

Chapter 3

Individual versus society in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

A short biography of Ralph Ellison

Birth

Ralph Waldo Ellison was born in Oklahoma City on 1st of March in 1914. He is one of the most distinguished African-American writers of the twentieth century to win National Book Award. His father Lewis Alfred worked as an ice and coal deliverer and his mother Ida Millsap Ellison took several jobs like stewardess to look after her two sons after Lewis's death in an accident in 1917. Ralph Ellison was named after Ralph Waldo Emerson by his father who loved literature and hoped that his son will become a poet in future.

Job and education

In 1921, Ellison along with his bother and mother shifted to his uncle's home who lived in Indiana. However, this migration ended miserably as his mother could not find any job and his uncle lost his own. They returned back to Oklahoma thereafter and Ellison started taking up small jobs in order to earn for his family. From his childhood, Ellison was interested in music and he learned to play saxophone and trumpet from a neighborhood uncle. He attended Douglass High School and at the same time he was taking several jobs to support his family. He got an opportunity to play in the school's

football team as well. During his schooldays, his interest in music grew and after graduating in 1931, he took a job to collect money so as to join a local musicians group.

In order to get into a college founded by Booker T. Washington, he had to apply twice finally succeeding in getting admission as a trumpet player in the orchestra. This institution was an all black university but was not modest as expected. It bears resemblances with the college of Dr. Bledsoe from his masterpiece *Invisible Man*. During his college days, he cultivated an interest in literature and read many modern classics including T. S. Eliot, James Joyce etc. He also got inspirations from his English teacher to read English literature. He also studied modern poetry of Eliot and Pound and found a connection between their poetry and Jazz. However he left the college in 1936 without receiving a degree.

His literary career

Thereafter, in the same year he went to New York and took shelter in Harlem in order to study sculpture. However, he always hoped to go back to his college to complete his education which he left due to financial problems. Finding a steady job was difficult in Harlem. There he came into contact with Langston Hughes, an important figure of black literature and he introduced Ellison to the black literary establishment. He came to know several other writers and his literary career started with reviewing books followed by short stories and articles. His first book review was published in New Challenge and was entitled as “Creative and Cultural Lag”. His first story was “Heine’s Bull” which was not published. His first published short story was “Slick Gonna Learn”, and his other writings of that time are “The Birthmark”, “King of the Bingo Game” and “Flying Home”. With the help of Richard Wright, he got an

opportunity to edit the articles for the Communist Party. But both of them distanced themselves from the Communist Party when they realised that this party was not working for the African American rather it was politically inclined. His masterpiece *Invisible Man* is inspired by this incident. There is, in fact, a representation of the Communist Party in the form of the Brotherhood whose intentions are never really known by the protagonist. After writing *Invisible Man* in 1952 and its massive success, in 1964, he published his collection of essays *Shadow and Act*. He started writing another novel but unfortunately a house fire burnt down 300 pages of his second novel. He again wrote 2000 pages for the second novel but he could not complete it. In 1986, he published his *Going to the Territory*, a collection of seventeen essays.

The literary endeavor of Ellison was such that he believed in the artistic quality of a literary work. He believed that art should be free from any confinements. Despite of being a black writer in a racially prejudiced society, he preferred not to write protest novel because it will bind the texts within limits. “Ellison has not let the racial consciousness destroy the creative individuality” writes Aparna Batra in her thesis “Strategies of Survival in Postwar American Fiction” (Batra, 169). Ellison did not talk about a single motive in literature; rather literature should have wider applications. His aim was to deal with mankind, not with the people of a particular class. This is exactly what he did in *Invisible Man*. The protagonist is not just a representative of his race but stands for every human being in his search of identity. In 1953, he won National Book Award for fiction, received Presidential medals and an honorary Doctorate from Harvard University.

His married life

In 1938 he married Rosa Araminta Poindexter who was a stage actress. She was two years older than him. However, their marriage did not last long and in 1943, they broke up due to his affair with Sanora Babb. In 1946, he remarried with an accomplished woman named Fanny McConnell who helped him financially during his writing of *Invisible Man*. She was a graduate from the University of Iowa, a founder of Negro People's Theatre and a writer of The Chicago Defender. She not only helped him financially but also joined her hands in his editing of his masterpiece.

He taught in several institutions; Bard College, Rutgers University, University of Chicago and New York University. He received many awards for his literary ventures and became a prominent figure in American literary scenario. He explored the possibilities of his life to a large extent and became one of the most important writers in America. In the words of Aparna Batra, "Ellison belongs to the category of those postwar writers who have not turned pessimistic or cynical in spite of living in the world where 'mere anarchy is let loose' but reveal faith in the essential goodness of the human world, man's capacity to transcend the limitation imposed by the color or race and hope to explore infinite possibilities of survival" (Batra, 165).

Death

On 16th April of 1994, Ellison died due to pancreatic cancer.

Context of the novel

Invisible Man was published in 1952. At that time, many novels were written on social protest. But Ellison did not write it as a protest novel despite of the backdrop. At

that time when this novel was written, the Black people had started gaining importance in America. Harlem Renaissance grew up to give the Black art and literature recognition. All the Black people as well as some of the White people were writing about racial discrimination, the sufferings of the black people and the struggles they had to undergo in order to be known and accepted by the White society.

The Great Depression of 1929 changed the economic scenario and people became more work oriented. The economic ups and downs created class differences and everyone was fighting for their own betterment. The society also showed the growth of socialism and communism. Communist party in the beginning gave hope to the new intellectuals and gave them opportunities to express themselves. Karen Halttunen has beautifully pointed out the changes taking place in that society as “a society attuned to changes in the roles of men, women, immigrants and African Americans, the relationship between the government and the citizens, the increasingly visible economic and social importance of consumption and the role of culture in shaping behaviour and Values” (Halttunen, 2008, 214).

It was also a time of the growth of consumer culture. The production as well as the consumption rate increased and the people’s standard of living was also changing. The growing mechanization has substituted man with machinery which led to the identity crisis of people at that time. The publication of *The New Negro* in 1925 marked a great step in the development of the Black people. The migration to the North and the gradually developing society grew a confidence among the Black people. They started to be recognised for their intellect and not merely for the sympathy towards their race. The game of victimisation was coming to an end and the Blacks along with the Whites

started working for their personal development. The confidence of the Black people was such that they did not want to go back to their earlier conditions.

