CHAPTER FIVE

CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE OF THE MYSTICAL ELEMENTS IN SAVITRI AND THE ODYSSEY

After analyzing the mystical elements in Savitri and The Odyssey, the researcher attempts a comparative study of both the poems in this chapter. This chapter focuses on the points of convergence and divergence concerning the mystical elements in Savitri and The Odyssey.

Awakening of the self, the first stage or phase in the mystical quest, occurs to the protagonists of both the epics under consideration. In the case of Aswapati in Savitri, it happens relatively early in life. It is the passion for an offspring which urges him to undertake for the quest. Sri Aurobindo dedicates Canto III of Book One, “The Yoga of the King: The Yoga of the Soul’s Release” to explain the mystical awakening taking place in Aswapati. The author portrays his awakening of the self through his practice of Yoga. He writes: “Awakened to the lines that Nature hides, / Attuned to her movements that exceed our ken, / He grew one with a covert universe” (44).

Savitri also goes through this experience. The awakening of the self in her begins in Canto II and the search proceeds up to Canto VII (474-557) of Book Seven. There is an immediate cause for her search. It is the impending death of Satyavan that compels her to search for the Divine. While she was thinking about Satyavan’s fate, a voice urged her: “Why camest thou to this dumb deathbound earth”; “Arise, O soul, and vanquish Time and Death” (474). In Satyavan, the awakening of the self takes place spontaneously. It is not compelled by any external forces. While residing in the forest with his fellow sages he aspires for the
really Real. Although Aswapati’s Yoga and quest cover a major portion of the poem, Satyavan’s quest ends with the advent of Savitri and he finds the Divine in her and declares: “All with thy coming fills” (408).

Coming over to Kazantzakis’ Odysseus, the awakening of the self occurs to him when he receives a sudden revelation that “even his native land was a sweet mask of Death” (45). Returning to Ithaca after the Trojan War, he finds no interest in anything. His rebellious spirit wishes for further journeys and he decides to sail off with a small crew. He declares to Hardihood, one among his crew: “I like to hang on the cliff’s verge of god or beast; / my mind can never be slaked with either good or evil” (184). Prevelakis writes in the Epilogue to *Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey*: “My book . . . is the Commentary: an attempt to find parallels between the poet and the new Odysseus, both hunters of God” (168). So it is God himself who is the sole target of Odysseus’ hunting.

The awakening of the self takes place in Aswapati, Savitri, Satyavan and Odysseus. Aswapati and Savitri have strong reasons which compel them to pursue their inner quest. Aswapati, according to the original legend, decides to practise Yoga with the sole intention of getting a child. But in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo does not specify the reason for Aswapati’s quest. He abruptly records his journeys and experiences and the different planes of existence traversed by him. The impending death of Satyavan urges Savitri to take up the quest. She wants to gain spiritual strength to fight Death. But Satyavan’s search is different from others. He is not under any pressure from outside. His quest takes place as part of his traditional upbringing. And it is less intense than Aswapati’s and Savitri’s.
Concerning the awakening of the self, Odysseus stands apart from Aswapati, Savitri and Satyavan. His search is not compelled by any fatal events; nor is it a natural one. He enters this state inspired by an insight which suggests that the dull and routine life in one’s native land is equal to death. It occurs to him like a lightning and he decides immediately to leave his kingdom, Ithaca, behind.

Initially, Odysseus is not very well disposed to seek God. But almost in the middle of his journey the nature of his search changes and acquires a new dimension. It is said that there are thousand and one ways to reach God depending upon the credibility and commitment of the person involved in the search. Sri Aurobindo’s and Kazantzakis’ protagonists take seemingly different ways to reach the one and the same Principle.

An awakened self, in the next phase of its mystical quest, undertakes incredible adventures and journeys with the sole passion for the Absolute. Here, Sri Aurobindo and Kazantzakis differ significantly. Sri Aurobindo, being an Oriental sage, gives more importance to the internal quest while Kazantzakis, an Occidental seer, pays more attention to the external travels, at least at the beginning of the poem. Aswapati, Satyavan and Savitri traverse through the inner worlds to find the Absolute while Odysseus undertakes external travels for the same purpose. But later he too changes the direction and mode of his quest and turns to the inner world.

