



Spirituality and Identity in Sherman Alexie's True Diary

Dr. Manveer Singh

Lecturer in English

BSS Inter College

Pamnawali Muzaffarnagar (U.P.)

Abstract

Alexie's novels largely deal with the burning and current issues in which the natives are engulfed, engrossed and obsessed about the question of spirituality and identity. His characters practicing and observing their habits, customs, traditions, rites and rituals, faiths and beliefs are strong and powerful evidences in support of their quest for spirituality and identity. Their use and practical involvement in traditional Indian life style and affairs represent that they are after cultural identity and cultural pragmatics. Needless to say that historical trauma of colonization contributes to the formation of Native American cultural and Identity, as depicted in his novels. Deterioration of tribal values, poverty, social displacement and identity crisis are all traumas experienced by American indigenous groups, such elements create a climate of cultural disintegration, which lasting over generations, can become a self induced genocide. In addition to trauma are the emotions associated with the better treatment and betrays of Indians by Euro American society, anger, resentment hopelessness are the product of cultural exchange.

Keywords-Spirituality,Identity,Ritulas,Faiths,Beliefs,Tradition,Cultural exchange.

Indian identity is the heart of the matter. Native authors are so concerned about Alexie's satirical style because stereotypes have profound influence on one's identity. His characters seem to be unsure about what Indian identity really is and they are constantly searching and readjusting its meaning. Native culture united people from various diverse ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the pursuit of national goals. Violence, integral to most liberation struggles, becomes the part of identity sometimes. In many cases a justification for native violence was located in structure of racism and colonialism. Richard Wright's graphically violent 'Native Son' 1940, he suggested that Bigger's extraordinary violence is the direct effect of racial segregation. Ngugi wa Thiong O in a recent interview underline the significance of such response, even though he does not quite agree with use of term 'Nativism' Ngugi says. "The primary thing is to look at power. The language question should really be discussed in terms of power relations and in terms of production and distribution of knowledge. If you look United Nations, you will find that only five or at most six languages dominate it...four or five of those languages are European".¹

Alexie has diasporic sense in his writing directly or indirectly. Characters are moving here and there to search his/her identity, willingly or forcefully sometimes. Homi Bhabha sees disjuncture and displacement as a productive condition. We need to rethink the very idea of identity, Bhabha suggests in the essays in 'The Location of culture 1994' Bhabha sees borders as thresholds, in between space where identities can be recast. These are zones of transition, hybrid space Bhabha writes,

"The need to think beyond narratives of originally and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments as process that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference." These in between space provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood singular or communal that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative site of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself."²

Using a range of terms that suggest borders thresholds and indeterminate space, Bhabha rejects notions of a fixed rooted or binary identity, he also rejects the idea of original identity and originally moment / home. Instead Bhabha proposes that we see identity as a process of negotiation, and of articulation. This process of negotiating a new identity in new contexts social, economic, political, and literary is central to postcolonial migrant theory. Writing is an expression of this shared identity of being dislocated and is a principal theme in the fiction from Caribbean, Asian American and other countries. What this means in that national ethnic

or communal identity are constituted in the absence of a territory. In some sense hybridity is a mixing of discrete ways of living the productive mixing and cross fertilization of culture form is the ways of life.

In most cases this multiplicity results in an identity that is extremely fluid and can even induce a sense of anxiety dual identity might be advantageous but as Ngugi's novel suggests it can also be disabling schizophrenic when adopted culture fails to see beyond the ethnic identity of the exilic individuals then, this individual has no choice but to retrieve her / his indigenous identity. Bhabha ignores the fact that identity is not merely an individual assertion, it is socially sanctioned and validated in Meena Alexander's *Manhattan's Music* 1997, Sakhi voices the dilemma of never quite adjusting.

"Traveling place was hard staying was harder, you had to open your suitcase, lay out the little bits and pieces into ready-made niche smooth out the sari exchange it for a spirit. Then you tucked the suitcase under the bed and forget about it, started accumulating the bric-a-brac that made you part of the streets around."³

forms, social and political transformation are of course, self evident : with political independence nation states achieve a measure of sovereignty, psychological transformation is about the change in attitude, but perhaps the most important transformation of all in the realm of culture. Protagonists of his novel mainly come into the contact of cultural transformation and hope that they would be succeed in their lives to get an identity, which they could not get in In Alexie's fiction here is a transformation of identity in various Reservation. But ultimately tradition of Reservation got superiority above Whites As in Wole Soyinka's '*The Lion and Jewel*' (1963, collected plays), Sidi is a young girl is wooed by the school teacher Lakunte. Lakunte is a Christian and does not accept the village's tradition. Sidi's photograph appears in a Logus magazine and begins to act pompous. The chief Baroka wishes to make Sidi his wife. Eventually Sidi opt for tradition in the form of Baroka rather than Christian/ modern Lakunte, This becomes symbolic victory of tradition as Baroka puts it in the play. "Yesterday wine alone is strong and blooded, child and though the Christians' holy book denies. The truth of this, old wine thrives best within a new bottle the coarseness is mellowed down, and the rugged wine acquires a full and rounded body..." (The Lion and Jewel, 43)

