CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Rudyard Kipling's once acclaimed words of sagacity that "East is East and West is West and never shall the twain meet" do not appear to be aphoristically truthful today in the context of globalization in every tangible sphere of human life. But well ahead of the physical shrinking of the world, the human psyche attained it centuries ago since the human spirit operates everywhere with almost the same ephemeral yearnings and aims at the ultimate eternal yearning - the merger into the Brahman consequent on Self-Realization.

In this regard, Comparative Literature enables one to understand the oneness of human consciousness. The comparative approach to all kinds of learning is not a new phenomenon, but Comparative Literature Studies as a discipline is certainly novel. In fact, comparative exercise is as old as the human race. Recent critical interest in Comparative Literature is mainly due to the recognition of the discipline as a more satisfying response to the fast changing literary situation today where no single literature is an island unto itself. There are underlying similarities of themes
and treatment as also striking contrasts in such diverse literary endeavors as inter-cultural studies.

As Rene Wellek states, "The method of comparison is not peculiar to comparative literature; it is ubiquitous in all literary study and in all science, social and natural" (qtd. in James 38). Comparative literature addresses itself to a mode of responding to literature in all its totality of insights and concerns. It presumes that no literature or author can be sensibly studied in isolation. In the contemporary critical atmosphere, literary responses not only approximate but also surpass the sources of creative process.

The scope of Comparative Literature certainly extends itself to the comprehension of the cosmic principles that operate in particular creative processes placed in comparison with one another. In this regard, Remak's comment referring to Van Tegham's three-tier approach to the study of literature is handy to settle the terminological clashes: "Expressed visually, national literature would be the study of literature within walls, comparative literature across the walls and general literature above walls" (14).

J.M. Carre defines Comparative Literature as "the study of spiritual international relations between the works, the inspirations and even the lives of writers belonging to several literatures" (qtd. in James 40-41). Perhaps the definition given by Anna Saitta Revigna justifies the relevance of Comparative
Literature as an academic discipline: Comparative Literature is "a modern science which centers on research into the problems connected with the influences exercised reciprocally by various literatures" (qtd. in James 40-41).

In the words of Nair

To sharpen our impression of a writer's personality, we have to compare and contrast him with others, with writers who worked in the similar field, took up similar subjects, similar problems, and who wrote under similar conditions. Comparative Literature helps us to enter into the spirit of an author, to penetrate into the vital forces of his personality (48).

The adage of the ancient Tamils "Yādhūm orēi yāvarum keīlit", the Sanskrit equivalent of "Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam" meaning 'the whole world is my home and all are my kith and kin' is very pertinent to quote in this context. The researcher bears what Chellappan and Devi say "A comparative study of themes and motifs in literatures and cultures shows not only the transmigration of certain themes and symbols, but also the persistence of certain universal patterns in the evolution of human consciousness" (94).

The words of Mohan seem relevant here: all of us "appreciate another literature or literatures, conceding that other patterns of
life can be just valid as the one that is immediately our own. The human mind is everywhere the same, has the same capacities; but the solutions individual cultures find to problems of human existence are different” (XV).

So the cravings, aspirations and agonies experienced by one somewhere in the world are definitely shared by another simultaneously somewhere else in the same world. However, the two have to face different milieus, faiths and restrictions even while sharing on a common platform the question of understanding one’s own self. This is precisely the backdrop of the research problem undertaken in this thesis to compare the two of the great novelists-thinkers of the twentieth century - John Steinbeck and Raja Rao.

This thesis entitled *Nature and Purpose of Human Existence: Fictional Realizations in John Steinbeck and Raja Rao* attempts to study analogically the theme of *Self-Realization* in select novels of John Steinbeck and Raja Rao in the light of the four stages of life and four objects of life as enunciated in the Indian philosophical system. It is in order to introduce the research problem with reference to the tenets of Indian philosophy and justify the need for a comparative study of these two seemingly dissimilar writers.
Man and his existence

Human beings are in every possible way the best of God's creations. They have a metaphysical urge to go deep into the question of existence, birth and death. "The glory of man is that he is a thinking being," says Swami Vivekananda, an Indian saint of the twentieth century (qtd. in Rolland 23). Man, being a rational animal, has a great capacity for discrimination, which elevates him to a higher level. He cannot remain idle with his myriad abilities.

The faculty of reasoning which man alone possesses in abundant measure, makes him superior to all other living beings. Hence he alone ponders over the nature and purpose of his existence. He wants to find out his identity and he is interested in the exploration of the self. This quest for exploration can never be the concern of other beings in the world. All kinds of doubts, from which all other living beings are absolutely free, tease human beings. For the ontological and teleological questions, he seeks to find a solution through religion. Many religions emphasize that Self-Realization is man's chief goal in life. That the individual soul is part of the Universal soul is the culmination of his spiritual life. All other beings live according to the physical laws of Nature. But man alone has to create his own laws in tune with the natural laws to perfect and harmonize his physical, social, moral, intellectual and spiritual life.
In this age of Science and Technology man's greed for material possessions is on the increase and economic values threaten to overbear moral and spiritual values. The philosophy of the modern man seems to interpret man in terms of economic and material values. But man's achievement of liberty and liberty of achievement, as Sastri says, "consist in his free quest for realization of this inner spiritual freedom" (2). The new emphasis on Science and Technology and Economics is good because it enables man to control nature's powers as well as maximize production and equalize distribution, but he will never find ultimate or complete satisfaction in such an achievement. Nature is not our foe to be conquered, but a friend given by the Creator for our succor and Self-Realization. We must achieve self-conquest leading to realization if we are to enjoy the things, which Nature has in her hand and which Nature was meant by God to give us.

Man has to shape himself to suit his own environment. He cannot and should not live by means of his instincts like the lower creatures. He has to live by his intellect and specially by his intellectual and moral and spiritual nature. The knowledge of animals and birds is limited to the need of food and their love is limited by pairing and by bringing up of their young ones. But man has boundless thirst for knowledge - knowledge for its own sake and science is the consummation of that passion. He is not satisfied
with family life alone and has an urge to extend the frontiers of his love to the society around him, then to the nation and beyond the nation to humanity. He has got an urge to know the causal power, which has created the universe, sustains and guides the universe and to know the inter-relations between himself and that Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent Power.

Man must also realize his expanding self in an ever-increasing identity with nature and with all living things. Life in society means service to society in a spirit of selfless love and renunciation. We have in human life not only the operation of the law of competition and struggle for existence of the fittest, but also in a greater measure, the operation of the higher law of mutual dependence and cooperation and of the struggle for the existence for others, and for fitting all to survive on the principle of 'each for all and all for each.' Thus the human heritage is passed on from generation to generation, and the sum total of human knowledge and love belongs to all nations and families and individuals.

