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**Reclaiming Native American Identity in Zitkala- Sa's *Old Indian Legend***

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### Abstract

*Zitkala Sa's Old Indian Legend foregrounds the narrator's search for Native American Cultural identity. She is fond of getting exposed to both the white people's culture and the indigenous culture of Navajo people. But his adaptation falls flat as he is beset with plenty of prejudices and discriminations. Iktomi and other Navajo youths feel suffocated in the mainstream American society. Harassed, and horrified by the arrogance and exclusionary practices in the mainstream American culture, Iktomi tends to go back to his own cultural history, tradition, legend and myths of ancestral origin. Though he occasionally encounters various prejudices, aggressions, exclusionary practices, he is finally happy to live in the world of new things where he partly gets the chance to change himself and partly an opportunity to make a return to Navajo community. He is opposed to the isolationist practice of Navajo community. Similarly, he is not deterred and discouraged when his professional responsibility compels him to treat on the path of risk and hazard. The narrator is also equally oriented towards his native ritual, cults and tradition while undertaking a risky job of chasing and tracking the missing criminals. Once, Navajo youths believe that there is problem in accepting diversity, difference, multiplicity and heterogeneity. They do not succeed in this attempt at cultural synthesis. So they begin a new search for Native American identity. They give value to naïve American culture, genealogy, racial ancestry and rituals. But this prospect anticipated by the narrator is dimmer and dimmer in some corners of American society.*

Key Words: Cultural Identity, Indigeneous Culture, Main stream American Socieity, cultural syntehsis.

This study intends to find out factors and scenarios that drive Native Americans to reclaim their Native American identity. Iktomi, the protagonist in Zitkala-Sa's *Old Indian Legend*, finds peculiar and unexpressed sense of solace, joy, harmony and wholeness as he moves closer to native ritual, tradition, communal life and primordial sense of oneness with Native American topography. Identity is an extremely complex issue. Certification of blood quantum is usually required in order to be legally identified as Native American. Some tribes require a certain blood quantum for membership. Informal constraints within the tribe also affect identity. Some tribal members with full-blood quantum consider tribal members with mixed ancestry not to be truly Native American.

Even when blood quantum is not an issue, the behavior of tribal members can affect the perception of their identity within the tribe. A full-blood can be considered a government Indian rather than truly Native American. In addition, there are those who claim Native American ancestry because it has become politically and financially advantageous to embrace a multicultural and even a minority heritage in modern American society. The issue of Native American identity is thus problematic. In fact, some question whether "authentic" natives continue to exist at all, having been sullied by the degenerative impact of Western influence.

No one voice can speak for all Native Americans, including her. However, as a mixed-blood Native American, She is the anthropological participant-observer in this scenario in a unique way. Her heritage includes, in order of purported degree: Irish, Cherokee, Choctaw, Scottish, French, and German ancestry. Of these, the Cherokee heritage has had the strongest cultural impact on my life, probably due to my tribal membership, birth, and long-term residence in the tribal territory of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. However, when forced to make a definitive statement

about my identity, for example on application forms, she mentally quantified her mixed heritage and chose "Caucasian" to indicate that I was not more than half Native American (through I have no formal documents to prove that I am more than half Caucasian either). To complicate matters even more, I know of no formal documents that prove my Choctaw ancestors' blood quantum or tribal affiliation. According to family oral tradition, one of my Cherokee great-grandfathers registered as only half Cherokee on the Dawes Roll (1902-1907) because he feared losing his business. If this is true, even my documented Cherokee ancestry is not accurate.

Instead of choosing to live free individual life, Iktomi used to live in community. Instead of personal benefit, native inhabitants of Dakota used to give undue priority to the welfare of all the people of the community. Self is sacrificed for the wellbeing and welfare of the all the inhabitants of the community. Now as the time brought gradual change, some moderately educated youths like Iktomi come out exploring fresh jobs. Since they have limited skill, education and training, they got just the part time jobs that yield meager income. In this process of adaptation and assimilation, they are bound to encounter other prejudices and exclusionary practices. Therefore, he makes a return to embrace the spirit of nativism. He locates his self in the mold of nativism. He acts in conformity with what his ancestral set of communal rules and rituals dictate. Thereby he strives to reclaim that which was robbed of from him.

In Zitkala-Sa's *Old Indian Legend*, Iktomi's increasing dissatisfaction with the mainstream American culture pushes him follow the life style, language, social life and viewpoints of native Americans. At first he is slightly tilted towards the culture of the white Americans. Over time he comes to realize that he would find himself empty and enervated if he is bent on cultivating the ethos of mainstream American culture.

The more he is forced by circumstance to immerse in white man's culture, the more he is frustrated and desolate. How could he develop the integrity of his self if he is overburdened with despair and desolation?

In Zitkala Sa's *Old Indian Legend*, Iktomi's conflict with the mainstream American culture and his own fondness for the spirit of nativism drive him to reclaim Native American identity. The realization of the limits of individual identity which is extremely valorized in mainstream society motivates him to be aware of the significance of collective identity. He derives unique sense of solace and holistic sense of union with native geography and communal life.

Iktomi struggles to gain back the core component of his identity and individuality in the midst of chaos and confusion which are the superb gifts offered by the assimilationist model of socialization valorized much by the disciples of the model of cultural synthesis and syncretism. Iktomi clings to native ritual, cultural ethos, custom and costume paves the way for the reclamation of lost Native American identity.

Zitkala- Sa is a noted and controversial writer who herself has fallen prey to different prejudices against deviant activities. To a large extent, it has been assumed that *Old Indian Legends* is a mirror-manifestation of her troubled private life. In her real life also the author has faced several examples of hostility for being a native Indian in reservation. Most of her novels deal with those voices and themes which the mainstream society forbids. The voices of nonconformists and the ostracized are actively represented in her major works. Her novels are also about secluded life in reservation and its far-reaching effects in society.