Achebe or Rushdie provides another vision of Nigerian or Indian society They subtly those of the people interrogate to prevent European notions about societies Native American

live with legacy of having been colonized, their culture decimated, and subsequently generations ‘Americanized’ by white culture that arrived on the continent from the seventeenth century. Writing by Native American seek an understanding of this transformation, the traumatic past that has rendered them special subject in Reservation or completely Americanized Indians with no connection to their cultural pasts. These writing make it clear that there is an urgent need to retrieve their parts. Lee Francis writes “to reclaim their identity American Indian urban youth need to learn the stories of the people. They need to learn, remember, and tell the ancient origin and migration stories...And they need to tell new stories about growing up and living urban lives. These new stories are learned it is important to tell stories about those people...Link those stories with from whom urban Native youth are descended.”⁴

Through the second person narrative style, Alexie evokes the emotional response associated with Arnold’s experience with reader because Arnold can speak directly to the reader; the reader sees Arnold’s rationalizations and decision behind his action in a more direct way than third person narrative might allow. Arnold is aware of the repercussions of choosing to attend Reardan, an all White high school off Reservation land. Although Arnold chooses to attend Reardan, an all White high school off Reservation school cannot provide him a good education, Arnold must decide what elements of the two cultures benefits his identity. Arnold, even as a teen-ager, can recognize cultural difference and learn from his exposure to family, friends and adults. He states, “My sister is running away to get lost, but I am running away because I want to find something.”⁵ Arnold takes part in a personal journey of daily life off the Reservation; he is committed to that decision and confronts problems that transpire because of the choice he made to attend school outside the Reservation. Arnold confronts his best friend Rowdy, who asks, “And when are you going on this imaginary journey?” (True Diary, 49). Later, he accuses Arnold, “You always thought you were better than me” (True Diary, 52). The passages expose two contact zones to the reader one inside the Reservation and one outside the Reservation. The former implies a tension between Indians because Reservation Indians who choose not to leave the Reservation consider Indians who do leave traitor to the tribe or Indian culture. The latter contact zone refers to experiences mainstream society and exchanges with cultures other than Indian.

Thomas’s songwriting indicates his participation in oral traditions, which opens one’s insight, or a consciousness that enables him to evaluate his identity in relation to his

surroundings. Thomas's reflection about his surroundings helps identify his purpose on the Reservation evaluate opportunity off the Reservation, and what he may contribute to his tribe by either choice. The narrative alludes to Thomas's insight in the text, "Thomas looked around at the little country he was trying to save, this Reservation hidden away at the corner of the world."⁶ The band coyote Springs is comprised of Junior, Victor and Thomas, who are later joined by Chess and Checkers Warm Water. Thomas continues his ritual of storytelling, which is a strong part of his identity, by writing lyrics for the band's music. Thomas' mapping and imaging or formation of identity, takes place in the act of songwriting because his words speak to modern audience yet refer to a cultures past. That heals him most of the time. Mapping is a complex process that also involves identity in relation to mixed cultures and where an individual feels where they are most needed and where they may make a greater contribution to the society they choose. Mapping also includes the mental dialogue or subconscious evaluation a person takes part in to make decisions relative in the identity process. Alexie makes this evident with his explanation of Thomas: "After he (Thomas) woke up, he paced around the room, stood on his porch, and listened to those faint voices that echoed over the Reservation" (Reservation Blues, 46). Thomas is a young man with deep tribal roots but struggles with the choice to leave the Reservation to seek a better life because he is aware there is limited opportunity for him if he remains on the Reservation.

Spirituality plays a subtle but important role in Alexie's fiction. Characters rarely engage in any kind of religious practice, and spirituality is not discussed as explicitly as some of the books as other theme. Nerveless, he often describes his characters in religious termed. Characters contain numerous references to both Christianity and traditional Spokane spirituality. Samuel Builds-the-Fire's story about the Creator God Coyote reveals a great deal about his attitude towards religion and spirituality. In an interview with Joelle Fraser, he states "Part of it is that we had a land based theology, but all theologies are land based". Christianity is land based in its beginnings. I think in some ways Indians embrace it because it is a Cultural or racial self esteem issue. We are trying to find something positive that differentiate Us from the dominant culture. And the best way to do that because the U.S.is "so industrial and so wasteful."⁷

Blues identity becomes the point from which the characters discover strengths and weakness when mapping their Indians identity and confronting complexities of culture

boundaries. Blue is the focal point for multicultural conversation between characters because the music Coyote Springs produces Calvary record and groupies Betty and Veronica, who are girls from Euro American mainstream society. Alexie include popular culture, historical characters, humor, negative stereotype and traumas a part of the narrative in his novels. Alexie's perception of himself is reflected in the characters he writes about; he consider himself an individual coming from two hometowns and two cultures, making one unique identity. Alexie himself is always moving or evolving as a writer, not only in the way he identifies a centre of Indian identity, but as a topic of debate.

In the words of Owens that Alexie's prose is original in many ways. His humor is an essential component and weapon that allows authors to maintain an aggressive posture of their own Indian identity within their work. He implies in his novels that Indians are their own agents of change, so identity must be cultivated at an individual level in order to be productive to be the community. Which has left damaging consequences for its indigenous people Instead of being forced to choose between the Reservation or mainstream society. Perhaps Alexie and his novels and short stories inform the reader that hybridity does not eradicate any one culture or identity, but allows one the comfort and the freedom of experiencing two culture without the constraints or limitation of boundaries. Alexie's representations of Reservation life reveal that colonial Oppression resides in many facets of the Reservation but does not diminish a tribe's authority as something strictly affected by imperialism. Much of his work is immersed within pop-culture and humor, but this is the style that makes up his voice heard. Humor is a buffer, anger in an avenue and pop-culture serves as his setting but written choose their own devices. The Reservation has a dual nature undeniably the result of colonial expansion It represents culture hub for inhabitants, a colonial apparatus.

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