught by women and African-American teacher teach African-American Literature and why not real Native Indian teachers are allowed to handle genuine Native American Literature in the University? Alexie uses Marie, the cultural insider, to establish that white writers, who believe they understand the lives of American Indians and, write about Indians, perpetuate the colonizing act of misleading the reading public about Indians and their culture.

Corliss considers college to be an “extreme sport for an Indian woman” (*Blasphemy* 390). It is the inherent racism that is all pervasive in the white world. Racism is the huge risk factor for indigenous youth:

College was an extreme sport for an Indian woman. Maybe ESPN2 should send a camera crew to cover her academic career. Maybe she should be awarded gold medals for taking American history and not shooting everybody during the hour and a half in which they covered five hundred years of Indian history. If pushed, Corliss knew she could go crazy. She was paranoid schizophrenic in waiting. Maybe all the crazy homeless Indians were former college students who’d heard about manifest destiny one too many times. (*Blasphemy* 390)

The everyday helpless destiny of a Native, who is well aware of the real racist history of the U.S. nation building myth, has the potency to make him crazy or schizophrenic. So, it is quite understandable that it is not only racial discrimination and marginalization that has deprived them of opportunities but racism inherent in, right from the nation building myth to the racism internalised in the academic arena too proves to be a great

threat to the Native youngsters. The immense courage to withstand and sustain such false propagandas is essential in order to acquire the white man's education that could help them about rehabilitation and rejuvenation to their community.

Marie and Corliss are unable to escape such testing racism in their academic life that threatens their mental stability. Though Corliss desires shooting everybody during the history class she does not engage in performative acts but Marie unburdens her rage by engaging in real protest and confrontations with her authorities.

The female protagonists Marie and Corliss are possessed with positive resilient factors like intelligence, perseverance, self-esteem and an indomitable spirit. In the case of Corliss her social factors of resilience are non-abusive and supportive parents, extended family members and the Native and white teachers support. Marie's environment factors include good and supportive parents and her group of homeless Indians in the streets of Seattle to whom she provides with sandwich and is lovingly called "Sandwich lady" (*IK* 144).

For Native women like Marie and Corliss, apart from the historical trauma background that makes a constant presence in their lives, they are also scapegoats of Native American female stereotypes. As Native men have been stereotyped by the Euro-American white society, Native women too are equally fixed and framed in stereotypes as sexy Native 'princess Pocahontas', 'squaw' and 'papoose'.

Marie, who is full of fire and potency to self-define her identity resists to stereotyped identity. Her knowledge, indomitable spirit, clever interrogation she puts her white teachers to embarrassment. Her self-assertiveness commands the white man to acknowledge her identity, "so individualistic. Not tribal at all" (*IK* 393). Dr. Marther could not imagine a Native woman "so impulsive" and "so emotional" (*IK* 393). She is a powerful contemporary female warrior, who declares, "I'm not some demure little Indian woman healer talking spider this, spider that, am I? I'm not babbling about the four

directions or the two-legged, four-legged and winged. I'm talking like a twentieth century Indian woman. Hell, a twenty-first century Indian, and you can't handle it..." (*IK* 247).

Corliss all-powerful to establish herself in the white world is also aware of the limitations set to her because of her racial identity. "She knew, she wasn't supposed to be in college and she wasn't supposed to be as smart as she was and she wasn't supposed to read the books she read and she wasn't supposed to say the thing she said. She was too young and too female and too Indian to be that smart" (*Blasphemy*402). Corliss, intelligent, smart, self-confident and fully resistive to others' efforts to shape and determine her future can no way relate to the pop culture defined papoose or squaw or princess Pocahontas. She declares "my very existence disproves what my conquerors believe about this world and me" (*Blasphemy* 402) and asserts "But I exist" (*Blasphemy* 402).

