

# **CHAPTER-II**

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### ETHNIC TRIBULATIONS IN *INVISIBLE MAN*

#### I

Ralph Ellison belonged to the oppressed racial minority in America and tried at his best to express sufferings of his community through writing. He dominated the literary world with his artistic expression, extraordinary imagination, and the social reality about which he wrote through his essays and novel. He wrote about the plight of African-American community in the light of his personal vision and experiences. The personal touch to his writing has given an insight in the problems of Black people, because it deals with his life. In fact, literary works are created with an expression of self and with the touch of society in which it is written. Ralph Ellison has written a novel *Invisible Man* with this view of social reality and personal experiences. The novel focuses Black man's plight in the white community. In the Introduction to the essay 'Shadow and Act' Ellison has said that, "the act of writing requires a constant plunging back into the shadow of the past where time hovers ghostlike". He has done the same while writing *Invisible Man*. Ellison was aware of the Black predicament. The Black consciousness in him forced him to write. Further his name also inspired him to be a writer. His father, Lewis Alfred Ellison, consciously and deliberately named him after the great novelist Ralph Waldo Emerson, because he wanted his son Ellison to be like Emerson. Ellison retained the first name, Ralph dropped the middle name Waldo and changed Emerson into Ellison and had a name Ralph Ellison. The historical background to his name, its association with Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the unexpressed will

of his father (that Ellison should become a writer) encouraged him to be a writer in real life. With his skill and art of writing, Ellison created his own tradition and place in the history of Black American literature. Ellison's essays, stories and his only Novel '*Invisible Man*' contains his personal experiences as an American Negro and his quest for identity and the protest against the racial discrimination in America.

*Invisible Man* is a novel about a Negro and the narrative technique used in it is autobiographical in mode. Ellison has written his experiences in life with anguish in his heart and agony in his soul. He attacks his own society. Negro and his plight emerged from American socio-economic policy and cultural strategy. The same Negro community became inseparable part of American Society. Ellison himself was the victim of racial and colour discrimination in America. So sufferings and tribulations of an invisible Narrator are of Ellison's own. He has written the novel in the guise of Invisible Man. Invisible Narrator in the novel is the mouthpiece of Ellison. At the deeper level Ellison has tried to write an autobiography in the form of novel. So, we dare to conclude that Ellison has written an autobiography in the form of autobiographical novel *Invisible Man*.

## II

The novel *Invisible Man* presents the story of a black man who is living in the world which is hostile and antagonistic to him. It depicts contemporary America with its racial segregation and transformations in the social and cultural aspects. The novel opens with a prologue describing the depressed state of the Narrator who remains nameless and invisible throughout the novel. This invisibility and the state of being without name or identity made the

protagonist universal and cosmic. The unknown invisible Narrator undergoes through various transformations, from a meek submissive person to a revolutionary fighter. His transformations are similar to the transformations in America from slavery to the freedom. The unnamed protagonist of the novel unfolds the story of his life and we see him as a member shifting his identity from one group to another, from a college student to a paint factory worker, from the factory worker to a member of Brotherhood organization, thus each time he got new identity and new group. He used to live in an underground whole in the darkness. He said about his invisibility that society didn't want to see him, so he remained invisible. Society didn't accept his existence. He had 1369 lights in an underground, yet there was darkness. Whatever the electricity he had, it was stolen from the government electricity supply. He had murdered a white man who bumped against him in the darkness. The memories of his forefathers especially of his grandfather haunted him. He remembered his grandpa who prophesized that the narrator would be kept running all his life. Narrator got opportunity to express his thoughts in front of the most influential and honourable white men in the town. While delivering speech in the fancy ballroom, he used the word 'social equality' instead of 'social responsibility' for which he received a number of retorts and critical comments. He along with other boys who were hired for entertainment, was forced to watch the dance of a naked blonde. Again they were compelled to participate in the inhuman game of Battle Royal. Because of his speech Narrator was awarded with the scholarship for higher education at the state college. Due to oratory he got the best opportunity of education and also received a bitter shock of

expellment from the college that gave him disillusion and frustration forever.

With education, he crossed the new horizons of knowledge. Once he was asked to have a drive with Mr. Norton who was an old white trustee of the institute. Dr. Bledsoe, school-director, instructed him strictly about the drive and warned him to fulfill the responsibility carefully. During the drive, Mr. Norton got information about a sharecropper, Trueblood and his story of incest relationship. Trueblood was rumoured for making his daughter pregnant. Norton met him, listened to his story patiently and at last overwhelmed with emotions and felt unconscious. In fact, under the effect of dream and sleep, Trueblood had raped his daughter, Mattie Lou. Somehow, he managed with his angry wife and took the responsibility of both pregnant wife, Kate and daughter, Mattie Lou. Mr. Norton needed whisky to revive from unconsciousness. So, narrator took him to the nearest brothel the Golden Day. It was the bar and recreation hall for the Blacks. They had strange and rude experiences at the Golden Day which made the situation worst. As a result of all this, the Narrator was expelled from the college. He was blamed for not providing facilities to Mr. Norton as per his status. School director, Mr. Bledsoe gave him order of expellment and suggested him to go to New York for a job and if possible return to school as a paying student. He gave him seven sealed letters for recommendation of job which proved to be fake or false letters. The expellment from the school was shock to the Narrator, but he was positive in nature and he took the expellment as an opportunity. He left New York in the morning. To his surprise the vet doctor who attended Mr. Norton at the Golden day was also transferred due to his treatment to Mr. Norton.

Narrator started the search for job with the recommendation letters, but failed in his attempts. He decided to meet Mr. Emerson to whom the last letter was addressed. Instead he met son of Mr. Emerson. Younger Emerson was a generous person so he disclosed the letter to the Narrator. Narrator was shocked at the intricacy of Mr. Bledsoe who had appealed the employers not to give Narrator any job or any kind of assistance. Mr. Bledsoe had tactfully planned the future life of the Narrator. The bitter truth opened the eyes of the Narrator. He was completely disillusioned as he used to believe Mr. Bledsoe as the benefactor. He also felt humiliated. He decided to take revenge of this.

