

# **INTRODUCTION**

## INTRODUCTION:

Native American people are the aborigines or inhabitants of American Continent. In the prehistoric time, they had entered in the vast land of it and had established their 'own' world. But it was called 'New World' by settlers because it had remained unknown and detached from the so called 'Old World' till Columbus discovered it in 1492. Since then white settlers from various countries of Europe started entering slowly in search of natural resources, land and wealth. European contact and then occupation of all the ways of their life brought nearly an extinction of these people with their cultures. Today they called as Native Americans or Indian Americans or Indians, are suppressed by white people since the very settlement of whites in the early 16th century.

Before the arrival of European colonizers, Natives were happily performing their myths, rites and ceremonial liturgies. They had developed their agriculture and their lifestyle was fit to their natural world. They were multilingual and had hundreds of indigenous nations each with individual cultures. They were gifted with great creative faculty and had developed weaponry, religious and socio-political systems. So they had become multifaceted personalities.

The name 'Indian' has come from the assumption that is an inhabitant of the West Indies, where the first Portuguese colonizers had arrived. Later Indian Americans were called by names such as Natural man, Savages, Noble Savages, Wild Man, Cannibals, Devils, Dangerous Neighbors, Infidels, Barbarous People, and Salvages. These defamatory were the first step into taking away their 'Identity'. Today most of the Native people prefer to refer themselves as 'Indian' or 'American Indian'

instead of 'Native American', a term introduced by the government of United States.

At the beginning though it seemed political and economical invasion, all the White Europeans' attitudes were colonial. They made laws in favor of colonization to victimize Natives. They not only grabbed their lands and subjected them but also made them outcasts in their own place. Military power and superior weapons were used to crush Indians and to turn them into slaves. Millions of Natives were captured, slayed and brutally killed by white immigrants. Native Rulers were terrorized, slaughtered and subjugated. All the aspects of their culture such as beliefs, rituals, customs, habits, faiths, traditions, languages, religions, economy, policy and way of life were ended slowly or gradually taken away from them. Thus the very settled world of the Indians was destroyed which affected their identity badly.

American Indians though had to face tormentation and hardships. Some of them who survived from these clutches tried to assimilate in the dominant White world. Among them who accepted Christianity and colonizer's superiority were not treated with respect of Europeans. Some frightened Indians forced to hid in the valleys and dense forest. Indians were treated as sub-ordinate, sub-alters, and sub-standard people. They were ill-treated and tortured mentally and physically by whites. This state of continuous slavery created deadly fear among them. As a result of it, they felt inferior and uprooted. They lost their 'identity' in their own land. In this way they were paralyzed on the religious, cultural, political and socio-economical level.

More than four hundred years Indians were away from the mainstream life of twentieth century. Their life was away from today's so

called progressive, humanitarian and democratic America. Today though they get education and services, they stuck to their originality. Through literature, they try to recall their ancestral culture and past. Their despair and angst are delineated in their writings. They speak about their 'loss of inheritance'.

Though apparently Natives had accepted White man's ways, civilization and culture, inwardly they rejected it. They had kept all their then living world at the inner level of their psyche, to express it through art and literature. Through literature they negate and refuse White values strongly. This literature of protest pours anger and rebellious attitudes. They express their suffering and loss through the stories and songs which had been passing from generation to generation, unnoticeably.

At present Native American writing has proved as a benchmark. Its passion and poetry has drawn attention of the world. It has created its place and a distinctive mark in the world literature. Native American writers have begun to write about their experiences through autobiographies, old oral narratives, liturgies, histories, essays, poetry and fiction. Sherman Alexie, one of the most prominent and prolific writers of America represents modern Native American writing. He has played a crucial role to give name and fame to Native American literature.

This research attempts to reach the original inhabitants of America, a displaced and submerged group of people. It touches to their religious, ethnic, social, economic and political practices and concerns, in short their identity. A brief survey of contemporary Native American writing and literary career of Sherman Alexie is given in the introductory chapter. The first chapter summarizes theoretically the quest for identity. Second and third chapters attempt to examine and analyze *The Lone Ranger and*

*Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* in detail and to establish the theme of the quest for identity.

