

ABSURDIST APPROACH TO AFRO-AMERICAN NATIONAL QUESTION IN RALPH ELLISON'S INVISIBLE MAN

Tilak Bahadur Khatri

ABSTRACT

This article explores the different contradictory facets of society that the nameless black Protagonist of Ralph Ellison's novel Invisible Man goes through which leads him to fall into Absurdism. The protagonist, who is from black nationality, belongs to the working class in class based society. He is exploited not only by whites but he is exploited by the rich blacks as well. He gets help not only from the blacks but he also gets help from the lower class whites as well. But he is unable to differentiate friends from foes. As he belongs to the black nationality, he wants to liberate himself and the whole black nationality from every kinds of oppression, injustice, and inequality. This leads him to join the Brotherhood (the communist Party) but leaves it soon as he is unaware of its principles. He never joins the Black Nationalist party and he is unable to find out any other forces that will be the remedy for black national oppression. In the end, he becomes hopeless and begins to see chaos everywhere and decides to run away from the society. But living aloof from the society, he still sees the possibilities to serve the society which is an absurdist idea in itself. This queer theory of Absurdism the protagonist develops at the end, leads the struggles of Afro-Americans nowhere, instead, it damages their struggles arousing the frustration and the pessimism to the whole oppressed Afro-Americans.

KEY WORDS

National Question, Class Struggle, Absurdism, Brotherhood, Black Nationalism, Invisibility, Consciousness, Ignorance, Oppression, Proletariat, Bourgeoisie.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ralph Ellison is a well-known Afro-American novelist and essayist. He wrote two novels in his life time. His first novel *Invisible Man* (1952) won several prizes including the National Book Award and his most ambitious project, the second novel *Juneteenth* was published after Ellison's death in 1999. Ellison deals with the Afro-American National Question in *Invisible Man* through its unnamed poor black protagonist. It is a semi-biographical novel because the black protagonist of the novel represents Ellison himself in many ways. The plot of the novel moves around the story of the protagonist who travels from south to north to get his livelihood, identity and freedom but he fails to get them, becomes frustrated, retires from society and begins to live in isolation. The nameless black boy tells his story while living underground and becoming an "Invisible Man" to the society. At the end of his story, when he was running away to save his life in a race-riot, he fell down a manhole. He claims that he has stayed underground in a coal cellar lighted by 1,369 bulbs ever since. This place symbolically represents the invisibility of the nameless black protagonist in oppressive American society. This article tries to find out the reason behind the protagonist's sufferings, the pain of his struggles and the causes of his failures to identify the remedy of the black national oppression in America.

2. PORTRAYAL OF THE ISSUE

The novel is set in the approximate period 1930-1950. As a young man, in the late 1920s or early 1930s, the narrator lived in his home in the south. He is very poor and belongs to the slave family. His grandparents were slaves eighty five years ago. He admits: "I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves." His grandfather appears to have been a freedom fighter. He might have been involved and fought in the civil war carrying guns for the emancipation of slaves. On his deathbed he has said to the narrator's father: "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 a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction" (*Invisible* 15, 16). The narrator's grandfather has portrayed the life of blacks in America as a war that should be fought continuously if they want to survive with dignity. He himself had carried gun until he had given up it back in the Reconstruction. What the narrator's grandfather means to say that there is no future of American blacks if they run away from struggle and stop fighting. Slaves were freed not only because they were favored by Lincoln, the union leadership and industrial capitalists but also because the large numbers of black slaves joined the union army and they fought against their masters and confederate troops of the south. Amilcar Cabral and Paul Robeson write: "Around 186,000 Afro-American troops served in Northern armies. They came from working class and petty bourgeois circles in the North and from free and fugitive slave elements in the south. Others took up arms against their masters and confederate troops as the Union armies approached" (17).

His grandfather's death bed words suggest us about the success, failure and betrayal in the struggle of blacks in America from slavery to civil war and Reconstruction and onwards. His grandfather as well as black slaves had carried guns and they were freed but when they gave up their guns in the period of Reconstruction, the blacks were betrayed by the compromise of 1877. In the period of reconstruction and onwards "Negroes are frequently and arbitrarily arrested, beaten up and murdered by US authorities at various levels and members of the Ku Klux Klan and other racists" (Tsetung 1). This suggests his grandfather has seen the plight of American blacks and he knows it is struggle or war which is synonymous to their life. Therefore, at his death bed, he has given the most important clues of Afro-American life to his family members.

