CHAPTER II

BIOLOGICAL VIEW

OF LIFE
CHAPTER II

BIOLOGICAL VIEW OF LIFE

Life is a gift of nature. The philosophy of naturalism thereby gives prominence to this primordial force that is the source as well as the sustenance of all life and denies any kind of supernatural element in man. In literature, the term 'naturalism' has been used in three different ways. Firstly it refers to the works that exhibit a marked interest and love of natural beauty, secondly it is often used as a synonym for realism and finally it refers to those works of literature that use realistic methods and materials to embody a certain form of philosophical naturalism as in the works of Zola.

In other words, in literature, naturalism developed mainly out of realism and due to the growing influence of the scientific thought. The main influences thus that went into the formation of the naturalistic philosophy in literature were: Darwin's biological theories, Comte's application of scientific idea to the study of society, and Taine's application of deterministic theories to literature. Those in favour of a naturalistic approach to and interpretation of life concentrated on depicting the social environment and dwelt particularly on its deficiencies and on the shortcomings of human beings. The naturalist's vision of the estate of man tended to be subjective and was very often somber. Broadly speaking, naturalistic writing presents explicitly or implicitly, a view of experience that might be characterized as pessimistic materialistic determinism. It emphasizes the strength of external forces (social and natural) that obstruct human freedom, and the strength of internal forces (genetic and unconscious) that limit human
rationality and moral responsibility. There is a tendency in naturalistic writing to look upon life as a downhill struggle with the only outcome in failure or death.

Naturalism closely associates and asserts man's kinship with the lower animals. Writers writing in the naturalistic mode are likely to take a behaviouristic view of mind and to show the primacy of 'instinctive' behavior, thereby assigning a large part of human motivation to sex, hunger and other basic drives. This reductionist view is frequently reinforced by the use of animal imagery and symbolism, as with the horses in Zola's Germinal, or the battle between the squid and the lobster in Dreiser's The Financier.

The naturalistic point of view was first established in literature by the Goncourt brothers in their work Germinie Lacerteux (1865) and gained prominence with the works of such writers as Deisser, Zola, etc. Emile Zola, considered as the high priest of the naturalistic movement in literature was of the view that men's lives and actions were determined by environment and heredity, and it was the business of the novelist to dissect and perform an autopsy on life.

One such writer who has successfully followed the naturalistic trend in his writing is John Steinbeck. Many of his works reveal how he sees man's position in the universe as naturalistic. This naturalistic tendency in his works is due to the fact that he finds man at the mercy of certain uncontrollable and unforeseeable forces, but at the same time he also finds man capable of resisting these forces. It was his naturalistic bend of mind that gave birth to his biological view of life.
A true American scholar, Steinbeck learned in the school of nature. He became familiar not only with the beauty of nature but also with the cruelty and harshness of nature. He saw seeds take life and sprout, blossoms bloom and fruits ripen; he also saw animals getting killed and becoming prey to another. To the sensitive psyche of the young Steinbeck, nature left a profound influence with its persistence, mystery and holiness that later in his mature years as a writer got strengthened with contemplation and experience.

Writing out of a setting in northern California where the main occupations are agriculture and fishing, Steinbeck rarely separated his politics from his feeling for nature. Historical time is not as important as the cycles of the growing season, and evil is interruption of nature, when land is expropriated, when people are thrown off their farms, when bosses of any sort refuse the fruits of labour to those who earned them. The land and the people are what basically exist and what must remain. This attachment to nature ensures that Steinbeck builds his works from a rich variety of observed detail.

Steinbeck loved nature and believed that to understand the large picture of life they had to study the small pieces first. He wanted to teach us to love nature, tide pools, marine biology, natural history, and naturalists. Not content to view the world with what he identified as simple understanding-acceptance, Steinbeck believed that man is a creature of earth, not a heaven-bound pilgrim, and the writer's most memorable characters are those who see life whole, and then act on the basis of that understanding, to break through to useful and purposeful social action. Writing in the naturalist style, portraying people as the center of his
stories, his people and his stories were taken from real life struggles in the first half of the 20th century depicting the close affinities that these human stories have with the natural forces working in nature.

Nature, fate, heredity, environment, society, deprive man of his free choice. Steinbeck's biological view of man, that man has animal instincts and drives, refute the belief in man's nobility, dignity and free moral choice. He views man as an organism, both as individual and as part of a group. The tragic awareness of the presence of limitations in human life, which prevent the development of warmth and fellow feeling, causing suffering and death, is indicated through the use of devices like the dominant animal symbols.