Peter Greyer is of the opinion that Sa encourages her characters to be guided by inner feelings and emotions. This tendency adopted by the majority of characters

from native Indians serves as the fulcrum to the progressive unfolding of plot. The following extract is illustrative of the case in point:

It's also an insight into a world where introverted feeling seems to guide, rather than the extraverted thinking of various Americans who support reservation life of natives. Proper use of a function also requires quality, of course. The most heart-touching tale that is frequently anthologized is "The Widespread Enigma Concerning Blue-Star Woman," in which a woman must obtain rights she never would have needed but for white man's law through the trickery of two Indian men who have learned dishonesty in the white men's schools. "A Warrior's Daughter," also often anthologized, tells of an Indian woman who takes action and therefore fate into her own hands. (12)

Greyer is of the view that Sa's sympathy to the secluded and lonely characters is projected dramatically in the tales that are included in this collection. The polar opposite things that are juxtaposed in this collection serves various purposes. This juxtaposition also means different rules for conversation and questioning. The notion of rehabilitation, rather than punishment, is the recurrent theme of almost all the tales.

Stefanie Castillo is one of the leading critics of Sa. She goes so far as to seek elements of realism even in Sa's *Old Indian Legends*. She studies Sa's collection of stories in proximity with the realistic novels of other popular native American writers. Castillo gives the following view in this regard:

The world of love and loyalty as created by Sa is fascinating, richly drawn and truly memorable. She is adept in capturing crime-solving techniques. Sa felt that Indians would continue to languish unnecessarily as wards of the state. Other topics include warnings

against the use of peyote. The bravery of Indian soldiers during war as well as the place that bravery should have earned the Indian in American society and the brotherhood of man. (43)

Sa succeeds in dealing with the issues of love and loyalty, trust and the transaction of faith. She is far more ahead in diversifying scope of native literature by adding variety of issues and themes. It is this skill which has immortalized Sa.

The old legends of North America belong to the blue-eyed little patriot as to the land's black-haired aborigine. When they are grown tall, they may not lack interest in a further study of American Indian folklore. Seizing upon this fact, Peggy Antrobus makes some observations in the following extract:

A study which so strongly suggests the USA's near kinship with the rest of humanity and points a steady finger toward the great brotherhood of mankind, and by which one is as forcibly impressed with the possible earnestness of life as seen through the teepee door! If it be true that much lies in the eye of the beholder, then in the American aborigine, as in any other race, sincerity of belief, though it were based upon mere optical illusion, demands a little respect. (12)

Antrobus's conclusion is that native Indians are much like other peoples. These stories are told around campfires, to the delight of young and old alike. The psychological effects of incidents and events that occur in the daily professional life of several characters are handled with delicate sense of care and prudence. Native inhabitants of Dakota will revel in this undertaking.

Bishal Basu says that Sa makes use of specific jargon words forcefully. Excessive use of words creates redundancy in Sa's expression in Sa. He makes the following revelation with respect to this aspect of *Old Indian Legend*:



Words and of figures that are not really necessary are repeatedly used in the novel. *Old Indian Legends* lacks inspiring moods and atmosphere. Escapist youths seek the serenity of manner. They seek relief from the dryness and dreariness of urban life. Whatever relief they get, it is relief procured at the cost of life. But here is effort to overcome such a crisis. (14)

Sa addresses the demands of common experience delicately. The aggression of experience and unconquerable passions of outlawed men enchant readers at large. For this purpose Sa is incredibly skillful.

Laura Miller focuses on the reverse theme of oedipal obsession along with the archetypal theme of journey is the most striking aspect of the text. She has opined the following remarks regarding to the literary distinction of Zitkala and the reverse theme of oedipal obsession:

The novel actually reverses two major themes in Zitkala—his return to his Appalachian routes actually takes him further into the south, as opposed to away from it and into the west, as many of his other novels have done. Astute readers will recognize that the oedipal theme still dominates although it has been reversed, as the father is a fully realized, protective, and nurturing presence for the majority of the narrative, a character who undertakes this sorry pilgrimage with his child's welfare and future in mind. However, the feminine/maternal presence is once again absent. (17)

The intense sense of attachment exists between mother and son. The close affinity and attachment lies between father and son. The father wants to see his son survive at any cost. The father takes his son's unharmed survival as the prime purpose of his life. So

he waits for a moment in which his son's safety is guaranteed. The absence of the son's mother is the most startling aspect of the novel.

Arthur Jarvis is critical of the mode of representation of the recurrent themes that are quiet common in the popular American imagination. Jarvis notes that the representation of space in American culture has been the best of places or the worst of places. In *Old Indian Legend*, the land itself loomed large in the imagination of America. Developing this theme, Jarvis points out the following remarks:

It is essential to recognize that geography plays central role in the American imagination. It exerts powerful impact in imagination of American people. Many of the key words in the discourses of American history and definitions of that nebulous entity referred to as national identity are geocentric: the Frontier, the Wilderness, the Garden, the Land of Plenty, the Wild West, the Small Town, the Big City, and the Open Road. The geographic monumentality of the New World inspired feelings of wonder and terror. (27)

Jarvis's claim that *Old Indian Legend* is part of this cultural narrative is subject to criticism. It is obviously clear that the story collection mirrors the dystopian moments. The story collection is without elements of hope though. *Old Indian Legend* inherently possesses the mythic and allegorical power. With this power, he seeks to supersede reductive attempts to assess the novel. An unnamed father and son travel through a barren apocalyptic wasteland. This journey bears profound meaning and implication.

Jill Jopore is the noted critic of Zitkala. He saw the elements of Zitkala's stylistics. From the perspective of dystopia, Jill Jopore makes the following statement:

Zitkala's novels have always reminded us of the majesty of the novelistic form in an age when the genre has been pronounced dead, exhausted, and obsolete. His style and linguistic range have reminded us of the capacity language retains to surprise and excite. Many readers have found that they could not easily shake off a Zitkala's novel when they were finished with it. Every now and again, a work of fiction will come along that offers a startling critique of the culture that produced it. (46)

Jopore noticed the distinct poetics and stylistics in the novel, *Old Indian Legend*.

Zitkala's viewpoint is incomparably unusual. Viewpoint of Zitkala on the subject of the growing encroachment of state in the private affairs of individuals deserves prolonged reflection and concentration. In the complicated political landscape individual freedom is thwarted due to the pressure of state, reality has to be fabricated with the mobilization of typical and distinct stylistics.

