

Chapter 4

The Terms of Proximity and Differences of the Struggle in the Novels

Albert Camus's *The Stranger* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*; both the novels are the product of post world war literature. Both the writers have witnessed the various changes that occurred in the society during the first half of the twentieth century. However, the social scenario of the creation of both the novels is different. Camus's *The Stranger* is about a society where people lost faith in God and questioned their existence whereas Ellison's *Invisible Man* is of the same time but with a different socio-cultural scenario. In his novel, the question of race is seen popping out at times. Camus's society is a post war society which has seen poignant death, and massive killing and thus is disillusioned. The individual in Camus's novel is one who does not believe in God or society and is convinced to live on his own terms. The individual has understood that nothing can provide meaning to life; therefore, he simply lives without any specific purpose and is also aware of the ultimate end; i.e. death that succeeds life. Ellison's *Invisible Man* is from the same time but hails from a different socio-economic scenario. He is a black man in America who lives at a time when racism was still present in the society. But Ellison's protagonist is not only fighting for his existence among the Whites, rather, he is also fighting against the whole society, a combination of both Blacks and Whites in his quest of creating an identity. The protagonist's wish is to be recognised by everyone around. His fight is to make an African American identity, not an African identity in an American society. The struggle of the individual in

Ellison's novel is wider than just the racial context. However, in both the novels, the question of identity and individuality is common.

Camus's *Meursault* rejects the society on his own terms whereas Ellison's *Invisible Man* is compelled to live away from the society due to certain circumstances. In both the novels, there is an individual, who is fighting with the society for his identity and individuality and a society, which is functioning for its own sake. Here in this chapter, a comparative study of both these novels in terms of the struggle between individual and the society is done.

The Question of Struggle

The beginning of the struggle is totally different in both the cases. Camus's hero has no intentions to fight but the society comes in his way of life. He does not react violently but without raising his voice to a higher pitch, he makes the reader feel his struggle. The invisible man, on the other hand, comes in direct contact with society and tries to become a part of the society which rejects him. Unlike Meursault, he wants to be accepted and recognised. It is very much interesting to note that there is no escape from society no matter what one does. In both the cases, the reason the conflict arises are different. Meursault does not want the society to interfere in his life, he does not want to be known, and he only wants to live according to his own will. But the protagonist of Ellison wants the society to recognise him, he wants to go inside the society and he wants to work in such a way that the society will remember him forever. He himself initiates the approach and therefore, the society interferes in his life wholly. The people around him start to use him for their own needs. In the first case, the individual is trying

to go far from the society but is followed by it and in the second case; the individual is following the society which in turn plays with the individual.

Both the novels are about the individuals who stand against the society and struggle for their existence and freedom and they fight in order to get away from the powerful clutches of the society. Various aspects like title of the novels, name of the individuals, their identity, individuality, experiences, struggles, attitudes as well as the role of the society in both the novels in relation to the protagonists are needed to be analysed.

The Individuals:

The individual in Camus's novel is a person who has strong individuality, strong sense of identity and who is concerned with his own life rather than looking at what others are doing. The first impression made by the individual is that of a selfish and an egotistical person. He is a man who does not concern himself with what other think of him or what others do. Rather, his interest is only on what concerns himself. He is a man who is very rational and is ready to face what the world has to offer. He does not expect anything from others, does not use them and passes no judgments on others. He is unmoved by what the convention demands. He always tells the truth which makes him stronger than ever.

On the other hand, the individual of Ellison's novel is a man who is lenient and is easily dominated and manipulated. His sense of individuality and self go through the society and he is not content with what he is. What makes him happy is societal approval rather than his personal achievements. He is always on a quest of finding an identity on societal terms and this search for identity costs him his dignity. He is so very

much dependent on others that he even agrees to forget his past so that his new identity can be formed. He is surrounded by those people who take advantage of him due to his simplicity and trusting nature. He lies, pretends and does all sorts of things due to the immense pressure he feels from outside. To sum up, he is not self-dependent and self-sufficient.

The Society:

The society in Camus's novel is a post war modern society which is disillusioned due to the growing mechanizations, the killings and murders done during the wars. The society is even confused regarding God and is scared not to find any meaning in life. The hollowness is tried to be fulfilled by the people in different ways. Some looked at religion for meaning and some looked at the society to give their life a meaning and some just embraced the meaninglessness and led disillusioned life. To maintain order in life, people looked at society as the unifying force so as to remove the chaos. The society in Camus's novel is deep rooted in conventions. It judges people based on their behaviour. The chaplain, the magistrate, all the other characters gave preference to moral codes rather than rational understanding. They judged Meursault for his emotionless attitude more than the murder which clearly indicates the emotional sensitivity of the society Camus portrayed.

