

Chapter II

Spokanes' Life = Social Issues x Dysfunction

Sometimes, father, you and I
 Are like a three-legged horse
 Who can't get across the finish line
 No matter how hard he tries and tries and tries

- Alexie, *Reservation Blues*

Alexie has enlightened the world at large about the contemporary American Indian experience with his honest and humorous character studies of modern tribal life, both inside and outside the reservation. Whether cast in poetry or prose, his works have offered a devastating and deeply human portrait of contemporary Indian life and are based on history and personal experiences crafted by imagination to perfection.

Of the four works, taken for the research the short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and the young adult novel *The Absolute True Diary of the Part-Time Indian* are more focused on the reservation life whereas the focus is on the urban life in the novel *Indian Killer* and the latest publication of short story collection *Blasphemy* which is a combination of Alexie's earlier stories focusing on both the reservation and urban life and new stories with a main focus on urban life of the Spokane Indians. His works are mainly concerned with the social issues of the Spokane Indians residing in and out of the Spokane reservation.

The author's works detail with dark humour, the debilitating influence of alcohol and substance abuse, abject poverty, unemployment, violence, inferior education, inter-racial marriages, misplaced adoptions, predicament of the mixed-blood, racial discrimination and the ordeal or search for identity. His works that of the early period of his career has focused much on the reservation life and later with his shift to Seattle his works focus on the urban life of the Spokane community in Seattle,

because his art is nothing but the product of his personal experiences crafted to perfection by imagination. In both the cases the social problems faced by the Indians are almost the same except for the variation in intensity of certain social issues peculiar to the locale.

Before venturing into the more complicated issues of intergenerational trauma and identity crisis of the Spokane Indians it is inevitable to understand the devastating issues, of the contemporary Spokane Indian society, that are the direct influence of five decades of colonization, oppression and marginalization. The community's tragic history forms the root of the complicated social issues like trauma, and identity crisis as well as other social issues like alcoholism, poverty, violence, racial discrimination that forms part and parcel of everyday life. Altogether these issues have resulted in total dysfunction and stasis of the community at all levels. The four major social issues – alcohol and substance abuse, poverty, violence and racial discriminations are being analyzed in this chapter for a better understanding of the contemporary social issues faced by the Spokane community. Since violence is intrinsic to alcohol and racism, it is not dealt separately, as alcohol, poverty and racial discrimination are dealt separately.

Of all the socio-cultural issues, alcoholism is the most predominant and it is considered as the trademark trait of any Indian irrespective of the numerous ethnic groups of Indians. The Spokane community of Alexi belongs to the North West region of the US and it stands as a typical example for an alcoholic community. In this community almost ninety percentage of the population is drunkard, irrespective of age and sex. This chapter captures the debilitating effect of alcoholism which results in untoward violence and death, poverty ridden families, destruction of promising younger generation in both the field of education and sports and the resultant disillusionment and despondency in their lives.

Alexie is very much condemned and criticized for his alcohol soaked stories and the multitude of drunkards by many critics and his own Native community for

producing the drunkard stereotype desired by the white society. The author strongly denies the accusation, “No. I’m not. The idea of the drunken Indian is not a stereotype—it’s a damp reality. I just try to write what I see and what I know” (Peterson 159). He adds the denial of truth infuriates him, according to him those who deny the fact are either drunk or lying or romantic fools. The problem of alcoholism did not miss Alexie’s own family for he “grew up in a family of alcoholics- my mother, my father, my brother, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, family dog, spider roaming around the house with whiskey” (Peterson 161) says Alexie.

The historical fact about alcoholism is that

In areas north of what are now the states of Arizona and New Mexico there were no significant traditions of fermented or distilled beverages before European contact, and alcohols effect were largely unknown throughout much of North America. Thus the indigenous people of North America in the early days of European contact had no role models for drinking behavior, nor did they have mechanisms for dealing with the negative consequence of drinking. Alcohol was also used as a diplomatic and economic tool between Europeans and Indians.

(Wahpeconiah 40)

His first collection of short stories *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is soaked up in alcohol since Alexie himself has been a binge drunkard during those years. He resolved to sobriety when Hanging Loose Press, agreed to publish a collection of his poetry *The Business of Fancy Dancing* in 1992. His work run the gamut of human emotions: from drunken rage to playful humour and biting sarcasm, despondency and disillusionment, family relationships and tribal affinity.

The first story “Every Little Hurricane” of the collection *The Lone Ranger* serves as a candid snap for the alcohol soaked reservation life. The story highlights numerous elements that constitute the rez life. Hunger, violence and alcoholism are

the Holy trinity that is all pervading in the reservation. Victor's family is the host of the largest New Year's Eve party in the tribal history.

The entire gathering has drunk and the atmosphere is charged with undefined fury. Arnold and Adolph engage in grappling with each other in their wild fury under the influence of heavy drinking. Everybody smelled alcohol, sweat and cigarettes. Victor, the small boy is the witness of this turbulent weather caused by alcoholics of his community. He is knocked out of his bed by this tumultuous party in the first floor. He helplessly watches his uncles' vehement fight with each other and the senseless activities in which the other Indians are involved in. He feels shocked, helpless, lonely and scared. His parents are of no use. The scared child searches his parents for comfort but finds them already passed out on their bed.

His mother and father breathed deep, nearly choking alcoholic snores. They were sweating although the room was cold, and victory thought the alcohol seeping through their skin might get him drunk, might help him sleep. He kissed his mother's neck, tasted the salt and whiskey. He kissed his father's forearm, tasted the cheap beer and smoke. (*LRTFH* 9)

"Every Little Hurricane" clearly captures the pain and despondency of growing up in an alcoholic family on a reservation filled with alcoholics.

Growing up in an alcoholic reservation not only results in acute mental depression and shock, it also makes them follow the members of their community and they are naturally initiated into alcohol at a very early age. The community is alcoholic irrespective of age and sex which devastates their future. The already despondent condition of the rez had been worsened by the devastation caused by alcohol on promising young people of the rez.

The narrator Victor, of "The only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore" is a former basketball player unable to realize his basketball dreams. He is skeptic of the most promising reservation basketball hero Julius Wind

maker. Because, “There’s a definite history of reservation heroes who never finish high School, who never finish basketball seasons. Hell, there’s been one or two guys who played just a few minutes of one game, just enough to show what they could have been” (*LRTFH* 47). The reservation heroes are defeated down by one or other reasons like alcoholism, poverty and diabetics to which the American Indians are prone to. Of all the causes’ alcohol forms the prime reason for the devastation.

According to Victor, the reservation hero is remembered forever and in fact their status grew over the years as the stories are told and retold, whereas white society do not even remember the names of their dog that has saved entire families from house fire by barking. It hurts to lose any of them because the Native society looks at ball players as saviors. The rez desperately longs for a champion player hoping for its empowerment. But the sad story is that ball players fall prey to alcoholism and do not even finish their high school. In an interview Alexi states that star ball players of the reservation never find a place in first class basketball team because the young champs of rez never attended “college” (John and Carl Bellante 9) which provided players the opportunity to exhibit their talents to move further to flourish. Julius Windmaker the latest of the long line of reservation heroes, who is also good academically, unfortunately, falls prey to steruo. He loses his grace and gift of a champion player because of addiction.

The case of Eugene is also similar to Julius Wind maker. Eugene, the uncle of Arnold Spirit, in *The Diary* is considered a legend in basketball but he could never make it to the national team, because of his addiction. Beyond dispute, the reason for Eugene’s failure to flourish is his addiction to alcohol that naturally damaged his skills in the game as well as doomed his academic potentials to a collegiate education. Alexie in one of his interview, as mentioned above recalls how lack of college education devastated the prosperities of star player of the rez.

Not only Julius Windmaker’s deterioration due to addiction is sad his involvement in vandalism and the consequent arrest by the tribal cops is more

disappointing. The case of Julius Windmaker can be considered as an example for the devastating consequences brought about by alcoholism on the promising younger generation of the Indian community.

The hero, Victor of “All I Wanted To Do Was Dance” is a drunkard and an insomniac who always believes that one more beer could bring about all desired changes in the despondent rez life:

He thought one more beer could save the world. One more beer and every chair would be comfortable. One more beer and the light bulb in the bathroom would never burn out. One more beer and he would love her forever. One more beer and he would sign any treaty for her. (*LRTFH* 88)

He is a randomly employed blue collar employee whose addiction worsens after his white wife leaves him. She leaves him in the hope that their separation would bring about changes in him but he turns into a binge drunkard unaware of his own whereabouts and deeds. “He was drunk bruised by whiskey, brutal” (*LRTFH* 84). Alcohol is his daily dose of hope and courage and “he poured vodka into his cup before the coffee was finished brewing” (*LRTFH* 87). His perception of life is “Nothing more hopeless than a sober Indian” (*LRTFH* 87) which proves the hopeless condition of the reservation life.

For Victor, memories familiar and beautiful are inseparable from the flavor of alcohol. His sweet memories are of a powwow when he was a young boy along with his drunken parents and the entire drunken community that staggered under the influence of alcohol. For the Spokane community “this other kind of dancing was noting new” (*LRTFH* 88).

“Amusement” captures the detesting picture of a drunken Indians amidst the whites who frown upon the drunkard stereotypes. Dirty Joe, whose face is full of scars resembling that of a warrior is actually not a warrior. His scars are evidence of the battles he fought in the Indian bars for booze. Once, Dirty Joe has completely

passed out on the ground of a carnival who is accompanied by Victor, and his girlfriend Sadie. They both carry him, to get rid of him, by putting him in a rollercoaster by convincing the clerk. The funny sight of Dirty Joe, whose head rolled from side to side back and forth in the roller coaster, provokes too much laughter and contempt from the onlookers. Victor and Sadie who have played the practical joke on Dirty Joe are thrown an accusative sight by the people around which made them quit the place. Things turn worse when the unconscious drunkard regains consciousness from the roller coaster. Dirty Joe is considered to be a typical stereotype of a “stinky drunk” (*ATDPI* 70) Indian.

The nameless narrator of “Jesus Christ’s Half-Brother Is Alive And Well On The Spokane Indian Reservation” is a lonely youngster and an unemployed drunkard. He is accidently thrust with the responsibility of a newborn baby of Rosemary Morning Dove and Frank Many Horses, who die in a fire accident. The narrator has nothing to do except to get drunk and while away time with other drunkard friends. The only other activity he is engaged is playing basketball like many of Alexie’s heroes. Baby James is not normal. He never cried, moved or made noise. The narrator took good care of the baby and developed a tender relationship with the abnormal child. He took James for regular checkups and doctors said that his physical development is slow but that is normal for an Indian child. One night the narrator is too intoxicated to remember that James has been left in somebody’s house. He is arrested by the tribal police for abandonment.

