



LIFE ON THE REZ: AN ANALYSIS OF ALEXIE SHERMAN'S *ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART TIME INDIAN*

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Abstract

Native American literature in the United States is mostly a representation of the issues of identity, race, ethnicity, and life on the reservations where the Native people were transferred after the colonization of America. The experiences of many Native Americans on the reservations, are not very good reminiscences as these are fraught with depression, alienation, violence, suicidal tendencies, and alcoholism. Many Native writers have depicted the life on the reservations with a touch of despondency and pessimism. Sherman Alexie, with his semi autobiographical novel, *Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*, presents his life experiences on Spokane Indian Reservation in a melancholic and humourous tone. The present paper focuses on the main character of the novel, Arnold Spirit Jr., a teenage Native American boy, his life and experiences on the reservation from his perspective. For the purpose, historical and biographical approach is applied to the text. The cultural, historical, social, and political contexts of the text are also analyzed to understand how the Native people negotiate with their conditions. The paper also discusses the government policies, social and political conditions that led to the establishment of Indian reservation system. Focus will be on the contemporary social, political, and cultural conditions of the United States and how these have influenced the overall progress of the Natives. Native Americans have now started venturing outside the reservations, which were home to them for many generations. Arnold's decision to take admission to an all white school in Reardon is a step towards this process of reconciliation. The paper also discusses the outcome of this interaction between people from different backgrounds, the reactions of Junior's people and his understanding the importance of accepting his identity without fear or shame.

Introduction

This is the incredible story of a Native American boy's attempt to break away from the life he thought he was destined to live. -Cover Page of *Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie

Sherman Alexie, born October 7, 1966, at Wellpinit, Spokane Indian reservation, near Spokane, Washington, is a prolific Native American writer. Through his poems, stories, novels, and films, he has portrayed a vibrant picture of the sleepy and inactive lives of Native Americans, which have brought accolades to him at national and international levels. Alexie boasts of a Spokane Indian identity, Coeur d'Alene tribe from his father's side and a mixed ancestry from Colville, Choctaw, Spokane and European Americans from his mother's side. He spent his childhood on the reservation and the lived experiences there played an important role in forming his life and ideas later in life. His writings draw a lot from his experiences, which were greatly influenced by his maternal grandmother, a spiritual leader of the Spokane tribe. Alexie experienced a traumatic childhood with disease, fear of mental disability, fragile health and unsympathetic attitude of people. This naturally inspired him to shun public appearance and find solace in the company of books and drawings. In his eighth grade, he decided to attend Reardon High school to avoid sad fate on the reservation.

Sherman Alexie got his first introduction to native American literature through Alex Kuo who gave him a book of Joseph Bruchac, a Native American writer, *Songs of this Earth on Turtle's Back*, bringing a desirable change in his personality. In the year 1993, he wrote a collection of short stories, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fishfight in Heaven*. It remains his best known work with adaptation into a film *Smoke Signals* (1998). In the story, Alexie asserted, "Native Americans have a way of surviving. But it's almost like Indians can easily survive the big

stuff. Mass murder, loss of language and land rights. It's the small things that hurt the most. The white waitress who wouldn't take an order, Tonto, the Washington Redskins." (Poetry Foundation) *Reservation Blues* (1995), his first novel, received many awards and was named Granta's Best of Young American Novelists list in 1996. Editor Ian Jack said that the judges had "liked his work because it had something to tell us. Native American life, life on the reservation, is a pretty under described experience." (Poetry Foundation) Alexie's semi-autobiographical novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) won National Book award for Young People's Literature and the best audiobook award in 2008. Most of his writings deal with the themes of despair, poverty, violence, and alcoholism in the Native Americans' lives. The focus of his works is on the grappling issues of lives of Native people in modern times, living as Natives and the meaning of living life on an Indian reservation. There is a sense of struggle, conflict and powerlessness in his characters in white dominated society but he seems to be challenging this especially after the incident of 9/11. Though, most of his works deal with serious issues, the humour in his works becomes a means of cultural survival in the face of issues faced by Indian people in the American society. Unlike his predecessors, Sherman does not rely on traditional forms but blends all the elements of modern culture, Indianness and all aspects of life at a reservation center. Alexie has now moved away from revealing a uniquely Native American world to Anglo audiences. He deliberately stays away from the mythologized, spiritual stereotypes surrounding Native Americans, and focuses instead on the realities he grew up with on the Spokane Indian reservation in Wellpinit, Washington, which ran thick with poverty, alcoholism, and hopelessness. In spite of all these problems, he argues in favour of a balanced approach, which is reflected in accepting his identity as an Indian and asserting himself in the modern American society.