The society in Ellison's novel is of the same time but with a different socio-cultural scenario. America has witnessed a severe case of racial discrimination for a very long time. The society was still somewhat racially prejudiced and the worst cases of racial discrimination were still heard from the South. However, the society in the North was somewhat different from the South and the Black people had started

flourishing in every aspects of life. During the 40s and 50s, the Black people have gained gradual prominence and with the influence of Harlem Renaissance of 1920, they started taking charge in art and literature. The intellectual growth of the Black people was distinct and the black people were not ready to accept their earlier condition. The focus of all the people at that time was to grow and develop individually. Some were fighting for only blacks and some considered both black and white, but whatever is the case, everyone was supporting and fighting for their personal cause.

The society in this novel is full of power hungry people who want to fulfill their own needs no matter what the cost is. Everyone is looking at personal gain only. They would go to any extent to exploit anyone in order to make their personal profit. The single individual who is thoroughly considerate is exploited by everyone. Such is the society in Ellison's novel.

The terms of proximity and differences

Both the novels have an individual on one side and the larger society on the other side and the individuals undergo a struggle with the society in order to keep their individuality intact. However, the route of struggle is somewhat different in both the novels. Despite of having the same aim, the way of the struggle is different and this is what makes the experiences different altogether. Irrespective of the social context, irrespective of the way of behaviour, both the individuals are standing against the society which gives a clear hint of the imminent conflict between any individual with the society provided the individual considers his/her individuality as the most important aspect of his/her character.

At first, the title of both these novels needs due attention. Both the titles are addressed to man, to individuals whose identities have been referred to in relation to their position in the society they belong. The titles represent how the individuals have been looked at and identified in the society. In Camus's novel, the individual is 'the stranger' who is unfamiliar to everyone in the society. The position of the individual has been determined through societal perspective. He is a stranger in the sense that he is different from everyone, he does not do what everyone else does and his reaction to every situation is unique. Therefore, he appears as a strange person when looked at from within the society.

The 'Invisible Man' similarly refers to the protagonist of the novel, the individual. He is referred to as 'invisible man' because he has not been seen by people. His invisibility is the result of the refusal of the people to see him. The title metaphorically implies that the individual, despite of being alive, living among the people, working with them, is still invisible to them because he has never been given the required amount of recognition. Therefore, he is an invisible man; invisible to the inner eyes of the people.

In both the novels, the individuals are not given full names. Camus has given the surname of the protagonist whereas Ellison has completely denied his protagonist any name. Meursault, even though a surname, is enough to represent a man like the protagonist of the novel. The protagonist has his own way of life; own likes and dislikes and no one can impose anything upon him. The absence of first name is the writer's deliberate way of keeping him within society, where he is known but only in fragments. Since the people can not understand him, since his actions are not decipherable by others, since one part of him is remain unknown to others, he is a stranger. On the other

hand, Ellison's protagonist is not given any name at all. The writer has denied him any name in order to emphasise how the protagonist lacks an identity. Moreover, it also means that this invisible man can be identifiable with anyone. Name is the first marker of identity and the writer's not giving him any name is deliberate in order to make the readers understand the intensity of the situation. He is the invisible man throughout. Moreover, he has been given different names at different times which indicates that his identity is not fixed rather it depends on those around whom he is residing. His identity is based on how others want to perceive him.

Camus's Meursault chooses to be a stranger whereas; Ellison's protagonist has been forcefully made invisible. It is not his choice but his condition. Meursault is more like a master of his own life. He directs his life the way he wants and does what he wants to do. All the actions he has done are determined by him and he does not consider what others say or talk about him. On the contrary, the invisible man can not direct his life on his own terms and is never found doing what he really wants. Every step he takes has been decorated and organised by the people around him. The invisible man's inclination towards public opinion is what has made him subordinate to the society. He has accepted the society as his superior and is thus obliged to follow the instructions given to him.

The sense of self of both the characters is different from each other. Meursault's sense of self has been defined by himself. He has a clear view regarding his life and his individuality. He is not dependent on others for how he wants to be looked at. In fact, others' opinion does not matter to him at all. His self-consciousness is untouched by his social-consciousness. He is not a man who would allow other's opinion to mould his life. No matter what other say or do, he gives little attention to that and rather sticks to

his own way. The invisible man, on the other hand, has a strong consideration for others understanding of him. His sense of self is highly depended on how others look at him. In fact, he wants to look the way others want to see him. And thus, in order to fit into other's concept, he very often rejects what he feels and really wants. In Invisible Man's case, his self control and social control are almost inseparable from each other. His self control is directed by the social control that is constantly present. In the words of Roucek, "self-control refers to the individual's attempt to guide his even behaviour in accord with some previously developed ideal, goal or purpose. The goal is, of course, usually determined by the values and folkways of the group to which the individual belongs" (Roucek, 1956, 3-4).