He resides in an alcohol asylum for a month with James and resolves to be sober for the rest of his life. “Everyday I’m trying not to drink and I pray but I don’t know who I’m praying to and it’s the basketball gathering ash on the shelf or the blank wall crushing me into the house or the television that only picks up public channels” (*LRTFH* 125). But for the sake of baby James, he is successful in maintaining his sobriety.

The narrator is a natural victim to alcohol in an alcoholic reservation devoid of saviors and role models. He feels painful whenever he thinks of the worst choice of choosing alcohol for life which multiplied to the already existing disillusionment of life in rez. “At those moments I want to drink so bad that it aches and I cry which is a strange noise...for something” (*LRTFH* 126).

The nameless narrator is one of the heroes of Alexie who has come to term with the reality of life by his own sense of discretion. It is very painful to understand the impairment brought about by alcohol to the already eroded Native community by the colonizers. He doesn't want his fellow men to surrender to alcohol as a means of escapism. His heart ached when he found Lester Falls Apart “lying drunk as a skunk” (*LRTFH* 126) in front of the Trading Post. He tries to pick him up and says “you got to stand up on you own” (*LRTFH* 126). This could be considered as the message that Alexie wants to communicate to his community. He wants them to “sober up” first before anything else.

Samuel Builds-The-Fire of “A Train is an Order of Occurrence Designed to Lead to Some Result” is a gentle elderly teetotaler, the grandfather of Tomas Builds-The-Fire, the story teller of the reservation community. He is forced into addiction by the changing economic conditions. After his grown up children have left him alone Samuel is bereft of economical support and company for life. All his friends are dead and the younger generation has no time for stories. Hence, Samuel shifts to Spokane, the only town in the reservation, in search of a job. He secures a job of a maid in a motel with a meager income with which he is happy. Samuel is a traditional man who cherishes the tribal values:

Samuel had always thought alcohol would corrupt his stories, render them useless, flat. He knew his stories had the power to teach, to show how this life should be lived. He would often tell his children and their friends, and then his grandchildren and their friends, these stories which could make their world into something

better. At the very least, he could tell funny stories that would make each day less painful. (*LRTFH* 134)

Samuel is dissatisfied with his manager for renting rooms for drug dealers and prostitutes. When he comes across Indian women working as prostitute he is hurt. He sees his own daughter's face in the faces of the prostitutes. On paydays he gives the Indian prostitutes a little money. "Don't work today", he would say just for today" (*LRTFH* 136). His gift of storytelling leaves him and never returns, after his painful encounter with the death of a young Indian boy in the motel room due to drug overdose.

Samuel Builds-The-Fire's tribal values are put to test by the unexpected economic regression. The compassionate and dignified Samuel Builds-The-Fire could not withstand the sudden disillusionment and surrenders to alcohol. It is the most ironic change in the life of the old man who has never drunk. "All his life he had watched his brothers and sisters, most of his tribe, fall into alcoholism and surrendered dreams" (*LRTFH* 133). But he has always abstained himself from alcohol. When the old Samuel is fired out from his job he finds himself for the first time in a bar. Samuel's unfamiliarity with alcohol seems ironic to the bartender because alcoholism and Indians are synonymous. The world identifies an Indian with the drunken Indian stereotype. The bartender laughs and laughs and Samuel feels embarrassed of his helpless condition. The bartender wants to call the local newspaper for the coverage. And now, Samuel understands how it all begins. "With each glass of beer, Samuel gained a few ounces of Wisdom, courage. But after a while he began to understand too much about fear and failure, too" (*LRTFH* 134).

After his first drink Samuel feels that he has come to an epiphany. He does not realize that it's a misguided epiphany. Beaten down by the world and alcohol old Samuel falls face down on a train track while the train fast approaches. "Alexie does not sugarcoat the ending, leaving the reader with idea that there are many Indians like

Samuel, who selflessly want to improve the condition on the reservation but are ultimately unsuccessful casualties of mass apathy and despondency” (Grassian 64).

In “The Lone Ranger And The Tonto Fist Fight In Heaven” incompatibility between Victor and his white girl friend widens because of his addiction to alcohol. They live in the city of Seattle and he is a blue collar employee. Often they fight with each other and she accuses him for his alcoholism: “You’re just like your brother,” she’d yell. Drunk all the time and stupid” (*LRTFH* 185).

The Victor leaves the city to his rez while he feels unsafe and homeless in the city. After a few month of break from his own insecurities he gets back into employment at the high school exchange program. Ever since, he has been on the wagon. The narrator is a victim of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and caused by colonial oppression. He has surrendered to alcohol to escape from reality. But, as the narrator of “Jesus Christ’s Half-Brother Is Alive And Well On The Spokane Indian Reservation” this narrator too has his epiphany for good.

The most unfamiliar form of addiction has been highlighted in “Family Portrait”. The fact that addiction is not restricted to adults but everyone irrespective of age has access to intoxication in strange ways in a reservation is really shocking. They discover strange forms of intoxication ignoring the danger that surrounds it. This short story is a recollection of childhood memories by the narrator. While he articulates the memories of his siblings he recollects, “Then there was the summer of sniffing gas. My sisters bent their heads at impossible angles to reach the gas tank of BIA vehicles. Everything so bright and precise, it hurts the brain” (*LRTFH* 195). His brother presses his mouth tightly to the mouth of the gas tank of the lawnmower and this “strange kiss” is for intoxication. Despite the “Warning: Intentional misuse by deliberately concentrating and inhaling the contents can be harmful or fatal” (*LRTFH* 196). These little addicts misuse all health hazards to intoxicate themselves. One more strange form of addiction is found in “Indian Education” while the narrator’s cousin Steven Ford a boy of fifth grade sniffs rubber cement from paper bag to get

intoxicated. The reason for “these sweet, almost innocent choices that the Indian boys were forced to make” (*LRTFH* 175) would be seen elaborately in the II chapter that deals with Trauma. Victor, Junior and Thomas Builds-The-Fire whom Alexie calls “The Trinity” recurrently appear in his works. These stories cover their life span from childhood to adulthood. While Thomas Builds-The-Fire is a teetotaler Victor and Junior are alcoholics from their childhood. In the story of “This is What It Means to Say Phoenix Arizona” Victor recollects his violence against his friend Thomas Builds-The-Fire when they were in their teenage under the influence of alcohol. In *The Diary* Arnold Spirit’s friend Rowdy known for his violent nature is an occasional alcoholic at an early age of fourteen though not a drunkard.

Junior Polatkin in “Wild West Show” is a student of Gonzaga University in Spokane, “who always had to wake up, stagger from bed and make his way to his class” (*LRTFH* 232). He is remarked by his girl friend “I’ve seen you before. At parties and stuff. You seem to drink a lot” (*LRTFH* 237). Especially for the Natives, who are away from the reservation, the racist attitude of the white society compels them to take refuge in alcohol. And therefore they unfortunately become the drunken Indian stereotype. Drunkard Junior is another stereotype to the eyes of the white world.

In “The Drug Called Tradition” Victor, Junior and Thomas Builds-The-Fire seek the help of a “brand new drug” motivated by the desire to have vision which is considered as part of their tradition. They do not obtain the vision that they intended for but just receive drug induced delusion.

In “Cry Cry Cry” the fancy dancer and drug dealer Junior uses drugs for agility and power to perform his war-dance in powwows. To make his war-dance more traditional Junior seeks the help of drugs. He makes use of a wide range of drugs like speed, crack and meth to induce power to his performance but power of drugs promotes him to a drug dealer from drug abuser. Also his crimes end him up in

jail where the situation turns worse. It is ironical that in these two stories where the characters are more concerned with tradition seek the help of drugs to be traditional.

For Jackson Jackson of “What You Pawn I will Redeem” booze is “a bottle of fortified courage” and “bottle of imagination” (*Blasphemy* 443). He is a Spokane Indian, drunkard and homeless on the streets of Seattle who has set himself on the mission of redeeming his grandmother’s powwow regalia for nine hundred and ninety dollars within twenty-four hours time as dead line set by the pawnshop owner. Jackson Jackson very wise in arguments and tribal in attitude is one more admirable character of Alexie’s bunch. The admirable Jackson has “worked various blue and bluer- collar jobs” (*Blasphemy* 437). He has always held his “bottle of fortified courage” as a good friend all through his life. A philanthropist heavily influenced by potlatch culture of the plateaus makes genuine attempts at earning the sum required. Though totally unsuccessful in his attempts the powwow regalia, is handed out to him for his sincere attempts by the good hearted pawnshop owner.

In Alexie’s stories it is normal to come across drunkard fathers who often desert their family to go on a binge drinking. Except for addiction and abandoning their family these fathers are mostly loving and lovable fathers who would often spend times and remain sober at home and are not violent in their attitude. Victor’s and Arnold Spirit’s father fall into this category that Alexie has modeled after his own drunkard father. His stories equally hosts brutal and despicable fathers like Bird Lawrance of Rogie Polatkin of *Indian Killer* and the nameless father of Rowdy of *The Dairy*. After a disgusting experience with Rowdy’s father on a Thanksgiving Day Arnold says “Yeah, that was the guy who was raising Rowdy. Jesus, no wonder my best friend was always so angry” (*ATDPI* 103).

Except for few, the entire Spokane community of Alexie is filled with drunkards. In most of his works the presence of staggering alcoholics are felt throughout the stories especially those, which are set in the rez. *The Dairy* is one such novel filled with alcoholic father, sister, friend and cousins aunts and uncles and the

issue of alcohol related deaths. Arnold's father a binge drunkard leaves his family often and returns after few weeks and at times months. Arnold Spirit misses lot of school in Rearden and one of the reason Arnold states is "Mom & I had to go search for my father so we could bring him home and keep him safe" (*ATDPI* 174).

One of the serious issues of an alcoholic community is the number of alcohol related death and violence. Of all other novels and short stories Alexie has made use of *The Diary* to highlight this particular issue through the eyes of the exasperated and traumatized young Arnold:

Yep, my sister and her husband lived in some old silver trailer that was more like a TV dinner tray than a home.

"They had a big party -" my father said.

