

Chapter V

Conclusion

Sometimes, father, you and I
Are like dirty ghosts
Who wear the same sheets every day
As one more piece of us just dies and dies and dies

- Alexie, *Reservation Blues*

This work began with the objective of exploring the various factors that contribute to the dysfunction and stasis of the Spokane community with respect to the individual characters, who paves the way for its re-enactment of the pop culture myth of the vanishing race in the select works of Sherman Alexie. This study undertakes an indepth analysis of the socio-cultural issues, historical trauma factors and resistance and resilience attitude Spokane community in the select works of Sherman Alexie. As a result, often painful and at times surprising and amazing facts that contribute to the dysfunctional mode of Alexie's fictional Spokane community are revealed.

“The portrayal of alcoholism that has been rampant through the generation cannot be denied and presents a paradox with which native writers must grapple” (Bird 144) and therefore the social issue of alcohol and substance abuse are apparent truths in the works of Alexie. His alcoholics range from pathetic drunk like Samuel Builds-The-Fire in the short story “A Train is an Order of Occurrence Designed to Lead to Some Result”, pitiful alcoholic parents like the parents of all the protagonists of Alexie, to the stinky drunk like Dirty Joe in the short story “Amusements”. Alexie's exposition of a wide range of alcoholics bring to the spotlight myriad issues surrounding the single issue of alcoholism. The entire community is uprooted from a promising present and future and this entraps them to the painful past that assures nothing. Promising younger generations like the small boy Victor, teenage basketball player Julius Windmaker, Arnold Jr., Thomas, Junior Polatkin and all of Alexie's protagonists are destined to grow up and thrive in the

alcoholic's filled reservation. The result is that except in very few cases most of the upcoming young talents quietly naturally adopt to the culture of alcoholism and they lose their future along with that of the community's.

One of the main reasons for violence in the Spokane community is alcoholism and these young protagonists at times involve in violence and vandalism and end up in jail as in the case of Julius Windmaker. This in turn, affects their chance for a collegiate education that could make vast difference in their life. Therefore, alcoholism is the giant Goliath that devours the invaluable resources of the community and renders it helpless. Since, majority of the of the community's members are alcoholics the smallest unit of a community, the family is filled with alcoholics, irrespective of age and gender, which destroys their health and meagre resources. Alcoholism, most of the times proves to be fatal to their lives, because intoxication leads to fatal accidents. A thoughtless fatal gunshot over the lost sip of a drink is an usual violent ceremony of the alcoholic Spokane community.

Since, alcoholism is a common trait of the blue-collar employees of the Spokane community, they are mostly unsupportive fathers to their families. Even traditional men like Samuel Builds-The-Fire, who cherishes their tribal values, pathetically cede to alcohol, due to financial recession. The most painful aspect of the life of the reservation alcoholics is that after they switch over to sobriety, their life is all the more hopeless and helpless. The federal government's lack of support in providing job opportunities, valid education and dignified life, forces the Natives to depend on alcohol as an all curing panacea. Moreover, all their sweet memories are inseparable from the memory of their intoxicated parents, friends and relatives who always stagger in alcohol.

The power of alcohol is so overwhelming that it has successfully resulted in cultural degeneration. Their spiritual practices like going on a vision quest and traditional dances are powered by drugs like meth, speed and crack which prove the constant infiltration of alcohol and drugs and the resultant erosion of the Spokane culture and community. In this work, Alexie uncompromisingly captures the debilitating effects of

alcoholism, which results in the destruction of the promising younger generation's untoward violence and death, poverty ridden families, and the resultant disillusionment and despondency in the lives of the members of the Spokane community, in his stories. As alcoholism is a constant truth that cannot be denied in the contemporary American Indians' social life, poverty is also as powerful and dominating aspect of their society. The colonised Spokane community that is forced to remains in an endless environment of "American third-world" (*LRTFH*xiii) poverty manifests itself in all aspects of their life.

The Spokane community, under colonization and oppression, denied of opportunities is filled with generations of alcoholics. Life for them is an endless environment of sickening poverty, hunger and pangs, HUD houses, commodity foods, trailer houses, penniless Christmas and poverty in all forms. Such acute poverty form the community's common standard of life and their everyday nightmares. The dire poverty is reflected in Indian Health Care Services too, which fail to provide quality health care for the Spokane community. Inadequate medical supplies, inefficient doctors and the resultant pain and sufferings form the recurring themes in many of his stories. The Health Care system's insensitivity to the physical and emotional pains of the Natives is captured through the sufferings of the hydrocephalus, Arnold Jr. in *The Diary* and the bone fractured Victor in "Jesus Christ's Half-Brother Is Alive And Well On The Spokane Indian Reservation" and this obviously reflects their dehumanization of Indians. It is also involved in the most unjust and genocidal practice of sterilizing Indian women without their consent and knowledge as in the case of Victor's mother in the short story "Fun House". A highly crippled health care system cripples the lives of the poor and sickly Spokanes.

The only type of educational institutions for the reservation Indians is the reservation schools that follows outdated and useless curriculum. Arnold Jr. is expected to read from the same book that his mother reads in her seventh grade. The lack of importance to the education of the reservation children exposes the biased colonial attitude of the BIA incharge of reservation affairs.

The Tribal Council and Bureau of Indian Affairs are the two governmental institutions set by the federal government for the welfare of the Native community. They are callous and biased and therefore mismanage the meagre relief measures provided by the government for the reservation community. These two power centres are unreliable and useless in promoting the standard of life of the Natives. Poverty is neither their cultural quality nor their ancestral property it is the product of five hundred years of colonial domination and economic privation. For no reason of their own, the Spokane Indians are destined to struggle in a wrenching poverty. Alexie also underscores that the sickening poverty forms the reason for the absence of heroes in Native communities who could teach them survival.