Narrator managed to get a job at a 'Liberty Paint Factory' in New York. The factory concentrates on making the perfect white paint. Narrator's boss, Kimbro was demanding and burlesque. Narrator was new in the job. He mixed the wrong ingredient in the paint and the paint became off white, instead of the perfect white. Narrator was fired off from his position and sent to work in another department of the company under the supervision of Mr. Brockway. Here, accidentally, Narrator attended a meeting of Brotherhood union. Mr. Brockway scolded him on this issue. While they were engaged in the verbal attack on each other, they ignored the gauges room and the tank burst out. Narrator was wounded severely and covered in the white paint, and then he was admitted in the hospital. He revived consciousness in the hospital but was unable to remember his name and identity. He lost his job forever, but he received lot of compensation.

He left the hostel and took shelter under the motherly care of Mary Rambo. One day in the evening, he watched the process of eviction where an old couple was thrown out in the cold. This scene

of dispossession and injustice to the old gave him a strike and mental shock and he addressed the crowd and motivated it to stop the eviction. His speech created spirit in the crowd and he received positive response. As a result of his speech, the eviction stopped, but considering his public speech as an illegal action, police followed him. He ran away to escape from the police, but he noticed that a short man was following him. The man approached him and introduced himself as Brother Jack, member of Brotherhood organization. He was impressed by the oratory of the Narrator and offered him job in the Brotherhood, because he was confident about Narrator and believed that he would give a new direction to the Negro movement run by the Brotherhood. For the sake of money Narrator joined brotherhood organization and within a short period created his own place in the union. At the beginning, he was satisfied with the job but soon realized the dark realities of dirty politics in the union. After the murder of Clifton, there was riot in Harlem. Clifton was murdered by the Ras and his group, who believed Brotherhood to be the organization of Black people only and avoided the company of the whites. Narrator realized the deceptive nature of the Brotherhood organization and decided to be away from it. He selected an underground whole as his dwelling place and started to live invisibly there. He burned all his documents including educational certificates and thus cut off himself from the past. He started to live in the darkness, in the company of meaningless and shapeless things. The act of burning things that were related with his past suggested his being separate from the humiliation and old bondage. The life of slavery was about to end and he waited for the dawn to come in his life.

*Invisible Man* presents the relationship between a man and his society. The place that society gives to a man is very important in the upbringing of an individual. The society never treats all its classes equally, so automatically the inferior one is exploited at the hands of the superior class. The same happens in *Invisible Man*, the black community is exploited socially, politically, economically, culturally at the hands of the White community. The novel is written in the light of personal vision, but gives universal meaning and scope to the sufferings of the black community. The protagonist of the novel lived in the tragic and absurd conditions. His main predicament is painful alienation from the mainstream of human life and loss of identity. His being invisible and nameless itself indicates his nothingness in the society. He is a man of flesh and blood but invisible to the world, because society doesn't consider his existence. The prologue of the novel presents the theme and baffling situation in which the protagonist is caught. His life has become tragedy and nightmare only because of the black colour of the skin. The black colour is like a curse to the black community as it is the only reason of their sorrowful life. The colour of the skin, whether black or white, is decided by the nature. So, neither the protagonist nor his community is responsible for the plight. It is bias minded attitude of the society and the so called culture and manners that are responsible for the tragic exploitation of the black community. The exploitation of black community happened at all levels such as social, emotional, political, cultural, educational, etc. Ellison has depicted the real and subtle picture of this exploitation in the light of his personal experiences. The novel is not personal account but it presents social reality in America. Invisible Narrator becomes metaphor for the black community in America. The novel transcends



the limits of personal touch and reaches at the universal level. The invisible Narrator who is Ellison himself has presented the humiliating life of a black in the white world. The black community was forced to live like in the hell. They were deprived of essential human rights. Black writers like Richard Wright, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and James Baldwin presented the plight of black community. Through his literary art, Ralph Ellison also tried to give justice to his community. This literature is profound in its expression. *Invisible Man* is the milestone in the journey and development of African-American literature.

### III

The protagonist is presented nameless and without any identity. His only identity is the colour of the skin Black. The nameless protagonist expands his identity to the large black community and also keeps one way open to identify himself with Ralph Ellison. At the outset of the novel, invisibility of the narrator is explained, when he says. "I am Invisible Man". The sense of invisibility, namelessness and of no identity doesn't give any existence to the narrator. His presence doesn't matter for the rest of the world. In fact name is our identity and makes us visible to others. But the condition of namelessness makes the protagonist nothing for the world. It is as if he is not a human being for the world. He declares his existence as,

"I am Invisible Man. I am not a spook like those who hunted Edgar Allen Poe, nor I am man of substance of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids, and I might even be said to possess mind. I am invisible simply because people refuse to see me". (Page No. 7)

Thus the reason of invisibility is not scientific or biochemical factor but the peculiar attitude developed by the society is responsible for the invisibility of the Narrator. He is phantom for others. Narrator calls himself a nightmare which sleeper wants to destroy. This presentation of image is not degradation but it is social reality. The society has denied him the very existence and rights essential to live comfortable life. His invisibility was a curse for him. He had accepted his lot and preferred to live in an underground whole which is damp and cold like grave. He compared his whole with grave which again suggested the wretched condition and the degraded status of his living. He had 1369 bulbs lighted through the stolen electricity of the government, but still he was invisible to the world. The underground whole appeared to him brighter place in New York. He called his life as a states of hibernation i.e. sleep like condition. He was living in tragic conditions where development was not possible.