Resistance and individual freedom are inextricably joined to each other. It is the form and style that are bound up with the core theme of the novel. Emily Naubaum had sought to study Zitkala from the perspective of humanism:

Then, there are the post-apocalyptic scenarios in which humanity is reduced to subsistence farming or neo-feudalism, stuck in villages ruled by religious fanatics or surrounded by toxic wastelands, predatory warlords, or flesh-eating zombie hordes. An advantage to having young readers is that most of this stuff is fresh to them. They aren't going to sniff at a premise repurposed from an old twilight zone episode or mutter that the villain is an awful lot like the deranged preacher. (9)

Humanity is reduced to the bare level. In this subsistence level human beings had to reveal their selfish and brutal nature. But it is those poor people who remained patient and calm, and displayed a nuance of humanism.

To provide background for those who've not yet read the book, *Old Indian Legend* takes place in a post-modern North America, where society has collapsed thanks to drought, famine and war. Those in power oversee twelve districts. Yolia Kolaver is the popular critic of political decadence. He has written several books about the role of women in politically decadent state. Regarding to the position of women in totalitarianism, he had made the following revelation:

Women in dystopian society were to have a very specific role, significantly different from the role the head of chaotic society designated to the women of politically decadent condition. Whereas the head of plunderers wanted women to work and be able to support the family financially, some liberal members were very clear about women's role in softening the tension and chaos. Outside of certain specialist fields, the protagonist saw no reason why a woman should work. (287)

The juxtaposition of the past's visible images and the present invisible Native Americans in American society results in a loss of continuity between the two. Long-standing stereotypes are still being fixed and reinforced in many museums. Forced acculturation and assimilation have rendered those stereotypes virtually useless in recognizing Native Americans today.

Although all these critics have examined *Old Indian Legends* in a various way, none of them dwelt upon the issue reclaiming Native American Identity. Sa has done her level best in preserving the oral tradition, native cultural ethos of Indians. By

introducing a memorable character, Iktomi, Sa tries to portray every aspect of the uniqueness and exclusivity of native American culture. From one large bunch of coarse weeds to another, he wound his way about the great plain. He lifts his foot lightly and places it gently forward like a wildcat prowling noiselessly through the thick grass. His nearness to the distinct daily chores and free communal activities are themselves representative of how manages to get back his identity that was eclipsed through invasion and reservation life. He stopped a few steps away from a very large bunch of wild sage. From shoulder to shoulder he tilted his head. Still farther he bent from side to side, first low over one hip and then over the other. Far forward he stooped, stretching his long thin neck like a duck, to see what lay under a fur coat beyond the bunch of coarse grass.

The researcher makes use of the views of L. M. Silko which is elaborated by her in her foundational work, *Yellow Woman and Beauty of Spirit*. Additional theoretical insights are taken from Tomas King's work, *Green Grass, Running Water*. Silko is of the view that identity should be regarded in racial, sexual, gender, financial, and educational terms. It also invites people to analyze the literature in light of artistic movements, cultural trends, and identity theory. The core and extended contexts can help people to better appreciate the authors' social milieus. The performance art context discusses how artists expanded the definition of art to raise awareness of social issues. The memorials context describes some of the postmodern memorials. These artistic and political movements have direct bearing on heritage, community, opportunity, and identity.

Every Native American is associated with collective survival. They must acknowledge that sexism is a destructive force native life. It cannot be effectively addressed without an organized political movement to change consciousness,

behavior and institutions. In *Yellow Woman and Beauty of Spirit*, Leslie Merman Silko says, "Storytelling personally brings people together; it engages them collectively in giving and receiving the events of their lives. In such storytelling times, people occupy space with focused attention" (55). Native American cultures have all in various ways been influenced by the interrelationship between orality and literacy. This is obvious in societies where oral culture predominated in the pre-colonial period, as in the case of some African societies and in the indigenous cultures of all settler colonies.

Penelope Myrtle Kelsey's *Tribal Theory in Native American Literature* takes up the challenges proffered by these critics directly. He argues for a reading of Native texts that begins by recognizing their specific tribal referents, traditions, and methodologies. Kelsey's study owes a strong debt to the earlier scholarship and its articulation of the need for an Indigenous criticism. Kelsey defines her purposes in this book as demonstrating how "Native American epistemologies and worldviews" (8) constitute a legitimate theoretical grounding for reading Native texts in culturally appropriate ways; establishing a "substantive connection between community perspectives and knowledge and critical practice" (9).

In an essay, "Godzilla versus Postcolonialism", Thomas King supports various aspect of native literature of Canada. He exposes critically "come of the limitations and short comings of post-colonial theory. Native people are those inhabitants of a land before the European settlers and colonizer come to colonize them. Native literature/indigenous literature are that sort of literature which was "created by the native people of particular culture and geography. Post colonialism is rooted in plenty of assumption" (78). King gives an example from his private life to tell how dreadful life is guided by assumption. According to King, post-colonial theory is based on the

notion of progress (improvement) and emancipation. The followers of post-colonial theory believes that "primitivism gives way to sophistication, simplicity gives way to complexity and old yields to the new in parallel to the expansion of post colonialism" (76).

With their entry into the community of Navajo people, different cultural norms and practices of the white penetrated the fabric of Indigenous culture. Passion for gambling, greed for materialistic things, rejection of communal values, individualism, the violation of laws are some of the degraded cults of white man's culture that produced the ruinous effects of the white. Gradually, the Navajo culture is affected by both the good and bad aspects of the culture of white people. The expanding influence of white culture in Navajo community is so overwhelming that Navajo youths cannot resist. Initially, they could not follow the increasing trends and fashions of the white. But gradually, even the Navajo youths begin to accept the new culture, trends, fashions and customs of the white people's culture.

Iktomi befriends a group of dancing ducks and tricks them into breaking their necks by playing music. He makes them dance in a way which they would twist their necks and break them, killing them. He then takes the ducks back to his teepee and cooks them till he hears a tree cracking in the wind. Thereafter he goes to investigate. He breaks the limb that cracks but gets stuck by it and a group of wolves come along and eats his feast. Ikotmi is hungry and needs foods because the wolf took the ducks. He goes and prays to Inyan. In the story Ikotmi refers to Inyan as the great-grandfather. Ikotmi follows through and prays to Inyan to bless him with meat and in so doing, Ikotmi offers Inyan his blanket.