Literature and art started to express the common theme of individual in a group and the best expression of this theme is found in jazz. Writers like W.E.B. Du Bois, Zora Neal Hurston, and Langston Hughes arrived at the scenario and changed the Black literary outlook. However, most of the writers wrote about the White's approval and the finest examples of which are *Blackberry*, *Infants of the Spring* etc. Race riots also started to appear at places, equality was the demand of the hour. The Black culture started to be recognised, studied and understood and Ellison also had gone back to South to study Black folk culture. A huge bundle of literature written by Black people started to appear and a handful of White people also joined their hands together in this regard. Writings like *Native Son* by Richard Wright, "Mulatto" by Langston Hughes and others like *If We Must Die* and *The Lynching* appeared making the Black experience and the Black cause known. Amiri Baraka arrived with his concept "The Blackman is the future of the world" (Gray, 2004, 664). Ellison arrived at this scenario and wrote not for the Blacks alone but for the entire mankind. For him, confining literature within a boundary is doing injustice to literature. His novel, although expresses Negro experience, but it is more like African American experience in a world that is changing rapidly both socially and economically.

A brief summary of the novel

The novel opens with a prologue where the protagonist (narrator) tells about his present state. He says that he is invisible because others refuse to see him and he has taken a shelter in a basement which is not known to others and he has enlightened his

shelter with 1369 bulbs so that he can see his form. He also says that he is fighting against everyone. The entire story is told in retrospect and the protagonist details down all the incidents that had led to his 'hibernation' in a hole.

The protagonist remembers the advice his grandfather used to give when he was young, that is to 'yes' the Whites and to destroy them with agreement. However, his behaviour was always the most 'desired' one. After his graduation from school, he was asked to give his graduation speech in a gathering where White people were present. It was the same speech he gave on his graduation day and was praised for. However, on that special day, when he arrived at the place, he along with his other friends was humiliated severely. White people from all social strata were present there and the young Black boys were asked to take part in the Battle Royal at first, that is, to fight with each other for money. The fight was preceded by a sensuous dance by a blonde which made the young boys uncomfortable. But the protagonist was so determined to give his speech that he took part in everything. He thought that the people present there were the ones who could evaluate his value. After gathering coins from an electrified rug which was also addressed to entertain the Whites by humiliating the boys, the protagonist was given the chance to deliver his speech even though hardly anyone was interested in the speech. After the speech, he was given a scholarship for college education which made him really happy.

Then he joined the college and was very much inspired by the president of the college Dr. Bledsoe. Being a good student, he was given an opportunity to chauffeur around a white trustee of the college Mr. Norton which made him feel important. But the tour ended up badly when he took the trustee to Jim Trueblood, a black man who impregnated both his wife and daughter and the Golden Day an asylum of Black

veterans which made Mr. Norton sick and injured. Both these places were such that no one would like to visit but he was simply following the orders given by Norton. The story of Trueblood made Mr. Norton sick and when he asked for a drink, the protagonist found no option but to take him to the Golden Day where a fight broke out and Mr. Norton got wounded. He somehow managed to take Norton back to the college with the fear of the consequences.

Dr. Bledsoe revealed his true nature after the incident and made the protagonist realise that he had no value in the institution. Bledsoe, being a hypocrite, can go to any extent to secure his position in the college and therefore, in order to impress Mr. Norton and to show his power, he expelled the protagonist from the college. His threat, plea had no impact on Bledsoe and he was asked to leave the college with a few recommendation letters to distinguished people from New York under whom he can work, gather money and return the next year to complete his education. The protagonist accepted his fate and keeping a hope for better future, left for New York.

After arriving at New York, he took shelter at Men's House and started visiting the distinguished person with the recommendations but was dismissed by all of them. Therefore, he decided to meet the last person by himself only to realise that he has been fooled by Bledsoe. The letters were not of recommendations but were the real presentation of his grandfather's dream. It was only the son of Emerson, the last distinguished person who revealed him the truth that the letters were about not to give him any job. Devastated, he went to join a paint factory where he was first rejected at sight but later was given a job to mix the colors. Due to lack of proper instructions, he could not complete the task properly and was shifted to another room with heavy machinery. Mr. Brockway, the in charge became skeptical about the protagonist's secret

association with the union due to the protagonist's unintentional encounter with the union members, and Brockway threatened him to murder. He ultimately tricked the protagonist and succeeded in causing heavy injuries to him.

He woke up in a hospital with loss of memory and discovered himself being experimented upon. The doctors used him as a lab rat and discharged after completing their experiments. Coming out from the hospital gave him a different feeling; he felt that he was no longer afraid of who he was. Since there was no hope of going back to his education, he would live the way he wanted. He got some compensation money and lived on them for some time.

One day while walking, he saw an eviction of an old couple which enraged him and he gave a very passionate speech. Motivated by his moving speech, people stopped the eviction and restored the old couple back. Following this very incident, he was invited to join Brotherhood; an organisation formed by both Black and White members. The protagonist joined the organisation for financial needs at first and gradually started liking it as well. However, before joining the organisation, he was asked to forget everything of his life and he was given a new name, new appearance and a whole new life. The protagonist was yet to realise that he has been losing his identity and individuality gradually. His first speech was criticised and he was asked to take lessons in order to understand the scientific way of doing things in Brotherhood. After that, he was invited to various places for speeches and lectures. He encountered another young leader Tod Clifton who seemed very powerful and the protagonist felt insecure for his position. Both of them one day encountered Ras the Exhorter who is a black nationalist who believed that Brotherhood spoke not for the Blacks but for the Whites.

