

Chapter IV

Mysticism and Obedience to the Entities of Nature

And the Father made it clear that each man and woman is like a soldier sent by God to guard some part of the castle of the Universe. And some are in the ramparts and some far deep in the darkness of the walls. But each one must remain faithful to his post and must not go running about, else the castle is in danger from the assaults of Hell.

—John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*.

Steinbeck's Spiritual Naturalism and Mystic Adherence

Kai Nielsen in his article “Naturalistic Explanation of Theistic Belief” advocates the antitheistic belief of Naturalism as a psychological theory asserting:

Naturalism denies that there are any spiritual or supernatural realities. There are, that is, no pure mental substances and there are no supernatural realities transcendent to the world or at least we have no good ground for believing that there could be such realities. It is believed that anything that exists is ultimately composed of physical components.
(519)

This speaks clearly of the scientific temperament of the Naturalist, be it in philosophy or literature or any other discipline, that everything in the world is to be weighed on scientific scales. All explanations about anything's existence are to have scientific observations because objectivity is the only proof of factual presence as Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro put up in

their book *Naturalism* saying, “Everything that exists is part of nature and that there is no reality beyond or outside nature” (6). The existence needs logical understanding. There is, otherwise, no proven mark of the existence of spirits, soul, ethereal selves, etc., which have their own separate world apart from the physical world. Something exists or we wishing for something to be true cannot be strictly adjudged on personal conviction but rather it requires the scientific sensibility. Naturalism assesses the truthfulness of the spiritual and the supernatural solely on a scientific parlance. For instance, the existence of God needs to be backed up with scientific hypothesis because there still lives a contrasting divide behind the origin of the universe whereby one school believes in the science behind its origin, while the other school believes in the Supremes hand behind the crafting of the universe. Tom Clark’s “Spirituality Without Faith” published in the *naturalism.org* situates the Naturalism of spiritual where he states:

There exists no personal soul or spirit, no supernatural God or creator, no purpose that can be attached to existence, no ultimate meaning to life, and no special first-person way of knowing that puts the individual in direct contact with a deeper reality. The most profound experiences available to us are, like the most trivial experiences, a matter of brain states, nothing more. (Clark)

Contact with the non-material realm does not exist rather the brain courses such relation and takes it as the ultimate truth. Hence, there is not at all a need to explain any event in the light of external agencies like deities or spirits, rather the physical world generates consciousness and the culture of society. This is the notable belief residing at the heart of Naturalism. Anything that is seen is found to be existing because other entities are existing. This can be taken in the form of a cause-effect relationship in which one’s existence is the effect of the cause triggered by the other, and this is postulated based on the scientific empiricism because “[s]cientific empiricism

guarantees an underlying unity or interconnection of phenomena and so it places all things within a single world, quite the opposite of traditional supernaturalism” (Clark).

This brings forth an argument to understand: if Naturalism looks at the scientific proof behind the existence of the spiritual/ supernatural realm, does it mean that even the Literary Naturalists are strict proponents of Naturalism with a belief that nothing mystical lives as they cannot be proved? John Steinbeck was a spiritual man deep inside. Even though he had strong negation for any of the dogmatic ideologies, Steinbeck always lived with spiritual qualities which he found in nature through its connection to humanity. Dr Susan Shillinglaw, in her “Thoughts to John Steinbeck’s Spirituality” presents a remarkable episode in John Steinbeck’s religious underpinning as was shown by Robert Bennett in his monograph “The Wrath of John Steinbeck.” Nineteen-year-old John Steinbeck, one Sunday, accompanied his mother to her Church in Berkeley. The minister was preaching about the soul comparing it to be like a mortal which needs food for its survival. On hearing this, young Steinbeck got so restless and, in his frustration, responded: "Yes, you all look satisfied here, while outside the world begs for a crust of bread or a chance to earn it. Feed the body and the soul will take care of itself!" (Shillinglaw). The minister was infuriated listening to such a negative comment of disagreement coming from the congregation, who were to practice submission to what the minister or the preacher preached. Out of rage, he called Steinbeck to come and preach a much better sermon. Steinbeck’s outspoken rage against the better off elites, who used to give a hypocritic deaf ear to the sufferings of the lower-class people, made him challenge even the preacher. This discordant attitude against the heartless elites speaks of the grief Steinbeck’s heart used to feel at the sight of the harms meted out to the have-nots. His compassion for the poor spoke of his humanism.

This incident, without doubt, states about Steinbeck's humanist Naturalism, or in other terms, his Spiritual Naturalism which understood the agony and joy of humans towards whose deplorable condition of living he had compassion. This was evidently witnessed in his fictional writing where every character was deeply connected to his social and physical environment thereby appreciating to learn the spiritual values. This talks about his fiction which showed his spiritual sensibility not just found in religion but to a large extent found in nature, the milieu. So, Steinbeck's Naturalism marks him as a Spiritual Naturalist. What then is 'Spiritual Naturalism'?

It was by 1895 that the term, Spiritual Naturalism, came into popular existence. The focus of Spiritual Naturalism is happiness, contentment, or flourishing in life, and a relief from suffering. Rev. Daniel Strain in his "The Spiritual Naturalist Society" exulted the inherent meaning and understanding of Spiritual Naturalism as he labels:

Spiritual Naturalism has been described as 'science with awe,' but a true spirituality has to be more than that. Awe and wonder are important parts of spirituality. They inspire us to undertake the journey, but they are only the 'window dressing' of spiritual naturalism. A robust spiritual path will have the natural world revealed by science as its worldview, but it will also consist of a set of profound perspectives and wise values. It will include specific contemplative practices designed to instill that philosophy into our intuitive way of being. It will be a lifestyle that allows us to make progress. This progress will be a steady and measurable cultivation of a character that is more enlightened, more in tune with the way of the universe, more virtuous, more compassionate; and therefore, more capable of experiencing the flourishing, good life. This is nothing less than a path to freedom – freedom from fear and from the bonds of circumstance as a condition for happiness. (Strain)

Rev. Strain did not fully deny the complete scientific reasoning behind the existence of the spiritual mysticism as the philosophy of Naturalism puts forward, he in fact backed it up with the goodness of values that makes us believe in the theist beliefs of different religions and their teachings. Spiritual Naturalism believes in humanism which looks into the ethical conduct of one towards the other, the human world towards the nonhuman world, with mutual compassion and respect.

