PREFACE
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Ralph Ellison is too well known to need any introduction as a writer. Yet the present work on him needs an introduction. I was deeply attracted to this intellectual giant when I read his novel *Invisible Man*. Ralph Ellison is a writer with a rare instinctive insight into the nature of man; a global vision and a scrupulous style of narration. His novel touched a deep chord in me. I endeavoured to find out more about him and this thesis in the result of my pursuit.

Ralph Ellison's creative and critical output is not voluminous, but owing to the range of his themes and strategies of narrative techniques he offers a wide spectrum of critical perspectives. No researcher is ambitious to cover all the aspects of a complex writer like Ellison. So guided by the recommendations of the Research Degree Committee and being aware of our limitations we have confined ourselves to the limited perspectives of the writer. For the sake of convenience and clarity this study is divided into five chapters as summarized below.

Chapter One is the Introduction. It throws light on the life and development of Ellison as a writer. No writer can be untouched by the socio-cultural milieu in which he grows up. The earliest influence on Ellison was that of his mother. Music was Ellison's first love and he planned to make a career in music. He was very fond of reading and Andrew Malraux's *Man's Fate* and *Days of Wrath* had a deep effect on him. T.S.Eliot's *The Wasteland* drew him deeper into the world of literature. Twain, Joyce, Hemingway, Faulkner, Dostoevsky were others who influenced his writing. His first foray into the world of writing was when he wrote a review for
Richard Wright, who was the editor of *New Challenge*. After that there was no looking back. He went on to write short stories, essays and more reviews. *Invisible Man* in 1952 brought him to be the foremost black writer of America and many honours were bestowed on him. He also published two collections of essays, *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986). He was working on his second novel when he passed away.

The second chapter deals with the themes that dominate Ellison's fiction. The search for identity is Ellison's main theme. He is a black writer who uses the black experience to symbolize the American predicament within the larger human situation in the modern age. He has evolved the metaphor of invisibility to explain the plight of the blacks in America. The sufferings of the blacks is one of the major themes of Ellison. Analysis, self-definition and the growth of the individual are themes close to Ellison's heart. Ellison is again very voluble about the promises made to his people by the founding fathers of America and the breach of those promises. The Running Man metaphor exposes the theme of the modern man as well as the exploited and suppressed blacks. Ellison also formulates a way to transcend man's condition. According to him this transcendence can be achieved through folklore, culture and through self discovery and self definition. These are some of the major themes in Ellison's fiction.

The third chapter deals with the experience of the blacks in America. Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*, and his short stories give a very vivid picture of the experiences of the blacks in America. Blacks feel alienated and isolated in a white dominated society. Racial discrimination is a very ugly side of American society. The chapter is further divided into sections to deal separately with a) the strategies of survival
used by the blacks, b) the hopes and aspirations of the blacks and lastly c) the evils of the blacks. The first section reveals the techniques of masking, laughing, playing the fool, flattering as some techniques. Many blacks rely heavily on their culture, folklore, religion and God to get some respite from their traumatic life. Yet others are ready to form militant groups and try to come into direct confrontation with the whites. The second section deals with the hopes of identity, visibility and equality of the blacks. They crave freedom, economic stability and a social setup where they can live with head held high. Freedom of cultural expression is another aspiration of the blacks. The third and last section of this chapter deals with the evils inherent in the blacks themselves. The blacks have filthy unhygienic habits—they live in squalor. Immorality, incest and other such evils are rampant in black society. Some blacks are ready to crush their fellow blacks to win the approval of the whites. Such blacks weaken the black power and black unity. These and other aspects of the black experience have been covered in this chapter.

The fourth chapter deals with the narrative techniques used by Ellison in his creative pursuits. Ellison is a painstaking and conscientious writer. This chapter has been divided into three sections—a) language, b) symbolism and imagery and c) modes of narration. The first section deals with the language used by Ellison. Ellison does justice to the colloquial quirks of whites and black; southern and northern blacks and also the poetic language used by the primitive Trueblood. At time his characters speak with an epic eloquence and grandeur. Songs, rhymes and spirituals all form the language of Ellison. The second section throws light on the symbolism and imagery used by Ellison. The main symbols drawn by Ellison are those based on colour—black and white. Other colours also play an important part in his works. Sight and the lack of it gives rise to rich imagery. Flying is a metaphor
for escape from one's condition on one hand, and flying towards one's ambitions on
the other. Games, songs and music also become symbolic. The symbols of birth
and death recur. The last section of this chapter deals with the modes of narration
used by Ellison. These aspects of the Ellisonian technique have been covered in this
chapter.

The fifth and last chapter of this thesis deals with the predicament of man. The
chapter shows the universality of Ellison's work. From the subjective Ellison
rises to the objective. His hero becomes a symbol for Modern Man. He epitomizes
the struggle of man in today's materialistic and technical world. The hopes of
Ellison's characters are universal. The themes of invisibility and alienation are
universal problems. Ellison's cry for identity, freedom and self-definition is the cry
of all mankind. The transcendence that Ellison advocates is again universal. The
conclusion forms the end of the thesis. It puts together all the insights derived at in
the thesis.

The Ellison criticism is quite lopsided as attention has been given mainly to his
novel *Invisible Man*. We have attempted to deal with his short stories in detail
throwing light on the short stories in each chapter. Ample attention has also been
given to his essays in aligning our perspectives to his critical viewpoints. The
attempt therefore is to evaluate Ellison in the light of his own critical views. By
bringing nearly all his works within one cover we have attempted to add to the
Ellison criticism.

The original plan of the work was slightly different and was designed to be
a comprehensive study of Ralph Ellison's works, but we are obliged to follow the
suggestions of the Research Degree Committee and as a result we incorporated the suggestions and modifications as recommended by the Research Degree Committee. That has limited the scope of the perspectives and the treatment of the subject.

In the body of each chapter the names of the short stories referred to or quoted from are given in brackets (or mentioned in the body of the paragraph). Where Ralph Ellison's works other than short stories are referred to or quoted from they are given in brackets in abbreviated form, along with their page numbers. That obviates the need to refer to them again in the end references. The abbreviations used are listed on a separate page. All other references come as end notes at the end of each chapter. They are documented according to the M L A Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (Pg 184-193) The Bibliography given at the end of the present work is prepared on the principles of documentation of bibliographic form recommended in section 5.8.3 on page 184 of the M L A Handbook.

The present study lays no claims to be all inclusive or thorough, but we have made a reasonable attempt to make a critical reevaluation of Ellison's works from our perspectives which hopefully contributes to the Ellison criticism. We are aware that the same theme could be treated differently and perhaps better by other researchers and that is our asset as well as a forgivable limitation.