One day brother Wrestrum visited the protagonist and talked about the flag of Brotherhood. At the same time a journalist called him in order to interview him. The protagonist was convinced to give the interview by Wrestrum who later backstabbed him and accused him of being an opportunist and advancing his own interests in Brotherhood's name. Then he was shifted to another part of the city where he was given to deal with the women issue. He worked enthusiastically on this project but was in turn seduced by a woman. After a few days, he was informed that Tod Clifton went missing and Brotherhood has started losing its grip from among the people. The protagonist started looking for Clifton and finally managed to find him but only to discover that Clifton, being disillusioned from Brotherhood, had started selling Sambo toys on the street. He was shot dead by a policeman later and it saddened the protagonist and he organised a huge funeral for Clifton and delivered a moving speech to the crowd for their support for Brotherhood. He was summoned to an emergency meeting of Brotherhood after that and was heavily criticised for organizing the funeral. Brother Jack, whom he trusted, told him that he was hired as a tool, only to follow the instructions and not to think or act on his own. He was accused of forgetting his limits and Brotherhood disciplines and was asked to join brother Hambro for more lessons. Hambro told him about the manipulation of the weak and the need of sacrifice for survival which changed his views completely regarding Brotherhood. He came to know that Brotherhood had no real intentions for the Black people. It was an institution just to exercise its power over the weak.

Determined to unveil the true intentions of Brotherhood and to give them a taste of their own, he went back to Harlem. To remain safe from Ras's men, he bought a hat and a glass which changed his appearance and was being confused several times as

Rineheart who played several roles in the society. He understood that Rineheart has taken various identities just to adapt to the society and decided to undermine Brotherhood with false information. He realised that when he lied to them he was being loved but he was hated when he told the truth. He attempted to understand the true intention of Brotherhood by approaching a woman who was earlier associated with a member of Brotherhood but to no avail.

He came to know about the various riots that have started in the city and realised that it was all set up by Brotherhood. He joined a group of looters at first and later was chased by Ras's men. Trying to hide from Ras, he fell down into a manhole where he started burning all his lifelong savings from the suitcase he received on the day of Battle Royal. There in the manhole, he dreamt of being castrated by everyone who cheated on him, lied to him and played with him just to wake up and realise that he was a whole inside the hole. He felt free and safe inside the hole.

In the epilogue, the protagonist tells about his realisation that his mistake was to follow others' ways. He also says that this hibernation period was necessary and since he has understood and accepted his invisibility, he is now ready to come out of his hole to take up his social responsibilities; that is to see those things which are not visible on the surface. He says that he might speak for us someday.

Analysis

The Individual in The novel

The individual in the novel is the protagonist who is invisible metaphorically throughout the entire novel. He is that invisible person who represents that individual of the society who is always submerged without his/her consent to the needs of the group.

The individual in this novel is the tenth person of a group of ten people who has different ideologies from the other nine, but, on the basis of majority, his/her ideologies are unseen and rejected by others and he/she is automatically taken within the group's decision. It could be without the individual's consent or due to the pressure the individual feels under an un-relatable majority. The individual is not given any name in the novel which is an implication that it could be any Tom, Dick or Harry. The individual represents every one of us. The lonesome individual lives in a basement illuminating 1369 bulbs just because 'light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form' (Ellison, 2016, 6). He is aware of his invisibility and is perhaps outraged by it. He says that his invisibility is due to the viewers' 'construction of inner eyes' (Ellison, 2016, 3). He has been so much unseen that he is confused regarding his own existence. The individual is certainly in a trauma due to the ignorance of the society and has finally decided to live underground, becoming literally invisible from the surface.

The society in the novel

The society in this novel is beyond the racial society. Since the novel is written and published during the 40s and 50s, it tells more about a general American society rather than concentrating on racial society. Ellison himself, Saul Bellow and many other critics talked about the novel in general terms, therefore, to confine it within the racial boundary will be an injustice to the novel. Saul Bellow writes "Ralph Ellison has not adopted a minority tone. If he had done so, he would have failed to establish a true middle of consciousness for everyone" (Bellow, 1974, 28). The protagonist of the novel stands for all and represents each and everyone who suffers from identity crisis. Saul Bellow is right in pointing out the general tone of the novel. Again, James Alan

McPherson talks about Ellison's affirmation as a Negro American and writes "Ellison's achievements are too enormous to be reduced to a sociological cliché, a rhetorical formulation. If anything, his success proves that intelligence, perseverance, discipline and love for one's works are together, too great a combination to be contained or defined in terms of race" (McPherson, 1974, 45). The novel contains several aspects of the American society along with its racial content and the aspects of individual life and the fight for an African American identity.

Therefore, the society involved in this novel includes racism, Northern and Southern America, both the Whites and the Blacks and several other institutions. However, one common aspect is found among all these social institutions i.e. these are exercised by the powerful hypocrite people. These hypocrite people are ready to exploit the individual fully whenever needed without considering his/her consent. The individual is looked at as a tool for the benefit of the group and is denied any stand. As Dolores writes "In *Invisible Man* the protagonist encounters these American social institutions, discovering the hindrances to freedom in each one, beginning with the 'community' and its restrictions (the Southern White Community), then, in order, the institution of education (the Negro College Community), economics (the Northern Industrial Community), and politics (the community of the Brotherhood), experiencing the restraints of each as they are imposed upon the black man" (Dolores, 3-4).

Individual versus society:

The game of individual versus society is detected from the very title of the novel which stands for the individual, i.e. the protagonist of the novel. The title '*Invisible Man*' suggests that the person we are dealing with is invisible. He is neither seen nor

heard (metaphorically). The metaphorical implication of the title indicates that the person is always under a veil, not seen in the horizon. The question here is does he himself intentionally became invisible or is there some other issues involved. The answer is found in the prologue where the protagonist affirms his invisibility “I am invisible, simply because people refuse to see me” (Ellison, 2016, 3). It clearly indicates that his invisibility is not a matter of choice but it is due to the ignorance of his presence by others; it is a kind of imposition on him by others. The reason behind his invisibility is “a construction of their inner eyes” (Ellison, 2016, 3). The people who come into contact with him had a mindset not to acknowledge him, not to consider him due to which, the protagonist has decided to live literally invisibly, to live below the surface, at a place which no one knows exists and is constantly attempting to gain his visibility in his own eyes. The lighting up of 1369 bulbs and listening to a song regarding his own existence marks the height of desperateness on the part of the protagonist. Due to his long invisibility, he has started questioning his existence, “You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world that you’re part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And alas! It’s seldom successful” (Ellison, 2016, 3-4). However, this plight is not to convince others but to convince himself which heightens the tension. Being rejected several times has made him to question his own existence and his sense of identity and he is in a fight with himself.