Rameschandra S. Betai writes "...when 99 people united as a purposive group their purpose assumed a sort of spiritual entity, expanding the 99 to 100 persons in the total group. Once the social organism takes on the property of a person, its importance overwhelms all its constituent atoms, and its welfare becomes the object of chief concern. From that point, it is easy to go to any length in arguing the superiority of the group over the individual" (Betail, 329). One person's objectives always get submerged to the objectives of the total group. This is the rule of society, there is no space for 'I' but everyone has to work for the group. The group is numerically bigger than the individual and therefore, the importance of the group is bigger than the individual. If a person's wishes and desires somehow contradict with that of the group, he/she has to give up that desire so as not to contradict with the group or society. The importance of society surpasses the individual and irrespective of the situation, the individual has to contribute his/her part. This type of obligation is what has made the individual inferior to society. The protagonist of Ellison's novel is an individual who finds himself very

much dependent on society for everything. His sense of identity is hugely depended on how he has been looked at by others. The protagonist believed that by walking on the way shown by the people, he will achieve respect and recognition. But this was his fatal flaw which led only to his miseries and nothing more. He was, in fact, told by the Brotherhood members that one individual does not count when it comes to the group.

Meursault, on the other hand, is not the hundredth person to be submerged within the group but is the one who would stand apart and alone with all his differences no matter what. What is good for society and what society wants has no place in his life. He does what he wants without considering how others will look at him or think of him. His sense of his self is determined, directed by himself. Meursault dismisses everything that comes between him and his individuality. No one can influence him and no one can change him.

Every individual is different and has different sets of likes, dislikes, attributes and behavioural characteristics. Therefore, to expect the similar kind of attitude from all the individuals is irrational. But society has some set principles and codes of conducts which are applicable to all. This symmetrical perspective held by the group is not possible for everyone. Some people make compromises but some people might find it an unnecessary imposition. Social life is useful for a peaceful living but in making this to happen, different people have to behave differently which is not true to them. Meursault is a man who does not compromise his traits. He has strong regards for his individuality which the society fails to recognise. The society's habit of bringing similarity among people seems uncomfortable when Meursault arrives at the scene. Meursault lives with his differences and he does not pay much attention to what others say. The imposition from outside to be 'socially appropriate' (in the light of the novel

itself) will make him to pretend, therefore, he rejects the pretension. He was told several times to lie so as to look agreeable but this kind of compromise is what Meursault rejects.

But the invisible man is not a man of strong individuality. He knows his differences but does not regard them as higher. He, for the sake of outside world, takes up pretensions, displays expected behaviours and even gets ready to forget his past that has shaped him so far. His individuality is of less value than the social approval. The novel bears several examples of the protagonist's giving up of what he really thinks of himself and he does these compromises so that he can get recognition. Compromising one's interests completely is a sign of weak individuality. He does not have enough faith in himself. He is constantly under a kind of social control "Social control takes place when a person is induced or forced to act according to the wishes of others, whether or not in accordance with his own individual interests" (Rocek, 1956, 3).

Self confidence is another interesting aspect that comes forward when we talk about an individual standing against a group. While going against something as big as society, an individual needs a high sense of self confidence. The individual needs to possess a strong believe in what he/she is doing and in his/her convictions. Society is the combination of many individuals who have certain norms binding them together. To become someone who is not ready to compromise, to conform to the group's ideals, not to yield in any circumstances require huge amount of self-confidence. Meursault, the 'strange' protagonist of Camus's novel possesses high self-confidence. He does not care for the conventions, no matter how many times he was asked to pretend to do what is widely accepted, he sticks to his own convictions. No one can influence him throughout

and neither did he have any expectation from anyone. He was just relying on what he was doing and he is taking responsibility for his own actions.

The invisible man, on the contrary, does not have that amount of self confidence required for standing against the society. He, in fact, did not want to stand against the society but with the society. His lifelong wish was to be renowned and recognised by other people. Therefore, his sense of self was determined by others. His self confidence was so low that he “felt that only these men (those present in the Battle Royal) could judge truly my ability” (Ellison, 2016, 25). He follows orders and instructions, he is ready to give up his past experiences and he even takes the responsibility of something which he has not done just for the sake of gaining importance in others’ eyes. This lenient nature of his has made him a victim of the game played by others. This would not have been the case if he was strong enough to stand on his own against all the odds of the society. His lack of self-confidence is what has made him to fall prey all the times, it has made him vulnerable.

The public opinion and the individual insights in both the novels become interesting while evaluating the course of struggle under study. The public opinion supposedly concerns the benefit of the whole society. The public opinion is concentrated on ‘general will’ that is ‘public interest’ (Rousseau, 1971, 72). Rousseau even differentiates the will of individuals and the general will and writes “general will only regards the common interest and will of all regards private interest and is indeed but a collection of the will of the individuals: but remove from these the wills that oppose each other, and then the general will remains” (Rousseau, 1971, 72). The wills of all the individuals can never be similar; therefore, the ‘general will’ is the only possible will for a group. The ‘general will’ addresses to the general public but with

least due consideration for the individual wills because it is not possible to consider all the wills of all the individuals altogether at once. Therefore, the public opinion is hardly matching to the expectations of the individual wills. All the individuals have their personal understanding and personal insights which can represent neither the society; nor the society can represent each and every individual. Therefore, the problem arises when the public opinion requires the compromise of the personal insights.