Each one of us has such a heritage as his birthright and to it we owe the possibility of the unfoldment and fulfillment of our human destiny. Thus the prolonged helplessness of the human offspring and their educatability and complete education and their knowledge and appreciation of the entire human heritage as their birth right are the best proof that men and women are born with a
high spiritual destiny and they have got an undeniable right and an inescapable duty to know and achieve their spiritual destiny. According to Sastrī, "In love we are born, by love brought up, by the extension of the frontiers of love, we realize our oneness with society and nation and humanity and such expanding love will grow into devotion which will lead us to communion and union with God" (3). But man must not allow himself to die like the silkworm in its self-woven cocoon. He must not be content to expand in outer dimension. He must learn to expand in his inner dimensions also.

Man, in olden times, had yoga siddhis or potencies of mental concentration which he could put to angelic or infernal uses. Modern man too can put his scientific siddhis to such uses. Such inner and outer potencies can be used for good or evil. Man, like a tamer in a lion's cage, must make them obey him, or else they will finish him off. It is not an easy task. This is evident from the words of Tagore: "Man has taken centuries to discuss the question of his own true nature and has not yet come to [any] conclusion" (38). Radhakrishnan believes "that with tremendous progress in science and technology man seems to be still far away from having a deep understanding of his own nature and the mysteries of life existence" (qtd. in Saratchandran 63).

As a physical being, man has all the limitations and necessities of the empirical world. His existence is conditioned by
Time and Death. At the same time, as a spiritual being, he has the capacity to transcend the time order. He stands outside of nature, life, himself, his reason, and the world. He is a mortal being who aspires for perfection, and longs for a perfect kind of freedom that will lead him to pure truth and immaculate bliss. Man has within himself both the possibility and resources to attain his true being. Radhakrishnan further says: "The spiritual element in man allows his freedom within the limits of his nature. Man is not a mere mechanism of instincts. The spirit in him can triumph over the automatic forces that try to enslave him" (75). Man, who is related to the Universe, has been carved out of Nature's continuum

In the vision of Sri Aurobindo, "Man, who is the crown of evolutionary Nature, is destined to be the fine product of a Super-Nature, becoming himself perfect and helping to build a world that is perfect. All that has gone before is a preparation, all that is going on at present is a prelude to the coming of the New Man embodying a consciousness in which Nature, Soul, Earth and Heaven shall meet" (qtd in Pandit 13) Sri Aurobindo adds: "Man does not live alone; he lives in a society, he lives in an environment and the realization of God within is incomplete unless he realizes God in the world" (115)
Hinduism and the nature of human existence

Hinduism, founded on the ancient Vedic scriptures of India, discusses in detail the nature and purpose of human existence. Gandhi holds that Hinduism is "a relentless pursuit after truth" (18) Its creed is all-embracing. One of the most remarkable characteristics of the religion professed by Hindus was self-abnegation The keynote of Hinduism of the spiritual side is moksha or salvation, that is, the final absorption of the soul into the Infinite Soul that pervades all things.

Hindu religious literature in its pristine form is concerned mainly with the knowledge and method necessary to learn the truth about God. If there is one feature that stands above all others in Hinduism, it is its pluralism: there is no one chosen path, no one chosen people. As a result, there is no division of the world into mutually exclusive camps of believers and non-believers. As Rajaram observes, all paths of spiritual exploration are valid, and there are no such things as heresy and blasphemy in Hinduism. This is what makes Hinduism pluralistic (21). Hinduism realizes the place of man in this world and regulates the different stages, functions and aims of life. Every individual is part and parcel of the Supreme Being or Atman or Para Brahman. The Atman is always in Sat-Chit-Ananda state. That is, its attributes are Existence, Knowledge, and Happiness. Many Hindus believe that the Jiva or
individual soul is identical with that very Atman. Some, however, believe that it is different from that Atman. According to Hindu belief, mukti or moksha means release from Samsara or cycle of births and deaths (Sabharatnam 13). Therefore what man needs is a spiritually radiant mind, which alone can enable him to sublimate the Life Human into the Life Divine. In the West, Science and Philosophy, as Sastri points out, “were not fully unified and harmonized as in India. Indian philosophy is the science of spiritualization of life of the transmutation of the Life Human into the Life Divine” (Sastri 4-5).

**Man’s ultimate goal**

So long as man is not aware of how he is or what his true nature is, he is not in a position to realize fully the meaning and purpose of his life as man. He is unable to apprehend his final fulfillment and is also ignorant of his real good. Owing to the ignorance about the true nature of his being, he becomes unfit to realize his relation with the world as a result of which his relations with the world are generally confused and often become perverted. In other words, Man is not able to determine correctly his purpose and position in the world without having a clear knowledge of his own self. If he possesses some wrong knowledge about himself, then his perspective of the world is bound to be vitiated. His value-
sense too gets confused and he moves on the ocean of life precariously in the absence of appropriate judging principles.

As Gupta asserts: "The Upanishads have declared repeatedly that man is nothing but the self infinite (Tat tvam asi). If this meaningful saying of the Upanishads can be grasped fully by a man, then he is sure to undertake an enquiry into the nature of his own true being" (50). Sankara too has advised us to inquire into the meaning of tvam at the outset of our search for Truth. Our search for the knowledge of the self, however, involves self-analysis, which is to be carried out rationally and in a regulated manner. If an aspirant can follow the path laid down by the Upanishads, with single-minded devotion, then only he can realize that beyond the conscious and the subconscious level, there is another horizon of pure consciousness which constitutes the horizon of the real self.

Meditation is a means and is essential to have correct knowledge of the self. The discipline of meditation leads to the intuitive realization of spiritual truth in man. One who meditates on the true nature of the self and has his intellect, emotion and will purified and harmoniously balanced, naturally becomes a man of elevated personality. Such a person is regarded as a spiritually enlightened soul. With his enlightenment, he can visualize himself
and the world around him correctly, and clearly, and the horizon of his spiritual vision becomes wide and universal.

The world then unfolds itself in its true color to the spiritually inspired man and does not therefore cause uneasiness to his mind. Thus one who seeks to know the truth must, first of all, make his mind pure and well-balanced. Spiritual enlightenment, attained through meditation, presupposes moral awakening and moral progress of man. The mind of the aspirant who meditates becomes calm and steady through constant practice of meditation. His mind does not get disturbed even in the midst of the vortex created continuously by the waves of the worldly life. The external world, with all its vibrating currents, is always viewed by him as external, and is never identified with the inner world. Such a person is truly perfect and he never entertains any sort of illusion regarding the relation of the world with man. In fact, to enjoy the world in a detached but lively way is the real art of living. It enables the perfected personality to put necessary limitations and restraints on the different forms of enjoyment of the world. This he can do because he understands life from a deep awareness of spiritual nature, which has been revealed to him through meditation on his true form.

Meditation and spiritual enlightenment are essential not only for those gifted persons who embrace the life of total renunciation
or Sanyasa, but also for all ordinary people, involved in active worldly life. One cannot achieve real greatness in the mundane life without being able to control his mind and sense organs and without having a correct awareness of himself and the world. It is only when a man can attain the state of control and steadiness of the mind that he can hope to reach the apex of glory of his empirical life, and can discover that he has acquired the power of making even the insignificant events of the world happy and cheerful. He has freed himself from the clutches of his lower ego, and has attained the power of looking at the world in an objective way. In fact, to be free from the clutches of a low, self-centered perspective of life is real freedom, and this real freedom cannot be enjoyed if one is not spiritually enlightened.

