

Chapter I

Introduction

The spiders appeared suddenly

After that summer rainstorm.

...

The spiders disappeared suddenly

After that summer lighting storm.

Some people will insist the spiders were burned to ash

While others believe the spiders climbed the lightening bolts

And became a new constellation.

- Alexie, "The Summer of Black Widows"

The Native American or American Indian communities of the US are indigenous to the land, who are under oppression, suppression and colonization for the past five hundred years. The American Indians are not a single ethnic group based on their race. But they are diversified communities with, "over two thousand cultures" (Porter 42) and "five hundred languages"(Porter 42) in existence during the time of their contact with the European settlers. For the renowned Native scholar and critic, Vizenor, "natives are the very start of any history of the U. S." (178). In the process of the building of the nation USA, the European settlers subjected these Nativesto genocide.

The genocide carried out on these Natives is called as the *American Indian Holocaust*by the scholar critic Russel Thornton. To the greatest sorrow of the Natives, History has never acknowledged this genocide that which has resulted in a vast demographic disaster, reducing their population to just one percentage of the total population of the country. Even the remaining residual population of the Natives, all over the country, has been confined to reservations by their colonizers.They are also

subjected to irrevocable loss of land, language, culture and spirituality, as a result of innumerable disastrous policies carried out in the name of assimilation. The highly devastating contemporary issues and crisis of Native American communities are the products of five hundred years of colonization. So, it is apt to consider that Natives are people whose lives are defined by their history.

The contemporary Native societies are invariably plagued with five centuries of ongoing “domestic imperialism or internal colonialism” (Krupart 25) that has resulted in innumerable social crisis like alcoholism, poverty, violence, racism, unemployment, family dysfunction, illiteracy, suicide and cultural degeneration. The Native writers invariably address such social realities in their writings. For the past five hundred years of colonization, the writers of the diversified Native communities, with great responsibility have performed the function of the honest observer and cultural insider by recording and addressing the issues of their communities in order to bring about change and healing, and also their works are “quintessentially, political, addressing their persecutions and betrayals” (Petron 182) by their colonizers.

Native American literatures are dialogic texts that both reflect and shape Native identity and community while it also prioritizes land and sovereignty. The renowned critic Louis Owens considers Native novels to be a “local narratives of cultural continuity and recovery” (*Other Destinies* 22). For, such novels are actively engaged in the search for identity within the context of their community. Jace Weaver agrees with Owens and further asserts that “Native literatures are ultimately, quest for community” (161). Unlike the rugged individualism of the Western ideology, Native people find their individual identities in the collectivity of their community. For Native writers, the issue of communal voice is of vital importance and therefore their culture and community are represented with at most care. The work of literature is a means that colonized people

employ to assert their own existence and identity. Because, “Literature tells truths about the past that history cannot articulate” (Porter 39). The reason behind such conclusion is that the Native people are denied an authentic representation in the history written by their colonizers. Therefore, literature is one of the means of telling the truth about the past and history, especially when other means are inaccessible, for Native American communities. For Kelly Morgan, the “imaginative literature fiction and poetry – is a more accurate gauge of cultural realities than the ethnographic, anthropological, and historical record” (qtd. by Womack 15). Beyond dispute, this idea is strongly held by Native writers. Silko, believes in the stories of the Natives, because she avers, that is how “you know; that’s how you belong; that’s how you know you belong” (qtd. by Weaver 40). She adds “Story makes ... community” (qtd. by Weaver 40). The words of Vizenor, further reiterates the idea that “Native American Indian identities are created in stories” (*Manifest Manners* 56). In an interview with Billmoyer, Sherman Alexie the second generation writer of Native American Renaissance states that, “I believe in stories” (billmoeyers.com) rather than in any God. The literature is an important factor in the cultural survival of the culturally fragmented Native communities because it preserves and extends cultural knowledge and practices to forthcoming generations.

The traditional stories of the Native communities are communal. They belong to the people and define the people and their community as a whole. Because, the origin of these stories go back to the oral literature of their communities. Indian oral literature, due to the historical consequences, especially the last five hundred years of colonization, have undergone birth and rebirth numerous times on the American continent, but they still serve as a source of nourishment and the basis of Native American literature.

There are some marked distinctions that can be made between Native American and the mainstream American perspectives reflected in literature. Traditionally,

most Indian cultures believe in the sanctity of words. Either cast in poems or stories they are thought to possess a life and power independent of the narrator. Native American societies are matriarchal, nature oriented, non-hierarchical and spiritual. The idea of considering land as a property that could be possessed, expropriated, or alienated is foreign to Native communities. Their idea of time and life is more cyclic rather than a linear phenomenon. The most distinguishing aspect of Native culture is the “relationship of human beings to all other forms of existence in a vast web of cosmic interrelationship in which human stand at the bottom or on the periphery” (qtd. by Grassian 13).