The society stands at the other end holding the fate of the protagonist and denies him his visibility. There are certain events in the novel that had made the individual lose his sense of identity and individuality completely. And this is his great revelation that he has been used till now by others and it’s only “after existing some twenty years....I

discovered my invisibility” (Ellison, 2016, 6). After realising his invisibility, he started to defy the society. Now his mode of fight is not a direct one but ‘a fight against them without their realizing it’ (Ellison, 2016, 5). He has decided to fight passively. Although he lives down the ‘hole’, he is in peace; he is whole, not torn down by any obligations or restrictions. He is free to feel and think. The story of the protagonist, in the words of Stewart Rodnon is that of “...the sensitive and intelligent young man discovering that if he strikes through the mask, if he tears of the veneer, if he stripes the gliding, what he discovers is an essentially corrupt and Mammon-seeking society, which protects itself with rationalization and hypocrisies (Rodnon, 252).

After reading the novel, the conditions that resulted in the invisibility of the individual become known. The episode of Battle Royal is of greater significance in this regard which exposes the brutality and complexity of the society. People from every field like teachers, doctors, lawyers etc. were present in the hotel on the day of Battle Royal but their behaviour showed how they actually were. For their satisfaction and entertainment, they went on to degrade and humiliate young Black boys. The protagonist’s sense of self was changed that day. Because on that day, he was humiliated because of his race and he developed a sense that being black is automatically degrading. Moreover, his grandfather’s words confused his understanding regarding his own race. The grandfather told them to take up a passive fight by accepting everything the whites said. However, the protagonist’s conduct was nice from the beginning which he started to feel as treacherous since this is what the mode of fight according to his grandfather. His sense of identity was shaped at this stage by his grandfather’s advice which indirectly influenced his understanding that black people are

usually expected to be mean. It was reshaped by the people who displayed extreme sense of racial hatred in the Battle Royal.

The speech by the protagonist on the day of his graduation was so moving that he was asked to deliver the same speech among White people. When he arrived, he, along with other nine boys was forced to take part in that battle which was intended in entertaining the people present there. His dream of becoming a new Booker T. Washington has been shattered when he was blindfolded to fight with his friends and he felt that he 'had no dignity' (Ellison, 2016, 22). The societal approval had cost him his dignity. The worst happened when they were asked to gather the scattered dollar from the rug which was electrified. Nevertheless, the protagonist was determined to give his speech because he thought that it was the only way to get approval and recognition by the people. His sense of self depended on how others viewed him and this is what made him vulnerable. Even after the most humiliating incident on the day of Battle Royal, he was looking forward for his speech "I wanted to deliver my speech more than anything else in the world, because I felt that only these men could judge truly my ability" (Ellison, 2016, 25) as if "their approval lends a stamp of authenticity to his dreams and ambitions" (Batra, 177).

The need of approval by the society is always there among human being. It is a general human tendency to want to be known and recognised by others. Each and every person, at least ones in their life want to be famous and popular. And this can happen only and if the person is recognised by the society. That is why, in today's world of social media, people make videos, photos and even short films to get famous overnight through internet. In this case, the person's sense of self largely depends on how others look at him/her. The protagonist's wish for approval from others is quite

understandable. As Ann McArdle writes, “In society, men come to seek their happiness in the opinions of others and to see themselves as they are reflected in the opinions of the others. They are dissipated in the manyness of opinion. This dissipation follows from the fact that they see before them an indeterminate future which consists essentially in their relationship with other man. What they will be, what they are from other men” (McArdle, 270). It indicates that in a society, people are so very much depended on each other that their understanding of themselves also goes through the lens of other members of the society. They are dispersed and submerged in the multiplicity of voices and lastly, they lose their own voice. This happens when an individual comes in contact with the society; if the individual rejects the opinions and sticks to own ideals, he/she will end up as an ‘outsider’ and if listens too much to others then he/she will lose his/her individuality and identity completely and will become ‘invisible’. In the words of Dolores Beth Powers, the protagonist in this novel is “...constantly under the threat of ‘chaos’ or those irrational and violent forces against which he has no protection, and unable to assert his individual identity, because his concept of himself and of the world is limited by the identity imposed upon him by those in power in his community” (Powers, 4).

In the college of Dr. Bledsoe, he entered embracing all his dreams and aspirations and always displayed what was ‘the desirable conduct’ (Ellison, 2016, 16). By obeying Mr. Norton, a trustee of the college, he drove him to Jim Trueblood’s cabin and the Golden Day which ended up very badly. He was just obeying the orders but he was expelled from the college by Dr. Bledsoe since the places he took Mr. Norton to, were the places he should not have visited. The protagonist tried to refute the accusations made by Bledsoe and explained that it was not his mistake and Mr. Norton

wanted to visit Jim Trueblood and the Golden Day which resulted in his poor health. But Bledsoe used his power to strike fear into the protagonist; he was told that even though he is right, he can not prove it because the power is in Bledsoe's hands. Only Bledsoe can tweak the truth to his advantage and not a student. Bledsoe is in power and "power is confident, self-assuring, self-starting and self-stopping, self-warming and self-justifying" (Ellison, 2016, 139). The one who has power does not need to justify his/her acts but the powerless has to fight for it. To remain in power, Bledsoe can go to any level "I've made my place in it and I'll have every Negro in the country hanging by tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am" (Ellison, 2016, 140). The protagonist's illusion that behaving in the desired manner with "hard work, sincerity and clean living" (Batra, 181) is all that one needs to be recognised is broken down here. In fact, Mr. Norton, whom he believed as the standard judge of his conduct treated him as a mechanical being "...upon you depends the outcome of the years I have spent in helping your school. That has been my real life's work....my first hand organizing of human life" (Ellison, 2016, 41-42). The protagonist's life has been re-organised by that man even without his knowledge. Mr. Norton is that bureaucrat who automatically considers himself superior to others not just financially, politically or educationally but also as a human being.