#### **A. CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE:**

Native American literature began with the oral traditions and still today it exists due to continuous and vibrant oral traditions. All the aspects of oral literature are fully found in written literature. The written Native American literary tradition began in the eighteenth century when Samson Occum, a Mohegan Methodist missionary published *Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul, an Indian* in 1772. Early major Indian American writers from this wave were Samson Occum, William Apess, Zitkala-Sa, Emeline Pauline Johnson, Sarah Winnemucca, Charles Eastman etc.

From early twentieth century Lakota as-told-to autobiographies were being written. *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions* (1972) and *Lakota Woman* (1990), both written with Richard Erdoes, are contemporary examples of it. But an event of the publication of *House Made of Dawn* (1968), a novel by Navarre Scott Momaday (b-1934) of Kiowa and Cherokee heritage resulted into the acceptance of Native American literature in American mainstream literature. It won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize (1969) for the first time in Native American literature. It inspired new generation of Native writers in the 1960s and 70s to bring American Indian movement. This era of awakening is known as Native American Renaissance.

In this novel, in the quest of his identity Abel, a protagonist at first goes to World War II and then comes back in the tribal community Walatowa Pueblo, in which he was raised. *House Made of Dawn* is a Navajo prayer song, which admits the paternal side of one's cultural

identity. It deals with the withdrawal of their land and agony of their exploitation.

Two major milestones from this period are Vine Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969) and Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: Black Elk Speaks* (1971). Some foundational anthologies include *Carriers of the Dream Wheel: Contemporary Native American Poetry* (1975), edited by Duane Niatum, *The Man to Send Rain Clouds: Contemporary Stories by American Indians* (1974) and *Voices of the Rainbow: Contemporary Poetry by American Indians* (1975) by Kenneth Rosen. Geary Hobson's *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature* (1979) is titled after a line in Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and *American Indian Literature: An Anthology* (1979) by Alan Velie.

In *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969), through the journey of Tai-me, Momaday retells Kiowa folktales. At the end of Kiowa's wanderings Tai-me travels to his grandmother's grave. There he realizes that her lifespan has encompassed the decline in tribal identity. He develops a myth to include individual as a part of an ancestral past. He retraces the history of the tribe's three-century migration. *The Names: A Memoir* (1976) is another novel by Momaday which explores the self-identity. It is combined with Kiowa tradition's genealogical explorations. In *Ancient Child* (1989) he tries to sustain and interpret his culture to the Anglo world.

In her novel *Ceremony* (1977) Leslie Marmon Silko (b-1948) of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican and European heritage portrays how indigenous healing ceremonies have an effect on a mixed-race World War II veteran Tayo. An outsider and illegitimate in the tribe he sets on a quest and

completes it. It cures not only Tayo but also ends the drought which had plagued the tribe.

Joy Harjo (b-1951), a Poet of Creek Nation in mythological verse book *In Mad Love and War* (1990), speaks about political concerns and the challenges before contemporary Native Americans. Her *She Had Some Horses* (1983) represents animal symbol, the motif of the horse. In *A secret from the Center of the World* (1989) she provides a view of the American landscape.

*Love Medicine* (1984) by Karen Louise Erdrich, (b-1954) a writer of mixed racial ancestry, is about the members of five Indian families. Also, it is about mixed-bloods who are bound by the ties of blood, love, jealousy, hate, religion, death, history, and politics. Her *The Crown of Columbus* (1991) written with Michael Dorris, deals with the problem of personal identity of Indians who have lost their ties to their. It was published on the five-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in America.

*Songs for the Harvester of Dreams* (1981) by Duane Niatum (b-1938), of Klallam (Salish) and Italian-American heritage reveals the loss of personal connection with a collective past. It uses traditional myths, to narrate the disastrous consequences of the coming of the whites. It fears for 'growing white' and going away from origins. Yet it is often confident in the Native American roots.

Simon Joseph Ortiz (b-1941), a writer of Acoma Pueblo community in *I Tell You Now* expresses deep sorrows and determined long struggle of his people against colonialism to reclaim their identity. In the poetry collection, *Final Solution: Jobs, Leaving* he shows how colonization has made natives dependent. In *That's the Place Indians*

*Talk About*, he uses a metaphor to show the rapid decline of Native culture. *Destination, Seeking* is a collection of poetry where he redefines an image of Pueblo people to create a positive identity. The main theme of *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, for the Sake of the Land* (1980) is, five hundred years domination by foreign powers has failed to abolish Pueblo's old ways. A poetry collection *From Sand Creek: Rising in This Heart Which is Our America* (1981) is a political work. It takes the event of 1864's where 133 Cheyenne and Arapaho were massacred at Sand Creek.