The narrator, unfortunately, could not understand the clues of his grandfather. The narrator admits: "I could never be sure of what he meant." His grandfather taught him to be a revolutionary but he has chosen to be a humble and submissive one: "On my graduation day I delivered an oration in which I showed that humility was the secret, indeed, the very essence of progress" (*Invisible* 16, 17). He thinks his oration became successful because he was invited to give his graduation speech again at a gathering of the town's leading white citizens. He thinks it is a triumph for his whole community. But he does not know it is not a triumph but it is a disgrace for his community.

He is going to deliver his speech in front of the upper class white citizens. He says: "I was shocked to see some of the most important men of the town quite tipsy. They were all there - bankers, lawyers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants. Even one of the more fashionable pastors." They neither represent the lower class white citizens nor the people of black community. Before he is allowed to deliver his speech, he is forced to see a naked blonde dancing in front of them. While she was dancing, she was chased by a hypnotized merchant until some of the more sober ones helped her to escape. Then, the narrator is blindfolded and compelled to fight with other nine poor black boys. In this 'battle royal' the ten poor black boys are reduced to fighting animals. After the 'battle royal', the upper class white men force the poor black youths to scramble over an electrified rug in order to snatch at fake gold coins. As the poverty stricken boys struggle to pick up the coins from the electrified rug, the swollen belly

white spectators roared from above: "Pick it up, goddamnit, pick it up!" someone called like a bass-voiced parrot. "Go on, get it!" (*Invisible* 18, 27)

Only after humiliating him so much, he is allowed to deliver the speech in front of the people belonging to his enemy class and race. But he declares: "I wanted to deliver my speech more than anything else in the world, because I felt that only these men could judge truly my ability..." He does not know that they are his dire enemies judging racially and from his class stand. They are going to reward him a scholarship to a Negro college not because they appreciate his speech but because they want to use his oratorical skill against his people forcing him to say what they like. The school superintendent addresses the men saying: "Gentlemen, you see that I did not over praise this boy. He makes a good speech and some day he'll lead his people in the proper paths" (*Invisible* 25, 32). Leading his people in "the proper paths" for superintendent is to convince the black community to accept the supremacy of ruling whites. When the narrator is delivering his speech, his every words are scrutinized by his audiences. They do not like to listen the word 'equality'. When the narrator mistakenly pronounce 'equality' instead of 'responsibility', the sounds of displeasure filled the room. The M.C. rushes forward and orders him to correct the mistake and reminds him his place:

"you sure that about 'equality' was a mistake?"

"Oh , yes, sir," I said. "I was swallowing blood."

"Well, you had better speak more slowly so we can understand. We mean to do right by you, but you've got to know your place at all times. All right, now, go on with your speech." (*Invisible* 31)

This is the proof why the narrator is awarded for his speech. After he is awarded a scholarship to the state college for Negroes, he becomes extremely happy: "I was so moved that I could hardly express my thanks." But his happiness did not have its solid ground that it would last long. The narrator has a dream that night in which he meets his grandfather who informs him that his scholarship is actually a piece of paper reading "To Whom It May Concern... Keep This Nigger Boy Running" (*Invisible* 32, 33).

What his grandfather informs him in his dream, ultimately, becomes a naked reality for him. He is expelled from the college for the mistake that he has not committed. He goes off to a Southern Negro College which in due course is revealed as only another device for keeping ruling white consciousness peaceful and poor black men invisible. The narrator is asked to drive a wealthy white trustee of the college, Mr. Norton, around the campus. Norton talks incessantly about his daughter, then shows an undue interest in the narrative of Jim Trueblood, a sharecropper, uneducated black man who impregnated his own daughter. Mr. Norton himself had an incestuous feeling towards his own daughter. "This episode includes a powerful and significant scene in which Norton, a visiting white philanthropist, meets a black sharecropper locally notorious as the father of his own daughter's child and, listening to the black man's story, vicariously fulfills his own secret incestuous urges" (Wakeman 439-40). Mr. Norton frequently mentions as Negro is his fate but he does not have a good intention behind it. Jonathan Baumbach writes: "Underlying Norton's recurrent platitude that 'the Negro is my fate' (he means that they are his potency) is the same prurience that motivates the sadism of the white citizens in the preceding scene"(qtd. in Wakeman 440). Mr. Norton as well as the upper class white citizens of the 'battle royal' scene are cruel beasts for the poor black citizens including the narrator.