In both the novels under study, similar conflict arises. In *The Stranger*, the society demands an emotionally devastated behaviour from the person whose family member has died. It is known that when someone dies, the family members of the deceased are saddened but it is not compulsory. It is a matter of feelings and emotions which is very personal to an individual. Meursault is saddened by the death of his mother but he is a rational man who understands the reality quickly. Moreover, he does not believe in pretensions rather he prefers to show what he feels. He is entitled to his own opinion regarding the course of actions. But this attitude does not come under the public opinion. According to the conventions, a person who does not display proper 'required' emotions at due times is considered odd (in the light of the novel). Meursault's personal feelings here come in conflict with that of the society.

The invisible man, on the other hand, is very much dependent on the public opinion rather than on his personal insights. Whatever he feels, he denies for the sake of others' approval. His consideration of others' opinion more than his own is what weakens him and makes him vulnerable to the ravages of a ruthlessly selfish society. He is asked to sacrifice his personal opinion for the sake of the Committee of Brotherhood. He has been judged throughout by everyone and his wants have been surpassed for others. He even goes on to shape his likes in the light of what others will make out of it.

Not eating pork chops, not raising his voice and showing the best behaviour he could are some of the examples of how his personal space has been directed by public opinion. In fact, public opinion works as a force of social control over an individual. Especially on a person like the invisible man, whose understanding of him is reliant on the outside agencies, public opinion serves as the directive principle. "Conformity plays an important role in the determination of a person's attitude, and to the extent that the need for approval creates real pressure toward conformity, there must be conformity towards opinion of others..." (Roucek, 1956, 400).

The way of struggle is also different in both the novels. Despite of having the similar kind of aim in mind, both the individuals struggle in a very different manner. One's struggle is to keep him away from the clutches of society and the other's is to fit into the society. But the aim of both the characters is to keep their individuality and identity intact. Camus's Meursault is someone who 'does not play the game' and 'he is a man who, without any heroic pretensions, agrees to die for the truth' (Camus, 2010, 118-119). Meursault's way of struggle is not an aggressive one. He tries not to get involved in anything that does not concern his interest. His honesty and readiness to accept what comes in is what makes him unique. He, in fact, in the beginning does not feel that he is in a struggle. It is only when he was charged for not reacting properly at mother's death and trialed for it that he realises he is a subsequent threat to the society "I felt something stirring up the whole room; for the first time I realised that I was guilty" (Camus, 2010, 87). It made him realise that it is his way of living that is what has made him so different from others and thus questionable. However, during his entire living, he was constantly struggling as an individual not to be judged for what he does and how he does. His struggle is not a direct one; rather his way of living comes in

conflict with the society. At times, he has been forced to follow the set ideals of the society which is too much for him. Therefore his mode of struggle is not following the conventions and being himself.

But the invisible man struggles with all his might in order to create his identity. There is society on the other end which, the protagonist considers as superior to him. He believes that identity is the result of others' perception of him and his own understanding of himself is subordinate to society. He struggles so passionately that he gets ready to do whatever it costs to gain recognition. His way of struggle is opposite to what Meursault does. He does what the society dictates, he accepts what the society offers and he even exhibits the most desirable behaviour. He does what he is asked to do and in this process, he becomes a puppet at the hands of the society. His way of struggle is through accepting everything. However, towards the end of his struggle, when he fails to attain what he expected, he rejects everything he had accepted till now and decides to do whatever pleases him.

The struggle of the individuals in both the novels is very different in nature but Meursault's aim is to defend his identity and the invisible man's is to create his identity and Meursault takes up rejection as a mode of struggle whereas the invisible man takes acceptance as the way out.

The role played by the society in both the cases is very much interesting and similar in nature. The society in Camus novel believes in social conventions and its denial by anyone is something unacceptable. The society interferes in personal lives and even dictates the emotional responses at personal matters. Its conventions dictate the 'mechanical' behaviour from an individual (i.e. to do what is expected without considering real feelings). The integrity of the society lies in the strict adherence to the

social norms by its members. Its constituents should be those individuals who are ready to do away with their personal concerns so as to promote the groups' ideals. Irrespective of the differences among the people, it demands certain behavioural aspects from everyone which is difficult at an individual level. Therefore those people, who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of society (no matter what their needs are) become 'invisible'. 'Invisible' in the sense that they are not considered individually but are automatically associated with the group. But those who do not conform to the norms and stick to their own interests become 'stranger', stranger in the sense that they appear odd and unique due to their different attitude among others who mingle without any question.

Retreating is the movement of Meursault; retreating from the society or withdrawal. He observes everything happening around objectively. The descriptions in the novel from Meursault's mouthpiece are very objective in nature. Meursault's retreat is seen from the very beginning when he, without considering what the people will make out of, gets involved in casual activities immediately after his mother died. His withdrawal from the social actions is understandable because society puts some unwanted impositions on human beings. There is no rational rule written anywhere that a son whose mother has just died can not drink coffee or can not get physical comfort by someone. But the prosecutor, being a representative of the society states the 'rule' that "...a stranger may offer a cup of coffee, but a son must refuse it beside the body of the one who brought him into the world" (Camus, 2010, 88). Society is an establishment which functions depending upon many such rules which have no rational authenticity. The moral nature of society is what makes it look more irrational. It becomes necessary here to note that "The system of rules, conventions and requirements which make up the

orderliness of human society is artificial, arbitrary, and sometimes not altogether defensible. In all societies, it has been, and in ours, can only be, maintained by the vigilant and insistent exercise of control” (Roucek, 1956, 36). Because Meursault did not show ultimate pain at his mother’s demise, he was accused of not having a soul “had no access to any humanity nor to any of the moral principles which protect the human heart” and “his heart is so empty that it forms a chasm which threatens to engulf society” (Camus, 2010, 98).