John Steinbeck's fictions bring about a spiritual redemption. Naturalist in his principles, Steinbeck's spiritual impulse was so strong that most of his characters manifested an "awakening of...consciousness that coincides with the awakening of... conscience" (92) as was stated by Warren French in his 1975 book *John Steinbeck*. A life force was always at play pushing his characters to bear with all the predicaments, that were the outcome of all the societal, fiscal, and biological forces, landing to a glorious joy. Steinbeck with his unwavering dependence on Naturalism was thought of as someone whose faith never took him to the Church, and he denounced the Church as an institution where duplicity was more active, and he did not trust the churchgoers. Certain enough, Steinbeck rejected hypocrisy and complacency which he felt were well portrayed by the churchgoers which he portrayed through his characters. For instance, he created a character of hypocrisy through Mr. Baker Banker in *The Winter of Our Discontent* who was a regular Church attendee and an attendee of his wealth with no compassion for the lower strata. Shillinglaw in her article "John Steinbeck's Spiritual Streak" mentions this by instancing how "in *East of Eden*, Aron Trask, under the tutelage of a minister, is obsessed with purity and stifles any truly human impulses. The indomitable Lisa Hamilton, with a "finely developed sense of sin . . . suffered bravely and uncomplainingly through life, convinced that that was the way her God wanted everyone to live" (Shillinglaw 81) and so were other characters like Emalin

Hawkins, Joseph Wayne, and many more. He was never in favor of the pretense people were living with in the disguise of their spirituality. The ill treatment towards the elements of nature is not a spiritual discipline. His Spiritual Naturalism detested the lack of compassion leading to a negative co-existence of the natural world. The otherworldly entity stresses on humanism which the human world, without understanding, turn to dehumanization leading to unbearable suffering the evils of which Steinbeck stressed upon.

Humanity's desire is to live an all-fulfilling life with a character that is maturely developed. This is indeed possible only through continued learning which makes one to be wise in mind. So being wise and living well are supported by spirituality. Once we develop this spirituality of learning goodness from all the material and the non-material entities around, we become attuned to lending help to better this otherwise chaotic world thereby gaining a life which is good and flourishing. Spiritual Naturalism is completely not separate from the ethics and values, say of Christianity, like forgiveness, mercy, charity, love and compassion, and respect for one another mutually. Even in the absence of any scientific basis, the spiritual, supernatural and the mystic entities of nature can be proven of their existence due to the meaningful connections we create within ourselves with regard to these mystical elements which is because of the harmony that exists between this ordered cosmos and self. Spiritual Naturalism includes all the human affairs, no matter what the situation be, because it ultimately focuses on "happiness, contentment, or flourishing in life, and a relief from suffering" (Strain) through the methods of Naturalism viz., observation, logic, and reasoning.

It, however, cannot be ignored that Steinbeck had deep reverence for the gospel. In fact, often he would go back to the most essential book, the King James Version of *The Bible*. *The Holy Bible* was a strong guiding light for Steinbeck's stories, and his works had many of the

Biblical stories like that of Cain and Abel in his *East of Eden* and that of the passion of Christ as seen in his *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Biblical passages marked his stories like the first line of the Lord's prayer "Our Father who art in nature" (Steinbeck, *Cannery Row* 14) written in the end of the second chapter of *Cannery Row*. Incorporating Biblical contents Steinbeck would try to bring forth the meaning of being a Spiritual Naturalist. Steinbeck would say "that he had the "instincts of a minstrel rather than those of a scrivener," biblical cadences helped shape his prose" (E. Steinbeck and Wallsten 19). These brings into view the proof that Steinbeck was a theological believer. However, his spirituality, mostly, was seen in his trying to bring bliss and contentment in the lives of his characters who were being tortured and deprived of harmonious living. In other words, he was a Spiritual Naturalist, and through his characters he aimed to spread in the world the goodness which resides inside every individual, which the individual is to discover and employ for the happiness of the other counterpart.

Steinbeck's message to the world to have a heart of compassion can be deftly assessed by studying his fictional work *The Pearl*. Steinbeck opens his novel *The Pearl* in the little town of La Paz with the indigenous people living in harmony with the nature around them. There was so much of beauty and calm in the surrounding environment with the water splashing waves every morning, the birds chirping and chattering melodies, and the doves transcending to the sky. It was a family of three, Kino, his wife Juana, and their infant son Coyotito. One fine morning as they were having their morning meal of hot corn-cake, to their utter surprise they saw a scorpion hanging from Coyotito's hanger. Kino killed it but it did bite Coyotito. Nothing could cut the poison so they decided to take the baby to the doctor, but the doctor belonged to the race which "spoke to all of Kino's race as though they were simple animals" (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 8). The greed for power was much stronger than to render compassionate selfless care. The doctor

belonged to that strata of the hierarchy which knew only to rob the voiceless indigenes. To the doctor and others of the similar hierarchy, looking after their own growth and contentment was the top priority. They hardly used to do anything for the locals out of love. On the other hand, the poor pearl divers had no other option but to submit to the privileged. No amount of rage and anger worked when these divers were near the rich because they understood they could survive only at the mercy of the rich. Kino, though even could go to the extent of killing the doctor, was helplessly subservient for the sake of his son's treatment.

Steinbeck brought this character of the doctor who was so gripped by his greed and pride of belonging to the superior race that had killed the compassion of humankind in him. The doctor was in the house but he did not see on the child because he considered himself superior to the indigenes. He declined to treat with his fees being just eight misshapen ugly ulcer-looking pearls. The stigma of dejection and poverty was so heavy on Kino and Juana that as soon as they returned to the canoe they set out to search for a pearl, that would take all sorrows away, and let Coyotito be treated of the scorpion venom. The Divine intervention was so strong on them that they found one of the finest pearls. Steinbeck's faith in the spiritual realms gets an underpinning here. Considering the Biblical cadence, he brings forth the importance of prayers and how prayers get answered. This he projects through the character Juana who knew how their poverty would be treated well provided they had riches, for which she prayed to the Supreme to let them find the finest of the pearls. This pearl would act as their talisman that will make the doctor treat Coyotito because "the minds of the people are unsubstantial as the mirage of the Gulf" (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 14). Her prayer to be blessed with the best pearl which will remove all their pain of being poor was so intense and sincere for the miracle to happen that "her face set rigid and her muscles hard to force the luck, to tear the luck out of gods' hands, for she needed

the luck for the swollen shoulder of Coyotito” (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 16). This is what happens when humanity realizes the power that is in prayer. One, with all dedication and sincerity, should place the supplication to the Supreme to let the wishes of the heart be granted.

Any religion in the world, its spiritual instruction and teaching, talks of the miracles that take place when prayers are made by honest hearts and the prayers always get answered. Kino and Juana were in dire need of God’s grace and so their honest prayers were answered as they opened the shell and removed the flesh of the oyster to find the pearl. The happiness, as a postulate of Spiritual Naturalism, was differently written on their faces because they saw the pearl which, “captured the light and refined it and gave it back in the silver incandescence. It was as large as the seagull’s egg. It was the greatest pearl in the world” (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 17).

