CHAPTER-II

MAGIC AS A UTOPIAN CONSTRUCT

Tolkien's lecture-“On Fairy Stories” emphasizes that the appeal of fantasy is closely connected with man’s desire to transcend his own limitations: “At least part of the magic that wield for the good or evil of man is power to play on the desires of his body and his heart” (Tree and Leaf 15). The primordial desires are enumerated by him. Some of them reflect just a curiosity like the desire to visit the deep sea or the longing for the gracious flight of a bird. There are greater wishes like the desire to understand magically the talking of beasts and other creatures. Lastly, there is the oldest and deepest desire—the escape from Death. It is worth recalling that all these desires which gain fulfillment in fairy tales reveal their closeness with Utopia as they are all intimately related to the imaginative desire for a liberated experience. Such an experience is possible only in a Utopia. The intrinsic Utopian quality of Morrison’s magic realist fiction shall be explored in detail here.
Utopianism has a very long history. Ever since man wanted to place desire above reality and seek shelter in compensatory fantasies, Utopianism had been in existence. Folklore Utopias are the earliest of their kind. “The Isles of the Blest”, “Cockaygne” and “The Big Rock Candy Mountains” are some examples of the Utopias of folk imagination. “The Isles of the Blest” enjoy a kindly nature where crops grow untended and honey oozes from the hollow oak. The lands of Cockaygne give forth an abundance of all things for a life of no strain. Elemental desires are graphically etched in “The Big Rock Candy Mountains”, a song sung during the great depression of the early thirties. Accordingly, in the Big Rock Candy Mountains:

“You never change your socks
And the little streams of alcohol
Come a - tricklin’ down the rocks
The box cars are all empty,
And the railroad bulls are blind.
There is a lake of stew and whisky too
You can puddle all around ‘em in a big canoe /
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains. " (From Utopia to Nightmare 31-32).

Such edenic islands within sailing reach testify to man's compulsive need for palliatives that erase the cruelties and injustice of his times. So escape Utopias that abound in diverse cultures should not be challenged on the score of probability. Their isolation itself is a veiled plea of the author that it is an ".....excluded possibility for the real world." (Utopia and its Enemies 7).

Another version of escape utopia is a longing for the Golden Age, the perfect past. It can be a craving for the future too. As Harry Levin quotes Thomas Fuller, any version of the myth is a "..... mutual wish-dream of the perfect community." (The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance 10). There were such communities during the Neolithic times where love had been the rule. There was no predatory class, no taste for idle luxury, no compulsion to work beyond the necessary limits. Life was simple and these communities were true fraternities. Besides creating hyperbolic images of peace, contentment and a communal feeling, the myth of the Golden Age generated the tendency to polarize the past and present.

The story of Adam and Eve is the primal Utopia and the Golden Age of the Judeo-Christian World. With the passing of time, out of the Paradise myth,
emerged a longing for the second coming of the Messiah. The Christian hope of redemption is thus born directly out of the Paradise myth.

Utopias of reconstruction differ from escape utopias in their being possible cures for a tragic situation. These utopias are serious varieties of thought in social organization. For instance, a Utopist-Theodore Hertzka, the author of Freeland, likes to describe himself as “...a scientific and practical economist.”(The Quest for Utopia 108). The desire to form such communities is caused by a number of factors like man’s inherent tendency to create and solve problems, his addiction to discontent, his genuine desire to negate the negative in his own psychic and moral make up and make himself a set of values for better social arrangements. Therefore, disenchantment with the prevailing social conditions is the genesis of utopianism.

Starting with Thomas More, utopists have been trying to prove that private ownership is the accretion of the worst in man’s nature. In the absence of a common ownership of wealth, nothing else can cure the body politic. Besides economic justice, leisure is the other strong allurement of utopias. In the egalitarian society of utopia, work would be done indeed. Unnecessary labour would be excluded. An example is the utopia of Mary Griffith-Three Hundred
Years Hence where drinking except for cider and wine have been prohibited. The use of tobacco is also not allowed. At the other extreme is the French utopia of Charles Fourier whose member citizens obey their instincts as and when it pleases them. There are altruarian utopists like Skinner who hope that if people are provided with leisure and opportunities, a large number of them will turn towards art, science, the exercise of skills, the satisfaction of curiosities or the conquest of Nature. Thus, designs for utopias vary with the belief-system of individual utopists.

