

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Background of the Research

*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* is a young-adult novel written by Sherman Alexie. Sherman Alexie is an American poet, writer, and filmmaker. The very first novel from Alexie, *Reservation Blues*, received an American Book Award in 1996, his young adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* (2007) won the 2007 U.S. National Book Award for Young People's Literature, and his collection of short stories and poems, *War Dances* (2009) won the 2010 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction. Many of his works based on his personal experiences as a Native American and grew up in the Spokane Indian Reservation.

Based on Ana Maria da Luz Nunes Figuera in her article "Fitting in and stepping out: Sherman Alexie's semi-autobiographic identity in the *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*", Alexie's works are related to his personal experiences as a Native American and it shows significantly in the novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. She compared Alexie's works and found these results. This article makes the writer sees that Alexie shows his own experiences and intention through his novel. As he describes the condition of the Reservation, it shows that his social life is

one of the main ingredients of his work. The writer believes that the main character of this novel is the reflection of Sherman Alexie himself.

In the novel, Alexie describes a lot about the condition in the Native Reservation and giving his own opinion about it. The social issues such as get drunk, poverty and bullying are included in this novel. It is similar to the truth condition in Native American Reservation, based on 2005 BIA American Indian Population and labor force Report, among Native American who are employed many are earning below poverty wages. National Center for Education Statistic records in 2006 the number of Indian living below the poverty in the Reservation reach 38% to 63%.

The life in the Reservation is one of the most interesting topics in the novel and it is related to the issue about the differences of Native people society and the white society. In the novel, the main character decided to move to Reardan the white school in order to get a better education and a better life. Alexie in his book describes the struggle and benefit that the main character got from this big step as a Nativeboy. He explains the social condition that the main character faces when he moved to the white society. The cultural shock and other big differences with the main character previous environments are described in this novel. The writer assumes that Alexie intention in this novel is to show an image of white people who accepted Native American as the part of them. The social problems would always come wherever we go which is here also happened to the main character. These social aspects involved both of societies, Reservation and Reardan.

The writer decides to choose the title *The Acceptance of Native American in White society as Shown in Sherman Alexie's The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* because the writer wants to analyze the way white society accepts Junior as the part of their group. The writer believes that this work is the reflection of Sherman Alexie's childhood as a Native American and he wants to show a good side of white people based on his point of view and experiences.

## 1.2 The Identification of the Problem

The writer assumes that this novel written by Alexie shows his own experiences and feeling as a Native American who also lived with white people. He explains that the changes of society could effect in a good way. The writer wants to show that, it is not only in the novel, but also happen to Alexie himself.

In this research, the writer wants to analyze how the author depicts white people accept the Native Americans wholeheartedly. The perspective of white people is represented through the characters; Mr. P, Penelope, Roger, Gordy and coach. The writer would like to analyze how Native American accepted in the white society and the struggle to be the part of it. The writer also would compare the social condition in the novel and the reality.

### 1.3 The Scope of the Research

In this research, the writer focuses on analyzing the acceptance of Native American by white people through the novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. Some additional facts and information about the lives of Native Americans in Reservation and the biography of the author would be taken to support the writer's analysis. The related issues also will be used in this research.

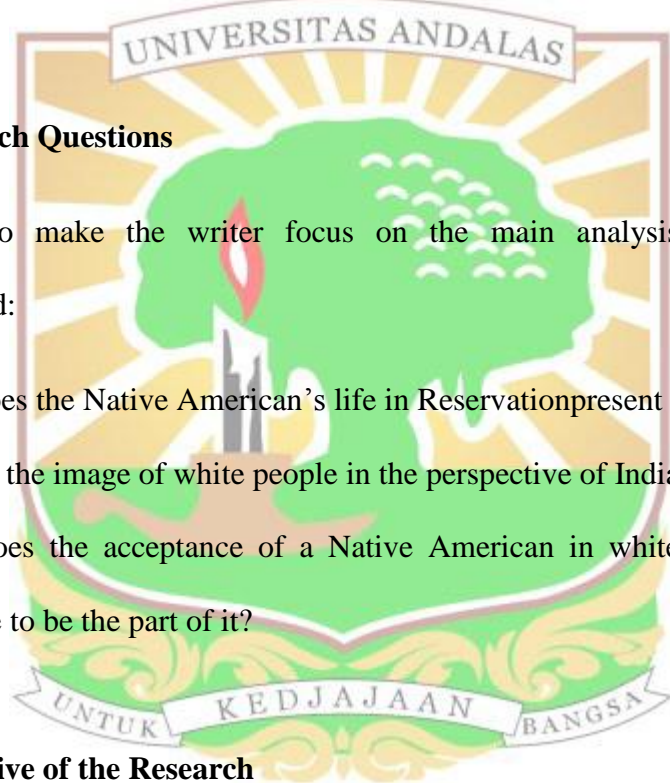
### 1.4 The Research Questions

In order to make the writer focus on the main analysis some research questions created:

1. How does the Native American's life in Reservation present in the novel?
2. What is the image of white people in the perspective of Indian in the novel?
3. How does the acceptance of a Native American in white society and his struggle to be the part of it?

### 1.5 The Objective of the Research

The aim of this research are to show the Native American's life in the Reservation and how is the acceptance of Native American in white society and the struggle to be the part of it. The writer would like to see it through the novel written by a Native American Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. The



writer wants to reveal the side of white people who treated Native Americans nicely as the part of their society.