The other significant perspective of the Native communities reflected in literature is that the heroes of the Western literature who exemplify rugged individualism, are a sharp contrast to the cultural heroes in traditional Native American literature who act to benefit the larger community by protecting them from destruction and providing them sustenance for life

According to Jace Weaver, the single most defining characteristic of Native literatures is its “sense of community and commitment to it” (43). He forms a portmanteau word “communitism” (Weaver 43) by joining community and commitment. For him, literature of Natives is basically communitism since, it has a proactive commitment to Native community, including the wider community. The role of communitism is to bring about healing to the Native communities that have been totally fractured and rendered dysfunctional by the erosion of five hundred years of colonization.

Therefore, the prime objective of any Native scholarship or intellectual work actively engages in the process of healing their community as well as the wider community. Author Sherman Alexie, who comes in the long line of Native writers is fully aware of his role, in the process of upholding his community’s priorities and actively contributing in the process of healing. He strongly believes that “The responsibility of

being an Indian writer are enormous” (Blewster 81). He aversthat, “everything I’m going to say is going to be directly influenced by my Indianness anyway” (Blewster 81).

The following pages consist analysis of the best of the best known writers of Native American Literature Renaissance, who address the cause of radical illness in the modern world and attempt to find a path to a regenerative life. The literature of Native American Writers in English dates back to early nineteenth century with large collections of autobiographies and oratories. Only few novels are published before Momaday’s *TheHouse Made of Dawn*. The history of Native American literature is often divided between works published before and after N. Scott Momaday’s *The House Made of Dawn* that is awarded Pulitzer Prize in the year 1969.

Momoday, a Navajo Indian is born in the year 1934. The novel *The House Made of Dawn* won the Pulitzer prize in the year 1969. With the publication of this novel it seems that floodgates have been opened and through them gushes out a huge number of books by Native authors, from various ethnicity and from leading publishing houses. Kenneth Lincoln refers to the period surrounding Momaday’s achievement as a Native American Renaissance. Momaday’s *TheHouse Made of Dawn*is followed by his other seminal work, *The Way to Rainy Mountain and Names*. His novels deal with ultimate human concerns like time, suffering, loss of power, loss of language and the reorientation to life through tradition rituals. The award winning *TheHouse Made of Dawn* deals with its hero’s attempts to achieve personal integration and healing through tribal rituals and community. The main axis of the novel is the community and the identity engendered by that community.

Momoday’s protagonist Abel in *The House Made of Dawn* represents the dislocation of psyche due to his experience in the Second World War. Already, a member of the often times dislocated Native community by the governmental policies for

assimilation, Abel suffers intense dislocation of the psyche and the resultant pain and suffering after his return from the war. “What makes Momoday’s novel so splendid, then, is his ability to provide not only a context for formidable suffering but to offer avenues for healing such suffering especially when this suffering is unparalleled in the annals of traditional mythologies” (Lundquist 56). For Gerald Vizenor, Momoday’s works are about “how to retain continuity with one’s cultural heritage though displaced from the community that sustains it. The very structure of these works express the dynamic by which the psyche internalizes the mythic, historical, and cultural components of identity” (*Manifest Manners* 78).

Vine Deloria is known for his prolific and voluminous nature of his work. He is the “most quoted” (Weaver 205) Native author by both Indians and Amer-Europeans. Deloria Jr. is considered a seminal thinker and writer of the Native resurgence. Deloria Jr. is a standing Rock Sioux from the Pine Ridge Reservation and he was born in 1933. He has been a professor of law, politics, and Native American studies at University of Arizona and University of Colorado. The most prominent work of Deloria Jr. is his first book *Custer Died for Your Sins* published in 1969. It is considered as a watershed event in Native political thinking and visibility to the dominant culture. With his style of irony, humor and biting satire, he attacks the Church, the government, stereotyped images of Indians and the culture of the white society in general.

Deloria in his book *God is Red*, addresses the humanity of Native people in a most appealing way. He has always been an uncompromising advocate of the humanity and culture of Indian peoples. The most obvious aspect of Deloria’s work is that it always indulges in exposing the superiority of Native culture over the dominant Euro-American society.

In his most recent book, *Red Earth, White Lies: Native American and The Myth of Scientific Fact*, Deloria attacks the Bearing Strait theory that reduces the status of Native

American as to settlers to the continent of North and South America. The necessity of this theory is to get themselves rid of the guilt of the theft of the American continent by placing the Natives too in the position of settlers from some other part of the world.

Leslie Marmon Silko is born in Albuquerque, New Mexico on 5 March 1948 raised at Laguna Pueblo. Novelist, poet, essayist, photographer, cinematographer, and in every case an ace storyteller. Leslie Marmon Silko is perhaps the most familiar and most often anthologized American Indian writer today, and her novel *Ceremony* (1977) is as widely recognized as any other contemporary American novel. In *Ceremony* as in all her other work to date, Silko's creative vision has been shaped in nearly equal measure by the land and by the variety of oral and written storytelling performances that are a part of her life growing up in Laguna Pueblo. Like her native Laguna, Silko's work is a study in cultural mediation and spirit transformation (Porter and Roemer 245). In *Other Destinies*, Louis Owens says of the *Ceremony*s: "Within her story of Tayo's journey toward wholeness and health, Silko – as did Momaday in *The House Made of Dawn* – conducts a healing ceremony for all of us, for the world at large" (Lundquist 71). *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) is "an epic work dealing with the prophecy that the conquering races in the Americas will so pollute the continent that the Native people will rise up to reclaim her" (Lundquist 79-80). Silko is recently named a Living Cultural Treasure by the New Mexico Humanities Council.