The approach of Meursault towards society is of withdrawal. He does not get involved in the social codes of conduct and follows what he believes. This retreat from the society is what makes him a significant character. This retreat is his going back to the ‘natural state of man’ (Rousseau, 1971, 48). Meursault leads an emotionally self-sufficient life. He understands the way of nature and therefore accepts everything as it is. Getting involved into society is for him like living in others’ opinions. The reason behind his non-conformity to society is “...generated out of the claim that man is by nature a-social and the fact that he lives in society, he must live as if he is what he is not” (McArdle, 253). Because of the ‘social contract’ an individual can no more act instinctively but his/her instinct will be substituted by ‘justice’ (Rousseau, 1971, 48). Meursault is a person whose all actions are driven by his instincts; his ‘passive’ reaction at his mother’s death, his intimacy with Marie and his killing of the Arab; all of these things are natural to him. Therefore, to go to society will be too restricting for him. His actions are even understood in the light of ‘pleasure pain mechanism’ in the body which serves as an ‘automatic guardian’ (Rand, 1964, 12). He gets involved in those activities which give him pleasure. Similarly, his killing of the Arab is due to his instinct, as it

was hot and he was sweating and at the same time the blade of the knife shined which caused him to involuntarily pull the trigger.

The invisible man's approach is totally opposite to that of Meursault. He goes closer to society, lives in the society embedded in its ideals and processes but only to realise that his contact is leading in one sided benefit only. The movement of the individual towards society in this novel is for inclusion at any cost. The individual is conscious not to bring his 'natural state' (Rousseau, 1971, 48) on his social image. He is always ready to display what is needed in the society. The most appropriate behaviour in front of everyone is what the protagonist's way of being agreeable. However, this particular aspect has brought him far from what he really is. Because he has suppressed all the anger, all his wishes and likes under an appearance in order to look appropriate. The best comeback is seen when, he without any shame, orders a plate of yam to eat and says "I yam what I am!.....I no longer felt ashamed of the things I had always loved....What and how much had I lost by trying to do only what was expected of me instead of what I myself had wished to do?" (Ellison, 2016, 256). The other comeback is seen when he crawls into the manhole to be what he actually is, it is only at the end he goes back to his personal interests. But before that, his entire journey to be 'civilized man' (McArdle, 253) brought only disasters to his life. His final retreat to himself gave him something which his earlier associations did not offer "something which the savage enjoys and which civilized (sociable) man has lost, 'surrendered'. The primitive thing is the feeling of his own existence which has been lost in the manyness of the opinions of others." This "return to the state of nature is a turning within to the isolated self sufficiency of the essential private self. This experience is not thinking but feeling of his

own existence. As feeling it is essentially private and un-shareable, as feeling of oneself it is whole for itself, self-sufficient” (McArdle, 254).

The concept of morality in terms of society is based on self-sacrifice. Who, in fact, decides collectivized ethics? What is good for a person can be bad for others. It always ends up in someone’s sacrifice. A person willing to sacrifice his/her personal happiness for the sake of others is considered to be a morally elevated person. Decoding the social morality, it can be understood that the happiness of others at personal costs is desirable and appreciated. It does not speak much about personal happiness. Ayn Rand has made an interesting observation in this regard “The moral purpose of a man’s life is the achievement of his own happiness...it does mean that he does not subordinate his life to the welfare of others, that he does not sacrifice himself to their needs, that the relief of their suffering is not his primary concern, that any help he gives is an exception, not a rule, an act of generosity, not of moral duty, that it is marginal and incidental-as disasters are marginal and incidental in the course of human existence...” (Rand, 1964, 34). Meursault seeks his happiness or contentment in his regular activities but it comes in the way of social moral code. His decision not to sacrifice his personal comfort for others’ approval of him is what makes him the odd one. His physical intimacy with Marie is perfectly justifiable at an individual level but on social level, it is unacceptable. For Meursault, it is an appetite just like hunger, but in the eyes of society, seeking physical comfort after a dear one’s death is immoral.