Toni Morrison's conception of utopia is unique. The Afro-American community and its importance in black culture is glorified and presented as the utopian ideal by her. Susan Willis has made a lengthy study of the direct relationship between history and community in Morrison's fiction in a chapter entitled "Histories, Communities and Sometimes utopia" in her book-Specifying. Her study is unique in its presentation of the distinction between Afro-American neighbourhood and community. The neighbourhood joins the past with the future. It has a rural origin. The forties' neighbourhood and the sixties' community thus are sharply contrasted by her:
"The neighbourhood defines a Northern social mode....for it describes the relationship of an economic satellite, contiguous to a larger metropolis rather than separate subsistence economics like the Southern rural towns of Shalimar and Eloe. It is a Midwestern phenomenon.....because it defines the birth of principally first generation, Northern, working class black communities. It is a mode of the forties.../ and it evokes the many locally specific black populations in the North before these became assimilated to a larger, more generalized, and less regionally specific sense of black culture that we today refer to as the 'black community" (Specifying 94-95).

Thus Willis discovers that Morrison's account of the neighbourhood is her mode of utopian realization.

The small Midwestern community where Morrison grew up was important in developing her sensitivity to the cultural ways of black life that would become the subject of her novels. The black community of Lorain, where she grew up, was composed mostly of migrants who found jobs there when they fled the South in the early 1900 s. Most of them had a strong sense of community, camaraderie and group defiance. Also in the 1920 s and 1930 s, when blacks had not begun to assimilate the ways of larger culture or forget distinctive cultural ways nurtured in slave communities, there was a stronger connection to traditional ways of doing
things. Lorain’s smallness and its working class community made up of people from various ethnic backgrounds made Morrison sensitive to the integrity of cultural difference rather than to the inferiority in cultural difference often imposed upon blacks in the South.

The people of Morrison’s community formed a cast of rich personalities who have always intrigued her. She says so in an interview with Le Clair:

“People were more interesting then than they are now. It seems to me there were more excesses in women and men, and people accepted them as they don’t now. In the community where I grew up there was eccentricity and freedom, less conformity in individual habits—but close conformity in terms of the survival of the village, of the tribe.” (New Republic 21 (1981)25).

Therefore, her fiction is predominantly a reflection on the role the folks in her community have in her writing.

In all her novels, recalling a community is her way of savouring that community’s life and keeping it alive. There are always the strikingly specific remembered places in her novels. In The Bluest Eye, Morrison describes the sly
affection with which the Afro-Americans pronounce the names of their home
towns-Mobile, Aiken, Newport News, Marietta and Meridian. A generalized
summation of all the good qualities of such quiet black neighbourhoods follows.
When she comes to Sula, she is more specific. In Sula, the entire narrative is
cradled in the reflection on a place, a neighbourhood with a way of life now past:
“In that place, where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their
roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course there was once a
neighbourhood.”(Sula 3).The Bottom, the separately defined black community of
Medallion contains a memorable array of community characters and places: Time-
and-a Half Pool Hall, Irene’s Palace of Cosmetology, Reba’s Grill and so on.
There are the Deweys, Tar Baby, Shadrack and Sula-all accepted as part of the
community even if other folks don’t approve of their ways.

In Song of Solomon, there is the defiant but cohesive presence of the folks
on Not Doctor Street and the men who still hunt the dogs and the women who
walk the streets without purses in Shalimar, Virginia. In Tar Baby, there is Eloé,
where yellow houses have white doors that women open and welcome people
lovingly. There is also the small community surrounding Bluestone Road in
Beloved peopled by Stamp Paid, Ella and Lady Jones. In Jazz, the Salem
Women’s Club and the Civic Daughters lend the community its distinctive
nurturing nature. An only-black town called Haven is founded by the old Fathers in Paradise which by 1910 had two churches, four rooms in the schoolhouse, five stores and the All-Citizens Bank. In 1949, the second generation of blacks moves to Ruby near the Beaver Creek, the deeper part of Oklahoma, where there are a feed store and a savings and loan bank. Ruby is picturesque in its quietness and beauty. There are “enormous lawns cut to dazzle in front of churches and pastel-coloured houses. The air was scented. The trees young.” (Paradise 45).