The racial discrimination is an unavoidable ordeal for the domestically colonised Spokane community and it has a major impact on all aspects of their life including their general psyche. The personally mediated racism of the white individuals is apparent at moments when they prevent their girl children from befriending Indian boys, and therefore, Alexie's protagonists Victor, Arnold Jr., John Smith and Reggie face similar problems constantly. The personally mediated racism even reaches a very violent and despicable stage as in the case of the white man and a BIA official, Bird Lawrence, who denies his surname to his half-white son Reggie. He brutally educates him against the Spokane Indians and their history.

Racism is institutionalized in press, judiciary, police force, education and media. The police often harass Indians while driving by framing them with false accusations as in the case of Jimmy Many Horse and Arnold Spirit's, the father of Arnold Jr.. The police consider the murder of homeless Indians as low priority case and as a natural pest control. An urban Spokane Indian narrator, who is discharged of guilt after the murder of a black boy is sensationalized to fuel racial discrimination. The notorious radio talk show host Truck Schultz is an epitome of racism who makes use of every opportunity to flare up racial violence. Racial violence ranges from fistfights between Native and white school boys as in *The Diary*, violent and brutal attacks by mixed blood Reggie and gang, by

white Arron Rogger and gang subsequently the brutal murders of whites by the Indian killer, greatly exacerbate the sensitive relationship between the whites and the Natives.

“The Trial of Thomas Builds-The-Fire” is a fine example of the racist judiciary that is threatened by Thomas’s provocative narration of Spokanes’ history. The judiciary decides to put an end to Thomas by fixing him of felony charges. The prisons of the country have the most loathsome and ugly episodes of sexual crimes among racist gangs. Alexie’s protagonist of “Scars” escapes this ordeal with the help of his own tribal gang’s support within the prison, while Junior of “Cry Cry Cry” becomes a victim, which has an everlasting impact on him till his death. This particular issue proves the individuals and the institutions of the white society to be threateningly prone to racism and racial violence.

The subtlest but intense form of racism is the useless education designed for the Native children. This form of racism reveals the colonizer’s plan to permanently subjugate the Natives to an eternal doom. Only very few like Arnold Jr. escape the ‘education for extinction’ in search of hope. The already marginalized and victimized Spokanes remain totally helpless with every institution set against them. As a result, a sense of failure and pain has ingrained in their personality and they become obsessed with it. They consider themselves as loser Indian sons of generations of loser Indian fathers. Such inculcation of psychological internalization of oppression leads to “autogenocide” (qtd. by Weaver²⁰).

Alexie’s stories also host the positive discrimination of Mary Lynn, who has sex with an Indian man just for the reason of being an Indian, the reverse discrimination of Marie Polatkin, who hates whites, and the passive and harmless racism of the white narrator of “Gentrification”. Moreover, the Natives are also victims of racist nick names and jokes and therefore, they are often called as ‘Chief’, ‘Tonto’ or ‘Squaw boy’. Almost all the protagonists of Alexie are called either of these names or all of these names as in the case of Arnold Jr..

The issues of Alcoholism, poverty and racism are not Spokane Indians' cultural values, but they are as Alexie says "symptoms of a disease called poverty and political oppression" (Campbell 118) and direct consequence of five hundred years of colonisation. Unable to escape this spirit stealing condition, they take refuge in alcohol which invariably renders their life all the more disillusioned and devastated. The community is filled with alcoholics in every generation and "keep(s) repeating the same mistakes" (John and Bellante 6) that has ultimately resulted in its dysfunction and stasis. Therefore, the Spokane community's lack of progress and prosperity, due to its wrenching social issues, have set them forever in the process of waning and vanishing.

When a community's identity is defined by its dysfunction, stasis and colonization it goes without saying that its identity is nothing other than pain and suffering. The impact of five hundred years of colonization has culminated in personal loss and grievance – poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, absent fathers – along with cultural loss and collective trauma. Their unresolved grievance and loss across generations might inevitably affect their psychological equilibrium that leads to their dysfunction and stasis. With this basic ideology chapter III entitled "**The Nexus of History and Hysteria: The Historical Trauma Matrix**" probes into another major issue of soul wound/intergenerational trauma/historical trauma of the community.

The trauma of the Native American community is due to their long term impact of suppression and historical oppression, a result of prolonged colonization. The Natives are also considered survivors of more extreme traumatisations because they have come through five centuries of genocide and forced assimilation. Therefore, the cultural trauma theory and the PTSD of American Psychiatric Association that considers trauma as an event based, individual oriented and chronologically bound phenomena does not account for the sustained and long endured processes of the trauma of colonialism and its intergenerational impact. Therefore, it falls short of diagnosing the trauma of the indigenous people, and hence, the historical trauma construct pioneered by Mary Yellow

Horse Brave Heart, has been applied to understand the trauma of Alexie's fictional Spokane community.

Historical trauma theory considers the trauma of the indigenous people to be deeper and more pervasive communal loss due to genocide, and massive human trauma over generations that results from loss of land, loss of language, culture to which they have been spiritually and emotionally tied. Therefore, historical trauma is collective, cumulative, emotional and psychological injury that extends over life span and across generations.

The highly distinct feature of historical trauma theory is that it identifies and acknowledges the transmission of psychological and emotional consequences of the trauma through generations. Native historical trauma theory pioneer Duran and Duran elucidate that historical trauma becomes embedded in the cultural memory of the affected community and it is passed on to subsequent generations by the same mechanisms by which culture is generally transmitted. Therefore, the trauma of the indigenous becomes normalized within the culture. According to Brave Heart, the psychological disorders of historical trauma victims are denial, depersonalization, isolation, memory loss, nightmares, psychic numbing, hyper vigilance, substance abuse, fixation on trauma identification, along with survivor's guilt and unresolved grief.