OF COURSE THEY HAD A BIG PARTY! OF COURSE THEY WERE DRUNK! THEY'RE INDIANS! (*ATDPI* 205)

Such a thought haunts Arnold as bad as his sister's death due to trailer fire after heavy intoxication.

The death of Marry due to alcohol has devastated everyone in the family. As a result, Arnold's mother broken and sad terrified of another such unfortunate incident makes her son Arnold promise her that he would never drink in his whole life. Already in grief and desolation, he does not want to remain at home bunking classes because, he feels,

I could not stay and watch all of those people get drunk I couldn't do it. If you'd given me a room full of sober Indians, crying and laughing and telling stories about my sister, then I would have gladly stayed and joined them in the ceremony.

But everybody was drunk. (*ATDPI* 212)

Arnold feels exasperated because 90 percent of the deaths have been because of alcohol:

Gordy gave me this book by a Russian dude named Tolstoy, who wrote: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way”. Well, I hate to argue with a Russian genius, but Tolstoy didn’t know Indians. And he didn’t know that all Indian families are unhappy for the same exact reason: the fricking booze. (ATDPI 200)

It is highly frustrating for Arnold to know the biggest difference between Indians and white people. The number of deaths and funerals that his white friends have attended would not even come closer to what he has seen and attended.

Alcohol affects Native Americans disproportionately; 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, according to the centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC study found that 66 percent of the men whose deaths were attributed to alcohol were younger than fifty year old (“1 in 10”). (qtd. by Wahpeconiah 40)

Eugene, Arnold’s uncle is “Not stinky drunk, just drunk enough to be drunk” (ATDPI 70). A kind gentle man is shot dead by his own friend Bobby in booze after a fight over the last sip in a bottle of wine. Such battle over the last drink is the most common cause for many unintentional murders among Native drunkards. Arnold feels bitter for “plenty of Indians have died because they were drunk. And plenty of drunken Indians have killed other drunken Indians” (ATDPI 158).

Arnold most beloved grandmother, too, who is tolerant and compassionate and loved and respected by the community, is killed by a drunk driver who struck her in his intoxication. Arnold resents that in the whole tribe there have been only five Indians who did not drink and his grandmother is one among them, “That’s the rarest kind of Indian in the world” (ATDPI 158). It is quite natural when he feels grandparents “are supposed to die of a heart attack or a stroke or of cancer or of

Alzheimer's. "THEY ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO GET RUN OVER AND KILLED BY A DRUNK DRIVER!" (*ATDPI* 158). So, it is not an exaggeration of despair when, Alexie reiterates the problem of alcoholism as "Small American tragedy replayed on reservation everyday" (Big Think).

Alexie's only hero who had not touched alcohol at any point in his life is John Smith of the *Indian Killer*. John, a Native American by birth adopted into a white family is affected by schizophrenia and paranoia. He never intoxicates himself in order to escape from haunting mental agony. Though affected by mental disorder a very brilliant aspect of John is he exactly knew, "what alcohol did to Indians. Real Indians did not drink" (*IK* 132). The Alaskan Way Viaduct in downtown Seattle is the shelter for the numerous homeless Indians in the city. John often visits the place when he works downtown. Though he does not speak much he has a natural affinity towards them. Before he too has been of the same preconceived notion that all homeless Indians are "stinky drunk" but he soon discovers the happy fact that many of them do not drink. He is both relieved and surprised at the same reason. "He was relieved that many of the homeless Indians refused to surrender and drink themselves to death. He was saddened that so many Indians where homeless and no simple reasons to offer for their conditions" (*IK* 144).

One such instance which surprises John is when he rescues the poor, old, homeless Indian lady Carlotta from a three troublesome white persons. When Carlotta, Duwamish Indian offers him a drink, John is disappointed and says.

He was disappointed in the old woman.

"I don't drink." John said.

"Heck, John. John, It ain't a-l-c-o-h-o-l. It's water. Bottled water at that.

You can tell anymore what they put in the tap water, you know?" (*ATDPI* 252).

John believes that alcohol makes people helpless. He never allows his co-workers to poison him with their mean words and alcohol. Similarly, in *The Diary* Arnold warns Rowdy not to drink otherwise he would get ugly.

While alcoholism is the culture of the community bars and Powwow Taverns acts as cultural centers where people gather to drink, chat, gossip and at times involve in provoking racial fights both Indians and whites alike.

The issue of poverty is as serious and devastating as alcoholism in the Indian Countries irrespective of the various ethnicities throughout the U.S. “Any portrait of modern American indigenous life that seeks cultural objectivity thus cannot avoid an account of Indian poverty” (Teuton 381). Therefore any realistic portrayal of contemporary conditions of the lives of the American Indians cannot avoid the abject poverty that has its dysfunctional influence on all aspects of their life from the basic necessities such as food, education, healthcare, housing and other secondary necessities.

Kicummah Teuton in her essay “Building Cultural Knowledge in the Contemporary Native Novel” insists that “poverty itself is not an American Indian cultural value” but a direct result of U.S. colonial domination and economic privation. Appropriation of the ancestral lands of the Natives and confinement of the Natives to vast useless land area named reservation led to the destruction of their age old life sources and way of life which in turn resulted in economic and cultural degeneration of the Indian communities in general. “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. Teuton 381).

Bitter social problems such as health problems, criminality, domestic violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, homelessness, incarceration and mental illness are all the byproducts of poverty and cultural bankruptcy in the Indian countries. “The federal government provides only gestures of care for those colonial wounds and suppresses

the truth of the genocidal campaigns against Native peoples beneath BIA concrete” (Teuton 383-384).

Sherman Alexie, committed to communicate native realities to the world does not romanticize life in reservations but provides a genuine picture of the Natives, grappling with so many social problems while poverty and alcoholism being dominant and all pervasive among them, in their lives. Throughout his works he focuses on the manifestation of poverty on all aspects of the Spokane community, both inside and outside reservation, except for the lives of the white collared urban protagonists. Poverty manifests itself at individual level from hunger and pangs, vodka and whisky on empty stomachs, empty refrigerators, penniless Christmas, HUD houses, abandoned cars, backward moving cars, trailer houses, and in the public level it manifests itself in too poorly funded educational system, and Indian Healthcare Services, Commodity Food Supplies, BIA and Tribal Council in public level.

The young Arnold Spirit of *The Diary* is more elaborate on the sickening effects of poverty and the despondency it brings along to one’s life. He considers himself to be “just a poor- ass reservation kid living with his poor-ass family on the poor-ass Spokane Indian reservation” (*ATDPI* 7). He puts forth a new equation that states “Poverty= empty refrigerator + empty stomach” (*ATDPI* 8). In their “American third-world” (*LRTFH* xiii) poverty stricken reservation life, hunger and pang is part of their everyday life. Often his family remains empty stomach and sleep is the only thing they have for dinner.

Arnold being raised in a poor family along with his siblings by a randomly employed, alcoholic, blue collar employee father and an ex-drunk mother is terribly frustrated by poverty while his family is unable to take care of their sick dog Oscar. He hates his mom and dad for their poverty and desperation in their lives. But he is very well aware of the fact that his parents did not gamble away their family fortunes, but they are the descendents of a long line of poor Indians. Arnold is clear that his

poverty is out of his control. He says, “It sucks to be poor and it sucks to feel that you somehow deserve to be poor” (*ATDPI* 13).

The most ironic fact of the reservation life is that “A bullet only costs about two cents, and anybody can afford that” (*ATDPI* 14). Therefore the sick dog Oscar is shot dead, instead of providing health care by his father. Arnold who feels “poor and small and weak” (*ATDPI* 13) understands that poverty does not provide strength or teach perseverance but it teaches only how to be poor and dysfunctional and weak. From the opening pages of *The Diary*, it is understood that poverty is an unavoidable fact of Spokane reservation life. So it is natural when poor Arnold feels very inferior to his rich white friends in the Rearden School, while compared to their middle class, upper middle class economic conditions that reflect in their outfits, accessories, food and pocket money. While he is unable to have proper breakfast before going to school, he finds his classmate Penelope suffering from anorexia. Similar incident is seen in the short story “Indian Education” too. The narrator listens to the white girls forced vomiting due to anorexia. It is heart rendering when the narrator young boy of eighth grade says “Give me your lunch if you’re just going to throw it up,” I said to one of those girls once” (*ATDPI* 177). He is also immediately reminded of his mother standing in line to get the commodities to feed her family, “we carried them home, happy to have food and opened the canned beef that even the dogs would not eat” (*ATDPI* 177). Moreover, eating such food only helps them grow skinny, which is equal to starvation and eventually leads to self-pity.

The narrator of the “Family Portrait” recalls his hunger filled childhood days with his siblings. Because of inadequate food his sisters pile up the spilt out food during dinner time which they consumed escaping the notice of their parents. The narrator of “Jesus Christ’s Half-Brother Is Alive And Well On The Spokane Indian Reservation” says “All my life, the days I remember most with every detail sharp and clear are the days when my stomach was full” (*LRTFH* 118). The narrator of “Imagining The Reservation” recalls similar hunger filled days of his poverty

stricken life “when I was young, living on the reservation, eating potatoes every day of my life, I imagined the potatoes grew larger, filled my stomach, reserved my emptiness” (*LRTFH* 151). Just to break the monotony of eating potatoes every day for every meal, his sister colored them using food color. It is not an exaggeration when the narrator of “Family Portrait” say “May be hunger informs our lives” (*LRTFH* 193).

Arnold’s daily commutation to the Reardan School which is located twenty-two miles away from the Spokane reservation is a daily adventure. Motivated to pursue the white man’s education, for a successful future, which his tribe can never provide him, he daily hitchhikes to his school in Rearden. His poor parents are unable to spend for gas to drive him daily to school and so he hitchhikes his way back and forth to school. At times when he finds no one to hitchhike he walks the entire distance home and gets blisters in his feet each time.

Arnold, the only Indian boy in the all-white school filled with rich students pretends to be rich without revealing his poverty. Everybody in Reardan assumes that the reservation Indians make lots of money from casinos. But in reality the Spokane casino due to its remote location and mismanagement happens to be a money losing business. Moreover “white people everywhere have always believed that the government just gives money to Indians” (*ATDPI* 119). Though the white majority’s assumption is directly contrary to the real economic conditions of the Natives, Arnold does not want to change their idea, because, he is sure that it is not going to do him any good.