A careful analysis of various neighbourhoods/communities in Morrison’s fiction reveals that they are synonymous with integrity and courage in the face of racial oppression. For instance, The Bluest Eye talks of quiet towns with black people who are self-sufficient, prosperous and therefore, happy. In Tar Baby the bold struggle of the blacks against oppression bears fruit in the form of an idyllic community at Eloe, an all-black town. Eloe in Florida is Son’s hometown which has ninety houses and no shacks. Son proudly announces to Jadine, his lover that there aren’t any whites in Eloe.

The blacks of Eloe fish a little, farm a bit and work in the gas fields in neighbouring towns. Thus, the three hundred and eighty five people of Eloe enjoy citizenly independence as the white masters live outside their town. Self-
sovereignty which is every black's dream is there in Eloe. It is the group effort of the community that grants it this boon. This strain of resistance has its culmination in Morrison's latest novel, *Paradise* where a whole community of Afro-Americans, who refuse to merge with the hostile but more privileged fellow beings of the same race, is introduced. This novel maps the entire saga of the exodus of one hundred and fifty eight freed men from Mississippi to Louisiana to Oklahoma and their eighty six year old stay in two new territories-Haven and Ruby and their decision to keep up their pure breed nature. The old Fathers and the New Fathers of this community are its leaders who exhort their members to guard their racial purity.

Apart from a boldness and firm resistance that stem from the white master's exploitation, the Afro-American community also depicts extremely close-knit ties. An instance of this utopian feature of the community is seen in *The Bluest Eye* when Cholly Breedlove's aunt Jimmy is on her death bed. Friends come to her bringing all kinds of things that are sure to cure her. Again, as the two women, who keep her company, talk fondly about the various illnesses they had, thus lending comfort and hope to the sick aunt. After her death too, the young Cholly is petted and taken care of by his aunt's friends. This woman-bonding praised by Morrison shows her conscious effort to bring in Afro-American cultural heritage
enjoyed by every black community. Patricia Hill Collins, who has studied deeply
the politics of empowerment of black feminists, explains this further: “In the
comfort of daily conversation and humour, African-American women as sisters
and friends affirm one another’s humanity, specialness and right to exist” (Black
Feminist Thought 97).

Besides the black women who showed solicitude to the lonely young
Cholly, there were men too who asked about his whereabouts and showed concern
towards the little vagabond as he ran away to Macon. Another example of child
care practised by the black community is seen when the county places Pecola
Breedlove in the hands of Mrs. Mac Teer, who is the mother of Pecola’s friends-
Claudia and Frieda, until Pecola’s family is reunited. Collins extols this virtue of
the community: “Even when relationships are not between kin or fictive kin,
African-American community norms traditionally were such that neighbours cared
for one another’s children.” (Black Feminist Thought 120).

A positive force that can give strength and support to the blacks is always
extended from their own community. Ironically it is Sula in Morrison’s second
novel, rising above racial oppression with the help of her outlandish way of living,
who is all-praise for the strong bond within their community: “Nothing in this
world loves a black man more than another black man. You hear of solitary white men, but niggers? Can’t stay away from one another a whole day. So it looks to me like you the envy of the world.” (Sula 104). Again in the same novel, we read of the lonely Eva, and her three little kids being helped by the Suggs and Mrs. Jackson:

“The Suggs, who lived two hundred yards down the road, brought her a warm bowl of peas, as soon as they found out, and a plate of cold bread. She thanked them and asked if they had a little milk for the older ones. They said no, but Mrs. Jackson, they knew, had a cow still giving. Eva took a bucket over." (Sula 32).