The historical incidents that brought about massive demographic disasters such as the break out of virgin soil diseases, especially the intentional spread of smallpox through infested blankets, and the intentional killing of Natives for land are called as 'the dark nucleus' of traumatic memory that is buried deep within the psyche of the Natives. Mrs. Brave Heart and other Native psychologist opine that four major genocidal policies of the U.S. Government – Removal and Relocation, Reservation, Boarding Schools and Termination, in the name of assimilation, have a tremendous effect on the Native psyche. The fictional works of Alexie, recapture the intergenerational trauma impact of these historical events along with the trauma of the contemporary life of his Spokane Indian characters.

Alexie throws light on the devastation of smallpox evil through the vision quest of Thomas Builds-The-Fire which reiterates the dwindling of their tribe. John Smith's life is a metaphor for the evils of Termination and Relocation policies set against Natives. John Smith, the Native American who is adopted by a white family, identifies the white man's city to be a place of war and a national monument of colonization for the Natives. The reservation policies that confined them to the reserves of useless lands are living examples of Euro-American colonialism and nation building at the cost of indigenous people's social-life and culture. Alexie's Spokane Indian reservation is a place of collective pain and traumatized identity where social issues are huge and deeply pervasive. Therefore, characters who have the ability to bounce back to life, escape reservation to avoid the danger of being drowned into the layers and layers of failures of their reservation.

The most brutal and hazardous war against the Natives take the form of educational program. The "night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom" (Nagugi 9). The fathers and grandfathers of Alexie's stories are the product of Carlisle Indian Industrial Schools founded for the assimilation of the Natives into white society. While these schools kill the Indian in order to save the man, they produce misfits who could neither fit into Native community nor the white society. These unproductive misfits are also trauma victims because of the inhumanistic brutal experience in the boarding schools which has rendered them totally devoid of parenting abilities. Native critic, Truer considers this as a severe damage to the Native community's social fabric. Sherman Alexie's stories are filled with fathers who are victims of childhood trauma in their boarding schools and their victimization finds expression in violence and alcohol, leading to family breakdown and social dysfunction. Not only this particular trauma, but every trauma of the Native community creates indelible marks upon the identity of their group in a fundamental and irrevocable ways that stands testimony to their cultural trauma put forward by Jerry C. Alexander.

The history of the Spokane community of Alexie meets the UN definition of genocide, including the residential boarding school programs, the systematic removal of Indian children from their tribes in the name of adoption, relocation, termination, reservation, uninformed sterilization of Indian women without their consent and innumerable atrocities that have systematically reduced their population and devastated their culture. An excruciatingly painful traumatic past constantly replays in myriad forms in their present lives. This has ultimately resulted in the systematic disintegration of the social and economic structure of the community.

Alexie captures the essence of the psychological conflict of the historical trauma through John Smith, the protagonist of *Indian Killer*. The root cause of the trauma of John Smith arises from the removal and relocation of John, a Native American baby, who is adopted by an upper middle class white couple Olivia and Daniel. They serve as a metaphor for America's paternalistic attitude that believes in doing politically right things. John, from his childhood is exposed to pop culture ideologies of Indian and Indianness and therefore, he is totally misled into false images of Indians and Indian culture. John, neither finds himself rooted in white society because of his racial identity, nor does he find rooted in the Native society because of the lack of access to authentic Indian identity.

John is repeatedly tormented and fragmented by his identity crisis that leads to drastic mood swings – suspicion, mental agony, depression, fear and terrific rage. His immense rage to kill a white man, whom he considers to be the cause of his rootless condition, ironically finds expression in killing himself at the end. The indigenous children relocated to white society are 'stolen generation' whose social problems and dysfunction are tremendous. John becomes a metaphor for the traumatic pain of the stolen generation whose trauma becomes a symptom of a larger historical loss, as well as its contemporary expression.

The novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* highlights the learned helplessness of historically traumatized community. Arnold Jr. the teenage protagonist

believes the world to be a series of disasters which reflects the wounding of the psyche of the Native communities. Arnold is fully aware of his condition as a colonized who, is denied of choices, chances and dreams. Many of Alexie's protagonists consider themselves as loser Indians born to replay their generations of defeat. For them, the reservation Indian is an utter hopeless person who can never strive for a dignified survival. The adverse childhood experiences, obtained from a historical trauma plagued community, result in the internalization of such negative qualities. They inculcate the idea that adverse events are stable and as individuals they are powerless to influence any of the future outcomes of their lives.

The unresolved grief, a product of their painful history and their ongoing colonization, is a major symptom of intergenerational trauma that spurs up spontaneous and random violence. When grief is externalized it takes the form of social and domestic violence – the sudden outbreak of violent encounters between friends and family members as in the case of the New Year Eve party in “Every little Hurricane” and gun shots at alcohol bars as in *The Diary*. The internalized rage ends up in suicide as in the case of John Smith in *Indian Killer*. According to Atkinson, such endemic nature of violence, over a number of generations result in violent behaviour, becoming the norm of families and societies possessed by intergenerational trauma. This observation very well substantiates the violent attitude of Alexie's Spokane community.

Brave Heart opines that survivor guilt is a symptom peculiar to intergenerational trauma, which leads to suicidal behaviour. This forms one of the major factors that accounts for the trauma prone community's alcohol and substance abuse, because alcoholism tends to be a slow process of suicide. So, alcoholism becomes a coping or maladaptive social behaviour for so many other painful historical trauma symptoms of the community. Moreover, it gets upgraded from a symptom of disorder or coping method, to trauma by itself, since, it results in other form of social disorders like violence, death, poverty, familial and communal dysfunction.