The novel under consideration in the paper, has been successful in remaining in the National bestseller lists since its publication in 2007. This is Alexie's first novel for young adults with semi autobiographical undertones throughout the novel. The novel presents the life of Arnold Spirit Jr. (Junior), growing up on a Native American reservation. Arnold Spirit Jr. is a representation of Alexie himself on Spokane Indian reservation. Fourteen years old Arnold plays the role of the protagonist and narrator in a convincing way. His reactions and analysis of the life are based on his experiences. The run of the novel has not been very smooth as in spite of being on the bestseller list, the novel is on the lists of banned books in schools across the United States because of its hard hitting content. Alexie has been successful in capturing the spirit of a teenage boy sharing his point of view about his family, friends, his aspirations, his identity, and the tragedy of his life in a very convincing way. He adopts a humourous and satirical way of looking at things and incidents and gives vent to his feelings by drawing cartoons. Alexie describes the life on a reservation without any reservation with convincing portrayal of adults turning to drinking and partying to cope with the dismal life on reservation. Junior does not want to fall to the level of the adults and is eager to leave the reservation. He struggles with the issues of identity and belonging, which are very important issues for many Native Americans. Still, he is hopeful for a better life and better future off the rez in his decision of leaving it.

To understand the life on a rez in the novel and its repercussions on the Native Americans, it is necessary to fully grasp the history of Native America and the background of the creation of the reservations first. The early days of European colonization in America led to bloody clashes between the Natives and the colonizers over possession of land and natural resources on the continent. The colonizers used a variety of methods to wrest the lands of the Native Americans, from negotiations to treaties, forcible removal, and wars for many years.

These battles weakened the strength of the Native Americans as they were forced to leave their lands and move to the far off places. Still, there were battles being fought between the Natives and the colonizers. Ultimately the U. S. government created the Office of Indian Affairs in 1824 to resolve the land issues and later the post of Commissioner of Indian Affairs was established in 1832. In 1830, the Indian removal Act had legalized the removal of Native Americans off of their ancestral lands to the reservations designated for them by the government.

The reservation system in America came into existence in 1840s with the annual report of William Medill, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at the time. He advanced the idea of putting the savage Native Americans on lands far away from the civilized white Americans. Missionaries were involved to civilize the Natives and to make them abandon their traditional, cultural, religious practices, and languages. William P. Dole was appointed the Commissioner of Indian Affairs during the Presidency of Abraham Lincoln in 1861. Dole was of the opinion that there was "no possibility of red men and white men occupying the same territory without the rapid contamination and ultimate extinction of the Indians." (Prucha 106) The U. S. Congress passed the Indian Appropriation Act in 1851, creating the reservation system for Native Americans. With this Act, the government forced Native people to move to reservations. The purpose of this system was not to provide a safe place for them where they could thrive without interruption. In fact, the system severely restricted the Natives' survival system that was based on hunting, fishing, and gathering their traditional foods. In consequence, they became completely dependent on government for food, medicine, and other necessities. They were introduced to wheat flour, grease, and sugar in their diets. Native people were allowed to govern themselves and to maintain some of their

cultural and social practices in the isolation of the rez.