Vizenor is described by N. Scott Momaday as "the supreme ironist," (qtd. by Blaeser 257). The Anishinaabe author, Gerald Vizenor (1934) has devoted his career to upsetting the status quo, to deconstructing the term "Indian," to re-defining the mixed-blood, and to liberating the contemporary Native people, he identifies as post-Indian. Vizenor has developed ever-expanding theories of 'survivance' a term coined by Vizenor to describe survival and endurance in a comic mode. The author of more than thirty books in multiple genres including poetry, short fiction, the novel, autobiography,

journalism, the essay, as well as theory and criticism. Gerald Vizenor is widely recognised as a leading writer and scholar of Native literature, and an innovative author who has given trickster narrative a contemporary turn. Vizenor has seven novels to his credit and his masterpieces are *Darkness in St. Louis Bearheart* and *Heirs of Columbs*.

Louise Erdrich (born Karen Louise Erdrich, June 7, 1954), is an Ojibwe writer of novels, poetry, and children's books featuring Native American characters and settings. She is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, a band of the Anishinaabe (also known as Ojibwe and Chippewa). Erdrich is widely acclaimed as one of the most significant writers of the second wave of the Native American Renaissance. *Love Medicine* is Louise Erdrich's first novel and most critically acclaimed novel, published in 1984. The book explores 60 years in the lives of a small group of Chippewa living on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in North Dakota. *Love Medicine* won the 1984 National Book Critics Circle Award. *Tracks* is a novel by Louise Erdrich, published in 1988. It is the third in a tetralogy of novels beginning with *Love Medicine* that explores the interrelated lives of four Anishinaabe families living on an Indian reservation near the fictional town of Argus, North Dakota. Within the saga, *Tracks* is earliest chronologically, providing the back-story of several characters such as Lulu Lamartine and Marie Kashpaw who become prominent in the other novels.

Linda Hogan belongs to the Chickasaw community. To date, Linda Hogan has eleven books, one play, and numerous short stories and essays to her credit. Her novel *Mean Spirit* and a collection of her poetry *Book of Medicines* are both finalists for Pulitzer Prize awards. After writing her first book, *Calling Myself Home*, she continued to write poetry. Her work has both a historical and political focus, but it is lyrical. Her most recent books are *The Book of Medicines* (1993) and *Rounding the Human Corners* (2008). Her work centers on the world of Native people, from both her own indigenous perspective and that of others. Hogan is a person who "talks about the need to write about

the land, history, old stories, violence, and lost children to help readers develop a deeper understanding of the destruction and survival of Native families” (Vernon 2). At present, Hogan’s works are more profoundly understood in light of various contemporary theories like ecofeminism and ecocriticism.

Sherman Alexie Junior is an enrolled Spokane Indian. He is Spokane / Coeur d’ Alene, since his mother is a Spokane Indian and he is Coeur d’ Alene by his father’s ancestry. Both Spokane and Coeur d’ Alene are Salish people who belong to the Northwestern tribe of the U. S. They all speak the language of Salish. The Spokane Indian Reservation is the homeland of the Spokane tribe whose population is approximately “2,500” says Alexie to Tomson (Peterson 22). Alexie calls his tribe as the “Salmon people” (Peterson 22). They are fishermen tribe whose life, religion, and culture revolves around salmon.

Alexie is born on 7th October 1966, in the town of Wellpinit, in the Spokane Indian Reservation. Sherman Alexie Sr. is Alexie’s father who is a binge alcoholic. His mother who is also an alcoholic, undertakes menial jobs to raise her six children. Alexie is born with hydrocephalus head which is due to an abnormally large amount of cerebrospinal fluid in the cranial cavity. At six months of age he undergoes dangerous surgery to correct the hydrocephalus disorder. Baby Alexie is not expected to survive beyond two year of age. Doctors’ hope has been that even if he survives he would be a victim of a severe mental disorders. To everybody’s surprise, Alexie has survived, and he recalls “I was a test case” (Peterson 162). He remarks about himself with his trademark humour as, “American medical establishment’s indigenous Frankenstein monster” (Peterson 162).

Because of his extensive training in academic things as part of the therapy to train him out of his expected mental disabilities, Young Alexie becomes a voracious reader.

As a result of his physical abnormalities, he is ostracized by his peers on the rez which compels Alexie to take refuge in books. By the age of twelve he completes reading all the books in his Wellpinit School Library. He completes *Grapes of Wrath* when he is five years old and is so impressed with John Steinbeck that he goes on to read *Cannery Row*, “*Of Mice and Men*, *The Pearl*, and *The Red Pony*” (John and Carl Bellante 12-13). For Alexie, his early literary influences come from white writers – Steinbeck, Faulkner, Hemingway, Emily Dickinson, Stephen King and Walt Whitman. His mother is a strong advocate for mainstream education, who believes that education alone can empower her children to survive successfully.