The very same Mr. and Mrs. Suggs resort to a desperate attempt, years later, to save the dying Hannah, Eva’s daughter:

“Mr. and Mrs. Suggs, who had set up their canning apparatus in their front yard, saw her running, dancing toward them. They ... hoisted up their tub of water in which tight red tomatoes floated and threw it on the smoke-and-flame bound woman.” (Sula 76).
Thus, in times of acute distress, the black community acts as the guardian angel. We read of Hannah’s last moments: “Somebody covered her legs with a shirt. A woman unwrapped her head rag and placed it on Hannah’s shoulder. Somebody else ran to Dick’s Fresh Food and Sundries to call the ambulance.” (Sula 76). This readiness to help one another is commendable as the blacks are not all well off: “People were very willing to help, but Eva felt she would soon run her welcome out; winters were hard and her neighbours were not that much better off.” (Sula 32).

Susan Willis gives yet another definition of an Afro-American community. She is of the view that black women writers use the term ‘community’ “……in the sense of a small organic neighbourhood, daily defined by people’s interaction……” (Making a Difference 214). It is this interaction that generates in the blacks a genuine concern for each other. So, Nel in Sula has only pity for the uncared for, aged whites who are put in ‘homes’. She realizes that blacks will never do the same to their elders: “White people didn’t fret about putting their old ones away. It took a lot for black people to let them go, and even if somebody was old and alone, others did the dropping by, the floor washing, the cooking.” (Sula 164). Again, the women folk along with the pastor plan regular visits to both black and white old people who are inmates of ‘Sunnydale’ in Sula.
Toni Morrison’s determination to deny her characters the option of living underground, in isolation, beyond community, has been focussed in the study of her fiction by Valerie Smith. So Smith says:

“Her characters achieve autonomy and a sense of identity only to the extent that they can understand and name themselves in relation to a social unit, be it family, neighbourhood or town” (Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative 123).

Thus Pilate Dead in Song of Solomon says she treasures the comfort she enjoyed amidst the Negroes in Virginia. Another colony of Negro farmers on an island off the coast of Virginia too took her in for quite a long period of time. The happiness she finds there is never again experienced by her as she bids goodbye to communal life afterwards. In the same novel, we encounter the community’s act of resisting the tendency to isolate an individual who tries to walk away from society. Accordingly, it is the collective attempt of neighbours that results in collection to meet the expenses for a funeral for Hagar, Pilate’s grand daughter.
Son, in Tar Baby, is a character intimately shaped and bound by his community. His concern for his fellow beings finds ample portrayal in the novel when he rescues Nommo, a less privileged black girl from the streets. Again, he tells Jadine that he cannot comply with her request to be a lawyer because he can never punish another Negro. He is also irritated at the nonchalant way in which Sidney and Ondine - Jadine’s uncle and aunt and Jadine herself, all blacks themselves, never bother to find the real names of the local helpers at L’Arbe de la Croix. His longing for a community is evident when he says that he craved for it while in prison and even on ocean. He longed to go home to that “.....separate place that was presided over by wide black women in snowy dresses and was ever dry, green and quiet.” (Tar Baby 168).

In trying to defy the colonizer, the black community has found strength, a voice and a uniqueness of its own. Simon During says: “The post-colonial desire is the desire of decolonized communities for an identity…” (The Post-Colonial Studies Reader 125). It is this compelling desire that makes Morrison glorify her community, romanticizing its strengths. The first notion of community in Beloved is gleaned by the reader when Stamp Paid’s, John’s and Ella’s selfless efforts to help Sethe cross the Ohio river and to nourish her newborn child-Denver are revealed. Stamp Paid has a special signal for John and Ella when a run-away slave
makes it to Ohio. He leaves the sty open and if a baby is there, he ties a white rag on the post. Ella brings the worn-out Sethe, a woollen blanket, cotton cloth, two baked sweet potatoes and a pair of men’s shoes. Sethe doesn’t feel like asking Ella whether her three elder children have made it safely to Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law. But Ella guesses her unasked questions and assures her of their safety. She also helps Sethe to reach Bluestone where 124, her home is.

The life blood of the traditional black community is its practice of sharing. In spite of its swaying under the memories of racist domination, the community helps Sethe in walking back to normalcy:

“Days of healing, ease and real talk. Days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits, where they had been and what done; of feeling their fun and sorrow along with her own, which made it better. One taught her the alphabet; another a stitch. All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and decide what to do with the day” (Beloved 95).

