

## **CHAPTER – IV**

### **CONCLUSION**

## CHAPTER: IV

### CONCLUSION

For the study of this dissertation, the focus is led on the place of Native American people and their literature in the United States of the twenty-first century. The quest for identity theory is chosen to apply to *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), a collection of twenty-two stories by Sherman Alexie. In it Alexie discusses various voices of the Native American lives and adopts different strategies to articulate the notion of what it means to be an Indian. He shows how United States' government occupying the land of Native Americans has placed them on the reservation. It with the 'help' of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has controlled the lives of Natives.

In this collection Alexie has depicted reservation life realistically, with the help of experience and hardships faced while growing up on the Spokane Indian reservation. His characters having got different opportunities and problems and life experiences represent different identities. The development of their identity is neither static nor a linear process but a continual process. It changes with time, physical and psychosocial growth. Such type of writings by Indian authors like Alexie contributes to the revival of Indian ethnic identity. It deals about the quest of helpless and poor Native American people for identity among the harsh surroundings.

There is vertical and horizontal kind of relation between these identities. Vertically all the stories are loosely interconnected in chronological order. All the protagonists, as an individual progress their identity consciously. They have caught the spirit of Native American people's liberation movement started in about 1960s. Horizontally there is a relation between protagonists. All they share the same kind of

experience. Certain characters recur, among them Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-the-Fire are two teenage protagonists or central characters. Most of the other protagonists are male, poor, illiterate, alcoholic, diabetic and unemployed.

This collection uses postcolonial literary themes to describe interactions between European countries, colonizers and the colonized. His characters become historical figures or figures from popular culture to tell their stories. Such names of the characters are connected to their identity. It shows the idea of self-ownership of one's name, seen in Native American Literature. Though the son openly mocks his father's "traditional" ways, he goes back to his father. Whites are not named throughout the book. Though dominant, they are portrayed as less powerful compared to Indians.

Characters of Alexie live in the illusory world of imagination. The power of imagination effects on the responses between them. It helps them to bear the loss and to live in the realm of freedom. Alexie juxtaposes humor and pathos, a strategy of narration, to succeed in achieving his purposes of writing. Alexie in *The Business of Fancydancing*, one of the stories from this collection puts it, "Humor was an antiseptic that cleaned the deepest of personal wounds". (164)

In this collection Alexie depicted the complexities of modern Native-American life, their dreams and lives on the reservation. He has reshaped conventional images of reservation dwellers through his blunt yet lyrical portrayals of life. His reservation dwellers have the attitude of hope and a strong sense of community. They have the potentiality to survive in the dark humiliating circumstances. They determine to preserve in the odds and stark realism of everyday reservation life. They

know that because of unequal ideas of justice they have to live an absurd life.

This dissertation focuses on how Sherman Alexie creates narratives to show the construction of Native identity through literature. It is most difficult for Native Americans, because the authority of defining and reclaiming their self has been taken from them. For hundreds of years, their historical experience and cultural information have been accounted by non-Natives. So Indians had not a significant voice in their description. Cut-off from their past and having a little continuity in their lives they have to struggle with identity development.

Though Native American people, an indigenous people of America are living there since about twenty-five to thirty centuries. They are still away from all the positions of power, opportunity, and place in the rapidly progressing global hub i.e. United States of America. It is proved by the statistics of income, health and crime department. Individuals who experience constant marginalization, experience poor mental and physical health, low self-esteem and self-doubt, and decreased spirit etc. They live life of isolation, resentment, frustration, stagnation, and anger with no hope of change. They feel out of place, unsatisfied and discomfort with the “old” racist accounts of Native identity. They are unsatisfied about how the world sees at them and how they see themselves. It has created anxiety within and outside the Native American world.

In all the writings of Alexie the theme of survival is at the center. He tries to pursuit all that has been lost during colonization. He suggests various strategies of survival to preserve the individual and cultural identities of Indians. Their traditional languages are an integral part of their cultures and identities, which form the basic medium for the transmission. Thus, the survival of Native American cultures, literatures,

histories, religions, political institutions, and values is most important. Alexie is of the opinion that the connections with it can heal and will help for the growth of Native Americans.

Storytelling is one of the primary and the only ways of survival. Through stories and literature past voices of their ancestors shape their identity. Stories make them aware about who they are and where they come from. Only through storytelling the knowledge of their history can be shared present world. It is essential for both the creation and preservation of Native American identity. Through the storytelling and writing Sherman Alexie presents a more modern and supple sense of Native identity. Alexie's protagonists and storytellers struggle to find out where they belong.

Alexie attempts consciously to re-write the history of U.S. with Native relations and to reshape historical "fact". He is aware about that Native American fiction is marketed politically and the concept of Indianness is represented what is expected by dominant ideologies. Readers of Native American literature especially Euramericans search images of Indianness formed in their psyche. Alexie tries to re-write the romanticized and epitomized stereotypes of the wild Indian warriors. He uses different strategies of resistance to break this territory. He does satire of pro-Indian politics, through dark humor, sarcasm and cruel stereotypes. He writes it with the help of new ideas and 'fictional' characters and makes space for new imaginations of Indian identity.