Arnold, on an unavoidable occasion unable to disappoint Penelope, takes her to Winter Formal. Financially weak, he could not “pay for anything – not for photos, not for food, not for gas, not for a hot dog and soda pop” (*ATDPI* 119). If not for Penelope, he would have given some imaginary excuse. Apart from the insufficient five dollars, the worst thing is that he had to wear one of his dad’s old polyester suits, whereas his friends turned with costly jeans, shirts, accessories, I pods and their own

cars. His pitiable condition compels him to believe that “poverty does not give you strength or teach you lessons about perseverance. No poverty only teaches you only how to be poor” (*ATDPI* 13).

Arnold now a student of the all-white school enter into a fierce basketball match against his old school’s basketball team, the Wellpinit Red Skins. After their victory, Arnold feels ecstatic for winning the match against his old school basketball team and his fierce opponent com dear friend turned enemy, Rowdy. But, he suddenly realizes that his victory is against the overwhelmingly impoverished lot to which he belongs.

I mean, Jeez, all of the seniors on our team were going to college. All of the guys on your team had their own cars. All of the guys on our team had iPods and cell phones and PSPs and three pair of blue jeans and ten shirts and mothers and fathers who went to church and had good jobs.

Okay, so maybe my white teammates had problems, serious problems, but none of their problem was life threatening.

But I looked over at the Wellpinit Redskins, at Rowdy

I knew that two are three of those Indians might not have eaten breakfast that morning.

No food in the house.

I knew that seven or eight of those Indians lived with drunken mothers and fathers.

I knew one of those had a father who dealt crack and meth.

I knew two of those Indians had fathers in prison.

I knew that know of them was going to college. Not one of them.

(*ATDPI* 195)

The vivid contemplation of Arnold clearly captures the disadvantageous position of the young kids of the rez School because of the corrosive effect of alcoholism and poverty that accompanies crime and violence too in the Spokane community.

The poorly funded Indian education system reflects the educational philosophy of Richard Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian School, whose prime objective is to assimilate the Natives into the mainstream American Culture. Since the motive of the rez schools is not to provide better education for the American Indian children for better prospects in their future, these schools are poorly funded and almost ignored of properly revised and updated syllabus. Already wedged in despondent and dysfunctional rez, the children of this community are desperate without the basic tool of proper education and positive role models, for a dignified and successful future. Arnold feels devastated when he is given the “Old, Old, Old decrepit geometry book” (*ATDPI* 31) that is thirty years old with his mother’s maiden name written on it. “My school and my tribe are so poor and sad that we have to study from the same dang books our parents studied from. This is absolutely the saddest thing in the world” (*ATDPI* 31). He measures his pain and frustration to the devastation of a nuclear bomb. His hopes and dreams floated up in a mushroom cloud” (*ATDPI* 31).

Mostly, the young protagonist of Sherman Alexie’s novels and short stories – Victor, Junior, Thomas Builds-The-Fire, Seymour, Adrian, Jackson Jackson, the numerous nameless narrators in first person and the fathers – are all invariably drunkards and mostly unemployed or randomly employed blue-collar employees. In *Indian Killer* there are a whole set of homeless and jobless Indians in the streets of Seattle, of whom there are both alcoholics and teetotalers. Though these Spokane reservation Indians receive government provided benefits, those benefits hardly offset the bleak economic conditions of the reservation. As Jace Weaver states it “The statistics, which are often repeated are staggering. The average yearly income is half the poverty level, and over half of all Natives are unemployed. On some reservation, unemployment runs as high as 85 – 90 percent” (Weaver 11). So, it is clear that these benefits provided by the government are not actual relief measure but “gestures of care for those colonial wounds” (Teuton 383).

Invariably, the general atmosphere of these stories is pain and poverty. These Indians have neither gambled away their ancestral properties nor the way Arnold Spirit puts it, “ My parents came from poor people, who came from poor people, who came from poor people, all the way back to the very first poor people” (*ATDPI* 11). But the social poverty to a large extent is a product of U.S. colonial domination and economic privation.

The intensity of unemployment problem in Spokane reservation is so pathetic that the population is happy to be employed in any kind of unfortunate jobs. This is obvious when the sound of siren excites the reservation dwellers because fire provides them opportunity for employment and wages. In “Jesus Christ’s Half-Brother is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation” the narrator along with Frank Many Horses and Lester Falls apart has been drinking beer, in the Breakaway Bar playing pool and talking stories, when the sound of the siren was aloud in the air. He says “Indians get all excited when we hear sirens because it means fires and it means they need fire fighters to put the fires and it means we get to be fire fighters and it means we get paid to be fire fighters” (*LRTFH* 111). This can be considered as a fine example for the utter desolate condition of the rez since fire provokes contradictory feeling of excitement rather than provoking alarm and anxiety. “Thirty years old and no job except getting drunk. What good are you?” (*LRTFH* 78) chides the exasperated mother in the story “The Fun House” who has danced topless in a Seattle bar to feed her son.

The episodes of penniless Christmas are common in Alexie’s stories. Victor’s father and Arnold Spirit’s father have nothing to offer their children on Christmas Eve. Victor has watched his father with empty wallet “cry huge, gasping tears. Indian tears” (*LRTFH* 5). Whereas, Arnold Spirit smells “booze and fear and failure” (*LRTFH* 151) in the wrinkled and damp five dollar bill that his father gave him on Christmas.

Not only possession of vehicles but even traveling is a costly affair for the Spokanes because of their poverty. Though there are few vehicles present in the rez except for one or two cars, the rest are pick-ups. Mostly these vehicles are backward moving vehicles with reverse gear alone functioning in them. The gears necessary for the forward motion of the vehicles are dysfunctional and the owners cannot afford to set them right, and therefore backward running pickups and cars are common in Alexei's Spokane reservation.

Economically impoverished, these people often hitchhike to their destination like Arnold does to reach school every day and they do not possess money to pay for their travel. When Victor's father is dead in Arizona in his trailer house, Victor does not have money to travel to Arizona to get his father's body back. His mother is just as poor as he is and his relatives and friends could not help him. "Who does have money on a reservation except the cigarette and fireworks sales people" (*LRTFH* 59). The Tribal Council set for the welfare of the community is not of great use. It is ready to pay only half of the required amount, stating that they are undergoing a difficult time financially. In "Flight" Alexie hints upon the mismanagement of the funds by the BIA, which spends huge sums on laying smooth pavement for miles while half the rez still lives on commodities.

In *The Diary* when Arnold's grandmother is dead, his sister who lives in Montana doesn't attend her grandmother's funeral. He recounts "My sister was not able to come to the funeral. That was the worst part about it. She did not have enough money to get back, I guess. That was sad" (*ATDPI* 161).

In "The Toughest Indian in the World" the journalist narrator speaks elaborately about the ceremony of picking up Indian hitchhikers whom he calls "twentieth century aboriginal nomads" (*Blasphemy* 27). He has learnt this ceremony from his father who has always picked up Indian hitchhikers with affinity and passion. The journalist reflects his childhood memories of how his father made room for any number of hitchhikers in his blue van. It is easy to make room for one hitchhiker but

Indians who headed home towards their reservation traveled in packs. “Once or twice, we picked up entire all-Indian basketball team, along with their coaches, girlfriends, and cousins. Fifteen, twenty Indian strangers squeezed into the back of a blue van with nine wide-eyed Indian kids (*Blasphemy* 29). Though the narration seems to be a lighthearted and humorous, it is the trademark of Alexie to render the most painful and pathetic in a light vein proving instant laughter.

While Alexie captures the sickening poverty of the rez in his rez stories *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* he reveals the pathetic condition of the numerous homeless Indians on the streets of Seattle in *Indian Killer*. The poverty level of these homeless Indians in Seattle’s Alaskan Way Viaduct and Occidental Park is much higher in the scale of poverty yardstick. King, a college dropout still retained the habit of reading every day. Joseph, the recluse who could sing tribal songs, still preserves a hand drum, the symbol of Indian tradition. Crazy Robert, a reporter for the Seattle Times at twenty-five has become homeless by thirty-five. Robert Agnes is the lover of stray dogs and scavenger birds. Green eyed Kim, has spent ten years in prison for killing her abusive husband. Annie, the black haired beauty of yester years has been a singer in Holiday Inns. The couple, half crazy Zera and Cornaleous, who has been the deep sea fisherman, the old lady Corlotta lott, who claims to be landlady of Damamish land and calls the white people homeless, make out the rag tag bunch of homeless Indians.

Mary Polatkin, the young Spokane Indian lady, a student of Washington State University in *Indian Killer* is the only genuine soul, who feels a deep human responsibility towards the homeless. She could never pretend not to notice these homeless Indians whenever she walks by them. She feels a deep pain for their awkward position, since there is “no simple reason to offer for their condition” (*IK* 144).

Miss. Polatkin is created as a contrast by Alexie to the numerous Seattlers who consider the homeless Indians as a threat and shame to the city and ignore their

existence. She is lovingly called “the Sandwich lady” by the homeless because she regularly distributes sandwiches to them. Her thoughtful gesture provided them food as well as company. Moreover it is a proof “that they were not invisible” (*IK* 146).

Sherman Alexie, in many of his stories, reveals the substandard quality of the Indian Healthcare Service, which is supposed to provide complete medical care for the economically downtrodden tribal community. But, the condition of the Health Care service reflects the denial and negligence by the Federal Government, a general attitude to issues related to the Indian communities. Inadequate medical supplies, substandard medical aids, inhygienic conditions and lack of well trained doctors constitute Indian Health Care Service.

In the opening scene of the novel *Indian Killer* a fourteen year old girl gives birth to the hero of the novel John Smith in a Health Care Centre. The author, Alexie makes use of this situation to give a graphic description of the condition of the health care centre: “Linoleum floors swabbed with grey water. Mop smelling like old sex. Walls painted white a decade earlier, now yellowed and peeling” (*IK* 1-2).

The Indian Health Care Service has only limited number of beds and all the available twenty beds have been occupied and people waited for beds in pathetic conditions. In an interview with Tomson Highway, a Cree playwright and novelist, Sherman Alexie speaks about the population of the Spokane Indian community both inside and outside the Spokane reservation: “About a thousand. There is about 2,500 Spokane altogether. Most of the others live in the city of Spokane, which is just off our reservation” (Peterson 22). So the Health care service which is to provide medical care for thousand and odd community members is just established with twenty beds and two doctors and a few medical staff. All the more disgusting is the appalling unhygienic conditions that prevails in the Health care centre. John’s mother undergoes her labor in an already bloodstained sheet and the poor Indian girl is expected to heal.