#### IV

Narrator's Grandfather represents past and bitter experiences of slavery. His image and thoughts present the slavery which existed generation after generations. The grandfather is no more in the world but his message haunted the narrator all the time. He was a quiet and peace loving person who didn't create any trouble for his community. Narrator remembered his grandfather and the message he delivered from his deathbed to next generations. He said,

"Son, after I am gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a 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 them with yeses, undermine them with grins, agree them to death and destruction, let them swallow you till they vomit or bust wide open". (Page No.17)

These words of the grandfather filled narrator's thoughts and also created a sense of fear in him. The grandfather died with bitter words on his lips and his message haunted Narrator throughout the life. He wished 'to yes' the white men to death. He accepted the predicament of life meekly and without complains. Grandfather's life and his message reflect tragic slavery period and continuous victimization of Negroes. Narrator found the message ambiguous especially the thought of treachery and to yes the white community was strange. The message of grandpa referred to the complete surrender of the Blacks to the White community. Grandfather and his generation accepted slavery as a fruit of fate or destiny. His message indicated complete surrender and endurance. Narrator also refers to a nightmare in which he observed an image of his Grandfather. In the dream he found an official envelop with a state seal. These were envelops within envelop endlessly and at last one message written on the envelop, "Whom it may concern, keep this Nigger boy running." He found his Grandfather laughing at him. This dream was a kind of prophecy that Narrator experienced in his life as he realized that he had been blindly running from himself all of his life. Narrator's reference to the past and to his Grandfather show that a Negro found it difficult to get rid of his past and sufferings of his ancestors. The experiences of the past life were inseparable part of his life. Personality of a Negro was formed on the background of the tribulations of earlier generations. Throughout the whole life, the image of Grandfather haunted the Narrator. He says,

“It was a face that fascinated me. The eyes seemed to follow wherever I went.” (Page No.31)

Narrator’s reference to the past and haunting image of the Grandfather stands for the dark history of the Black race.

## V

Narrator remembered his high-school days when he was a naive high-school student. On the graduation day, he was asked to deliver a speech at the gathering of town’s leading and influential white citizens. His intelligence and success gave him an opportunity of speech. At the same occasion, he had strange and humiliating experience in the game of Battle Royal. Narrator and other boys who were hired for evening entertainment were called in a fancy ball room and forced to participate in the Battle Royal game. At the same time in the same room a naked blonde started dancing. The boys were forced to look at the naked blonde. Some men scolded them for looking at the Blonde. In such dilemma the boys were standing for the next order of the Whites gathered there. They wanted to run away from the room, but the force and pressure on them was such great that they even didn’t move. Narrator says,

“We were rushed up to the front of the ballroom, where it smelled even more strongly of tobacco and whisky. I almost wet my pants. A sea of faces some hostile, some amused, ringed around us and in the center facing us, stood a magnificent blonde stark naked. There was a dead silence. Some of the boys stood with lowered heads, trembling.” (Page No.20)

The naked blonde was attraction for the black boys. They wanted to possess her but for them she was just a dream which was impossible

to fulfill. She was the object desired by the blacks. At any cost they were ready to possess her. Narrator says,

“Had the price of looking been blindness, I would have looked (at the blonde).” (Page No. 20)

Such was the fascination of the white woman the Blacks had! The American flag tattooed on the belly of the Blonde stands for American ideas of freedom and equality. But these things were refused to the Blacks. America is the land of liberty and freedom, but for Negroes it was land of slavery.

After the dance, the boys were called for the game of the Battle Royal. It was a game specially played to entertain the white people gathered there. The presence of the intellectuals and rich persons at the Battle Royal game such as bankers, lawyers, judges, doctors, fire-chiefs, merchants, even school teachers, and superintendents is really surprising. The so called cultured and civilized men gathered there to see and enjoy the humiliation of blonde and the black boys. The boys were blindfolded and forced to fight in the boxing ring. After several fights Narrator and Tatlock, the biggest of all boys remained in the ring. At last Tatlock won the game. All the boys were bleeding and sweating. The next part of the game required the boys to grab gold coins on the rug which was electrified. Yet, the boys were enjoying the collection of the coins and yelling and laughing loudly. All the boys enjoyed the coin collection despite the electric shock. Narrator gives real account of the situation. He says,

“We were all wet and slippery and hard to hold. Suddenly, I saw a boy lifted into the air, glistening with sweat like a circus seal, and dropped his wet back landing, flush upon the charged rung, heard

him yelling and literally dance upon his back, his muscles twitching like flesh of a horse stung by many flies.” (Page No. 27)

To the surprise of the black boys the gold coins they collected proved to be false. In fact poverty made them to collect the coins and they dared to bear the electric shock for it. After the game of Battle Royal, the main attraction of the Whites was Narrator's speech. After the announcement, narrator started his speech under tension, with body ache, pains, sweating and bleeding. Because of the outer circumstances, tension and physical pains, Narrator couldn't speak loudly, so the crowd shouted at him to raise his voice. No one was listening to him carefully but they were enjoying the bitter situation of the Narrator. He was trembling during his speech. He used the word 'social equality' instead 'social responsibility'. With this the outraged crowd asked him to take his words back. The reward of the speech narrator received was scholarship for higher education in the state college of the Negroes. The Battle Royal Game presents psychological, physical and social exploitation of Negroes. This cruel and inhuman game focuses on the brutality of the Whites. Blindfolded nature of the game reveals ignorance and darkness among the Negroes. Narrator felt so humiliated that he said he lost his dignity. The blonde is humiliated. She is also the victim of so called civilization.