It is only in the state of his spiritual awareness that a man can rise above the level of his limited individual self, and prepare himself for the noble task of sacrificing his good and acting with energy and devotion for the good of the world. When a man can grasp clearly the distinction between the changing lower self and the unchangeable higher one, he attains the power of sacrificing his smaller ends for higher goals of life, whether empirical or trans-empirical.

To make sincere efforts to have a vision of the unchangeable and unaffected self of man is what is regarded as spiritual sadhana,
according to Indian tradition, and the *sadhana*, in due course, finds its completion in spiritual enlightenment. Meditation is therefore an essential limb of the spiritual discipline, because through meditation alone, man can discover his in-dwelling consciousness as his real being. This spiritual *sadhana* is a preparatory exercise to attain the greatest purpose in life.

There is obviously a purpose in life, which, as Pandit observes, “depends upon the view of life that we take. Life here is only a preparation for an ultimate good in some heaven” (238). Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga claims that there is a Truth in all our approaches to *Self-Realization*. There are many purposes in life. There is a series of purposes building up to the ultimate purpose, which is the elevation of our human consciousness into divine consciousness. The first aim of life is to be conscious and more conscious of ourselves till we are fully conscious. And that is the meaning of evolution. Sri Aurobindo is quoted by Pandit to have said that each one of us, when we delve deep into ourselves, is bound to find one day what is his individual purpose (240).

Like the purpose of an individual, there is a large purpose too. But within that, each one of us has an individual purpose. Our purpose is first to find out the Divine within ourselves.
Hinduism and the yogic concept

Rolland holds that "All human knowledge is but a part of religion" (238). Hinduism is one such religion that directs one towards this purpose. It encompasses the whole view of human purpose, both here and hereafter. Hinduism is a synthesis of all types of religious experience, from the highest to the lowest. It is a whole and complete view of life. According to Sarma, "the Hindus call their religion Sanatana Dharma or eternal order and are justly proud of it" (128).

Hinduism comprises five cardinal virtues and they are well exemplified in the ideal characters in the Indian epics and puranas. They may be regarded as the distinctive marks of the religious spirit of India. They are 1. Purity (Sattasvasuddhi), 2. Self control (Sama and dama), 3. Detachment (Vairagya), 4. Truth (Satyam) and 5. Non violence (ahimsa). Each of these implies purity of body and purity of mind and spirit (Sarma 28).

According to Swami Vivekananda, Hinduism preaches four great paths or yogas, which lead us to Self-Realization. He derives the word 'Yoga' from the same Sanskrit root as the English word 'Yoke' in the sense of 'joining'. The word 'Yoga' implies union with God and the means to attain that union. To Vivekananda, Karma Yoga urges us to "work incessantly, but give up all attachment to work" (qtd. in Rolland 189). One has to hold one's mind free and
should not project into it the tentacle of selfishness I and Mine. The only true duty is to be unattached and to work as free beings, to give up all work to God and all our duties are His.

*Bhakti* Yoga is the Gospel of Love or Devotion, which unfolds within its realm the two distinct spheres of heart and reason. It guides us to the whole and pure light of liberty and truth. The Vedantins call this state *Sat-Chit-Ananda* - Existence, Knowledge, Bliss Absolute. At the end of *Bhakti* Yoga, we come to an outburst of liberation or ecstasy - that is, Supreme *Bhakti*, where ties seem to be so broken that it must be annihilated or flung out of equilibrium. The *Bhakta* or devotee becomes ONE with the Absolute.

*Raja* Yoga (the Royal Path), which is the *yoga* par excellence, is the way of discrimination. Its field of action is the control and absolute mastery of the mind - the first condition of all knowledge. It achieves its goal by concentration. If by 'yoga' we mean union with the Supreme objects and subject of knowledge, *Raja Yoga* is the experimental psycho-physiological method for its direct attainment.

*Gnana* (or *Jnana*) Yoga is the knowledge of the true nature of self and the world. It is the rationalist and philosophical path. Its aim is the absolute Being, its starting point and methods are much more like those of the scientific than the religious spirit of the
West. It invokes both science and reason in no uncertain tones. In the opinion of Rolland “Experience is the only source of knowledge” (234-35). It follows that religion must be tested by the same law and the other sciences.

Four stages of life

One can choose any one of the yogic approaches or great paths to guide oneself to Self-Realization through the four stages or Ashramas of life. According to the Vedic social system, the life of a Hindu has been broadly divided into four Ashramas or stages:

1. The stage of Bramacharya (Student life) or the period of training,
2. Gruhasthya (house-holder life) or the period of work for the world as a householder,
3. Vanaprasthya (retirement) or the period of retreat for the loosening of the social ties, and
4. Sanyasa (renunciation) or the period of renunciation and expectant waiting for freedom. These four stages indicate that life is a pilgrimage to the eternal life through different stages (Sanyal 205)

In the first stage, that is, Brahmacharya, a man ought to learn and live the life of a celibate. During the period of growth between 8 and 25 years, every individual has to serve his Guru loyally for a number of years in order to come out as a man well-versed in at least one of the Vedas. This is the period of Brahmacharya or study and discipline. The student or disciple is
called Antevasin in the Gurukul (the house of the teacher). He becomes well disciplined under the parental care and tutelage of the Guru, who is his spiritual father and whom he serves with devotion or Bhakti. He becomes true in thought, word, and deed. He respects all his elders (Sabharatnam 30).

In the second stage, that is, Gruhasthya, he should marry and work for his livelihood making due provision for his progeny. As a Gruhastha, he has to follow Dharma and Truth and earn his livelihood in the most honorable manner possible. This is the most important Ashrama or stage, because it supports all the other Ashramas. The connubial tie cannot be severed after the death of the spouse. Without the wife, who is a partner in life, no religious rite can be performed in the house. Every Gruhastha is expected to spend a tenth of his earnings on charity (Sabharatnam 30). The Hindu ideal emphasizes the individual and the social aspects of the institution of marriage. As Radhakrishnan also points out, "Sensual love is subordinated into self-forgetful devotion" (Hindu View 60).