Arnold Spirit, the teenager hero of *The Diary* is born hydrocephalus and has undergone surgery in six months. As a result of his medical condition he “ended up

with forty-two teeth and near sighted in one eye and farsighted in the other” (*ATDPI* 3). Since his teeth are “ten more than the usual” (*ATDPI* 2) it is so crowded that he finds it difficult to close his mouth. Major medical fundings are carried out only once in a year by the Health Care Service and therefore Arnold has no other option other than getting removed all his extra ten teeth in a single sitting. He is treated with just half the dose of pain killers for pulling out such huge number of teeth on a single day. Though Arnold puts it funnily “our white dentist believed that Indians only felt half as much pain as white people did, so he only gave us half the novocain” (*ATDPI* 2), it exactly captures the inadequate medicinal supply of the Health Care Service. He is also provided with glasses that is “ugly thick plastic ones” (*ATDPI* 3) and with his big hydrocephalus head and ugly glasses he “looks like a three years old Indian grandpa” (*ATDPI* 3).

In *War Dance* his latest collection of short stories, the narrator recollects his experience in Indian Health Care Hospital when his alcoholic and diabetic father undergoes amputation of the right foot. The post surgical recovery room is more like a “recovery hallway” (*Blasphemy* 45). When his father becomes too weak to withstand the cold after the surgery he is badly in need of a blanket, and therefore the narrator son runs to the black nurse and pleads for an extra blanket, which is obtained after much pleading and patience. The blanket is too thin to be called a blanket. “It was not really a blanket; it was more like a huge beach towel. Hell, it was not even good enough for that. It was more like the world’s largest coffee filter. Jesus, had Health care finally come to this? Everybody was uninsured and unblanketed” (*Blasphemy* 47). The highly dysfunctional quality of the Indian Hospital is reiterated by Jimmy Many Horses in “The Approximate Size Of My Favorite Tumor” While he says, the Hospital released me because they decided that I would be much more comfortable at home” (*Blasphemy* 183). Metaphorically, the Indian Health Care Service is more crippled than the narrator’s father.

The delivery room in “The Fun House” where aunt Nizzy is in her labour, is a “mad house, a fun house” (*LRTFH* 81). In *Indian Killer* the labor of John Smith’s mother is more grim and detesting whereas aunt Nizzy’s labor is more chaotic with confusion. The Indian Health Service doctor, a novice keeps shouting at the nurses, “I have never done this before. You have got to help me” (*LRTFH* 81). Aunt Nizzy yells “shit, shit, fuck” (*LRTFH* 81) and she grabs the nurses and doctors and kicks her stirrups.

It is more painful when the narrator of “Jesus Christ’s Half-Brother is Alive And Well On The Spokane Indian Reservation” returns from the reservation hospital after being denied an operation due to his inability to pay for his treatment. His leg bone has been severely broken during a basketball match and he is desperately in need of a surgery to fix up his crushed bone. The poor health care coverage of the Indian Health Care Hospital demands payment from the poor unemployed narrator who say, “I don’t have the money or the strength, or the memory and it’s not covered by Indian Health I just get up and walk home almost crying because my leg and life hurt so bad” (*LRTFH* 118-119). So, such is the crippling condition of the Health Care Service of the Federal Government that cripples the life of the poor and sick Spokane Community.

Racial discrimination is an unavoidable ordeal for any colonized people and it has a major impact on all aspect of their life including the general psyche. Racial prejudices and discrimination are faced by ethnic minorities in the contemporary American society known for its melting pot culture. The Native American’s experience is one such which is in no means justifiable since they are indigenous to the land. Often contemporary ethnic American writers explore the ugly side of this American experience of racial prejudices that runs deep in the American Society.

Racial disparities exist in every aspect of the Native American life including education, health, employment opportunities, wealth, housing etc. The economic conditions of the reservation have been already gleaned through which reveals the

poorer than poorest third world economic conditions. They are the direct impact of the social discrimination practiced by the mainstream white American society for whom the Native community is either “invisible” or does not exist.

Alexie explores the persistent impact of racial prejudices and discriminations in his works irrespective of genres. His characters come across harmless dysconscious racial discrimination to highly violent and active racial discrimination which forms an inevitable part of the American experience that heavily influences their world.

Historically, vast numbers of Americans of non-white backgrounds have instead lived the ugly side of the American experience- that of racial discord and social standards of human values and beauty that often demand “white” characteristics, both of the physical body and of the inner person. (Lewis 71)

Of all the works, *Indian Killer* is considered the most racist of Alexie’s works that received a lot of negative criticism. The beliefs, attitudes and actions that perpetuate psychological and emotional pain of being ‘different’ make the story of *Indian Killer*. John Smith the protagonist is a Native American by birth but adopted by white American parents feels the emotional and psychological pain of being different in the white society. Unable to fit in both the societies, he gradually goes mad and at last commits suicide. Though he is a victim of identity crises it is the internalized racism that fuels the identity crisis. His adoption by the wealthy Smiths did not provide him the status of a white man but right from the childhood days he has been constantly viewed as a brown skinned American Indian. “Black hair, brown skin and eyes, high cheekbones, the prominent nose. Tall and muscular, he looked like some cinematic warrior” (*IK* 32). And so his teachers, friends, girlfriends and their parents, his co-workers, all view him as an outsider.

The internalized racism of the individuals, especially of the parents of the girl children are seen in the works of Alexie. The parents of the girl friends of both John Smith of *Indian Killer* and Arnold Spirit of *The Absolute True Diary of a Part Time Indian* are stubborn racists who strongly influence their daughters to give up the

friendship of brown boys. In *The Diary*, Earl the father of Penelope openly intimidates Arnold to maintain a safe distance from his daughter or else he would be punched in the stomach. Reggi Polatkin, too, experiences the same during his school days, who is a product of a painfully mismatched union between a Spokane mother and brutally racist white father Bird Lawrence. This BIA worker hates Indian military heroes who fought for their land and rights. Right from Reggi's childhood he has been educated brutally to accept genuine Indian war heroes as tyrants but brutal white commanders as heroes. Whenever he fails to be up to his father's expectation, he is slapped by his father who says "I want you to know I'm doing this for your own good," (*IK* 94). He wants his son to love his country, not to end up like other Indians running around with a gun or drunk and staggering around downtown. All such brutal brainwashes results in Reggi's belief that "he is successful because of his father's white blood, and that his Indian mother's blood is to blame for his failures" (*IK* 94). Though Reggi is the legal heir of the white Bird Lawrence, he has been denied the surname of "Lawrence" and he is named only after his mother Polatkin because, "As for Bird Lawrence, he has hated hostile Indians so much that he insisted Reggi use Polatkin, his Indian surname until he he'd earned the right to be a Lawrence, until he'd become the appropriate kind of Indian" (*IK* 92).

Alexie has portrayed the harsh realities of highly despicable and stubborn racism hidden in the heart of the white society in the person of Bird Lawrence. A highly prejudiced white man with utter hatred and contempt towards the Native people plays the role of a tyrant to his own son of brown skin and never gives the warmth and support of a father. He constantly belittles him and destroys his self-worth:

Bird himself evidences some of the worst qualities of that segment of white America that deems persons of brown skin colour and non-English speaking ethnicity inherently inferior and undeserving of basic human consideration. In Bird's estimation, his son's brown

skin marks his Indianness and renders him unworthy of human value- or, to put it another way, Bird views his son as an ugly manifestation of the utter inferiority of brown-skinned people in comparison to their white skinned counterparts. (Bracewell 72)

Buck Roger, another racist white man is the father of Aaron Roger and David Roger of the Washington State University. Buck Roger bereft of humanity trains his sons to shoot on the poor Spokanes who creep into his family farm to steal camas roots, a traditional and sacred root of Spokane Indians for thousands of years. Aaron Roger, the elder is his father's son equally merciless and racist whereas David Roger is kind and gentle. In a totally unexpected condition David Roger goes missing after his visit to the casino in the border of the Spokane Indian reservation. This incident unleashes the brutal racism pent up in the heart of Aaron which leads to a series of racial violence in the streets of Seattle. He along with his friends Barry and Seon involve in many violent racial brutalities against the homeless Indians in the city. Reggi Polatkin, too, after his termination from the university turns into a violent racist against whites along with his friends Ty and Harley and involves in attacking white alongside, Aaron's brutalities against Natives at the time of the Indian killer happenings.

The villain after whom the novel is named after is an extreme racist who commits violent murders as a revenge on the white society. It is of no use other than promoting racial violence and insecurity for both the whites and the Natives in the already ethnically polarized Seattle city. At the end of the novel, the killer performs a five hundred years old traditional Ghost Dance, which is supposed to dispel the invaded whites and resurrect the dead relatives and loved ones while returning the land to the decolonized state.

Along with the individual racism, Alexie also captures in his works the all pervading institutionalized 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. The judicial system that provides justice and equality to its people forms the backbone of any civilized society. Such judiciary has been turned into a highly racially biased institution of the colonizers resolved to discriminate the Native society. There are numerous examples for such biased officials throughout his works like the BIA judge, the troopers, many police officials of the Seattle police force etc. As a result, the already marginalized and victimized people remain totally helpless with no one around to help them even at the worst of situations.

In the *Indian Killer* the homeless Indian, Beautiful Marry is brutally raped and murdered but justice is not met out just for the reason of being an Indian, that too, a homeless Indian. When Jack Wilson a self-proclaimed Indian and a rookie police officer who is in love with the murdered Beautiful Mary enquires for justice and he is answered “Shit, that case is low priority, rook. One dead Indian don’t add up too much. Some other Indian guy killed her, you know. Happens all the time. Those people are like that. You ask me, it’s pest control” (*IK* 160). However, when the victims are white and the perpetrator presumably Indian, the police takes immediate action:

Has the Killer been a minority, Alexie suggests, there would not have been nearly as much concern, especially if the victims aren’t white. Supporting this idea is the fact that there is an outpouring of grief for David after he is found dead, whereas there is little or no concern for the Indian victims of Aaron’s and other whites rampages. (Grassian 122)

Moreover, Aaron Roger and Barry Church are issued six months of imprisonment in the country jail for their violent assault and near-killing of several Indians which exposes even more racial discrimination in the Seattle judicial system.

The racially biased judiciary is a well-established reality that the marginalized ethnic minorities of the US are quite aware of. This sentiment has been clearly

expressed in the story “Breaking and Entering” by an African American, Althea, who with her black community stages a protest on the streets of Seattle for the death of her son Elder Bridges. It is a totally unexpected tragedy that takes place in the house of the Spokane Indian narrator who is mistaken for a white man. While his motive has been self-defense he knocks to death a black teenager unintentionally who enters breaking his house to steal.