Upon returning from praying to Inyan, Ikotmi comes across a wounded deer and believes his prayers were answered. Ikotmi proceeds on building a fire and cooks

the meat he obtained from the deer, but while he does this he becomes cold. Realizing he has nothing to put on to make himself warming, he decides to go back to retrieve his blanket that he gave to Inyan. Upon return to his teepee he sees that his meat has been eaten. He is awake to the fact that his fire was out. The only thing Iktomi thinks is that he should have eaten the meat that he found first before going to retrieve his blanket.

Iktomi prepares some fish which he has when he hears a voice calling him friend. He looks around and sees a muskrat by his feet. The muskrat asked Iktomi if he would share his fish with him. Instead of being nice and share, Iktomi tells the muskrat that they should race for the fish. The muskrat tells Iktomi that he cannot race but Iktomi says that he would strap a heavy rock around his waist to slow him down and give the muskrat a fair chance. The muskrat agrees. They head off in opposite directions with plans on racing back to the fish. If the muskrat wins, they share, if he loses they don't. The muskrat swims across the lake and gets the fish, and then he tells Iktomi he should have just shared.

Iktomi comes across a coyote lying on the ground while he is walking across a prairie. He believes the coyote is dead even though he is still warm. Iktomi decides to take the coyote back to his teepee to cook and eat. The coyote is actually alive and when Iktomi arrives at his place, he builds a fire and throws the coyote into the fire. The coyote escapes the fire and tells Iktomi that he better make sure his prey is dead before preparing the meal. Iktomi first comes across a beautiful peacock in a tree and wishes to be as beautiful as the peacock. He begs the peacock to give him wonderful feathers and so the peacock magically transformers Iktomi into a peacock. The only condition is that he tries not to fly.



Being stubborn, Iktomi tries to fly but fails and gets transformed back into a human being. Iktomi comes across an arrow which he fails to follow just one rule and returns to normal. Finally, he comes across a fawn and wants to be like the fawn. He asks the fawn to give him spots similar to him. In order to get the spots, Iktomi has to be buried in dried grass and sticks in a hole and a cedar ember is then put in as well. The fawn agrees to help Iktomi. But after making the hole and Iktomi laying down in it, the fawn walks away with its mother and they look back to see blue smoke only to comment that he probably jump out before burning. Iktomi did not follow through with just one rule of being that new thing. In this case he would not stay in the fire to get the brown spots that he desired.

Traditional life in Navajo community does not seem to be suitable to him though he is born and brought up in this community. He loves the customs, laws, rituals and ethos of his native culture. But he has also realized the necessity to get adapted to the changing surrounding and demands of the time. Like Iktomi, hundreds of Navajo boys realized this situation. Therefore they put themselves on the way to assimilating culture and life style of the white. Individualistic culture and the communal culture of the Navajo come to collide in this space of interaction and intercommunication.

For some time, two different cultures enter transitional period. Violence and various criminal activities take place in the transitional time. As time passes by, the elements of cultural conflict and aggression get resolved. As a result, cultural admixture and social harmony begin to arise. Admixture and syncretism begin to appear removing all the cultural contradictions and conflicts. There are various ways in which Indian identity has been defined. Some definitions seek universal applicability, while others only seek definitions for particular purposes. The

individual seeks to have a personal identity that matches social and legal definitions, although perhaps any definition will fail to categorize correctly the identity of everyone. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, Thomas King says:

American Indians were perhaps clearly identifiable at the turn of the 20th century, but today the concept is contested. An Indian is an Indian regardless of the degree of Indian blood or which little government card they do or do not possess. Further, it is difficult to know what might be meant by any Native American racial identity. Race is a disputed term, but is often said to be a social (or political) rather than biological construct. American Indians have always had the theoretical option of removing themselves from a tribal community and becoming legally white. (56)

American law has made it easy for Indians to disappear because that disappearance has always been necessary to the 'Manifest Destiny' that the United States spans the continent that was, after all, occupied. Native Americans are members of communities before members of a race.

Traditional definitions of Indianness are also important. There is a sense of peoplehood which links Indianness to sacred traditions, places, and shared history as indigenous people. This definition transcends academic and legal terminology. Language is also seen as an important part of identity, and learning Native languages, especially for youth in a community, is an important part in tribal survival. Some Indian artists find traditional definitions especially important. An Indian is one who offers tobacco to the ground, "feeds the water, and prays to the four winds in his own language. An Indian is someone who thinks of themselves as an Indian. But that's not so easy to do and one has to earn the entitlement somehow" (76).

Race is not a factor in the acceptance of individuals into Cherokee society, since historically; the Cherokee people viewed their self-identity as a political rather than racial distinction. Going far back into antiquity based upon existing social and historical evidence as well as oral traditions among the Cherokee themselves, the Cherokee society was best described as an Indian Republic. According to Cherokee tradition, vengeance for the woman's death was required for her soul to find peace. The husband was able to prevent his own execution by fleeing to the town of Chota and purchasing Molly as an exchange. In this connection King asserts:

The local groups have shared a regional culture and also developed variations on this culture. The principal theme of regional culture is reciprocity, the belief that it is necessary and morally right to give something to get something in return. This idea has been expressed in the value placed on sharing with one's relatives and gift-giving with in-laws and allies. Reciprocity extends to relations between humans and spirit beings. Over time, Native peoples of the region experienced the fur trade, treaty era, federal assimilation policy, and a modern resurgence of the acknowledgment of tribal sovereignty. All these experiences shaped contemporary life, as basic indigenous beliefs and values became the basis of cultural identity today. (43)

Native American identity is anchored in a deep emotional bond with the homeland. Many lakes and rivers enabled the indigenous people to survive. They have always obtained subsistence by hunting, fishing, and harvesting rice, maple sugar, and the other native plants. The concept of trust land became culturally associated with economic security and tribal sovereignty. These ideas persist in the present. In the homeland are many sacred sites that have meaning and evoke powerful emotions for

Native people. Subsistence by hunting, fishing, and harvesting native plants has never been merely a means to survive. These are religious acts and vehicles for social cohesion.