Greed, self-seeking, selfishness, these vices, always accompany with someone’s growth and prosperity. The spiritual humanism, which Steinbeck focused upon, as argued by Daniel Strain ultimately focuses on “happiness, contentment, or flourishing in life, and a relief from suffering” (Strain). Dreams and desires bring happiness. Kino saw the pearl to be the fulfilment of his dreams of marrying Juana in the Church with both wearing clean new attires, and Coyotito studying to be a learned man. But his dreams got shattered again when the news of him getting the pearl reached other people’s ears with even the priest starting to weave dreams of progress for the church by getting possession of it from Kino. The greatest vice, greed, which has never done anyone good, brought the doctor, this time, to Kino to treat Coyotito. Not just the doctor, but one after the other, the rich of the region, with the dream and the desire to rise above their current status, start approaching and enticing Kino. The greed of the people was to such an extreme that Kino was attacked for the pearl and, out of fear, Juana asked him to throw it back. But with the dreams already hatched he decided to leave the town. Greed of becoming rich, with

this big fortune in his grip, had reached Kino too who had gone astray of the biblical teachings seeing the pearl. Unfortunately, Kino started to face its negative consequences. Steinbeck always used the gospel to tell the people what kind of spirituality all must apply in life to be happy. Steinbeck deliberates how Kino's greed to let his dreams for the family be fulfilled made him hit his wife Juana when

he struck her in the face with his clenched fist and she fell among the boulders, and he kicked her in the side. ... Kino looked down at her and his teeth were bared. He hissed at her like a snake, and Juana stared at him with wide unfrightened eyes, like a sheep before the butcher. She knew there was murder in him" (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 51–52).

He became a slave of the ungodly and became a murderer. Kino's greed brought along decline in his character of what he was, a loving husband, and a caring father. He was not anymore the Kino who would be finding musical solace in all that was around. He was one honest, happy, self-content passionate human before selfish self-gratification touched his innocent being and he chose unconsecrated ways all because he was driven by voracity.

Steinbeck's use of nature and its elements with a metaphorical teaching reveal that greed had never done anyone any good rather it is one cause of a person's downfall. It may bring happiness and joy to a certain degree for a certain period, but in the end it just becomes dust. Through Kino's affection for the pearl, which was only getting the three of them hatred, attacks, tortures, fear, and unhappiness, Steinbeck brought forth the ultimate truth of death when in their escape, Juana instead of asking Kino several times to give up on the pearl, a gunshot sounded and Coyotito's head was blown off. This loss was again because of the need to master the pearl. They returned with the lifeless body of Coyotito and they missed the joy of living.

Steinbeck being the priest of Spiritual Naturalism expressed the ethical and moral teaching of the return to nature whereby what is nature's should be kept in nature which is going to look upon the human world as their guardian angel. At the end of the novel, Kino after having learnt the ills attached with greed threw away the pearl back into the water where it was found from. "And the pearl settled into the lovely green water and dropped towards the bottom" (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 79). No matter how far one goes away, the return is always wished upon and always welcomed because the roots call one back. Once the return to the roots takes place the blending of souls happens for good. The pearl, once returned to its roots, was welcomed back as the other creatures of the bottom of the sea slowly came to it and covered it as if they were saying the lost has come home and we are not going to let it be lost again. As the crab raised the cloud of sand and covered the pearl, the pearl merged with the sea floor and vanished to live in its own natural habitat, not to be subjugated by human greed again.

Through this, Steinbeck proclaims how the Spiritual Being has designed the entities in such a harmonious blend that everyone takes the responsibility to watch over the other shaking off the anthropocentric attitude for the Divine has sent all to thrive peacefully. It can only be when all the elements understand each other's importance and leave behind all self-centeredness, there will be the establishment of Spiritual Naturalism just the way Steinbeck wrote in his work:

And the Father made it clear that each man and woman is like a soldier sent by God to guard some part of the castle of the Universe. And some are in the ramparts and some far deep in the darkness of the walls. But each one must remain faithful to his post and must not go running about, else the castle is in danger from the assaults of Hell. (Steinbeck, *The Pearl* 42)

Steinbeck's spirituality, and faith in developing a nature where everyone and everything learn to live in mutual harmony as against mutual predation leaving aside the mask of duplicity comes to light. What is man's must stay with man and what is nature's must stay in nature, no doubt helping in each other's progress. Everyone must take the responsibility of being guardians of harmonious cohabitation.

Susan Shillinglaw in her work "John Steinbeck's Spiritual Streak" acknowledges Steinbeck's 1933 novel *To a God Unknown* stating, "...*To A God Unknown*, a saga of man's relation to nature, god and truth" (85). Steinbeck wrote this fictional work to place an understanding about the ways of the Divine which are far greater than the mere human consciousness. There comes a time when human selfishness makes them subdue God's nature by challenging the Supreme mystical being. Records have set it true that this has always led to more of degradation and devastation when man starts provoking the forces of nature, precisely, the Creator of nature. Steinbeck's deep spiritual underpinning, which many deny tagging him as a non-religious person, gets a clearer presentation in *To a God Unknown*. His spirituality comes to the eyes in the very beginning of this work when he quotes some lines from the Veda acknowledging the greatness of God who is the maker of every living and non-living being, the sky, the earth, the warmth from the sun, the solace in water, etc., all have come from the Almighty, yet human dominance questions the existence of this Supreme.

The plot of the novel, *To a God Unknown*, begins with Joseph Wayne, son of John Wayne, who lived with his father and brothers on their farm, the Wayne Farm, near Pittsford in Vermont. Joseph wanted to go west for homesteading because he was aware that their farmland would not suffice their family as it already had Burton and Thomas and their respective families, and now that Benjamin was also planning of getting married, a bigger earning would only help

the family survive. Against his wishes to send his son away from himself, John, however, allowed Joseph to go bidding him farewell with his prayers. Joseph left for California. His land was the Nuestra Señora. There was a big oak tree in his land. Lumber wagon reached with Juanito. There was however something very strange about the land. It was lush green but people never used it earlier for agricultural purposes. His inquisitiveness made him ask Juanito, and he was told by Romas, the driver, that there were dry years between eighty and ninety, but after a long wait of ten years flood came and everything was lush green and productive again.

In the meantime, Joseph's father died and his brothers asked him if there still was land for them to shift. His brothers shifted to Nuestra Señora. Joseph always saw his father to be in the Oak tree and thence started to have so much reverence for the tree. Joseph, after a long courtship, married Elizabeth, and the day they were to reach the ranch the bad news spread about the death of Joseph's brother Benjy being killed by Juanito. Joseph rushed to find Juanito. On finding Juanito, he did not kill him rather said whatever he did was natural. As spring approached, new bounty of greenery was seen not only in the ranch but also in their lives. Elizabeth gave birth to their son. However, the season changed and there was no rain during the next fall. Months went by in drought and Joseph was worried about losing the cattle out of no water and fodder. One day when Elizabeth rode to the ridge to take a view of the ocean, she fell and died bringing a little rain. Joseph was heartbroken at the loss of his wife. He came across a man with an unusual fondness for sacrificing tiny animals every sunset. Dryness continued and life was dying on the ranch. The streams started to recede. Joseph had full denial for the church as he met Father Angelo. While heading back Joseph slit the throat of a calf so that the moss got water. He remembered how Elizabeth's fall had brought little rain. Joseph slit his wrist himself and it started to rain.