Gerald Vizenor (b-1934) of Chippewa and white ancestry represents mixed-blood identity. In *Griever: The Heirs of Columbus* he symbolizes how Native American people's failure has become a means of their survival. He questions Christopher Columbus's religious and racial identity. He explores contemporary Indian Identity politics in his edited book *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* (1989). In his recent work *Hotline Healers: An Almost Browne Novel* (1997) he seeks to achieve liberation, survival, and healing through the use of humor.

James Welch (1940-2003), a writer of Blackfeet and Gros Ventres heritage deals with the experiences of animals, seasons, and stories from reservation in *Riding Earthboy 40* (1971), a collection of poetry. In his *The Winter in Blood* (1974), there is a theme of a lost soul who later finds his place in his family and tribe. *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner* (1996) is a collection of essays by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (b-1930) (Crow-Creek-Dakota). It portrays the bold struggles, challenges and complaints of contemporary Native Americans.

Other major Native American writers of this second wave were Paula Gunn Allen, John Neihardt, Nila NorthSun, Barney Bush, Ray



Young Bear (Mesquaki), Roberta Hill (Oneida), Wendy Rose (Hopi-Miwok) etc. A major theme in the works of all the writers is the quest for identity. They are conscious about their history of suffering which is full with inhuman treatment. They unveil the cruel face of the white rulers and reclaim their destroyed selfhood and identity. These writers have created a place for Native American Literature in mainstream American market and have begun to shape its identity for the upcoming years. Native writing of this period has contributed to the revival of American Indian ethnic identity. The flourishing nonfictional essays and literary criticism by these writers foretell the bright future of Native American literature.

The memories of the historical experiences are the resources of their literature. They depict the glorious time before the arrival of colonizers, the sorrowful era of colonization and the era of their experience of World War I and Vietnam War. They use Indian tradition of myths, legends, symbols, images, narrative strategies and resources of languages effectively, “. . . to express their anger and anguish, sorrowfulness and happiness and the feelings of uprootedness and try to reclaim their own lost selfhood and identity. They try to reveal who they are why they are what they are . . . the main purpose of their writings is to reclaim their lost selfhood and identity and to glorify their true, genuine and authentic self”. (Ambhore 3)

At present in the United States of America hundreds of Native American writers are creating literary and other activities. They all have a deep feeling of their cultural loss and eroded identity. They represent all the exploited groups in the world and mourning of these groups throughout history.

## **B. LITERARY CAREER OF SHERMAN ALEXIE:**

Sherman Joseph Alexie Jr., a child of mixed descent was born on October 7, 1966, in Spokane, Washington. His father, Sherman Joseph Alexie Sr., was Coeur d'Alene and his mother Lillian Agnes Cox, of Colville, Flathead, was of Spokane and Caucasian white descent. He was born with hydrocephalus, with water on the brain. So he had to undergo a brain operation from which he was not expected to survive. He was diagnosed that he would be "mentally retarded" if he lived. But he surprised everyone by extra brain faculties. His father was a drunkard who often left the house. His mother worked as a clerk and sewed quilts to support her six children. Despite his upbringing in a rough environment with challenging circumstances, Alexie achieved excellence in academics. He read everything which he could get in hands. At the age of five he could read Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Alexie was raised in the town of Wellpinit on the 156,000-acre Spokane Indian Reservation in Eastern Washington State, U.S.A. It is an area established by the executive order of President R. B. Hayes in 1881. Wellpinit is a town of approximately one thousand people; about 50 miles Northwest of Spokane. Alexie describes the people of Spokane as 'a Salmon people'. The name 'Spokane' is derived from their own tribal name 'Spukanee'. It is one of the ethnic tribes of Native Americans who, call themselves as "Sqeliz" meaning "the people", or "Children of the Sun".