The Spokane Indian narrator is not charged for the crime since it is considered as self-defense. But the media cleverly makes a powerful piece of editing showing “the white man who owned a baseball bat walking out of the police station as a free man” (*Blasphemy* 258). Such sensational work of media always plays a major role in fuelling racial discrimination. “The Police don’t care about my son because he’s black,” Elder’s mother, Althea, said to a dozen different microphones and as many cameras. “He’s just another black boy killed by a white man. And none of these white men care” (*Blasphemy* 258). The condition grows more critical when he discloses his Spokane Indian identity through the same TV channel. The liberals, the conservatives and the media all are involved in contributing their share of biased racial discourses. The story also reveals the minorities’ lack of confidence over the judiciary as well as exposes the sly role played by the media and political parties in promoting the racial intolerance.

The wicked role of media in fuelling the racial antagonism plays a major role in the *Indian Killer* too. Truck Shultz, a white talk show host works hard to stir up anti-Indian sentiment at the time of the killings. Daniel Grassian calls him “far-right conservatism at best and vicious cold blooded racist at worst” (Grassian 119). He exposes pro-white and anti-Indian sentiments comparing Indians to spoiled children, savages and monsters. “They are an angry bitter people and treat the rest of us with disdain and arrogance” (*IK* 118). He pontificates that the US government should have terminated the Indian tribes from the very beginning. “They have rights that normal Americans do not enjoy” (*IK* 208). When Truck Shultz suggests of tubal litigation of

American Indian women to avoid welfare babies giving birth to more welfare babies, he reveals himself to be an arrogant racist and an imposter of human rights.

One more foul play by media is found in “Because My Father Always Said He Is The Only Indian Who Saw Jimmy Hendricks Play “The Star Spangled Banner” at Wood stocks”. The narrator’s father is a Spokane Indian, who has been arrested for an attempted murder for active participation in the anti-war demonstration during the late 1960s. The narrator’s father protests the war literally by fighting against the National Guardsmen with a rifle and his actions are appropriated by the media. His photograph is published in the newspaper with the caption: “ONE WARRIOR AGAINST WAR AND PEACEFUL GATHERING TURNS INTO NATIVE APPRAISING” (*LRTFH* 25). Daniel Grassian remarks “The narrator’s father, of-course, is not a warrior but the photographer capitalizes and eventually profits from the stereotype of Indian men as warriors, and the photo goes on to win a Pulitzer” (Grassian 71).

Thomas Builds-The-Fire in “The Trial of Thomas Builds The Fire” is arrested by the BIA police for reasons none other than he is “A story telling fetish accompanied by an extreme need to tell the truth. Dangerous” (*LRTFH* 93). Despite his misdemeanors, he is arrested for threatening to make significant changes in the tribal vision which the colonized government cannot permit to happen. The BIA police have seriously determined to frame Thomas Builds-The-Fire into felony charges saying “we don’t need this kind anymore” (*LRTFH* 94).

When, Thomas Builds-The-Fire, the self-proclaimed story teller of the Spokane reservation is presented for the trial in the court where he narrates the historical events one by one in first person reflecting atrocities carried out against the Native warriors, Quechan, Wild Coyote and 800 horses. Treaties and promises are disregarded; all unlawful and merciless strategies are adopted to put down the Native raising in order to conquer the land. Once again Alexie brings to light the U.S government judiciary that is bereft of justice and logic. Thomas-Builds-The-Fire is sentenced to two concurrent life terms in the Walla Walla State Penitentiary for the

charges of cold-blooded murder in those historic incidents that he has narrated in the court room. Alexie often uses the story teller Thomas Builds-The-Fire and the flash back technique in his stories to expose the real facts of history, otherwise being distorted to the advantage of the colonisers.

Jimmy Many Horses and his wife Norma of “The Appropriate Size of My Favourite Tumour” are stopped by a mean and racist police trooper for the false charge of disobeying traffic rules which is nothing other than an outright act of racial contempt. He insists on “a new law against riding as a passenger” (*LRTFH* 165) implemented by the Washington state to blackmail them for bribery. Jimmy Many Horses known “All you can hope for in these little wars is to minimize the amount of damage” (*LRTFH* 165). He with his robust humour tackles the white trooper with witty replies which infuriates the trooper and he drives away breaking more than four or five laws.

Arnold Spirit of *The Diary* chooses Rearden to pursue his education but at the same time he is reminded of its racism. He calls it racist Rearden. The rich farm town is filled with farmers, rednecks and racist cops “who stop every Indian that drives through” (*ATDPI* 46). Arnold recalls, “during one week when I was little, Dad got stopped three times for DWI; Driving While Indian” (*ATDPI* 46) is an example that reveals active racism by police personals and the insecurity that persists in the lives of the American Indians.

The narrator’s father in the story “Witnesses Secret and Not” annually visits the police office in the city of Spokane to give his witness for the murder of his drunkard friend Jerry Vincent. This has been an annual ritual for the past 10 years and he invariably repeats to the police that, “I’ve told you guys everything I know about what happened” (*ATDPI* 220). He has determined not to reveal even in case if he knows anything about the incident. He is opinionated, “because I don’t think they care much anyway. Just make more trouble for Indians is all” (*ATDPI* 217).

The most horrible and grotesque demonstration of racial discrimination in the form of violence has been evinced in the prisons of the U.S. Junior, a Spokane Indian, who is a drug dealer in “Cry Cry Cry” faces the worst kind of trauma due to sexual abuse in the prison by the criminals of other races -black gang, brown gang, white gang and Mexican gang. Junior a half- blood is also a racist who fights with the big boss Indian in the prison because of his blue eyes and pale skin. This makes him lose his tribal protection and he is gang raped by black group who later sell him to Aryan guys. The individual racism in everybody’s psyche irrespective of race is evinced in Junior’s unwillingness to accept the blue-eyed and pale-skinned man as an Indian and likewise the prisoners grouping and exploitation of prisoners of other race. Similar intimidating incidents in prison are also recollected by Victor’s father in “Because My Father Always Said He Is The Only Indian Who Saw Jimmy Hendricks Play “The Star Spangled Banner” At Woodstocks.”

The case of Mike a half blood and the hero of “Scars” is different from that of Junior of “Cry Cry Cry”. Mike is blue eyed and blonde haired who is imprisoned for killing his brutal father. At first, Mike experiences the horrible side of prison life, where racial crimes are very common. But things get better when he proves his Indian identity by speaking the tribal language, playing drums and singing tribal songs to the Indians in the prison. Mike makes use of his tribal protection to withstand the racially motivated abuse in the prison.

Another kind of racial issue is the disappearance of brown people and nobody holds responsibility for those missing Indians. They just simply disappear. The narrator’s father in “Witness Secret And Not” states, “Just about everybody at one time or another. All those relocating programs sent reservation Indians to the cities and sometimes they just got swallowed up” (*LRTFH* 212). Not only due to the relocation programs but also Indians in the prison disappear and the police department has no responsible answer for their disappearance as in the case of Jimmy in “Protest”.

Jimmy a pale Indian but not a mixed-blood is an active racist Indian of the reservation. He is a total rebel against all established norms and governmental authorities and institutions. He challenges any white man in a uniform- security guards, cops, firemen and postal workers. “Fuck them”, he said “And their Nazi fucking shorts” (*Blasphemy* 105). The narrator states “It happens all the time in the Indian world, especially among pale warriors. I think their radicalism becomes inversely proportional to their skin color” (*Blasphemy* 104). Jimmy gets into trouble with two cops calling them “You racist bastards” (*Blasphemy* 105). The cops are baffled and could not make out why a white man would call them racist. He is arrested and later nobody knows whether he is alive or dead. “Jimmy’s last act is to disappear and that is probably the most Indian thing he has ever done” (*Blasphemy* 106). In the same story another incident of police atrocity against the marginalized community is also exposed. Harold, a homeless Indian in downtown Spokane who has been taking carving lessons is mistaken for a criminal and is shot dead by the police. The reason stated by them is that Harold has a threatening look and he possesses a knife. But the knife is hardly three inches long, used for carving. All these invalid reasons undoubtedly sound pretty foolish which states clearly the helpless condition of the marginalized in a racially biased country.

The field of education has its own share of racial discrimination. The Native community in the reservation is not educated to produce clever minds but aimed at producing an inferior sect of people brainwashed for the acceptance of inferior role in the society. This is the government policy behind the education provided for the Native community which Alexie has highlighted in his National book award winning novel *The Absolute True Diary Of A Part Time Indian* and in the short story “The Indian Education”

Mr. P., the Maths teacher of Arnold Spirits, meets him in his house while Arnold is suspended from his school for throwing a text book at Mr.P. He reveals that “the only thing you kids are being taught is how to give up” (*ATDPI* 42). He advises

Arnold to take his hope and “go somewhere where other people have hope” (*ATDPI* 43). So it has been proved beyond doubt that the education provided in the reservation school is inferior, designed to produce failure models. He wants Arnold to “Multiply hope by hope” (*ATDPI* 43). The little boy is sure to find more and more hope the farther he walks away from the disparate and unproductive reservation education. Moreover, racially biased teachers advocate strict disciplines in Native children in order to assimilate the Indian children into the mainstream culture.

Mr. P. confesses to Arnold, “That is how we are taught to teach you. We are supposed to kill the Indian to save the child” (*ATDPI* 35). Their main role is to erase the cultural identities of the Indian Children in order to assimilate. They want them to give up their “Songs and stories and language and dancing” (*ATDPI* 35). It also proves corporal punishments are part of the academic discipline.

Truck Schultz the epitome of racism in his racist propaganda mentioned the intimidations imposed upon the Indian children in boarding schools where a wooden box is used to threaten the children by lying that it is filled with smallpox. “They knew about the Indians mortal fear of smallpox. For Indian children, smallpox is like the bogeyman” (*IK* 345). This serves as a fine example of how tough measures have been implemented to extract much needed assimilation. So it is assimilation in the guise of education which never provides them opportunities for hope, equality and success in their lives. Alexie suggests that “Indian Education” is often wasted and that, in a way, it’s less an intellectual education than an indoctrination into racism, sadness, and despondency, “what little education they receive is often frittered away after graduation” (*Grassian* 73).