Alexie is quite aware of his limited prospects at his reservation school education that only provides textbooks used by his own parents. Alexie arrives at the deliberate, bold, and wise decision to pursue education of the reservation from a school run for their kids in nearby Rearden. Although his initial experiences prove bitter amongst the white world, later it shapes his perspective both on the white world and on his reservation world.

After graduating from high school with honors, Alexie moves to college at Gonzaga University, a Jesuit school in Spokane, in 1985. He had a tough time in Gonzaga University because of the racist attitude of the whites in the Jesuit school. Alexie starts drinking at the age of nineteen and his habit worsens. He drops out of school after two years. He moves to Seattle and is employed as a busboy. On his twenty-fifth birthday, Alexie is robbed at knifepoint and returns to his reservation with a plan to change the course of his life. He joins Washington State University in the pre-medicine course but he could not withstand the requisite of human anatomy courses in the pre-medicine curriculum. He gets enrolled in American Studies in the same university. Alexie, also gets enrolled in a creative-writing course that would change his life. Originally he has

signed up for the course because it is the only one available during a specific time slot to fill after dropping out of an anatomy course. The creative writing professor, Alex Kuo, gave Alexie, a poetry anthology of works by Native American writers titled *Songs from this Earth on Turtle's Back: Contemporary American Indian Poetry*, edited by Joseph Bruchac.

It becomes a life changing, stunning experience for Alexie while he comes across a line by a Paiute poet Adrian Louis that says, "Oh Uncle Adrian, I'm in the reservation of my mind" (Peterson 25). On reading Adrian Louis, Alexie comes to term with his own internalization of oppressive thoughts because of which he himself has not understood his own potentials of writing poetry. Alexie's reaction is, "Oh my God, somebody understands me. At this moment I realized, I can do this!" (Peterson 25). His realization, that, his life experiences as an Indian in American culture in realistic terms too, has the prospects of being heard, provides an immense boost to Alexie, to write poetry at a prolific rate. Alexie later develops into a versatile artist who excels in the role of a poet, novelist, stand-up comedian, scriptwriter, and director.

His first volume of poetry that also consists of some prose pieces, *The Business of Fancy Dancing* is published by Hanging Loose Press in the year 1992. This year is a turning point in Alexie's life because he wins a prestigious National Endowment for the Arts fellowship for poetry and in the same year *New York Times Book Review* identifies Alexie as "one of the major lyric voice of our time" (qtd. by Grassian 3). This particular review has helped Alexie's trajectory to soar high.

His poems and novels are semi-autobiographical that expresses their innermost and frequently tormented feelings. Alexie's poems expose a complete range of human emotions like humour, pain and love. Grassian comments:

There is humor in the pathos and pathos in the humor; there is anger tempered by pride, as well as desperation and poverty tempered by humor and affection, just as it is often difficult to separate fact from fiction in Alexie's work, it is sometimes difficult to ascertain whether he is being serious or comic. It is not Alexie's intention to portray reservation Indians as helpless, poverty-stricken alcoholics, although many of his characters possess those characteristics. Rather Alexie portrays reservation Indians as battered ... who continuously struggle against the culture that stripped them of property, pride, and their indigenous culture. (16)

His first major book of fiction *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is published in 1993. The short story from this collection "This is What It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona" is selected for *The Best American Short Story* 1994. From his very first work he is identified as a "serious moral and ethical writer" (Grassian 56), committed to Native issues and to counteract Indian oppression. For Peterson, Alexie's works, "assumes the role of a vehement critic, calling attention to social and political problems on reservations" (xii).

Alexie publishes his first novel *Reservation Blues* in the year 1995 which receives the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award. This novel features some of the same characters as in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and it tells the story of Thomas Builds-The-Fire and his music band Coyote Springs. Scott Andrews in his article "A New Road and a Dead End in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues*" argues that in the novel the "Spokane Reservation residents reject Thomas' new road, despite the lack of opportunities provided by their 'old map', they enact what Vizenor calls the 'terminal creed,' static beliefs that, because of their changing nature, ensure the eventual emotional, cultural, or literal deaths of those who hold them" (236). He adds

“The novel ultimately re-enacts the colonial dynamic it otherwise exposes” (241). Alexie’s unflinching gaze at both the positive and the negative aspect of his culture, lays the distressing realities of the reservation life without idealization. The atmosphere of violence, alcoholism, and poverty that pervades his fictional Spokane community is generally condemned by his critics and especially Gloria Bird, a Spokane, in her article, “The Exaggeration of Despair in Sherman Alexie’s *Reservation Blues*” accuses the novel to be a “Portrait of an exaggerated version of reservation life. One that perpetuates many of the stereotypes of native people and presents problems for native and non-native readers alike” (189). Alexie is also condemned by Sean Kicummah Teuton in her essay “Building Cultural Knowledge in the Contemporary Native Novel” points out that Alexie “exposes the most troubling aspects of the American Indian World” in a “cultural vacuum” (Lewis 382). Few critics strongly disagree with Alexie for not pitching his stories in a strong Spokane culture. Teuton tersely questions Alexie “what right does Alexie have to share with general reader our most painful realities of poverty and social dysfunction?” (Lewis 382). Alexie’s response to not mooring in a specific Spokane culture is that, “aside from particular cultural things and ceremonies ... Indian culture is, by and large, pop culture” (Dellinger 123). For Alexie pop culture is the “cultural currency” (Fraser 92).