A true 'American Scholar' of Emerson, Steinbeck grew up in the lap of nature, imbibing its aspects in his character. He observed and respected nature not only in all glory and beauty but also in its harshest form as in Tennyson's words 'red in tooth and claw'. To the sensitive young boy, nature had intimations of the persistence, enigma and holiness of life. This affinity with nature and its omnipotent presence in every aspect of life stayed with the young Steinbeck, and matured into his works in life. Deeply interested in life and its mysteries, he was led by a passion for observation, examination and analysis of life outside the pale of humanity. Steinbeck was interested in observing the life of sea animals, insects and various other creatures, from the domestic poultry to common reptiles, insects and even unusual creatures like the snail and the turtle.

Another influence that fashioned Steinbeck's perception of man was his interest in the ecology of marine organisms. A serious student of biology, he
continued to take profound interest in coordinating his studies in animal
behaviour and the motives in human behaviour. Associated in the survey of
marine life in the Californian coast, Steinbeck got deeply acquainted with the
behaviour of several types of organisms. During his collection of these
organisms he found in them:

.... Life in a lusty, primitive form, yet clearly related to the life of
that larger organism, man, who .... Incomparably more complex
and potential, is nevertheless formed of the same kinds of living
cells subject to the same primitive drives, and a part of an
ecological pattern as determinate as that of the tide pool, though
infinitely more complicated. (Bracher 17)

In 1930 Steinbeck befriended Ed Ricketts, a man whom he later referred
to as the greatest man and the best teacher. Ricketts was a marine biologist who
lived in Monterey, and Steinbeck, who had been interested in the study of sea
life since his days as a student, was intrigued by Ricketts's biological analysis of
ocean creatures. Ricketts's studies went beyond sea life, however. He had
evolved a theory of nature that saw all creatures—including humans—belonging to
a single, interconnected system. This idea supported and fleshed out some of
Steinbeck's own beliefs, and it was soon reflected in the author's work. As critics
have noted, Steinbeck's writings after 1930 often emphasize the biological
aspects of his character's behaviour like their ability to adapt to changing
conditions in order to survive. He also began to consider the individual's role in a
larger group and the ways that people gain power by organizing with others.
These ideas, when applied to some of the prominent social issues of the Depression years, gave Steinbeck a source of fresh fictional material.

From Ricketts, Steinbeck learned to see life in scientific terms. His own reading of Ritter, and years of conversations with Ricketts, helped him see life in largely biological terms. Perhaps that is why so many of his most memorable characters are animal-like in thought and action. Tularecito in The Pastures of Heaven, Noah Joad in The Grapes of Wrath, assorted denizens of Cannery Row and Tortilla Flat, and, most significantly, Lennie in Of Mice and Men, have more in common with what Ricketts called 'the good, kind sane little animals' of the intertidal than with physicians or philosophers. But while Steinbeck understood and was sensitive to human weakness, and while he sometimes envied the simple Indians of the Gulf of California - who, as he notes in the Log, may one day have a legend about their northern neighbours, that 'great and godlike race that flew away in four-motored bombers to the accompaniment of exploding bombs, the voice of God calling them home' - he was not content to view the world with what he identified as simple 'understanding-acceptance.' Rather, for Steinbeck, man is a creature of earth, not a heaven-bound pilgrim, and the writer's most memorable characters are those who see life whole, and then act on the basis of that understanding, to 'break through' to useful and purposeful social action. The large picture of humanity in his fiction is basically naturalistic wherein people struggle within and against natural forces and are partly victims who endure and survive with their own grit and determination.
From his exploration of the environmental disaster in the Dust Bowl region described in *The Grapes of Wrath* to his voyage of scientific and spiritual discovery among near-pristine marine ecosystems recounted in *Log from the Sea of Cortez*, Steinbeck's entire canon probes the multiple and interlocked dimensions of his outstanding theme - that human beings and their environment are an inseparable unit. The trip that he undertook with Ricketts culminated in his book entitled *Sea of Cortez*, a detailed record of the expedition that further helped the author to give a concrete shape to his biological view of life. For Steinbeck the tide pools that he observed during the expedition provided him with the opportunity to observe and analyze life at its most primal level. He found in them the striking evidence of the life force at work, the primal urges of survival and procreation. Far from merely endorsing the subhuman values of struggle and survival, Steinbeck recognized the ethical paradox of man which is pointed up by the biological analogy. The qualities of wisdom, tolerance, kindliness, generosity and humility are almost universally acknowledged to be good, are in fact the concomitants of failure in society. Social success requires the bad qualities of cruelty, greed, self-interest, graspingness and rapacity. This paradox is in truth the pointer towards the universal law of nature that rules all life, 'survival of the fittest'.

