Visibility of ‘I’ in the invisible: a diasporic reading of invisible man by Ralph Ellison

Visibilidade do "eu" no invisível: uma leitura diaspórica de invisible man, de Ralph Ellison

Visibilidad del "yo" en lo invisible: una lectura diaspórica de el hombre invisible de Ralph Ellison

DOI:10.34117/bjdv10n3-033

Originals received: 02/16/2024
Acceptance for publication: 03/01/2024

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ABSTRACT
Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952) is awarded with National Book Award in 1953. It is a work of nationhood that discusses various topics like marginalisation, sustainability, crises of livelihood, supremacy and the socio-political instabilities. Modernity and the imperialist have brought diversity in the regional and ethical entities. Invisible Man deals with the need of willingness that is being suppressed by the unethical norms of colour, cast and creed. It also discusses the hardships of the Afro-Americans who survived in the mainstream with a spur of revival. So Invisible Man is on the other hand is treated as the voice of the marginalised. The novel begins with a first person narrative who is a black. The colour of his skin made him invisible even in his own eyes. So the question of being “I?” remains constant through out the novel. Apart from black identity and nationalism Invisible Man also discusses the substantial issues of individuality and personal identity. The narrator is being unnamed because it does not represent the black or the marginalised where as it represents the whole idea of the individuality. The novel seeks answer for the invisible ‘I’ who is needed to be visible and voiced.

Keywords: modernity, invisible, individuality, identity, visible, nationalism.

RESUMO
O livro Invisible Man (1952), de Ralph Ellison, foi premiado com o National Book Award em 1953. É uma obra sobre nacionalidade que discute vários tópicos como marginalização, sustentabilidade, crises de subsistência, supremacia e instabilidades sociopolíticas. A modernidade e o imperialismo trouxeram diversidade às entidades regionais e éticas. Invisible Man trata da necessidade de vontade que está sendo suprimida pelas normas antiéticas de cor, casta e credo. Também discute as dificuldades dos afro-americanos que sobreviveram na corrente dominante com um estímulo de renascimento. Por outro lado, Invisible Man é tratado como a voz dos marginalizados. O romance começa com uma narrativa em primeira pessoa que é um negro. A cor de sua pele o tornou invisível até mesmo aos seus próprios olhos. Portanto, a questão de ser "eu?” permanece
constante durante todo o romance. Além da identidade negra e do nacionalismo, Invisible Man também discute as questões substanciais da individualidade e da identidade pessoal. O narrador não é nomeado porque não representa o negro ou o marginalizado, mas sim toda a ideia de individualidade. O romance busca uma resposta para o "eu" invisível que precisa ser visível e ter voz.

**Palavras-chave**: modernidade, invisível, individualidade, identidade, visível, nacionalismo.

**RESUMEN**
El hombre invisible (1952) de Ralph Ellison es galardonada con el National Book Award en 1953. Se trata de una obra de carácter nacional que trata diversos temas como la marginación, la sostenibilidad, las crisis de subsistencia, la supremacía y las inestabilidades sociopolíticas. La modernidad y el imperialismo han aportado diversidad a las entidades regionales y éticas. Invisible Man trata de la necesidad de voluntad que está siendo suprimida por las normas poco éticas de color, casta y credo. También trata de las penurias de los afroamericanos que sobrevivieron en la corriente dominante con un acicate de resurgimiento. Por otra parte, El hombre invisible es tratado como la voz de los marginados. La novela comienza con la narración en primera persona de un negro. El color de su piel le hace invisible incluso a sus propios ojos. Así que la pregunta de "¿yo?" permanece constante a lo largo de la novela. Aparte de la identidad negra y el nacionalismo, Invisible Man también aborda las cuestiones sustanciales de la individualidad y la identidad personal. El narrador no se nombra porque no representa a los negros ni a los marginados, sino que representa toda la idea de la individualidad. La novela busca una respuesta para el "yo" invisible que necesita ser visible y tener voz.

**Palabras clave**: modernidad, invisible, individualidad, identidad, visible, nacionalismo.

**1 DESENVOLVIMENTO**

*Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison is one of such novels which have revolutionized the modern English novels. It has the doctrine that allows the audience to scrutinize the surrealist world through a different point of view. Ellison’s idea of *Invisible Man* is very strongly inferred with its need of visibility. In 1953, it was awarded the National Book Award for its unusual way of probing deep into the human grief and their existence. The revolution that it upholds stirs down the necessity of every person. The roots of belonging and the sustainability of growth are the two most crucial and inevitable in this modern world. Ralph Ellison profoundly understands the complexities of a black being born and brought up in the American estates. Ellison’s Invisible Man is a response to the treachery and betrayal part (the whites).