His response, for calling his work as “Chief Doom School of literature” (qtd. by Cox 47) by Louis Owens is “I write autobiographically... so what do I do in my literature? Do I portray the Indian world as I see it? And I do see it as doomed, ... Should I write the literature of hope no matter how I feel? No, I’m not hopeful. So how do you avoid victimization? We can’t. We are victims” (Nygren 146).

Though, strongly criticized by his critics, Alexie is also celebrated for his “complex sensibility simultaneously embracing the Indian way of life but with

nevertheless has been profoundly influenced by white American culture” (Bellante 3). In the year 1996 Alexie is selected as one of the twenty “Best young American Novelist” by Granta Magazine.

His next novel *Indian Killer* serves as a contrast to *Reservation Blues* which is gentle in its social criticism. *Indian Killer* is an uncompromising and terse narration of anger and violence. Alexie openly acknowledges that his own anger and dissatisfaction motivated the writing of the novel. Times Magazine calls Alexie “septic with his own appeasable anger” (qtd. by Grassian 104-105). The novel exposes the social problems and dysfunctions of the adopted Native children by white families that are tremendous. Still, Alexie claims that *Indian Killer* has been the hardest.

Alexie’s second collection of short stories *The Toughest Indian in the World* is published in the year 2001. This collection of short story differs from his first collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* in the way that it has moved from the reservation to the urban setup. It mainly focuses on the tension between whites and Indians in intimate relationship, and urban Indians and Indians on the reservation. Alexie wants to represent the Indians who live in urban areas because sixty percent of all Indians live in cities.

The Toughest Indian in the World is Alexie’s most critically acclaimed work since *Reservation Blues*. The Publishers Review remarks that the collection as “revealing him (Alexie) once again as a master of his craft” (Sybil Steinberg 352). In his article, “Indigenous Liaisons” Stephen F. Evans expresses that the conflicted issues of their Indianness like racial, spiritual and cultural essence and also their sexual and gender identities have “achieved a new level of thematic intensity and breadth of expression” (186). This collection of short story has won Alexie PEN / Malamud Award for Short Fiction in the year 2001.

Margaret O' Shaughnessey in her article "Sherman Alexie's Transformation of *Ten Little Indians*" mentions that "More to the point the stories in *Ten Little Indians* are less about what makes one distinctively Indian than being human and alive". She also calls them as 'redemption stories' where the characters are "forever saving someone, or at least making the attempt" (222). Alexie's *Ten Little Indians* is second collection of short stories on urban Indians which is published in the year 2003. He continues the exploration of urban Indians in the world. Unlike *The Toughest Indian in the World*, who are always obsessed with their Indian identity. The characters in the *Ten Little Indians* are more comfortable in a middle ground between Indian and white world.

In the year 2007, the novel *Flight* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* are published. Alexie receives the Western Literature Association's Distinguished Achievement Award for 2007. In the same year *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* wins the 2007 National Book Award for young adult literature. This novel also wins the 2008 American Indian Youth Literature Award from the American Indian Library Association.

Alexie has a huge audience both in the Native community and in the white society because of his subject matter that deals with the very ordinary protagonist and their day to day life and his choice of pop culture that serves as a bridge between the Native and white culture. He affirms that, "I'm a twenty-first-century Indian who believes in the twenty-first century" (Blewster 82). For Alexie, humour is the "most effective political tool" (West and M. West 70) and "a green card" (psawa.com).

Methodology:

The methodological approach of the research scholar incorporates a number of reading and research strategies borrowed from a variety of disciplines. The research scholar's preliminary research begins by reading a wide variety of contemporary Native

American literatures. At this point, the researcher is enabled to identify a commonality in particular subject matters produced by writers of Native American literature belonging to a diversified ethnicity, despite great differences in genre, other subject matters and intended audience. These common issues are the issues of alcoholism, poverty, the pain and the burden of a past history, cultural fragmentation, loss of identity and resistance to the ongoing “paracolonialism” (Porter 59). These commonalities are clearly due to the shared history among Natives, because of their colonization and conquest by Euro-Americans – a subject that is invariably addressed in each text.

The researcher’s next step is to choose the works of a single author, whose works mainly focuses on the subject matters, that has been identified ubiquitous in Native American Literature, for an indepth study, in order to clearly capture the contemporary predicaments of a Native community. A close reading of the critical works based on the chosen literary text and the author has further helped to enhance the researcher’s understanding of the context and subtext of the works. At this point of analysis, the researcher has been able to arrive at logical conclusions regarding chapter subdivisions and the applicability of critical theories, in order to further analyse the chosen text.