Alexie completed his education up to the eighth grade in the tribal school and graduated from all-white Reardan Highschool, Reardon, Washington. His success in the highschool won him a scholarship in 1985 to Gonzaga University, the Roman Catholic school in Spokane. But due

to heavy drinking he dropped out of it after two years. He worked as a busboy for some time. Then he decided to change his life and to become a doctor. He enrolled for Pre-med program at Washington State University, Pullman. But again due to frequently fainting in anatomy class he left it incomplete.

Again he enrolled in a creative-writing workshop. There he impressed by *Songs from This Earth on Turtle's Back* (1983) by Joseph Bruchac, a volume of Native American poetry by Joseph Bruchac. About this volume he writes, "I opened it up and-oh my gosh-I saw my life in poems and stories for the very first time". (Grassian 3) There his mentor and instructor Alex Kuo encouraged him to pursue writing as a career. His reason behind why he chose writing as a career is that, "But I was a former premedicine major who couldn't handle human anatomy, and I knew far too many lawyers, so I chose the third most lucrative pursuit: small-press poetry". (xii) From the same university he received a bachelor's degree in American Studies in 1991. There he received the Washington State Arts Commission Poetry Fellowship and National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship.

As a versatile writer Alexie has published more than 24 books. It includes poetry collections, novels, film projects, screenplays and short story collections including the *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. In 1992 Alexie published his first work, *The Business of Fancy Dancing*, a collection of short stories and poetry. *The New York Times'* James Kincaid praised this book and Alexie as, "one of the major lyric voices of our time". (xiii) For this book Alexie ". . . received an enormous professional boost". (Grassian 3) *The Business of Fancydancing* was very well received by readers. Over 10,000 copies of it were sold. Alexie himself refers to his writing as 'fancydancing'. It is the name given to the

changes made in the traditional dances by Native American veterans from World War II. For this book, he received the 1992 National Book of the Year Award by the New York Times Book Review.

Alexie followed it by *I Would Steal Horses* (1992), a small poetry chapbook, which won Slipstream's fifth annual chapbook contest in 1992, and *First Indian on the Moon* (1993), a book of poetry. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), a short story collection, was awarded by PEN / Hemingway Award for the Best First Book of Fiction, praising it as 'live and unremitting lyric energy'. Characters from this book also appear in other works of Alexie.

His first novel *Reservation Blues* (1995) won the Morgan Murry Prize and Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award (1996). In this novel, Alexie has expanded the characters from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. The developed characters Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Victor Joseph and Junior Polatkin are grown boys in their thirties who in the short story collection were in their teens. *Reservation Blues* was shortlisted for the prestigious international IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 1997. His second novel *Indian Killer* (1996) won the New York Times Notable Book Award. *The Summer of Black Windows*, a book of poetry by Alexie published in 1996. In the same year he was honored by *Granta* magazine as 'one of the twenty best American novelists under the age of forty'.

After that Alexie changed his direction, writing a screenplay for a feature film called *Smoke Signals* (1998). It is loosely based on a few stories from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, specifically on; *This is What It Means to Be a Native American*. Chris Iyer, a Native American filmmaker and director of Cheyenne and Arapahoe heritage promoted

film as Alexie also has claimed “. . . the first feature film written, directed and co-produced by Indians to ever receive a major distribution deal”. (Berglund 75) He broke the barriers by creating this first all-Indian movie. It won the Audience Award and the Filmmaker’s Trophy at the Sundance Film Festival in 1998 and nominated for the Grand Jury Prize.

Then he returned to the books of fiction and poetry. Other short stories by Alexie are *The Toughest Indian In the World* (2000), *Blasphemy: New and Selected Stories* (2012), *What You Pawn I Will Redeem* (2003), and *Ten Little Indians* (2003). *Flight* (2007), is a novel by Alexie. For his film proposals such as *The Business of Fancydancing* (2002) he worked as writer, producer and director, for *49* (2002) as a writer and as a presentator for *The Exiles* (2008).

Having a great oratorical skill, he reads poetry on stages. It has won him Taos Poetry Circus World Heavyweight Championship award three years in a row (2000-2002). His works of poetry include *Old Shirts and New Skins* (1993), *Seven Morning Songs for the Cedar Flute I Have Yet to Learn To Play* (1994), *The First Indian on the Moon* (1993), *Water Flowing Home* (1994), *The Summer of Black Windows* (1996), *The Man Who Loves Salmon* (1998), *One Stick Song* (2000), *Dangerous Astronomy* (2005), *Face* (2009), and *What I’ve Stolen, What I’ve Earned* (2013).