Man is the theme central to all of Steinbeck's novels. His interest in man, in man's inner consciousness, development and its externalization in the outward social scene is a major feature of all his works. His intention in telling a story is never for entertainment but for the sharing of his knowledge and experience. In
his works he dives deep into the causes, the instinctive forces, psychological tendencies and the motives behind them all.

Steinbeck had a deep interest in science and theology. His wide ranging discovery and exploration of life and its timeless design, enabled Steinbeck to comprehend the essential parallelism between man and animal in nature. He found in nature an exact analogy between man and animal. This realization was the seed that eventually germinated into his biological naturalism. In his novels, his approach to life is often undertaken and presented through a naturalistic view. The philosophy of naturalism in Steinbeck’s works enables him to view life with compassion and understanding, and affirm the oneness of all life. As per this view, human life and animal life are in fact the two scales of the same life-design.

The presence of a higher consciousness makes man ascend on the scale of the life pattern, positioning him on a higher level. The feelings of love and compassion inherent in humanity give it a position of supremacy. But these same feelings can also be found in animals.

Animals are positioned lower on the scale because of their lower instincts that degrade and down scale them. Driven by their basic urges and instincts they live life on an existential level. Yet man is not all that different from them. Possession of a higher intellect and compassion does not necessarily mean that man is not capable of possessing and displaying such lower and baser instincts. Selfishness, territorialism, carnal instincts, hatred and animosity are some of the qualities that man often possesses. Another important feature that man and
animals have in common is war, and the 'herd' feeling or the urge to live life in a group. E. M. Forster refers to this kind of herd feeling in *A Passage to India* because of which the people belonging to a herd or group stick to it for security and power as was the case with the Britishers in India who avoided contact and relations outside their group with the natives.

Steinbeck observes:

> We have looked into the tide pools and seen the little animals feeding and reproducing and killing for food. We name them and describe them and, out of long watching, arrive at some conclusion about their habits so that we say, 'this species typically does thus and so'. But we do not objectively observe our species as a species, although we know the individuals fairly well... If we used the same smug observation on ourselves that we do on hermit crabs we would be forced to say, with the information at hand, 'It is one diagnostic trait of Homo sapiens that groups of individuals are periodically infected with a feverish nervousness which causes the individual to turn on and destroy, not only his own kind, but the works of his own kind... When two crayfish meet, they usually fight.... And perhaps our species is not likely to forego war without some psychic mutation which at present, at least, does not seem imminent. (Steinbeck "Log from the Sea of Cortez" 763-764)

The instinctive tendency towards one's territory, possession and the inclination towards group and organization results in violence amongst both men
and animals. The law of nature rules in both the human as well as the animal world for all life is governed by this very basic and instinctive force of nature. Animal behaviour is governed by instincts and so are many of the behavioural patterns of Steinbeck’s characters drawn from the unsophisticated strata of society. An element of primitivism is evidenced in his characters like Lennie or the Joads, stripped bare of all idealistic and sentimental associations, they are reduced to the basic animal instincts whether ethically good or bad. Steinbeck in fact never forgets to evoke a realization through his characters that baring all superficialities they are all at the bottom ‘Animals’.

Steinbeck does not restrict himself only to the similarity in instincts and drives but observes other parallels too. He finds the echo of a child’s cry in that of a porpoise, cow and even a pig. He realizes the oneness of emotion in all living beings, be it sorrow and pain or joy and playfulness.

According to the novelist though man is alike an animal, yet he is the only living being whose drive is outside himself. He observes:

Man is the only animal whose interest and drive are outside himself. Other animals may dig holes to live in; may weave nests or take possession of hollow trees. Some species, like bees or spiders, even create complicated homes but they do it with fluids and processes of their own bodies. They make little impression on the world. But the world is furrowed and cut, torn and blasted by man.... He is the only animal who lives outside of himself, whose drive is in external things — property, houses, money, concepts of
power . . . But having projected himself into these external complexities, he is them. (Steinbeck “Log from the Sea of Cortez” 821)

This externalization divorces man from his real ‘self’ leading to the loss of his spiritual and moral strength. A life borne out of this spiritual and moral deficiency can only lead to a ‘wasteland’ where people struggle and chase after dreams that are mere illusions, which results in frustration and discontentment. Emancipation from this life of moral chaos and sufferings is possible only through the path of renunciation, selflessness, love and self-realization.