The protagonist of Ellison, on the contrary, is always ready to compromise his happiness although not for others but for his dependency on others, for his identity. His sacrifice is oriented towards his own identity but it results otherwise. Sacrifice of his dignity, sacrifice of his past and family and sacrifice of his earlier identity gave others

opportunities to use him. His sacrifices were taken as his weakness and were used against him to weaken him for personal use by others. His decency and quick trusting nature made him a tool at the hands of the Brotherhood who used him in furthering their cause, and when, he started to question, he was made to realise that he is nothing but a tool for them. It is only later he realises that “any doctrine of group activities that does not recognize individual rights is a doctrine of mob rule or legalized lynching” (Rand, 1964, 73). It is ‘legalized’ because it is decided by the group and group is automatically considered as superior to an individual. The protagonist feels that his individuality has been breached upon by the group, in fact by every group he comes to encounter with. Be it Brotherhood, Liberty Paints or the factory hospital, the protagonist is not given a chance to speak for himself but is judged and used without his consent.

Societal impositions are, in a way, barriers in the path of individual freedom. Without freedom, retaining individuality is not possible. Individuality is what makes an individual distinct, separate from others. It is the combination of his/her likes dislikes, desires, wishes, aspirations etc. In the words of Branden “...individuality and interdependence are logically inseparable. The basic independence of the individualist consist of his loyalty to his own mind; it is his perception of the facts of reality, his understanding, his judgment that he refuses to sacrifice to the unproved assertions of others” (Branden, 1964, 98). The interesting thing to note here is that society is made for individuals, its aim is to make people’s lives easy and smooth but the situation has turned and the society has, in fact, started controlling individual’s lives.

Meursault is very particular about his likes and dislikes and he does not tolerate any interference from the society. When he was dictated to behave in the particular way as shown by the lawyer or the chaplain in the prison, he rejects their notions. He refuses

to say what is not true to him in the court, and to the Chaplain, he reacts violently and claims that he is 'sure of his life, sure of his death and sure of everything' that happens to him because it is his choice (Camus, 2010, 114). In this regard, Meursault has succeeded in keeping his individuality intact. It is only at the end when he was trialed and condemned; he was dominated by the society. But the best part is, even at that situation, society can not take over him but only can exercise its power from outside.

The invisible man, on the other hand, does not have this kind of freedom. All his actions are governed by his social implications which gave others a scope of entering into his life and thus taking his freedom away. As it has already been known that without freedom individualism is not possible, therefore, the invisible man's wish to become a strong individual can not be fulfilled as he has already compromised his position. He is the person who started his career in Brotherhood with stopping an eviction of an old couple but is pushed so much by the committee that he ends up with a reversal where he, being trapped in a riot, helps a gang to evict a building and burn it down, but he did not know what and why he was doing. It was just because the group did that way, the protagonist also went with the flow. The question of freedom arises from the very first episode of *Battle Royal* where he was forcefully made to enter into a fight with his friends against his will. In the college also, he was expelled without considering what he has to say. Similarly, in the *Liberty Paints*, he was dismissed, judged and attacked without any consideration of his views. After the explosion, the doctors in the factory hospital treated him as well as experimented on him even though he wanted to get out of there. And the last example of his freedom being denied is his experience in *Brotherhood* where he was asked to talk but only others' words. He was asked not to think or act as he pleases but was strictly instructed to follow the protocol.

He could only speak what he was given to speak. His actions were restricted; therefore, his freedom was taken away. In all the examples, the protagonist is seen acting under pressure and all the outside agencies using him on their own terms. He tolerated and even accepted all the infringement into his space. "I had kept unswervingly to the path placed before me, had tried to be exactly what I was expected to be, had done exactly what I was expected to do..." (Ellison, 2016, 143). And because of all these reasons his individuality has been compromised to a greater extent. The only way to keep it safe is to go far away from all the people.

While coming into contact with the society; both the protagonists are excluded from the discussion that decided their fate. During the trial of Meursault, his lawyer asks him to keep quiet and decides to handle his fate all by himself. Meursault feels that he is being excluded from the discussion that concerns his life "they seemed to be conducting the case independently of me. Things were happening without me even intervening. My fate was decided without anyone asking my opinion" (Camus, 2010, 95). He was judged by others on the light of the prosecutor and the lawyer's opinions. Meursault feels that his exclusion from the discussion is a way of turning him into 'insignificance' (Camus, 2010, 100). The society does not consider the individual's opinion while making a judgment because it is generally agreed that human beings are liable to be judged by the society. The concept of moral code keeps the society above the individual "The social theory of ethics substitutes 'society' for god- and although it claims that its chief concern is life on earth, it is not the life of men, not the life of an individual, but the life of a disembodied entity, the collective, which, in relation to every individual, consists of everybody except himself. As far as the individual is concerned, his ethical duty is to be

selfless, voiceless, right less slave of any need, claim or demand asserted by others” (Rand, 1964, 24).

Similarly, the invisible man is also kept away from the discussion that concerned him. The letters written by Dr. Bledsoe to the distinguished persons were about to change the protagonist’s fate. After he was expelled from the college, he moved to the North, his future depended on those letters but he was specifically instructed not to open those. He trusted Bledsoe and did as instructed but was denied any job he was expecting to get. Dr. Bledsoe, being a powerful person shaped his fate without being physically present. The instruction not to open the letters is, in a way, an exclusion of the protagonist from the creation of his own fate. The Liberty Paints is another example where he is being judged as an object “they have made their decisions without giving me a chance to speak for myself” (Ellison, 2016, 215).

