Name

Instructor Name

Subject

Date

Part I: Q. No C

The novel ‘*Beloved’* by Morrison, narrates the traumatic past of the African Americans. In the African culture, tradition, rituals and mythical folklores have significant importance. This very reason served as a great motivation for Morrison to write this novel from the African perspective and not from a white man’s perspective because previously, the African voice was deliberately silenced in literary narratives. In the concluding line of *Beloved*, Sethe tells Paul D, “This is not a story to pass on”, based on the horrifying and terror-stricken Black history. This line also serves as a reminder that the memories and experiences of the African race should be recollected by them. Moreover, they should stand for their rights and change their future into a bright one for the upcoming generations.

In the novel, through the character of Beloved, the past has been retold. For instance, when Sethe kills her baby daughter, that memory haunts her for her entire life. It surfaces again through the ghost of that baby girl in the form of Beloved and serves as a reminder that this suffering is unavoidable for an Africa slave. In an instance, Sethe, describes this incident as,

“Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place--the picture of it--stays, and not just in my remory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think if, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened” (Beloved).

Slavery and White supremacy are dominant themes in the African literary narratives and depict how their cultural erosion occurred at the hands of the outsiders. The African history and culture, gives a high place to the art of storytelling through memory and recollections. Sethe’s views about her past and her culture also work as a caution or an aim that their past is full of Slave experiences, injustice and lack of freedom both physically and vocally. In an instance, Sethe gives the hint of a new future and says to Paul D, “Me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow” (Beloved).

The trauma and regression faced by the African community still holds a place in their history but the importance of the ‘communal experience’ is also stressed by the African Americans in history as well as in contemporary times. They once used it to overcome their sufferings in the form of various movements such as the emancipation movement but for these experiences to not happen again, this communal experience is significant. Morrison, in one of her interviews, explained the communal experience as beautiful, enlightening and a pathway for the future. She says that there is power in the communal experience because it advises what the struggles are (Rootedness).

Furthermore, through the concluding line, Morrison tells the future readers about her traditions, cultures and the brutality of life as an African slave. She has written this story to remind the African youth that although slavery has ended but their past cannot be undone. It will continue to inflict trauma and pain but their future can be changed and it cannot remain fragmented like their past. “Everything depends on knowing how much,” she said, “Good is knowing when to stop” (Beloved). Last but not the least, stories or memories which have unresolved endings make the past bleak but through her novel, the writer also aims for equality and an end to racial prejudices in future America.

Part II, Analysis Guideline

**Humanity and Spirituality in African American Literature**

Being a human, in all its essence means to take into account the feelings, emotions and needs felt by a human. If one looks closely, a human has to move around in a society along with his fellow humans, he has to follow rules to become a good citizen but he has to be kind and just, in order to feel for others. It is a universally acknowledged principle that man is born free but freedom comes at its own cost because in most parts of the world, people had to fight for their freedom. Their fight for freedom is not limited to roaming freely in their areas, it also includes the freedom of speech and the freedom of expression. Moreover, freedom allows a person to choose his religious beliefs and follow them. Lastly, on a broader prospective, it also includes freedom from want and freedom from fear. The human experience and freedom exist side by side and freedom makes a human free. When a man is not given his basic rights of freedom and freewill, it results in human slavery.

The short story *Speech Sounds* by Octavia Butler, best describes the essence of being human and stresses the importance of freedom. For instance, the plot revolves around a pandemic incident which makes the entire population tone-deaf and mute. People label each other’s identity based on various objects and titles for their recognition. The protagonist of the story, Rye, reveals her name as Valerie Rye at the end of the story. This situation of chaos and a speechless and nameless humanity refers to the theme of slavery in Africa. Africans were denied the freedom of speech, the freedom of want and the freedom to worship. The tone-deaf and mute people as depicted in the story symbolize the importance of speech, voice and a freewill for humans. When white colonial masters, colonized Africans, they denied them the freedom of will and speech till they later forgot about their independence. They raped African women, killed children and started human trafficking or slave laboring. In an instance, in the story, Butler has compared slavery to an illness:

The illness, if it was an illness, had cut even the living off from one another. As it swept over the country, people hardly had time to lay blame on the Soviets (though they were falling silent along with the rest of the world), on a new virus, a new pollutant, radiation, divine retribution… The illness was stroke-swift in the way it cut people down and stroke-like in some of its effects. But it was highly specific. Language was always lost or severely impaired. It was never regained. Often there was also paralysis, intellectual impairment, death (Butler, 3).

The recurrent symbol of speech and language points towards the value of opposition and justice in the society. The Africans were unable to speak for themselves because their voice was silenced by the White supremacists. Another symbol of ‘newspapers’ points towards the singular point of view of narrating the African history as the world remained aloof towards the horrors of colonization. Butler’s short story tells about the human experience in a postapocalyptic setting and recollects the African traumas of past. Moreover, it also serves as a reminder that in times of crisis, humanity should not be dead, instead it should speak for itself and for freedom of speech. Freedom of speech adds value to living and maintains social order in the world.

Humanity serves as an important theme in the African literature because they were held captive as slaves under worst human conditions. Similarly, the human experience in Africa was in a state of chaos and suffering for the longest periods of time and when they regained freedom it still served as a memory for them. The colonial narrative portrayed the African people as the Other and uncivilized. When Africans took control of their own narrative voice, they recollected their past and cultural heritage through the technique of storytelling. As Morrison puts it accurately in her novel *Beloved*, “Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (Beloved). Du Bois also talks about the importance of humanity and community in his essay *The* *Souls of Black Folk* as:

“Herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor, — all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked, — who is good? not that men are ignorant, — what is Truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men” (Du Bois).

He refers to the reception of Africans by the White community because the White Americans used to negatively portray them. In African literature, through the importance of harmony and communal experience, they have come together to take solace in each other.

Spirituality is another significant theme in African literature, through folklores and religious symbols, this theme can be seen in *Beloved.* The incarnation of Sethe’s dead child can be seen through the character of Beloved and according to the Christin believes, forgiveness holds a special standing in the religion as it brings a person closer to his Lord.

“Sethe, even looked straight at the shed where the daughter was killed], smiling, smiling at the things she would not have to remember now. Thinking, she ain’t even mad with me. Not a bit” (Morrison, 216).

Her faith in God restores and she knows that God has forgiven her sins and the author has attempted at merging African values with the Christian faith. The symbol of trees also signifies the African mythological folklores.

After reading and analyzing the meaning of humanity and freedom in African literature, I have realized the importance of freedom and its necessity in the times of chaos. Suffering is natural to human nature but the loss of one’s land and culture should be preserved. The value of communal experience, the importance of storytelling and the positioning of memory and trauma in the African literature serves as a guide for the reader. The African literature, if studied in the backdrop of the above contextual events, highlights the two-centered or postcolonial approach of reading the African history.

# Works Cited:

Butler, Octavia E. "Speech Sounds." *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (1983): 87-108.

Morrison, Toni. "*Beloved.* 1987." New York: Plume 252 (1988).

Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt, and Manning Marable. *Souls of black folk*. Routledge, 2015.