Godheads of the Greater Mind, The Heavens of the Ideal, The Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge and so on (95-302). In a similar vein, Savitri’s entry into the inner countries helps her find out The Triple Soul-Forces, The Soul, Nirvana and the All-Negating Absolute, The Cosmic Spirit and The Cosmic Consciousness (488-557).

Odysseus, on the contrary, is mainly involved in external journeys and travels from Ithaca to Sparta, then to Crete, Knossos, Egypt and to the source of the Nile. Unlike Savitri, almost half of The Odyssey is filled with physical adventures accomplished by Odysseus and his companions.

Some of the early actions of Odysseus include the suppression of a rebellion in Ithaca and the abduction of Helen from Sparta. He then arrives in Crete and destroys Knossos. He travels further and reaches Egypt and tries in vain to conquer it. Defeated by Pharaoh and his army, he flees and goes in search of the source of the Nile. Thus, the poem consists of expeditions, wars, revolts, conspiracies, abduction, deceits, quarrels and strife. But later Odysseus changes track and becomes an ascetic (419-775).

Purgation of the senses and the self is a crucial phase in the mystical quest. Freedom from sexual urges gets prominence here. M. G. Umar in Sri Aurobindo: Thinker and Yogi of the Future highlights Sri Aurobindo’s opinion in this regard:

According to Sri Aurobindo sex is neither good nor bad. It is an operation of Nature, used by Nature for her purpose. As long as man lives an ordinary life sex is admissible in moderation . . . But for an earnest seeker whose sole aim is realisation of God, sex becomes an obstacle, particularly in Integral Yoga. . . . Through
continence sex energy can be conserved and converted into pure vital, mental and spiritual energy. A second reason for sex-prohibition is that most often sex lowers the consciousness. (129)

In Savitri, Aswapati and Savitri abstain from sex and aspire for higher planes of consciousness. In The Odyssey, Odysseus too undergoes such purification. He frees himself from the female species forever after abandoning Diktena somewhere in the Nile delta. Prevelakis writes: “With this lament, Odysseus bids a final farewell to woman, as the new contests which he sets himself demand. At this point, his ‘aesthetic’ life ends. During the ‘ethical’ and ‘metaphysical’ stage of his life, he remains chaste” (Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey 88).

Aswapati, according to the original legend, practices tapasya for eighteen long years. Deshpande in Vyasa’s Savitri remarks that “he [Aswapati] decides to undertake this long and arduous tapasya. Every day a hundred-thousand oblations he offers to Savitri even while observing the strictest ritual-vows during the entire period” (92). Satyavan confesses to Savitri about his way of life before he entered into a life of austerities: “Once were my days like days of other men: / To think and act was all, to enjoy and breathe; / This was the width and height of mortal hope” (406-07). But later he takes up the path of asceticism and purifies himself. The following expressions from the poem highlight his efforts to purify himself: “I groped for the Mystery”, “I turned to seize its form”, “I plunged into an inner seeing Mind”, and “I strove to find its hints” (407).

In the original legend, Savitri, apart from her devoted life to her husband, decides “to undertake an austere vow of standing for three days and three nights
continuously at a given place, without taking food” (*Vyasa’s Savitri* 94). This is taken up by Sri Aurobindo and he elaborates on it in the last six Cantos of Book Seven. Thus Sri Aurobindo’s protagonists purify themselves in their spiritual pursuit.

Kazantzakis’ Odysseus too is keen on disciplining himself and his companions. Being an assertive captain, he exerts strict control over himself and others. One of the major temptations he and his crew face is the acute desire to settle down somewhere and lead a normal life with hearth and home. Many a times he exhorts his companions to abandon this desire and root out the wish to lead a cozy and comfortable life. Goaded by this spirit he leaves behind him kingdoms, possessions, kith and kin.

True purgation, signifies above all the freedom from all religions, philosophies, political systems and ideologies. Any ideology by its very nature cannot but be limited. But mystics go beyond the boundaries set by individual religions and philosophies and attain a higher level of freedom. Kazantzakis’ Odysseus achieves this status.