The narrator could not recognize them. He neither has class nor racial consciousness. He has hoped to use the rich white citizens including Mr. Norton as a ladder to go up for him and for his black community. The reality is just opposite which he cannot understand. "At the Golden Day, the mad doctor shrewdly observes that the young hero, so dedicated to becoming a leader of his people, has already learned to suppress not only his feelings but his humanity, that he is an invisible, walking personification of negative man" (Magill 600). The mad doctor exposes the

naked reality of the relationship between the narrator and Mr. Norton. The black people will be the destiny of Mr. Norton until he manages to keep them under his control and until the narrator like black people accepts to become the shadow of rich white people thinking that white is right and the rich whites are everything for the poor black people. The mad doctor points out: "He believes in you as he believes in the beat of his heart. He believes in that great false wisdom taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that white is right. I can tell you his destiny. He'll do your bidding, and for that his blindness is his chief asset. He's your man, friend. Your man and your destiny" (*Invisible* 95).

Among the people of the black nationality, upper class blacks are not the real sufferers of national oppression. Liu Chun says: "Among the people of the oppressed nationalities, those who actually suffer national oppression are mainly the oppressed and exploited classes, the workers and the broad masses of laboring people, most of whom are peasants" (5). The people belonging to the upper class black nationality make an alliance with the upper class whites in exploiting the vast majority of the lower class people of the black nationality. Dr Bledsoe, who is the president of the college, belongs to the black nationality. In his early years, he was no different from the narrator. He was a barefoot boy belonging to the lower class but years of his service to the upper class whites he managed to get their favor and became the president of the college. Now, his class position is changed and he is no different from the upper class white trustees of the college. As he belongs to the black community and has gained power and money equals to other upper class whites, the narrator like poor and powerless black people have mistakenly taken him as their leader. The narrator says: "To us he was more than just a president of a college. He was a leader, a 'Statesman' who carried our problems to those above us, even unto the White House . . . He was our coal-black daddy of whom we were afraid" (*Invisible* 116).

Dr. Bledsoe is neither the leader of the poor blacks nor he works as their coal-black daddy. He is one of their dire enemies belonging to their enemy class. It is not the will and decision of the narrator taking Mr. Norton to the old slave quarters and the Golden Day. It is the will and decision of Mr. Norton. When Dr. Bledsoe feels Mr. Norton is quite upset visiting there, Dr. Bledsoe exaggerates the issue to please Mr. Norton. Dr. Bledsoe croons in front of Mr. Norton: "Mr. Norton, *Mister Norton*! I'm so sorry . . . I thought I had sent you a boy who was careful, a sensible young man! Why we've never had an accident before. Never, not in seventy five years. I assure you, sir, that he shall be disciplined, severely disciplined!" In comparison to Dr. Bledsoe, Mr. Norton appears quite soft towards the narrator. Mr. Norton clarifies that it was not a big accident and the narrator was not responsible for this. But Dr. Bledsoe is not ready to stop there. He forgets once he was also a poor boy like the narrator and he belongs to the black community. Dr. Bledsoe declares: "Don't be kind sir . . . you can't be soft with these people. We mustn't pamper them. An accident to a guest of this college while he is in the charge of a student is without a question the student's fault. That's one of our strictest rules!" (*Invisible* 103, 104).

The upper class whites are God for Dr. Bledsoe. Dr. Bledsoe has taken them the source of power and everything. He persuades the narrator to be submissive and surrender in front of them. Dr. Bledsoe suggests: "These white folk have newspapers, magazines, radios, spokesman to get their ideas across. If they want to tell the world a lie, they can tell it so well that it becomes the truth; and if I tell them that you're lying, they'll tell the world even if you prove you're telling the truth." The motto of Dr. Bledsoe is to please the upper class whites and secure his power intact. For this, he does not hesitate to do anything. If he wanted he could protect the narrator and would not punish him for the crime he has not committed. But why does he save the narrator? He even does not hesitate to lie the upper class whites, his source of money and power, if it helps to protect his hard earned class position. He neither concerns the blacks nor the whites. His main concern is to save his class position. He explains the narrator: "I don't care. I wouldn't raise my little finger to stop you. Because I don't owe anyone a thing, son. Who, Negroes? Negroes don't control this school . . . nor white folk either. True they support it, but I control it. I's big and black . . . I'm still

the king down here" (*Invisible* 143, 142). Although Dr. Bledsoe reveals his power in the college administration, he does not show any interest to protect the narrator.

