



American Ideology and Black Consciousness in Paul Beatty's Novel *'The Sell Out'*

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ABSTRACT: Paul Beatty's novel *'The Sell Out'* (2015), recipient of 'The Man Booker Prize' in 2016, is a new masterpiece in satirical writings. It is lacerating, profound, targeted yet much provocative founded on the solid bedrock of stark reality. It presents before us both the urban and countryside picturesque realities and fantasies twisted with American ideology and black consciousness that have been debated for centuries. Although the novel pungently moves around the contemporary period, it ultimately links back to the past chronicles of collision between dominant Whites and Black consciousness. The psychic impression resonates throughout its uncompromising, battering and relentless comic narrative. The sense of indigeneity of the Black Americans and the overpowering Whites are shadowed down under the national narratives constructed in the States. But Paul Beatty as if reinstates its pervasiveness of segregation and reinforces dismantling of infirm ideologies incapable to undercover the consciousness that have been rooted in the Black psyche. Much celebrated American dream seems limping somewhere against such ground realities of the States. The Protagonist of Black community assuming to be the narrator's voice, and whose identity is blurred, narrates the whole story line

with the wry humor, corrosive satire contingently and successfully brings back the plot to that particular point where he had started. The paper aims to re-estimate the contemporary dynamics of Black Consciousness and American Ideology constructed to accomplish the American Dream that nourishes around not only the capitalist modes of development but also on the universal brotherhood, equal justice, civil rights, opportunities and indiscrimination.

KEYWORDS: *Ideology, Black Consciousness, Nationalism, Indigeneity* etc.

The Sell Out by Paul Beatty is a reconstruction of American- African dynamics of interrelationship of intellectual and cultural, social and educational matrices that have been recurrently upsurge down the memory lane of the once aboriginal race. Since the discovery of America and successive colonization of the original inhabitants of the land, the land had been under recurrent clashes between the dominant whites and dominated original inhabitants. The Sell out is neither a representation of the ghastly past characterized by collision between the races that disrupted in the making of the great nation till the proclamation of Independence. Even after the



declaration the American-African psychic possession had been released out of that ghost of racism. There had been the charges of apartheid for decades till the Civil Rights movement in the sixties. Hence the American Dream that becomes the motto of the States as if hurled down occasionally.

The novel *'The Sell Out'* begins with a *Prologue* and ends with a *Closure* consists of six parts entitled as – *The Shit you Shovel, Dum Dum Donuts Intellectuals, Exact Change, Too Many Mexicans, Apples and Oranges* and *Unmitigated Blackness*. However, all the parts share a sonorous continuity dexterously interconnected by the Narrator Protagonist, a black homeschooled youth educated under the uncompromisingly known as nigger-whisperer in the locality. He was a comparative psychologist and had been the interim dean of the department of psychology at West Riverside Community College. He established a horse breed centre and farming at Dickens the inner city founded in 1868 being nostalgic about the legacy as a stable manager's son based in Lexington, Kentucky and having opportunity to live in Black community due to his teaching profession. The plot mainly revolves around this place called Dickens a small a neighbourhood on the southern outskirts of Los Angeles county mostly inhabited 'a ghetto community'- the American-African Black race and some other Mexicans, Chicanos, and also Whites in and around it. The childhood of the narrator – Protagonist received unconventional growth because he became the experimental piteous poor animal under the supervision of replicating infamous social science experiments undertaken rigorously and consistently by his father. He wanted to instill the

Black consciousness and perennial captivation of Black and White rhetoric, segregation and racism into the chasm of his psychic compartments. He also propagated and tried to present that racist ghost within the community of Dickens and the people of the locality considered his convictions as he represented himself to an educated but pseudo intellectual group. He established the Dum Dum Donuts Intellectual forum to discuss the namby-pamby of their issues that he and other of the sorts considered to be pertinent for the discussion. After the death of his father, he never held high esteem for what he had done for him since his childhood. His experimentation, homeschooling and constantly vigilant to whatever he did left him a quite different breed than an absolutely a normal child at psychological level. So, after the death of his father having shot down by the police in the middle of the intersections of Los Angeles streets, he could not think or do the way he should have. Everyone expected him at Dickens to be the true heir of his father by replacing the position of his father's nigger whispering job but he could not find any reason to do like that. Despite that irresistibly and unknowingly he had to immerse into that peculiar modes in due course of time. He did not like the racism neither he accepted the existence of segregation in the States. But his thoughts for such goodness is to submit before the self inducted old slave, Hominy Jenkins, the only surviving member of the *Little Rascals*, movies much known for the depiction of racism but the details for the copy rights and the production chronology is lost to time. His resistance and recurrent suspensions also does not work because Hominy Jenkins likes to be a slave claiming its existence in the States and symbolizing the social standing of the Black



Community. Dum Dum Donuts Intellectuals Forum on the other hand is the extreme satirical representation of Intellectual nullity of the Black people that always try to find a way or the other give recognition to apartheid, segregation and racist attitude though the Civil Rights Movement had safeguarded the cause of every American-African citizen in the States. Foy Chesire, the ultimate occupant to the Narrator Protagonist's father's position to head the Forum is essentially a social snob of Black clan. He is engaged in diminishing the classic texts of Mark Twain, Steinback of American Literature by reproducing them alternating the terms vital to the text and thus representing them in comic caricatures. His intellectuality is nothing but stemmed from his imitative nature. He not only imitated the great texts he also imitated the concepts of the Narrator Protagonist's father to reproduce in his less famous television Talks and Short films. He travels in costly Mercedes Benz and lives in a poshy Hollywood Hills in a hired abode packed with all the luxuriousness of modern living. He claims of having the copy right of few episodes of the Little Rascals and indeed the narrator –protagonist and his self proclaimed slave Hominy Jenkins discovers them in his possession.

