

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 11 November 2012

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Assistant Managing Editor: Swarna Thirumalai, M.A.

## Survival of Blacks A Study of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

Anu Sheokand, M.A., M.Phil. (English)

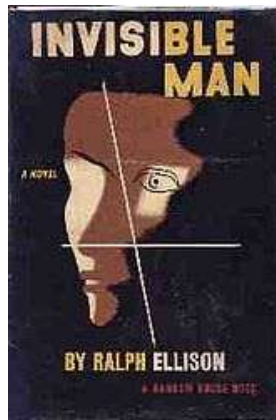


Ralph Waldo Ellison (1914-1994)

Courtesy: <http://macaulay.cuny.edu/eportfolios/drabik11/3-2/ralph-ellison/>

## Ralph Waldo Ellison

Ralph Waldo Ellison (1914-1994), a celebrated black American novelist, portrays the travails of survival both of self and society. He was not a prolific writer but his only novel *Invisible Man* that appeared in 1952 has immortalized him. *Invisible Man* which won the National Book Award in 1952, is acclaimed by many critics as one of the best American novels which is concerned with the identity and humanity of a black individual.



### *Invisible Man* – An American Classic

This novel has been heralded from the beginning as an American classic and polled as the most distinguished book in a Book-Week poll for the period of twenty years (Hassan, Contemporary 2). It has won many awards and accolades for the writer and has given him the distinction of being among “the most decorated of American writers” (Ellison, Going 45). The book has successfully presented the socio-cultural conditions in the form of a struggle of its nameless protagonist and this namelessness if metaphorically interpreted, itself raises the issue of identity and survival.

### Neither Pessimistic Nor Cynical

Ellison belongs to the category of those writers who have not turned pessimistic or cynical in spite of living in the world of chaos, who reveals faith in the essential goodness of the human world, man’s capacity to transcend the limitations imposed by colour or race and hope to explore infinite possibilities of survival. He says, “When I write, I am trying to make a sense out of chaos” (Hassan, Contemporary 3). Although Ellison’s canon limits itself to just one novel and a number of literary essays, he reveals a wide range of concerns as a novelist. Ellison’s

avowed aim is “to create novels that celebrate human life and therefore are realistic and ceremonial at their core. Thus they would preserve as they destroy, affirm as they reject” (Hassan, Radical 3).

### **Effective Statement on the Predicament of Life**

*Invisible Man*, Ellison’s masterpiece is a very effective statement on the predicament of life and what it means to be a Negro, as well as what it means to be an American undergoing the ugliness and brutality of the complex, varied American experience. In his writings Ralph Ellison created the conscience of his race which he himself claimed:

We are, we were born and became through our experience the “conscience” of the Negro people although they don’t fully recognize it yet. But our destiny is something more than that: it is to become the conscience of the United States. I know that now .... This is our country to an extent no one has yet set down. We might as well quit evading the issue and get busy breathing the breath of real life into its half-alive form (5).

### **The Protagonist**

The protagonist in *Invisible Man* is a young black American whose story begins when he has already at the age of twenty. He receives his schooling in his native town and has been awarded a scholarship as a prize for his graduation speech and is admitted to the college for Negroes in the same state. There he is expelled from the institution by its black President, Dr. Bledsoe, for having taken one of the distinguished white trustees of the college, Norton, to the shabby and dilapidated Negro dwellings and to a house of ill-fame known as the Golden Day. He goes to the Northern city of New York, with the college president’s letters of recommendation with a vague promise that the young man would be readmitted to the institution after a time. In New York he gets a job at Liberty Paints, but is soon badly let down by his immediate boss, Lucius Brockway, a Negro himself.

After this the invisible man enlists himself as a member of an organization called the Brotherhood, an organization which works actively for a mutual understanding between the whites and the blacks in New York. The protagonist begins his work sincerely and zealously,

first in Harlem and later downtown. There he receives urgent summons from the headquarters and is informed that Brother Tod Clifton, has suddenly disappeared.

