Conclusion

On the basis of forgoing analysis, it can be averred that Hermann Hesse, Raja Rao, Richard Bach, Paulo Coelho and Sujatha Vijayaraghavan have remarkably employed fiction as spiritual space via portraying protagonists as mystics and seekers of truth in the novels viz., Siddhartha, The Serpent and the Rope, Jonathan Livingston Seagull, The Alchemist and The Silent One respectively that have been analyzed in this dissertation. The fictional space comprises the locale, the world (socio-cultural setup) peopled by various characters grappling with their lives on day-to-day basis; nevertheless mystic-protagonists are a cut above the rest as the entire narrative is woven around them. They have different perception and understanding of life, which they question relentlessly before developing holistic insight into it. In fact, the mystic-protagonists serve as the epicentre of all the narratives and are unswerving in their commitment to negotiate deeper existential, philosophical and spiritual issues. As seekers of truth, they have their fair share of psychological anguish, inner turmoil, and spiritual conflicts before they achieve self-realization. The profound spiritual experience lays bare the consciousness of each mystic-protagonist having perennial urge to merge with the Absolute.

This overarching leitmotif of spiritual quest in the select novels appreciated here has been deftly problematized through rich symbolism, powerful imagery and use of diverse myths that add to the spiritual ambience of the text. It is interesting to note that most of the fictional artists tend to give vent to their own spiritual aspirations through portraying various mystic-protagonists who end up attaining expansion of consciousness after undergoing rigorous quest process. Consequently, their own philosophic and spiritual vision gets intricately woven into narrative and thematic fabric of their fictional ventures. In Hermann Hesse’s Siddhartha, for instance, it is journey not only of the protagonist Siddhartha for salvation but also Hesse’s own towards spiritual growth. Various influences on Hesse’s
work such as Western and Eastern philosophies alongside Jungian depth psychology have been analysed to depict uniqueness of his fictional framework which is marked by his own experiences and is “confessional in form and therapeutic in function” (Mileck xi). Siddhartha is predominantly Indian in its treatment having an oriental mystical aura on account of use of symbols, motifs, and themes that are culture specific.

Compared to Hesse, Raja Rao is a true Advait Vedantin, believing in the unity of the universe, in fact has been a Sadhak (in the sense of quester) all through his life. In reality, the essence of vedantic philosophy has permeated through his being as evidenced in his writing, which for him is sadhana—an exercise in truth. Autobiographically, The Serpent and the Rope is arguably a study of spiritual aspirations of the writer himself enacted through fictional representation of Ramaswamy as a mystic-protagonist. Paulo Coelho, on the other hand, is known as the prophet of New Age Movement who believes that if one wants to live one’s dream, s/he has to pay attention to her/his consciousness. Coelho’s work is an amalgamation of various philosophies from around the world. Life being an endless journey for him, he is “a pilgrim who travels an endless path” (Arias 29). The Alchemist thus propounds his philosophy of learning through various experiences during quest process and their transformative power.

Likewise, Richard Bach too is a believer of New Age ideals. He uses fictional frame to enact his philosophy of life that an ideal person is an absolute nonconformist as he does not believe in the authority of any kind. His novella, Jonathan Livingston Seagull substantiates his philosophy that only freedom can make one realise one’s destiny. Sujatha Vijayaraghavan’s The Silent One is steeped in Indian sensibility and Vedantic tradition presented as a way of life. Thus, the cultural ethos/milieu presented in each of the fictional narratives, is steeped in spirituality embodied by the mystic-protagonists.
The first chapter theorizes fiction as spiritual space wherein the praxis part of spirituality takes place. The fictional space thus becomes spiritually charged as it becomes a means to explore deeper/hidden meanings in life, and showcase the journey (quest process) of each mystic-protagonist to realise the truth/self. The concept of spirituality has also been explained as an adventure/plunge into the unknown followed by process of growth and transformation on the part of the seeker. Hesse’s *Siddhartha* and Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* have also been analysed to bring out the uniqueness of the spiritual space by analysing philosophies, symbols, motifs, myths, portrayal of characters and themes that have been woven in the fabric of the narrative. Thus in *Siddhartha*, the social backdrop in which his quest-journey operates is typically Indian. The title of the novel makes its Eastern connotation obvious. The Indianness of the narrative is highlighted by use of various symbols and motifs, such as river which is considered sacred in Indian culture; recurrent sound of Om used in daily chanting of mantras; and the very names of the characters such as Siddhartha, Govinda, Vasudeva, Kamala; etc. all remind of Indian gods. On the other hand, the quest for self in *The Serpent and the Rope* is propelled by the protagonist Ramaswamy’s reflections on Advait philosophy, and various aspects of social life such as familial relationships, social structures, status of Indian women and East-West encounter. It also depicts Indian Vedantic philosophy as an essential part of the protagonist’s day-to-day life steeped in Indian traditional and cultural heritage.

Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*, Richard Bach’s *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and Sujatha Vijayaraghavan’s *The Silent One* have been critically analysed thereafter to show how, for instance, in *The Alchemist*, it is the quest of shepherd of Andalusian region that takes us into the social life of Spain, moving on to Tangier, Tarifa, desert and oasis and eventually lands us in Egypt. It is followed by delineation of the theme of quest as enacted through the life experiences the protagonist, Santiago. Whereas Richard Bach’s narrative is a
fable that takes us into the deeper truths of human life by depicting a gull society, its aims and limitations through the life journey of its protagonist, Jonathan Livingston Seagull; Vijayaraghavan’s *The Silent One* is set in a South Indian village where spirituality is an integral part of people’s lives. The fictional space remarkably presents Vedantic way of life represented by the silent Pichai, the mystic-protagonist in a completely ‘demythified’ and demystified sense defying conventional categorisation, whose silent omnipresence (not towering but soothing) lends uniqueness to the spiritual space in the text.

Finally, the chapter brings out points of convergence and divergence vis-a-vis representation of fiction as spiritual space which is distinct on account of its culture-specific character. Each novel portrays the quest journey of its mystic-protagonist in a distinct manner. However, beneath this apparent quest-schema, a common thread of search for the self and meaning of life runs parallel in each fictional narrative thereby imparting it a spiritual ring.

The journey of the mystic-protagonist *a la* Joseph Campbell’s quest cycle as discussed in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* has been discussed in the second chapter. The hero embarking on a journey severs ties with his family/ familiar world in accord with Campbell’s first stage of hero’s journey called “separation.” The existential angst, the hero experiences at this stage has been examined from the viewpoint of the mystic-protagonist’s urge to live an authentic life *a la* Heidegger. Firstly, Siddhartha and Ramaswamy’s life journeys have been examined to underscore the existential angst that they experience upon confronting jaded socio-cultural norms. To find their true existence, the quester-protagonists have to break free of the oppressive clutches of tradition-bound society. Siddhartha’s existential angst results from his extraordinary intellect. Trapped as he is in the ritual practices of Hinduism and scriptural knowledge, he finds it hard to connect with the self. Distrustful of what his father had taught him, Siddhartha chooses his own path and leaves
his home to join the Samana’s way of life. After his experimenting with the life of self-abnegation, he experiences existential anguish particularly as he fails to find the answer. Unable to escape from reality and determined to know truth, he renounces Samana’s way of life to encounter his self afresh. Ramaswamy’s existential anguish results from coming back to his roots in his native country, India. His longing for a sense of belonging surfaces as he becomes aware of his spiritual alienation in a foreign land and also in his relationship with his French wife.