Marie is full of anger and protest and flares up at white man's lie in any form but Corliss takes advantage of positive ethnic stereotypes and does not feel any "guilt about it" (*Blasphemy* 369). She is pragmatically judicious, when she feels while Indians can be slaughtered just for the reason of being Indian why can't they enjoy certain privileges for the same damn reason. Highly analytical, she willingly adopts to the romanticized stoic Indian stereotype because she believes that, "[I]n the twenty-first century, any Indian with a decent vocabulary wielded enormous social power" provided that person is stoic who rarely spoke. (*Blasphemy* 369).

Anger according to Alexie is a prime component for survival and is best possessed by Marie than any of his characters. Anger is also a major symptom of historical trauma which is well adopted by Mari for a more positive action of resistance and to demand and defend the rightful identity of the Natives. Instead of becoming a victim of the unappeasable rage that leads to self-distinction either by addiction to alcohol as in the case of most Spokanes or by suicideas John Smith. "Anger in itself can

be positive or destructive. That is why you need to use imagination to make it positive” explains Alexie to John and Carl Bellante in an interview (Alexie10).

Resilience theory insists on building a positive self-image in the face of adversity. Marie and Corliss who are considered bright kids from their childhood are expected to play the role of redeemer for their society. They are very determined and positive of their self-image and least bothered of the degrading and derogatory stereotypes of their colonizers. The greatest risk factors they face as Native women is the negative stereotype, apart from racism and other social problems, which they have disproved by their intelligence, education and indomitable spirit. They successfully emerge out as highly potential individuals by breaking the negative stereotypes with their potential to self-define their individual identity and to create a new history that could be a preface for the emerging young Native women.

As Alexie’s work are document of resistance to many number of existing oppressive issues, he addresses the issue of Native women stereotypes with a sense of moral responsibility. Though Alexie calls himself a writer of “Spokane Indian male stumbling through life” (Big Think) and his works consist of very few female characters, he has produced remarkable women protagonists, who strive to reiterate their individuality which concomitantly defies the derogatory stereotyped images of Native women.

Similar to Native men, Native women are equally fixed and framed in stereotypes of sexy Native princess ‘Pocahontas’, ‘squaw’ and ‘papoose’. For, the popular culture, Native women are either beautifully seductive women whose major role is to satisfy the sexual desires of white heroes or the idiotic and stupid “Dumb girls” (*IK* 243) whose only duty is to give birth to numerous “evil babies”(IK 243). The Native princess Pocahontas is perpetuated with all “the euro-centrally ‘beautiful’ features of a Native American” (Mosfie n.pag). Alexie calls such degrading images of women as the “Madonna whore” (Alexie 85) in an interview with Fraser. He strongly condemns these

ubiquitous stereotypes reinforced by “progressive, liberal, intelligent, highly-educated men [who] are writing complex, diverse, wonderful male charters in the same book where the female characters are like women in a 3 A.M. movie on Showtime” (Alexie 85). His female characters are more individualistic, progressive, dignified and at times highly revered women who are perfect paradigms of Native women.

The Native American communities on the whole are matriarchal communities where “there is no stigma on being female, gender is not used to control behaviour” (Silko 236). In Native American creation stories, it is often the women who created life, through giving birth to children, or through the use of their own bodies to create the earth, from which plants and animals emerge. Women’s greatness is always measured by her sheer strength and courage to act at the face of adversity. “Women’s role reflected their own cultural emphasis on reciprocity, balance and autonomy. Most scholars agree that Native American women at the time of contact with European had more authority and autonomy than did European women” (Teachinghistory.org 1). Because women’s activities have been central to the community welfare, they have also held important political, social and economic power. In many North American societies, clan membership and material goods descend through women. So naturally, Native Americans do not perceive women as an object of sexual pleasure, devoid of sense and self-respect. There is no gender discrimination and women appear as often as men in the old stories as hero figures. Scholars argue that it is just after their contact, women’s authority has steadily declined because of cultural assimilation.