Black women lend each other infinite solace through their social practice of exchanging views and catching up with news. Sethe recalls the incomparable happiness she felt when she had a tête-à-tête with her community:
"The twenty eight days of having women friends, a mother-in-law, and all her children together; of being part of a neighbourhood; of, in fact, having neighbours at all to call her own – all that was long gone and would never come back. No more dancing in the Clearing or happy feeds. No more discussions, stormy or quiet, about the true meaning of the Fugitive Bill, the settlement Fee, God’s ways and Negro pews; antislavery, manumission, skin voting, Republicans, Dred Scott, book learning, sojourner’s high wheeled buggy, the colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio and other weighty issues that held them in chairs, scraping the floorboards or pacing them in agony or exhilaration.” (Beloved 173).

When a black woman’s house becomes a rendezvous where anyone can meet at any time of the day, it becomes a microcosm of their community. Susan Willis thus says that Morrison’s notion of community is best defined as a cultural practice: “...Community requires something more than geographic space. As Morrison would see it, the definition of ‘place’ is necessarily a definition of a group’s social practice, their mode of ‘dropping in’.” (Making a Difference 216-217). Thus we have Baby Suggs giving a feast to ninety people for no special reason at all: “Ninety people who ate so well, and laughed so much.../124,
rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety...” (Beloved 136-137). Later, we read about Sethe’s rash act of saving her last child from the life of slavery that awaits her. Immediately the community shuns her family altogether. Baby Suggs is unable to take in this revulsion. This just shows how important it was for her to be part of the community:

“... to belong to a community of other free Negroes – to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counseled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed – and then to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance – well, it could wear out even a Baby Suggs, holy.” (Beloved 177).

In spite of the community’s apprehensions of Sethe, they understand her and do all that they can to save her. Sethe recalls this with gratitude: ‘The colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio had drawn up a petition to keep me from being hanged.” (Beloved 183).

The multiple roles, into which Stamp Paid easily fits himself, give the reader an idea of what he has been doing to hold the community together. Morrison describes him as “... boatman, trucker, savior, spy...”(Beloved 136). He is the only one who tries to reach out to Sethe even when she is secluded from
every one else. He calls himself "... the high minded Soldier of Christ..." (Beloved 170). Thus the rank of the true representative of Ohio community can be conferred upon him. His indignation knows no bounds when he comes to hear that Paul D, having run away from 124, sleeps inside the church: "Since when a Blackman come to town have to sleep in a cellar like a dog?" (Beloved 186).

The very end of Beloved shows the community emerging as the major force that helps Denver in her hour of need. Denver finds she has to stir out of 124 as Sethe has degenerated into a semi-mad state as a result of her obsessive concern for Beloved. Denver goes to Lady Jones, a white lady who has taught her the alphabet. Maybe Lady Jones alerts the neighborhood about Denver’s dire need for money and food. Or she may have passed word to her church’s committee. From then on, Denver finds food arriving in her yard. Lori Askeland, who rediscovers the model home in both Uncle Toni’s Cabin and Beloved, says that such gestures of kindness certainly proves that the community is ‘... in a movement of reconciliation that continues to the end of the novel.” (American Literature 64.4 (1992) 800). A sack of white beans, some rabbit meat, a basket of eggs, a blob of flour-water paste etc. appeared with and without names. Denver went to the donor to express her gratefulness each time, sometimes, when Lady Jones’s and her guess about the giver of the parcel was wrong, the lady approached by Denver
would narrate a little act of kindness of Baby Suggs. Another woman remembered how she herself had cared for Denver when she was just a day old. Yet another would tell her how she had made shoes to fit Sethe's broken feet after her long journey from Kentucky. Thus Denver's attempt at reaching out produces a remarkable change in the community's attitude. Lori Askeland too mentions the same about the community: "The community, in turn, finds in Denver's expression of need the ties forged by Baby Sugg." (American Literature Vol 64.4 (1992) 800). The result is that thirty of them gather to walk towards Sethe's house trying to establish contact with her once again:

"Together they stood in the doorway... For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her... where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash." (Beloved 261).