In the third stage of Vanaprasthya, man should gradually retire from the concerns of the world and accustom himself to an ascetic mode of life. The aged householder goes to the forest and his wife follows him. It is the time when he renounces all his worldly possessions in order to prepare himself for the true life of
the spirit. The main objective of this stage is to escape from the din
and bustle of the complicated materialistic life into the solitude of
the forest to meditate on the higher problems. It is this stage of
Vanaprasthya or retired life, which follows on the preceding stage
and is preparatory to the next and final stage of Sanyasa. At this
stage, a man's duty is to serve the world by means of prayer and
sacrifice. He is therefore to continue the performance of the five
daily sacrifices and engage in other kinds of sacrifice as well. The
duties of man at this stage are, in the words of Sanyal, "sacrifice,
constant study of the Vedas, austerity and equanimity, readiness to
give and not to take anything, love and compassion for all living
beings" (210-11)

In the fourth stage, that is, Sanyasa, man should become an
ascetic entirely and devote himself to the contemplation of God. He
should not only free himself from the cares of mundane life, but
also attain a state of spiritual freedom when he is not tempted by
wealth or honor, and is not elated by triumph or depressed by
defeat. He develops a spirit of equanimity. In the words of
Radhakrishnan (Hindu View 64), he "bears impatiently improper
words and does not insult anyone; he does not hate anyone for the
sake of his physical body." In this stage, man has renounced
everything. He has to pass his days in trying to realize the highest
truths of his religion. He must achieve the goal of life, that is, god-realization through meditation or through selfless service and sacrifice. A real sanyasin is devoid of material possession and shows no distinction of caste, creed or color. He gives up all rites, ceremonies and worldly ties. He lives on alms, in solitude meditates on the Brahman free from rage and hatred (duvesha). The real sanyasin loves all mankind and all creatures with equal vision (Sabharatnam 31).

In Hinduism, the monk and the householder are treated equally, for every stage in life is necessary and natural and one issues from the other. All the stages are interdependent, since we pass from one stage to the other gradually and this is the general rule. "The goal in spiritual life", as Sircar says, "is to realize the oneness of being by going through all these four stages" (228)

**Sanyasa and Self-Realization**

Of all the four stages, the stage of Sanyasa is the last and final stage. All the first three stages culminate in this most important stage for Self-Realization, since renunciation is the effacement of self - a transformation from 'I' to 'we' and so a difficult task to carry out in life. Only a few can achieve this goal in life. This leads us to a discussion on the nature and purpose of Self-Realization.
For the successful practice of Sadhana, man should have an aversion for the petty enjoyments of life, and a burning aspiration for the attainment of the Divine. The more powerful these desires are in him, the more fruitful would be his efforts. He should study the scriptures and gain from them knowledge of God as experienced and expounded by great seers and incarnations. He should seek a spiritual teacher and wisdom from the scriptural teachings, these are the two most important requirements in a spiritual aspirant. A study of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita and some of the Puranas will give an adequate understanding of the theory about God, the Soul, and Nature as also of what Moksha (liberation) means. But Vedanta does not stop with a theoretical acceptance of a creed, a dogma, or a set of teachings, or with the performance of certain ceremonials adopting certain ways of life. The fundamental virtues it teaches, and the comprehension about God and the Atman, have to become a matter of experience for the aspirant. So in the religion of Vedanta there is insistence on Sadhana - in the practice of discrimination, renunciation, and meditation as instructed by the teacher.

As Tapasyanandha observes,

Realization of the presence of the Divine in oneself and in all beings is the final consummation of all these
endeavors. The evolution of the Jiva’s (Soul’s) potentialities through repeated embodiments is complete, when, at the maturation of his Sadhana he is able to abandon his individual ego through an unconditional surrender to the Supreme Being and thus realize his true self in Him. Then will the ‘I’ disappear in the ‘He’ (qtd. in Sarma VI-VIII)

The highest Bhakti demands complete renunciation. As a matter of fact, Bhakti itself helps one in renouncing earthly pleasures. The Bhaghavad-Gita says: the objects of sense fall away from the soul in the body when it ceases to feed on them, but the taste for them is left behind. Even the taste falls away when the Supreme is seen. Love of God and the worldly life act and react upon each other. Every aspiring devotee should compute his love of God by his renunciation of the worldly spirit. Of course, this does not mean that a man should shirk his responsibility unless he receives a higher call. On the other hand, it means that he should discharge the responsibility as a faithful servant of God in a spirit of self-sacrifice and with no sacrifice and with no desire for any earthly reward. For no offering is so pleasing to God, as our hard, efficient unrecognized and unrequited labor at the post to which he has called us (Sarma 78).
In Srimad Bhagavadam, about the essence of renunciation Sri Krishna says: "Detach yourself from the objects of desire. Abstain from worldly pleasures that you may thus free from the entanglement of the senses. This is the righteous conduct that leads one to the highest good, and frees man from grief, infatuation, and fear" (Prabhavananda 269).

Since birth as a human being is a rare opportunity given to man for realizing God, its significance must be understood and cherished. Every moment is meant to be devoted to pursuits in consonance with the goal, and not frittered away in pursuits, which leads one away from reaching the goal. Many are the prescribed paths to liberation like the path of action, contemplation, knowledge and devotion. Devotion, besides being an end in itself, can be pursued without much effort unlike the other paths, which have regulations that are to be practiced diligently.

The recommended means are all paths to reach the final goal of spiritual experience of union with God to be adopted according to one's nature, but the path of devotion is suitable for everyone. According to Bhattacharjia, different methods are given by different teachers to discover and cultivate the spirit of devotion for the Lord in a seeker's heart. Whatever be the means, the mind of the seeker must be persuaded away from its natural
fascination for sense-objects and must be guided to live a life of all-consuming identification with the Supreme (24).

The East and the West

Man, either in the East or in the West, has to go through the phenomenon of existence. While the East offers the four yogas or approaches to life and illustrates the four objects and stages of life, the West is going more material and metaphysical resulting in a quest for spiritual bliss. Since the advent of Science and Technology, material and social life of the people of the West has made remarkable strides. The Westerners have all kinds of material comforts. Their scientists have succeeded in conquering the space, made many discoveries and inventions. The impact of their findings is very conspicuous in all aspects of life. With the help of their scientific knowledge, they can make or mar things in no time. Many countries have emerged as super powers. Economically superior, they dictate terms to the underdeveloped and the developing nations. In the affluent nations, the countless material comforts that people enjoy have not given them real happiness and salubrious peace. A kind of spiritual sterility occupies their minds and thoughts. The religion they practice does not seem to offer solace to their perturbed minds. Material fulfillment has disintegrated their family life and brought in mental uneasiness.
Swami Vivekananda “had realized that during his first journey he had been caught by the power, the organization and the apparent democracy of America and Europe.” But during his second visit in 1900, he “had discovered the spirit of lucre, of greed, of Mammon, with its enormous combinations and ferocious struggle for supremacy.” He goes on to say further: “Social life in the West is like a peal of laughter; but underneath it is wail. It ends in a sob. The fun and frivolity are all on the surface; really it is full of tragic intensity. Here [In India] it is sad, gloomy on the surface, but underneath are carelessness and merriment” (qtd. in Rolland 149).

What the seer said nearly a century ago holds good even today. People in the West encounter innumerable insoluble problems in their family life. Divorces are very common even for frivolous reasons. Estranged children and forsaken aged parents pose a concrete threat to their social life. Because of unhappy family life and uncongenial environment, children take to crime to give vent to their unhappiness and pre-marital sex ruins the life of many youngsters. On the contrary, as the celebrated German scholar and Indologist Max Muller says, India is “most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow - in some ways a very paradise on earth.” He feels that India has solutions to some of “the greatest problems of life” with "choicest gifts." Muller further points out that Europe may draw from Indian literature the
"corrective which is most wanted in order to make our life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life" (qtd. in Rao, Meaning 40-41).