His best known and bestselling first young adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* is a semi-autobiographical novel. It won the 2007 U.S. National Book Award for young people’s literature, California Young Reader Medal, and Odyssey Award for Best 2008 audiobook for young people. It is a book of his experience while growing on the Spokane tribal reservation in poverty. It is an attempt to re-establish his eccentric self. *War Dances*, a collection of short stories

and poems won the 2010 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction. Except these, his combinations of poetry, short stories, novels and films have won Alexie several prestigious honors, awards and prizes.

Alexie considers himself at first as a poet and short story writer, and then a novelist, screenwriter, filmmaker and performer. For Alexie poetry and stories are very natural. In his words, "It's like breathing for me". (Cline 199) Besides writing and filmmaking he has contributed for the enrichment of literature by several ways such as recordings, radio scripts, essays and as an editor. Alexie's entry in the film industry changed his literary perspectives. He became more anxious about the accessibility of his writing and its potentiality for a film adaptation.

Alexie sees the New Age Movement, an increasing interest in all the things related to Native Americans, ". . . with suspicion, viewing it as a misguided attempt on the part of white people to usurp Native Culture largely for their own selfish purposes". (Grassian 14) Alexie, like many contemporary successful Indian writers, finds it difficult to write for both, mainstream American and reservation life. He refuses to follow mainstream standards of Native American Literature, which he thinks are a romanticized version of Natives. An independent writer he does not write to delight a specific audience and to provide a form of escape and entertainment. But he writes books that challenge, and sometimes offend the readers.

The protagonists in most of the works of Alexie struggle constantly with themselves and their sense of powerlessness among white American society. Alexie uses dark humor while exploring other themes such as poverty and survival, love and anger, despair and dreams, bleakness and alcoholism, and racism on off or on the reservation with satiric wit.

His writings evoke sadness, but at the same time he uses humor and pop culture to leave the reader with a sense of respect, understanding, and compassion. Though he uses humor in all of his works to express his feelings, the underlying message is very somber and serious. He uses humor as a means of personal empowerment. He claims,

Humor is self-defense on the rez. You make people laugh and you disarm them. You sort of sneak up on them. You can say controversial or rowdy things and they'll listen or laugh. (Grassian 2)

One of the purposes behind Alexie's writing is to rewrite dominant American history, which has failed to notice the violent colonization. He waves figures from popular culture and history with his characters. He uses magic realism to place fictional and historical characters like Buffalo Bill and Crazy Horse, in the modern-day situation. With these characters his contemporary Native American characters appear drinking, playing baseball and committing petty crimes. He writes hardships of reservation life and the loss of Native American ethnicity. Their cultural identity is robbed cruelly, and they are discriminated and misrepresented for generations. So they have to struggle for physical and emotional survival and to recover a cultural identity. Cline in the *Ploughshares* says that, "His work carries the weight of five centuries of colonization, retelling the American Indian struggle to survive, painting a clear and often painful portrait of modern Indian life". (201)

Alexie portrays ordinary and uninteresting realities of modern reservation life. He juxtaposes economically disadvantaged life of contemporary Native Americans with traditional media stereotypes. He has tried to reshape conventional images of Native American people. He tells stories using postmodern practices of writing. In his stories, Alexie

challenges readers' ideas about a story by blending together dream sequences, diary entries, aphorisms, multiple narrators, faux newspaper stories and stories within stories.

Alexie, a rebellious author, advocates Native American concerns without compromise. He focuses on that side which was still unknown to his readers. In his works homeless Indians try to find their way in middle-class society. He is of opinion that, Indians are indigenous to a place, that is America, still they are searching for their identity, is pretty ironic. He has written in his poetry collection *Old Shirts and New Skins* (1993):

You scour the reservation landfill / Through the debris of so  
many lives: / Old guitar, basketball on fire, pair of  
shoes. / All you bring me is an empty bottle.  
Am I the garbageman of your dreams?