Other events follow, but the neighborhood certainly helps in bringing about the exorcizing of the ghost and the restoration of order to 124.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite explains the genre called the Jazz novel while reflecting on the similarities between Jazz and the West Indian novel:
“Dealing with a specific, clearly defined, folk-type community, it will try to express the essence of this community through its form. It will absorb its rhythms from the people of this community and its concern will be with the community as a whole, its characters taking their place in that community, of which they are felt and seen to be an integral part.” (The Post-Colonial Studies Reader 330).

All these characteristics of the Jazz novel are propounded in Morrison’s sixth novel, Jazz. The Armistice of 1919 becomes the backdrop of this novel. The story is all about black migration from the rural South to the urban North. How a bucolic community is transformed in its confrontation with the city’s life style, with all the attendant hopes and frustrations the Southerners have suffered, is recorded by Morrison. She herself makes this point specifically in relation to Jazz:

“In this respect, the focus of interest is the same as in the early novels; the black communities which exist behind and which transcend the boundaries drawn up by the whites to define and contain them.” (Toni Morrison 112).
The city of Harlem in 1926 can boast of colored clerks, colored nurses and a Negro Surgeon at Harlem Hospital. But the City has only frightening moments in store for the southerners who have migrated there. Morrison’s prime concern in this novel is to throw light upon the collective experiences of the black community, especially the Southerners in Harlem. Hoodlums reign the streets. A note of ominous fear always lurks behind: “Word was that underneath the good times and the easy money something evil ran the streets and nothing was safe- not even the dead.” (Jazz.9). Many of the black women in the city were armed. Inspite of their fear, the southerners loved the city because they had left poverty, misery and betrayal from the whites back at home.

Morrison takes pride in the community’s attempt at forging a method of survival against all odds in the new terrain. It is the womenfolk who act a unifying force in Jazz. We read of Salem Women’s Club planning to help out Violet Trace after her husband’s rash act of murder. Later the Club decides to help a family who has lost everything in a fire. Similarly Harlem has the Civic Daughters who meet to plan for the Thanksgiving fund raiser for the National Negro Business League. Also, when Joe Trace is inside a train, he perspires a lot after the hectic search for Dorcas. It is a Negro woman who holds out a fresh handkerchief to wipe his face. Dorcas has a close friend called Felice. Her
parents are in Tuxedo as they work there; but they miss their home all the time. Felice's mother longs for all the communal activities back at home. She narrates her mother's disappointment:

"...my mother is still sad about that because all of the things she should have been doing in the Church - the Suppers, the meetings, the fixing up of the basement for Sunday-school parties and the receptions after funerals - she had to say no to, because of her job in Tuxedo. So more than anything she wanted gossip from the women in Circle A Society about what'd been going on; and she wanted to dance a little and play bid whist." (Jazz 198-199).

Like Pilate in Song of Solomon, Violet Trace of Jazz is able to pinpoint the exact reason behind her loneliness. She tells Felice that if she had been in Rome in Vesper County, she would never have made herself a nervous wreck. Cut off from the agrarian community of the South, when she moved up North, she descends into madness. Severing one's ties with the community thus spells disaster for Violet Trace and other Morrisonian characters, says Valerie Smith: "Those whom social relations exclude lack self-knowledge and are destroyed by
themselves or by others.” (Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative 123).

Morrison’s consistent attempt at familiarizing her readers with the strong communal bond of the Afro-Americans reaches its culmination in Paradise, her latest novel. The unified community of fifteen families, that is, one hundred and fifty eight freed men founded two utopian only-black towns – Haven and Ruby. Their combined effort results in a paradise that guards itself against white racism. The Old Fathers who were themselves part of the exodus would narrate their adventures to spell bound listeners. The sole aim of the telling and re-telling of their own stories is the same: they want to keep themselves together. Accordingly their collective memory would record accounts:

“About the saddles of the four black-skinned bandits who fed them dried buffalo meat before robbing them of their rifles. About the soundlessness of the funnel that twisted through and around their camp; the sleeping children who woke sailing through the air. The glint of the horses on which watching Choctaw sat.” (Paradise 14).
The Old Father had a refrain which again has the power of confiding to the reader the strong pull they felt towards their own community: "Oklahoma is Indians, Negroes and God mixed. All the rest is fodder." (Paradise 56).