Big Mom, Grandmother Etta, Norma Many Horses and Mary Lynn are the other four striking women characters in these select works of Alexie, whom he has created after real Indian women of the tribal society. Big Mom is the spiritual leader of the Spokane tribe. For Victor, “she may have been the one who created the earth”(LRTFH23) since she is the one who has the “good medicine” to heal the soul wound of the community. She is the mentor and the guardian of the Spokanes and she

gifts, a little drum, the symbol of Native tradition to Victor and asks him to play on it in case of dilemma or crisis which could help him to re-orient to his real identity.

Grand Mother Spirits is the grandmother of Arnold Jr, the protagonist of *The Diary*. Arnold considers her to be smart and kind, and she possesses the “greatest gift of tolerance” (ATDPI155). She is a wise person whom Arnold turns for advice and he admires her for her tolerance to eccentricity. She has never been judgemental and hateful but always approaches “each new person and each new experience the exact same way”(ATDPI155). She encourages Arnold in his adventurous endeavour to venture into the white man's world. For her, meeting new people is the “whole point of life” (ATDPI 156). Grandmother Spirits' last message “on earth was a call for forgiveness, love and tolerance”(ATDPI157). She wants her family to forgive the drunk who kills her causing accident. The grandmother’s message of forgiveness which could help the community which is plagued by trauma and hatred to jettison its five centuries of pain. The Big Mom and grandmother Spirits are created after Alexie's own grandmother Etta whom Alexie considers as his “link to tradition” (Alexie 156) who would give him the history of his family. Though Alexie has not been traditional like other grandchildren of grandmother Etta, “she didn’t care”(Alexie56), but supported him in his endeavour with unconditional love and support.

Norma Mary Horses the protagonist of “The Approximate Size Of My Favourite Tumour” appears in few more stories in the collection *The Lone Ranger And Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Alexie portrays Norm as a “cultural life guard”, watching out for the Spokane who are “so close to drowning”(LRTFH199). She is called “grandmother” (LRTFH199) as sign of respect. She is always energetic, positive, cheerful and helping and has great respect for her tradition and elders that when young people go astray she takes them to some elder's tip to make them listen to “some...dusty old story”(LRTFH65). For Thomas Builds-The-Fire, “Norma was a warrior. She was powerful” (LRTFH65) both physically and mentally that she is adored by her tribe.

Mary Lynn, the urban, is a white-collar woman in her forties is employed in Microsoft. She is married to Jeremiah, a white, chemical engineer. They have met in college and decided to marry in spite of their racial difference. They ignore race as a “social construct, illusionary” (*Blasphemy*344). But in course of time after parenting four children – two of the girl children resemble Jeremiah with white features and the boys resemble her with Native features and with the racist attitude of the grandparents from both the sides – race is being felt as something “real” (*Blasphemy*344).

As an act of reverse discrimination, Lynn goes to bed with a Lummi Indian man. For Lynn it is a “carnal form of affirmative action” (*Blasphemy*333), which is purely “a political act! Rebellion, resistance, revolution!” (*Blasphemy*333). At a crucial moment, she understands that their love for each other is much deeper, powerful and reliable than race cannot defeat, but only create complications every now and then. Mary Lynn emerges out to be a highly competent, bold, and mature modern, urban, white-collar Indian woman, who amidst the confusion of racial loyalty discovers the power of human bonding and relationship.

Alexie’s creation of women characters stands strikingly different from the exaggerated stereotypes of the white society that denies identity to Native women. They are neither the sexual squaws nor Princess Pocahontas to the white men or dumb papoose to populate the reservation. They are more complex and mature ladies who are aware of their tradition and spiritual roles in their community and family. Grandmother Spirits and Big Mom are cultural and spiritual guardians who carry out their responsibility of guiding their community. Especially the young women of the community based on their own sense of discrimination decide either to reside or leave the reservation in search of dreams and hope. When Marie, Corliss and Lynn leave the rez in search of their future in the wider world, Norma equally potential resides in the rez to take up the mantle of the cultural guardian like Big Mom. Alexie's female characters strongly resist the culturally and racially demeaning stereotypes and myths.