The protagonist goes back to Harlem and finds that the people have fallen considerably under the influence of Ras, the Exhorter who is a fanatical black man, opposed to the aims and purposes of the Brotherhood. Soon, the invisible man alienates the top leadership of the organization by his action in arranging funeral for Tod Clifton, who is shot down by a white policeman in a public street where he in the disguise of a hawker, had been found selling toy dolls, contrary to the regulations . Then he is directed by Brotherhood's theoretician, Brother Hambro, to do what the top leadership tells. Invisible man also comes to know about Rinehart, an imposter. He encounters Ras, the Exhorter, who orders to hang the invisible man. The invisible man escapes from the fury of the mob and takes shelter in a manhole in a sewer, and, falling asleep there because of sheer exhaustion and fatigue, sees a dream in which he is castrated by Dr.Bledsoe, Mr.Norton, Brother Jack, Brother Hambro, Ras and others.

Waking up he still hopes that some sort of understanding between the blacks and whites would emerge because America is one, though woven of many strands. Thus, in the end the only solution of racial problem is the harmonious interweaving of the diverse strands of various cultures, races, and beliefs, that a satisfactory living can be achieved by a nation as a whole. Therefore, we find that the novel embodies the progress of the protagonist from illusion to perception where this protagonist becomes the representative not merely of black American psyche but also of entire mankind, inclusive of social justice and equality, and of survival itself. Ellison was greatly aggrieved by the negative image of Negroes in fictional and non fictional writings. He lamented the fact that there was not an American Negro drawn "as that sensitively focused process of opposites, of good and evil, of instinct and intellect, of passion and spirituality, which great literary art has projected as the image of man" (Ellison, Twentieth 3). His effort in writing *Invisible Man* was directed towards the creation of a protagonist who possessed the full ambiguity of the human.

### **Novel in the Form of Episodes**

The novel in the form of episodes covers the history of black Americans from the Reconstruction period to World War II, inclusive of the black-white relationships in pre war

south, the influence of Booker T. Washington's strategy for Negro development and the impact of large scale migration from the South to the North. Granville Hicks remarks, "What such a novel as *Invisible Man* does is to demonstrate that American Negro is deserving of not only political and economic but cultural equality" (60).

Since the novel covers a substantial part of the African American history, it deals with various modes of black survival in white America. These range from the physical survival to cultural and spiritual survival. Since survival essentially included entry into the main stream America, Ellison's attempt is to harmonize Negro culture with general American culture so that Americans at large can understand the tenor of Negro life. Since meaningful survival implies preservation of their primary identity as blacks and right to their identity as Americans, his survival is unity in the diversity of American life and civilization. This Ellison has shown in his novel very effectively.

### **Hero's Sensibility**

Ellison has shown the great influence of black folklore, jazz and the blues on the hero's sensibility. Such artistic expressions have provided the rituals which give order to the chaos of black experience and become a base for survival. Ellison in his collection of essays *Shadow and Act* says, "Folklore projects the wisdom in symbols which express the group's will to survive; it embodies those values by which the group lives and dies" (Ellison, *The World* 171). Ellison was attracted towards jazz from his early youth. A jazz session is one where creation, reception, composition, and performance blend together. The emphasis on constant overcoming and transcendence through act has given not only a musical arrangement to the entire novel but has also celebrated the invisible man's struggle for survival against all odds. *Invisible Man* also shows a more direct influence of the blues.

The novel has many blue singers Tim Trueblood, Mary Rambo and the cart man Peter Wheatstraw. The novel is so enriched with blues that it has been called "a blues odyssey" and even "the literary extension of the blues" (Murray 167). The existence of this element strengthens their primary identity and thus helps them to survive under oppression.

### **Humour – Another Tool for Survival**

Another tool of survival which Ellison opts in this novel is humour. He observed in an interview that white Americans depend upon blacks' ability to retain an optimistic or comic view of life: "if blacks can stay optimistic, how bad can things be for everybody else?" (O'Meally, *The Craft* 45) The novel is replete with examples of ethnic humour which is ironic in nature. An example of the use of a popular black rhyme is Lucius Brockway's motto for Liberty Paints: "If it's optic white, It's the Right White" that is based on

If you're white, you're right

If you're brown, turn around

If you're black, get back.