Many well-known writers in the West have brought to light this sorry state of affairs in their writings. These writers have been influenced by the spiritualism of ancient India. Even in the 19th century, American thinkers like Emerson, Thoreau, Walt Whitman and others came under the influence of ancient Indian philosophy and made use of oriental thoughts in their writings. American transcendentalism probably owes its origin partially to ancient Indian philosophy. The titles of poems like 'Hamatreya', 'Brahma', and 'Maia' by Emerson suggest how deeply he was indebted to the Indian Scriptures. The poem 'Brahma' draws a parallel to the verses in the second chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita.

Similarly, Emerson draws from the Upanishads too. His concept of the Over-Soul is typically Indian. The Over-Soul is a literal translation of the Sanskrit Paramatma, which is its analogue. As Dwivedi observes: "The Over-Soul is a very good exposition of this concept by a Western mind" (57-8).

The Vedanta philosophy was one of several thought currents from abroad that reached New England in the early decades of the 19th century and contributed to the thinking of Emerson and
Thoreau. The former knew the Laws of Manu, the *Vishnupurana*, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Katha Upanishad*. There are several references to these scriptures in his journals, essays and poems.

Emerson speaks of the *Vedas*:

> It is sublime as heat and night and a breathless ocean
> It contains every religious sentiment, all the grand ethics which visit in turn each noble and poetic mind
> and nothing is easier than to separate what must have been the primeval inspiration from the endless ceremonial nonsense which caricatures and contradicts it through every chapter. It is of no use to put away the book if I trust myself in the woods or in boat upon the pond nature makes a Brahmin of me presently: eternal necessity, eternal compensation, unfathomable power, unbroken silence, - this is her creed (qtd in Oliver 11)

Even a cursory reading of his poems ‘Brahma’ and ‘Hamatreya’ and their themes clearly reveal his profound knowledge of the *Katha Upanishad*. Oliver declares that Emerson was almost “the high priest of Orientalism in America by the time he published ‘Brahma’ in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1857” (168)

Emerson’s conceptions of reality, of goodness and beauty are Oriental in origin. These conceptions, Emerson asserts again and again, have their foundations in the Oriental principle of spiritual
unity. He is convinced that Plato is a student of Oriental philosophy. "Plato, in Egypt and Eastern pilgrimages, imbibed the idea of one Deity in which all things are absorbed." "In all nations," he goes on, "there are minds which incline to dwell in the conceptions of fundamental Unity. The raptures of prayer and ecstasy of devotion lose all beings in one Being. This tendency finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East and chiefly in the Indian Scriptures in the *Vedas*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Vishnu Purana*" (Emerson 404-06)

Emerson, like Plato, is a prophet of universal unity. And he owes his understanding of universal unity to the influence of Indian philosophy. His famous poem on Brahma, which expresses in a few lines the central doctrine of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, is the abundant proof of the influence Indian thought has exercised on his mind. It is primarily through Emerson that Indian thought has found on American soil a firm footing. Emerson and Plato are heretics in the western philosophic tradition on account of their sympathies with the Oriental idealistic tendency.

Thoreau too was introduced to Oriental writing while still at Harvard. Emerson, Thoreau and other transcendentalists were interested in the concept of 'self-hood' and elaborated doctrines of 'Self' found in Hindu Scriptures which tell us that the central core of one's self *antaratman* is identified with the cosmic whole, Brahman.
The *Upnishads* state: “The self within you, the resplendent, immortal person is the internal self of all things and is the Universal Brahman. Concepts similar to this cardinal doctrine of Vedanta appear in the writings of the Transcendentalists” (Fisher et al. 33).

The critics further point out that in some respects, Henry David Thoreau was, more than Emerson, attracted to the Oriental philosophy and thought. While Emerson found the Hindu doctrines of soul congenial to his own ideas about man’s relationship to the universe, “Thoreau found in Hindu scriptures a way of life with which he felt a profound affinity” (33).

The Vedanta philosophy too inspired Walt Whitman. “For the long opening poem of Leaves of Grass - “Song of Myself” - contains Whitman’s exultant concept of ‘myself’ in which he expresses the essence of Vedantic mysticism. Mysticism as the Vedantist understands it and as it finds expression in “Song of Myself” is a way of embracing the other, the objective world, in an inclusive conception of Selfhood. It is a way of finding the world in the self and as the self. Like the “Cosmic Form” described in the *Gita* and the Dynamic Self of the *Upnishads*, Whitman’s ‘Self’ sweeps through the cosmos and embraces it. Gandhi in this context after reading Emerson’s *Essays* says: “The essays to my mind contain the teaching of Indian wisdom in a western ‘guru’. It is interesting
to see our own sometimes differently fashioned” (qtd. in Fisher et al. 37-38).

British writers like T.S. Eliot and Somerset Maugham took keen interest in the Oriental literature and thought. For example, the subtitle ‘The Fire Sermon’ in The Waste Land, in the opinion of Jain, refers to ‘The Fire Sermon’ preached by the Buddha. against the fires of passion, hatred and infatuation” (169). Eliot also refers to the Fable of the Thunder in the Verse 2 of The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. It is worthy of quoting Jain here: “Eliot’s attention was first drawn to this passage in May 1912 by Charles Laxman, his Sanskrit teacher at Harvard, who gave him a copy of Vasudev Laxman Shastri Phansikar’s Sanskrit edition of The Twenty-Eight Upanishads” (189). Eliot concludes The Waste Land with the Sanskrit chant ‘Shantih, Shantih, Shantih’, which, as Jain observes, “implies that he had to look beyond the European tradition to find a word of adequate depth and romance.” The word ‘Shantih’ is a formal ending to an Upanishad, the equivalent of which is “The peace which passeth understanding” (194).

Brunton aptly says in this context. “Western people should seek their spiritual help from India as one contribution among several and not limit themselves to its particular form alone. Huxley, Heard, Maugham and Isherwood are but babes in the Vedantic wood. Vedanta is a labyrinth” (31).
Somerset Maugham finds spiritual realization in the Vedantic philosophy of India. His novel *The Razor's Edge* (1944) was the fruition of his spiritual journey to India in 1936 and his meeting with great sages like Sri Ramana Maharshi (Mernard 28-29). He refers to his visit to India in his book *Points of View* (48-52), a collection of essays which contain an article titled 'The Saint' (48-52), devoted to Sri Ramana Maharshi. Maugham in this article says, “The religion of the Hindus is not only a religion, but also a philosophy, and not only a religion and a philosophy, but also a way of life” (52). His novel *The Razor’s Edge* describes the story of a young American’s spiritual quest. It has a sweep of three countries, America, France and India with a majority of characters belonging to France, which forms the center of attraction and main hub of activity. Spiritual realization is the novel’s main theme, which is beautifully contrasted with material pursuit. The novel brings home to us the general feeling that since material pursuit is as much a razor's edge as spiritual realization, it is worth the trouble to try the latter, which brings perennial happiness, permanent peace and everlasting calmness.