## VI

Narrator got an opportunity of education at the state level college for Negroes. At last the portal of education was open to him. On Founder's Day, there was visit of college trustee to the college. Narrator was assigned the duty to accompany, Mr. Norton, rich and white benefactor and trustee of the institute. He used to believe that

the institution had given bright and pleasant future to the Negroes. It shaped the career and destiny of the black people by providing them educational opportunities. Mr. Norton dedicated all his social work to the memories of his daughter. He had an immense love for his daughter who was no more in the world. Throughout the whole drive, he spoke about her. In the company of Mr. Norton, Narrator had feeling of pride and anxiety. He tried his best to give all comforts to Mr. Norton, because he knew that any complain may result in dangerous effects about his educational career. Narrator had high esteem for Mr. Norton. He said to him,

“You have yours and you got it yourself, and we have to lift ourselves up the same way”. (Page No.41)

Mr. Norton also had feeling of superiority. He and the Narrator reached the Black colony near the college campus. Somehow, Mr. Norton came to know about Trueblood and his strange story. Trueblood, a black sharecropper was responsible for the pregnancy of his wife and daughter. He was shunned by the college for the alleged incest he committed. Narrator tried to distract Mr. Norton from the story of Trueblood but Norton was firm on his decision to meet Trueblood and his family.

They went to Trueblood. He narrated his story. He proved himself a good accomplished story teller. He lived in small room with his wife Kate and daughter Mattie Lou. They adjusted their sleeping bed at night and Mattie Lou slept between her parents. One night, Trueblood observed his daughter and the physical changes that indicated development of womanhood in her. He noticed that she was enjoying a romantic dream may be of her young boy friend. Kate was fast asleep. Trueblood, while thinking about her daughter, remembered his girlfriend at his young days. His daughter moved

next to him. He slept and observed a dream in which he went to the house of white man, Mr. Broadnax in search of meat. He directly went to bedroom where a white woman grabbed him. When he woke up, he found himself on the top of his daughter who was crying and screaming loudly. His wife Kate woke up and stroked him with an axe. He ran away but again returned to take his responsibility. Kate compromised and they lived together.

Black community in the town scorned him for the disgrace he brought to the community. The White community sympathized and supported him. Even Mr. Norton gave him hundred dollars. The Trueblood tragedy happened because of small house and the repressed emotions of Trueblood which he tried to enjoy in a dream. They tried to fulfill their wishes in a dream. We can also apply the Freudian theory of Electra-complex to this story. The natural attraction between father-daughter, surrounding circumstances, poverty, unfulfilled wishes are responsible for the tragedy. White community supported Trueblood because white persons like Mr. Norton saw their repressed self in Trueblood. The incident is a blot to the Negro community and again focuses attraction for the white woman in a Negro mind.

## VII

The strange and shocking story of Trueblood made Norton unconscious. He required whisky to revive from this experience. Narrator took him to the Golden Day brothel which was only for the Blacks. It was the nearest place for them to go. The Golden Day was a sporting and gambling house for the Blacks. It was also a place of money seeking prostitutes. While crossing the road to the Golden



Day, they came across a group of mental patients who were also visiting the place at the same time. They went against their attendant and trapped Norton and the Narrator in the middle. This experience made Mr. Norton unconscious. A vet doctor revived him back. At the Golden Day, the mad crowd attacked Supercargo who was a giant black man and the attendant of the mad patients. Late at night they returned to the college. Mr. Norton immediately called a doctor for his treatment. He received a mental shock by the strange and absurd experiences of the black world. In fact, he found the Trueblood story and the mad patients interesting. But his sensitive and civilized mind couldn't bear all this. When school president, Mr. Bledsoe came to know about the whole situation, he immediately expelled Narrator from the school. Narrator was blamed for taking Mr. Norton to the degraded places. Narrator was not at all responsible for this. He did as per the wish and order of Mr. Norton and was punished for the act he had not done and lost the opportunity of higher education.

The Golden Day incident indicates the social and educational exploitation of the Blacks. The right of education was reserved for the whites, Narrator got an opportunity of education because of his skill of oratory, but the white intricacy robbed him of the opportunity. It seems that the white people just needed a cause to exploit the Blacks. Narrator explained the situation but no one gave him justice. His expellment from the school is very pathetic scene in the novel because all his dreams and aspirations are smashed under the feet of racism. The reason for his expellment is that he showed dirty aspects of the Black community to the well-educated Mr. Norton and it caused mental trouble to him. Mr. Norton received mental disturbance due to the tragic picture of the black community.

Nowhere had we found Narrator guilty for this. It is Norton who permitted him to go everywhere, forces him to listen to the Trueblood and at last narrator was compelled to go to the Golden day. At the Golden Day, Norton took vet doctor as an insane person. He was disturbed and shattered mentally because of the life style and manners of the Blacks. The whole situation and circumstances at the Golden Day were beyond the control of the Narrator. But Mr. Bledsoe blamed him for the disgrace that he had brought to the institution. He claimed that Narrator had ruined the prestige of the college within half an hour journey. He considered Narrator as a criminal of the worst kind. He says,

“Your poor judgment has caused this school an incalculable damage. Instead of uplifting the race, you have torn it down. Don’t you know we can’t tolerate such a thing? I gave you an opportunity to serve one of our best white friends, a man who could make your fortune. But in return you dragged the entire race into the slime”!  
(Page No.117)

The conversation between Mr. Bledsoe and the Narrator focuses Bledsoe’s views on racism and the Black community. Bledsoe regarded the Black people as uncivilized and degraded creature. He believed in the white power and was confident about the Whites. He says, “White is right.” When agitatedly Narrator opposed the expellment and warned Bledsoe to revolt against the injustice. Mr. Bledsoe says to the narrator,

“Power does not have to show off; power is confident, self-warming, self-justifying. When you have it, you know it. You are bucking against power, rich white, folk’s power, the nation’s power which means government’s power. You are black educated son fool. These white folk have newspaper, magazine, radios, and spokesman to get

their ideas across. Their lie also becomes the truth. You are nobody what to think.” (Page No. 119)

Thus, Bledsoe supports the white power. When Mr. Norton shows generosity to the Narrator, Bledsoe warns him, “Don’t be kind sir; you can’t be soft with these people. We must not pamper them. An accident to a guest of this college when he is in the charge of student is without question the students fault.”