The restrictions imposed by the reservation system were responsible for conflicts between the U. S. army and the Natives, known as the Indian wars. Ultimately, after massacres and victories, the U. S. army relocated them to reservations. Soon, the discovery of gold in those areas increased the greed of the civilized people and the Natives were further removed from these reservations. In 1868, President Grant started policy of assimilation of Natives into mainstream U.S. society. Missionaries were sent to reservations to convert them, which was abandoned after fierce resistance by the Natives. In 1869, Ely Samuel Parker became the first Native American to become Commissioner. The Dawes Act 1887 subdivided tribal lands into individual plots and destroyed the reservation system. "The aim of the act was to destroy tribal governing councils and assimilate Native Americans into mainstream U.S. society by replacing their communal traditions with a culture centered on the individual." (Khan Academy) In the 1930s, the years of the Great Depression, President Roosevelt created the U.S. Indian Reorganization Act. This New Deal allowed the Natives to reorganize and form their own government and resurrected the reservation system. At present there are over 500 federally recognized Native American tribes in the United States, with defined boundaries of their reservations. Earlier the reservations were established to keep the Natives away from the civilized white society as they were considered barbarians and primitive. The conditions on these reservations have always been poor in comparison to the rest of the United States. In spite of all drawbacks, the reservations have become symbols of the Indian identity and for the struggle of minorities being accepted by the general public. They are no doubt, symbols of prisons but at the same time of traditions and home for the Natives.

The story of the novel, *Absolutely True Diary of a Part time Indian*, is set in one such reservation of Spokane Indians in Wellpinit, founded in 1881. Arnold Spirit Jr. tells the location of the reservation thus, "approximately one million miles north of Important and two billion miles west of Happy and if the government wants to hide somebody, there's no place more isolated than my reservation." (Alexie 30) The very description of the reservation is suggestive of its being hopeless and unimportant. It is far away from mainstream society and a perfect hiding place for vagabonds as nobody from the outside world bothers to come here. Arnold gives a vivid and detailed description of his life on the rez in a humorous and satirical way. Native people can follow their traditions here without any hindrance from outside. In spite of their efforts to keep their culture and traditional practices, American culture has also influenced them in a negative way, that is about gambling, drinking and food habits. The economic development of the mainstream American dream has not reached Wellpinit as most of the Natives live in poor conditions and survive on the ration and subsidies from government. Colonization and later forced removal of the tribals led them to a life of resignation with no ambition to move ahead in life and leaving the reservation ever. They have forgot their existence and wait for the government ration every month. Arnold also belongs to such poor family on the rez that has lived in a cycle of poverty for many generations.

The autobiographical tone of the novel is set from the beginning of the novel in the portrayal of the protagonist, Arnold Spirit Jr. Like the author, the protagonist too is born with genetic disorder, resulting in surgery at a young age of six months and escaped mental disability with physical deformities. Arnold discusses in detail, all the problems that have made the rez places of despair and disgust. Beginning with poor health services, which is the first thing he needs due to his ill health, he goes on to describe

the education system, poverty, alcoholism, violence, unemployment, and suicidal tendencies of his people. Within this hopeless condition, Arnold keeps his hopes high of one day making it big. Arnold describes the health services in a humourous and satirical way as he describes his experience of getting his teeth removed. He comments that major dental work was funded only once a year on the reservation. Therefore, he has to get his extra teeth pulled out in one day. This is a reflection on the government's indifferent attitude towards the health issues of the Natives. It also shows apathy of the white doctors towards the pains and feelings of the tribals. As Arnold tells, "And what's more, our white dentist believed that Indians only felt half as much pain as white people did, so he only gave us half the Novocain." (2) This is a scathing comment not only on the health services on the reservation but also on the apathy of the white people towards the Native Americans. Their pains, and problems have no meaning for the whites. The depressing conditions on the rez are a part of their lives from birth to death.