Ruby has an area of just ninety miles and it witnesses an increase in bounty ever since it’s founding in 1950. Houses are never locked there. Their women have never worked in a white man’s kitchen. They haven’t nursed a white child either. Haven, like Ruby, taught its men and women the blessings of sharing:

"Cotton crop ruined? The sorghum growers split their profit with the cotton growers. A barn burned? The pine sappers made sure lumber ‘accidentally’ rolled off wagons at certain places to be picked up later, that night. Pigs rooted up in a neighbor’s patch? The neighbour was offered replacements by everybody and was assured ham at slaughter/… . Having been refused by the world in 1890 on their journey to Oklahoma, Haven residents refused each other nothing, were vigilant to any need or shortage." (Paradise 109)

There is not even a jail in Ruby which again is a proof of their checking all forms of infiltration of white law.
A brick oven, that was at the Centre of Haven, the first town founded by the Old Fathers, became a community kitchen within no time. When the second generation founded Ruby, the menfolk took away the oven and reassembled it carefully so that it still was the favorite haunt of the community. They stayed to gossip, fuss, quarrel, complain and roar with laughter near the Oven. The Oven, thus in Paradise is metonymic of a utopian community.

In her stories Morrison wants to show the values played out in the interior life of Afro-American community. As a result, a rendering of folk beliefs and superstitions becomes part of her attempt at unravelling the utopian features of her community. Customs often represent the acting out of a belief and these beliefs and customs which are typically Afro-American certainly reflect an intrinsic black culture. It is for this reason that she narrates the lived experience of Afro-American customs, practices and superstitions in all her novels. Wayland D. Hand, who is an authority on popular beliefs and superstitions of America, talks about folk medicine. He sees it as a specialized branch of knowledge in the field of medical magic. Hand praises the scholars who have not neglected the study of "...folk botanicals and regular/folk therapeutic procedures." (American Folklore 251-252). Morrison too makes her contribution by upholding the rich knowledge
of medical magic her ancestors had. For instance in The Bluest Eye we read about Aunt Jimmy's women friends who bring her all kinds of pot liquor in order to cure her. Susan Willis uses the incident as an eye-opener which reveals the individualistic way in which black women try to overcome their poverty. For Willis, this simple use of medical magic is "... an alternative to wage labor and industrial alienation..." (Specifying 9) as well. M'Dear, a midwife and diagnostician, comes to cure Aunt Jimmy. She is a practitioner of black magic. She lives in a shack near the woods. Though old, the infirmities of age were unknown to her.

The narrator -cum-friend of Pecola-Claudia and her sister, Frieda are also shown to believe in a combination of verbal charm and medical magic. They plant seeds of marigold hoping for a better future for Pecola:

"...' [W]e'll plant the seeds out back of our house so we can watch over them. And when they come up, we'll know everything is all right. All right?' 'All right. Only let me sing this time. You say the magic words.'" (The Bluest Eye 149).
Pilate Dead in Song of Solomon is one who believes in folk medicine. She helps Ruth her sister-in-law, who has been longing for her husband – Macon, by giving her one of her own herbal remedies. Ruth affirms the magical power of Pilate's medicine:

"She gave me funny things to do. And some greenish-gray grassy looking stuff to put in his food.... I felt like a doctor, like a chemist doing some big important scientific experiments. It worked too." (Song of Solomon 125).

Mere folk beliefs and superstitious too are given importance in the novels of Morrison. She is affirming the black cultural identity of her novels through this. For example, in Tar Baby, Son vows his belief in spirits to Valerian. Therese, the washer woman in the Street home believes in omens. A sudden dash of butterflies is taken to be the announcement of the arrival of the chocolate eater by her. She gives Son a tiny bag of luck as a parting present. We also see both Therese and Gideon, her husband sorting to black magic to ruin Americans as a whole. In Sula people take notice of the plague of robins that accompanies Sula's return to Medallion after a period of ten years. They keep broomsticks across their doors at night and sprinkle salt on porch steps in fear of Sula. The whole
community starts looking upon Sula as Evil Incarnate ever since Mr. Finley, while sucking chicken bones, looks up to see Sula and dies instantly.