When the major issues of historical trauma are considered, it is extremely apparent that every single issue is highly potential to produce an array of other disorders that are quiet powerful to produce more and more disorders. For example, the issue of relocation in the contemporary situations takes the form of adoption or moving out of one's reservation, for education and job opportunities and this results in identity crisis and racism, which in turn provokes alcoholism, rage, violence that again leads to poverty, loss of identity, racial violence, and alcohol induced accidents and deaths. Hence, the soulwound or historical trauma emerges to be an endless, as well as, a vicious circle.

An in depth study of this chapter, has clearly reiterated that the unhealed soulwound of five hundred years of genocidal assimilation policies, forced upon Alexie's Spokane community have resulted in a collective, cumulative and intergenerational trauma. The protagonists of his stories are caught up in this vicious circle trauma and they are denied of future, hope and success and therefore, they constantly re-enact the vanishing Indian Myth.

When a community is under historictraumatization and oppression for more than five hundred years of its colonization, their resistance to the ongoing oppressive conditions forms part of their everyday life. Since, the fictional works of Alexie reflects the resistance attitude of the contemporarySpokanes community, his works are considered highly politicized literary works that vehemently critiques and interrogates the oppressive colonizing institutions and ideologies of thehegemonic society. Therefore, it naturally falls under the category of resistance literature in accordance with Barbara Harlow's ideology of resistance literature that addresses the issues of colonialism and oppression in all its forms- both internal and external landscapes.

The main characteristic of Native American literature is to engage in counter narratives to the misrepresented history as defined by the written and visual pop culture narratives of the hegemonic Euro-American society that tell a story of the European conquest of North America. The resistance in Alexie's works involve two different

processes; one is the revision of history and the other one is the revision of misrepresented Native American identity. Alexie's revisioning of history includes the revisioning of great mainstream myth of the nation building – the great myth of discovery and conquest by Euro-Americans and the bestowing of civilization and Christianity on the barbarous Natives.

Alexie revises history with the help of the community's story teller Thomas Builds-The-Fire and Fr. Duncan whose stories underscores the apocalypse brought upon by the Natives in the name of civilization and Christianity. Alexie's critics opine that revising of history along with providing imaginary alternatives to dominant culture's narratives might not change the present but may provoke his community to conceive of other possibilities which will influence their future.

Alexie's works are greatly concerned with the stereotypes and myths propagated by pop culture films and television that reiterate the myth of the noble savage or the vanishing Indian of the past. Alexie's protagonist Victor, Thomas, Junior Polatkin, Arnold Jr., Rowdy, Marie Polatkin, Corliss and numerous other narrators in the stories reject and resist the hegemonic society's imposed stereotype that has reduced their identity to visible ethnic markers and outdated and exaggerated images. For, the hegemonic white society, the Native is an unidimensional static product –a Tonto, a noble savage, a stinky drunkard, a chief, a squaw boy or a welfare cheat. But Alexie's fictional characters of the Spokane reservation totally resist these degrading images that in no way reflect them. The protagonists of the Spokane community struggle for self-representation and self-definition against the poisonous colonial scripts that has killed their self-worth and cultural identity along with subverting the history of millions of American Indians.

Alexie's protagonists are quite aware of the mechanism of five centuries of colonization that has always aimed at their psychological internalization of oppressive images and ideologies in order to colonize their internal landscape. In spite of the malicious propaganda of the pop culture, these Spokane characters are very much

conscious of their Indian identity but the irony is that the identity they are aware of is an ‘imposed identity’. Centuries of oppression and economic sanctions of the federal government have created a painful and negative identity on the Spokane society. Without access to authentic Indian identity they ironically embrace their pain and defeat as their identity which proves self-defeating. Except the three protagonist Marie, Corliss and Arnold Jr., the rest of the protagonists end up in their reservation re-enacting the vanishing Indian myth. They have mistaken by associating life changing positive experiences – optimism, success happiness and material prosperity – with their every flourishing colonizer and associating pain and poverty to their own identity. Their loyalty for their culture and an inherent rage against their rulers, make them adopt an irrational resistance for anything and everything white. In their resistance to dehumanizing myths they pathetically and ironically end up as the vanishing Indian by their “unchanging nature that ensure the eventual emotional, cultural, or literal deaths” (Andrews 236).

The formula for survival that Alexie prescribes for his fictional Spokane Indian community is “Survival= angerx imagination” (*LRTFH* 150). The protagonist Victor, Thomas, Junior Polatkin and many other narrators exhibit an all-consuming anger in the form of resistance, but at the same time, they lack other half of the survival technique. On the other hand, Arnold Jr., Marie Polatkin and Corliss are resilient individuals who are fully equipped with the coping strategy to face the white world.

A theory of psychological resilience emphasizes the positive factors like intelligence, smartness, optimism, creativity etc. to re-bounce to life in the face of traumatic situations. Since, Alexie’s protagonist Arnold Jr., Corliss and Marie emerge successful because they are smart enough to combine their anger with imagination. They are as resistive as any other member of their community, but their resilience makes them identify a valid education, of the hegemonic society, as their redeemer.

Recent researchers have identified the issue of racism and trauma as extreme vulnerable factors for indigenous communities. These young Spokanes are by birth intergenerational trauma victims and who are also vulnerable to the destructive factors of the racism inherent in the white world. Attending college is an extreme adventure for the Natives, because of the inherent racism that finds expression in every aspect of their life – from the social environment to academic environment with a biased curriculum that propagates colonial scripts. The American history taught in the college is highly potential of making any Native youngster to end up with schizophrenia. Arnold, Corliss and Marie, in the process of self-defining their identity, undergo such mental turmoil along with the risk of crossing their reservation borders, which is considered a safe haven for the reservation community.