(Page No.88)

Bledsoe explained the inferior position of the Negroes. He was not ready to accept the existence of the Narrator. At last Narrator is confronted with expellment and Bledsoe asked him to go to New York. He gave him seven sealed recommendation letters. Bledsoe assured the Narrator about his education in future and he would have admission in the school as a paying student. But he has planned the future of the Narrator in such manner that he will stay away from the school forever. Bledsoe asked Narrator to meet in the chapel to listen to the hymns and the sermon of reverend Barbee. Barbee talked about the college, its trustees, founders and vision. At the end the Narrator came to know that Barbee was blind. Instead of the blindness, Barbee had capacity to look into the matter. Barbee presented the superiority of the whites. His speech increased the feeling of guilt in the mind of the narrator. The expellment from school was great disgrace for the Narrator and his family. Even he thought that he had brought shame to his parents. So, he didn’t inform them about this. He says,

“I would never live down my disgrace. My white friends would be disgusted and I recalled the fear that hung over all those who had no protection from powerful whites”. (Page No.122)

These words indicate the feeling of insecurity that the blacks had in the white world. In fact, black didn't have right to complain against injustice nor they plead against it, because the white was the only authority. Narrator also accepted the decision and left for New York. Early in the morning, Narrator left the college and went to the bus station. There he met the vet doctor, who was transferred to Washington. The vet doctor got punishment of transfer for his treatment to Mr. Norton. His conversation with Narrator at the Golden Day revealed the humiliation he received by the whites. In fact, he was well educated person in the society but he also didn't get any dignity or self-respect. He explained his tragedy to the Narrator as "My work could bring me no dignity". Once ten men came to him at night and whipped him. This experience revealed the truth that knowledge could not bring dignity. Vet again has the similar experience of degradation in the form of his immediate transfer without any purpose or without any mistake by him. The vet was shocked with the innocence of the Narrator. So he warned Narrator against the white intricacy and requested him to look beneath the surface. He says, 'come out of fog, young man' (Page No.127). He uses pronoun 'they' for the white power and says, "Why the same they, we always mean white folks' authority, the God's fate, circumstances the force that pulls you back.

(Page No.128)

He advises the Narrator, "Be your own father young man. And remember the world is possibility if only you discovered it." With this message Narrator started his journey to New York.

The thoughts and experiences of the vet doctor indicate the exploitation of an educated black people. Despite their education, they didn't get equal treatment in the society. It means for equality

mere education or to be civilized was not the criteria, but colour of the skin was important.

Narrator compares his expellment from the school with Adam's expellment from the Eden Garden. Like Adam, he never got back his place in the heaven that is, the school. School is his Eden Garden where he got the bliss of knowledge through means of education. This expellment indicates educational exploitation of the Narrator. His right of education was taken away. This expellment gave full stop to his education, as he never returned to the school. Actually, the expellment is a turning point because it gives the major turn to the Narrator's life.

## VIII

Mr. Bledsoe gave a recommendation letter to the Narrator. The seven letters appeared to him as a triumph cards for his better future. He dreamed of bright future with these letters, but destiny had different roles for him. He decided to meet the referred persons and struggle for the job. The very next morning, he planned to meet Mr. Bates and got disappointed. He says to himself that Mr. Bates might not wish to see a Negro, "The first thing in the morning". (Page No.136) So, he gave the letter to his secretary. He met near about all the persons and handed letters to them. Everyone denied the job and he was frustrated with the refusal for the job. He became suspicious about the secretaries, so he decided to meet the last employer Mr. Emerson and to give him the letter. He took the appointment and met the younger Emerson, Son of Mr. Emerson as Mr. Emerson was out of town. Younger Emerson was generous and kind, so he showed the letter to the Narrator. Narrator was completely disillusioned with the message of the letter because

nowhere Bledsoe had recommended him for job; instead he had asked not to give job or any other opportunity to the Narrator. Because of this message no one from the seven employers had called Narrator for the job. The last letter was addressed to Mr. Emerson. Narrator went to his office and met his son. The conversation between the Narrator and Mr. Emerson (Younger) focuses on the exploitation of the Narrator. Younger Emerson was shocked with the message of the letter and he warned Narrator to be away from the college and its authority. Narrator innocently asked him the reason behind it. About his Alma Mater Narrator says. "I think it's one of the best in the world". (Page No.150) When Mr. Emerson suggested him to take admission at any better college in New York, Narrator refused it firmly. To the question, has he read the letter? Narrator replies," why? No sir! It wasn't addressed to me, so naturally I wouldn't think of opening it....." Narrator's answers about his future plans were full of innocence and indicated that he was completely unaware about the schematic plans of Mr. Bledsoe. He wanted to be a teacher or a member of the administrative staff in the college or he was interested to be Mr. Bledsoe's assistant. These answers were striking to Mr. Emerson because he was well acquainted with Mr. Bledsoe's planning. He again warned Narrator not to be blind and look at the situation carefully. He became angry that such seven letters had been given to the narrator and he had handed over them. No one called him for job. Mr. Emerson asked him not to meet his father at all and when Narrator argued, he gave him the letter to read. The letter disclosed the truth and the reality stood stark naked in front of the Narrator. Actually, Mr. Bledsoe has planned to stop the educational career of the Narrator. He mentioned Narrator as former student of the college and assured he would not have any

opportunity in the college again. He called Narrator's behavior in the Golden Day case as the most serious defection from the rules of the institute. According to him, Mr. Emerson should follow his message if he was true to his white race. Narrator's eyes were filled with tears and he couldn't bear the humiliation and deception. The message for him is the message of death as if Bledsoe had asked others to keep the Narrator in death like conditions. He decided to take revenge which is again impossible thing for him.