If the first part of the poem depicts Odysseus’ rigorous self-discipline which is required of a sea captain, the second part (Book XIV onwards) shows him as an ascetic. Prevelakis in *Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey* writes about Odysseus’ purification: “He sends Granite off with the band, and he himself enters on his second retreat, entirely alone. His asceticism purifies him from matter, the odor of sanctity which he gives out draws throngs of pilgrims to him” (70). In both the epics, the second element of the mystical quest, namely, the purgation of the senses is found.
The dissolution and disintegration of the ego is the next important step in the mystical quest. The only barrier which hinders the total union of the individual self with the Absolute is the ego. Unless a mystic drops his/her ego, he/she will never enjoy total communion with the Divine. Both Aswapati and Savitri succeed in their efforts and become one with the Absolute. About Savitri, the poet writes: “Her mortal ego perished in God’s night. / Only a body was left, the ego’s shell” (552). He speaks about this experience in detail in the following lines:

He sees his little self as very God.
His little ‘I’ has swallowed the whole world,
His ego has stretched into infinity.

He builds on a mighty vacancy of soul
A huge philosophy of Nothingness.

An eternal zero is his formless self,
His spirit the void impersonal absolute. (453)

It is clear from these lines that unless one sheds his/her ego, he/she can never come into contact with the Supreme Being. All religions advocate this philosophy but prescribe different methods to do so.

Sri Aurobindo proposes the practice of Integral Yoga to cast away the ego or the limited self. Odysseus finds his ego disintegrating. Friar observes that a man goes beyond “The mind, the heart, and hope, beyond his ego, his race, and mankind even, beyond all phenomena and plunge further into a vision of the Invisible permeating all things and forever ascending” (The Odyssey xiv). This
“Invisible permeating all things” is nothing but the Absolute Being. Odysseus realizes this and passing through all the above stages experiences the egoless state of existence.

The ultimate phase in the mystical quest is the gradual transformation of consciousness. It is worth noting here that being modern writers both Sri Aurobindo and Kazantzakis have been influenced by the theory of evolution. Both share the possibility of human beings reaching an ultimate inwardness which will bring in a mystic cosmic consciousness.

One of the basic tenets of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy stands for matter in human beings becoming conscious of itself and aspiring for the divine. Kazantzakis expresses it in slightly different words when he writes that matter in man has to be transubstantiated into pure spirit. Being an Oriental sage, Sri Aurobindo depends upon the practice of Yoga which systematically helps the seeker to achieve the gradual transformation of consciousness. Kazantzakis on the other hand tries different methods in succession to achieve this goal.

Aswapati and Satyavan are able to attain a cosmic consciousness with the help of their ascetic practices and Yoga. Savitri in her pursuit of the “inner countries” discovers the cosmic spirit and consciousness. Describing her ultimate status after she attains the cosmic consciousness, the author remarks: “She had risen up from body, mind and life; / She was no more a Person in a world, / She had escaped into infinity” (548). According to Ganguli, Book Two of Savitri – The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, comprising fifteen cantos, describes “the various worlds and realms of consciousness in the universal Nature and narrates
how the seeker climbs one realm of consciousness to a higher in his upward
march” (Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri: an adventure of consciousness 139).

A gradual transformation of the consciousness occurs in Odysseus as well.
Prevelakis writes: “Stage by stage his [Odysseus’] consciousness rises from the
ego to the race, to mankind, to the earth itself. He is granted a vision of God as a
flame penetrating the universe” (Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey 69-70).
Kazantzakis, through the character of Odysseus, expresses his core idea of
spiritualization. Bien rightly observes: “Life evolves toward increasing
spiritualization by means of transubstantiation. Rocks evolve to plants, then to
animals, then to man; sensation develops into instinct, then intelligence and finally
self-consciousness” (Nikos Kazantzakis 14).