At one point Steinbeck speculates that our sense of memory, of rhythm, of archetype, is nothing less than the stirrings of ocean waves and the primordial slime of our evolutionary beginning. The deep and black depths of the ocean is in fact the low dark levels of our minds, the unconscious in which the dream symbols incubate and sometimes rise up to sight.

Steinbeck’s interest in marine biology enabled him to trace the human parallel in the school of fish and humans. Throughout his works, his biological view of life can be traced as an important theme of Steinbeck. The use of nature imagery reflecting the human parallel of emotion and mood sets the background of the narrative. The parallelisms drawn between man and animal imagery abound in abundance in all his novels. The social concern and realism portrayed in his novels are actually an extension of the biological fact of life.

Men according to Steinbeck may or may not have souls, which is something that cannot be measured or tested. It can however be perceived that
they are as subject to natural laws as the animals. This biological interest in human existence is the basic feature that accounts for the novelist's simplification of human motive in his novels.

In his novel Tortilla Flat (TF), the nature imagery of Steinbeck's Monterey finds a vivid description that reveals the author's affinity with nature. A hill, the blue bay, dark pine trees that dot the landscape of Monterey where the Paisanos live is described very beautifully by Steinbeck. In his love of nature he equates it with spirituality and freedom. And so the sight of sea gulls symbolizes the presence of God in practical life.

Steinbeck's study of the school of fish and the individual fish is significant as it leads to his concept of group-man. Group-man shows behaviour quite unknown to individual intentions. The tide pools thus showed not only the fascinating spectacle of individual survival, but also revealed unusual examples of corporate and unified life. Steinbeck in Sea of Cortez posits the existence of a corporate entity, a larger animal, a group. The concept of the Group-man was first articulated by Steinbeck in June 21, 1933, in a letter to his friend Carlton Sheffield. Steinbeck co-relates the formation of the group-man with that of coral building an atoll which cannot be built by one coral but by a group.

The biological view of life of the novelist finds an apt representation in his description of the house, a symbol of the group as an organism:

This is the story of Danny and of Danny's house. It is a story of how these three became one thing, so that in Tortilla Flat if you speak of Danny's house you do not mean a structure of wood
Sharma 63

flaked with old white wash.... No, when you speak of Danny’s house you are understood to mean a unit of which the parts are men, from which came sweetness and joy, philanthropy and, in the end, a mystic sorrow. (TF 373)

If the house symbolizes group organism, then the individual emotions of joy and sorrow of its parts unify to form a single group emotion. Danny’s house is the microcosm of the group organism that enlarges itself into the macrocosm of Monterey. This ecological community represents the organismic complex with its own nervous system that is in effect the various ways through which information and emotions travel. The communication of information spreads rapidly and people are abuzz with the news of events that happens in one part of this organism. Steinbeck expresses his wonder at the incredible speed through which news or rumour travel like the news about a coast guard cutter who had gone on the rocks near Carmel or the news about the party that Danny and his friends are planning.

A parallel is also drawn between the Paisanos like Danny and his friends, and the ‘symbiotics’ or ‘commensals’. The food collected at the back doors of restaurants, selling of wood, collection of fish from the fishing boats, pilferage of food and wine, gleaning of bean fields, are all examples of the various ways the ethnic community of Paisanos live by.

So in one aspect Tortilla Flat is the story of this symbiosis. The paisanos, trying to preserve their own values, pushed into a corner
of the habitat, are forced to become scavengers and jackal-like snatchers of others' food. (Fontenrose 35)

The conception of group organism further matures in his novel In Dubious Battle (IDB). The group organism or group-man is presented as a collection of individuals, created in periods of great tension to function with enormous strength as a single organism. Steinbeck further develops this concept as a metaphor in the novel.

The migrant workers as they band together to strike and riot, take on a strange, unpredictable, dangerous unity. They take the form of the group-man which has an identity of its own, totally alien to the various individuals comprising it and to their individual intentions and needs.