### 1.6 The Review of Related Studies

Kevin Talbert in his article “Using the Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian to Teach about Racial Formation”(2012) said that this book shows “hope” is not only for white. He thinks that this book can help students and everyone sees how the social relationship can change someone. In his study, Talbert gives more attention to the racial issue, as we know that Junior is an Indian boy and he went to the white school. Based on Talbert, the most important thing about the book is to send the crucial culture message to the adolescents that in this age they need to know about many things. Students at this stage of age need to be taught about the racial thing to avoid the conflict or related problem about racism, and using this book is a good choice. This study brings the racial issue as the main problem to be analyzed, but he makes it as a good way which shows that nowadays there are many white people who want to accept Native American, everyone from different races have the same opportunity to gain their hope and dream. This research supports the writer’s idea about the white people who accepted Native people wholeheartedly.

The second study was by Ana Maria da Luz Nunes Figueira for Universidade Nova de Lisboa Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas research. In her study with the title “Fitting in and stepping out: Sherman Alexie’s semi-autobiographic identity exercise



in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*”, Ana analyzed the character of the author through his works by comparing some of Alexie’s works. She tries to show that individual versus community is a very important thing for Alexie. She focuses on how Alexie sees the society and interpreted it in his works. This research helps the writer in this study to know the characteristic of Alexie’s works, based on this research the writer finds that almost all of the Alexie’s works talk about the Native Americans live and their struggle. The society could impact to someone in writing his work, which is here Alexie describes his experiences and intention as a Native American.

The next one is from Judit Szathmari in American E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary with the title “Indian? Fiction? Indian Fiction? Communicating Culture between Reservation and non-Reservation Realities in Contemporary Indian Literature” (2011), in his study Szathmari give more attention to Indian as a writer. He says that “Indian Fiction function as a method of survival of culture popularly regarded as exotic, extinct”. The literary works from Indians, which consist of Indian’s live and experiences basically is a way of Indians to survive their tradition and to make the world knows about them. In his book Alexie mentions Indian’s cultures and traditions; it gives us some knowledge about Indians indirectly. Szathmari sees a work from a Native is a way for him to shows and introduce their culture. The writer also found in Alexie’s book *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*, Alexie describes his own tradition, such as powwow dance and another tradition of Native people in the Reservation. It helps the writer to improve her knowledge about Native people and support the writer’s idea, seeing Native people life from Native’s works.

An Article by Lloyd Brightman, Gail Dana and Stephen Marks entitle “Native American Lifestyle: Issue for Human Services Professional” (1983) talks about the different between Native society and the white society. They compare many things from both of these societies. They also found that every tribe has the difference social pattern too. The process of acculturation happened as the time passing by. This research focus on the Native and white in their lifestyle, showing what makes the Native and white different. From this article, the writer can see the different from both society and compares it with the description of Alexie in his work. In this research Lloyd Brightman, Gail Dana and Stephen Marks only focus on the factual information and the real data about how the living and lifestyle of Native people and giving some comparison with whites. According to this research, the writer can use the information as the factual data to support the information that is needed by the writer.

The writer uses all of those previous studies and related information to help her with the research. These previous studies could be the reference for the writer to gain more factual information related to this research.

## 1.7 Theoretical Framework

The sociology of literature is an area to study the relation between a literary work with social structures and condition in which the work created. It shows that the literary work is a determiner of the social situation. Swingewood in his book with Laurens said that, “As with sociology, literature too is pre-eminently concerned with men’s social world, his adaptation to it, and his desire to change it” (P.12). We could not separate the literary work with society; the individual and his society are the materials to create a literary work.

The writer decides to use the sociological approach in this research because sociological approach seeing a social problem in the literary work which is connected to the social problem in reality. The writer aims to see how Sherman Alexie is showing his own social condition through his work. As the experts said above a literary work is the combination of author’s imagination, intention and social condition. Based on a literary work we can see the true condition of several eras. The writer also believes that the work *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part time Indian* could be seen as a social document that records the true condition in the Reservation.

Swingewood in the first part of the book *The Sociology of Literature* said that a literary work is a reflection of social condition and a combination of the author’s imagination and wishes. He believes that a literary work is a social document that recorded social condition. The writer focuses on using this perspective by Swingewood that supports the writer’s idea about a literary work could be used as a social determiner. With this approach, the writer would see how Alexie describes the reality



of Native people who live in the Reservation and continue his education in white school.

In the book *the sociology of literature* Alan Swingewood and Diana Laurenson stated that:

“We learn both of the themes of the nature of society and the ways of individuals experienced it, through the fictional characters that have seen and record not only the reality around them, but their hopes, wishes, dreams and fantasies” (1971: 17)

The writer believes that the main character in the novel is the reflection of Alexie himself and it could show a lot of similarities with Alexie's life. We cannot take the whole of the work as the actual social information and by this, the writer would see Alexie biography as the comparison to show that his work *The absolutely True Diary of A Part Time Indian* have the real social condition not only his own imagination and wishes. The writer will also search the truth of social condition based on the novel timeline and related to it to show that this book is the reflection of a true social condition. By this, the writer wishes to see the acceptance of Native American in a white society and it is not only the author wishes or imagination, but also happen in the real society and happened to the author himself.

## 1.8 The Methods of the Research

### 1.8.1 Collecting Data

The method to collect the data in this study is library research. There are two kinds of data, primary and secondary data. The primary data of this research is a novel by Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. The secondary data are some articles, journals and critics of the previous study and other data that is used by the writer to complete this research.

### 1.8.2 Analyzing Data

In analyzing data, the writer does the close reading to *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*, other books, journals and articles related to the issue and the theory to help the writer finished the study. Then the writer would collect the important quotations and knowledge to improve the research.

### 1.8.3 Presenting the Result of Analysis

In presenting this research, the writer uses descriptive methods. The writer tries to reveal the acceptance of Native American in white society.