The discussion among the doctors and nurses in the factory hospital is another interesting example of this kind. He could hear them talk about the experimentations that are to be done with his body but he was not considered. The doctor’s not hearing his call when he shouted is an instance of how his body is also at others’ hands. The ‘no importance’ (Ellison, 2016, 228) of his psychology is the ultimate level of objectification. His physical response to the electric shock is a matter of entertainment for them. The post-hospital life of the protagonist is tried to be re-arranged by the doctors who assured that ‘society will suffer no trauma on his account’ (Ellison, 2016, 228). In Brotherhood, his course of actions was determined by the committee and he was asked to follow the instructions without considering his personal understanding. In all these cases, he is being looked at objectively. His life, his feelings and

understandings are not of matter to those who decided his fate and he is pushed to the boundary whenever the situation demanded.

Considering the social perspective, individuals are an essential part of the society. Individuals can not be separated from the society and since they are the constituents of the society, it is automatically expected from the individuals to behave in a socially approved manner. Laurie Spurling's study on the relationship between society and individual enlightens the understanding of how and why social implication is considered to be readymade to the individuals. According to Spurling, society and individuals are interdependent "...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 still allows my own individuality to develop" (Spurling, 1977, 86). Therefore, society as a unifying force does not look at an individual as a separate entity. It includes the individual within its horizon and therefore, the conventional control comes into existence. The society in Camus's novel is governed by similar idea and therefore, Meursault is a member of the society who has to behave accordingly. The integrity of the society, in fact, lies in the unity among the individual. But Meursault appears to belong to a different 'breed' due to his casual behaviour, indifference and instinctive behaviour at all times. His lack of emotional display is what shocks the society. The caretaker's clarification of his non-emotional attitude is to consider him within the group. In fact, all other instances like the chaplain's insistence on God, the lawyers' insistence on lying (which is not lie according to the lawyer) are the ways of Meursault's inclusion within the societal

norms. But when Meursault remains adamant, he becomes a threat to the society, and therefore, is removed ultimately. Meursault is a person who does not understand the social inclination, he finds it unreasonable to act the way the convention demands. For him, the social activity is a kind of 'mechanism' and he is caught inside it. "The papers often talked about a debt being owed to society. According to them, it had to be paid" (Camus, 2010, 105) Meursault does not understand how he has been indebted automatically. "He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings and society immediately feels threatened" (Camus, 2010: 118-119). The judgment was made on his peculiarities rather than on his criminality. In fact, the society could not digest the peculiarity of Meursault and therefore it was better for the society to remove the danger so as to retain the integrity of the society. Meursault's impression of the trial was expressive of how and why the trial was made and he was sure that his 'peculiarity proved his criminality' (Camus, 2010: 81).

But the reversal of this situation is seen in Ellison's novel. The protagonist of the novel displays all the qualities expected by the society, he displays the most desirable behaviour and in fact, his objective is to fit into the society. But, in this case, the society is found taking advantage of the individual. It is the individual's integrity that is under attack in this novel. The protagonist's acceptance of everything imposed upon him has posited the society in an advantageous position above the individual. His trusting nature has made him vulnerable and the people around him used him as a tool for their personal gain without considering how he would feel.

In both the novels, it can be observed that considering the importance of society, society behaves in a very different manner but it is common that it does not give importance to the individual needs. Neither Meursault being indifferent nor invisible

man being considerate, are benefited from the society. Both are found suffering on their own way.

Talking about the suffering of the individuals at the hands of the society, Meursault's suffering has only one layer because he suffers directly at the hands of the society. There is no double oppression and no other agencies are involved. He faces the societal intervention in his regular activities. However, the suffering of the invisible man is multi-dimensional, intersectional. Intersectional in the sense that he is not simply dominated or sidelined by the white society only, but also by the society in general. The invisible man suffers at the hand of the society because of his vulnerable nature. But he is not just taken for granted as an individual but also as a black individual. Ellison himself has written that his intention is not to write a protest novel against racism. But the suffering of the protagonist is certainly worsened because of his race. He is a black person who is in a quest of finding an African American identity. Because of the racially prejudiced background, he is already being looked down upon.

There are several instances of racial issues in the novel which show that his sufferings are multidimensional; because he is an individual fighting against a big society and he is a black individual. The advice of his grandfather regarding the behaviour of the people of his community furthers the racial issue and at due times he gets confused when he comes in contact with white people "when I was praised for my conduct I felt a guilt that in some way I was doing something that was really against the wishes of the white folks" (Ellison, 2016 16). The fear during his tour with Norton, Norton's attitude regarding Jim Trueblood's shameful act "But that should not be so strange. I understand that your people.." (Ellison, 2016, 49) etc. are the example of racial stereotypes. Because of the fear of being stereotyped, the protagonist refuses to

eat pork chops and grits and “it was a sign of discipline” (Ellison, 2016, 172). Not to behave in a racially stereotyped manner is what his standard of behaviour was because he wanted to look more polished. It makes it clear that to adhere to his racial attitude (his natural tendencies) is what would make him look more primitive and undesired. In this sense he is constantly under pressure to behave otherwise so as to look more desirable. This constant pressure is doubled when he is oppressed as an individual by the society indiscriminately. These two things are working on him and that is why, his suffering is double or ‘intersectional’ in comparison to that of Meursault who is tried to be dominated by a general society.