At the beginning, the narrator has visualized himself as a potential Booker T. Washington. Booker T. Washington who had founded Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama was an ex-slave, educator and writer. Far from being Booker T. Washington, he has to face the problems of his livelihood after he is expelled from the Negro college. Dr. Bledsoe shows a false kindness to the narrator giving him seven letters which will help the narrator to find a job in New York city. Addressed to several white trustees of the college, these letters are sealed and Dr. Bledsoe strictly warns the narrator not to open them. These letters of recommendation are of no help. At last, the narrator goes to the office of one of his letters' addressees, a trustee named Mr. Emerson. There he meets Emerson's son, who opens the letter and gives it to the narrator to read himself. To his surprise, the letter has not recommended him for a job. The narrator has been betrayed; the letters from Bledsoe actually portray the narrator as dishonorable and unreliable. After collecting some money for college fees, the narrator has planned to return to the college in the fall but Dr. Bledsoe does not want him to return back. Dr. Bledsoe has a plan to chase him further away. He has written in the letter addressed to Mr. Emerson: "I beg of you, sir, to help him continue in the direction of that promise which, like the horizon, recedes ever brightly and distantly beyond the hopeful traveler" (*Invisible* 191).

Dr. Bledsoe is not an alien race for the narrator but the narrator is betrayed by the black Dr. Bledsoe more than anyone else. After the narrator read the letter, he manages to discover the naked reality: "I had seen the letter and it had practically ordered me killed by slow degrees..." The narrator is submissive and humble. He has not learnt and he does not know to use force against his enemy. He has learnt to go up by being humble and doing the service of the people like Dr. Bledsoe and Mr. Norton. But after reading the recommendation letter of Dr. Bledsoe, he cannot remain humble and submissive. From his inner heart, he feels to take revenge on Dr. Bledsoe. He realizes the importance of violence and he somewhat understands the suggestion of his grandfather given to him at his death bed. The narrator takes a vow: "When I stopped, gasping for breath, I decided that I would go back and kill Bledsoe. Yes, I thought, I owe it to the race and to myself. I'll kill him" (*Invisible* 194).

The narrator is not in the position of fulfilling his intense desire of taking revenge against Dr. Bledsoe. The primary thing for the narrator is to survive in New York City. So, he takes help from the young Emerson to get a low-paying job at the Liberty paints plant, whose trademark color is "Optic White". The white young Emerson helps the narrator to find the job but he has to quit the job because of the black mischievous worker Lucius Brockway. The narrator briefly helps as an assistant to Lucius Brockway. Lucius Brockway is a black man who makes this white paint. Later Brockway suspects the narrator of joining in union activities and turns on him. Neglecting the paint making, the two men fight, consequently, one of the unattended tanks explodes, and the narrator becomes unconscious. The narrator wakes in the paint factory's hospital. He has temporarily lost his memory and ability to speak. The white doctors take an opportunity to conduct electric shock experiments to their unidentified black patient. The white doctors, who do not concern the humanity of the black patients, experiment on them and force them to forget their culture and ancestry. Robert O' Meally writes: "In *Invisible Man*, the factory hospital is a metaphor for the modern industrialized city that fractures black folk-consciousness. There the white doctors, with shrieks and electric shocks, endeavor to force the young fellow to learn his place, to forget his history and identity, and to yield to the power of the cold, steely machine" (227).

After the narrator recovers his memory in the hospital, he is not allowed to return to his job. He becomes jobless again. He is expelled from the college because of the black Dr. Bledsoe and he is compelled to leave his job because of the black mischievous worker Lucius Brockway. The

narrator is a black but he is victimized by the other two blacks. But the majority of blacks of the lower class helps the narrator in need and guide him to go along the right path. After the narrator leaves the hospital, because of his physical weakness, he collapses on the street. Some black community members take him to the home of Mary Rambo, a kind black woman who lets him live with her for free in Harlem and nurtures his sense of black heritage. Mary Rambo reminds the narrator: "It's you young folks what's going to make the changes . . . 'Y' all's the ones. You got to lead and you got to fight and move us all on up a little higher." Miss Mary appears so kind and dear one for the narrator. Miss Mary who does not only help the narrator in need but, like his grandfather, she also tries to guide him to take the right path. Miss Mary is more than a 'friend' for the narrator. She acts for him as a force, a stable, familiar force which keeps him from whirling off. The narrator admires Miss Mary: " . . . Mary reminded me constantly that something was expected of me, some act of leadership, some newsworthy achievement; and I was torn between resenting her for it and loving her for the nebulous hope she kept alive" (*Invisible* 255, 258).