(O'Meally, *New* 11)

There is also a comic element when the grandfather advises the protagonist to, "undermine'em with grins" (13). Ellison has also provided opportunities for the whites to laugh at blacks and thus, blacks become buffoons to the white. Clearly it does not at all mean acceptance of Negro inferiority. Thus, in *Invisible Man* Ellison adopts the comic attitude towards life that facilitates survival.

### **Three Parts – Prologue, Narration and Epilogue: Meaning of Survival**

Ellison has divided the novel into three parts- Prologue, Narration and Epilogue. Through these the writer shows how the protagonist begins his life, what he experiences and how he learns to be a survivor. The protagonist's idealism and ambition of becoming another Booker T. Washington makes him move on in life despite the contraries he faces. He completes his journey from victimhood to survival, from illusion to disillusion and invisibility to visibility learning from his personal experiences only. Survival means in the novel a movement from invisibility to visibility. His grandfather's words were the first attempt to make him see the reality:

Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome'em with yeses, undermine'em with grins, agree'em to death and destruction, let'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open....Learn it to the youngguns (13-14).

In the above lines the phrases, “keep up the good fight”, “our life is a war” hints at aggression as the means of survival. We also get a hint of how to opt rebellious attitude when the grandfather says, “I have been traitor all my born days”, “a spy in the enemy’s country”, conveys secretive aggression and “agree’em to death and destruction”, is the grandfather’s message to substitute direct aggression with deceptive acceptance. Here, Ellison is clearly giving expression to the different modes of survival open for the blacks.

### **Recognizing the Ugly Reality**

Ellison also shows various incidents and episodes to expose his protagonist’s sensibility to the ugly reality of the racial situations in America and particularly the inner conflict which black man suffers in his attempts to acquire some self-hood. When the protagonist gets an opportunity to speak before “a gathering of the town’s leading white citizens” (14), it is for him “a triumph for our whole community” (14). The mental image which he creates for the party is in stark contrast to the reality.

Ellison’s smoker episode clearly points towards the social status of blacks in the society. Each ordeal is designed for their mockery, yet the invisible man hardly recognizes the disparity between his expectations and the actual situation. He doesn’t like fighting in the battle royal not because the activity itself is degrading but because he will be detracted from the dignity of his speech. So, we see that he is only worried about his desire to speak before them: “I wanted to deliver my speech more than anything else in the world” (20). And towards the end of the evening when white guests ask him to speak, in spite of humiliation, physical pain and bleeding mouth, he is prepared to recite each word as he had practiced them. But the instant he utters the words “social equality”, silence descends on the noisy crowd who then make him disown the belief in the “social equality” repeatedly.

### **Irony of Life**

Ironically, the mere possibility of a reward justifies any insult to which he may be subjected. At this point the invisible man does not recognize the reality of his being a victim. And his final prize makes him too happy to understand his real relationship with the whites. Here, for him survival depends on his reward.

## **Victimization and Vulgarization**

Invisible man's experiences at college also reveal his victimization and vulgarization by both whites as well as blacks. Characters like Norton, Bledsoe, Trueblood and the veteran may serve as an eye-opener for him, but the invisible man refuses to see reality and remains a victim to whatever was around him. He even becomes blind to the distinction between the material rewards and the moral virtues. For him Bledsoe is, as he says, "the example of everything I hoped to be: influential with wealthy men all over the country, consulted in matters concerning the race, a leader of his people, the possessor of not one, but two Cadillacs, a good salary and a soft, good-looking and creamy-complexioned wife" (86). Survival here clearly implies wealth, influence, importance, good looks and a light-skinned wife. The implication is that he wants to be like the white.

Negation of primary identity, therefore, is indicative of survival through negation of the self. Desire to be like the white in the future implies lack of pride, or even self-hatred, which is the greatest stumbling block for a meaningful survival.