They strongly exercise their courage, intelligence, autonomy, and power to redefine themselves as twenty-first century women.

In reality, there are very few success stories of Indians in any field and the Native communities lack role models to follow and flourish. In the short story “The Only Traffic Signal On The Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore”, Victor refers to the need of iconic role models: “Indians need heroes to help them learn how to survive”(LRTFH 49). When it comes to women characters without doubt, Alexie has created an array of role models of resilient Indian women.

A close study of the resistance and resilience attitude of the fictional Spokane community members of Alexie reveals the abundance of resistance and the inadequacy of resistance. Alexie’s protagonists are very much aware of the mass media propagated poisonous colonial scripts that robs them off their cultural identity and their history. Neither the male protagonists Victor, Thomas, Jr. Polatkin, Arnold Jr. Jimmy, Jackson Jackson and so many other narrators are stoic Tonto and savage warrior, nor the female protagonist are squaw and papoose. These Spokane Indians are normal human being possessed with love, loath, anger sorrow, humour and pain along with their own eccentricities as in the case of Thomas and Fr. Duncan. They defy the pop culture narratives malicious propaganda.

They are very much aware of the mechanism of five centuries of colonization that has aimed at their psychological internalisation of oppressive images and ideologies in order to completely colonize their internal and external landscapes. Therefore, Alexei’s protagonists actively resist the notoriously racist and deeply humiliating stereotypes and myths by revisioning and totally rejecting anything and everything related to white. Apart from one are two cases they relentlessly refuse to internalise the oppressive images of the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism of the Euro-Americans which has ultimately resulted in their assimilation, “expect [for] particular cultural things and ceremonies” (Alexie 123). In spite of such a condition, it is amazing to note that they are very much

conscious of their Indian identity but unfortunately a negative identity. After five centuries of genocide, oppression, relocation and acculturation the Indian identity has been so fractured” (Alexie 145) that they are rendered devoid of an authentic identity.

For the Spokane Indian protagonist “being Indian was mostly about survival” (*IK* 101). They attribute all positive attitude of life to the white society. By rejecting life transforming attitudes, they indirectly adopt self-defeating attitudes like alcoholism and substance abuse to reduce the pain of their trauma prone life. Although their resistance is justifiable, their indiscriminate resistance holds their feet wedged to their past which subjects them to an ever dysfunctional mode.

Alexie’s protagonists inspite of their intelligence and power, adopt negative approach to life by failing to consider resilience to re-establish themselves and their community. By their indiscriminate resistance and unappeasable anger, generation after generation they replay the vanishing Indian myth and the drunken Indian stereotype which leads to their vanishment. Alexie’s protagonists ultimately re-enact the colonial dynamics which they otherwise despise. So, it becomes apparent that, apart from their socio-cultural, psychological issues their negative attitude, an all-consuming irrational resistance, in the absence of resilience forms the prime reason for their community’s dysfunction.

Sherman Alexie, a realist, who in the process of capturing the contemporary realities also presents role models for his community through the characters of Arnold, Marie and Corliss, who are resilient to redefine their identity. Arnold is the one who strongly resists the vanishing Indian myth by his determination to avoid alcohol and to succeed in the white world. He willingly adopts a multiple tribal identity to reaffirm his positive identity, which stands testimony for his resilience.

The female protagonist Corliss and Marie are equally resistive to colonial scripts that damage their self-esteem. Marie by her protest ceremonies against the falsification of

Indians and Indianness define her own individuality and Corliss on the other hand, refuses to conform to the fears and failures of her community. The ideal combination of resistance and resilience, in these three iconic characters of Alexie, to succeed and not to yield, breaks the negative cycle of reservation history and creates a new and promising history.