One day, the narrator witnesses the eviction of an elderly black couple from their Harlem apartment. The narrator encounters a crowd of people gathered in front of a building where two white men are pulling out the poor old Negro couple from their apartment. The Negro couple are helpless. Among the crowd of people, nobody has dared to help them. Looking at the miserable condition of the old couple, the narrator is moved by a warm, dark, rising whirlpool of emotion and unknowingly, he begins to yell: "Black men! Brothers! Black Brothers! . . ." The narrator asks the people to organize and fight against the injustice done to the old Negro couple. The narrator yells: "Let's follow a leader, let's organize. Organize . . ." (*Invisible* 275, 276). Soon, the people are organized and men, women and children begin to pick up the thrown out pieces of furniture and other articles and lug them back into the building. With the encouragement of the narrator, the people are organized and the old couple manages to get back their apartment.

The oppression of the Negro Couple appears to be only a national oppression but in the final analysis it is a class oppression. Regarding the black national oppression in US, Mao Tsetung points out: "In the final analysis, a national struggle is a question of class struggle. In the United States, it is only the reactionary ruling clique among the whites which is oppressing the Negro people. They can in no way represent the workers, farmers, revolutionary intellectuals, and other enlightened persons who comprise the overwhelming majority of the white people" (3). As the old couple are being pulled out from their apartment by the two white men, the old woman feels all the whites are as their enemies. Turning her eyes toward the sky, she moans: "These white folks, Lord. These white folks." But these two white men do not represent the majority of white people. They are the representative of the ruling whites. One of the two white men explains: "I don't want to do this, I *have* to do it. They sent me up here to do it. If it was left to me, you could stay here till hell freezes over . . ." (*Invisible* 270). Later, when the thrown out articles of the Negro couple are being lug back by the people into the building, one of the two white trustees is also carrying a chair back inside. Not only him, there are other several white men and women are also helping the old Negro couple carrying their thrown out articles back into the building. The narrator becomes puzzled to see them helping the Negro couple:

"We're friends of the people," one of the white men called.

"Friends of what people?" I called, prepared to jump down upon him if he answered, "you people."

"We're friends of *all* the common people," he shouted.

"We came up to help." (*Invisible* 282)

These white people, who are helping the Negro couple, belong to the workers, farmers, revolutionary intellectuals and other enlightened persons who comprise the majority of the white people.

The narrator has developed racial consciousness but he does not have class consciousness. The narrator has connected the eviction of the Negro couple to the racial oppression. He thinks that the old Negro couple are evicted because they are blacks. So, in his speech, he has only addressed to the black brothers to fight against the injustice done to the old Negro couple. In his conversation with Brother Jack, the narrator explains the reasons to help them: "'Sure, we're both black,' I said, beginning to laugh. / He smiled, his eyes intense upon my face. / 'Seriously, are they your relatives?' / 'Sure, we were burned in the same oven,' I said" (*Invisible* 292). The narrator knows the old couple are black but he does not know that they are utterly poor and helpless. If the old Negro couple are rich, nobody would force them to leave the apartment. If the narrator belongs to the upper class black like Dr. Bledsoe, he would not talk in favor of the old Negro couple. The old Negro couple are oppressed racially, but more than that, they are oppressed because they belong to the oppressed class. The narrator and the old Negro couple have an intimacy because they belong to the same race, but more than that, they are intimate because they belong to the same oppressed class.

The speech given by the narrator against eviction brings him the new opportunities in his life. Brother Jack overhears his speech and offers him a position as a spokesman for the Brotherhood, a political organization that allegedly works to help the socially oppressed. It has been said that all the common white and black people are organized in the Brotherhood for their common good. Brother Jack is one of the main leaders of Brotherhood and he belongs to the white community. Brother Jack explains about the objective of the Brotherhood to the narrator: "What are we doing? What is our mission? It's simple; we are working for a better world for all people. It's that simple. Too many have been dispossessed of their heritage, and we have banded together in Brotherhood so as to do something about it" (*Invisible* 304). Jack's explanation about the Brotherhood makes us clear that the Brotherhood is an organization that works for the betterment of the people who are economically and socially oppressed. Meally writes: "In the novel the Brotherhood stands, to a large extent, for the American communist party" (236). After the narrator joins the Brotherhood, he himself has interpreted the Brotherhood as such:

I thought of Bledsoe and Norton and what they had done. By kicking me into the dark they'd made me see the possibility of achieving something greater and more important than I'd ever dreamed. Here was a way that didn't lead through the back door, a way not limited by black and white, but a way which, if one lived long enough and worked hard enough, could lead to the highest possible rewards. Here was a way to have a part in making the big decisions, of seeing through the mystery of how the country, the world, really operated. For the first time, lying there in the dark, I could glimpse the possibility of being more than a member of a race. It was no dream, the possibility existed. I had only to work and learn and survive in order to go to the top. (*Invisible* 354-55)