The apple pickers are the raw materials of the cell while the party men are the senses leading group man into significant action to the extent that violence so personified can be led. The character of Jim is one such sense that comes to accept the notion of violence as an end in itself.

The presence of violent emotion (blood) is the pre-requisite for the creation of group-man. The violent killing of Joy as he arrives on a train is the precise moment of the birth of this group-man. Here the train engine symbolizes the mechanical force that can destroy the unstable force of group-man. But at the moment the power of group-man outweighs the mechanical power:

A strange, heavy movement started among the men.... The guards aimed with their guns, but the line [of striking men] moved on, unheeding, unseeing.... The ends of the long line curled and
Sharma 65

circled slowly around the center of the dead man, like sheep around a nucleus.... The guards were frightened; riots they could stop; but this slow, silent movement of men with the wide eyes of sleepwalkers terrified them. (IDB 655)

Jim's leadership of the strike, his control of the group-man further develops into pure violence. The violence and cold thought of Jim scares Mac who cannot help proclaim in horror, "God Almighty, Jim it's not human." (IDB 740). Jim himself has his moment of realization at the horror of the violence he has led when the group-man limited by its physical needs disperses at the news of food as hungry men and lives are thus saved. He tells Mac, "It was like all of them disappeared, and it was just one big-animal, going down the road. Just all one animal." (IDB 772)

Nature and animal imagery that reveals the author's biological view can be found in the description of the eyes of Jim's mother which are like 'white stones', the parallel between group-man and sheep, in Mac's words when he describes the education he is going to impart Jim as "like teaching hunting dogs by running them with the old boys,..." (IDB 554)

Steinbeck, a marine biologist, has a biological view of nature and people, rather than a people-centered one. According to him we are a small part of nature, just part of the scenery, and not at the center of the universe. The lives of individuals are relatively unimportant in the overall scheme of things. Our life is not predetermined from the beginning but neither are we able to alter nature's
grand design. George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men* (OMM) want to change their lives, but they will never be able to change who they are.

*Of Mice and Men* is the story of Lennie. Steinbeck's use of animal imagery for describing human beings and Lennie's affinity with animals aligns him with the naturalistic tradition of writing. Describing Lennie he says, "... he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws." (OMM 798). Not only is Lennie shapeless as a human being but his responses to situations are mostly unspoken like that of an animal. His affinity to that of a bear is often mentioned in the course of the novel. The narrative is focused on Lennie, the bunk house and ranch. Lennie is one individual part of the groupman comprising of others like George, Carlson, Curley and Slim.

Steinbeck uses certain biological processes to define and understand human relationships. For instance many times in nature two different kinds of plants or animals live in what can be called as a symbiotic relationship, that is one needs the other in order to survive. George and Lennie need each other in the same manner. Lennie needs George for protection and guidance, to lead him. George does his thinking for him and tries to keep him out of trouble. And in the case of George, Lennie is more than just a companion who keeps him from being lonely. In fact Lennie makes him feel special and smart. He helps George to stay focused on his vision of the future farm. In other words they both take care of each other, they both are essential for each other for their survival.

If Lennie is described as having hands like 'paws' and snorting like a 'horse', then Curley's wife is referred to as a 'fluffy' animal. In the hierarchy of
the natural world, there are some who are stationed at a higher level and some on a lower level. Man is superior to animals but even amongst men there are some who are positioned as lowly. Lennie is also one such character who is a reduction of humanity to the lowest level. He is described as a 'huge man, shapeless of face'. He is not only compared to a bear but his responses to the situations are also like that of a mute animal. He is a bear in human shape led by his keeper George, even when attacked by Curley, Lennie waits for his keeper's command to defend himself. He is like a dog that has no existence without his master, "they'll take ya to the booby hatch. They'll tie ya up with a collar, like a dog." (OMM 850)

The human attitude towards animals; looking after them as long as they are healthy and useful, and shooting them when they are ill or old, has a close bearing with Lennie's existence. Like an animal which is put down when no longer useful to man, Lennie's life is also brought to an end when he becomes a trouble for George.

The working of group-man in the background of the novel finally results in George's killing of his friend Lennie to save him from the violence of the mob (group-man). The shooting of Lennie is an act of compassion like shooting a beloved creature. The group insists on punishing Lennie for murder while it approves of Carlson's crime. And thus:

George shoots Lennie with the Luger that Carlson used to kill Candy's old dog. The defenseless man is linked by the weapon
with the defenseless dog in the group’s web of created power.