The natural and spontaneous outcome of a genuine mystical quest is the
mystical attainment which has five dimensions. The first is the recurrence of voices
and visions in the mystics’ lives. Aswapati receives plenty of visions and hears
voices from above. Canto IV of Book Three in Savitri titled “The Vision and the
Boon” talks about the visions received by him. The Divine Mother appears and
speaks to him: “A shape was seen on threshold Mind, a Voice / Absolute and wise
in the heart’s chambers spoke: / O Son of strength who climbst creation’s peaks”
(335). The Divine Mother, pleased with his austerities, promises: “Only one boon,
to greaten thy spirit, demand; / Only one joy, to raise thy kind, desire” (341). After
receiving the much awaited vision of the Divine Mother, an astonished Aswapati
replies with fear and awe:

How shall I rest content with mortal days
And the dull measure of terrestrial things,
I who have seen behind the cosmic mask
The glory and the beauty of thy face? (341)

However, he gathers courage and asks the Divine Mother for a child who can save
humankind and She grants his request and promises him a daughter in the form of
Savitri.

Savitri, the incarnation of Goddess Savitri, receives many visions in and
through her internal quest. In Canto II of Book Seven, a mighty voice argues with
her. In the next Canto, another voice speaks to her. In the following Canto, titled
“The Triple Soul-Forces,” many celestial persons meet with and talk to her. She
first comes across the Mother of Seven Sorrows. Then she hears the voice of the
Man of Sorrows. She ascends further and meets the Mother of Might and the latter
introduces herself as Durga, Lakshmi and Kali. Then she hears an echo from the
Dwarf-Titan—the Ego of the world of desire. Again she presses forward and
encounters the Mother of Light who is immersed in lifting man’s soul towards the
Light. The whole of Books Nine and Ten are devoted to Savitri’s prolonged
debates with Death. She is able to chase and argue with the God of Death. The
visions that she receives and her conversations with celestial beings underscore her
mystical attainment.

Kazantzakis’ Odysseus too receives many visions and listens to many
voices from the powers above. Death often visits him and he feels his invisible
presence following him wherever he goes. He speaks with Death many times and
asks for an extension of his life. Temptation often appears in the form of a snake-
like Negro boy to dissuade him from his efforts but he rejects his arguments. In
Book XVIII, the Tempter appears and praises him telling him that he now bears all
the thirtytwo signs of the perfect man and that he has already attained salvation and
so need not struggle any more. To this, Odysseus replies that he is the saviour and
does not expect salvation on earth. Defeated, the Tempter disappears.

Odysseus is also endowed with visions of God and hears the voices of his
ancient heroes such as Tantalus, Heracles and Prometheus. They appear before him
frequently and encourage him to continue his struggle. While throwing light on the
contents of chapter XIV of *The Odyssey*, Friar pays attention to the ancestors’
appearances and their instructions to Odysseus:

Tantalus . . . accuses Odysseus of planning to build a city and to
settle down, of betraying the unappeasable heart, the restless search.
. . . Heracles urges Odysseus to complete the task he himself had
left unfinished, to push on to the thirteenth and final labor
(immortality), though he cannot discern what it may be. . . .
Prometheus laments that . . . he could not finish ‘life’s most glorious
task; that he neither made his peace with God nor killed him. (795-
96)

In both *Savitri* and *The Odyssey*, the protagonists receive visions and hear
voices from above which are positive signs of their mystical attainment. In both the
works, divine as well as evil powers appear before the characters either to support
or dissuade them. But one of the major differences between these two epics is the
role of Death in the respective poems. In *Savitri*, Savitri argues with Death in an
expansive manner while in *The Odyssey*, Odysseus talks with Death very briefly.
The Divine Powers in the former poem favour and support the protagonists while
in the latter it is the Divine Power which needs help and support from Odysseus.
Self-realization is an important phase in mystical attainment. Aswapati attains self-realization and the poet writes about it in the following fashion:

A universal light was in his eyes,
A golden influx flowed through heart and brain;
Force came down into his mortal limbs,
A current from eternal seas of Bliss;
He felt the invasion and the nameless joy. (79)

When one reaches this state, he/she is devoid of all kinds of desires and aspirations. Aswapati is content with himself. He is in a blissful state not wanting anything more. Highlighting this particular state of a mystic Underhill writes: “He emerges from that long and wondrous journey to find himself, in rest and in work, a little child upon the bosom of the Father. In that most clear relation all feeling, will, and thought attain their end” (Mysticism 443). Aswapati’s only demand is that the same experience should be bestowed upon the entire human race.