Santiago’s love for travelling makes him feel discontent with what his father wants him to be in life. He chooses his own path of being a shepherd as against his father’s wishes of becoming a priest. He has always wanted to know the world, and this was much more important to him than even knowing God. Santiago’s father tries to dissuade his son but in vain and has no choice but to bless his son eventually. Thus his journey toward freedom starts from breaking free from his father’s aspirations for him. He also has his share of existential dilemma on account of his choice to be a shepherd. Each step of his journey offers him a new perspective to look at life. Likewise, Jonathan initially conforms to the norms of Gull Flock and remains content merely with fighting for food, but sooner listens to his inner voice that goads him to follow his dream. Nevertheless, the price that he has to pay for following his dream is, by getting banishment. This in turn sets his quest/journey for meaningful existence in motion enabling him transcending his predicament. As far as the mystic-protagonist in The Silent One is concerned, he is beyond dilemma of any sort being a self-realized soul but minor characters such as Lakshamma and Parvathamma do feel alienated and isolated because of Iswara and Paramasivan’s dedication for the quest to self-realization. The minor characters around the mystic-protagonist have to bear the brunt of existence as they grapple with problems of day-to-day existence. Thus, we may observe that barring Pichai, the silent one all other mystic-protagonists have to face existential
predicament and come to terms with it the hardest way. However, this predicament in no way serves as an impediment as all of them transcend it and move on to benefit community and society at large with their experiences.

The existential anguish resulting in a crisis and eventually leading to spiritual awakening has been examined in the third chapter. The existential predicament has been viewed as a must in the process of spiritual growth of mystic-protagonists. In fact, it causes discontentment which lies deeper in the protagonist’s consciousness so that the quester/seeker comes face to face with such dilemma with a view to find answers on the path leading to truth. This stage of the journey of the quester-protagonist has been expounded in terms of Joseph Campbell’s second stage in quest cycle called “initiation,” and Jungian stages of elucidation and education in the individuation process.

Siddhartha’s encounter with the Buddha imparts a paddle push in his quest process as he gets convinced that one cannot become Buddha by following any teacher or teachings and thus decides pursue truth all by himself. He touches the nadir of sensuality and materiality resulting in his disillusionment with Sansara (the mayavic illusory world) and causing extreme existential angst. So much so that he dies a symbolic death which, in fact, is imperative for his spiritual awakening. He hears the sound of Om and feels once more connected to his self, his quest for truth. He also becomes aware of the unity of universe under the guidance of Vasudeva, the Jungian wise old man. In Ramaswamy’s spiritual journey, the crises results from his spiritual longing for Savithri and breaking of marriage with Madeleine. In fact, Ramaswamy’s spiritual passion grows for Savithri as he is able to see his self in her being. Their desire for each other culminates in a ritual marriage that lends another dimension to their relationship as his spiritual salvation becomes possible. Ramaswamy feels profoundly connected to his nativity and yearns for guidance from a guru/wise old man.
Santiago’s moment of existential crisis occurs when he falls in love with Fatima, and yearns to be with her in the oasis giving up his quest for the sake of lady love. But the alchemist makes him realize the necessity of pursuing his quest. It is, in fact, Fatima’s faith in his quest that makes him overcome this hurdle and a clear path for his spiritual endeavor is paved. He feels connected to the Soul of the World and demonstrates full faith in the choice that he makes. Jonathan, however, learns all the intricacies of speed and perfect flight from Chiang besides learning the virtue of love and compassion. His desire to go back to earth leads him to existential crisis, but he overcomes it as the compassion for the suffering gulls on the earth (metaphorically the world) and hence stages a return. The chapter ends with brief comparative summation of the mystic-protagonists who transcend the existential predicaments and achieve self realization.

The last chapter deals with the culmination of the quest of the protagonists which has been viewed in terms of the arrival implying self realisation/ enlightenment/ moksha/ liberation from the cycle of birth-death-rebirth. It has been viewed in terms of final stage of Jung’s individuation process called “transformation” followed by integration with the community/ roots where the quest starts from. After throwing light on the points of difference between Eastern and western quest processes, the final stage of Campbellian “return” has been examined in detailed manner. For instance, in the Eastern thought, self-realisation is viewed as union of the seeker (soul) with the divine (Oversoul) thereby becoming aware of one’s being as Brahman; but in the Western thought, individuality is given excessive prominence.