## **Music as Mode of Escape**

Further in the novel we have Trueblood who strives hard to survive after he has impregnated his daughter. When he feels his head is about to burst, he finds himself singing the blues. The blues and the music he creates allow him to come to terms with what he has done. Here music has been presented as a medium to survive. Traditionally music is treated as a mode of escape as well as transcendence. In both cases it helps survival without changing the outer reality. Trueblood accepts his blackest sin transforms him from a villain into a hero. But he also becomes a thing of entertainment for whites when they are delighted to listen to his story. Whites use him for their satisfaction. But, we find that Trueblood has not only "looked upon chaos" (46) and survived, he has also established a new order. With Trueblood, fake morality of Norton is exposed and here the protagonist has two options for survival. But invisible man still needs to learn to survive with dignity in the multicultural American society.

## **The Need to Shatter Stereotypes**



Ellison suggests that the only way to lead a dignified life is to shatter the stereotype Negro image of invisibility and discover selfhood, which he has shown in the case of Trueblood and Veteran, who were driven out of the city at mid-night and whipped for saving a human life. These incidents could very well have become invisible man's guiding spirit for survival, but his naiveté makes him ignore the truth. Veteran's words bring out the true character of invisible man, who comments on him when he leaves Golden Day: "Behold! a walking Zombie! Already he's learned to repress not only his emotions but his humanity. He's invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, Sir! Mechanical man!" (72).

### **Survival without Self Dignity**

The image of Zombie implies survival without self dignity, an illusion, repression, negation of one's humanity and hence it is a death in life as conveyed through the words walking personification. Thus, after Golden Day incident we find that there is little hope of a meaningful life for the protagonist because he foolishly thinks that white man can be his savior.

But the invisible man becomes a victim of Bledsoe's politics, because he took Norton to Trueblood's shack and showed him that picture of ugly reality which is to be kept away from wealthy whites. Instead of realizing that the behaviour of his superiors might be full of contradictions, he makes himself relive the sequence of the day's events in such a way that he himself comes to own the responsibility for Norton's accident:

Somehow I convinced myself; I had violated the code and thus would have to submit to punishment. Dr. Bledsoe is right, I told myself, he's right; the school and what it stands for have to be protected. There was no other way, and no matter how much I suffered I would pay my debt as quickly as possible and return to building my career... (123)

Bledsoe expels him from the college; this has resulted because he follows the path shown by the victimizers. Instead of opposing or trying to break free, he convinces himself that the formula is right: "For despite my anguish and anger, I knew of no other way of living, nor other forms of success available to such as me. I was so completely a part of that existence, that in the end I had to make peace" (131).

## **Movement to North**

The invisible man leaves the south as punishment for no fault of his; he is neither disillusioned nor are his convictions shaken up. Movement to the north can also be interpreted historically as a mode of survival. He moves to the north all prepared to redeem himself. He has seven letters of introduction from Bledsoe, and hopes to find employment immediately. In spite of his experiences he trusts the letters. But contrary to his hopes, the letters prove ineffective in getting him a job or even an interview. Seventh letter takes him to Mr. Emerson's office. Before this he stops for his breakfast, the counterman suggests the special breakfast of pork chop and grit to the "southern boy" but he orders toast and juice. It is his survival need which has compelled him to change his dress-code and even his food habits.

## **The Disparity between the Ideal and Reality**

It is the job interview at Mr. Emerson's office that brings over to him the disparity between the ideal and the real. Here, he learns the bitter truth that his letter of introduction is framed to "keep this Nigger Boy Running." And while returning from Emerson's office he listens to somebody whistling blues, which reminds him of an old childhood lyric. This time he hums the song and identifies himself with the "poor Robin" that was "picked clean." Earlier, he would not have conceded to any knowledge contained in folk rituals but "now he admits that they contain the lessons that apply to his present condition" (41). This new self-acceptance can also be seen in the episode in which he buys and eats yams in public view. He can declare "I yam, what I am" (257) without fearing disapproval from any quarter. It is the protagonist's efforts to survive, to be the new Booker T. Washington which reveals his failure to deal with reality. Through the protagonist, a picture of economic, social and political exploitation of people from slavery to the great migration, and to the industrial north has been presented to us. Invisible man faces industrial society without any personal and cultural identity.

