

Demystifying monolithic and monotonous racism in Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*

*Prof.J.Emagulate Rani(Research Scholar)& Dr. J.Amalaveenus
St.Joseph's College (Autonomous), Trichy.*

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to explore monolithic racism in the American society. The psychological growth of Gunnar, the protagonist of Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*. Gunnar as a small boy undergoes emotional abuse among the white boys in the school. The scars of racism remain unhealed. The subtleties of modern racism are excavated with the help of the various characters. The disguisement of color-blindness is perpetuated by the American. It is also taught to the children at the young age to pretend themselves. The power structure is prevailed in the society. The supremacy of white race over the downtrodden people is focused upon.

Key Words: Modern Racism, Cultural Racism, Existential Nihilism, Postmodernism, Emotional Abuse, Bildungsroman, Color-blindness, Power-structure.

The term 'racism' is not the voice of the past. But, it perpetuates in the postmodern era in subtle ways among the people. Paul Beatty examines the sheer ignorance of racism as the result of thinking narrowly. As he writes in the prologue of his novel *The White Boy Shuffle* thus "In the quest for equality, black folks have tried everything. We've begged, revolted, entertained, intermarried, and are still treated like shit" (*Prologue, 1*) Beatty delves into the exploration of modern racism in his novels. The protagonist's journey as an Afro-American among the white society is depicted to illustrate on racism. Symbolic Racism is also known as modern racism. The subtleties of racism get excavated in the novels of Paul Beatty. Francis Duggan investigates the existence of modern racism in his poems,

“So many people still judged by their race

For such there never ought to be a place

‘A fair go’ those untruthful words I do recall

There is no such thing as a ‘fair go for all’ (Duggan, 9-11)

Paul Beatty says in *The Sellout* as “Blackness sometimes, it’s the nihilism that makes life worth living” (1). Beatty drives his readers towards optimism and purpose of survival. Jean Baudrillard calls the postmodern period as a nihilistic epoch of the 21st century. One of the significant elements of postmodernism is existential nihilism. The novels of Beatty unveil the hopelessness of blacks struggle for liberty from racial prejudice. Life requires searching a meaning in it. The blacks discover their blackness as a driving force for their survival in the society.

In Beatty’s *The White Boy Shuffle*, Ms. Cegeny lectures on importance of living in a colorblind society to her pupils. This discourse provides a vivid picture of minds in the classroom. Ms. Cegeny puts forth a question, “Does anyone have an example of color blind processes in American society” (30). The student of white race replies “justice” is an example but Gunnar as an Afro-American replies as “dogs”. Gunnar explains saying, “I believe that dogs are truly colorblind, but they’re born that way. Class, it’s important that we judge people for what?” The people need to be judged for their minds not on race. The color-blind ideology is a sheer ignorance of its followers. The behaviors of his peer mates make Gunnar experience racism as a black boy in the white society. So, he controverts his teacher on colorblind society.

In *Social Inequality and Social Stratification in Us society*, Christopher writes that “color-blind racism” represents “whites assertion that they are living in a world where racial privilege no longer exists, but their behavior supports racialized structure and practices” (6). The treatments of blacks indicate the race-conscious of people of color. The color-blindness is about the opportunities based on individual’s potential. The abstract liberalism requires being exercised in

their lives. The content of character needs to be measured not the color of their skin. The nurse explains Gunnar on color blindness that to pretend as he does not see color. He also should not utter like ‘Black people are lecherous, violent, natural-born criminals’. The racial superiority and racial inferiority cannot escape itself in the name of biological racism. It examines the psyche of whites that they disguise themselves as color-blind. But, inwardly they imprint an image on the blacks as violent and criminals. Human hatred begins on color which is a crucial part of living a worthless life.

Paul Beatty indulges in exploring the various forms of racism in his novels. Racism acts as a frozen exhaust of excited minds of blacks. Gunnar defines the color white as “White was the expulsion of colors encumbered by self- awareness and pigment” (35). The white supremacy and power structure make them feel inferior among others. Gunnar also defines “Black was an unwanted dog abandoned in the forest” (35). The tribalism of Africans cannot be misconceived as uncivilized. The new racism relies on the culture of the whites and blacks. That is, the western culture as the superior one in the society. It moulds the mind of them as powerful. The cultural racism prevails among the people which are well exhibited in Beatty’s *The Sellout*

“That’s the problem with history, we like to think it’s a book- that we can turn the page and move the fuck on. It’s memory, and memory is time, emotions, and song. History is the things that stay with you” (105)

Gunnar possesses a gun with the intention of protecting himself. He explains that “downtrodden ghetto youth to defend themselves against the oppressive system” (178). The terms like “downtrodden” and “ghetto” are the symbolic representation of power structure in the society. The whites attempt to exhibit their power on the marginalized blacks. The living community of blacks addressed as “ghetto” that is the slum. Gunnar’s talents are misjudged and underestimated in the school. It is because he is an African.

The psychological tyranny is that the white boys bully and mock at him. Gunnar shares his fear to escape from the clutches of white boys. The blacks are compared to gorillas for their color, a human with an animal. It shows the brutality of thinking vehemently. Gunnar ignores the situation of putting himself a laughing stock. The stereotypical portrayal of blacks is discussed. The black athlete is not meant to spend his time in the library. Gunnar hides himself to be away from the mock attackers. The emotional disturbances prevent the psychological growth of the black children. Beatty depicts the miserable adulthood of Gunnar in *The White Boy Shuffle*,

“In the library I could avoid white boys asking me if I thought blacks were closer to gorillas while tufts of unruly chest hair crept past their collars like weeds starving for sunlight. I could hide from smarmy college basketball recruiters who’d never think to look for a black athlete in the library” (156).

As a cultural –mulatto Beatty divulges the distressing condition of his survival in the American society. Gunnar’s experiences are a replica of all the black children among the whites. The reiteration of a song on freedom is a significant. That is the liberty gets buried to know the cost of it can help to buy. The abstract liberalism makes the blacks embrace the freedom in the society. The word “nigger” gets used to address the blacks in the ground.

Works Cited

Beatty, Paul. *The White Boy Shuffle*, New York: Picador, 1996. Print.

Beatty, Paul. *The Sellout*, England: One World Publications, 2016. Print.

Du Bois: W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York: Bantam Classic, 1903. Print.

Singh, Dr. Alka, *Postmodernism Text and Contexts*, Jaipur: Yking Books, 2014. Print.

Waugh, Patricia. *Literary Theory and Criticism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.