Viewed thus, Siddhartha’s moment of self-realisation is made possible as he listens to the river intently and experiences interconnectedness of the universe. Nevertheless, Siddhartha’s ultimate realisation has not been perceived in the sense of a goal/static state; on the contrary, it is a dynamic state ever growing and flowing like the eternal flow of the river.
Unlike Siddhartha, Ramaswamy does not experience enlightenment in actual sense of the term, nevertheless, having found his Guru, he definitely gains a perception much needed for the realisation of the self. In fact, he becomes a self-actualised being.

Santiago’s arrival in *The Alchemist* is marked by his transformation into wind, and his realisation that the simple truth of life is always within our reach. Jonathan’s sense of compassion for the aspiring gulls on Earth lends a sense of completeness to his self-realisation. Since Jonathan’s arrival is evidenced by his attainment of perfection not just for himself but also by making others aware of his wise/complete sense of being. He stages a formal “return” to Gull Flock to share his wisdom with the aspiring gulls and contributes to his community via releasing the gulls from bondage of their limiting thoughts.

It is the mystic-protagonist, the silent one/mouni who attains *moksa* (liberation) in actual sense of the term. By practicing rigorous vedantic training of mind, devotion to the deity Bala, mastery of three *Vedas*, and eventual immersion into the ocean of silence, he is able to liberate himself from the cycle of birth and death and pass into eternity. Campbellian “return,” in fact, is characterized by the protagonist going back to his roots to share his wisdom for the betterment of the society. Self-realisation has been depicted as a dynamic state where the whole perception of the protagonist changes as he returns to serve his community. Siddhartha’s return is marked by passivity even though he causes transformation on Govinda’s part. However, the return of Ramaswamy and Santiago is marked by increased degrees of self-confidence that makes them more aware of their spiritual potential. Jonathan, on the other hand, returns back to Gull Flock to share his wisdom with the aspiring gulls, and is thus able to give a meaning to the meaningless existence of other gulls. The mystic mouni’s “return” is an unconscious and silent as he is like divine prevalence triggering changes in his surroundings, changing lives and alleviating sufferings of the masses. Thus, one may observe how each mystic-protagonist’s quest
journey, despite being culture-specific, coalesces toward the end thereby proving its cross-cultural connect. In fact, the main purpose of this dissertation has been to examine mystic-protagonists representing different cultures with a view to point toward inter-cultural dimensions of spiritual quest. The trajectory of their life crosses and intersects at various junctures. The foregone analysis has amply depicted how the textual frameworks of the select novels, which have been viewed as fictional space, are markedly different yet similar in more respects than one.

Hence, as stated, this dissertation seeks to establish cross-cultural dialogue via offering insights into diverse socio-cultural climes that facilitate growth of spirituality in multiplex manner. Spirituality being the most important aspect of all the cultures, its fictional representation varies considerably as evident in each novelist’s perception and treatment/employment of fiction as spiritual space. As a case in point, Hermann Hesse’s depiction of Hindu rituals, self-abnegation of Samanas, the cycle of Sansara (birth-death-rebirth), and vedantic quest for unitiveness with the divine are still a norm in various parts of India. Likewise, the Vedantic philosophical way of life as depicted in The Serpent and the Rope is also part of everyday life of an Indian. The practice of seeking the blessings and guidance of Guru to seek salvation has been practised by generations not only in India but other countries as well—a practice still prevalent.

Bach’s Jonathan Livingston Seagull and Coelho’s The Alchemist making it to the bestsellers list the world over validate the universal significance of spirituality fictionally represented by them with resounding success. Jonathan and Santiago can also be termed as modern day Everyman encumbered by sense of duty and deeper call for inner transformation. Their new age ideals, stressing the need to find one’s true self and living one’s dream have made millions of people relate to the spiritual aspirations of these protagonists. Even though Sujatha Vijayaraghavan’s The Silent One is region and culture
specific narrative, the quest of Pichai/mouni has universal ring as quest for the ultimate union with the divine has always engaged people the world over.