After this, the protagonist gets a job at Liberty Paints. Here also he becomes a victim of Kimbro's wrath and Lucius Brockway's jealousy which ultimately land him in the factory hospital. Here "inside a strange coffin-like machine he sees a vast stretch of clinical whiteness" (208); this is employed by Ellison to point out that in the industrial north the machine takes over the dehumanizing process. There, he even receives electric shocks till he does not know even

his name and knows “just...blackness and bewilderment and pain” (40). This dehumanization process has completely shaken his virtues of humility, equality and fellow- feeling. Thus, we see that invisible man tries to survive under cover of his humility, but this is not accepted by selfish and egotistic men like the people at the smoker, Bledsoe, Norton, Brockway and others. Here, he suffers emotional as well as physical deterioration. Only in Mary Rambo, who takes him as a paying guest, he finds a savior.

### **The Brotherhood**

Then, the Brotherhood has a strong appeal for the protagonist as it provides him a strong platform for his speeches and a way to release his anger. It is his desire for a meaningful survival, but his inability to look beyond the surface of things makes him accept a new social role. And here too his ideologies are in contrast with the organization. Brother Jack tells the protagonist very categorically, “you mustn’t waste your emotions on individuals, they don’t count” (284). Here too, oblivious of the fact that the Brotherhood is trying to exploit him for its own end, the invisible man is once again ready to be the “new Booker T. Washington.” In his desire to be a survivor and a leader of the people, he becomes a tool in the hand of the Brotherhood and still remains a victim. His hopes arise again and he starts comparing himself to Frederick Douglass, who rose from slavery to attain a berth in the government ministry simply due to his oratorical skills. He is happy with his progress and finds himself “remembering and refusing to hear the echoes of his grandfather’s voice” (325).

### **Brother Tarp**

In this organization there was another character named Brother Tarp, who struggled for survival in this country of whites. He spent nineteen years of his life tied to a chain for saying ‘no’ to a white man. In the meantime he lost all his family members, his land and all other things but not his life. Tarp presents the protagonist with an iron link that was a part of the chain he was tied to. This link lying on his table in his office brings against him serious charges which led to his sacking. He is once again victimized, this time by the party which was working for the uplift of his own race. After a few days the protagonist is again called to Harlem and assigned the task of finding Tod Clifton, another member of the organization. He finds Clifton on the

street selling Samba dolls, dancing obscenely on invisible threads. Clifton's killing in a minor dispute shows the unreliability of law and police in America. This incident provokes the protagonist to rethink about himself in relation to the Brotherhood and its ideology. As Thomas A. Vogler says, "Tod's death is one of the key turning points of the book". (133)

### **Invisible Enemy**

Ellison clearly shows that when in the south, there was a clear visibility of the enemy in the white but the struggle for survival in the north becomes problematic and enigmatic because of the subtlety of the enemy or the antagonist. The protagonist experiences a constant undercurrent of violence against the core of the human self. Now he begins to see the antithesis between the professed unity and segregation of blacks as a race in reality. He realizes that his blind faith in the principles of Brotherhood has driven him away from the needs of his own people.

With the realization that the Brotherhood has never bothered about the interests of the race, he understands the significance of Clifton's Samba dolls. Here, the black puppets are the members of the brotherhood who are manipulated, by the white leadership. And when invisible man wishes to enlighten the Brotherhood about the real situation in Harlem, he learns that the only reality that exists is what the brotherhood chooses to call real. Brother Jack tells him, "You were not hired to think" (405). His assigned job is to talk and that too only what the committee decides. Here he realizes the wide gulf between his vision and the "leaders'" vision.