In order to give vent to his suppressed feelings, he draws cartoons. The poverty on the rez and of his family makes him draw to become rich and famous. "I draw because I feel like it might be my only real chance to escape the reservation." (6) He is aware of his condition and this makes him desperate, "I am really just a poor-ass reservation kid living with his poor-ass family on the poor-ass Spokane Indian Reservation." (7) His family has to miss a meal sometimes because of poverty. In spite of all this Arnold's sense of humour is great when he makes fun of his own hunger. But the death of his dog without treatment due to poverty makes him angry at his condition. His father has to shoot it to save it from more pain because they cannot afford money to take it to the doctor. Arnold hates his poverty at such times, "I wanted to hate dad and Mom for our poverty. ... But I can't blame my parents for our poverty.... And it's not like my mother and

father were born into wealth. It's not like they gambled away their family fortunes. My parents came from poor people who came from poor people who came from poor people, all the way back to the very first poor people." (11) He comments on the poverty of the Natives and how it has shattered all their dreams of escaping poverty. They never had any chance because of their being Indians and nobody was interested in their dreams. Arnold believes that his parents were very talented but never got any opportunity in their lives because of being Indians and poor. He observes, "But we reservation Indians don't get to realize our dreams. We don't get those chances. Or choices. We're just poor. That's all we are." (13)

Poverty and unemployment are rampant in all families on the rez as Arnold feels it on many occasions. Arnold's determination to go to Reardon is fueled by his observation of his parents' lives who have no dreams and hopes left in them. The poverty on the reservation has left without dreams and hopes for future, "They never got the chance to be anything because nobody paid attention to their dreams." (11) Arnold hates poverty and he sees the only escape in leaving the reservation, "It sucks to be poor, and it sucks to feel that you somehow deserve to be poor. You start believing that you're poor because you're stupid and ugly. And then you start believing that you're stupid and ugly because you're Indian. And because you're Indian you start believing you're destined to be poor. It's an ugly circle and there's nothing you can do about it." (13) In a way, poverty is a vicious circle for the Indians on the reservation, from which there is no escape. There is neither good education nor jobs on the reservation, "What kind of a job can a reservation Indian boy get? I was too young to deal blackjack at the casino, there were only about fifteen green grass lawns on the reservation (and none of their owners outsourced the mowing jobs), and the only paper route was owned by a tribal elder named Wally. And he had to deliver only fifty papers,

so his job was more like a hobby." (15) Arnold gives a real picture of the reservation life because government opened casinos there in the name of giving jobs to people but in reality, there are not many opportunities. The policies of the US government have created a feeling of hopelessness and there is no escape from it. He may be a part of the group of Indians who think that leaving the reservation is the only way of gaining something in life. Arnold too wants to leave the rez for his studies but he understands in the end that leaving is not the solution. The Indians have to come out of self pity in order to achieve success.

The education system on the rez is quite poor without any opportunities afterwards. Arnold has to face all these conditions every day and he is desperate to leave the rez to find better opportunities in the world of the whites. The turning point in his life comes when he joins the school at the rez and gets a school book used by his mother some thirty years ago, "My school and my tribe are so poor and sad that we have to study from the same dang books our parents studied from. This is absolutely the saddest thing in the world." (31) He throws the book at his teacher in disgust. This incident reflects the poor standard of education and a poor school system in comparison to the education system for the whites and kindles an ambition in Arnold to leave the rez in order to get better education and opportunities. The three schools on the reservation, besides Junior's school, one is "filled with poor Indians and poorer white kids, and yet another one is filled with the poorest Indians and poorer than poorest white kids." (45) He has to face humiliation at the white school in Reardon, where a white teacher makes fun of his learning on the reservation, "Where did you learn this fact? Yes, we all know there's so much amazing science on the reservation." (85) This condition of depression is true for many reservations but few of them are doing good as well, "the Mississippi Choctaws have thriving casino business and provide

nically for the tribal members who still live on the reservation." (James 72)