The narrator understands the Brotherhood as an organization where both blacks and whites can work together. But he takes the Brotherhood as a means to get his personal rewards and as a ladder for him to go to the top. The real communist party does not work for anybody's personal advantages but it only works for the oppressed class as a whole in the class struggle. The communist party is only one organization that is capable of organizing the blacks and the whites of the oppressed class to end up every kinds of oppression of the common people including the black national oppression in US. Karl Marx writes in the Communist Manifesto: "The communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole" (49). The communist party is formed to eliminate the every kinds of human oppression and it does not have its aim only to have some changes in the old system of oppression. The Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA states: "An actual revolution does not mean trying to make some changes *within* this system—it means *overthrowing* this system and bringing into being a radically different and far better system" (1). The communist party does not only speak about the

reformation of old society, instead, it aims to do the actual revolution that establishes the new and better system overthrowing the old one. The Brotherhood, which appears to be a communist party in the novel, is the only option for the narrator if he wants to emancipate himself and his race from the national oppression. But the narrator joins the Brotherhood with the wrong concept of using the party for gaining his personal advantages and fulfilling his personal ambitions.

After the narrator joins the Brotherhood, he is placed in charge of advancing struggle in Harlem. The narrator delivers speeches in different programs and becomes a high-profile figure in the Brotherhood and he enjoys his work. One day, however, he receives an anonymous note which warns him to remember his place as a black man in the Brotherhood. Not long after, the black Brotherhood member Brother Wrestrum accuses the narrator who tries to use the Brotherhood to advance a selfish desire for personal upliftment. Brother Wrestrum has accused the narrator because Wrestrum becomes over-zealous to the success of the narrator and there is some truth behind his accusation as well. While a committee of the Brotherhood investigates the charges, the organization moves the narrator to another post, as an advocate of women's rights. This incident brings some frustration to the narrator on his belief to the Brotherhood. The narrator complains:

Brotherhood was something to which men could give themselves completely; that was its strength and my strength, and it was this sense of wholeness that guaranteed that it would change the course of history. This I had believed with all my being, but now, though still inwardly affirming that belief, I felt a blighting hurt which prevented me from trying further to defend myself. (*Invisible* 406)

This small incident becomes the subject of the narrator's negative evaluation of the Brotherhood. After a short time, the Brotherhood sends the narrator back to Harlem, where he discovers that Clifton has disappeared. Later, the narrator finds Clifton on the street selling dancing sambo dolls. The sambo dolls represent the stereotype of the lazy and servile slave. Clifton does not have a permit to sell his wares on the street. White policemen arrest him and shoot him dead in front of the narrator and the others. The narrator organizes a funeral for Clifton in his own decision and gives a speech in which he portrays his dead friend as a hero, galvanizing public sentiment in Clifton's favor. The Brotherhood becomes furious with him for staging the funeral without permission, and Jack severely criticizes him: "The great tactician of *personal* responsibility regrets our absence. . ." (*Invisible* 464). The narrator is mainly being criticized for the action he has taken without consulting with the senior leaders of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood sends the narrator back to Brother Hambro to learn about the organization's new strategies in Harlem.

The narrator becomes more frustrated on the Brotherhood when the Brotherhood and Brother Jack hold different views on the question of Tod Clifton's funeral. It is natural that opinions can differ on some issues inside the communist party but they are settled in course of the inner-party struggle. But, the narrator has taken it negatively and he says: "Some of me, too, had died with Tod Clifton. So I would see Hambro for whatever it was worth." The narrator comes to Brother Hambro's apartment where Hambro tells him that the Brotherhood has chosen to slow down the aggressiveness of the Negroes in Harlem. Hambro informs him: "In fact, we now have to slow them down for their own good. It's a scientific necessity." Clifton's funeral has increased agitation over race relations in Harlem. The narrator wants to get the quick result leading the agitation further. But analyzing the agitation, the Brotherhood has come to the conclusion that it would not be the right time to lead the movement further because it would upset the master plan of the Brotherhood. Hambro explains the narrator: "I mean only that they must be brought along more slowly. They can't be allowed to upset the tempo of the master plan. Timing is all important" (*Invisible* 478, 503, 504).