Native ways of life are at once endangered and alive and well. They are endangered by the imperial legacies that have reduced many Native people's experience of American history to little more than the dispossession of land, resources, and culture. The vast majority of Native American languages are endangered; many have become extinct. This is also a moment of profound rebirth of Native languages, cultures, traditions, and life ways. Native peoples maintain both the privacy and secrecy of important ancient rites and simultaneously adapt to changing times by creating new forms of community life and ritual.

Silko argues that "today Native American storytellers, poets and novelists may not recite the old stories exactly the way their ancestors did and they may have new tales to tell, but they know that the ancient art of oral narration is a precious gift" (65). Such gift must be brought into active application. It is to be "recollected and refashioned so that each generation can breathe new life into the gift of nature" (87). In this regard, Silko makes the following point:

The storytelling tradition is at the heart of most contemporary Native fiction, which means that writer/storyteller operates out of a shared knowledge base of myths and legends that are communal in nature. Because stories arise out of communal experience, the concept of a single author is an anomaly for Native critics and authors. Therefore contemporary Native American authors convert the collective traditional tales and myths of their people into European literary forms. (77)

The distinction between oral and written cultures has been used in anthropology to define the preliterate, pre-historical and primitive cultures in opposition to the literate, historical and by implication contemporary people.

Some statements describing an oral / written distinction seldom match with the nature of oral discourse. Oral discourse is viewed as less complicated. It is taken as less advanced and seemingly deficient. There is no simple dichotomy between "oral and written discourse, between non-literate and literate societies. Rather there is a considerable and quite interesting continuity between the oral and the written, sharing diverging within each" (88). There are oral genres in Native America that have such "written properties as fixed text, planning and abstraction from context and written genres in European based societies how such oral properties as spontaneity and repair scansion into pause phrases and context dependent interpretability" (66).

A colossal amount of money is robbed by an underground criminal. Investigation takes place to track down the robbers and their gang. Without any fault of his own, Iktomi is dragged into the alleged case of robbery. The intentional act of dragging Iktomi into this criminality incites racial and communal dissent and protest. This is an instance of how unrest and uproar of protest are heard in the matrix of culture in transition. The following extract gives a glimpse of this reality:

Stoner was coming out of the side entrance now. He pointed at the roof, shouted, "Who is that up there? What the hell" Hey, Teddy yelled, trotting toward the two men, unsnapping the flap on his holster. "What"? Both men stopped. Teddy saw muzzle flashes, saw Cap Stoner fall backward, and sprawled on the pavement. The men spun toward him, swinging their weapons. He was fumbling with his pistol when the first bullet struck him. (2)

There is a trend to drag innocent and vulnerable people of Navajo minority when any complicated case of crime, murder and vandalization take place. But the reality does not come out easily. When their extreme efforts at investigation do not yield result, they intentionally target Iktomi.

All Native American culture areas had powerful family bonds. They are defined by maternal or paternal lineage. These familial connections tended to result in the formation of bands or clans. These smaller groups "came together to form tribes, which, in turn, may have formed strong cohesive bonds with one another for the common good. A prime example of this situation is the Iroquois Confederacy" (Kuiper 15). It is an alliance of five tribes that forestalled European attempts at dominance in North America during the 17th and 18th centuries. All Native American cultures have "strong and readily defined similarities to one another in their sense of spirituality and their religious ceremonies" (15). While there existed many differences in what was celebrated and when, "there were a number of common central beliefs that were shared by most cultures, including animism, shamanism, vision quests, and spirits. Animism is the belief that souls or spirits exist not only in humans, but in animals, rocks, trees" (15). Specific animals had certain defined characteristics. Some tribes even believed that animals existed before humankind and established on Earth the various rules and guidelines that humans were meant to follow.

Many moderately educated youths like Iktomi came out of their community seeking employment and other alternative means of earning. In their process of social adaptation they are sometimes intentionally targeted. They are prevented from enjoying a calm and tranquil life even in the society where the so-called White is not able to enjoy. These Navajo youths want to pick new interesting style of bring change in their traditional life. But there are hindrances from those who want to create havoc

and horror in society. Thus, those who are desirous of change in their tradition and custom are equally threatened by the criminals, narrow-minded people and enemies of change.

Survival has always been difficult and individuals have not been able to count on being successful in the search for game or other resources. Sharing among family members and gift-giving between groups of non-kin worked as a form of social insurance. Relatives had to work cooperatively in many economic pursuits. The common view "was that the natural resources belonged to all the people and individuals were only entitled to use rights. Today, tribal resources, including income from tribally owned businesses, are available to all" (22). The game animals and plant resources also allowed the indigenous peoples to participate in regional commerce from the time of contact with Europeans to the present. Today, traditional subsistence activity is culturally associated with tribal sovereignty, and tribes own businesses, including fish processing plants. In *Godzilla versus Post-colonialism*, Tomas King adds:

Questions of identity are also some of the most important facing contemporary Indian nations and individuals. They are intimately woven into matters of nationhood, sovereignty, territorial integrity, treaty rights, and access to resources—not to mention the questions that issues of identity raise about personal and familial recognition. Complicated by ideas about genetics, culture, behavior, language, geography, physical appearance, and legal/political recognition by tribal and nation-state governments. (34)

Indian communities and individuals exercise in these matters. As indigenoussness is far more than just ethnic difference, it requires a different kind of understanding than

is typical in mainstream multiculturalism. Radical nativism is posited on a reassertion of the central place of kinship, reciprocity, responsibility, and spirituality within the intellectual frameworks of American Indian scholarship.