Again, Marpessa, the lady in love with the protagonist continues to maintain her adulterous relationship much after her marriage with Mr. Peaches. She is a dexterous lady bus driver in the streets of Los Angeles. Her day to day encounter with innumerable commuters accommodating both Blacks and Whites has never been perturbed although some Black propounders like Hominy, Chesire or the protagonist suspect of its prevalence in the social circles. Racism and segregation were

mainly visible in public domain such as public transportation system where the sitting arrangements were made on the basis of class, race and hierachy. But Marpessa never had such experience although she belong to so called the Black oppressed race and an opposite sex. She is also representation of enjoying the equal opportunity in work places that many black people seek to claim existence of injustice and oppression in opportunities. The story achieves climactic position at the 'L. A Festival of Forbidden Cinema and Unabashedly Racist Animation' on the Nuart Screen where Hominy is invited being a part of the "Little Rascals" and the narrator accompanies him. As always, the narrator, here too tried avoid being called 'Master' by Hominy. But it springs up suddenly out of nowhere. An stranger fellow in the festival recognizing Hominy as one of the member of the Little Rascals, considers him as the "last of the real niggers". The conversation between the man and Hominy goes on:

"... you, my man, are more than the last Little Rascal, youre the last nigger. And I mean 'nigger' with the hard 'r'."

"Why, thank you, white man."

"and do you know why there are 'nt any niggers?"

"No, sir. I don't."

"Because white people are the new niggers. We're just too full of ourselves to realize it."

"The new niggers, you say?"

"that's right, both me and you – niggers to the last. Disenfranchised equals ready to fight back against the mother ...f.....ing system." (244)



If there conversation is freshener to the almost obsolete concept of the civil disintegration, the sudden call of Hominy to the narrator addressing him as master before the public after his felicitation and speech confirms at least for the face value resulting into the narrator protagonist sustaining almost a fatal shot and successive arrest on the charges of segregation and racial discrimination. So, when the pages of the novel open up with the *Prologue*, we discover the narrator-protagonist hands cuffed behind escorted by policemen inside the Supreme Court premises United States at Washington D.C. He is a convict of the serious crime of practicing the slavery system, which he had never committed. As natural, his arrest and prospective penalization by the court his mind seeks to re-visualize the complex system where perhaps the treatment would have been different had he been of a white privileged race. The very opening lines inwardly cudgelled by the narrator are an attempt to reassert the possible prevalence of racism:

“This may be hard to believe, coming from a black man, but I’ve never stolen anything. Never cheated on my taxes or at cards. Never smuck into the movie or failed to give back the extra change to a drugstore cashier indifferent to the ways of mercantilism and minimum-wage expectations. I’ve never burgled a house. Held up liquor store ... yet somehow crestfallen, look on my face. But here I am, in the cavernous chambers of the Supreme Court of the United States of merica ... my hands cuffes and crossed behind my back, ... as I sit in a thickly

padded chair that much like this country, isn’t quite as comfortable as it looks.” (3)

Later on, when he is out of the hotel he stares at the Lincoln Memorial, the champion of Independence of America and thinks to himself and questions:

“If Honest Abe had come to life and somehow managed to lift his bony twenty – three foot, four-inch frame from his throne, what would he say? What would he do? Would he break dance? ... would he read the paper and see that the Union he saved was now a dysfunctional plutocracy, that the people he freed were now slaves to rhythm, rap, and predatory lending,, and that today his skill set would be better suited to the basket ball court than the White house?” (4-5)

The narrator-protagonist is the product of twenty first century when the youth think about the individual and global prosperity and there is no value for segregation or that nasty racism. He was nurtured by his father with personalized treatment through homeschooling and interaction live with the surrounding apparatuses. Even though his father being a psychologist and a college teacher, tried to influence his thought process by regularly feeding the segregation and racism stuff, he never showed such tenets in action till his father’s unjust encounter or till his conscience is tempered by the state agency. It acts as spark to resurface the essence of that notion hidden somewhere inside the sub-conscious mind. On finding his father’s dead body sustaining number bullet injury, he is not taken aback much. But when he rethinks about the entire incident of his father’s death which was not a serious crime at all or his own situation after the



arrest on false charges of propagating slavery, he somewhat displeasingly ponders that the policemen could have treated him in some different ways in his case as he did not commit any serious crime or did violate any rigorous law. He feels that the a white man would have been treated in different way but not at least like his father.

Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) in the United States engrossed into massive protest against the legalized, Racial Discrimination and disenfranchisement and Racial segregation. The pioneers of the movement were – Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X etc. the grave movement turned to violence sometimes seemed to disrupt the non contentious propagation of the privileges citizens the very national ethos of American's Dream that propagated as in James Truslow Adams words in 1931 - "... life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" irrespective of class, society, circumstances and lineage. Because these legally banished anti-national elements though apparently invisible were actually persistent in the very root of the American- African lives. The leader of the masses for the cause of the segregated race Martin Luther King wrote in his "*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*" in 1963 in this manner:

" We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands ... when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American Dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by

the Founding Fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence."

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