### **No Ideology is Reliable**

The situation becomes even more complicated as Ras, the exhorter has become Ras, "the destroyer." To escape him the protagonist wears glasses and a wide hat. Now, he is mistaken for some Rinehart, a man with many identities. The invisible man's experience of betrayals have caused him to believe that no institution or no ideology is wholly reliable. Given his sense of a chimerical reality, the identity of Rinehart seems to suit him, for Rinehart is a consummate manipulator of surfaces, pimp, runner, lover, the preacher. He is all things to all people. The protagonist finds the idea of Rinehart appealing on two grounds. First, Rinehart provides him

with an identity into which he can escape with ease. Second and more important, the invisible man is compelled by the hustler because he is able to change identities at will and thereby turning the ephemeral nature of the world to his advantage. In the following passage, he remarks on the place of a Rinehart figure in a chaotic society:

What is real anyway? ... The world in which we lived was without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world of fluidity, and Rine, the rascal was at home. Perhaps only Rine the rascal was at home in it. It was unbelievable, but perhaps only the unbelievable could be believed. Perhaps the truth was always a lie (401).

### **Develop Your Own Self**

But invisible man least realizes that to live a meaningful life and emerge a survivor he needs to set his limits and standards. Since he has always tried to enact a role, his real self is invisible to himself. And he can become a survivor only when he prepares himself to see the world truly and establish its relation to it. When on asking guidance from Hambro, he finds that he is also like others. He now realizes that he is being used. It forces him to realize that the blind acceptance of authority and ideology can reduce him to nothing but be a victim. His survival shall have to depend upon evolving his own self. His betrayal by Brother Jack makes him realize that each man sees only the image he projects:

Here I had thought (the Brotherhood) accepted me because they felt that colour made no difference, when in reality it, made no difference because they didn't see either colour or man.... [All the people who betrayed him] were very much the same, each attempting to force his picture of reality upon me and neither giving a hoot in hell for how things looked at me. I was simply a material, a natural resource to be used (409).

It is here in the novel that the protagonist decides to use his invisibility as the means for revenge. He decides to remain in the organization telling them what they wanted to hear until the reality of Harlem is shown to them: "For now I saw that I could agree with Jack without agreeing. And now I could tell Harlem to hope when there was no hope" (438). He becomes ready to use his grandfather's advice: "I didn't know what my grandfather had meant but I was ready to test his advice. I'd overcome'em with yeses and undermine'em with grins" (439). So, he tells the leaders only those things that please them and in general keeps a low profile. As the

leaders have never revealed the real nature of their plans, he has unknowingly become involved in conspiracy. He had desired to organize the black community; instead he has been involved unknowingly in the Brotherhood's effort to destroy it:

It was not suicide but murder. The committee had planned it. And I had helped, had been a tool. A tool just at the very moment I had thought myself free. By pretending to agree I had indeed agreed, had made myself responsible for that huddled form lighted by flame and gunfire in the street, and all the others whom now the might was making ripe for death (445).

### **A New Sense of Self and Knowing**

After this he comes face to face with Ras feeling a new sense of self and knowing “he was now no worse than he nor any better” (482). It was the Brotherhood who spread riots and left Ras to shoulder the blame. The protagonist has now understood that both he and Ras have been victims of their own illusions. This riot is a demand for freedom and justice of his people. He has been a victim of his own illusion all his life. As Ras shouts, “Hang him!” the protagonist decides that it is “better to live out one's own absurdity than to die for that of others, whether for Ras's or Jack's” (484). Here he recognizes the absurdity of the American identity compounded of hope and desire, fear and hate that has kept him running:

I stood there, knowing that by being hanged by Ras on this street in this destructive night I would perhaps move them one fraction of a bloody step closer to a definition of who they were and of what I was and had been. But the definition would have been too narrow; I was invisible (546-47).

### **Seeking Meaningful Existence**

In an attempt to escape from white hoodlums, he falls through an open manhole and lands in darkness on top of a pile of coal. Inside the manhole there is complete blackness. He is now not only in figurative darkness but is also surrounded by physical black space. Thus, we see that the protagonist has to wage a war first to be a survivor on physical level and then for a meaningful existence. When he lights the paper of his social identities, symbolically he divests himself of all the assumed identities and roles. He realizes that he cannot go to either of his old

homes but has to start a new life. It is here that we see the spiritual survival of the protagonist, when his body, soul and heart unite together. Thus, the fall into manhole is a movement away from society and into the self.