Despite the existence of so many vulnerable factors, they are successful in building a positive self-image of themselves to defy the pop culture myths. Arnold's life changing decision of not to yield to alcohol helps him break the negative stereotype of the drunken Indian. Marie who is aware that Native women do not possess any individualistic identity in the eyes of the white world, is successful in demanding it from Dr. Marther, her white professor, who acknowledges her individuality. Corliss proves to be a judicious pragmatist who happily makes use of the positive Indian stereotype to enjoy advantages. These resilient characters make use of their anger along with their imagination to find alternate way of life in order to survive and succeed in their own world and in the world of their colonisers. These protagonists are not limited by their ethnicity or gender. They stand in sharp contrast to the many self-defeated characters of Alexie and therefore they are Alexie's iconic role models for their community.

This chapter also discusses the strong resistance of the Natives against the cultural appropriation by whites. Alexie strongly condemns the appropriation of Native culture in the characters of the detective novelist and self-proclaimed Indian Jack Wilson and the professor Dr. Marther of the Washington State University, both of whom, mythologise Indians and Indianness. The mythologizing, romanticising and vilifying of Native people

have been the reason behind many of the stereotypes and myths on Natives, that have proved detrimental to their community's identity and especially to the upcoming younger generations for mistaking them for authentic Indian identity. The inheritance of such myth by Natives result in what Vizenor calls the "Terminal Creed" (*Mixed Blood Messages* 85) that ultimately leads to self-extinction. Alexie believes in humanizing people which can alone help people in identifying with each other, either romanticizing or vilifying may only result in creating distances and misconceptions.

Since, Alexie's works are documents of resistance to many numbers of existing oppressive issues of the Native society, he also addresses the issue of Native women stereotypes – 'princes Pocahontas', 'papoose' and 'squaw' – with a sense of moral responsibility. The characters of Big Mom, Grandmother Etta, Norma Many Horses and Mary Lynn are striking women characters, who are more individualistic, progressive, dignified and at times highly revered women of their community. These women protagonists are perfect paradigms of the matriarchal form of the Spokane community that has transformed to patriarchal system due to their forced assimilation. The reason behind elevating Marie and Corliss as resilient and iconic female protagonist, among the numerous male protagonist, is a strong representation of Alexie's resistance to the existing malevolent media stereotypes of Native women.

At the end of this particular chapter, it becomes quite apparent that the Spokane community is with abundance of resistance but inadequate in resilience that forms the reason for their devastation. Their resistance reaches the height of irrationality, that ends up in neglecting life-transforming positive attitudes, which automatically leads them to their self-destruction. Their all-consuming rage and hatredness towards their colonizers and their colonial scripts, end in an irrational resistance to everything white. This irrational resistance in the absence of resilience confines them to the reservation of their mind as well as in the eternal pain and poverty of their community. Unfortunately, this in turn drives them to replay the vanishing Indian myth without their own intension.

After a critical analysis of various factors of the three major domains of the life of the Spokane community, it is proved beyond doubt that the Spokane community is highly dysfunctional and static. It is a community that is completely eroded by socio-cultural issues, psychological devastation, historical trauma and political oppression by stereotyped identities and degrading myths. For Natives, it is their genocidal history and the resultant historical trauma form the root cause for all their devastation and disillusionment. The innumerable spirit stealing miseries and pain have already plundered their community to lose its potency to produce saviours and role models. They are always marginalized, subordinated and abandoned without proper rehabilitation measures even at the dawn of twenty-first century.

The relationship between the Native community and the mainstream U.S. community is that of the coloniser and the colonized. “The policies that govern and regulate reservation life are still under the control of the colonizer / perpetrator” (Faimon 245), who has nothing to provide except gestures of support for five centuries of crippling colonization. The forced assimilation policies of their colonizers have necessitated their surrender of culture, language and spirituality. The Euro-American’s profound violation of racial identity of the Natives have led to the “illusion of white superiority” (Weaver 20) and a “common feelings of shame, guilt and inferiority” among Natives which has led to the psychological internalization of oppression, what M.A. Jaimes-Guerrero considers as “autogenocide” (qtd. by Weaver 20). Alexie’s heroes invariably, including Arnold Jr. who is the only resilient male character possess these self-effacing qualities along with the qualities of learned helplessness of their community, a symptom of historical trauma that devastates their self-esteem.

Alexie’s stories also bring to the limelight the irony of the existing two governmental institutions that are inefficient, irresponsible and corrupt in their office and of no use for the rehabilitation of the community. The Tribal Council’s poor funding abilities are exposed when they refuse financial assistance to Victor in his endeavour to bring his dead father’s body from Arizona. The Tribal council’s corruption and hypocrisy

are exposed when the Tribal council's head pockets a watch in the process of discarding it. The office of the BIA is more biased and distanced because the president of the BIA is invariably a white, appointed by the President of the United States. The mismanagement of funds is exposed in the short story "Flight", that talks about money spent on lengthy smooth pavements, while the entire reservation feeds on worst kind of food. The vast canvas of the Spokane community, as painted by Alexie elucidates in detail the historical trauma truth, that trauma is ever cumulative. Their victimisation, to genocidal crimes and forced assimilation policies, have resulted in a condition of eternal intergenerational trauma that accompanies physical and psychological hazards. The hydrocephalous head, innumerable teeth and a strange physical structure of Arnold Jr., the juvenile diabetics of Victor and the high percentage of diabetics of the Natives and an array of psychological symptoms like low self-esteem, rage, learned helplessness, maladaptive social behaviours, etc. make up the personality of Alexie's protagonist to exacerbate the prevailing challenging survival conditions of the reservation. These qualities render them deprived of vigour and vitality to succeed, to redefine and reconstruct their identity.