In all his writings Alexie deals with the historical and contemporary oppression of Indians. In his works the common crisis arises among the characters is about identity. Indians have been forced to leave their tradition behind and try to become like Europeans. Alexie tries to reconstruct ethnical and social background of Native culture. His main characters, usually of Indian descent, try to find out 'who they really are?' and how they can fit into society, while remaining connected to their roots.

From the past two decades, Alexie has been presenting modern Indian American identity. It reflects the struggles of Indians in the United States of America. Since 1994 he has been living in Seattle and has become urban Indian. There he lives with his wife Diana Tomhave, of Hidasta, Ho-Chunk and Potawatomi heritage, and their two sons. He has remained active in the Native American Community. He is on the



*Presidential Panel for the National Dialogue on Race* as well as, on the board of directors for the American Indian College Fund. He is a founding board member of Longhouse Media, a non-profit organization. It teaches filmmaking skills to Native American youth and how to use media for cultural expression and social change. He always supports youth programs and takes various initiatives for the upliftment of women.

### **C. REVIEW OF CRITICISM ON SHERMAN ALEXIE:**

Sherman Alexie has been writing from last more than twenty years. He is one of the most recognized contemporary voices of America. A literary polymath, he is one of the most widely read American Indian writers in the United States and likely in the world. A number of studies are available with reference to Alexie's contribution to English literature, contemporary American literature and especially to Native American literature. Some noteworthy among them are mentioned here.

Some books published on Sherman Alexie are mentioned below. *Sherman Alexie: A Collection of Critical Essays* (2010) edited by Berglund Jeff and Roush Jan is the first volume of critical essays devoted to Alexie. These essays are insightful and provide new perspectives on a writer for having his finger on the pulse of America. Being an interdisciplinary in approach, these essays cover writer's entire career. Griffith Jane sums up this book in *The American Indian Quarterly* as, "The collection's essays live up to the epithet "critical": topics are thorough, urgent, contradictory". (392)

*Conversations with Sherman Alexie* (2009), by Peterson Nancy J., displays the characteristics of his writings such as passion, sharp observational skills, dynamic sense of humor etc. This book includes interviews of Alexie from 1993 to 2007. He speaks about the ideas and

themes in his writings. The reservation life is the central concern for Alexie. His other concerns are city living, love, politics, contemporary literature, and beloved sport basketball.

*Critical Insights: Sherman Alexie* (2012) is written by Leon Lewis. It can be said about this book as poet Al Young, winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award, has said about *War Dances* (2009), a collection of stories and poems by Alexie that the book, “. . . ‘taps every vein and nerve, every tissue, every issue that quickens the current bold-pulse . . . the caring, eye-opening beauty of this rollicking, bittersweet gem of a book’ . . . explore impact of atrocities on his writing, the identity of the American Indian modern writing and the author’s broadening perspective on the human condition” (web).

Daniel Grassian’s *Understanding Sherman Alexie* (2011) is a first book-length examination of Sherman Alexie. It offers a comprehensive look at a writer who is engaged in both Native, as well as mainstream American culture. It reflects his primary artistic challenge that is how to write about Indians in a predominantly televisual country that distorts the nature of ethnicity itself. It shows how Alexie empowers Native Americans by connecting their lives to popular culture. It presents Alexie as a writer of fierce talent, intellect, wit, honesty, and commitment to help readers to understand contemporary Native American lives.

*Literary and Cinematic Reservation in Selected Works of Native American Author Sherman Alexie* is a book written by James Meredith K. in 2005. In the words of Moore, “Sherman Alexie is the reigning “. . . ‘world heavyweight champion’ . . . He shares with many American Indian writers a central motif reaffirming Native lives and Native nationhood . . . his bold, sometimes campy, style tends to affirm a more

individual agency unique to Native identities . . . in the heart of his humor, Alexie invariably circulates the grave themes of ongoing colonial history and its personal effects in Indian country”. (304)

Kathryn Vanspanckeren says that Alexie “. . . is the youngest Native-American novelist to achieve national fame. Alexie gives unsentimental and humorous accounts of Indian life with an eye for incongruous mixtures of tradition and pop culture”. (152) After the publication of Alexie’s first short story collection *The Business of Fancydancing* (1992) James Kincaid in *New York Times Book Review* (Rich Nicholls, ed.) declared Alexie as, “. . . “one of the major lyric voices of our time””. (xiii)