*The Razor's Edge* is introduced to us through the lines from the *Katha-Upanishad* I iii.14: “Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the excellent ones. The wise ones describe that path to be as impassable as a razor's edge, which, when sharpened, is
difficult to tread on" (Gambhirananda 175). These lines indicate that the path to Salvation is as hard to pass over as the sharp edge of a razor. The question of Salvation and the difficulties that we have to face take us to the Creator, God and our belief in Him.

One can conclude that the West has been looking for spiritual guidance from the East. Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, T. S. Eliot and Maugham give representation to the quest for the meaning of life in their writings. They have accepted and been satisfied with the Oriental view of life. They have successfully attempted to use literature as a mode of quest for the nature and purpose of human existence. India has been the seat of various schools of philosophy and religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Down the ages at every point of time in the recorded human history, great souls from all the four corners of the world were attracted to the East, especially India for its unique charm and its mysterious key to the ills of human life. Writers cutting across nationalities and cultural barriers have recognized the Indian way of achieving God-realization. To this tradition belongs John Steinbeck who has shown in his novels the limitations of human beings and his philosophical acceptance of man's relationship with the universe around him. Introspection is a unique universal human characteristic. Ontological and teleological questions concerning the nature and purpose of being are raised and variously answered in speculative
and religious philosophies of both the Eastern and Western tradition. Literature too is an area of human expression wherein man has often tried to find answers to the questions such as "who am I?" and "What is my destiny?" The way two writers belonging to different countries, cultures and ethos have tried to answer the above questions shows that though they belong to different ecological situations, their basic belief and Weltanschauung are surprisingly similar.

This factor makes it a worthwhile comparative study of the two authors, one from the East and the other from the West and of their philosophical bases and views on the nature and purpose of human existence. John Steinbeck and Raja Rao are two writers with surprising similarities in their treatment of the theme, nature and purpose of human existence. These two writers exhibit the oneness of human thoughts and endeavors, though in varying expressions and fictional representations.

In their novels, Steinbeck and Raja Rao are basically concerned with the relationship between man and his environment. Steinbeck writes his novels on the problems faced by man in his physical, social and economic environment in the particular context of Western California. Raja Rao shapes his fiction on man’s struggles to fit himself in a suitable spiritual and physical environment. Both the novelists have been considerably influenced
by the Indian philosophical concepts such as the *Advaita* principle, which attempts to provide an answer to the perennial questions posed by man over the ages. Even a preliminary reading of their novels reveals the scope for a comparative study.

Both John Steinbeck and Raja Rao were born in the first decade of the 20th Century – Steinbeck on 27th February 1902 at Salinas, California and Raja Rao on November 5th 1908 at Hassan, a small town in the erstwhile Princely State of Mysore, now known as Karnataka State in India. After studying French for sometime at Aligarh Muslim University, Raja Rao intended to go to France to do further work in French literature at the well-known French universities of Montpellier and Sorbonne. Receiving a grant from the Government of Hyderabad, Rao proceeded to France for his proposed research in the Mysticism of the West, though soon he drifted to literature. Steinbeck, even as a high school student at Salinas dreamed of becoming a writer. He took courses in Latin and biology apart from English and literature, which were the natural favorites of the aspiring writer Steinbeck.

At Stanford University, his main interest was writing and he could shape and mould his fiction writing skill, particularly under the direction of a Stanford teacher in the art of the short story, Edith Mirrielees. From her, “Steinbeck learned the necessity of
Getting a gist of a story across with an economy of expression" (Ditsky 6).

Being born in an orthodox Brahmin family, even as a child Raja Rao got a good exposure to the Vedas and the Upanishads. The Indian epics The Ramayana and The Mahabharata, Brihatstotaratnakara, an anthology of Sanskrit religious verse, Buddhist texts in English translation, Medieval Kannada mystical poetry, the works of the renowned art historian and scholar, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Mahatma Gandhi’s autobiography, The Bible, Plato, Dostoevsky, Malraux, Kafka, Valery, Rilke, Andre Gide, Ignazio Silone and Gorky had a profound impact on Raja Rao (Dey 19).

Ed Ricketts, a marine biologist, who became a life-long friend of Steinbeck, had a major influence on his life and art that enabled him to develop his theories "in which human nature was seen as fundamentally organismic, that is, as being comprehensible only when viewed in the context of its place in the organismic scheme of things" (Ditsky 6).

By 1925, Steinbeck had read widely in English, American, and European literature, he enjoyed Milton, Browning, Thackeray, George Eliot, Hardy, D H. Lawrence, Jeffers, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, among others, including a few writers for whom his enthusiasm later waned: James Branch, Cabell, Norman Douglas and Sherwood
Anderson (Fontenrose 3). Steinbeck's upbringing and environment influenced him considerably. He was sensitive to every feature of his native region; in *East of Eden*, he says, "I remember my childhood names for grasses and secret flowers. I remember where a toad may live and what time the birds awaken in the summer - and what trees and seasons smelled like" (1).

.. Fontenrose quotes Peter Lisca to have pointed out that Steinbeck's works show his persistent interest in both the biological and the mythopoetic heritage of man (6). His topographical and geographical knowledge of the valleys in the province in which he had grown helped him give accurate description of them in his novels.

Both Steinbeck and Raja Rao had married three times, for their first two marriages had failed. When Raja Rao was engulfed by disillusionment, he visited various great thinkers and Ashrams in India. He visited Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1939 at Pondicherry and met Sri Aurobindo and the impact of the latter's writings have gone a long way in shaping his own views on literature and aesthetics. He also met Ramana Maharshi at his Ashram at Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu during 1939-40. He also visited Narayan Maharaj at Kegagaon in Maharashtra in 1940-44. Raja Rao also met another guru Pandit Taranath. These visits bear eloquent testimony to the
depth of his agony and desperation, his insistent search for the right path.

Raja Rao’s spiritual quest came to an end in 1943 when at Trivandrum in Kerala State he met Sri Atmananda Guru, who became his spiritual teacher - his Guru in the traditional sense of the term and who solved all his doubts and questionings and showed him the path to continue his writing profession instead of becoming a sanyasi.

The dissolution of his marriage was followed by a long silence over more than a full decade during which Raja Rao devoted himself to an extensive study of philosophy. As a result, the world saw the publication of his metaphysical novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) that has an extract from Sri Atmananda’s work as its epigraph. *The Serpent and the Rope* is his major work, perhaps the most sophisticated exploration into the ambiguities of an intellectual encounter. It received wide acclaim and the prestigious *Sahitya Akademi* award. He was invited to teach Indian Philosophy at an American University. He met Romain Rolland on 8th July 1936. Raja Rao was also influenced by the great authors both Indian, and European, Indian epics and Puranas, Buddhist texts, Australian poet Rainer Maria Rilke, poems and autobiography of W.B. Yeats, French poet Paul Valery, Jean
Christophe of Romain Rolland also profoundly influenced him (Srivastava 13-14).