Ralph Ellison born in 1914, Oklahoma City derives his lineage from his great grandfathers who were bound to the shackles of slavery. When he moved to New York in 1936 for his earnings to provide himself a better career, he encountered the racial
discrimination as an offshoot. Then he began writing short stories and essays for the Federal Writers Program to earn a living and to do research. “New Masses”, “The Negro Quarterly”, “The New Republic”, “Saturday Reviews” and other publications were some of his noteworthy works which gave him an identity of being a prolific writer. An outburst of his for the opposition to the racial injustices is clearly visible in the *Invisible Man* which resulted in he himself becoming an invisible man. With the outbreak of Second World War, Ellison worked for the U.S. Merchant Marine as a cook. There he never noticed an elementary change in the behaviour of the Whites towards him. It was the same as it was before ruthless as well as merciless. The colour was the only thing which marked such a difference between him and the whites. The colour drew a boundary between the two. Despite of his hard labour and serving his best he was an ‘invisible man’ in the world of whites. Surprisingly, something is termed as invisible if it is not visible to naked eyes but here though it is clearly visible but due to one’s complexion the term invisible is used for that person. So, the concept of ‘invisible man’ evolves from the ignorance and the need of identifying the self. It becomes utmost necessary to identify one’s own-self in the ever increasing crowd of beings and to be able to find one-self in the map of human being. In today’s era it is one’s identity that distinguishes one from other and gives a new recognition to one self. So, in order to persevere in today’s world one needs to identify one’s identity.

*Invisible man* is a manifesto of racial discrimination which is prevalent in the modern day world. It is a voice for the invisible people who are continually in search of a visible self. According to a Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal’s book *An American Dilemma* reviewed that the novel has “changed the shape of American literature”. (Smith and Welch, 519-564,) It is often discussed as a bildungsroman which tells the story of an unknown black narrator who is in search of his identity and visibility in the white American society. The need of establishing self-identity in the society and to be treated as a human is the ultimate theme of the novel. It constantly deals with the perpetuities of indifferences that a black has to face. The society that marked the colour boundaries has created the indecency of visible to be blackened for self improvisation. But the coarseness of the dogma of the humanitarian society has liberated the coloured to grow in terms to know the unknown and to explore the unexplored to understand the visibility of freedom.

*Invisible Man* can be read as an allegory which deals with the unknown narrator’s perilous journey of innocence to enlightenment. The novel comprises a story of coming of age where a black man searches for its identity. The novel develops into an idea where
an un-named narrator gives an account detail of his socio-economic upbringing in the modern day temperament. The narrator himself describe as an invisible man, “I am an invisible man.” (Ellison, 3) The narrator narrates that his grandfather being a modest man confesses his anger towards the white at his deathbed. The system that has corrupted controlled and classified against them. So the narrator decides to dismiss his grandfather’s word and again go back being a meek and submissive. And when he being selected to take Mr. Norton to a visit all the meek and submissive built up attributes goes wrong one after the other. Moreover, both the veteran at the Golden Day and the narrator’s grandfather seem to endorse invisibility as a position from which one may safely exert power over others, or at least undermine others’ power, without being caught. The narrator demonstrates this power in the Prologue, when he literally draws upon electrical power from his hiding place underground; the electric company is aware of its losses but cannot locate their source “Poor fool, poor blind fool, I thought with sincere compassion, mugged by an invisible man!” (Ellison, 5)

On the other hand Ellison provides no solution for the complexities to the hierarchical legacies of racial discreet. Even though the unmanned narrator withdraws the notion and boldly states “I couldn’t be still even in hibernation. Because, damn it, there’s the mind… It wouldn’t let me rest.” (Ellison, 184) So, here Ellison points out that the only way to find a true liaison with the racial injustice is only when one pulls out its own true self. The need of visibility is extreme in the mockery of being invisible. The prime feature is to be an active and an individual self who can relocate the self and its identity in the relationship of the new and the history.

The character of Rinehart is a mystifying and puzzled one which embraces a source of deep ambiguity throughout the Invisible Man. The physical appearance of his is never been marked in the novel but the narrator learns his existence through others mistake who they mistaken him to be Rinehart. Rinehart is a disguise he seems playing different character for different people like that of a pimp, bookie, and reverend, all among other things which people used to think. Rinehart’s character is an extremely strange creation of Ellison’s manifesto, which is designed in a way that it seems more confusing and troubled that of being real and virtual, where as the character represents a conflict in the conception of identity. The notion of identity evidently gets changed depending upon the interactions and conundrum through the narrator’s interpretations. Throughout the novel the mystery of identity gets jeopardized and the forsaken freedom gets apprehended. As the novel progress the scenario gets defiled from the enchanted self.
of the meek narrator’s. At first, the narrator feels that Rinehart’s flexibility facilitate a kind of freedom, but he quickly realizes that Rinehart’s fluidity and shapelessness represents a complete loss of individual selfhood. In the end, the liquidity of Rinehart’s identity is one of the forces that compel the narrator to discover his own more solid identity.