Wayland D Hand talks about another type of magical practice called contagious magic:

"Contagious magic, also subsumed under the rubric of sympathetic magic, rests on the law of contact, and envisions the magical association of things even after separation... Contagious magic underlies much of sorcery and witchcraft, particularly in magical operations where.. nail parings, hair combings, etc. are used in dolls(spite dolls)... These dolls are then pierced, scourged, and even burned." (American Folklore 250-251).

Morrison records an example of contagious magic in Song of Solomon. When Pilate is once again approached by Ruth so that Macon Dead will not attempt to abort his baby, Pilate puts a small doll on Macon’s chair in his office: “A male doll with a small painted chicken bone stuck between its legs and a round red circle painted on its belly.” (Song of Solomon 132). The result is miraculous – he left Ruth alone after this.
Ominal magic, or predictive magic is the third element in the body of folk knowledge. Hand goes on to define it as the kind of magic that:

"...rests on the premise that events or states of being can be foretold by observing things which are not immediately related yet which may possess some inner connection perceived only by the person who is able, or claims he is able, to read these signs." (American Folklore 249).

For example, in Jazz when Violet Trace attacks the corpse of Dorcas who is murdered by her husband, many blacks start looking for signs:

"A host of thoughtful people looked at the signs (the weather, the number, their own dreams) and believed it was the commencement of all sorts of destruction."(Jazz 9).

Paradise quotes how Soane Morgan in 1973 looks up to see a lady smiling to herself in the Yard. She carried an empty basket, but she took it as though it had something. Soane looks upon this as "...a sign of what was to come on an emptiness that would weigh her down, an absence too heavy to carry." (Paradise 102). Similarly, at K.D's wedding, people were nervous because they spotted buzzards flying north over the town: "The question in their minds was whether
that was an omen for harm (they circled the town) or for good (none landed)”. (Paradise 147).

The delineation of a Community Other mother makes the utopian sketch of Afro-American neighbourhood perfect. Children who are orphaned by sale or by death of their parents, children who are born through rape and children who are born into poverty or to alcoholic or drug-addicted mothers are all supported by other mothers in Afro-American communities. An ideal ethic of caring is practised by such other mothers who often feel accountable to all the children of their community. For example, Socialist Karen Fields describes how a “... grandmother ... draws on her power as a community other mother when dealing with unfamiliar children ...” (Black Feminist Thought 129). Eva Peace of Sula thus automatically fits into this role of community other mother. She is magnanimous enough to take up the deweys into her sprawling house. The deweys are even sent to school by her. She looks after a mountain-boy, a white called Tar Baby who is nothing but a drunkard. Eva is also a mother to the newly weds who stay as boarders in her house.

A discussion of the healing touch the Community other mother brings in another such character in Beloved. She is none other than Baby Suggs, the
grandmother figure of the novel who is blessed with all the qualities of a spiritual leader. Strangers drop in even at odd hours at 124. Food, advice, care and moral strength are provided for the needy by her. She is there as strong as a pillar when Sethe returns to her. In the study conducted on Matriarchs by Patricia Hill Collins, mention is made about the scholarly conclusion of William E.B. Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier who maintain that "...matriarchal families... were an outcome of racial oppression and poverty." (Black Feminist Thought 73). Exactly at this point she discovers that her soothing powers can be extended to the whole community by letting loose the great love she carries within.

To sum up, it must be pointed out that Morrison's utopian construct of Afro-American community serves us with images promulgated through the cult of true humanity. In their courage and integrity, in their closely bound nature, in the thrill and excitement that come from the nurturing of their age-old beliefs and in the portrayal of Black extended family networks, Morrison is able to add on extensively to the thematic content of African-American experiences. By tracing the special structures of Black Culture she is able to equate them with a world of perfection.