In 1965, Raja Rao married Katherine Jones, an American stage actress. The same year he published his third novel *The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of Modern India* (1965), a short novel of unique artistic achievement, which attracted sharp controversial reaction from critics and readers. His next novel *Comrade Krillov* (1976) delves deep into the ambiguous soul of an orthodox Brahmin Communist. His short story collection *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978) has further baffled the critics. It incorporates some of the stories of *The Cow of the Barricades* (which belongs to the early phase of his career) and a few new ones.

His magnum opus, *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) purported to be the first part of a trilogy, was awarded the prestigious Newstadt Prize by the Oklahoma University. In this book, he repeats the theme of multicultural confrontation, whereas *On the Ganga Ghat* (1989), a collection of stories, meant to be read as a whole, presents a glimpse of that Indian reality which is beyond the conflicts of time with a quiet and objective stance. *The Meaning of India* (1996) is a collection of essays. His latest book *The Great Indian Way: Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1998) pays
glowing tributes to Gandhi, one of the greatest men of the twentieth century

With deep roots in the Eastern philosophies and also in the Western literary, intellectual and artistic ambience, Rao declares, "An Indian writer in English must absolutely discover and identify himself as an Indian first" For him therefore, "literature is sadhana - not a profession but a vocation" (Dey 21-23). Raja Rao is the most difficult but perhaps the most spiritually satisfying and enlightening novelist, for he makes generous use of religious and philosophical symbolism. The characters in his works are domestic Karmayogins working for the happiness of others without looking for the fruits of action. For example, his first three novels are based on the Indian Yogic philosophy Kanthapura celebrates Karmayoga, The Serpent and the Rope deals with Jnanayoga and The Cat and Shakespeare is concerned with Bhaktiyoga (Devi 46-7)

Raja Rao affirms that he is committed to Advaita Vedanta and a sadhaka. In an article Rao says, "When you understand that beyond your body and beyond your mind is the Absolute Reality, then you are a Vedantin" (Myself 119). Sambamoorthy is of the opinion that the "quest of the several protagonists in Raja Rao's novels for a metaphysical identity becomes the sine-qua-non of the central theme" (26).
Coming to Steinbeck, he earnestly began his writing career in the late 1920s. His first novel *Cup of Gold* was published in 1929 and from then on as a writer he did not look back till the 1960s. His contribution is voluminous, but a mention must be made about his major works, which are taught even today at colleges and universities. Even about four decades after his death his popularity has not diminished much. He continues to attract millions of readers all over the world, for “he was a champion of the 1930s, a prophetic voice for America, a popular philosopher, an involved journalist and a detached artist” (Hayashi VIII). In his ‘Foreword’ entitled “The Artist as Magician”, Warren French says that Steinbeck “is the writer who bridges the gap between the unsophisticated public and the serious artist” (XIII).

The publication of *The East of Eden Letters* also provide us with unique insights into the artist’s state of mind as he was working. According to Peter Lisca (1), Steinbeck’s works “provide the over-view of modern American experience.” In *To a God Unknown* (1933) and *East of Eden* (1952), he discusses in detail homesteading in California at the turn of the century. The stable rural community of pre-depression days finds expression in *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *The Red Pony* (1938). Steinbeck deals with accuracy the violence and epic experiences of the 1930s in *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and *The Grapes of*
Wrath (1939). The Second World War is depicted vividly in his works The Moon is Down (1942) and Once there was War (1958) and the subsequent moral lassitude of people in The Winter of Our Discontent (1961) and Travels With Charley (1962).

And all along, in the thirties, forties and fifties, Steinbeck made use of American subcultures as a mirror to make people laugh a little at themselves and their pretensions. This purpose has been served by novels such as Tortilla Flat (1935), Cannery Row (1945) and Sweet Thursday (1954) In Sea of Cortez (1941), Steinbeck wrote eloquently of man’s physical (ecology) and spiritual (mysticism) necessity to relate to “the whole thing” from the tide pool to the stars. And these interests are never far from the center of his fiction. It is the violation of ecological principles that leads to The Grapes of Wrath, from Joseph Wayne’s belief in To A God Unknown in the spiritual dimensions of Nature to Ethan Hawley’s faith in his stone talisman in The Winter of Our Discontent, contemporary youth recognize their own more than casual interest in the efficacy of rituals and the possibilities of astrology. Their rejection of commercialized values and their
tendency toward drop-out and commune social structure is found from *Tortilla Flat* to *Sweet Thursday* in surprising detail. (Lisca, *Teaching* 2)

Efficient organizations of violent demonstrations against power are portrayed in *In Dubious Battle* and the belief in the one family of man in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Burning Bright*. The disillusionment with the government reforms is expressed in *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*

Modern interest in folk culture finds reflection in *The Grapes of Wrath*, which in "The Ballad of Tom Joad" has itself contributed to that culture. John Steinbeck's interest in such minority groups as the Mexican Americans is revealed in *The Pastures of Heaven* and *Tortilla Flat*. In a single character, Crooks in *Of Mice and Men* (1937), Steinbeck has better expressed the predicament of the Black in American life than some who have written at length. Finally, in *Travels with Charley*, he discusses the genuine urge of today's youth to travel through the country to see it and understand it at first hand (Lisca, *Teaching* 2-3)

Steinbeck's central theme in his novels is Paradise Lost, Paradise Lost taking various forms the Grail Paradise and Avalon of Arthunan legend in *Cup of Gold* and *Tortilla Flat*, the asphodel fields of *The Pastures of Heaven*, the Promised Land of *To a God Unknown* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Eden of *In
Dubious Battle and East of Eden. "His most persistent theme has been the superiority of simple human virtues and pleasures to the accumulation of riches and property, of kindness and justice, to meanness and greed, of life-asserting action to life denying. In several ways, he has asserted that all life is holy, every creature valuable. Herein lies his sentimentality but also his strength" (Fontenrose, Introduction 140-141).

What is generally found in the novels of the American West is found in Steinbeck's novels also. In his novels, characters are independent, although shaped by the land, and have had a good deal to say about their destinies. They are usually shaped morally rather than psychologically thus allowing freedom of action. They are based on wonder and have the quest. Any surrender made by them is usually to the land rather than to society. In spite of this, the characters still remain free within their society. As Fontenrose says, they are concerned with a long view, with man as member of a race or species, as part of the natural environment.

They look at good and evil as eternal qualities, as permanence within nature. The character seeks to identify with nature, within the entire scheme of life, as representative man. They experience spiritual calm in the midst of fury or disaster. In the novels of Steinbeck, man takes the test of survival alone being naked before the universe. They want to escape from the confines
of society and search for Eden, or for self, or for the secrets of the natural world. These novels are epic, romantic or mythic and they are often lyrical. In these novels, good and evil tend to be absolutes. The characters undergo physical or spiritual ordeal and they are irrational or intuitive (Milton 60) The American theme announces itself regularly in Steinbeck's stories in a recurring image of a new movement west, a movement particularly to California. Many editors and critics find in his characters "an expression of the joy of living" (Cleanth Brooks et al. 2452-3).