Steinbeck's deep connection to the land was not just based on his inquisitiveness but was mystical in nature. To him nature was always sacred, and had a lot of untold secrets which he felt like exploring, nature was something magically special. Barry Lopez in his 1989 book *Crossing Open Grounds* quotes how John Steinbeck "brings together the human heart and the land" (71). Human heart which is guided by the spiritual understanding is the procreator of life provided it follows what the creator deity wants it to do. Steinbeck, with his characters, allegorizes the spiritual qualities which some have and profess while others go against. Burton, Joseph's second brother, was a Christian in the true sense of Christianity and always believed in lack of tolerance and charity, in men, to be the cause of all unproductiveness. He dislikes all the sacrificial practices that Joseph favored for the land because sacrifices were not a part of religion, God or Nature detest any kind of sacrifice which was evil, "...nature had constituted for a religious life. He kept himself from evil and he found evil in almost all close human contacts" (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 22). Steinbeck's protagonist, Joseph Wayne, is no doubt a protector and procreator of life, but his obsession with fecundity ostracized him to be not a true spiritual Christian because he was overruled by rapaciousness to grow and take the most out of the land, as forwarded by Susan Shillinglaw in her study stating:

Certainly, the grandest of Steinbeck's spiritual seekers is Joseph Wayne, the hounded protagonist of this curiously rich and suggestive novel. He's a pantheist who finds in nature a place to create a dynasty—the Valley of Our Lady near Mission San Antonio—and the wonder that tallies with the unknowable in man, the mysterious rock, the man on the cliff who sacrifices an animal nightly in homage to sunset and uses his own bloodletting to bring the rain. For Joseph Wayne, nature teems with reproductive energy and creative force. (85)

Joseph Wayne's character puts Steinbeck's Spiritual Naturalism to a gripping understanding. Through him Steinbeck exclaimed how greed can go to the extent of taking away all the rights of others. It makes one so blinded that he leaves behind all understanding causing tortures, harms, blood sheds, sacrifices, and all the other evils of a vile spirit. It blinds a man of his happiness and joy which otherwise can be so gorgeously attained by living a godly life of mutual respect and love for all the elements that make up nature. Joseph Wayne was having an inexplicable hunger to occupy all the valley. His eyes shone at the thought of grasping the entire farmstead. His greed took over his good self and he became a domineering dominant with the only chant running inside him to be, "it's mine" (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 8). His rapaciousness made him see himself as the master who only knows occupation of what he desires in the like manner of a patriarch occupying and subduing the voiceless other gender. This comparison of Joseph to an overpowering patriarch proves right because, "For a moment the land had been his wife" (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 8) and he was the dominating husband.

Nature is the home of all goodness but Joseph wished his dominion over nature forgetting that nature's fury no one can stand. And this, at the end, led to his life being taken away as his lack of respect for the Divine made him fall a prey to sacrifices by first slitting a calf to appease mother nature and then himself. Steinbeck talks of a sort of animistic practice which got null and void at the turn of the acceptance of religious teaching.

Steinbeck was against religious dogmatism because these only lead a man astray. Joseph's ranch in California had a big old oak tree. He wanted to build his hut beneath the tree but Juanito asked him not to lest the branch may fall. Joseph developed a close attachment to the tree from the moment he heard of the death of his father. He started to see his father in the oak tree and started revering it. When Juanito told Joseph that the dead never go and always stay

near, Joseph said, “No,” ... “It is more than that. My father is in the tree. My father is that tree! It is silly, but I want to believe it” (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 19). Likewise, when Elizabeth gave birth to their son, Joseph wished to place it in the arms of the oak tree seeking grandfather’s blessings on the child, but rather Burton deterred him because he thought it to be against the religious teachings and is an act of the pagans who believe in evil. Steinbeck’s spirituality, hence, never favored dogmatism in religion which attaches natural entities with these kinds of evil subjectivities. Dogmatic beliefs and practices are against Spiritual Naturalism because dogmatism in religion only brings harm and no prosperity. It acts as an evil force making one perform evil rites and rituals in the name of bringing good to someone or something. Humans forget of the harm dogmatism brings to nature instead of gifting happiness which is the guiding principle of Spiritual Naturalism.

From the Spiritual Naturalist heart that lived inside Steinbeck, which he portrayed in his fictional works *The Pearl* and *To a God Unknown*, it thus comes to light that Steinbeck tried to dispel the knowledge that true happiness of living a spiritual life rest in letting nature live as it is without disturbing its balance. By doing this the pleasure of living can be achieved and the principles of Spiritual Naturalism, which are completely not separate from the ethics and values of Christianity, like forgiveness, mercy, charity, love and compassion, and respect for one other mutually, will be achieved by bringing joy, satisfaction, and flourishing in life. His Spiritual Naturalism brings to ground the firm spiritual belief of all religions about the prevailing goodness at the end of everything, though it may appear a far cry in the beginning. Spiritual Naturalism is all about compassionate understanding and thriving of godly goodness. He wrote to editor Pascal Covici, in January 1941:

All the goodness and heroisms will rise up again, then be cut down again and rise up. It isn't that the evil thing wins—it never will—but that it doesn't die. (E. Steinbeck and Wallsten 221)

Consequently, by recounting beliefs and forwarding to the readers the varieties of stratagems for survival through the characters, events, and nature in his novels, Steinbeck showed his spiritual identification. His Spiritual Naturalism knew that evil will never vanish and so will goodness always exist to overtake evil.

Kire's Spiritual Deep Ecology and its Otherworldly Obedience

Arne Dekke Eide Naess, the initiator of the philosophy of Deep Ecology was strictly against the Shallow Ecology's teaching of the anthropocentric view of nature where human demands override nature's existence, the domineering belief that nature is only to serve humankind. His philosophy focused on the non-anthropocentric view of ecology. In the *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy* Keller describes "Deep Ecology" to be "an egalitarian and holistic environmental philosophy founded on phenomenological methodology" (206). The minutest to the major living and the non-living elements found in nature have something in them which helps in the mutual thriving of one another. One element can never flourish in isolation from the other and this, universal understanding, must be taken seriously. This requires a direct relationship to be built between the human and the nonhuman world, the spiritual manifestation of nature being of chief importance.