Dr. Bledsoe is the very representative of the power-monger of the society who always wears a mask of humility and honesty but is very treacherous in reality. He is very manipulative and he can go to any extent to please those who will secure his position. The protagonist sees his real face when he hides his real feelings while meeting Norton after the accident happened in Golden Day "As we approached a mirror

Dr. Bledsoe stopped and composed his angry face like a sculptor, making it a bland mask, leaving only the sparkle of his eyes to betray the emotion” (Ellison, 2016, 100).

Society exercises its power over individual through social control. As theorized by J. S. Roucek, social control can have three purposes: exploitative, regulatory and creative and among these three, exploitative is the dangerous mode of control exercised upon an individual (Roucek, 1956, 8). By considering the instances in the novel, it can be said that society and its agents exercise exploitative control over the invisible man. Because the control exercised upon the protagonist is driven by the personal interest of different people.

The society is a combination of individuals and it is dictated by the powerful. The rules, regulations and desirable and undesirable behaviour are determined by the powerful people of the society. Those who are in power can mould and use the situations for their advantage. The protagonist is also a constituent of the society but he is a small particle who looks at others for help and approval. In the words of Rand “The notion of collective rights (the notion that right belongs to some men and not to individuals) means that ‘rights’ belongs to some men but not to others that some men have the right to dispose of others in any manner they please and that the criterion of such privileged position consists of numerical superiority (Rand, 1964, 73). The political nature of society is unveiled in this episode when the powerful members exploit the powerless for their advantage and they also hold the power to turn everything the way they want. And the small members like the protagonist ends up being no one “you’re nobody son, you don’t exist” (Ellison, 2016, 140).

Bledsoe is not even faithful to the other white members of the authority. He is there just to secure his own position and if it requires playing different games at

different times, he is ready to do that. In the beginning, the protagonist liked the way Bledsoe operated in the college. He is rich and with authority and it attracted the protagonist, he even aspired to become like Bledsoe in future. But Bledsoe is just a hypocrite person using everyone to get what he desired and this broke the protagonist's illusion. He understood that the society is not as simple as it appears to be but rather a complex structure where everyone has their own purpose and own ways to get what they wanted no matter what the cost is. Bledsoe expels the protagonist from the school to satisfy his ego and also to show his concern for the white trustee Mr. Norton whose life was threatened at the risk of the protagonist. Despite of the fact that the protagonist was innocent in this case, somehow he convinced himself that he had 'violated the code and have to submit to punishment' (Ellison, 2016, 144). He forced himself in believing that Bledsoe is right and is doing what is to be done for the sake of the college. Since the protagonist can make no difference with his truth, he decided to submit to the authority.

Bledsoe's assurance regarding the recommendation letters was another way of exercising his power over the weak. The recommendation letters were just to give him false hope and to keep him running. The people to whom the letters were addressed did not even bother to meet the person mentioned in the letter. The dismissal is based on Bledsoe's words. And the protagonist is too docile to understand that. In a complex society like the twentieth century America, which was witnessing so many changes in terms of social, political and economical level, the protagonist's submissive nature will never help him to survive. The protagonist is far from understanding the political complexity of society and always ends up as a victim.

The protagonist, however, always managed to show the best and the most ‘desirable’ behaviour in front of everyone. He had been self-conscious when he came into contact with the important people with the recommendation letters. In fact, he behaved in the most agreeable manner in front of all the people whom he thought to be important. His self-consciousness became inseparable from his social consciousness because he attached everything to the social outlook. His social consciousness has made him more inclined towards others. As Roucek points out a person’s social consciousness comes in relation to his group and then “he regards himself as having a status. This consciousness of status operates as a powerful element in social control. The individual tends to conform to the established modes of behaviour and to avoid those actions which incur group displeasure or disapproval” (Roucek, 1956, 26).

In the Liberty Paints, he was rejected by the union at first sight and was later attacked physically by Mr. Brockway who tricked him to an explosion. Looking at all these instances, it can be sensed that the protagonist is the representative of those individuals who get caught so badly in the clutches of society that it gives them nothing more than wounds; physical, mental and emotional. All his associations with people had failed and he had been attacked severely. The situation got intense when the protagonist woke up in a hospital with a loss of memory but only to be used as a guinea-pig for the doctor’s experiments. He was given electrical shocks and one of the doctors claimed that since all his earlier memories will be erased he would no longer be a threat to the society. The irony of the situation is that the society had threatened his integrity as an individual so far. It had even threatened his life and ultimately he was made to forget his sense of self too, but in turn, he has been considered as a potential threat to the society.

In the game against society, identity becomes crucial for an individual. Because unless and until an individual has an identity, he/she will not be accepted and if he/she is not accepted, he/she will lose the sense of identity completely. The issue of identity becomes very interesting because identity has no fixations or centrality. The same person can have multiple identities based on who sees him/her and at what context. The same person can be a son/daughter, father/mother, brother/sister etc. It means that identity may vary context wise. A sense of identity develops when one comes in contact with the society and is ready to be considered to be part of the society. Here Ronald D. Laing's concept of identity becomes worth consideration which goes like "identity is reached and sustained two dimensionally, it requires recognition of oneself by others as well as simple recognition one accords to himself" (Laing, 138). The dependency of the individual on others for a sense of recognition is what makes him/her vulnerable. This is what has made the protagonist vulnerable at the hands of the powerful group of the society. His belief that 'hard work, sincerity and clean living' (Batra, 181) is enough to leave a mark in the society shattered very badly and his identity is completely demolished to such an extent that the protagonist finally accepted his loss of identity and affirmed his invisibility.