(Levant 141)

The novel also has many references to creatures like lizards, rabbits, dogs, deer and snakes along with an accurate description of their movements thereby indicating Steinbeck’s deep interest in the animal world.

Steinbeck’s most popular novel The Grapes of Wrath (GOW) represents the development of his biological view of life from a violent and pessimistic to an enduring story of struggle and optimism. In the novel we see the group-man moving westwards neglecting ruin of his individual cells, but unified in his basic compulsion. But the group-man (the Joad family) in the novel is a matured concept of the author not his earlier group-man. He defines differences:

The group is not group-man. The earlier concept is a “beast”, created by raw emotion (“blood”), short-lived, unwieldy, unpredictable, mindless; a monster that produces indiscriminate good or evil. The group is quite different – rational, stable, relatively calm – because it is an assemblage of like-minded people who retain their individual and traditional sense of right and wrong as a natural fact. Group-man lacks a moral dimension; the group is a morally pure instrument of power. The different is acute at the level of leadership. The leaders have ambiguous aims in In Dubious Battle, but they are Christ-like (Jim Casy) or attain moral insight (Tom Joad) in The Grapes of Wrath. (Levant 98-99)
Animal imagery abounds in the novel to symbolize at different levels the human sex drive or violence and depravity in human behavior. And so Muley Graves refers to himself as ‘snortin’ like a buck deer, randy as a billygoat’, while Casy refers to a participant in a revival meeting as ‘jumpy as a stud horse in a box stall.’; fighting ‘like a couple of cats’ or a tractor hitting a share – cropper’s cabin requiring ‘a shake like a dog shakes a rat’. Muley is described as ‘mean like a wolf’ at the beginning and later as ‘mean like a weasel’; Purly Boy Floyd’s career is compared to a maddened animal at bay; Winfield Joad as a ‘kid – wild and calfish’ and Al like a ‘dung - hill rooster’.

But the best parallels drawn in the novel can be found in the description of the Joads’ flight to California in the various analogies drawn from the animal world.

Casy describes the impersonal industrial economy from which they are fleeing:

Ever see one a them Gila monsters take hold, mister? Grabs hold, an’ you chop him in two an’ his head hangs on. Chop him at the neck an’ his head hangs on. Got to take a screw-driver an’ pry his head apart to git him loose. An’ while he’s layin there, poison is drippin’ an’ drippin’ into the hole he’s made with his teeth. (GOW 117-118)

Consecutively the roads to California are fuli of people like them ‘frantic people running like ants’ but on reaching their destination they get to work like ‘draft horses’ and driven like ‘pigs’. 
Casy wants to lead the people somewhere and Tom wonders why. Here the novelist introduces an analogy between man and a 'thick-furred yellow shepherd dog’, "trotting down road, head low, tongue lolling and dripping..." (GOW 21) Joad wonders aloud asking the dog, if it’s going some place and answers himself “home may be” (GOW 21).

Steinbeck’s characters struggle for survival in the same way as the animals do, they strive and make efforts to preserve and perpetuate life under difficult conditions like the animals.

The episode of the turtle in Chapter III of the novel is the most famous example of Steinbeck’s biological view of life. The turtle’s patient and difficult journey over dust fields, across a road and walled embankment. The turtle’s endurance and strength enables it to survive even in the toughest of circumstances. The turtle seems to be awkward but is able to live through the struggle like the Joads. The parallel between the animal and man is represented through their endurance, struggle, optimism and even in the physical attributes like the turtle’s eyes which are ‘fierce, humorous’ similar to the fierce and humorous Joad family. Like the Joads’ survive the mismanaged conditions in the dust bowl of California, the turtle also survives an accident with a truck.

The turtle in fact re-instates Steinbeck’s belief in the primary instinct of all life that is ‘survival’. Everyone is involved in the cycle of life and death, in the struggle for survival. In its journey the turtle kills the red ant but it carries an oat seed in its shell and unknowingly drops and plants the seed in dust, thereby contributing its valuable part in regeneration and continuation of life. In the
novel Ma states her faith in man’s capacity to survive when she declares, “'Ever' thing we do – seems to me is aimed right at going' on. Seems that way to me. Even getting’ hungry – even bein’ sick; some die, but the rest is tougher.”' (GOW 389). Jack Nimitz in his article 'Ecology in The Grapes of Wrath’ calls this the ‘group selection principle’.