The coping strategy or the maladaptive social behaviour, a major symptom of the soulwound finds expression in alcohol and substance abuse which once again thwarts their life socially, economically, physically, culturally and spiritually. So, it can be assumed that how historical trauma, the unconquerable malignant demon produces huge pain that ultimately forces asylum in alcohol – the prime reason behind the highest percentage of alcoholics in Native communities. And just this particular issue is all powerful and consuming that it delivers degeneration in all domains of the Native's life. The destructive cycle is repeated and the devastation and disillusionment are relentless in Alexie's fictional Spokane community.

For any community "the first principle of recovery is the empowerment of survivor" (Faimon 242). Revitalization is achieved when the hegemonic group recognizes the injured society's claim for rehabilitation and "hopefully supports that community's traditional governmental patterns, language, spiritual traditions, cultural symbols and

stability and health” (Stamm et al. 100). Unfortunately, any such support is not handed out to the fictional Spokane community by the hegemonic group. Alexie’s heroes, who abandon alcohol for their betterment, end up frustrated and disillusioned at the dire conditions of the unpromising hopeless reservation life which in turn forces them to think of reverting to alcohol.

Alexie is often condemned and criticized for populating his stories with the drunken Indian stereotypes. Renowned Native critic Louis Owens argues that Alexie’s fiction “too often simply reinforces all of the stereotypes desired by white society” (79). But the statistics reveal that alcoholism runs “five times the national average” (Weaver 11) and what is all the more painful is that, “these statistics have not changed in thirty years” (Weaver 11). The statistics proves as a vital testimony to Alexie’s works which is considered as “survival document” (F. Evans 48) of “a consciously moral satirist” rather than that of a “cultural traitor” (F. Evans 48) which also disapproves his critics’ claiming, his characters as stereotypes.

In the face of internal colonialism that deprives “cushioning resources” (Sztompka 167) that is “wealth or power” (Sztompka 167) or both, the traumatised Spokane community is caught between the grinding plates of colonialism. Alexie’s protagonists are very well aware that, the white government, whose assimilation policies and ongoing colonialism have reduced their society to degradation, is the perpetrator of their pains. Therefore, they have internalized a strong rage and hatredness for anything white. In a way, a justifiable affect, it has utterly proved self-destructive and self-defeating. Instead of transforming their nebulous rage into a powerful tool by modifying it with imagination, in order to win over their enemy, in accordance with the formula, “Survival = anger x imagination” (*LRTFH* 150), they turn it into a destructive force by their lack of imagination. Imagination is the other vital part of the survival formula that is inevitable in conceiving alternate identity. In the case of Alexie’s protagonist, it fails to gain prominence in the face of their all-consuming anger, except with few resilient characters

– Arnold Jr., Marie Polatkin and Corliss. Therefore, their anger is never promoted to positive force and hence it fails to be “specific and directed” (Alexie 10).

The greatest disadvantage of the Spokane community is that they are unaware of positive life experiences for the past five centuries and this has inculcated in them, a negative aspect of pain and poverty as Indian identity. They associate every positive life force like optimism, material success and happiness with the white. In their blind rage, that leads to an irrational resistance to positive life experiences they pathetically get entrapped in an eternal destructive life cycle. Their “Anger without hope” (Alexie 10) denies them self-representation and self- definition.

The most pathetic and the greatest irony of the Spokane community is that they, in their complete resistance to stereotypes, unfortunately end up re-enacting the myth of the vanishing Indian or what Vizenor calls the ‘terminal creed’ (*Mixed Blood Messages* 85) a definition of ‘Indianness’ imposed upon indigenous Americans for five hundred years. This particular aspect has, often times, come under attack by Native critics for Alexie’s portrayal of unpleasant stark reservation realities to the vast audience. Despite these accusations against Alexie, vast majority of Native as well as white critics rightly defend his works as “artistic vision of a survival document” (Evans 48) that calls attention to social and political problems on the reservation. Especially Adrian C. Louis in his foreword to Alexie’s poetry collection *Old Shirts & New Skins* (1993) argues that, “It is so important for us when a poet like Sherman Alexie emerge to detail our dreams, our hopes, and our embattled state of being” and concludes that “He speak to people in a hope of bringing about change; he speaks as a functioning ear and eye of the people; he speaks as a seer” (viii).

Alexie is very well aware of the responsibilities of being an Indian writer of a minority sect of the U.S. whose population is “less than 1 percent” (Campbell 117) of the total population of the country. His works are highly politicized documents engaged in bringing to the forefront the innumerable colonizing forces that devastates

American Indians all over the country. Louis Owens, who is dissatisfied with Alexie's sober narratives comes out with statistics of the Native communities that states: "indigenous people... commonly live with as much as 85 percent unemployment, deplorable healthcare, and even worse education, horrifying rates of alcohol and drug addiction, an epidemic of fatal alcohol syndrome, and the highest suicide rates and the lowest life expectancy of any ethnic group in the nation" (121). These statistics very well provide answer for Alexie's portrayal of Indian world being poignant and negative. Therefore, it is true that his works are honest documents that reflect the painful reality of Spokane Indian lives in particular and Native American lives in general, that have become distorted, disrupted, destroyed or doomed.

Alexie's artistic intention to refashion his works on realistic model of his community is to 'address the evils' (Evans 49) that have engulfed their lives. Being acknowledged as the 'spokesman' of the entire Native communities across the country, Alexie with great commitment, attempts to heal the open soulwound. The main part of the "process of healing is to address what is evil" (Joy Harjo 140). Therefore, his poignant stories that address the evils, come along with strong messages to his own community as well as the entire Native communities.