Savitri attains self-realization at the end of her spiritual quest. Pandit in Introducing Savitri writes about Savitri’s self-realization: “Onward Savitri moves until she comes to a narrow passage through which she enters. At the other end in a house of Fire she meets her secret soul. The human Savitri and the divine Savitri look upon each other and become one” (101-02).

The formation of universal consciousness and the feeling of oneness with the universe is an important phase of mystical attainment. Pandit calls it “cosmicisation: increasing expansion of our consciousness till it becomes one with the universal consciousness” (The Book of Beginnings: Talks on Sri Aurobindo’s
Savitri: Book One 388). Aswapati, for instance, experiences this state and the author portrays it as follows:

In this tremendous universality
Not only his soul-nature and mind-sense
Included every soul and mind in his
And grew one flesh and nerve with all that lives;
He felt the joy of others as his joy,
He bore the grief of others as his grief;
His nature grew a movement of the All,
His soul was a delegation of the All. (318-19)

This is a unique experience in the life of a mystic. Just like Aswapati, Savitri too has the same realization. The following lines indicate that she also has reached this stage: “All was, all lived; she felt all being one” (554) and “All beings thought and felt and moved in her” (556). Pandit remarks that Savitri becomes “one with Nature and feels the movements of all in Nature as in herself. She is no more an individual person, she is all in the world. She is spread out in infinity, one with the Whole” (A Summary of Savitri 158).

Talking about a unified consciousness in mystics Underhill writes, “All the mystics assure us that a unification of consciousness, in which all outward things are forgot, is the necessary prelude of union with the Divine; for consciousness of the Many and consciousness of the One are mutually exclusive states” (Mysticism 364). Odysseus traverses through these stages many times. On the fifth day of his
conversation with God, his identification with all living beings is complete and hence in the spring rains that night all creatures seek shelter in his body and his brain. The author’s depiction of Odysseus where he welcomes all living beings is worth presenting here:

Come all my long-lost exiled brothers, beasts and birds,
the middle wall falls crashing, the heart opens, welcome!

Thus did the suffering man hold all earth in his hands
but could not bear the pain or joy, and his eyes brimmed. (438)

Most mystics have dealt with the experience of the dark night of the soul. It is the last crisis a quester has to undergo just before his/her total surrender to the Absolute. Underhill has highlighted some of the key dimensions of this experience:

“(a) The loss of the Presence of God . . . Extinction of the transcendental consciousness (b) The acute sense of imperfection . . . (c) Loss of mystic feeling—Spiritual ennui . . . (d) Intellectual impotence—Loss of will power . . . (e) The pain of God, or dark ecstasy . . .” (Mysticism 380). Almost all these experiences are present in both the epics under consideration in varying degrees. The appearance of the Tempter in various disguises and his persuasion to abandon the mystical quest should be added to the above features of the dark night experience. But all these experiences strengthen the quester’s character and prepare him/her for the complete union with the Absolute.

Aswapati faces “the dark night of the soul” situation while he makes his descent into Night in Cantos VII and VIII of Book Two. There he encounters ugliness, perversion, lust, cruelty, despair, greed, tyranny, cynicism, lie and ignorance and other negative qualities. He passes through this dangerous zone
reciting the Name of God, constantly aware of the treachery from behind. Pandit writes: “Aswapathy advances alone into these menacing realms, combats the powers that seek to deprive his mind of its light, smites away their clinging influences. . . . The Abyss from below rises to claim his soul which is now alone with the confronting Night; he is being sucked in, pressed down from all sides” (A Summary of Savitri 59). However, the Godhead in him rises to face these dangers calmly and he escapes with the power of his spirit.

Savitri too passes through “the dark night of the soul” when confronted by Death. But unlike Aswapati, she enters this phase with the soul of Satyavan and is seen chasing Death. Hence, in the strict sense she does not go through this stage of her own accord but does it for the sake of her husband. But it affects her indirectly. Book Nine titled “The Book of Eternal Night” and Book Ten “The Book of the Double Twilight” deals with her encounter with Death for retaining her husband’s soul. The prolonged arguments of Death are quite persuasive. But she counters every suggestion put forward by Death with her powerful and ingenious replies.