After education, the Narrator wanted to have a job, as job provides money and status in the society. Bledsoe took both the means of civilization and livelihood. So Narrator had to start again with zero efforts. What happens in the campus drive and at the Golden Day was mere co-incidence and Narrator was not responsible for that but he got severe punishment. The recommendation letter proved to be ironical, because instead of recommending the Narrator it denied opportunity to him. Bledsoe is not loyal to the Narrator, nor deceives him apparently. The letter proves to be more troublesome than the expellment from the school. The main problem with the Narrator was his innocence and his acceptance of the world as he supposed it to be. So, he didn't read any of the letters, until Mr. Emerson forced him to read it. He had tremendous belief in Bledsoe. He took white as trustworthy person. So, until the last moment he expected positive reply from the employers. He was hopeful and believed that with hard work and education he would get success and dignity in the world. But his dreams were crushed under racism.

## IX

As per the suggestion of Mr. Emerson, Narrator went to the Liberty Paint Factory for job. As there was not any option, for money and to fulfill basic necessities, he accepted the job. He realized that education was just impossible for him. Liberty paint was a symbol of American capitalism. Its motto “If it is optic White, it is White” and “White is Right”, “Keep America pure with Liberty Paints”, itself declared white dominance. Without any inquiry Mr. Kimbro gave job to the Narrator. While working in the factory, Narrator mixed wrong ingredient into the paint and the paint became off white. Due to this mistake, he was fired off from the job and transferred to another department. The New boss Brockway had clashes with the Narrator. He strongly objected Narrator’s participation in the union meeting. The meeting was of the Brotherhood organization. The strong objection of Brockway resulted into quarrel. In the verbal attack and fight, they ignored the gauges room and the tank. Finally, there was a burst due to pressure, Narrator was severely injured and became unconscious. Covered in a white paint, he was admitted in the hospital. Narrator was successfully saved but he didn’t know exactly what had happened. He got discharge from hospital and from the paint factory also. The search for new job began. Lack of money and struggle for existence continued in the Narrator’s life.

## X

Narrator took shelter under the motherly care of Mary Rambo. Poverty, hunger, scarcity of money etc. problems gave him



frustration. The support and help of Mary was the positive aspect of his life at New York. His conversations with Mary encouraged him to fight against the established order. Time and again Mary reminded him of his responsibilities and leadership. She was hopeful about future and used to say, "It's you young folks what's going to make the changes." Narrator got energy from Mary but felt directionless and used to wander late at night. The feeling of protest and agitation grew in the Narrator during this period. He formed his own views on certain issues of the Black community. It got expression in his speech at the time of eviction that he watched on the street.

Once Narrator was wandering on the streets of New York, at that time he read one message, "Win greater happiness with whiter complexion. Be outstanding in your social set" (Page No.212), which was about the white colour of the skin. It appeared to be an advertisement of a product in which the relationship between the colour of the skin and social status of a person was focused. The message underlines the importance of the white colour of the skin. Narrator remembered Mr. Bledsoe and thought that he had ruined his life and educational career. Mr. Bledsoe had completely destroyed Narrator's educational career. In such disappointed state of mind, Narrator ate yams. The thoughts of his community were lingering in his mind. In his return journey to his room, he observed the eviction. An old black couple was pulled out of their own house by the police. Their luggage including the Bible spread all over the road. The lady wanted to pray, but was not allowed in the house. The old couple had sons and grandsons. The old man was eighty-seven year old. He served as a day labourer. The couple was poor and weak and unable to fight with the system. The things included in

their luggage indicated their poverty. Narrator calls these things as “stuff strewn like chitterlings in the snow” (Page No.225).

It was the total sum of life of the earning that the old man had throughout his life. In fact, life of a Negro was hard and full of sufferings. Such pathetic life was the same for a Negro everywhere in America. He looked at the lady. She was like his mother. The appeal of the Lady to the crowd made Narrator to oppose the eviction. She says,

“What on earth, the old woman sobbed, pointing to the stuff piled along the kerb.” (Page No.216)

She further says, “Don’t tell me, It’s all the white folks, not just one. They all are against us.” (Page No .218)

The white tendency is responsible for the eviction. Narrator, being sensitive member of the society, appeals the crowd to stop the eviction. He says angrily,

“Dispossessed? Dispossessed... They didn’t get anything. They can’t get anything. They never had anything. So who was dispossessed?” It throws light on the poverty and humiliation of a Negro. The policeman didn’t allow the old woman to enter the house to pray. The human rights and rights of Negro were crushed under the feet of the white dominance. The old couple cried loudly against the injustice and this scene of dispossession stroke the protagonist and then he delivered a speech that stimulated the crowd. The policeman threatened everyone with a gun and was ready to shoot if they left their place. At last Narrator took the lead and opposed the tyranny with all force. He ironically called the Black community as law-abiding and slow-to-anger. Because they didn’t protest injustice and wrong things done to them, he further says,

“Dispossession? Eighty-seven year old dispossessed? Dispossessed of what? They have nothing to take off from them. He explained the state of a Negro as”, they didn’t have anything, they can’t get anything..... So how they can be dispossessed? (P.226)

He appealed the crowd to dispossess the feeling of dispossession itself. With this appeal, the crowd took positive turn and started to put the luggage in the house. They entered the house for a common prayer. Some white men also joined them in the revolt. The brutal policeman was defeated and the crowd successfully placed the couple in the house. With the sound of siren, the crowd scattered. Narrator also ran away but realized that someone was following him. The person who followed and caught him was the member of brotherhood organization, Brother Jack. He praised the oratory skill of Narrator and offered him job at the Brotherhood organization, which was struggling for the Black community. Later on, Narrator accepted the offer because of his critical financial conditions. But, when he came to know about the aims and objectives of the union, he decided to work for the betterment of his community.