"Arne Naess was of the belief that Deep Ecology favored an approach that treated nature from a deeper-spiritual view through a sensitive understanding of the non-humans enveloping us" (Yanger and Barua b555). Humankind is to see itself in close parity with all the other living

and non-living world. Nothing is separate from the other. Moreover, mutual respect is the guiding principle behind this mutual harmonious coexistence. This mutual respect can only happen when one starts to see the other being to be a storehouse of values inherent in them. Naess looked at this biocentric/ecocentric perspective to establish a “biospherical egalitarianism” (Naess 95). This egalitarianism is when all individual species work for each other’s growth keeping predation away. However, the misconception in the minds of man that everything around them is inferior to them and are to be submissive to their orders and acts is the most alarming damage everything in nature still faces. It is to be, time and again, reiterated that man is nothing superior, but is just a minor member, like the others, in this big family called life. Deep Ecology here talks about the interconnected interdependence between the human world and the natural world.

In the recent years, valuing nature from the ethical and the religious standpoint, and viewing it as spiritually essential for the existence of the all-inclusive human and nonhuman world has been positioned as Deep Ecology. Nature is considered as God’s creation and the human unprecedented intervention has brought down this Divine manifestation to a considerable extent. Spirituality, as professed by the religions, shows deep respect and concern for nature and thus pressures towards caring, respecting, and showing reverence to nature. Thereby, Roger Gottlieb in his work “Spiritual Deep Ecology and World Religions: A Shared Fate, A Shared Task” postulated that Spiritual Deep Ecology stresses on “the intrinsic ethical values of the natural world” (17). Roger Gottlieb further poses that “deep ecology is not only a response to questions about whether or not nature has intrinsic value, it is also a distinct perspective about what people are” (19). This interrelation talks of a connection to nature whose foundation is of human dependence on nature. The marvel of the sky, water, wind, land; the mysteries behind

birth and death; magical weeds and rivers, etc. were all being bowed at by the human life long before the coming of any of the religious texts or oral evangelization. This means the awe attached to all the entities, be it the spiritual or the supernatural, has no time frame. Spiritual Deep Ecology defiles the conformist conception of placing the human world as distinct and higher than the natural world. This goes against the anthropocentric stand of human dominating the nonhuman entities. Man is himself a natural being who is not, in any way, separate from the other natural beings which are considered sacred and need to be revered. Likewise, the reverence for the Supreme residing in nature is a shield for the sustenance of humankind. The Divine resides in all the ordinary physical realities found in nature. The mystical have something in them which makes the searching for the truth of living possible and it is “a sense of reverence and sacredness, insight and inspiration, that is found in (to use David Abram’s felicitous phrase) the “more than human” world” (Gottlieb 17) which backs up living.

As discussed, Easterine Kire with all her attempts has always been looking towards finding the value implanted in the Naga culture and tradition and presenting the same not just to the world outside the Nagas but even to the contemporary inhabitants who should carry with them the legacy of their ancestors. She has a deep appreciation for the cosmic secret which is the core narration in each household in the scattered hamlets. In her August 2020 interview by Veio Pou published in *Scroll*, with the title “Years of listening to stories grows a wealth of knowledge within your spirit” Kire said about her audience being the Nagas is “because I write things that are familiar to them: we have shared memories, shared story-banks from the past, both from the natural world and the spiritual world” (Kire). Kire’s fiction deftly presents the existence of a dependent connection between the human and the nonhuman world which is one primary fundamental principle of Spiritual Deep Ecology. There is an easy mingling of the otherworldly

milieu with the human land, and this is not just a fantasy or a creative imagination to draw onlookers as she writes about the Divine in the entities or of the supernatural connection with the natural beings. This is a belief itinerant down from the time of the ancestors who have in many ways given proofs of the merging of the two contrasting worlds- the seen and the unseen. Spiritual is one of the basic groundings of her works.

There has always been a debate about considering the Naga religion to be animistic, because the Nagas have been seen to be worshipping all the elements of nature be it the river, the trees, the rocks, etc. The rituals of worshipping never were attuned to the worship rituals followed by the indigenous inhabitants as Christianity saw its dawn in this region. The animistic belief of Nagas was because of the belief pattern "...that 'everything is conscious' or that 'everything has a soul.'" ("Animism") as is stated in the *New World Encyclopedia*.

Nagas, since the advent of Christianity and even years after its assimilation in the hills, have a faith that talks about the supernatural to make the term animism to be a clearer manifestation in nature. With the turn of Christianity, a new order in belief and practices was starkly noticed and a civilized belief system took shape. Even Mary Clark, the forerunner of bringing Christianity in Nagaland had stated, "The Nagas, once civilized and Christianised, will make a manly, worthy people" (Eaton 13). It cannot be denied that the religious practices have become more structured among the Nagas and it can no longer be termed as animistic, but it still cannot be ruled out that the belief of the inhabitants on the unknown, residing in all the animate and the inanimate objects, still exists. Even to this day the belief of going to a riverside and getting a wash on the third day of a person's demise, believing that from that day the spirit of the person no more lingers in the worldly realm and transcends to its final abode, to the Divine, is practiced among all the tribes, though for some it is on the third day while for others on the fifth

day of the person's demise. This form of "Naga Indigenous Religions" (Shohe 23) acknowledges the value that is inherent in all the entities of nature providing semblance to the philosophy of Deep Ecology.

Nagas have always had a close connection with the forests and the hills which are home to them. There resides a dependence of man on nature. This dependence made the indigenous forest dwellers look up to nature with a lot of veneration with the belief rooted in their subconscious and the conscious state which always voiced about the presence of the Divine in nature. This Mystic Being was their benefactor and so it was imperative to never arouse annoyance. But who was this Mystic Being and where did he live for the indigenes to place their rituals of worship? In *Naga Village: A Sociological Study*, Kewepfuzu Lohe emphasizes, "There is no written dogma about the idea of God and faith . . . places like thick forest, rocks mountains, springs, lakes, rivers and the other natural objects are believed to be the abodes of these spirits" (26). It was the rites and rituals which the people practiced to appease the divine spirits residing in nature, to get their favor on themselves, that the indigenes enriched their religious conduct. It is an established belief that the spiritual elements residing in nature are a source of blessing to prosper in the living. The awareness of the Divine in nature makes one stop from committing atrocities on the environment as in the words of Asenla Yanger and Krishna Barua:

Ecological awareness as spiritual is the forward of deep ecology because our faith makes us acknowledge our reverence to the divine, just the way one limits himself from committing any sin because of the thought that it might incur curse from the divine. Similarly, only when we see the divine manifestation in each of the entity of nature, we limit ourself from destroying it. (b558)

Spirit Nights by Easterine Kire opens with the beating of the log-drum. In this work, Kire emphasizes on the spiritual teachings which each of the religion and their holy book talks about. The Divine never favors “Rebellion. Arrogance. Greed. Hatred of all that is good. Self-seeking. Envy” (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 129). These are the six vices of life which Kire, through her deep connection and dependence on the entities of the natural world, tries to bring to light through *Spirit Nights*. Tola and her husband, after performing many child bearing rituals gave birth to a son and named him Topong Nyakba but Topong’s life tragically ended, when, after marrying Sechang and birthing their son Namumolo (Namu) they had to orphan him at the age of five years being killed at the enemy attack. Tola became the only family of Namu and loved her grandson with all she could. Namu was taught about the way of living in consonance with nature performing rituals and taboos, etc. Tola was the granddaughter and daughter of a seer and was herself blessed with dream-revelations which are still believed to be the Divine’s way of forewarning of some things going to happen soon. She got dream revelations whence Sungnuo once came to her and asked her not to indoctrinate fear in Namu and to fill him with courage and wisdom. But, as the patriarchal notion says, she being a woman could never hold to be a seer nor was she accepted to be one as Chongsen, who was the lineage to be the seer of the village, started developing jealousy against Tola.