In the game of individual and the society as a power structure, very often the individual has to give up his/her personal ideals to get accepted by the society. The invisible man, in his lifelong quest for identity had taken up every possible step starting from following instructions, fighting back to 'Rinheartism' but failed everywhere and ultimately accepted his invisibility. At each step of his quest, he forgot about his past or was asked to forget about his past and he tried to create everything new altogether just as instructed. In the words of Aparna, "for him, the survival depends upon the degree to

which he does what the world expects of him and he will be rewarded with respect and acceptance (Batra, 180). But the sense of identity is very much depended on what has shaped one so far. In the first instance, he rejected his grandfather's advice and took part in the Battle Royal to face extreme level of humiliation. When awarded, he forgot (did not consider) this episode and went on to take a new start at college. Inspired and assured for a better future, he did whatever he was asked to do but was humiliated one more time. Even the incident at Liberty Paints is what had knocked him down. Mr. Brockway tricked him to the explosion in the factory. After the hospital experience, he felt re-incarnated and started being himself. But again while encountering with Brotherhood, he accepted their proposal of creating a different personality by taking up new name and forgetting his history. The treachery of Brotherhood was the last straw and he ended up confining in a hole. In all the cases he is never seen really free. One way or the other, he is always in the clutches of the society. His freedom has been compromised. His relation with himself passes through the doors of society and for him, the eyes that see him are more important than the eyes he sees with.

The game of submission started from the first time when he yielded on the day of Battle Royal. Even after experiencing humiliation at the hands of other people, he did not withdraw; neither did he realise his position. His conviction was ravished but he remained silent. At the college incident when he was expelled, he accepted that it was his mistake and was thus, ready for a punishment. This letting loose of convictions was what had made him so vulnerable that he was unable to take any stand later "If one found it difficult to maintain one's loyalty to one's own conviction at the start, a succession of betrayals-which helped to augment the power of the evil one lacked the courage to fight-will not make it easier at a later date, but will make it virtually

impossible” (Rand, 1964, 49). Therefore, for the succession of failures he faced throughout, he himself is responsible to some extent.

After joining Brotherhood, a radical group formed by both Black and White members, he was given a new identity; a new name, new address and a new appearance. He was asked to forget everything he learned, to cease contact with family and to forget about his past. It is interesting to note that one’s identity is very much a product of one’s past and present, it is a result of the past experiences, but the protagonist is asked to remain untouched by his past which raises confusion. During his stay with the Brotherhood, he gave speeches at different places, was recognised by many, loved and appreciated by many, but the void was always there, the void between his reality and the imposed present. He, like a ‘schizoid’, was not ‘at home’ in the world he was living. By ‘schizoid’, the reference is made to a person “who is not able to experience himself ‘together with’ others or ‘at home’ in the world, but on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation, moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as ‘split in various ways...as two or more selves” (Laing, 1). Identity is formed when one recognises what he/she is, but here the protagonist is forgetting what he was throughout. In the struggle to fit in the outer world, his existence was torn between his two selves; “the old self that slept a few hours a night...and the new public self” (Ellison, 2016, 367). He was living two different lives, one publicly and one was within himself and the isolation was due to the fact that his public life had surpassed his personal life. And without being recognised by the ‘real self’, ‘the self is not able to preserve what precarious identity or aliveness it may already possess’ (Laing, 139).

Economic control plays a significant role in understanding the protagonist's various movements. Because he is in financial need, his movements are directed by these needs. The protagonist experiences an economic control at the hands of Bledsoe in form of the recommendation letters, in the Liberty Paints and also while joining Brotherhood, he is driven by the need for economic support. His need for finance has made him liable to be exercised upon with an economic control by the outside agencies. His moving to New York, joining of Liberty Paints and the Brotherhood, all is driven by his economic needs. In this sense, his movements had been directed and guided on depending on his financial conditions. It is one form of social control that works upon individuals in restricting or directing their movements.

The episode with Brotherhood is what had made the protagonist realise his real place in the society. He had accepted the job for financial support; however, he was expected to be thoroughly active because his voice and his oratory skill was what they needed. But he was far from realising that it was only his oratory skill that was important not the man. Without knowing the truth, after the death of Tod Clifton, he took up his 'personal responsibility' to give Tod a proper funeral (Ellison, 2016, 445). But he was told that he has no 'personal responsibility' because it is not the individual that was hired but his skills and he was told "you were not hired to think" and "the committee makes your decisions" (Ellison, 2016, 451, 453). It was the blow that made him realise how he had been looked at. He was asked to remain within the discipline and in this case, losing his own voice, sacrificing his ideals and beliefs and compromising his identity was the form of discipline demanded by the Brotherhood. And he had no option but to obey. The situation heightened when brother Hambro made him realise that the institution stands at the sacrifices of the weak and the policy goes

like “it’s impossible not to take advantage of the people” (Ellison, 2016, 486). So basically, the Brotherhood was an institution that intended for a collaborative effort to bring equality and peaceful living among Blacks and Whites, but merely at an apparent level, what its true intentions were never known by the protagonist since he was never told about that. The Brotherhood kept its intentions far from the protagonist and they called themselves scientists. They judged through ‘cultivating scientific objectivity’ (Ellison, 2016, 486). There was no place for emotion in this institution and people were treated as machines and the protagonist was also a victim of the same. He felt as if he had been locked in the machine of the hospital again, which was used to do experimentations on him like a lab rat. Here, in Brotherhood also, he had been experimented upon and used as a tool.

The writer very interestingly brings Clifton’s dolls into the narrative as an analogy that reflects the position of the protagonist throughout. The invisible black thread that makes the dolls dance represents the control exercised by various social agencies that have made the protagonist dance to their rhythms. After realising his position in Brotherhood where he had given all his energy but was deceived, he decided to take up his grandfather’s advice of being one of the most desirable persons. Since he had recognised his invisibility, he would, from then on, hide his true desires under the surface and would remain true to himself no matter what. “My ambition and integrity were nothing to them and my failure was as meaningless as Clifton’s.... I was and yet I was invisible, that was the fundamental contradiction” (Ellison, 2016, 488). Therefore, to keep up his integrity as an individual, he would explore all the possibilities he had but would play with them the way they played with him. “I’d overcome them with yeses, undermine them with grins, I’d agree them to death and destruction and I’d let them

swoller me until they vomited or burst wide open....All they wanted of me was one belch of affirmation and I'd bellow it out loud...I'd become a supersensitive confirmer of their misconceptions" (Ellison, 2016, 490).