The union gave him all comforts of life including house and clothing. Narrator moved to his new house in the North. The next day only he had very strange and the most humiliating experience. He threw his garbage in a garbage can in front of a private house of a white family. As he turned to walk, a Lady in the house called him back and asked him to pick up the garbage from the can. She warned him not to put his trash in that can again. She shouted loudly, “We keep our place clean and respectable and we don’t want you field niggers coming up here from the south and ruining the things”. (Page No.265)

With this mess, people gathered on the street. Narrator felt annoyed and embarrassed. At last, she decided to call the police. Narrator explained his attitude,

“When the collectors come, garbage is garbage. I just didn’t want to throw it into the street. I didn’t know that some kinds of garbage were better than others.” (P.265)

At last, unwillingly the Narrator wrapped his garbage in a paper and decided to throw it on the street. After some time, he threw the same garbage on the street. Again a White man saw it and he created the same mess on the issue of garbage. The white person had a doubt that it might be gun or bomb or stolen thing that narrator put in the street. So, he asked him to put the wrapped thing in his bag again. Despite the explanation by the Narrator, the white man took the garbage as a stolen object or explosive material. He said to the narrator,

“I know what kind of garbage it is. You young New York Negroes are a blimp! I swear you are! I hope they catch you and put your ass under the jail!” (Page No.267)

At last, Narrator decided to throw the stuff in the South, and did the same.

Such was the pathetic condition of Negroes. They were not allowed even to put their garbage in a garbage can. If it is eviction or garbage problem, the whites used to call the police. Again, police always took the side of the whites because the accepted rule was “White is Right”. Negros became the victims of atrocities by the police, law and the government. Justice was on the side of the whites, so what the Whites said and believed became the rule for the society. That is why, narrator’s protest for the eviction, became Newspaper event on the front page. The media called the protest as

“Violent protest over Harlem eviction.” Narrator felt humiliated and insulted over this garbage scene and realized the horrible nature of the problems of his community.

## XI

Narrator joins the Brotherhood organization to struggle for the rights of the Blacks and to solve their problems. He worked with Brother Jack, Hambro, Clifton, but created his own impression on the union. Another organization known as the Nationalistic Movement also worked parallel to the Brotherhood organization, with the same aim of the emancipation of African-Americans. Both unions had the same target but their means were different. The Nationalistic movement opposed the white community by all means. It didn't believe in the principle, 'white is right and cooperative'. So it struggled against the white people not the white tendency of dominance. It rejected the whites. On the other hand, the Brotherhood organization tries to establish brotherhood between the Blacks and the whites. The Brothers believed that some kind and generous white people always had helped the Blacks, so white tendency of tyranny was wrong and not the white community. Narrator and his companions Jack, Clifton etc. worked in Brotherhood organization Ras, the exhorter was the leader of the Nationalistic Movement. The conflict or cold war existed in both these unions. Brotherhood organization valued principles and disciplines a lot and expected its members to follow the doctrine of the organization strictly. At the beginning, Narrator felt comfortable with the organization but slowly he realized the hidden dictatorship in the organization. Narrator became successful and got publicity as

a spokesman of the Harlem region. He got warning from the seniors to be slow in his work.

The speeches delivered by the Narrator at various occasions revealed the thinking and direction of the organization. Narrator was violent in his expression. In his speech at the rally, he comments on eviction and dispossession as the serious ways of victimization. He referred Negroes as dumb and blind as they used to accept the things without protest. In his speech he says,

“Dispossess him, and evict him. Use his empty head as spittoon and his back as door mat. He will not oppose because he is blind..... They have tried to dispossess us of our manhood and womanhood, of our childhood and our adolescence, even of our dislike of dispossession.... Being dispossessed? Days of dispossession.... Season of homelessness.... Time of eviction.....”

He remembered his expellment from the college and the injustice done by Mr. Bledsoe. But he had positive attitude to expellment and took it as an opportunity for the highest rewards in future. He decided to work hard, learn more, struggle and survive and go on the top. He was ready to devote for the brotherhood but his dream was ruined with the murder of brother Clifton. Clifton lost his life in the struggle between the brotherhood and the Nationalistic Movement. Ras, the Exhorter killed Clifton as he regarded Clifton as a friend of the whites. The murder leads to race riot in Harlem. Narrator wanted to use this event and struggle for the justice but the party restricted him not to be violent and his wish to motivate people was defeated strongly. However in his speech at the funeral of Clifton was motivating and thought provoking. He says,

“His name was Tod Clifton, he was unnamed... his death was senseless as his life was futile..... He struggled for the

Brotherhood.... It would make him more human.... But he died like a dog on the road.” (Page No. 367)

Clifton's death proved the greatest loss for the Black community in Harlem. Narrator wanted to give direction to the riot and agitated crowd. But he did not get support from the organization. He was asked to fight with intellect and in a disciplined manner. He failed to manage with the organization and the death of Clifton also shocked him. So, he decided to struggle alone and to remain invisible since then he preferred underground. The black community really appears as dumb and blind. Both of the organization failed to lead them to the right direction. The leaders also fail to provide right vision for future. Lack of right and proper leadership leads the Black community to failure. Narrator also gets failure in his political career. On one side, racial discrimination and its exploitation and on the other hand lack of right attempts to struggle against the exploitation increased the sufferings and tribulations of the narrator and his community.