Instead of choosing to live free individual life, Navajo used to live in community. Instead of personal benefit, they used to give undue priority to the welfare of all the people of the community. Self is sacrificed for the wellbeing and welfare of the all the inhabitants of the community. Now as the time brought gradual change, some moderately educated youths like Iktomi come out exploring fresh jobs. Since they have limited skill, education and training, they got just the part time jobs that yield meager income. In this process of adaptation and assimilation, they are bound to encounter other prejudices and exclusionary practices. Social mobility of the Navajo youths is restricted and ultimately threatened by fear. The Navajo youths in their hangouts and gatherings illustrates facts regarding the conditions of Navajo employees who struggle to settle in the open society of America:

Damn good of you to come, he said. I was afraid you would tell me you were retired now and I should worry somebody else with it. Glad to help if I can. They polished off the required social formalities faster than usual, discussing the cold, dry winter, poor grazing, and risk of forest fires. For the Navajo youths it is not easy to get settled in a decent and secure way in the society where there the norms and styles of the White always gain an upper hand. (77)

Yet the Navajo youths do not feel frightened and weakened by every hurdle that com  
Such a foundation ultimately realigns both the debates and the assumptions about  
Indian identity, drawing on the indigenous strengths, values, and concerns that have



enabled North American tribal peoples to survive the devastation of Euro-Western colonialism for more than five hundred years.

The question of Indian continuity rests firmly at the mercy of those with a vested interest. Regarding to the effect of colonial aggression, Tomas King makes the following claim in *Green Grass, Running Water*:

For many Native Americans in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the transition from tribal sovereignty to government dependency was harsh and dehumanizing. A pro-assimilation policy founded on bigotry and social Darwinism perpetuated a longstanding battle between indigenous tribes and the Great White Father over the definition of their national identity. Many Indians chose differing roles in the overwhelming process of assimilation and acculturation as a means of surviving the onslaught of White expansion in both their lands and their cultures. (88)

Some accepted the pressures of White society and replaced tribal traditions with the White man's clothing, religion, professions, and often their names. Others rejected the prospect of assimilation outright, choosing instead to retreat further into their shrinking reservations, becoming a suppressed and impoverished refugee population in their own homeland. Yet evolving beyond the choices of resistance or acquiescence to White culture, another group of American Indians assimilated them into White society and preserved tribal identity through the competitive arena of American sports i.e. on their way to the establishment in society.

There are some Navajos who get positive support and moral encouragement from white people. In the same way, some misdirected and confused Navajo lads are also involved in plenty of anti-social activities and criminal activities. As a result,

conflict and chaos have arisen in society. In this situation, deep-seated cultural insularities and parochialism have appeared. But scope for the admixture of differing cultural ethos is also on the rise. How the society administers these cultural dynamics matters a lot in the event of transition and the incoming prospect of cultural admixture.

In the course of carrying out his duty as an assistant and ally to the investigation mission, he happens to fall in love with Emma who is a Navajo girl through and through. Their preferences and tastes clash, though the clash seems to be a sort of disagreement in the beginning. Although their interest and choice of social mode of life differ markedly, both of them have seen the possibility of erasing the differences that are erasable. They do not delay to patch up their differences. It is not only the intense passion but the understanding and willingness to forget the restrictive forces and embrace the life-affirming norms that pave the way for harmony, understanding, liberality and mutual sense of responsiveness. Such viewpoint and responsiveness are index to the emerging prospect of harmony and reconciliation. The following extract is illustrative of this point:

The next broad phase of federal policy was one of termination by which all the special arrangements made by the government for the American Indian in the field of education, welfare etc., that in the eyes of the supporters of termination had created a system of virtual dependency implemented by a top heavy system of administrative bureaucracy, were to be ended. The idea that the Indian was a special case was considered to be 'un-American' in theory and practice, particularly in the 1950's. (54)

The supporters of termination argued that if the Indians were treated like any other ethnic group and not shielded and removed from the ideology of competitive individualism. The relationship between Indian assimilation and American sports begins at the Indian boarding schools developed by the United States government to assist in the acculturation of indigenous children.

Many found themselves at government funded schools through the urgings of their parents, although government coercion often played a key role in the recruitment of resistant students. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, addressing this phenomenon, Tomas King remarks:

The institutions modeled themselves after military schools, relying on rigid structure, discipline and the development of an education whose main objective was assimilation. Racial and ethnic identity is critical parts of the overall framework of individual and collective identity. For some especially visible and legally defined minority populations in the United States, racial and ethnic identity is manifested in very conscious ways. This manifestation is triggered most often by two conflicting social and cultural influences. (77)

Deep conscious immersion into cultural traditions and values through religious, familial, neighborhood, and educational communities instills a positive sense of ethnic identity and confidence. Second, and in contrast, individuals often must filter ethnic identity through negative treatment and media messages received from others because of their race and ethnicity.

These messages make it clear that people with minority status have a different ethnic make-up and one that is less than desirable within mainstream society. Others, especially white Americans, manifest ethnic and racial identity in mostly unconscious

ways through their behaviors, values, beliefs, and assumptions. For them, ethnicity is usually invisible and "unconscious because societal norms have been constructed around their racial, ethnic, and cultural frameworks, values, and priorities and then referred to as "standard American culture" rather than as ethnic identity"(81). This unconscious ethnic identity manifests itself in daily behaviors, attitudes, and ways of doing things. Unlike many minority cultures, there is little conscious instilling of specific ethnic identity through white communities, nor is differential ethnic treatment often identified in the media of white cultures. Everyone benefits from the development of a conscious ethnic identity and benefits as well when multicultural frameworks are used in their learning environments.

The constructs of race and ethnicity in the United States are complex and difficult to define and frame. Researchers are not consistent in their meaning, which makes these concepts particularly challenging to grasp. To add to the confusion, racial and ethnic identity "transcends traditional categories and has become a major topic in psychology, literature, theology, philosophy, and many other disciplines. The concept of racial identity, in particular, has been misunderstood and contested. Some meanings are derived from its biological dimension and others from its social dimension. As a biological category, race is derived from an individual's physical features, gene pools and character qualities.