Arnold is suspended from his school for throwing a book on his teacher in frustration. His teacher pays him a visit and rather than scolding him, he urges Arnold to leave the reservation for a better future. He tells him of the times when white people were supposed to handle the Natives by beating, "We beat them. That's how we were taught to teach you. We were supposed to kill the Indian to save the child. In response to horrific response of Arnold, he clarifies, "No, no, it's just a saying. I didn't literally kill Indians. We were supposed to make you give up being Indian. Your songs and stories and languages and dancing. Everything. We weren't trying to kill Indian people. We were trying to kill Indian culture." (Alexie 35) The teacher now thinks that whatever was done in the name of civilizing the Indians was wrong and he advises Arnold to leave the reservation. Mr. P. tells him that the life on the reservation takes away all hopes, therefore, Arnold must leave it, "And you are a bright and shining star too. You are the smartest kid in the school...I don't want you to fade away. You deserve better.... You have to leave this reservation... I mean you have to leave the rez forever." (40-42) Mr. P. is quite furious at the idea of how the lives of the Indians are being destroyed on the rez, "The only thing you kids are being taught is how to give up. Your friend Rowdy, he's given up.... All these kids have given up.... And their mothers and fathers have given up, too. And their grandparents gave up and their grandparents before them. And me and every other teacher here. We're all defeated." (42) He is, however, impressed with Arnold, "but not you.... You won't give up. You threw that book in my face because somewhere inside you refuse to give up." (43) Mr. P tries to redeem himself by forgiving Arnold and in a way becomes instrumental in Arnold's decision in going to Reardon.

Arnold's decision to go to Reardon, an all white school, is also full of apprehensions as he

says, "Reardon is the rich, white farm town that sits in the wheat fields exactly twenty two miles away from the rez...filled with farmers and rednecks and racist cops who stop every Indian that drives through." (46) In the beginning he feels "I was still a stranger in a strange land." (81) The cross roads between two cultures and two worlds is a complex situation in which he is trying to find a place for him. "His identity is questioned at all steps of his life by others as well as himself." (Schroder 93) Though, the reservations were created by the colonial power in order to remove the Indians from their lands, they have become a part of their lives and their identity, "the reservation is the center of their heritage and their identity are grounded in." (James 45) Arnold's decision to leave reservation means that he has to create new identity for himself. "Indians exist in a world in which they do not belong and must struggle to find a middle ground between the two identities that are constantly at odds with one another, that of their Native heritage and that of the dominant white culture that surrounds them." (Jamie Korsmo)

The novel throws light on the family life of the tribe on the reservation. Unlike their white American counterparts, they believe in the value of families, relationships, and friendship, "Indian families stick together like Gorilla glue, the strongest adhesive in the world." (Alexie 89) Arnold's family members love each other in spite of being poor and value their relations. His parents sometimes are drunk due to depression but they are caring and understanding. They support him in his decision to study in a white's school in spite of their meagre income. Arnold does not think of leaving the rez, he just wants to leave the despair and hopelessness for a better future, as he says, "Ever since the Spokane Indian Reservation was founded back in 1881, nobody in my family had ever lived anywhere else. We Spirits stay in one place. We are absolutely tribal. For good or bad, we don't leave one another." (89) His decision to leave to study in an all white high school draws heavy

criticism from other Native people on the rez and even his best friend Rowdy gets angry with him and becomes his worst enemy. People look at him as a traitor as if he has committed a heinous crime by this decision. Arnold is not leaving the reservation forever since his parents are there and melancholy it may be, it is still home. The gloomy life on the reservation means always struggling for survival in negligent conditions. The bonding between families, neighbours, and their tribe, is not sufficient to make him forget the deprived and dejected conditions on the rez. Arnold has a positive outlook towards life in spite of many problems in his life. Of all the characters, he seems to be only one who has made peace with his identity as a Native American. He is able to see the positive and negative aspects of both the worlds but is determined to see the merits of both.

The problem of alcoholism is very much rampant on the reservation apart from poverty. Arnold's parents as well as other people on the rez are always drunk. He is the only one who does not like drinking. Arnold describes, "my grandmother had never drunk alcohol in her life... that's the rarest kind of Indian in the world." (158) Sherman Alexie describes in detail the serious problem of alcoholism through the portrayal of Arnold's parents, Rowdy's father and other characters. This problem leads to violence as depicted in the swollen eyes or bruises on the faces of Rowdy and his mother most of the time. Though, Arnold's parents also drink a lot but they are never violent. Poverty, lack of opportunities, depression and despair has made people bitter and they try to drown their problems in alcohol. Arnold points out the serious problem of alcoholism, "Plenty of Indians have died because they were drunk. And plenty of drunken Indians have killed other drunken Indians." (158) Arnold has to mourn the death of relatives and friends because of this drinking habit. His grandmother is killed in an accident hit by a drunken driver. His father's best friend Eugene is killed in a bar, and his sister and her husband die in an inebriated