## **XII**

Poverty and hunger were the constant companions of the Negro community. Both problems go hand in hand. Generally, where there is poverty, there exists hunger. The reason of these problems lies in illiteracy and ignorance. Education was not offered to the African-American community. So automatically sources of income or to earn money were limited to them. They were forced to work in the plantation and were not paid properly. They didn't possess land, house or any other type of estate or property. Formal education was not given to them. So job or official work or business

was never their field. Those who luckily took education found it very difficult to complete education and if they completed it to get job was very rare. Narrator lost the opportunity of education because of the expellment from school and the tragedy happened in his life. Such was the story of many Negro students who failed to complete their education. Negro was also prohibited to acquire any skill or art or profession. Because of the lack of professional skill, the manual labour was the only option for majority of Negroes. In this way, lack of education and professional skill was responsible for poverty and because of poverty there was the problem of hunger.

For the sake of money Negro children were ready to do anything. At the Battle Royal game they fought, collect coins ignoring the electrical shocks on the rug. Trueblood shared his pathetic experience and shameful story with the white people, as he knew that the cultured and civilized whites would offer him financial assistance out of sympathy. Again his tragedy happened because of small house which he couldn't construct into large one because of lack of money. Poverty made Negroes to repress their emotions. So they tried to fulfill these emotions in their dreams and tragedy like Trueblood and Mattie Lou happened. This community never had all comforts of life even they didn't get basic needs like food, clothes and shelter. They used to live in huts or cottages outside the house of their masters. The food they ate was stale food given by their master and the clothes were the worn out clothes of the master and his family. It means they had to depend on their masters for their needs. After civil Rights Movement, they got basic rights but they became the victims of strategies of the Whites like Narrator became victim of Bledsoe and his schematic plan of recommendation letter and expellment. To complete education, then



to get a job, to struggle for survival and then live happily with self-respect were the greatest challenges for a Negro. They were assumed to be thieves, because poverty made them to steal things. The garbage thrown by the narrator was taken as a stolen object. Such prejudiced attitudes existed towards the Blacks.

The protagonist of the present novel suffered from poverty, hunger, illiteracy since his childhood. He was poor, so depended on scholarship for education. Hunger was dominant in him when he lived at Men's house. Even at Mary's house he observed poverty.

He says,

"Cabbage was always a depressing reminder of the leaner years of my childhood and I suffered whenever she server it..... The third time in a week.... Mary must be short of money". (Page No.240)

A cheap vegetable like cabbage indicates poverty. Narrator joined brotherhood for money and comfortable life then he became devoted worker of the organization. Even in the underground whole, he suffered from poverty and hunger. Thus these problems were always accompanied the Narrator and his Black community.

### **XIII**

The novel concentrates on a male protagonist and presents the plight of the Negro race. At the same time it also gives a glimpse of Negro women who suffered double, first as a Negro and then as a woman. The novel also presents repressed state of white woman through the characters like Sybil and the unnamed white Woman in whose house narrator went after his speech. We are also told that narrator's speech on women was very impressive and generally after his speech white women get attracted to him. The unnamed white

woman called narrator to her home to discuss about the Brotherhood organization and its work. Afterwards she revealed her intention and we are surprised with the situation when her husband was at the door and Narrator was in her bedroom. Her husband was after money and his business and never found time for the woman. She gave way to her repressed emotions in the company of the Narrator. Thus, her psychological suppression made her to deceive her husband and follow illegal path.

Another women Sybil stands for an abnormal state of mind. She wanted to get raped by some strong man especially black one. She forced Narrator to rape her and at last, when the activity was over she felt satisfied. The reason behind this emotion as explained by Sybil herself was that in her childhood she had heard a rape story from one of her friends. Since then she had that emotion of rape in her mind. Such repression of emotions is psychological abnormality. Majority of women suffered from this as they couldn't satisfy their emotions because of social or cultural restrictions on them.

Women as a Power didn't appear in the novel. To some extent, we find Emma as powerful in the Brotherhood, but again she stands as an object of attraction for men. Mary presents fine and lovely nature of woman. She is motherly figure in the novel. She inspires Narrator to do something for the grace of his race. Another image of exploited woman is the old Lady whose house was evicted. The Lady rebelled against the eviction and also appealed the crowd to protest the eviction. In fact it is her urge for prayer and to enter the house that made Narrator and the crowd to rebel and protest the eviction. Her appeal, when the policeman pulled her out, was really heartbroken. Mary and the old Lady represented the old generation who has suffered a lot because of the slavery and wanted to rebel

against it and abolish it. The other women in the novel are Mattie Lou and Kate, daughter and wife of Trueblood were meek and submissive. They were the victims of the repressed emotions of a black man. Kate was a brave woman who wanted and actually tried to kill her husband after his prohibited action. Mattie is the victim of her father's emotions in a dream. The dream of Trueblood presents black man's attraction for the white woman. In his dream, he wanted to enjoy a white woman. The white woman was always a bait or enchantress for the black man. We observe the same feeling in the dance of Blonde at the game of the Battle Royal. This attraction for white woman and the feeling to enjoy or to rape her, presents Black community's feeling to revenge the White Race. The overall presentation of women, may be black or white, in the novel is of an oppressed object and submissive creature.

#### XIV

The novel is a journey of an unknown black Protagonist surrounding white atmosphere and accepting the challenges of the Black Community. In the underground life he realizes the real state of his community. His black community is torn away from familial bonds, under clothed, starved, whipped, sold and purchased as objects, chained, tortured, sexually assaulted, haunted by dogs and betrayed, deprived of all comforts of life. All these tribulations happened only because of the colour of the skin. Ellison's invisible protagonist is also deceived, troubled, tortured by the Whites and at Brotherhood by his own people. Ellison doesn't go back to the period of slavery but he depicts the contemporary state of his brothers after reformations and Civil Rights Movement. The

protagonist of the novel is optimistic, energetic young man ready to create his own identity. He struggled for his existence but got defeated yet he was hopeful. At the end he burned his past and was ready for dawn with new dreams in his eyes. He is destroyed but not defeated. The novel has compact structure of twenty-five chapters with prologue and epilogue that maintains the structure of the novel and presents the story of tribulations of Ellison and his community.