Arnold, too wise for his age makes a bold decision to cross the reservation in the pursuit of real education which would power his hope for success. He is quite aware of the racist heck town Rearden. In his school he is viewed as ‘Big Foot or a UFO’ (*ATDPI* 56). “He was lonely and sad and isolated and terrified” (*ATDPI* 94). He longs for recognition from his classmates and teachers. He feels like a stranger in a

strange land and this sense of not belonging is generally associated with the immigrants and it is very pathetic that people indigenous to the land are reduced to the level of immigrants outside their reservation.

“Every Indian in the city was probably suspected by his neighbour and his co-workers” (*IK* 341) is not only the experience of the detective fiction writer Wilson’s experience but it is the same for John Smith of *Indian Killer*, the nameless narrator of “The Lone Ranger And The Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” and the teenager Arnold in *The Diary*. “I was a reservation Indian and no matter how geeky and weak I appeared to be, I was still a potential killer. So mostly they called me names. Lot of names” (*ATDPI* 63). The narrators of “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven,” immediately understands the insecure feeling and suspicion of the 7-11 worker as soon as he enters the shop. “He knew this dark skin and long black hair of mine was dangerous. I had potential” (*LRTFH* 183). Such humiliating and embarrassing confrontations are part of the everyday life of Indians in the white world. When the narration of “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” quits the city to his reservation after a brief period of incompatibility in his inter-racial marriage and a hostile city life, his family is not surprised. Because “There is an old Indian poet who said that Indian can only reside in the city, But they can never live there” (*LRTFH* 187).

In the case of the narration of “The Lone Ranger And Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” one thing to be noticed is the narrator makes use of the embarrassing situation to slightly scar the 7-11 cashiers. “On one level, this encounter is the fight described in the title of the story, subtle battle for dominance which, Alexie suggests, exist on a daily basis between Natives and non- Natives and possibly between other minorities and the white mainstream” (Grassian 65).

He compares this distrust and uneasy encounter between himself and the graveyard shift workers with the turbulent relationship he has with the white woman, who accused him that “I started to look at her that way too” (*LRTFH* 182). She left

him since “when one person starts to look another like a criminal, then the love is over. It’s logical” (*LRTFH* 182).

Their tumultuous relationship motivated the narrator to “spend as much time away from her possible’ (*LRTFH* 182). He drove around Seattle for hours “searching for something familiar” (*LRTFH* 182) and ended up in an upscale residential neighborhood where the police stopped him to warn, “You’re making people nervous. You don’t fit the profile of the neighbourhood” (*LRTFH* 183). Once again racial disparity is the cause for the conflict both in his personal and public life,” For the Narrator, who feels largely excluded from mainstream America, most encounters with whites are fraught with tension and are ultimately demeaning” (Grassian 66).

Marital disharmonies fuelled by racial disparities are common in Alexie’s work. Marry Lynn, a Spoken Indian woman and Jeremiah a white man has been long married and has four children. During their early days of marriage, they considered race “as an enemy that existed outside their house, as destructive force they could fight against as a couple, as a family (*Blasphemy* 344). But race has become a “Frankenstein monster” (*Blasphemy* 344) that has grown beyond their control and also it is a constant presence and a threat. The individual racial prejudices inherent in them played its role in both the couple as well as in the parents of the couple, because, they gave preference to their grandchildren based on their colour.

They have planned well to tackle the “why, how, what, who are when” (*Blasphemy* 345) of their inter-racial marriage but slowly gave up the course of their long married life. It is Marry Linn who dared herself to a most racist act of willing to have sex with an Indian man just because he is an Indian:

If forced to admit the truth, or even some version of the truth,
She’d testify she is about to go to bed with an Indian stranger
because she wanted to know how it would feel. After all, she’d
slept with a white stranger in her life, so why not include a Native
American? Why not practice a carnal form of affirmative action?

By God, her infidelity is a political act, Rebellion! Resistance,
 revolution! (*Blasphemy* 333)

Apart from her positive discrimination one thing that has to be noted is her idea of her husband to be a white stranger. This makes it obvious that though they are bound in the most intimate form of relationship there always persists the feeling of being a stranger in a strange world, among the couple.

In “Gentrification” the white man is a lone dweller in a black neighborhood who mentions, “We live as people live, aware of racial dynamics but uninterested in their applications as it applies to our neighborhood” (*Blasphemy* 295). His inability to retain those African names makes him feel a bit racist of himself since he is only at ease with simple English names. Once a horribly stained mattress is disposed on a curb by a black family in the neighborhood and it has been left there unattended for almost a month. It is a disgusting site and it polluted the area but nobody cared to get rid of it. The narrator presumed it to be a more racist attitude, by the city for its disdain for the black neighborhood; by the black family for its disregard and by the black neighborhood for its reluctance to condemn. They are, “passively revealing that, despite our surface friendliness, we didn’t really care about one another” (*Blasphemy* 296). The narrator plunged into action on a midnight to dispose the horrible mattress. As he got ready for the horrendous endeavor he laughed aloud for what would the police do “If they discovered a clean-cut white man creeping through a black neighborhood” (*Blasphemy* 297). The idea is funny because it is ironical for clean-cut white man to be suspected in a black neighborhood. His loud laughter therefore revealed his sense of racial superiority and the inherent passive racism in an otherwise gentleman.

This inherent passive racism, harmless and safe is also seen in *The Diary* where Arnold finds no word to describe the feelings of the elderly people of Rearden who are unable to compare him to the great Rearden star players of the part. Because an exemplary Indian is absolutely strange for them as well as they could not compare

an Indian to a white person which reveals their inherent passive discrimination. “And no matter how good I was I would always be an Indian, and some folks just found it difficult to compare an Indian to a white guy” (*Blasphemy* 181).

Apart from being victims of unjust-social discrimination they also faced dysconscious racism. Certain practices are followed by people without conscious of the racial undertone hidden in it. Dr. Cornell Pewewardy of the University of Kansas calls this kind of racism “‘dysconscious racism’, or in other words, racism that the people themselves who exhibit it are unaware of” (qtd. in Roppolo 187). Numerous racist names are used for Native Americans like ‘Chief’, ‘Tonto’, ‘Squaw boy’, ‘Geronimo’ ‘Sitting Bull’ and many more. The most common moniker is ‘Chief’ which is used generally by all, without racial Intentions. In ‘War Dance’ the World War II veteran Leonard Elmore recalls to the narrator how his grandfather Adolph is usually called ‘Chief’ than by his original name and it is very common in those days to call an American Indian ‘Chief’ which did not attach derogatory sense to it. Since, no Indian would escape being called ‘Chief’ once in his life time Leonard Elmore enquired the narrator how he felt when he is called ‘Chief’. “I threw a basketball in the guy’s face” (*Blasphemy* 61) replied the narrator. Apart from this narrator Arnold Spirit, John Smith, Jack Wilson, Jimmy Many Horses and many heroes and other characters of Alexie’s stories are called ‘Chief’ often times.

Highly derogatory comments and appalling jokes that they are subjected to does not fall under this dysconscious racism but they are racial malice of wicked racism that at once provoked violence and furry. Arnold Sprit felt weak and scared in Reardon but when attacked by malicious racist joke by “Roger the Giant” (*ATDPI* 64) boy of the school he felt that it is the most racist thing that he has ever heard in his life:

“Hey, Chief,” Roger said.”You want to hear a joke?”

“Sure,” I said.

“Did you know that Indians are living proof that niggers fuck buffalo?”

He could not “let them get away with that shit.” (*ATDPI* 65)

So, Arnold, however, weak grew terribly powerful and punched Roger in his face and “his nose bled like red fireworks” (*ATDPI* 65). Similarly, Jack Wilson is provoked in the Last precinct by Terrible Ted, a drunkard and a belligerent homicide detective. “They smell” continued ted. They’re fucking drunks and welfare cheats. They ain’t got no jobs. They’re lazy as shit” (*IK* 240). Though Wilson is terribly infuriated he is helpless. His hands were shaking with anger as he quitted the Last Precinct. “He never understood why people hated Indians as much as they did” (*IK* 241).

Apart from racial discrimination and prejudices practiced by the mainstream society anti-racist racism practiced by the Native community, has been widely noticed in Alexie’s works. The unappeasable furry of Rowdy at the idea of Arnold leaving the rez to Reardon, attacks on Arnold in the basketball match against rez school, Marry Polatkin’s constant harassment of her Native American Studies Professor Dr. Mather by contradicting his ideas about Indians are all nothing but an anti-racist racism. Especially, the pent-up racism in the female characters like Marry Polatkin and Marry Lynn, anti- racist racism that metamorphosis into strange forms like verbal harassment and disloyalty.

There is a strong protest in the court room by the local community in the rez while Junior of “Cry Cry Cry” is arrested for his crimes. They protested the arrest calling it racism. But the narrator of the story strongly felt that “plenty of Indians have gone to jail for no good reason. But plenty more have gone to jail for the exact right reasons” (*Blasphemy* 4). When the community begins to protect every Indian irrespective of their crime it might result in populating the rez with murderers and rapist and drug dealers. “While it is clear that Alexie’s Sympathies lie more with Indians he does not excuse or endorse their actions and attitudes” (Grassian 105). He

has been just in depicting his Spokane community equally racist with their racist sentiments and attitudes.

While trying to understand the social issues of the contemporary Spokane community in the works of Sherman Alexie, it is clearly noticed that social dysfunction is the current condition of the community. A functional society is one that is led by administrators and dynamic role models in all spears of the society who help their society to develop constantly in terms of economy, new job opportunities, fruitful education, and reliable healthcare services in order to provide safe and dignified living conditions for every individual.

A totally dysfunctional society is that which does not provide all these inevitable social needs to its members because of the absence of able administrators and successful role models. Moreover, prevalence of debilitating issues like alcoholism, violence and racial disparities leads to greater complications and poverty of the community which forms the case of the Spokane community that is already eroded by colonialism.

Since social dysfunction and the resultants stasis forms the order of the day in the Spokane Indian community progress and mobility seems nearly impossible in the lives of the characters of these stories. Alexie's heroes Victor, Junior, Thomas-Builds -The Fire, the numerous nameless heroes in first person, have never seen any progress or change in their lives; neither their drunken fathers nor their drunken fathers have seen any progress in their lives. Complete disillusionment, lack of opportunities, alcoholism, poverty, inherent trauma and five decades of political oppression are the evils of colonization that has totally devastated the Spokane Community.