condition in the back of their burning trailer. He is appalled by drinking frenzy on the reservation, which is the worst part of life there and has become a constant picture on the rez. Arnold's father leaves them for weeks altogether on a drinking spree. This is the reality of his life on the reservation and he sees just one hope to leave this place, that is by going to Reardon for studies. Contemplating over his situation, Arnold says, "Reservations were meant to be prisons, you know? Indians were supposed to move onto reservations and die. We were supposed to disappear." (216) This is the reality of the reservations but Alexie wants the Indians to fight back in spirit, by being brave, achieving success against all odds. He himself is a shining example of this success.

With his notions of refinement, Arnold does not fit into the life of reservation. Playing basketball at Reardon also gives him a chance to prove his worth in an all white school. His selection in the basketball team at school also points out the necessity for the Indians as well as the whites to understand each other leaving behind the negativity. In fact, Arnold has been a very good basketball player on the rez but he has never been able to challenge Rowdy, definitely the best player there. Reardon gives him a chance to prove himself irrespective of the fact that he is a Native American. He states, "as the season went on, I became a freshman starter on a varsity basketball team. And sure, all of my teammates were bigger and faster, but none of them shoot like me." (179) There is stark contrast between his life on the rez and in Reardon. On the rez, he has to face insults and gets beaten up every day. In Reardon, in spite of all his hesitations and with the exception of a few people, he gets a chance to prove himself. He was lonely on the rez with the exception of friendship with Rowdy but in his new school, he gets best friend in Gordy. He is selected for the university junior team and he has to play his first game against his former teammates at the reservation. He realizes that they had all the advantages at the white school while many of

his former teammates had not "eaten breakfast that morning." (195) Korsmo states that in Alexie's novels, "Indians often defy the social and cultural boundaries that captivate them and, as a result, experience limitlessness of exposure to and interaction with two very different cultures." (5-6) Arnold has to negotiate between two cultures every day, "I woke up on the reservation as an Indian, and somewhere on the road to Reardon, I became less than Indian." (Alexie 83) His moving between two worlds and adapting to both of them is an effort to become a part of both. Many Indians on the reservation have forgot that "reservations were meant to be death camps.... I was the only one who was brave and crazy enough to leave the rez. I was the only one with enough arrogance." (217)

The overall conditions on the rez are hopeless, killing all aspirations and zeal for life because of poverty, sub standard education and unemployment. Many people don't have anything to do and they depend on the government for their food and have to hungry until the next supply. They try to forget their failure in booze and violence. Moreover, if they want to leave the rez, they find themselves misfit in the white world as Arnold thinks in the beginning. He actually is a misfit in both the worlds because he neither likes the drunk and violent atmosphere of the rez nor he finds it easy to be accepted in the white world. In his new school he finds out that he is smarter than many white kids. Soon he learns to maintain a balance between the two worlds and it is based on his acceptance of his identity as an Indian but not to be ashamed of it. He feels that most of the Native Americans will never do this, which results in further desolation and despair in them. Sherman has dealt with the issue of reservation and life there with honesty. "It accurately reflects the way a teenage boy would talk about his family, friends and the tragedy that enters his life throughout the course of the novel." (Abigail Bouwma) Life on the reservation has become center for preservation of Native American culture. His depiction of life full of

drinking and poverty is an honest picture of the life. Arnold has to grapple with the issues of identity and belonging, which is the problem of many Native Americans. Verlyn Klinkenborg says, "Alexie writes effectively for a divided audience, Native American and Anglo. He is willing to risk didacticism whenever he stops to explain the particulars of the Spokane, and, more broadly, the Native American experience to his readers. But Alexie never sounds didactic. His timing is too good for that." (Poetry foundation)

His representations of the life on reservation have made him an authority on the issues related to Natives and helps in learning more about their people and identity. There are negative things arising out of this situation. Non Native people look at reservations as place deprived of all happiness, and opportunities. They have assumptions that Native people are always violent, drunk, and unemployable and this is not because of government policies but because of the Natives themselves. White people are curious about them how they are even able to make it away from the rez implying reservation is the place that needs to be escaped.