The uniqueness of Navajo pastoral life and communal norms are clearly emphasized in most of the part of the narrative. Nothing brings as much pleasure to the cowboy as loitering in the pastoral land does. He "rolls down the window of Apache Country Sheriff's Department Patrol Unit 4 as Chee walked up. He leaned out, staring at Iktomi. The cooler's in the trunk, Danshee said. Dry ice in it, with room enough for about forty pounds of smoked salmon" (30). The civilized modern life and

longing for pristine pastoral life are described side by side in the narrative. When some of the Navajo boys come to the isolated pastoral land in the wilderness, their awareness of cultural difference and nostalgic longing arise in their minds. But the desire to get settled and assimilated into the broader social framework of multiracial community gains an upper hand. Iktomi's counter-remark serves as an instance of illustration regarding the direct interaction between them:

I could not get along without that, Iktomi said, and told his friends what he had learned about the intruders and the insurance and his futile effort to sell it, and all the rest. You mind us driving over there and showing me where the pickup was found, and the barn where Iktomi kept the plane? Just going over that part of it with me? You are waiting to use your buddy Cowboy because you are not back on duty yet, and do not have any business out there anyway even if you were. (30)

Using these features as distinguishing characteristics, Europeans grouped people hierarchically by physical ability and moral quality, with Caucasians as the pinnacle, followed by Asians and Native Americans, and Africans last on the racial ladder. However, looking beyond these characteristics, there are more similarities than differences between racial groups and more differences than similarities within these groups.

Regarding the literary representation of the issue of native cultural continuity and identity, Tomas King's following view seems relevant:

Today, literary and theoretical manifestations of racial identity are discussed not in biological terms but as a social construction, which “refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular

racial group. Racial identity seems most often, however, to be a frame in which individuals categorize others, often based on skin color. The use of skin color is one of many labeling tools that allow individuals and groups to distance themselves from those they consider different from themselves. (34)

Ethnic identity is often considered a social construct as well. It is viewed as an individual's identification with a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves or others, to have a common origin and share segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients.

Design in communal life of Navajo is lessened by the dark color that the narrator happens to notice in the broad framework of transforming social life. The awareness of the beauty and harmony of life in Navajo community is constantly accompanied by the awareness of the darkness and fear which is not expressed manifestly. A sort of law or harsh rule is imposed by the higher authority that is fully confirmed in the implementation of that law. That authority is heedless of how much emotional and sentimental loss that imposing policy incurs. Iktomi says, "once again testing the federal law- enforcement theory that to locate fugitive you send out local cops until the wild hunters start shooting them, thereby giving away their location" (31). Such an imposition of harsh and arbitrary decision of the federal government dislocated some native tribes and other Navajo families.

The possibility of harmony and admixture does not arise in so simply a manner as people readers tend to think. Conflicts, chaos, unrest, dislocation and other unbearable events had occurred. Even the common tribal and native people had to pay

huge emotional, social and cultural prices to wait for the glimmer of proximity, fusion of ethos and admixture of social lives.

Ethnic identity seems most often to be a frame in which individuals identify consciously or unconsciously with those with whom they feel a common bond because of similar traditions, behaviors, values, and beliefs. These points of connection allow individuals to make sense of the world around them and to find pride in which they are. If, however, positive ethnic group messages and support are not apparent or available to counteract negative public messages, a particular individual is likely to feel shame or disconnection toward their own ethnic identity. Ethnic identity development consists of an individual's movement toward a highly conscious identification with their own cultural values, behaviors, beliefs, and traditions. Ethnic and racial identity models provide a theoretical structure for understanding individuals' negotiation of their own and other cultures. Tomas King's additional view on this subject clarifies the point:

Racial and ethnic identity can affect the relationship with learning that individuals have in their learning environments. Most individuals from white ethnic groups have experienced learning that is grounded in their own cultural norms. These individuals have not typically learned multiculturally and are likely to struggle in multicultural educational environments. (92)

Their communal skills may be less well developed. Persons from other groups and some white ethnic individuals have experienced learning that is grounded outside their own cultural norms and have learned to some extent to negotiate multiple cultural environments. However, they may continue to struggle even after many years of white-normed education.

The narrator says “once again he heard the birdcalls, more distinct now. To his right, close to the window, a single bright spot in the darkness attracted his eyes. What seemed to be a small television screen presented the image of a meadow, a pond, shady woods, birds” (38). The longing for rustic life comes to clash with the hectic life and demands of professional life. Educators can benefit all types of learners by creating environments that balance different cultural norms, such as by designing collaborative and individual tasks, encouraging reflective and "discussion activities, and using visual, written, relational, and other types of learning styles Curricula and activities must be consciously and visibly multicultural to include a variety of worldviews and bases of knowledge" (62). In addition, educators must continually reflect on the influence of the relationship between their own racial and ethnic identity and how they define an effective learning environment and a successful learner.

Feelings of comfort and rightness for many educators are likely to mean that they have created a learning environment based on their own cultural norms rather than on a multicultural learning framework. Both "racial and ethnic identity affects the experience with and interpretation of relationships with others in the learning environment" (29). As a result of their racial and ethnic identities, learners bring to the learning environment vastly different experiences of treatment by teachers and peers. The following extract tends to add further glimpse of clarity to the already mentioned facts about native identity:

Many of these individuals have learned despite their learning environments rather than because of them. These individuals' bicultural or multicultural experience of life makes it likely that they will possess some level of multicultural skills, an enhanced ability to compare and contrast multiple perspectives, and keen reflective and



observational abilities. To cope with others' racial and ethnic reactions to them, however, they may react cautiously, assertively, or sometimes aggressively to teachers and peers. (43)

Most white individuals, in contrast, are likely to experience and be resistant to ways of learning and doing that are outside the educational norms in which they have been raised. These learners are likely to lack multicultural and self-reflective skills; they are likely to insist on individual tasks.

Members of many minority and international groups bring an experience of consciously having to negotiate and even survive educational treatment of invisibility or negative ultra-visibility, lowered expectations, stereotyping, hostility, and even abuse. The feeling of being betrayed by his own tortures him. But he controls himself. In his monologue he says, "My only profit from this note will be revenge, which the philosophers have told us is sweet. Sweet or not, I trust it will remove from society two scoundrels, betrayers of trust, traitors to the cause of liberty and American ideals of freedom" (40). He is driven by the nostalgia for the gradual loss of Navajo faith in the miraculous and supernatural power of nature. The following extract clarifies the point:

A long time ago when I was a boy, and the winter stories were being told in the Hogan, and people were talking about the great dam that was going to make Lake Powel, and how the water of the Colorado and the San Juan were backing up and drowning the canyons, the old men would talk about how the Utes and the Paiutes would come through the canyons in their secret ways, and steal the sheep and horses of our people and kill them, too. (51)

Reminiscence becomes the only medium to survive in the condition of extreme isolation and total preoccupation in the profession. On the one hand he is affected by obsession and on the other he is tempted minute to minute to the sheer beauty and simplicity of Navajo life. Story-telling is the most distinguishing characteristic of Navajo community. Homecoming is another significant condition that a Navajo individual has to follow.