"In every act of rebellion, the man concerned experiences not only a feeling of revulsion at the infringement of his rights but also a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself. Thus, he implicitly brings into play a standard of values so far from being false that he is willing to preserve them at all costs" (Camus, 1960, 19). This is how a rebel arises when too much oppression occurs. The protagonist had finally realised that his existence, his happiness and his ideals are more important than what others think of him. He had decided to be loyal to himself. He had decided to say 'no' but not directly, he can no more compromise his existence because it had become intolerable. He had arrived at a situation where rebellion remained the only option. In the words of Camus "He rebels because he categorically refuses to submit to conditions that he considers intolerable and also because he is confusedly convinced that his position is justified" (Camus, 1960, 19).

The protagonist's wish to conform to the group was an effort to find recognition. He wanted to be a part of the society but unfortunately, he fell prey to the political ventures of the people all the time. The denial of his personal conscious actions by the Brotherhood made him realise that he had always been below the surface and his voice has been ignored by all. The irony of the situation is, his voice was the primary tool of the Brotherhood but his words were wrapped in others' intentions. He was just like the dolls sold by Tod Clifton. His affirmation of his invisibility and his decision to go underground was, in a way, a rebellion. His quest for identity through affirmation, rejection and 'Rinehart techniques' failed and the last straw was his realisation that it

was Brother Jack himself who had back stabbed him double facedly. He could take up no more but he convinced himself not to die “that’s enough, don’t kill yourself. You’ve run enough; you’re through with them at last” (Ellison, 2016, 549). After doing everything he could he had finally reached a place where he could be manipulated no more, where he could think in peace and quiet. Living underground was necessary for him because “in our society man himself is idolized and publicly worshipped, but the single individual must hide himself underground and try to save his desires, his thoughts, his soul in invisibility. He must return to himself, learning self-acceptance and rejecting all that threatens to deprive him of his manhood” (Bellow, 1974, 29).

The following excerpt from Camus’ *The Rebel* beautifully expresses the rebellion of the invisible man. “Awareness, no matter how confused it may be, develops from every act of rebellion; the sudden dazzling perception that there is something in man with which he can identify himself, even if only for a moment. Up to now, this identification was never really experienced. Before he rebelled, the slave accepted all the demands made upon him. Very often, he even took orders, without reacting against them. He accepted them patiently, though he may have protested inwardly, but in that he remained silent he was more concerned with his immediate interest than as yet aware of his rights. But with loss of patience, with impatience, a reaction begins which can extend to everything that he previously accepted” (Camus, 1960, 11). Like a slave, the protagonist had accepted all the orders to fulfill his financial as well as social needs, but gradually he came to know that he had lost his control over his own voice. His sense of personal responsibility was a joke to them. After failing at every level, falling into the manhole and burning all his possessions, he had realised that he had done injustice to himself so far. He was ready to take social responsibility but by being invisible because

his visibility had been his weakness. His wish to be visible and recognisable had made him vulnerable. Therefore, he would not allow anyone to exercise power over him anymore but will do what he thinks to be correct. The final comeback is what has given him a proper individuality so far. Otherwise, he had been living robotic existence acting out on the instructions.

The society against which the protagonist is fighting is filled with hypocrites and power hungry people. Starting from the programme where he was invited to give his graduation speech to Brotherhood, everyone was taking advantage of him. His search for identity in a 'quasi-equal' society becomes a challenge. The society consisting of both the Whites and the Blacks was not ready to accept him but to exploit him. The White people gathered on the speech day were there to entertain on the young Black boys. They were not yet ready to accept 'social equality'. Dr. Bledsoe, despite of being a Black person, did not care to ruin one of the black student's lives. He is focusing on keeping the authority to himself. He could do anything to remain in his position; even at the cost of others lives. Ellison has portrayed a society at the wake capitalism. The individuals as well as the formed societies, all were harbouring a 'capitalistic attitude'. Everyone was looking for personal gain and profit and Bledsoe is a perfect example of 'capitalist' individual who in order to maintain his position can go to any extent in exploiting people.

The young Emerson who showed sympathy towards the protagonist had his own homosexual tendencies to fulfill. He had seen the protagonist as a potential mate for his needs and that was why he was behaving in such endeared manner. The hypocrisy and selfishness is also seen in the hospital where the doctors use patients as tools for experiment without their consent. The patient's psychology is not of their concern. The

Liberty Paint was also an institution full of people who are extremely inconsiderate. Mr. Brockway and the union are the other best examples of hypocrisy. When the protagonist entered into the room by mistake where the union meeting was going on, he was rejected immediately just on sight. He was not given any chance to explain what his views or why did he go there. They were forcing their judgments on him and he didn't have a say in all these. "...They were forcing me to accept things on their own terms...They had made their decisions without giving me a chance to speak for myself...here in this room my defense was negated, stripped away" (Ellison, 2016, 215). His unfortunate encounter with the union members was without his will but Mr. Brockway accused him and tried to kill him. In both the cases, the protagonist had no knowledge of what was happening around. He was judged, accused of and tried to be killed without given a chance to explain himself. The irrational behaviour shown by the union and Mr. Brockway explicitly point out the inconsiderate nature of the society and people. His honesty and decency are not a prize but a weakness which made him vulnerable to the attacks of the extremely 'selfish' society.

Ayn Rand writes about society and compares it with tyranny and writes: "Socialism is merely democratic absolute monarchy, that is, a system of absolutism without a fixed head, open to seizure of power by all comers, by only ruthless climber, opportunist, adventurer, demagogue or thug (Rand, 1961, 64). The society in this novel is not addressed to social welfare but is oriented towards a handful of powerful people's interests. Society, or in the name of socialism, individual rights, interests and choices are compromised "Since there is no such entity as 'the public', since the public is merely a number of individuals, any claim or implied conflict of the 'public interest' with private interest means that the interest of some men are to be sacrificed to the

interest and wishes of others” (Rand, 1964, 62-63). The powerful people, in the name of social welfare are seen taking advantage of the individual. The Brotherhood and Dr. Bledsoe who promised the protagonist a better life and identification are the finest examples of the hypocrisy of the society.