The next step is to limit the chosen author’s subject and texts for a more detailed analysis and to more clearly define the selected works by means of suitable critical theories. Since, pain is found inherent in the lives of the Natives in the select works, trauma theory has been considered for critical analysis for a better understanding for the working of trauma in the lives of the Natives in the chosen works. A close reading of the various kinds of trauma construct has been made to identify the right kind of trauma theory to suit the text in hand. The **historical trauma / intergenerational trauma / soulwound** has been identified as the relevant theory for the purpose to address the prolonged traumatization and the intergenerational transmission of trauma of the Natives’ Spokane community.

A detailed study of literature review of theoretical and analytical texts dealing with concepts of resistance and resilience has helped in providing a more focused theoretical framework for deeper analysis of the chosen text. The *Resistance Literature* of Barbara Harlow is used to analyse the resistance attitude of the Spokane community in the chosen work and likewise resilience theory from the field of psychology is used to evaluate the resilience attitude of the characters. The application of psychological resilience theory is considered more applicable to the chosen texts and therefore, psychological resilience as advanced by American Psychological Association is used to evaluate the resilience factor of the chosen text.

The researcher has also considered many other secondary materials, in addition to those listed in the literature review and works cited and also beyond those materials written by the authors themselves. The process also involves secondary materials written by Native and non-Native scholars and writers working in relevant area of study. These materials include biographies, book reviews, interviews, journals, articles, monographs, government reports and other critical analyses that have greatly helped to define and elucidate the key concepts of the researcher.

Uniqueness of the Study:

This research work is unique because of its homogeneous approach in the analysis of the select works of Alexie. Thread bare analysis of three major domains of the life of Native people – the socio-cultural, the psychological and the political are made. The chapters that discuss the trauma and the resistance and resilience of the Spokane community are critically examined with the application of theories concerned from the field of psychiatry and psychology, in order to prove the objective of the research. In the choice of theories, the application of historical trauma theory, which belongs to the discipline of behavioural science to literary work, is quite a rare phenomenon. The elaborate application of this theory, exclusively to the works of Alexie and that too for

two of his novels and short story collections makes it still more unique. So far, the application of **trauma theory** to analyse the works of Alexie, restricts to single text and especially, his short story collections have not been analysed under trauma theory so far.

The researcher has also identified that the application of **historical trauma theory**, a product of behavioural science, to literary text proves mutually complimentary. Because it justifies the trauma of the Spokane people, captured in the works of Alexie to be historical/intergenerational trauma beyond doubt and likewise the validity and the applicability of a psychological theory in the field of literature. Likewise, **resilience theory** too is from the field of psychology. Usually, Native American literature is analysed within the framework of cultural resilience but this research strives to analyse the works of Sherman Alexie under the lens of psychological resilience theory. This again proves the validity of a psychological theory in the field of literature. The application of three unique and essential theories to critically evaluate the select works of Alexie, tremendously reveal the numerous factors that operate behind the process of dysfunction and stasis of the Spokane community.

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis of the research are:

- The contemporary socio-cultural and political issues that culminate in the dysfunction and stasis of the Spokane community forms the overarching themes of Alexie's works.
- The genocidal history along with the colonisation and assimilation policies have attributed to the soul wound or historical trauma or intergenerational trauma of the community that persists into the present and whose influences are both devastating and eternal.

- The community exhibits strong resistance against the established white myths but the resilience attitude is comparatively minimal to resistance that accounts for its lack of revitalization.

Objectives:

The objectives of the studies are:

- To critically probe the Spokane community from multiple perspectives in select works of Sherman Alexie.
- To analyze the factors that contributes to the generational dysfunction of Alexie's Spokane community.
- To theoretically unravel the historical trauma dimension of the Spokane community.
- To explore and understand the Native's resistance through re-visioning Native history and revisioning of popular culture myth.
- To detect and evaluate the resilience factor of the community.

Primary Text:

The primary texts chosen for the study are:

- *The Lone Ranger and the Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven* (1993) (Short Story Collection)
- *Indian Killer* (1996) (Novel)
- *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) (Novel)
- *Blasphemy* (2009) (Short Story Collection)

From the huge oeuvre of Alexie, the researcher has chosen these novels and short story collections because:

- The underlying themes of these stories irrespective of genre – short story and novel – effectively reveal and critique the Native American life world with its dysfunctional mode and rebellious hues.
- These select works viewed in its entirety presents an excellent example of the full evolution of the writer from an angry young man with a main focus on single ethnicity to a compassionate human being embracing multiple tribal identities.
- The delineation of the contemporary Native American experience discussed in these works very well serves to justify the main objectives of this research.

Theories Applied:

Trauma Theory:

- Caruth, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. Print.
- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 3rd ed. Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1980. Print.

Historical Trauma Theory:

- Brave Heart, M. Y. H. “The Historical Trauma Response among Natives and Relationship with the Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration.” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 35.1 (2003): 7-13. Print.

Resistance Theory:

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Documentation:

- The methodology advocated by *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Seventh Edition* has been followed closely for the purpose of Documentation and Citation.