When Navajo people feel uncomfortable in the process of adaptation, they try to overcome their temptation and begin to make a temporary return to the gracing graces of Navajo community. Strict adherence to the superstitious and supernatural mysticism produces a restrictive effect in Navajo community. Those Navajo youths who are already on the way to modernization feel deterred by these elements of mysticism inherent in the community of Navajo people. The following extract reveals the story-telling habit of Navajo and the healing effect of the ritual of homecoming which stand in sharp contrast to the western trend of individual life:

She said they would hear stories the Navajos told about how he could jump from the bottom of the canyon up to the rim, and then jump down again. But she said the Mogche people knew he was just a man. About then they started calling him badger. Because of the way he fooled the Navajos. Iktomi leaned forward, into the silence which followed that, and began: Ask her if this guy had a son. (70)

Magic, ritual, mystic rite and other cryptic codes abound in Navajo community. These codes are not easily penetrable to those who approach them with the doubting eyes. A sort of faith must well up in the heart of those who want to explore its transformative dimension. The preference for silence over the vocal mode of self-assertion is heard in the gradual descents of many Navajo characters into the matrix of silence.

Time consciousness is the distinguishing mark of socialized modern life. In the rapturous moment of relishing the beauty of nature, the pressures of time come to interfere. Even the joyous moment is marred by the haunting effects of time. Things should be done within the bound of time. Time is commodified in the modernized society where the prescribed task is to be done within the set time. But time does not matter as much as it matters in the society of the white. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation migration, displacement, and relocation jointly makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. The unsettling advantage of this position is that it makes readers increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition. Navajos had cultivated their wild land in their own way to spark the light of civilization. It is not true that only the white are the harbinger of civilization. Navajos have their own history of setting civilization kick-started. This reality is not accepted. The following extract is expressive of this unrecognized fact:

When the Mormon settlers moved in the middle of the nineteenth century they found the Navajos were already digging a little coal out of exposed seams. So were the Utes. But the Mormons needed a lot more to fire up smelters, so they developed some tunnel mines. Then the Aneth field development came, and there was natural gas to burn. The mines were not economical any longer. Some of them were filled in, and some of them collapsed. But there must be some around there in one form or another. (90)

The march of civilization is not westward. Navajos had also built up their own curve of civilization. But it is interpreted in a wrong way. Judged from the viewpoint of the white, the Navajo history, culture and civilization seem to be inferior. Though it is not

inferior and of lowly status, adventurers, explorers and biased ethnographers produced the discourses of wilderness.

The proximity between Navajo life and culture with Nature is hinted at the heart of the whole narrative. The magnificence of nature and splendor of mountainous side are acutely perceived. This realistic perception constantly evokes the lack of such grandeur in the social modernity of the white people. The following extract evokes this sort of perception and the idea of limits of cultural reality:

Gothic Creek Canyon had widened a little, and the copter was moving down it slowly and almost eye level with the rimrock to Iktomi's right. He could see another bench sloping up from the canyon floor, supporting a ragtag assortment of chamisa, snakeweed and drought-stunted salt bush. It angled upward toward the broad blackish streak of a coal seam. Then just yards ahead and just below the narrator saw what he was hoping to see. Then we land, get the tanks rejoiced and do it all over again. Except this time it will be quitting time and we will knock off for the day. (97)

In the zone of contact, two different world views, two different ethos of cultures and two different modes of social lives stand face to face with each other. Mixed blood boys are not in the condition of neither lamentation nor undue jubilation. They just want to remain open and exposed to both types of cultural realities. Search for cultural singularity is what they have gradually forgotten. They do not like to promote the idea of preserving the singular cultural practice, identity, social life. Any attempt to preserve singular cultural identity, and ethos is doomed to fail as it breeds conflict and chaos. It is the erasure and dissolution of difference that appears as the foremost and fundamental condition for the affirmation of cultural admixture.

The top of mountainous regions are dug for coals. Heedless of the consequence of such an aggressive activities and excavation, the westerners are already ahead of this mission. They do not have any concern for what sort of impact such a march of civilization, modernization and mission of conquest could bring. Though such an aggressive activity has taken place, there is also an awareness to forestall such a move. Awareness has already begun. The following extract is suggestive of the acute sense of awareness of the western idea of conquest which is fostered by the progress of science and technology:

Cabot was studying him. Let's see now, he said. You think that the people digging coal out of the cliff down in the canyon decided to dig right on up to the top? If I know my geology at all, that would have them digging through several thick levels of sandstone and all sorts of other strata. Is not that right? Actually, I was thinking more of digging down from the top. He handed Cabot two photos of the old structures, one shot from rim level and one from a higher angle. (103)

The narrator is sincerely tied to what norms his parents bequeathed to him. The vast panorama of Navajo culture, American heritage and racial ancestry has exercised a great deal of leverage. Openness to experience and willingness to appreciate the positive traits of the strange are two key whereby Iktomi can formulate and shape his identity and interpret any kind of cultural codes.

The addition of postcolonial to the critical vocabulary remains controversial.

The rigid and inflexible codes and practices have driven them. The power of adaptation is simply declining. Their passion for the purity of doctrine and creed has worsened rather. Instead of taking the possibility of the birth of doctrinal hybridity in the global context, the Navajo inhabitants of have affirmed their longing for the

singularity and purity of creed. The infatuation for cultural purity and religious narrowness haven given birth the numerous cases of criminalities and anti-social activities.

To cut the long story short, the major parts of the narrative dwell upon troubled psyche of those who want to establish themselves in a new way in the hope of proper social treatment. The lack of immediate adaptation to the strange culture weakens the psychology of the Navajo youths. Yet they make a retreat to their own legend, history, ritual, and indigenous identity.

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