Various efforts were made by settlers for the disappearance of Native American culture entirely. Events such as Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee massacre of 1890 were taken place to assimilate Native Americans into the mainstream culture. Residential boarding schools for Native American children were established to teach them "civilization"

and Euro-American cultures. Deliberate attempts were made to change their dress, customs, language, occupations, religion, kinship networks, and extended family and philosophy. Children separated from reservation life felt cut off from their heritage, culture, religious background, and race i.e. identity.

With the help of these events, Alexie constructs ethnicity and resists the present erosion of Native people and culture. He transforms these events and images into new tribal stories of survival. He knows that such events have made American Indians alcoholics. Alcoholic Indians is a false or substitute identity created by dominant culture for Indians to remain into it permanently. It is the reason behind the loss of self or self-erasure and sufferings of Indians. It results into extreme poverty, broken families, drug abuse, grief, isolation, etc. Adrian in *The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Don't Flash Red Anymore* sitting with Victor on the front porch discusses how drinking has ruined dreams of so many members of the reservation.

In this collection Alexie shows that Indians have inherited the oppression from their troubled past, centuries of genocide and colonialism. He combines it with contemporary issues such as alcoholism, apathy, negative stereotyping, assimilation etc. In his narratives horror and humor, hopelessness and slapstick are woven together. He shows how Native Americans struggle to keep their culture, history, stories, and lives i.e. identity away from affecting or succumbing to globalization and modernization.

Place i.e. reservation area and class are the important part of Alexie's writings. Twentieth century America's cultural icons like soft drinks, television, and convenience stores are against the Native American values of family, community, and tradition. In spite of

wretched life protagonists of Alexie are hopeful. At the end of several stories, they intend to change the world. The story '*Witnesses, Secret and Not*' ends with the family together in love. Though drunk and in tears, father of the narrator wants to change the future.

His characters face emotional complexities while living in a community torn apart by alcoholism. They, yet, are unwilling to assimilate in the values of a culture which has oppressed them. They daily battle against the humiliations, hurts, feeling of loss of home and hope, outraged pride, broken promises, scourge of alcoholism, and pain of death by fire i.e. survival. In the story *This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona* Thomas tells to Victor that, "My father, he died on Okinawa in World War II, died fighting for this country, which had tried to kill him for years". (73)

The institutions called Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and Reservation Area has a special place in their vision. All the sufferings of Indian people are the outcome or consequences of these two institutions. It has a direct impact on Native people's emotional and physical life. Many a times it makes them helpless and restricts their free will. Keeping their interests aside they have to give priority to reservation and BIA rules. Thus, suppression, marginalization and such similar feelings are the consequences of this suffering. Only Natives have to suffer physically, emotionally and spiritually. Thus, it becomes clear that it is difficult to establish their identity according to their will.

Besides, one more important aspect in their identity is their financial status. Society expects that Native man should do minor work keeping his interests aside. Native people when go to cities or outside reservation their life changes drastically. They are openly rejected by mainstream society for not having ability to earn money. Number of

times they have to leave the opportunities because of their Nativeness. They are forced to remain in that particular type of a static situation permanently and for that they are accused. It results into dissatisfaction and boredom. They have to depend on White society for money, job and \ for daily bread and butter. On the one hand, they are not allowed to work in the cities on important and intellectual posts. On the other, they are provided community gees to remain dependent and in debt. But if they try to change it, conflict arises. Arnold in *A Train Is an Order of Occurrence* is the classic example of Native condition in the Western mainstream society.

In the life of Native people, community has a very special place. Though sometimes it is responsible for personal conflicts, ties of the community are very strong. In the story, *Amusement* Aunt Nezy works hard to feed her husband and son and tries to save her family. Throughout the collection, numbers of characters try to save relations or families from breaking. In the story, *This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona* Victor shares his father with his friend Thomas and thus reunites with age old culture and history of Indian people which Thomas represents.

The present 'being' of Alexie's characters is the heritage of their particular type of cultural and familial history. They conflict with present, face it boldly and make adjustments with it. They do it consciously to maintain the unity of their culture. Because of this Alexie's characters consider their self with others and face all the problems. They have a sense of morality, responsibility and consciousness towards society. Their sensitive minds and humanity are their identity. It takes them above the limits of Nativehood. Though they just dream, drink, and hope as there is a very little scope for their free will. They protest against available worst situation and try to turn it into good and favorable. All these characters



show different stages of growth and development. They represent changing image of Native people after 1960s.

Psychological and physiological changes and various stages of developments occur in the life of these adolescent characters. During these phases, they try to find out the answer to the question 'Who am I'. Victor, in the first story *Every Little Hurricane*, a child of nine years old, watches the new generation, ". . . a former basketball star fallen out of shape" (44) in the fifth story, *The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore* is in his mid or late-twenties.

Thus, the quest of Alexie's protagonists for their identities passes through the matrix of childhood-orphanhood-unemployment-hope and reunion etc. to constitute the very idea of 'being' and 'becoming'. All the protagonists struggle hard to achieve their authentic identities. To do it sometimes they sacrifice existing social structures. Alexie, in his writings treats boldly this predicament of Native American people. It helps him to achieve distinct place in the tradition of contemporary Native American writers, which is being enriched by writers like Allen, Erdrich, Harjo, Hogan, Momaday, Ortiz, Silko, Tall Mountain, Tapahonso, Welch, Whiteman etc.