Steinbeck's best works brilliantly expose mankind's "grievous faults and failures", alert us to social and economic dangers, and remind us of our forgotten commitments and dreams. His strongest convictions and passions appear in his fundamental belief in humanity, in his expectation that man will endure, and that the creative forces of the human spirit will prevail (McCarthy 143).

From a careful reading of the fiction of both writers, one can infer that their personal lives have permeated into their writings. As a result, their writings have been colored by their philosophical bent of mind. The inherent urge in the authors projects itself through the chief characters that they have created. In fact, certain characters can easily be identified with their respective creators. It is absolute fiction but reality fictionalized. The theme of man trying to become one with the Absolute recurs in their writings. The
thematic affinity between them and their personal experience in
the realm of the intangible call for a comparative study of their
novels.

Three novels by Steinbeck - *To a God Unknown* (1933),
*The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *East of Eden* (1952) and three
by Raja Rao - *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope*
(1960) and *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) are taken up for a
comparative study. It is hypothesized that despite the East-West
divide in terms of cultural and civilizational parameters, Steinbeck
and Raja Rao share a common platform to delve deep into the
nature and purpose of human existence through their fictional
explorations of human experience. An in-depth examination of the
novel of these two writers aims at substantiating the hypothesis
proposed.

Steinbeck's early novel *To a God Unknown* (1933), his
magnum opus *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and his later novel
*East of Eden* (1952) trace the steady progression of man's quest
for *Self-Realization* by stages. These three novels share a singular
thematic concern of man and his environment.

Raja Rao's early novel *Kanthapura* (1938), his master-piece
*The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and his later novel *The Cat
and Shakespeare* (1965) also mark the steady progression of
man's eternal quest for Self-Realization, the ultimate goal of life on earth. Hence the present comparative study. The influence of the Vedanta Philosophy is very conspicuous in the works of both Steinbeck and Raja Rao. For instance, Steinbeck has used a hymn from the Rig Veda as an epigraph to his novel To a God Unknown and his use of the concept of the Advaita in the novel proves the author's deep familiarity with Indian philosophy.

As regards the similarities, The Grapes of Wrath (1939) and The Serpent and the Rope (1960) are considered to be epic novels. If the former gives a graphic description of the Depression in the 1930s in America, the latter is a magnificent guide to India. There is a kind of quest for Self-Realization in Steinbeck's novels. We can see the quest for the Absolute in To a God Unknown (1933), the quest for freewill in The Grapes of Wrath (1939) and the quest for a resolution of the conflict between good and evil in East of Eden (1952). Each quest is a dimension to the approach to Self-Realization.

In the case of Raja Rao, the quest for Self-Realization initiated in the early novel Kanthapura (1938) matures in his major novel The Serpent and Rope (1960) and finds its culmination in The Cat and Shakespeare (1965).
The research problem identified in the novels for a comparative study will be approached through the four Ashramas (stages) of life – *Brahmacharya, Gruhasthya, Vanaprasthya,* and *Sanyasa* and the four Purusharthas (objects) of life – *Artha, Kama, Dharma* and *Moksha* enunciated in the ancient Indian philosophical system.

Radhakrishnan observes, “The fulfilment of man’s life is spiritual experience in which every aspect of man’s being is raised to its highest point; all the senses gather, the whole mind keeps forward and realizes in one quivering instant such things as cannot be expressed” *(New World* 91-92) It is therefore evident that in Steinbeck and Raja Rao “there is a hope of a land of ‘eternal glory’ of a radiant security beyond the chaotic flux of man’s material experience” *(French, Study Guide* 37)

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter justifies comparative studies of literatures, introduces the writers under question and outlines the thesis problem.

Chapter Two entitled “*Joseph Wayne and Moorthy Two Aspirants for Self-Realization*” tries to place Moorthy of *Kanthapura* in the Indian philosophical system and juxtaposes him with the character Joseph Wayne of *To a God Unknown* They pass through the intermediary stages of *artha, kama* and *dharma* before they reach the final and much coveted goal of *Self-
Realization. The evolutionary stages of their spiritual voyage are markedly illustrated in the novels. The influence of Indian philosophy is evident in both the works and the writers exhibit the oneness of human thoughts and endeavors, despite many man-made barriers. The protagonists do their Karma and are not concerned with the results thereof which serve only as a means to the end - Self-Realization.

Chapter Three "Bhakti Yoga as a Path of Self-Realization: East of Eden and The Cat and Shakespeare" examines the novels mentioned in the title on a comparative basis. This chapter discusses how the protagonists Adam Trask of East of Eden and Ramakrishna Pai of The Cat and Shakespeare attain Self-Realization in the light of the Indian philosophical system through the Bhakti Yoga. For a Hindu, there are two dharmas - the Samanya dharma which deals with the affairs of world and the Vishesh dharma which pertains to the affairs of the soul. Marriage is a worldly event and part of the Samanya dharma. Marriage binds husband and wife together for life and conjoints upon them their commitments to each other. Adam does full justice to this part of the Samanya dharma and marriage to him is a kind of devotion or Bhakti and so sacred. Adherence to sacred things is also a path of Self-Realization in the Indian philosophical system. Adam precisely does this in the novel East of Eden and successfully finds himself
on the path of Bhakti Yoga leading to Self-Realization. Adam’s dream of making a Garden of Eden for his wife does not materialize but he gets enlightenment in the process. As far as Ramakrishna Pai of The Cat and Shakespeare is concerned, he is introduced at the Gruhasthya stage. As a Gruhastha, Pai is inclined towards the earlier objects of life - Artha and Kama. Pai is also at last freed from the fetters of this temporal life like wife and children and looking forward to the Promised Land, which he can soon reach through his Self-Realization.

Chapter Four "Reaching the Peak in Self-Realization The Grapes of Wrath and The Serpent and the Rope" examines the two prominent characters of the novels Tom Joad and Ramaswamy who lend themselves to a comparative study. Both of them proceed along life as everyone else in the world with all the failings and trivialities that lie at the center of human existence. Despite their initial lapses both physical and moral, the protagonists have often been perturbed throughout about the not-too-easily answerable questions of human existence. Eventually, both of them reach the peak of Self-Realization through the Gnana Yoga.

Chapter Five "Conclusion" summarizes the findings arrived at after a close scrutiny of, and in consonance with, the Indian philosophical tenets, which provide an insight into the nature and purpose of human life. Literature mirrors not only the physical but
also the spiritual. The fiction of Steinbeck and Raja Rao provides us with a chance to go deep into the rare combination of the physical and the spiritual and a pragmatic scenario in which such a combination works out. A close analysis of the novels shows that highly evolved human beings like Tom Joad, Rama, Adam Trask, Ramakrishna Pai, Joseph Wayne and Moorthy reach their spiritual objective of *Self-Realization* but in their different physical contexts.