The process of healing, that could bring rehabilitation and revitalization, involves three vital steps: the disowning of alcohol, forgiving their colonizers and empowerment through education. Alcoholism that has its own legacy in the Spokane community plays a vital role in regenerating and activating all evils – poverty, family dysfunction, communal dysfunction, violence, suicide, death, accidents, health hazards and the accompanying disillusionment and despondence – that colonialism has set in motion. Alexie's fictional Spokane community is filled with a wide range of alcoholics of all age and gender which has been already discussed in depth.

The novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* captures the pain of alcoholism through Arnold Jr., who undergoes the malignant and inconsolable pain of

losing his family members and losing a considerable number of men from his already too small a tribe, every year. He promises, never to touch alcohol in his life and chooses to fight for his life than to surrender to alcohol. The narrator of “Jesus Christ’s Half-Brother is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation” after turning to sobriety laments for the horrible condition of his drunkard friend Lester. He painfully pleads saying that, “[L]ester I say you got to stand up on your own” (*LRTFH* 126) and this is exactly the prime message of Alexie to his community and to the Native communities in general. Alcoholism, a disease of the oppressed and impoverished, needs governmental intervention for rehabilitation but in the case of lack of support from the government, it is self-effort that Alexie insists on, for recovery. He strongly avers to the Native people that “[O]ne thing you have to do before anything else is sober up” (Alexie 118). A complete liberation from alcohol is the desperate first move toward having dreams, destinations and hope.

Giving up of alcohol ensures mental, physical and emotional balance. In the twentieth century “Wellbriety” (www.wellbriety.org) has gained momentum in the Native communities that strives for recovery from alcohol and substance abuse. “The ‘well’ part of wellbriety is the inspiration to go beyond sobriety and recovery, committing to a life of wellness and healing every day” (www.wellbriety.org). Alexie, whose responsibilities are immense, advocates Natives to sober up for wellbriety, to give a persistent tough fight against the many colonizing forces. Beyond dispute, sobriety and wellbriety could be great leap in the process of healing.

The second vital force of revitalization involves ‘forgiving the unforgivable’. There is an unappeasable rage, in the heart of the Spokane protagonists against their colonizers who are responsible for their state of a “racial orphan” (qtd. by Berry 53) over whose fate “Humanity has often wept over” (qtd. by Berry 53). Their rage transforms into a self-destructive force of irrational resistance to the ‘assumed’ qualities of white way of life that includes all life transforming positive attitudes – hope, success, prosperity,

optimism, happiness, etc. – and thereby ending up as self-defeated pathetic victims. It is not only internalization of oppression but also irrational resistance too, proves to be a process of “autogenocide” (qtd. by Weaver²⁰), for Alexie’s Spokanes’ who end up defeated and devastated relentlessly.

Alexie prescribes “*Forgiveness*” (*LRTFH* 150; italics in original) to jettison their psychological and social baggage. He talks about forgiveness right from his first book of short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. The narrator of “Imagining the Reservation” believes that “[T]oday I am walking between water, two parts hydrogen, one part oxygen and the energy expelled is named Forgiveness” (150). Though they wanted to forgive they are unable to forgive the white society. The idea of forgiveness is further reiterated very powerfully in the novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. The grandmother Spirits of Arnold Jr. is the messenger of forgiveness for the Spokane community. But, for the Natives it is impossible to forgive the unforgivable.

Being a member of Spokane community plagued by historical trauma, he is considered as an angry young man for his highly politicised artistic outputs that strongly condemn the oppressive institutions of the white colonizers. Especially his early works, carry his “unappeasable furry” (qtd. by Peterson xiv) and Alexie himself acknowledges this fact, in his Introduction to the tenth edition of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* he considers the younger version of him to be “angrier” (*LRTFH* xxii).

Alexie’s works are semi- autobiographical and his protagonists, especially, Victor, Junior Polatkin and Thomas, heroes of his initial works, are considered his fictional “alter ego” (Carl Bellante 4). Therefore, it is natural for these heroes to exhibit their anger and angst in the form of “their separation and their refusal to belong” (Delliger 123). But as Alexie matures over the age, his anger mellows down to recognize “human goodness and mortal grace” (*Blasphemy* 373). The female protagonist of “The Search Engine” Corliss, is Alexie’s mouthpiece who articulates in a positive tone that “[I]t was easy to hate white

vanity and white rage and white ignorance, but what about white compassion and white genius and white poetry? Maybe it wasn't about whiteness or redness or any other colour" (*Blasphemy* 372).

Bernhard Giesen in his article "The Trauma of Perpetrators" reiterates the ideology of Cunningham's the "politics of apology" (147) in order to jettison the rage of the colonized and victimized. It is believed that, a ritualistic confession of a collective guilt, which represents the act of taking responsibility for centuries long crime, can serve as an amazing panacea for healing the psychological soulwound of the victimized. But, Native American communities have never been apologized to, by their perpetrators, which would help to promote forgiveness.

Alexie, in his interview with Ase Nygren points that United States is still a "colony" (Paterson 154). United States has been successful in accomplishing its genocide against the Natives rather than Germany with regard to the Jewish. He is very adamant while he affirms that, "I want what happened here to receive the same sort of sacred respect that what happened in Germany does. I want our dead to be honored" (Peterson 154). He could not withstand "the arrogance of t[his] country to have a Holocaust museum, to point out the genocidal sins of another culture" (Peterson 117) that he considers ironical.

In the field of psychology "[F]orgiveness is an emotion-focused coping strategy" (Greene et al. 1) that may help to "reduce a stressful reaction to a transgression" (Greene et al. 1). When Alexie's Spokane community arrives at the decision of forgiving its perpetrators that would be a great turning point in their lives, because they no more need to indulge in an all-consuming resistance to mislead them to destruction. Concomitantly, they may slowly change to a healthy relationship with their colonizers to adopt to positive and highly influential qualities of life to empower, succeed and thrive in the extended white men's world. This may certainly pave the way for their healing by bringing in new life experiences that puts an end to the negative cycle of dysfunction and stasis.