Keeping the city clean is also a chief epitome of the novel. It is constantly been pointed out that it is necessary to keep the ‘optic white’ in the main frame. Similarly, when the narrator seeks for his individuality he was instructed by Mr. MacDuffy that “You better leave things in the locker room” (Ellison, 197) the superficial mere seems very casual but the ironic statement suggest that the narrator being a black has to keep his belongings back, the history that he upholds to has to be laid out if he wants to mingle with the new décor of the modern world. As the slogan that up ridge the post-colonial attitude of the whites “KEEP AMERICA PURE WITH LIBERTY PAINTS” (Ellison, 196). The freedom which the white marks is to the blacks who can withstand the adversities without being visible in the mainstream. The darkness that the narrator always wants to fight back but in despair as the void remains banked with loneliness “Then down into the earth; back to the ancient dust; back to the cold black clay… mother… of us all.”(Ellison, 131) The urge of going back to home constantly remains in the backdrop of the narrator but the going back was never so easy for him. As like when he took Mr. Norton for a visit and encountered the different diversities of his old life and people it brought him quite a trouble. So, the narrator wants to find his self to make an existence in the world where he could also be visible to those who composed him to be invisible due to his skin color. Those all vivid descriptions made the black man realize his own identity which he lost few years back. He was able to relate with his past and establish a certain identity of his own as well as of his other black fellow mates.

The harsh reality of life when faced by Mr. Norton on his visit with the narrator left him with bewilderment. He got a glimpse of the dreadful life lead by the people of that land. The realities which were forsaken due to the new wave of discreet has left many abandon and deserted. Similarly, when Mr. Norton came across Jim Trueblood, an uneducated black man who impregnated his own daughter was bizarre for the white. On the contrary, Trueblood according to his name was truly a savage who lives at the outskirts of town. According to Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* correctly points out that as because the orients are always looked through the eyes of the Western’s “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European
Western experience.” (Said, 1978:1) The savagery is being defined as that the representation of the character Trueblood is a depiction of Mr. Norton’s way of seeing the orients. But the Trueblood represent the clan of the savagery so the fact of impregnating his own daughter is an act of mating for human survival as they were outcaste from their own land and need a survival in a land of sleepwalkers. The black slavery and savagery is being forecasted through Trueblood. As far the narrator is concerned he is being deceived by the whites so promptly that his reality collapses. So, in the novel by limiting the narrator’s identity, these ideologies effectively render him invisible, as they force him to bury his real self beneath the roles that those around him require him to play. It is his color that forces him to become invisible even though his deeds demand him to be the brightest.

As far human civilization the black was given no position to speak for their own right, so the narrator questions “What did I do, To be so black, And blue?” (Ellison, 12) at the beginning is a testimony for the need of searching the self so that the sense of freedom could be tested “When I discover who I am, I’ll be free” (Ellison, 103)

The world is full of blind men and sleepwalkers who cannot see him (black) for what he is “Sometimes it is best not awaken them; there are few things in the world as dangerous as sleepwalkers.”(Ellison, 38), the narrator describes himself as an “invisible man.” The motif of invisibility encompasses the novel. The idea of being eyed-blind changes the whole scenario into a lash land of untidy humane relationships “I remember that I’m invisible and walk softly so as not awake the sleeping ones.”(Ellison, 38) The Invisible Man portrays blindness in a negative light which treats invisibility much more ambiguously. Invisibility can bring disempowerment, but it can also bring freedom and mobility. As the narrator correctly points out that the freedom of one lies with its own-self “Perhaps to lose a sense of where you are implies the danger of losing a sense of who you are.”(Ellison, 577) Certainly, it is the freedom that the narrator derives it from his inscrutability that enables him to tell his story. The narrator in a shrewd way narrates the entire story and sticks to the main theme till the very end. The cyclic order of the ambiguity constantly remains till the end of the novel where as at the end of the novel, the narrator has decided that while invisibility may bring safety and security for the actions that are consummated in secrecy cannot ultimately have any meaningful impact. One may undermine one’s enemies from a position of invisibility, but one cannot make significant changes to the world. Accordingly, in the Epilogue the narrator decides to emerge from his hibernation, resolved to face society and make a visible difference.
The work of Ellison “Invisible Man” is a mirror to the society to uplift oneself from the dogmatic norms. It also tries to liberate one own self from the delude ideologies of the ancient and try to find the one true self by exploring the new dimensions of the future through present. To be visible in the eyes of the world it is important to mark own boundaries by breaking the others. Unless and until one does not perform something idiosyncratic from others one remains unnoticeable. Identity is what distinguishes one from other. So, in order to get attention of the other beings it is important to establish a strong and distinctive identity of one self. The sleepwalkers will always put the cloak of invisibility to the potentials so that the power does not get divided. But to ensure one's existence one has to think out of the box as the narrator who tries to find itself to be free and to be visible in the dockyard of invisibility. So it is very important to realize that the blackness is highly significant, but cannot easily be deciphered. The acceptance of one notion of race, is the only way to discover that their exceptions and difficulties in the ideas which one encounters is very immeasurable. Thus, the acknowledgment of one’s own identity is at utmost supreme to endure the obscurities. The need of freedom will be enlisted and endured by the need of visibility of one own self in front of its own eyes. It can be concluded that liberation and self-identity are the prime things needed for survival and development of one own self in this rapidly developing world. These two factors are required for one to cope up with the ever increasing and the ever demanding world.
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