The narrator cannot agree with Hambro's views which makes the narrator to think that the Brotherhood is against the black movement in Harlem. Moreover, the narrator comes to the

conclusion that the Brotherhood is a white men's organization which suppresses the blacks. Though the narrator is criticized for the first time in the Brotherhood by the black member Brother Wrestrum, he equals the Brotherhood only with the white members and Brother Jack and he declares they are no different from Norton and Emerson. The narrator says: "And now I looked around a corner of my mind and saw Jack and Norton and Emerson merge into one single white figure" (*Invisible* 508). For this reason alone, the narrator almost decides to renounce the Brotherhood. Regarding the narrator's renunciation of the Brotherhood, Meally says: "In *Invisible Man*, the protagonist's decision to renounce his whole hearted support for the Brotherhood is based on his discovery that the radical group is racist" (236). The narrator thinks the Brotherhood has only used him, as he is used by Mr. Norton as a weapon targeting blacks by a black for their advantages. He comes to the conclusion that the Brotherhood has used him in the principle to "use a nigger to catch a nigger" (*Invisible* 558).

If the narrator concludes the Brotherhood is a racist one, he has another option, though it is not a good option, to involve himself into black nationalist movement led by Ras the Exhorter. In the novel, Ras the Exhorter has led an organization guided by the philosophy of black nationalism. The black nationalism is a bourgeois ideology which organizes all the people belonging to the oppressor and oppressed class of a nation against all the other nations. Revolutionary political organization/Marxist Leninist writes: "All nationalism, both of the oppressor and the oppressed nations, is the ideology of the bourgeoisie. It is based on the idea of 'national unity' - the unity of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie of one nation against all other nations" (7). In his organization, Ras the Exhorter has organized only the black people and he takes all people belonging to the white nationality as their enemies. Ras declares: "We organize-organization is good - but we organize black. BLACK!" Ras further declares: "No! Ras, he be here black and fighting for the liberty of the black people when the white folks have got what they want and done gone off laughing in your face and you stinking and choked up with white maggots" (*Invisible* 373, 375). Ras criticizes the narrator who joins the Brotherhood. Ras takes the Brotherhood as the organization of whites and for him it is an enemy organization.

After the narrator renounces the Brotherhood blaming it is a racist one, on the issues of black movement, he does not possess the different views than Ras the Exhorter. But, the narrator does not come closer to the black movement led by Ras the Exhorter. The narrator has portrayed a race-riot that starts at the end in Harlem, as a terrorist activity and its leader Ras the Exhorter as a great terrorist. The narrator describes them as:

They moved in a tight-knit order, carrying sticks and clubs, shotguns and rifles, led by Ras the Exhorter become Ras the Destroyer upon a great black horse. A new Ras of a haughty, vulgar dignity, dressed in the costume of an Abyssinian chieftain; a fur cap upon his head, his arm bearing a shield, a cape made of the skin of some wild animal around his shoulders. A figure more out of a dream than out of Harlem, than out of even this Harlem night, yet real, alive, alarming. (*Invisible* 556)

As he could not understand the nature of racial movement, the narrator has found it to be a great terrorism. For him, Ras's activities bring no positive changes for the oppressed black community in America, instead, they only create terror and frustration to them.

Because of his inability in understanding the different contradictory facets of a society, the narrator falls himself into absurdism. He finds the world utterly absurd. He says: "And I knew that it was better to live out one's own absurdity than to die for that of others, whether for Ras's or Jack's" (*Invisible* 559). In his confused state in understanding the world, the narrator is more attracted to Jim Trueblood and Rinehart who are the symbols of chaos. Jim Trueblood who is the black sharecropper of the south, embraced chaos by impregnating his own daughter and Rinehart, who is a Harlem gambler, lover, priest and seer has become a master manipulator of a chaos. Meally writes: "Indeed, what these black men have most in common is that both have stood

before teeming chaos and have survived" (244). Like these two black men, the narrator himself decides to accept chaos in which he thinks there are infinite possibilities for improving. The narrator, in fact, decides to live underground, making himself separate from the society, to discover these infinite possibilities. But it is obscure what he means of these infinite possibilities and how he achieves them. No matter how, the narrator philosophizes his theory of Chaos, it is nothing more than the revelation of his own ignorance in understanding this complex world. The world is full of contradictions. To talk about the American society, there are contradictions between whites and blacks, between upper class and lower class whites, between upper class and lower class blacks, between whites and red Indians and other nationalities, between males and females and so on. There is a relative unity and absolute struggle between these contradictory forces. It is an unavoidable rules of dialectics. Those who are unaware of the rules of dialectics, they begin to see chaos and absurdity everywhere. This is the case of the narrator of *Invisible Man*.