The grandfather's words still haunt him as he succeeds in understanding their significance. The protagonist has learnt to be self-reliant and confident. While going through the tortuous process of recalling the entire gamut of his experiences to put it down, he confesses that he can neither escape them nor can file or forget them. But the procedure of writing it down has mitigated his anger and bitterness and thus, become a mode of survival. Therefore, we find that the protagonist's way to survive is in a world which is "concrete, ornery, vile" but nevertheless "sublimely wonderful" is based on "understanding [his] relation to it and its to [him] (464). Thus, the protagonist rises above his own narrow concerns and sees diversity as the solution to tyrant states.

The basic problem is that nobody knows who he is and where he is headed and the world witnesses a "spectacle of the whites' busy escaping blackness and becoming blacker every day, and the blacks striving towards whiteness becoming quite dull and grey" (465) The protagonist declares: "Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat. Our fate is to become one, and yet many" (465).

### **Struggle for Spiritual Survival**

Thus, his journey of survival involves his struggle for mere physical as well as spiritual survival; it is journey from innocence to a new wisdom and from ignorance to knowledge. One more thing which we notice in the case of invisible man is that he has not become a cynic and can still love: "in spite of all I find that I love, I have to love" (467). The protagonist reveals such moral virtues as honesty, truth, sincerity and integrity but never flaunts them. He is not only pretending but actually practicing them and still surviving in the world full of chaos. He tells the world that one can be virtuous and still survive facing odds and defeats. From the very beginning the emotional protagonist of *Invisible Man* reveals a desire and a capacity to transcend his state. He wishes to rise above the limitation imposed by his race and the colour of his skin. His struggle to transcend all difficulties, odds and adverse circumstances helps him emerge as a survivor. All along the protagonist has been trying to find transcendence and the

novel concludes with his final transcendence as he becomes the spokesman of entire humanity: “Who knows, but that, at the lower frequencies I speak for you?” (469) Thus we find the protagonist’s journey in the novel is a saga of survival, and he became a survivor. Robert Penn Warren declares the novel to be the “most powerful artistic representation of the negro under dehumanizing conditions and at the same time a statement of human triumph over these conditions” (25).

---

---

### References

- Ellison, Ralph. *Going to the Territory* .New York: Vintage, 1986. Print.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Random House, 2002.Print.
- Ellison, Ralph. “Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of humanity” Kerry Mc Sweeney, *Invisible Man: Race and Identity*. Boston: Twayne, 1988. Print.
- Ellison, Ralph. “The World and the Jug”, *Shadow and Act*. New York: Random, 1964. Print. 171.
- Hassan, Ihab. *Contemporary American Literature: 1945-1972 An Introduction*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973. Print.
- Hicks, Granville. *Invisible Man* The Saturday Review, Oct 24, 1964, 60.
- Hassan, Ihab. *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* .Princeton: Princeton Uni, 1961. Print.
- Murray, Albert. *The Omni- Americans: New Perspectives on Black Experience and American Culture*.New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1970. Print.
- O’Meally, Robert. *The Craft of Ralph Ellison*.London: Howard, 1980. Print.
- O’Meally, Robert,ed. *New Essays on Invisible Man*. New York: Cambridge, 1988 Print.
- Robert Penn Warren, “The Unity of Experience,” *Ralph Ellison: A Collection of Essays*, ed. John Hersey.Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1976. Print. 25.
- Vogler, Thomas A. “Invisible Man: Somebody’s Protest Novel,” *Ralph Ellison: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Hersey. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1974. Print. 133



Anu Sheokand, M.A., M.Phil.  
Research Scholar  
Department of English  
Chaudhary Devi Lal University  
Sirsa 125055  
Haryana  
India  
[anu83sheokand@yahoo.com](mailto:anu83sheokand@yahoo.com)