In the meantime, Namu grew up to be a brave man of fifteen taking part in all the rituals and activities. He married Thongdi. The dream revelation came true and the village was eaten up, scattering total darkness when one could not even see his own hands. Namu became the seer and with this Tola’s dreams got pronounced by Namu. It was the twentieth day of darkness and dirges of death clouded the village, though no one came out of the house. Many were killed, many disappeared, and there was no rain for the grains. Everything was dying. Tola started to

sing her dirge with Namu. Through her dirge, she was asking all to leave aside all greed and to cleanse their heart of ill thoughts. The tiger who had killed everyone, came from behind the village gate, and Namu decided to take it himself this time. Chasing headlong, with the spear of his great-grandfather, he dashed inside the mouth of the tiger, and to his surprise he found light inside the stomach. It was as though his present memory had frozen and was taken to his childhood because he saw all his family members he had lost while he was young. The spirits started deceiving him as he tried to come back out of the stomach of the tiger. Thongdi and Choba hunted for Tola's help and even though, in this process she would have to go through a difficult process, after two days Namu came back after killing the tiger, a little depressed killing his family along with the tiger, but soon he accepted it because he realized that it was all false, a lie to mislead, and with that light returned to the village because of Tola's sacrificial selfless wisdom and Namu's courage, and the good conduct he had been instilled with by Tola since the time of he being a small boy.

Tola's nocturnal visitor appeared in her dream for the last time telling her that Namu was to be the bearer and keeper of knowledge and faith of his generation. Tola narrated her dream revelation to Thongdi while Namu was being convinced of being the seer of the village. Namu did not like seership and left to collect firewood unknowingly walking into the village of Seers, Mvüphri, where he was warmly welcomed. The Seer asked him what was the feeling he got when he killed the tiger and Namu's response was that he got the feeling of pure happiness. This pure happiness of helping others was seership. Namu learnt the divine godly way of living which was in helping others without any selfish motive. Tola died leaving Namu to learn to walk on his own.

Kire in *Spirit Nights* talks about the belief of performing rituals to mark the spiritual presence in each of nature's substances so as to appease the mystic beings to send blessings in return. Tola and Namu, "finished the rituals for the protection of the harvest, and prayed their grain would be long lasting and feed them throughout the next agricultural year" (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 50). It was mandatory for every household to perform all the rituals for their harvest. After the prayers, it was a practice to sprinkle rice brew. This would help the household win the favor of the god of harvest. Likewise, rice brew was sprinkled by Tola on the posts and the bamboo containers, they used for storing grains, with the strong conviction that this would please the spirit of the house and the granary respectively, and in return they would bless them with the protection of their grains and a better harvest, much better than the present harvest, in the next agricultural year too. This spiritual practice of worshipping the divine element is still diligently practiced by the agricultural villagers of the region for a better harvest to feed the people.

The mystical elements residence in all the entities, be it the house and the granary, is a popular belief and it is mandatory to please them for a blessed harvest. This greatly furnishes of the value attached to the entities of nature where even a rock has importance and so is to be venerated. The rituals were practiced because people were aware of the value each entity held. To ensure that the harvest would be long lasting and safe from rodents a ritual was practiced where the women had to eat only lentils, beans, and root vegetables for two days after harvest as the women chanted and worshipped the "creator-deity" (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 51). What exactly does the spirituality of the Nagas talk about the Creator-deity then? Who is this deity?

Every woman of the village observed this ritual and the family tip-toed in and out of the house while the mother sat by the fire, chanting and worshipping the creator-deity. After

it was completed, they would join the others on a good harvest festival when everyone had finished bringing their harvests home. (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 50–51)

Kire brings to light the spiritual aspect of the Nagas by talking about the ‘creator-deity’ who “is the deity worshipped by all the Naga tribes, and recognized as the creator of heaven and earth. It is a male deity and considerably mightier than the spirits that are always in conflict with man. It is a noble and ethical figure, worshipped at festivals and at every great event in a man’s life” (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 170).

The manifestation of the Divine in nature is seen in almost everything around. Trees, rocks, rivers, stones, etc. are endowed with qualities and so are revered by the indigenes. The practice of worshipping nature has been in the Nagas since their ancestral past. With the advent of Christianity this practice of revering the element of nature declined. In *Naga Cultural Milieu: An Adaptation to Mountain Ecosystem*, Vikuosa Nienu argues:

The mountains and rivers of their land, combined with the indigenous flora and fauna, shaped the Naga life, culture to a great extent. Consequently, for the Naga people, the mountains are more than just a habitat; rather, the mountains are a sacred vicinage- a sacred landscape and heritage that helped forge Naga society, beliefs and identity. (34)

Nienu’s argument verifies the continuation of offering regard and respect to the entities of nature which continues even in today’s time with Christianity having been deeply rooted in the region. One glaring instance of the belief of the Mystic Being’s residence in nature is the worshipping of the log drum the Nagas regard as their ‘Protector.’ The log drum has a very special quality in the cultural makeup of the Nagas. Different beatings of the log-drum are symbolic of the warnings and the dangers approaching the village, like the danger of attacks by wild animals, or enemy

villages. Villagers working in the fields or being anywhere rush back to their homes listening to the sound when they hear the beating of the log-drum. It can be said that the log drum is venerated as a deity of protection. Nagas take the log-drum to be their father. As a father protects his children, the log-drum is a Spiritual Being which acts as the Divine protecting his believers from harms and danger.

At the rotting of the log-drum it must be replaced which follows a sacred ritual because “a tree was a living entity and it would not hesitate to show its anger at any act of disrespect towards it” (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 57) leading even to death caused by the tree, and if this befalls people will have to blame themselves for trying to overpower the Spiritual’s residence in the tree. The seer of the village would see a dream with the spirits telling him about the chosen tree and only that tree would be cut, however before cutting it good respectful words are to be spoken where the villagers, who go to fetch the tree, are to mention the objective so that the spirit residing in the tree does not get offended. Revering the inherent value, the men would say:

‘Venerable one, we ask you to come with us and be our father. Come and protect our families from our enemies and those who want to see us destroyed. Come and lend us your wisdom. When we use the axe on you, please do not cause harm to the man...Our only intent is to give you a more noble purpose than that you are fulfilling in the forest...Permit us to use your protection.’ (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 57)

The log-drum is a village deity and only revered terms were and are still used to acknowledge it “calling it, ‘Our guardian,’ ‘Our protector,’ or ‘Father Drum’” (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 61) and no child is to disrespect it either mishandling it or by chiding it. It has the Divine manifestation in it and is not to be hurt or harmed or else it will not protect the villagers. Once the seer is told of the name of the tree, in his dream to be felled and carved as the log-drum, he would wake up and

pray to let him forget the name of the tree. This prayer is done because this is not just a name but it is the spirit essence which is based on the trust and expression of deep faith between the tree and man.