Structure of the Thesis:

The present study is divided into five chapters namely:

- Chapter I – Introduction
- Chapter II – Spokanes’ Life = Social Issues x Dysfunction
- Chapter III – The Nexus of History and Hysteria: The Historical Trauma Matrix
- Chapter IV – Muting Mainstream Myths: The Resistance and Resilience Vortex
- Chapter V – Conclusion

After introducing in chapter I, the second chapter entitled “**Spokanes’ Life = Social Issues x Dysfunction**” focuses on the three major issues – alcoholism, poverty and racism of the Spokane community in the select works of Alexie. These major social issues are “nightmares” and “everyday reality” (*LRTFH* 6) of the community that plague their community, ever since their colonisation.

The issue of alcoholism is the most predominant trait of Alexie's Spokane community and Alexie presents a candid snapshot of the legacy of alcoholism in the Spokane reservation. Alexie uncompromisingly captures the debilitating effect of alcoholism which results in untoward violence and death, poverty ridden families, destruction of the promising younger generation and the resultant disillusionment and despondency in the lives of the members of the Spokane community both in his novels and short story collections.

Though Alexie is strongly criticized for his drunken Indian stereotypes, the data of centre for Disease Control and Prevention proves that "the 2001-2005 age adjusted alcoholism mortality rate for Native Americans is approximately three times the rate for the U. S. population as a whole" (qtd. by Wahpeconiah 40).

Any portrait of contemporary American indigenous life cannot miss the Indian poverty because "The worst poverty in North America exists among American Indians and that poverty is a source of other socially destructive problems in Native communities" (qtd. by Teuton 381). Alexie's Spokane reservation is an "American third-world reservation" (*LTRFH* xiii) where poverty manifests itself from hunger and pangs, vodka and whiskey on empty stomachs, HUD houses, trailer houses, penniless Christmas on individual level and at public level, it is obvious in the too poorly funded educational system, and Indian Healthcare Services, Commodity Food Supplies, BIA and Tribal Council. The support extended by the federal government is not actual relief measures but "gestures of care for those colonial wounds" (Teuton 383). Such bleak economic conditions accompany social problems such as health problems, criminality, domestic violence, alcoholism, etc. Alexie also underscores that the sickening poverty forms the reason for the absence of heroes in Native communities "to help them learn how to survive" (*LTRFH* 49).

The Racial discrimination is an unavoidable ordeal for the domestically colonised Spokane community and it has a major impact on all aspect of their life including their general psyche. Alexie explores the persistent impact of racial prejudices and discriminations in his works through a panorama of racism, from internalised racism to institutionalised racism. In his works he also captures the all-pervading institutionalised racism followed by the white government in all governmental institutions established to support the Native community. As a result, racial bias runs deep in the judicial system and police force. There are numerous examples for such biased officials throughout his works like the BIA judge in the “Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire”, the troopers, and many police officials of the Seattle police force in *Indian Killer*.

Moreover, the Natives are also victims of racist nick names and jokes. As a result, the already marginalised and victimised people remain totally helpless with no one around to help them even at the worst of situations.

Alcoholism, poverty and racism are not Spokane community’s cultural value, but are the consequences of 500 years of colonisation that has totally thwarted the community to the edge of despair. This has made them dysfunctional and static. Progress and prosperity are beyond the Spokane community’s reach as well as the effects of the ongoing domestic colonisation are beyond their control which sets them forever in the process of waning and vanishing.

The third chapter entitled “**The Nexus of History and Hysteria: Historical Trauma Matrix**”, explores Alexie’s Spokane community’s inherent trauma and its impact making use of historical trauma theory.

The Native American communities are considered as the survivors of the more extreme traumatisations because they have come through five centuries of genocide and forced assimilation. Alexie’s Indian characters have endured policies that exactly fit the

legal description of genocide, including the residential boarding school programs, the systematic removal of Indian children from their tribes in the name of adoption, relocations, termination, reservations, forced sterilization of Indian women and many more atrocities, that have systematically reduced their population and ravaged their culture, along with systematic disintegration of the social and economic structure of the community.

Alexie who “protests against the colonizing forces that devastate Native people across the America” (Peterson xiv) proclaims genocide and Holocaust as a part of Native history, and brings to spotlight the impact of these assimilation policies in multiple contexts. In all his works, he discusses the festering wounds of the Spokane community: the trauma of the stolen generation, the absent fathers, and maladaptive social behaviours. Alexie discusses all these factors that have resulted in the attrition of the social and cultural fabric of the community.

This chapter also captures the myriad shades of the pain of the historical trauma that manifest itself through maladaptive social behaviours, learned helplessness, family violence, community violence, the issue of missing fathers and family dysfunction.

The unhealed soul wound / intergenerational trauma of Alexie’s Spokane community leads to its dysfunction and stasis, which in turn results in endless trauma of socio-cultural disorders. Hence, trauma is a vicious circle of hopelessness and despair that holds back Alexie’s heroes forever in the disillusioned past.