Sherman Alexie had no such result in mind when he wrote *Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*. No doubt, the whole idea behind writing a semi autobiographical novel was to reveal the reality of the reservation, which is a place of abject conditions. In his representations of Arnold's life on the reservation, Alexie wants to bring home a point. It is to change the attitude of the Native Americans about themselves and make non Native people accept them as they are. Alexie wants the Natives to have a sound grounding in their identity and land which will help them in mitigating damage of assimilation as a result of university education. "Make no mistake-Richard Pratt's mandate to "kill the Indian and save the man" assimilation policy is still fully in effect and university education is a large part of that assimilation." (ict news) It is positive education that can help native people in

contributing to precious native home lands and people. "Go away, gain knowledge of how to help contribute and improve our communities. Come back. Strengthen the community." (ict news) Modern education has its drawbacks for the Natives as after getting modern education, many Native people feel ashamed of their reservations and life there and rather than giving a helping hand in improving the conditions, they leave it.

"In reading a plethora of Native American Literature, a glaring light has shined forth, exposing the Indian reservations as a place without advantages, without hope, and without resources. All of the tribes place such value on heritage and community, yet, the reservations, put into place to keep the Indians in their supposed place and out of the way of the Eurocentric whites devoted to completing Manifest Destiny, claiming all land as theirs from coast to coast, have become a status quo that Indians cling to." (discover hub pages) Clinging to their culture and heritage has made them dependents on government. They find it quite difficult to maintain a balance between modern and their traditional world.

Not only in the present novel but also in other works of Alexie, his protagonists deal with the constant struggle with their sense of powerlessness and hopelessness in white society, raising awareness about the plight of the Native Americans and the struggle they face as they are torn in two worlds. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*, sheds a great deal of light on the reality of reservation life and difficulties. People may use it as a historical text to formulate their views regarding the Natives. Many critics are of the opinion that Alexie has presented a negative picture of the reservation life, which is hopeless, alcoholic, and stagnate. As Jennifer Conner points out that she "developed a dislike towards the main character and got the impression that the character felt sorry for himself and wanted others to feel sorry for him as well, calling the novel a sob story." (Beyond the Demography) The book gives

readers an insight into life on an Indian reservation. Alexie calls his gritty, dark novel "reservation realism". (Digital Library of America)

Junior is able to ultimately find a new identity which acknowledges both the worlds. He gives more than the stereotype, "He has become a postmodern voice in the continuing search for Native American social reality and cultural identity. Alexie's works show dark humour, the debilitating influence of alcoholism, suicide, want of proper health care, unemployment, racial conflict, housing reservation, and poverty that pervade human life on the reservation as well as the anger that emerges from the distortion and annihilation of a true identity of Native American." (7267) Laughter, tears, and a kind of balance are required for this kind of writing. Sarah A Quirk from the Dictionary of Library Biography, writes, "Alexie asks three questions across all of his literary works: "What does it mean to live as an Indian in this time? What does it mean to be an Indian man? Finally, what does it mean to live on an Indian reservation?" (Dictionary of Literary Biography) In fact, Alexie is successful in bringing the debate on the issue of the reservation life and how to handle the pressures of the Native world and the non Native world. He is quite certain that if the Natives want to have identity in the modern world, it is by first accepting their identity as an Indian. As David Treuer points out, "it's good to remember, you know, that reservations are ...remnants of our homelands that have been reserved for our use and for us to live on. So, these were not given to us: These are the miniaturized portions of land that has always been ours. And our rights extend to the reservation, but they also extend oftentimes beyond the borders of the reservations." (NPR. org)

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