The “more than human” (Gottlieb 17) entities exist in nature and would come to help man like the spirit carvers who would come at night to work by carving on the log or the stone. No one dared to inspect the strange sounds that they heard at night by venturing deep into the woods. Log-drums, the village gates etc., were very sacred because of the presence of the celestial to protect the people, and so their carving was a very sacred task in which the spirits helped the people by advancing the task, carving sometimes real animal figures and sometimes mythical beings.

Kire’s Spiritual Deep Ecology gets a grounding as she brings forth the Christological underpinnings of dream revelations and their interpretations by the seers or the priest, something which is so common in the religious practices of the Nagas, and is still believed and seen with fervent reverence. Tola was the granddaughter of a seer and her father himself was a seer. Tola used to get dream revelations which acted as the forewarning of the ill fate the village was to face. Her dream was a warning of the ill human acts that have caused anger in the world of the sacred. She warns the people of the punishment they are going to face and there is no remedial measure they can take to stop the wrath of the spiritual realm from falling on them. The only way to appease the anger of the Sacred is to be inside their household avoiding all the actions which lacked wisdom-filled notions. She warns the people to be not raged and retaliate against the power of the Divine because doing that will stop the “creator-deity” (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 51) from delivering the people and may further lead to more dreadful destructions. Obedience is the only key to survival. This is what the spiritual adherence instructs, to do away from evil and take a

path that is righteous. Kire through her fiction clearly pictures what the Supreme Being demands from His children, and it is only by obeying the instructions of the Supreme Being salvation will be obtained and light will be restored. Namu, through her grandmother's adherence to the world of goodness, brought back light and life killing the tiger of rebellion, arrogance, greed, hatred, envy, and self-seeking. This can be done only "by an active cleansing of our thoughts. Hatred and enmity, envy, murderous and lustful thoughts must be discovered and uprooted. Pride and self-interest too" (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 86).

Repentance is the way to take a leap ahead to the Divine. As all the world religion preaches about the victory of light over darkness, Kire showed how this can be achieved through repentance as villagers started to gain wisdom of good. The *Holy Bible* of the Christians, the *Quran* of the Muslims, or the *Upanishad* of Hinduism, all talk about the darkness that must be taken over by light. For instance, The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.3.28) housing the famous mantra chant, preach about this light, as quoted by Francis X. Clooney S.J. in the Harvard university blogpost:

asto ma sad gamaya | tamaso ma jyotir

gamaya | mrtyor ma amrtam gamaya ||

From what is not, lead me to what is; from darkness, lead me to light; from death lead me to what is undying. (Clooney)

This chant talks about the universality of the Divine blessing of letting all darkness be taken over by light, all death by immortality. Kire professes this spirituality when Tola witnessed the change in the villagers when "her spirit could sense the repentance that was sweeping across the village, house by house, soul by soul" (Kire, *Spirit Nights* 106). People were now careful of their

thoughts, words, and deeds. They learnt to humble themselves and apologize to others for their wrongdoings, keeping their egos aside. Tola could sense this change. There was no more darkness in people for their repentance removed the darkness and brought light. The villagers learnt the virtue of the Divine, to be good. In every entity, human or nonhuman, lives the Divine and it only teaches good virtues. We need to respect each other and seek no harm to anyone or anything. This is the Spiritual Deep Ecology whereby every entity has value to serve the greater good of the Divine. This is the crux of Spiritual Deep Ecology.

Kire's Christological approach of the Divine's residence in the earth and the people get clear projection as she recreates the prophecy behind the birth of Jesus Christ so clearly stated in the *Holy Bible*:

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt.1:20–21).

Kire expresses this prophetic birth in the very beginning of her work *Son of the Thundercloud* where she writes:

““One afternoon, the woman was drying paddy outside her house when, all of a sudden, the sun disappeared and a raindrop fell on her from the sky. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She was happy again and the son grew up to be a mighty warrior who avenged his father and seven brothers.”” (Kire, *Son of the Thundercloud* 9)

Son of the Thundercloud, has been analyzed by scholars from sharp ecocritical eyes talking about the relationship that exists between nature and man, the ecofeminist approach also got gripping study. However, there is yet something more to this work of fiction which creates the existence of the Divine in nature. The novel's Spiritual Deep Ecological radiance is all embracing.

Kire opened her novel *Son of the Thundercloud* with a conversation between a mother and her son, mother with her usual storytelling to put her son to sleep. Pelevotso, shortened as Pele, was born in the village named Nialhou. As a grown man, he was married and the wife bore Pele their child. However, the village once got famine-stricken and Pele lost his parents as well as his wife and son. His broken heart made him leave his ancestral village. Walking for two weeks he was told about the Village of Weavers which had food and water but there was a huge mountain he would have to scale to be in the village. While walking he met two women who gave him shelter in their hut and talked about the village Noune which was devastated due to famine for seven hundred years but the two of them had been surviving with the hope of the birth of the 'Son of Thundercloud' who would bring rain and life.

The next dawn, a big crater was seen in the field and they were all shocked to hear thunder and were amazed at rain assailing the roof. Swiftly, Pele could see the earth turning green and the two sisters growing younger than what they appeared in the first meeting. They were convinced of the birth of the 'Son of the Thundercloud' and rushed to the Village of Weavers to meet their youngest sister Mesanuo on whom a raindrop had fallen, and the next day she was cradling a baby boy. Mesanuo was the woman whose husband and seven sons were killed by the tiger and a word was in the village that her son would avenge the death of his father and brothers. The headman and the villagers thought it to be Pele who had replenished the land

but he directed them to Mesanuo, through whom the prophesy came true. The villagers started to respect Mesanuo and her son Rhalietuo. There was an abundance of rain, and the river uninterruptedly started flowing in the village. They all started to live happily.

Rhalietuo, one day, dreamt of him killing a tiger who had killed a man and his seven sons unaware that they were his own family. Pele, Mesanuo, and Rhalie traveled to Mesanuo's sisters and returned after a span of seven years. The villagers did not recognize them thinking they must have died. In the meantime, the villagers started plotting to kill Mesanuo and Rhalie because they feared he would kill the tiger who was giving protection to the village in their absence. Pele got shocked to know about the plot and pitied the disbelief of the people about the prophesy. The prophesy came true, and Rhalie killed the tiger but jealousy caused him to be killed by Viphru, the headman's son. Mesanuo did not want her son's body to be buried in the village which was saved by her son and so they took the body and buried it in the abandoned village. Pele and Mesanuo stayed back in the house of her sisters who were no more. Pele woke up in the middle of the night and got a vision of the three sisters. As he woke up in the morning, he found Mesanuo dead and her spirit traveled to the other world with her sisters in the middle of the night. Pele moved away from the abandoned village.