Education is considered as the major tool of revitalisation and empowerment by Alexie. His characters, who are considered resilient embrace the white man's education to revitalize themselves. As in the case of young Spokane Indians, Arnold Jr., Corliss and Marie Polatkin, who with a desperate aspiration to succeed and establish in the world of their colonizers choose education as their powerful weapon and armour to withstand the numerous battles that awaits them as the members of a marginalised community. These protagonists of Alexie want to escape the dysfunctional and destructive force of their reservation, in order to defy the vanishing Indian myth and to prove their existence and their individual identity. Arnold is enlightened by Mr. Pto strive for hope with the white man's education, Corliss is a "resourceful thief, a narcissistic Robin Hood who stole a rich education from white people" (Blashemy 363) while Marie is a born warrior, who pursues education to fight against her oppressors.

What makes them remarkable is that they are highly brilliant in identifying a valuable education as their redeemer in a hopeless community that has ever been in the need of a redeemer. And this redeemer is helpful in leading them out of their reservation borders and has helped them liberate themselves from the reservation of their own mind as well, with an exposure to endless possibilities and opportunities.

In the beginning of the novel, *The Diary*, Arnold expresses his internalized oppression by exposing his view about himself and his tribe to be poor and ugly. He also strongly feels to be a successor of a defeated generation. But after his association with promising white kids, he gives up the reservation of his mind that makes him realize that he is not restricted just by his Spokane Indian identity but he is redefined by multiple identities. He feels happy to "belong[s] to more than one tribe" (Davis and Stevenson 190) based on his choice. Likewise, Corliss and Marie with a powerful tool of education feel that they are not limited by their ethnicity or gender.

Alexie believes that education can serve as a miraculous tool of empowerment for his Spokane community and the Natives all over the country. Because, it is highly

potential to produce multiple and highly significant changes in the lives of the Natives which includes re-defining their identity, liberations from their internalized oppression, hope of endless opportunities and material success. But the most disappointing fact is that the high school literacy rate of Native communities in the U. S. is “67 percent”,(whitehouse.gov 5) the lowest of any racial group and only “13 percent” (whitehouse.gov 14) complete bachelor’s degree” when compared to the national average. It is evident that even the minimal numbers of Native children who complete their school education do not consider collegiate education because, for them moving to college is moving into the realms of danger and insecurity for the Natives. “For the ones who do, the culture shock is too great” along with a “sense of isolation” (Alexie 9). But, Alexie strongly recommends the younger generations to take the risk and to move out of their reservations, that still serve as the “nefarious function” (Alexie 189) of colonialism. He insists on Arnold Jr. of *The Diary*, as a role model who is none other than Alexie himself in his teens. Alexie, in an interview to Davis and Stevenson, remarks that, Arnold Jr. is “largely an autobiographical character and I wanted to tell this story for artistic and political reasons... I want all those folks, Indians and not, who celebrate me to realize that they are also celebrating the fact that I left the rez. All of my books and movies exist because I left” (Alexie 189).

Alexie’s believes that the extraordinary potentials and legendary talents needs a platform to be exposed and schools and colleges alone can provide that platform. At the disadvantage of missing schools and college, the potential of the young Natives goes useless, as in the case of Eugene, the uncle of Arnold Jr. in *The Diary*, and Norma Many Horse in “Somebody Kept Saying Powwow”. Hence, it is apparent that through his works, Alexie strongly establishes the magical revitalising power of education to activate the healing process of their generations of deep soulwound.

As it has been already stated in the Introduction, according to Jace Weaver the single most defining factor of Native American Literature is its “communitism” (43) or its

commitment to its community, in order to bring about social or political changes. The works of Alexie, very well confine to the ideas of “communitism” (43) with its earnest attempts to expose the numerous colonizing forces of the colonizer and the follies and foibles of his own community. Though, the select works of Alexie taken for the study, reiterates his Spokane community’s re-enactment of the vanishing Indian myth in multiple context, Alexie clearly states that he does not write “out of a colonized mind’s need to reinforce stereotypes” (*LRTFH* xix). He adds “I am writing autobiography” (*LRTFH* xix). The observation of Mc Cracken comes to our rescue in rightly interpreting Alexie’s works. He articulates that, “Native writers can manipulate the image of the drunk Indian or the vanishing warrior as a tool for self-criticism, as a means of firmly but responsively introducing a catalyst for a change” (“Appropriating with a Purpose” 31). Also, Alexie himself makes a clear statement of his stand as a “cultural investigator” (Dellinger 122) rather than a “cultural cheerleader[s]” (Dellinger 122). And therefore, it is obvious that the negative or the vanishing image of the Spokane community, that Alexie presents is an honest reflection of his community with a desperate need to caution them and prevent them from the danger of vanishing in order to survive and thrive.

To stop forever from rehearsing the act of **Vanishing Indian**, Alexie’s works give an emphatic message to his community through the vision of Thomas Builds-The-Fire, to “*Take care of each other*” (*LRTFH* 69). And this forms the ultimate message of Alexie because of the Spokane community’s present vulnerable state and of their genocidal past. Simon Ortize’s poem best sums up this clarion call to the Natives:

We must struggle for our lives.

We must take great care with each other.

We must share our concern with each other.

Nothing is separate from us.

We are all one body of people.

We must struggle to share our human lives with each other.

We must fight against those forces

which will take our humanity from us.

We must ensure that life continues.

We must be responsible to that life.

With that humanity and the strength

which comes from our shared responsibility

for this life, the people shall continue.

-Simon Ortiz (Acima), *The People Shall Continue*

This is precisely what Alexie's Spokane community needs to come out of their present quagmire.