The fourth chapter entitled “**Muting Main Stream Myths: The Resistance and Resilience Vortex**” focuses on the resistance exhibited by Alexie’s characters towards the history narrated by the hegemonic white society as well as stereotypes imposed upon them by the whites. In his novels, Alexie revises the great mainstream myth “to save the soul of the Natives” (qtd. by Erico 18), from native’s point of view. Through his works,

Alexie bust open many popular culture myths – the smallpox myth, the Thanksgiving myth, the Columbus myth and many more – in order to underscore the apocalypse brought up on the Natives in the name of civilization and Christianity.

A Native American who is “a one dimensional static product of the US imagination” (Tatonetti 14), is nothing more than a stereotype of a noble savage or the vanishing Indian of the past. Alexie’s fictional characters of the Spokane community totally resist these degrading images that in no way reflect them. According to Fanon, “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it” (Weaver 19). Alexie’s protagonists are quite aware of the mechanism of devaluing the pre-colonial history by their colonizers, who aim at inducing “autogenocide” (qtd. by Weaver 20) or internalization of oppressive images. In spite of the malicious propaganda of the colonial narratives, these Spokane characters are very much conscious of their Indian identity. But the Indian identity they are aware of is, an identity imposed upon them by a prolonged oppressive colonial rule. Alexie’s Spokane protagonists embrace pain and defeat as their authentic identity and strongly adhere to it. In their rage and hatredness to their colonizers, they totally reject all positive and life changing resilient qualities, since they have always identified these qualities with their colonizers. So, their irrational resistance defeat them in the end. While majority of Alexie’s characters exhibit resistance, unfortunately only few are resilient to fight back and to venture into future.

Alexie, a cultural insider, who wants his community to give up such reservations of their mind, create highly resilient characters – Arnold Jr., Marie Polatkin and Corliss – to serve as a contrast to the self-defeating characters who confine themselves only to resistance. These three protagonist adopt the resilience formula, prescribed by Alexie,

Survival = anger x imagination and successfully emerge out as highly individualist personalities who defy the vanishing Indian myth.

The final chapter entitled “**Conclusion**” proves that Alexie’s Spokane community is plagued by the socio-cultural issues that have rendered it socially dysfunctional and static. They do not have counsellors, mentors and redeemers to save them out of their despair. The historical trauma that has never been healed, reign over Alexie’s characters which form the root cause of all their social and psychological issues. There is no revitalisation or rehabilitation for the members of the community by the federal government which proves their disfranchised condition under “paracolonialism” (Porter 59).

According to Alexie, the process of healing that could bring rehabilitation and revitalization, involves three vital steps: the disowning of alcohol, forgiving their colonizers and empowerment through education. His primary message, to his community through his alcoholic characters, is to sober up first by self-realisation and self-efforts and hamper the process of self-extinction.

His works also insists on forgiving, in order to jettison the rage and hatredness against their colonizers. Because, psychologically, forgiveness is also a best coping strategy that helps in reducing stressful reaction to irrevocable damages. Forgiveness may certainly pave the way for their healing which concomitantly help them adopt to positive life experiences that they have been resisting so far since, they associate these positive qualities with their ever flourishing colonizers. Alexie, in one of his interviews with Nygren, points out the denial of the genocide and the unapologetic nature of the U.S. towards the Natives and believes, unless that colonizers seek apology to the Natives, there is no hope of forgiveness from the colonized.

Alexie believes that education can serve as a miraculous tool of empowerment for his Spokane community. Because education can provide them with all the powers that could help re-define their identity, liberate them from their internalised oppression and open the gates of endless opportunities and material success, which is highly essential for the community to progress and thrive.

Alexie may produce a negative picture of the Spokane community but he only reflects the unfortunate reality. His artistic intensions to refashion his works on realistic model of his community is to address all the evils of his community. He strongly addresses these evils in order to bring about awareness, and caution the Native community from vanishing.

Racial prejudices find expression in stereotypes, ethnic slurs, political myths and proverbs. One such myth is the vanishing Indian myth that has been conceived during the conquest of the American continent and building of the so called nation the U. S. This myth is a variant of the proverb that expresses the slanderous views concerning Native Americans “The only good Indian is a dead Indian” (qtd. by Mieder 41). This slur is first used by General Sheridan during the Indian wars in the late eighteenth century. Similar sentiments reverberate throughout history which means “either complete assimilation or total annihilation of the American Indians” (Wahpeconiah 36). The proverb in blunt words means a warning or an order that forces the Natives to change their way and to assimilate them into the main stream white population. White policy makers have done little to promote the former but, everything to ensure the latter. Millions and millions of Natives have been killed and the survivors are driven into useless reservations. Therefore, from the beginning the white settlers consciously desired the literal vanishment of the Native Americans by execution or by assimilation. It is alarming that the myth of the vanishing Indian still holds its currency.

The ideology of vanishing Indian aptly suits the case of the protagonists of Sherman Alexie's fictional Spokane community. The crucial difference being that white people no longer have to shoot or hang the Natives, but still either by choice or by chance they are destined to vanish at the face of total dysfunction and stasis, even at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Hence, this research tries to analyze the various factors – the socio-cultural issues, the historical trauma matrix and the resistance and resilience vortex – that contribute to the generational dysfunction which forever makes Alexie's Spokane Indian protagonists to enact the role of **Vanishing Indian**.