The study of Christology is about the study of Jesus Christ starting from who Jesus is, and what are His teachings and parables all about, trying to understand the wisdom believers obtain from His gospel. Christology, in easy understanding, is the portrayal of Jesus in the scriptures. The *Britannica Encyclopedia* defines 'Christology' as "a part of theology that is concerned with the nature and work of Jesus, including such matters as the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and his human and divine natures and their relationships" (Hillerbrand and Stefon). Just as Jesus came to deliver people, Kire visioned of humanity to get a Christ-like image to

deliver harmonious coexistence amongst all the natural and otherworldly entities. This Christ-like image, which is to be in all humanity, Kire presents with the fulfilment of the prophesy as the headman responded to Pele's inquiry. Nature had already started to change and there were visible signs of rejuvenation, with nature turning greener and everything appearing fresh and renewed as though a great blessing of miracle has fallen upon them. The headman's response to Pele that "[a] virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, and he will save his people. Signs and wonders shall accompany his birth, and land shall be rejuvenated. That's all I remember" (Kire, *Son of the Thundercloud* 41) pointed towards Rhalie. Rhalie was the fruit of the prophesy, and, as he was born with the kindness of the Almighty, his birth rejuvenated the land and everything was greener with life. This can be well surmised as the rejuvenating quality which the entities of the earth are filled with as Mesanuo narrates how "[t]he cloud passed over our village and nothing happened. Nothing except for that one drop of rain. I felt the baby grow inside as soon as that drop landed on me" (Kire, *Son of the Thundercloud* 37). Mesanuo was drying the herbs in the sun, as is a common practice in every Naga household, and as she was getting the herbs inside the house, there was the sound of approaching rain, and just a drop fell on her which rejuvenated her barren womb.

This is the proof of the value the Supreme has added to all the elements of nature. Even a raindrop has in it the value of birthing life, making the barren dry earth covered with a lush green canopy of life proving the Divine's appearance in nature. The same happened in the village where everything was changing to a cleaner, fresher appearance "as if the earth was newly born and creation would start all over again. The sponge-like stony soil had been softened by the rain, and the large holes in it had closed over" (Kire, *Son of the Thundercloud* 32). Not just this, Pele could see the change in the two ancient sisters too and he was shocked to see the quick

transformation because they appeared to ageing backwards and looked younger, more human, and replenished. They responded to Pele's proclaiming of the promises of how one entity looks at the growth of the other entity living in a shared interconnection.

Another mystical adherence is witnessed in the religious practice of naming a child which has always been of great importance in any household or any religious beliefs. Celebrations are observed and only after prayers a child is being christened. Nagas believe that the child should not be left without a name for too long or else the spirits try to take the child away. Moreso, the name of the child should be significant so that the child grows up to be brave keeping in tune with the name bestowed upon him. Pelevotso was named so by his grandmother who insisted on giving him a big name so that he does not stop from living a life of heroism and wisdom. Pele's mother wished to call him with a safe and insignificant name but his grandmother gave him a significant name with substantial meaning and expressed about the popular traditional belief followed by the Nagas. It is a belief, still prevalent, that if children are named with insignificant names, it appears as though the parents are restricting them from doing greater things in life keeping them within the safety of family which is wrong because children, particularly sons, are to display their warrior bearing.

Naming a child again has a lot of connotations to the spiritual realm as names are always to be with meanings of the spiritual desires and qualities parents would wish their child to grow up with, like for instance, in *Son of the Thundercloud* Kire used the name Pelevotso meant "faithful to the end" (12), one of the two sisters was named Kethonuo meaning "truth" (34), and the other was named Siedze which meant "a future full of hope" (34). The third sister was Mesanuo which meant the "pure one" (Kire, *Son of the Thundercloud* 37). Just the way Mother Mary, the mother of Jesus was a pure virgin who brought light to humanity by birthing Jesus,

likewise Mesanuo saved the village from the tiger and brought rain and rejuvenation through her son “Rhalietuo, the Redeemer” (Kire, *Son of the Thundercloud* 51) and he was really the Redeemer for the village. Thus, the name of a person has a deep spiritual connection attributing devotion to the spiritual realm residing in natural elements.

Spiritual Deep Ecology is thus the way forward for mutual coexistence as it brings a deep connection between the human and the nonhuman worlds attributing the nonhuman ecosphere with spiritual resemblance. By stressing on the intrinsic ethical values inherent in all the entities of nature, a sense of belongingness evolves where one stops harming the spiritual natural world. Fritjof Capra in his “Deep Ecology: A New Paradigm” discusses of the ecological awareness relating to spiritual awareness the core of which is the awareness that nature and self are no different but one. This argues for the recognition of all living natural elements as having value inherent in them. The Spiritual Deep Ecological awareness is essential because only “when the concept of human spirit is understood as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels connected to the cosmos as a whole it becomes clear that ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest essence and that the new ecological ethic is grounded in spirituality” (Capra 21), and Kire deftly presents this ecological awareness which exists between the individual and the cosmos.

Steinbeck and Kire, thus, skillfully picture the Divine in nature as well as the intrinsic value in the entities whereby an interconnection develops between the human and the nonhuman elements of the ecological sphere through their own ways of reverence to the out-worldly entities so intermingled with the entities of nature making them both the professors of Spiritual Naturalism and Spiritual Deep Ecology. The Spiritual Naturalism of John Steinbeck, though Steinbeck is considered a Naturalist modeled on scientific facts and realistic observation, brought

Steinbeck's humanism to focus in semblance to Kire's. His Spiritual Naturalism used the metaphors of nature through which he allegorized ways to bring pleasure and happiness warding away the hypocritical behavior of the church-goers as well as the class-conscious higher strata.

Likewise, Easterine Kire's Christological approach, having semblance with the postulates of Spiritual Deep Ecology, brings to the forefront the coherence that exists between the human and the nonhuman elements including the spiritual and the supernatural whereby each have their value inherent in themselves which adds spark to the growth of the other entity as was equally believed by Steinbeck too. One must understand the value of the entities of nature believing that the Supreme spirit resides in each, and just as the Omnipotent looks for the wellbeing of those who revere him, in a like manner the elements of nature become life-giving and life-sustaining mystical realities. An innocent adherence to the mystical entities residing in nature is a way onward to protect everything around acknowledging their values. Steinbeck and Kire shared their spirituality, being Spiritual Naturalists as well as Spiritual Deep Ecologists, by adding ethical morals to humankind through their learning of the spiritual essence present in the natural nonliving elements.

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