3. CONCLUSION

This article draws a conclusion on the development of the narrator which goes against the statement of Ralph Ellison. In the interview given to *Paris Review* Ellison says: "In my novel the narrator's development is one through blackness to light, that is, from ignorance to enlightenment, invisibility to visibility"(qtd. in Callahan 41). But, the plot of the novel shows the narrator's development is one through blackness to blackness, that is, from ignorance to ignorance, invisibility to invisibility. The narrator remains the same ignorant black youth from the beginning to the end. The narrator neither did know the way of emancipation of himself and his black community at the beginning nor does he find the ways at the end. His theory of Chaos tells him that neither the Brotherhood nor the Black Nationalist can liberate him and his whole suppressed black nationality and neither he discovers any other forces and nor he thinks he himself can create such forces for their liberation. His chaos theory tells him to move into Absurdism. He makes an absurdist plan in which he sees infinite possibilities to serve the society living aloof from the society. Renouncing the communist and nationalist ideologies, the narrator adopts the ideology of Absurdism. His theory of Absurdism on Afro-American national question not only misleads the struggles of Afro-Americans but it also serves the ruling whites to strengthen their political power arousing the frustration and pessimism to the oppressed Afro-Americans. In this sense, though the novel raises the issue of Afro-Americans, it ultimately speaks against Afro-Americans. In this regard, one African American author, John Oliver Killens, condemned the novel as a "vicious distortion of Negro life" (qtd. in Haley 367). As the novel ends the struggles of blacks in failure and frustration, Ellison not only demonstrates the inability of blacks to fight against the powerful whites' world but he also devalues the successful struggles of blacks since the civil war.

4. REFERENCES

- [1] Cabral Amilcar and Paul Robeson Collective. "The Development of the Afro-American Nation." In Defence of the Right to Political Secession for the Afro-American Nation. Revolutionary Political Organization Marxist Leninist/ Amilcar Cabral and Paul Robeson Collective, Sept. 1982, PP. 16-23.
- [2] Callahan, John F., editor. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: A Casebook. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- [3] Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. "How We Can Win – How We Can Really Make Revolution." Revolution Newspaper/revcom.us, 19 Sept. 2016, <https://revcom.us/a/457/how-we-can-win-en.html> Accessed 6 Aug. 2019.
- [4] Chun, Liu. The National Question and Class Struggle. Foreign Languages, 1966.
- [5] Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. Vintage Books, 1995.

- [6] Haley, Charles Pete Banner. "Transformations and Re- inventions: Juneteenth and Ralph Ellison's American Identity." *The Journal of the Historical Society*, II:3-4, Summer/Fall, 2002, PP. 363-76.
- [7] Magill, Frank N., editor. *American Fiction Series 2*. Salem Press, 1985.
- [8] Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Foreign Languages, 1975.
- [9] Meally, Robert O'. "Ralph Ellison." *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies*, edited by A. Walton Litz, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981, PP. 221-52.
- [10] Revolutionary Political Organization Marxist Leninist. "Marxism-Leninism and the National-Colonial Question" In *Defence of the Right to Political Secession for the Afro-American Nation*. Revolutionary Political Organization Marxist Leninist/ Amilcar Cabral and Paul Robeson Collective, Sept. 1982, PP. 3-15.
- [11] Tsetung, Mao. "Oppose Racial Discrimination By U.S. Imperialism." *The Marxist-Leninist*, 26 Dec. 2008, <https://marxistleninist.wordpress.com/2008/12/26/two-articles-by-mao-zedong-on-the-african-american-national-question/>. Accessed 1 Dec. 2018.
- [12] Wakeman, John, editor. *World Authors 1950-1970 : A Companion Volume to Twentieth Century Authors*. Wilson Company, 1975.

AUTHOR

Tilak Bahadur Khatri, M. A, is a Lecturer of English Literature at Patan Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal, since 2017. He has had two decades of experience in teaching English Literature at PMC and other different colleges of Kathmandu Valley. He is a resident of Jhapa district, Nepal. He pursued his early education from his home district in Jhapa, Nepal. He earned intermediate and bachelor degrees in two faculties (Humanities and Commerce) from Mahendra Morang Adharsa Multiple Campus, T.U., Biratnagar, Nepal. He did his M. A. in English Literature from University Campus, T.U., Kirtipur and currently he is a PHD scholar at Tribhuvan University, Nepal. He has translated four Chinese novels, two philosophical documents and a Chinese research writing written on the Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution from English to Nepali language. He has published a number of articles on both literature and philosophy in different Journals and Magazines. His email address is tilakkckhatri@gmail.com