Everyone played against him and on him for their personal gain. He sought to avenge by deceiving them and revealing their secret. He approached Sibyl who was associated with brotherhood earlier and tried to gather the needed information, but this transaction turned out to be one-sided where the woman took advantage to fulfill her sexual drives. He was even degraded to the ‘stereotypical uncivilized nigger’ level as she asked him to rape her. After all these compromises, he realised that being invisible will be the best for him, because, “A compromise is not a breach of one’s comfort but a breach of one’s convictions. A compromise does not consist of doing something one dislikes, but of doing something one knows to be evil” (Rand, 1964, 49). It implies that his lifelong compromise has jeopardized his convictions. But finally he recognises his mistake which was to believe others and to move on the way they showed rather than choosing the way by him “My problem was that I always tried to go in everyone’s way but my own. I have also been called one thing and then another while no one really wished to hear what I called myself. So after years of trying to adopt the opinions of others I finally rebelled. I am an invisible man” (Ellison, 2016, 553).

After turning into a rebel, he had started to consider himself, respecting himself. “The rebel defends what he has...his aim is to claim recognition for something which he has and which has already been recognised by him” (Camus, 1960, 23). His search for recognition is very long, as he himself claims, it is twenty years long. And after so many rejections, his decision to rebel is his final call. He has accepted him as he is and thus,

he is becoming, in his way, a part of the society but with his own choices. By trying to become a part of the society in others' call, he has lost his freedom, his voice. He was used as a puppet, he was denied his identity, and he was ripped off his individuality. He was although working on the surface and obeying orders, his wishes and aspirations were denied every time. And it happened only because he has given the society an authority over him by accepting its premises. He expected to get 'civil liberty' but the process has demolished his 'personal liberty' totally. The society made an extension into the personal liberty of the protagonist and clearly made an infringement upon his personal space and made him to compromise giving him the false hope for identity. He faced severe losses in the trade of personal space for 'civil liberty'. In the words of Rousseau "A man loses by social contract his natural liberty, and an unlimited right to all which tempts him and which he can obtain" (Rousseau, 1971, 50). The connection with social institutions has jeopardized his existence. The compromises he made in the name of society have shaken his very essence. The namelessness in the hospital, the new identity in Brotherhood and his confused identity with Rineheart has made him realise that he can be surpassed easily. A hat and a pair of glasses and he is not recognised any more; this vulnerable identity is what he has achieved so far.

Human is born social, people come to a language, a society, a group which shapes and moulds their attitudes and behaviour for the rest of the life. Social implications come naturally to human as a hereditary aspect. And thereby, the individual is already bound by the rules. An individual can never deny the social implications of his/her life. Laurie Spurling even doubts the existence of individual without social implications "...it is doubtful if there is that strictly individual project which is oneself" around which (and therefore, to some, extent, separate from) lies the

social. Rather individuality and sociality are implicated in each other. From the moment I am born I live in a world of speech, customs, institutions and cultural objects that together form my actions and thoughts in a way that allows my own individuality to develop” (Spurling, 1977, 86). There is no denying the fact that society shapes an individual and makes him/her what he/she is. The individual needs to agree to the social principles and thus grow alongside the society. However, too much adherence to the social conventions is what makes an individual vulnerable. By sticking to one’s own ideal with a little social consciousness is not harmful, but denying one’s desires for the sake of approval of the society gives control to the group and an individual proceeds to perform what the society dictates. In this novel, the invisible man goes to the next level of agreement and gives up his personal space, his past, his name and all he has achieved so far for the sake of gaining identification in the larger society. His attempt to live his mark ends up pathetically and he withdraws after losing the small mark he has made earlier. He learns that to retain his individuality, he needs to free himself from the constraints of the society. So the path of his journey is “after being ‘for’ the society and then ‘against’ it” (Ellison, 2016, 555) is to take a midway. He has understood the diversity of the world which opens up many possibilities; therefore, he does not have to play the stereotypical role, nor does he try to go back to the submissive role. Since he has understood that there is a ‘passion towards conformity’ and ‘an increasing passion to make men conform to a pattern’ (Ellison, 2016, 556), he has decided to live in the hole far from the reach of all the chaos. His association with Brotherhood has defied his creativity; he is not allowed to think but to merely follow the instructions. Under no circumstances he is allowed to act without the instruction. All his movements are confined by the discipline of the committee. This wish not to conform is what has kept

him inside the hole. Because once he steps outside, he will be forced to identify with the conventions that are available out there.

The invisible man, no matter what the situation is, remains silent so not to enrage anyone who is superior to him in position. Since he looks at others for his identity he remains passive and in agreement. He believes that he has understood the way only to later realise that he has been fooled so far. He tries to get recognition, fights for it but his identity is further pushed and pushed to the periphery. His quest for identity and individuality has been sidelined at several occasions by several people. Starting from the Battle Royal to Dr. Bledsoe's treachery, Brotherhood's hypocrisy, and confusion with Rineheart to the 'rape' of Sibyl, he has been used as a tool; he has been reminded that his existence is of no value. Nowhere has he been called or known by his name or his profession. Moreover, the writer's denying him any name throughout joins hands in pushing his individuality further. He has not been considered as an individual independent of social impositions. His simplicity and innocence is what has made him vulnerable to the selfish demands of the opportunist society. The writer has used 'invisibility' as a symbol for the 'loss of self' (Rodnon, 255) and identity which can be described as "Man's worth and dignity in opposition to the impersonal terror of authority" (Rodnon, 256). Russell W. Nash writes about the protagonist's journey from a stereotype to become a social type. The fight the protagonist has to undergo is two-layered; the first layer is to fight against the stereotype that he has been associated with and the second one is what he becomes in the process of gaining recognition, but he fails at the fight. His journey is beautifully portrayed by Russell in the following terms "as developed by Ellison, the protagonist starts as a villainous conservative and he becomes a liberal hero through playing the revolutionary fool. Beginning by trying to

play popular hero roles, he is reshaped by the norms of segregation...he is a mere mechanical man, blindly and cruelly actuated by unjust power, the power of a whole discriminatory society (Nash, 358).