Some noteworthy articles and reviews published on Alexie are *The Approximate Size of His Favorite Tumor* by Coulombe J.L. in *American Indian Quarterly* (2002), *Sacred Hoop Dreams: Basketball in The Work of Sherman Alexie* by Goldstein David S. in *Ethnic Studies Review* (2009), *Double Identity: Writer Sherman Alexie Aims to Reach from His Native American Roots Towards a Wider Culture* by Ulin David L. in *Los Angeles Times* (2003), *In His Own Literary World, a Native Son Without Borders*, by Konigsberg Eric in *New York Times* (2009), *An Indian Without Reservations* by Egan Timothy in *New York Times Magazine* (1998), *An Interview with Sherman Alexie* by Fraser, Joelle in *The Iowa Review* (2001), *Alexie Sends Strong Signals* by Pabst Georgia in *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (Mar.9, 2002), *Sherman Alexie’s Indigenous Blues* by Ford Douglas in *MELUS* (Autumn 2002), etc. Like these so many reviews are available on various aspects of Alexie’s writing. Articles published by Alexie himself are *Making Smoke* in *Whole Earth* (Fall 1998), *Death in Hollywood* in *Ploughshares* (Winter 2000/2001) etc.

Alexie is being interviewed continuously by scholars from various fields such as historians, educationists, literary critics, anthropologists, intellectuals, sociologists and editors of famous print and electronic media. Gwinn Mary Ann, an editor of *Seattle Times* in conversation with Alexie what says about *Blasphemy*, a collection of short stories by Alexie, can be applied to all his works. He says that, “The theme is identification – rich, poor, black, brown – it’s the sense of being caught between being in a community and being an individual. The pain of your parents and your tribe telling you what to do and who to be”.

*Sending Cinematic Smock Signals: An Interview with Sherman Alexie* by D. West, J.M. West in *Cinecaste* (1998), *Crossroads: a Conversation with Sherman Alexie* by Purdy J. in *Western Washington University* are conversations by Alexie. Some conversations such as *A Conversation with Sherman Alexie* by Diane Thiel, *A Reservation of the Mind* by Marx Doug, *A World of Story-Smock: A Conversation with Sherman Alexie* by Nygren Ase, and *Conversation with Sherman Alexie* by Davis Tanita and Srevension Sarah etc. are collected by Peterson Nancy J. in the book *Conversations with Sherman Alexie* (2009).

Taking a step further, the present study is a modest attempt to study Sherman Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* with the theme of quest for identity.

#### **D. HYPOTHESIS**

In the select short story collection for present study, the theme of quest for identity reflects in case of all the major characters. Because of this identity quest they suffer from loneliness, alienation, isolation, aloneness, anxiety, frustration, alcoholism, despair, strangeness,

bleakness, helplessness, powerlessness and other similar consequent feelings.

The study of the present work *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is carried on analyzing and interpreting it with the help of these aspects.

## **E. METHODOLOGY**

The emphasis is laid on a very close reading of primary and secondary data available on the subject. Historical, interpretative, analytical, evaluative and comparative methods are used for the present study.

Introduction, an initial part of the study puts forward research frame of the dissertation. It includes points such as a survey of contemporary Native American Literature, literary career of Sherman Alexie, review of criticism on Sherman Alexie, hypothesis, methodology, and chapter scheme to be used.

Chapter first is the theoretical framework of the theme that is quest for identity. Chapter second and third analyze the stories from select short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* in the light of the theme quest for identity. Dissertation is concluded in chapter number four. This last chapter sums up the arguments made in the previous chapters during the course of study.

## **F. CHAPTER SCHEME:**

The final chapter scheme of the dissertation is as follows:

### **INTRODUCTION:**

- A. Survey of contemporary Native American Literature
- B. Literary career of Sherman Alexie

C. Review of criticism on Sherman Alexie

D. Hypothesis

E. Methodology

F. Chapter Scheme

CHAPTER I:

Quest for Identity: A Theoretical Framework

CHAPTER II:

Quest for Identity in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (stories-1 to 11)

CHAPTER III:

Quest for Identity in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (stories-12 to 22)

CHAPTER IV:

Conclusion