Both the novels can be read as social satires where the society exercises its power over the individuals without considering their individuality. Camus has written about a society which is driven by the conventions so much that the people tend to judge anyone who has different ideals from the group. The chaplain’s insistence on God, the judge calling Meursault an ‘antichrist’ shows that the society is inclined towards God. The moral judgment on Meursault is indicative of the fact that the society lacked rationality. The heights is seen when Meursault is sentenced to be ‘decapitated in a public square in the name of French people’ (Camus, 2010, 103) but during the trial the murder was hardly discussed on. All the discussion was related to his behaviour and not with the killing. It is interesting to note that the people who accused him of not being emotional at the mother’s death are absolutely fine with the death sentence of a person. The question is what kind of emotion do they hold?

Ellison’s novel is also a social satire which reveals the true nature of society. The protagonist has been used and exploited by everyone around him just because he agreed to all. It clearly exposes the hypocrisy of the people who would not let go a

single chance to use anything and everything they find for their personal gain. Emerson and Sybil along with all other social establishments are the best examples of people who would not think twice before using a person for their benefit. As long as the protagonist fulfills their purpose, he was welcomed. But as soon as he took a stance, he was removed from the scenario or was belittled. The hypocrite society used the individual for its gain but ultimately, when he realised the game, he removed himself from everywhere. He has understood that amidst the society, he, as an individual has always been invisible.

In the light of Rousseau's VIII chapter of *The Social Contract*, the 'primitive man' is Meursault who works through his instincts, driven by his physical impulse and he regards only himself and the 'civilized man' is Invisible Man who is very much serious about his duty, considers others' principles rather than own impulses and believes in justice (Rousseau, 48-49). But no matter what they are, both suffer at the hands of the society. The ending of both the novels brings an end to the struggle of the individuals. The ending of *The Stranger* is although easily accepted by the protagonist; it indicates that there is no escape from the society. No matter what one does, how one behaves, the indifference of an individual is only strong enough to challenge the society but it can not win over the society. Society finds out its own way to bring a settlement. The condemnation of Meursault is the settlement brought about by the society and it clearly indicates that society holds the power in changing the fate of an individual.

Similarly, the ending of *Invisible Man* suggests that to gain societal approval is not an easy task, and to do what the society demands even at the cost of personal choices makes one lose his/her place completely. What society needs is a balance between both personal and social life.

However, Meursault's death is more a failure than invisible man's withdrawal. Meursault accepts his death without any dejection. From an absurdist point of view, his understanding of the inevitability of death is justifiable. But if it is approached as the ending of an individual's struggle against society, it is a failure because "if an individual actually consents to die, and when the occasion arises, accepts death as a consequence of his rebellion, he demonstrates that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of common good which he considers more important than his own destiny" (Camus, 1960, 21). Accepting death is like accepting the society's decision regarding his fate in which, he is not even involved.

The ending of *Invisible Man* is, on the other hand, a little optimistic in nature. After long submission to the demands of the society, he has found solace in his own company. He has withdrawn from the society because he has finally understood that he can not change his position. His final withdrawal into a manhole in his sole company is, in a way, a wining since it gives him a scope to be himself without any imposition. His final decision to take his social responsibility by being invisible in fact keeps him in an advantageous position. Therefore, *Invisible Man's* ending is, in a way, brings a better condition for an individual. But removing oneself from the society completely and withdrawing is not a big prize either.

It becomes quite clear that by taking up what the society has to offer, an individual becomes vulnerable and is used by the hypocrite society, but at the same time, by disregarding the society completely also, there is no way out. Society finds a way to remove the odd one. Therefore, the final solution is to create a balance between the personal life and the social life so that one looks neither too socially inclined nor too driven by personal impulses. But in the process, one becomes an actor acting out the

role only. In the words of Laurie Spurling, “The term ‘role’ has been traditionally employed in sociology to indicate the point of insertion of the individual in the ‘social structure’. Or, to be more accurate, there was no place for individuals, for concrete men, in the models of social structure in sociology, but only role players or actors, stripped of any power of innovation or creativity, and who acted in conformity to normative or expected patterns of behaviour as laid down by the social structure” (Spurling, 1977, 87).

The question of authority is decided by how the writers have resolved the issue of struggle in the novels. In both the cases, the individuals are finally removed from the scenario which indicates that the authority is at the hand of the society and not with the individual. No matter what the individual’s demands are, his/her fate is ultimately decided by the society. In Ellison’s novel, the protagonist lastly talks about taking up his social responsibility, but that too by sticking to his invisibility. Therefore, the role society plays in deciding the individual’s fate is undeniable.