The general picture of the rez obtained in these stories is that, the Spokane reservation is geographically and politically isolated from the main stream society, which is also all the more isolated from hope and happiness. Victor in "Because My Father Always Said He Was The Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play "The Star-Spongeled Banner' At Woodstock" describes the quietness of the rez to be "so

quiet, a reservation kind of quiet, where you can hear somebody drinking whiskey on the rocks three miles away” (*LRTFH* 35). So the Spokane reservation is both geographically as well as socially isolated planet devoid of energy and spirit. This eclipsed reservation is administrated by BIA and Tribal Council, the two main governing bodies of the reservation.

The Tribal Councils in the U.S are the tribal self-governments that have the inherent power to all matters involving their members and a range of matters in their respective Indian Country. The tribal chairman and the members of the Tribal Council are all elected by the tribe. The tribal governments are generally not in a position to levy property or income taxes because of the unique land tenure in Indian Country and fragile economies. Income from tribal business is the only no-federal source for most tribes and hence the revenue status of the Tribal Council is weak and unable to meet out all essential and basic well-fare programs of the tribe.

The inefficiency and poor monetary conditions of the Tribal Council is highlighted in “This Is What It Means To Say Phoenix Arizona” when Victor seek the help of the Tribal Council to bring his father’s dead body back to Spokane from Arizona. The Tribal Council does not consist of able administrators to adopt dynamic strategies to tactfully manage the poor economic conditions of the council. Basically the tribe constitutes of uneducated people with the entire characteristic typical to the Spokane Community and hence the Tribal Council members elected from within the tribe are naturally prone to be poor administrators.

In one of the interviews Alexie states that while sovereignty of Indian Nations is fought for, the Tribal Councils are managed by people who could not spell sovereignty. In “Distances” the Tribal Council chairman pockets a watch calling it a whiteman artifact and a sin, in the process of clearing the rez from white men and things related to them. Lack of efficiency and inadequate funds alone are not their drawback but dishonesty and hypocrisy too are seen among them. In “Flight” while John-John runs “down the reservation highway, three miles of smooth, smooth

pavement” (*LRTFH* 227) Alexie ridicules “It happens that way: the tribe had a government grant to fix the roads, but half the Indians on the reservation still lived on commodities” (*LRTFH* 227).

The BIA is one of the oldest bureaus in the Federal government established to oversee and carryout the Federal government’s trade and treaty relations with the tribe. Earlier in 1824 BIA has been under the US Department of War which later was transferred to the newly created U.S. Department of the Interior. Since, 1824 there have been 45 commissioners of BIA of whom, except six American Indian or Alaska Natives the rest of the commissioners have been white people. Since this office bearer solely belongs to the Federal Government the commissioner is a political appointee appointed by the President of USA. These commissioners have little background or understanding of Indians and Indian affairs prior to their appointment. Bird Lawrence, a white man the father of Reggie Polatkin, one of the protagonists in *Indian Killer* is a BIA employee. He is filled with contempt and hatred towards the local community as well as his own half-white son whom, he denies his own surname and insists to use his Indian surname.

It is quiet natural for the racially biased BIA to work against the tribal community though it has been established to govern Indian affairs. In “The Trial of Thomas-Builds-The Fire” their animosity towards the local community is made obvious while they seriously contrive to put an end to him with felony charges which has been already discussed elaborately in the issue of racial conflicts. The BIA’s indifference and insensibility are brought to light when Alexie states the small noises that Thomas made after his twenty long years of silence “contained more emotion and meaning than entire sentences constructed by the BIA” (*LRTFH* 94). The hero of “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” is a star basketball player of his school days. When he finds a white guy in the reservation gym is the new BIA chief’s kid who is also a best ball player, he immediately feels that “this BIA kid needed to be beaten by an Indian, any Indian” (*LRTFH* 189). Though he has been trying to regain

his game and shape that he has lost from drinking and sadness, he jumps into a basketball match to defeat him. Under such a racist attitude between BIA and the local community possibility for growth or development are impossible.

Apart from the Tribal council and the BIA other important activity centered spots are the Government Commodity Stores, Trading Post and Powwow Tavern. Names of companies or factories or marketing places are not seen in any of these stories and novels. So, it is very obvious that there is no scope for developmental activities or employment or economic inflow. Mostly the members of the community are blue-collared employees both in and out of the reservation and hence no scope for sufficient economic inflow or stability since they are also drunkards. Therefore, poverty is the order of the day which influences all walks of their lives. Hunger informs the lives of the community members, since, empty refrigerators, empty stomach, and poor quality commodity foods are the common condition of the rez. If at all there is a party in the reservation it is only liquor party and it is celebrated by the amount received from the corporation for letting land for lease to put power poles or windmills.

Poverty, hunger and pain are deep rooted in the rez life where success or successful role models are hard to emerge. Amidst these discouraging conditions mostly no body aspires to achieve and the few who dream and have the potential for success succumb to one or other social evils like alcohol or poverty and end up drunkards like the rest of their community members. Many such examples are seen in many of these stories and novels. Arnold Spirit says ‘Given the chance, my mother would have gone to college. She still reads books like crazy’ (*ATDPI* 11). And mentions that “Given the chance my father would have been a musician. When he gets drunk, he sings old country songs and blues too. And he sounds good. Like a pro. Like he should be on the radio” (*ATDPI* 13). Their dreams and talents are futile because, nobody paid attention to their dreams.

It is true when Arnold points out “But we reservation Indians don’t get to realize our dreams. We don’t get those chances or choices. We are just poor. That’s all we are” (*ATDPI* 13). The case is the same with the college dropout Junior Polatkin, the dignified and elderly Samuel-Build -The Fire, the legendary basketball player Eugene, upcoming star basketball player Julius Windmaker, college dropouts Jackson Jackson and Thomas King and many more nameless heroes.

A sense of failure and pain has ingrained in their personality that they are obsessed with failure. When Arnold’s father say, “Those white people aren’t better than your” (*ATDPI* 55). Le feels, “But he was so wrong. And he new he was wrong. He the loser Indian father of a loser Indian son living in a world built for winners” (*ATDPI* 55). In “War Dance” when the narrator hero is in conversation with another Indian in the hospital he says “I mean, come on, I’m a loser, ... My whole family is filled with loser’s” (*Blasphemy* 49).

The conversation between the Spokane narrator and Lummi is about their purpose of stay in the hospital and the above mentioned dialogue is irrelevant and uttered spontaneously by the Lummi Indian. This makes it clear that it is somewhere deep in their psyche that failure in an American Indian attribute.

“It is hard to be optimistic on the reservation” (*LRTFH* 49). Because anything related to success is considered as the quality of white:

A lot of people are so dysfunctional, to point they believe that any Indian striving for success becomes white, that failure is an American Indian attributed. They’ve internalised the colonialism so much, they’ve internalized the stereo type so much, that they think any effort towards success is white. (qtd. Kelley Blewester 77)

Unfortunately, the Spokanes do not have any successful role models or savior heroes who could redeem them from their poverty and dysfunction. “And, just like everybody else, Indians need heroes to help them learn how to survive. But what happens when our heroes don’t even know how to pay their bills?” (*LRTFH* 49)

Laments Victor in “The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn’t Flash Red Anymore”. While Alexie’s characters struggle to break, the chains of generational handicaps their poverty pulls them down from moving further. “How do we imagine a new life, when a pocketful of quarters weighs our possibilities down?” (*LRTFH* 152).

While poverty, dysfunction failure and the resultants stasis forms the way of life it is sure to accompany boredom and trauma to the community. Life becomes uneventful filled with generations of pain and frustration imparting negative attitude to life. Such trauma leads to suicide and one such attempt is seen in “The only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn’t Flash Red Anymore”. Where, Victor and Adrian try to pull the trigger of the pistol putting the barrel in their mouth. In this short story the boredom filled uneventful life of the young and dusty heroes of the reservation is captured crystal-clear. “A year later, Adrian and I sat on the same porch in the same chairs. We’d done things in between, like ate and slept and read the newspaper” (*LRTFH* 50). Some more conversation between Adrian and Victor throws light on the absurdity of rez life:

“Well”, Adrian asked What do you want to do tomorrow?

“Don’t know”

“Shit, that damn traffic signal is still broken. Look.”

Adrian pointed down the road and he was right. But, what’s the point of fixing it in a place where the STOP signs are just suggestions?”

“What time is it?” Adrian asked.

“I don’t know. Ten, I think.”

“Let’s go somewhere.”

“Where?”

“I don’t know, Spokane, anywhere. Let’s just go.” (*LRTFH* 52)

Nothing has changed in their lives for the past five centuries under colonization and hence, “It was the beginning of a new day on earth, but the same old shit on the reservation” (*LRTFH* 73).

In an interview to *The Bloomsbury Reviews* Alexie is questioned about the recurring image of time in his stories where we come across character who stand in line for five hundred years or woman who hasn't smiled for two hundred years. Alexie replies “Yes. The past is still here for us we carry all of that with us. Otherwise they wouldn't keep repeating the same mistakes” (Peterson 6). In “All I Wanted To Do Was Dance” Victor the protagonist who at times drives a garbage truck for the BIA or cooks hamburgers at the Tribal Café stands in line to buy beer in the Trading Post. When Seymour is asked how long Victor has been standing there he replies, “Victor has been standing there his whole life - I think he's been there for five hundred years” (*LRTFH* 89). Such images of time not only indicate that the lives of the Spokane Indians are not only haunted by boredom and monotony but, it has been the same without any change or development for decades together. Neither the federal government, nor the Tribal Council has genuine concern for the Natives of the land. People without proper leadership and successful role models adopt same old life destructive choices. Therefore, their lives are nothing but a combination of poverty, despondency and addiction due to five decades of political oppression.

After an in-depth study of so many plots, characters and dialogues in these two short story collections and two novels, it is proved beyond doubt that these major social issues of alcoholism, poverty, racial discriminations and violence have been instrumental in bringing about total dysfunction and the consequent stasis of the Spokane community. Alexie one of the current generation of new story letters, is not interested in romanticizing the rez life but honestly and boldly delineates the reality of the contemporary situation.

It is a well-known fact that the American Indian communities have lost their Native land language, culture, religion and spirituality as a result of colonization and

five long decades of persistent colonial oppression and forced assimilations. But their victimization to genocide by the European settlers is a fact that, the world is unaware of. These Native population, who are victims of such traumatized past are greatly affected by their loss and grievances which is reflected in their behavior and lives in many levels. Their addiction to alcoholism, violence and racism are all explicit forms of their inherent intergenerational trauma brought by the colonization that has been passed from generation to generation, which indeed greatly ameliorates their community's dysfunction. So, trauma and its various types which play such a vital role shaping everything and anything of the community will be made a thread bare analysis in the following chapter.