And so the group-man, that is the Joad family endures all harsh experiences of their journey and gains in moral stature and strength to survive and regenerate life wherein hope, love and compassion is born out of misery.

Apart from the biological view of life that is an extension of Steinbeck’s philosophy of naturalism; other nature imagery represented in the narrative can be seen in the description of California with its vineyards, orchards, and valley and farm houses. The description of the region’s beauty is portrayed beautifully through beauty of spring season when the valley becomes laden with fruit blossoms and further the contrast of this image with harsh reality that awaits the Joads is drawn through the picture of abundance of produce that are dumped, destroyed and left to rot: the fruitful fields and the starving men on the roads.

East of Eden (EOE) is the summation of Steinbeck’s literary career, the maturity of his art. The novel very evocatively presents the natural beauty of the Salinas valley. a nostalgic reminder of early childhood experience which shaped his naturalistic bent of mind.

Heavily based on the biblical story of Cain and Abel it represents the evil in man through animal imagery of a serpent in Eden. So Cathy-Kate is described as a poisoner having the features of a serpent like sharp little teeth.
Although the novel is an example of the novelist’s maturing of his art, yet in this novel it is the author’s knowledge of theology that takes precedence over his biological view of life. Still there are instances where we do find a glimpse of Steinbeck’s scientific inclination. Cathy Ames for example is described as produced by “a twisted gene or a malformed egg.” (EOE 61)

The group-man or group organism hardly finds a place in the narrative except for the army and family representing groups. In fact the intolerance of individuality by the army is discarded for its hostility towards the ‘free, exploring mind of the individual’.

Steinbeck’s biological view of life as represented through his novels is in fact a representation of his existential vision of life. Through his numerous works he has time and again presented life vividly and realistically through the individual destinies and endeavours of his various characters working against the alienating forces of modern civilization, through a journey of hopelessness, disaster and tragedy to finally emerge with a glimmer of hope, a new faith in their heart. Through his biological view of life Steinbeck represents the macrocosm of life in the microcosm of American society and his firm belief in the Sartrean existentialism wherein, “- man is free, man is freedom.” (Sartre 34)

In his best fiction, Steinbeck worked out the conflict between primitivism and progress, between his own view of the world and that of Ricketts—both of which were based, of course, on a scientific view of life organized around the concept of wholeness which is as spiritual as it is biological. The Sea of Cortez is a work of travel literature that enables one to understand the range and depth
of Rickett’s impact on Steinbeck’s fiction. And this permits the people to see Steinbeck’s fictional accomplishments in a new and fresh light. In so doing, we see not just the absurdity of arguments raised by those who attacked Steinbeck’s novels on the basis of his alleged belief in any particular political ideology. It can also be seen that his thinking is not worn and obsolete, but is as current as the modern environmental movement, which it predates and with which it has so much in common. If the *Sea of Cortez* is considered in all its complexity, John Steinbeck can be seen fusing science and philosophy, art and ethics by combining the compelling if complex metaphysics of Ed Ricketts with his own commitment to social action by a species for whom he never gave up hope, and whom he believed could and would triumph over the tragic miracle of its own consciousness.

The true biologist deals with life, with teeming boisterous life, and learns something from it, learns that the first rule of life is living. As Joseph Fontenrose comments:

> The organic view of the world renews primitive animism at a more sophisticated level. To the animist, sky and earth, wind and storm, tree and rock are living entities. Out of animism springs myth and so Steinbeck’s biological interpretation and his mythical interpretation of the human condition flow from one and the same source. (Fontenrose 90)

Steinbeck may have written in part from a biological perspective, but he was also an idealist, a thoughtful man who searched to find the essence of things.
the meanings or patterns behind what he observed. Steinbeck reminded us that while humans are intellectual and emotional creatures, they are also animals and part of nature, not above and apart from it. Tom and Ma Joad have to adapt to their physical circumstances to survive, but they can also hope and dream and rise above their own personal needs to care for others.

Steinbeck’s biological view of life, his naturalism is thus a kind of supernaturalism. Though he believes in the primacy of the life instinct that commands simply to ‘survive’, yet he also affirms that it is only the humans who are capable of dreams, hopes and transcend their mere effort to survive.
WORKS CITED

Bracher, Frederick. ‘Steinbeck and the Biological View of Man.’ The Pacific Spectator, 2 (1948), 14-29. Reprinted in Steinbeck and his Critics.


---. The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study.