While Savitri is seen fighting the Lord of Evil—the ultimate Negating principle—the God of Death, Aswapati and Odysseus are tempted only by the agents of the Evil One. Hence, Savitri’s victory is unique. Furthermore, she not only wins the fight against Death but also regains the soul of Satyavan from his clutches. In a symbolic sense, she has regained immortality for the whole humanity by winning Satyavan back, for he represents the soul of man.

Even after retrieving Satyavan’s soul she is tempted with a sweeter proposal. Both she and her husband are offered a life of eternal bliss upon the
higher planes along with gods and goddesses. But Savitri boldly rejects it and tells the radiant God:

But Savitri answered to the radiant God:

‘In vain thou temptst with solitary bliss

Two spirits saved out of a suffering world;

To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
To change the earthly life to life divine.

Even the charm of thy alluring voice,
O blissful Godhead, cannot seize and share. (692)

At last both of them return to earth victoriously having coming out of the dark night of the soul unscathed.

The dark night of the soul experience destroys Satyavan. He is unable to fight against it. Compared with the other major characters of both the epics, namely, Aswapati, Savitri and Odysseus, it is Satyavan alone who is defeated by the Evil elements though temporarily. But “The Book of Death” finally gives way to “The Book of Everlasting Day” where he comes back to life and returns to the earth along with Savitri.

Odysseus’ “dark night of the soul” is connected with the snake-shaped Negro lad. In Book XVI, Temptation appears in the form of a snake-like Negro boy and mocks at Odysseus. Again in Book XVIII, Temptation comes forward to praise Odysseus saying that the latter has already become a perfect man and so should now scatter into non-existence. But Odysseus, writes Prevelakis, “succeeds
in defeating Temptation, who urges him to commit suicide because life has no further peak or flower to offer” (*Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey* 96).

Temptation makes his last appearance in the last Book (XXIV) where Odysseus fondles the sleeping Negro boy and finally hangs him like a scarecrow on one of the masts: “The frontier guard then smiled and hung the Negro boy / on the mid-mast as scarecrow for the lower world” (775). Odysseus, like Savitri, finally triumphs over Temptation and emerges victorious out of the dark night of the soul.

The last phase in mystical attainment in all traditions is complete self-surrender and the final union with the Absolute. Concerning this last requirement of a quester, Umar writes: “One must open to the Divine Grace and Force and allow it to act upon the being, and must progressively surrender all of oneself—mind and heart, life and body—to the Divine so that He may fill all being and nature with His Truth, Light, Force, Power, Strength, and Ananda” (*Sri Aurobindo: Thinker and Yogi of the Future* 105).

The mystical quest which started with the dissolution and disintegration of the ego reaches its culmination in the union with the Absolute. Underhill remarks: “In that mysterious death of selfhood on the summits which is the medium of Eternal Life, heights meets the deeps: supreme achievement and complete humility are one” (*Mysticism* 443). She adds: “Initiated into the atmosphere of Eternity, united with the Absolute, possessed at last of the fullness of its life, the soul, self-naughted becomes as a little child: for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (443).

Analysing *Savitri* from the perspective of complete self-surrender to the Absolute, one finds Aswapati surrendering himself totally before the Divine
Mother at the end of his quest. According to him, the Ultimate principle is feminine. He finds her “the Way” and “the Goal”. Writing about Aswapati’s self-surrender, Pandit remarks: “He surrenders all of himself to Her so that Her vast Power can act and fill the finite with the Infinite, bring Her healing touch of Love, Truth and joy into the suffering world. He gives his freed soul to her and her alone” (A Summary of Savitri 90).

It is not only the inner self which is surrendered to God but the outer physical form as well. Jugal Kishore Mukherjee explains the nature of this transformation as follows: “it is understood that it is not merely the inner consciousness which has to undergo divine transformation, even the outer physical system of man, including all its forms and functions, has to submit itself to the unrelenting process of supramental transformation” (The Ascent of Sight in Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri 88). Both these transformations take place in Aswapati.

Moving on to Savitri, one finds out that she also achieves this double transformation—inner and outer. By the end of her search she meets with the Divine. Sitaraman in his essay “Savitri, the Mother” underscores the specific sadhana of Savitri which differs drastically from the sadhana of most of the other yogis: “Savitri has offered even this very Gnostic individuality of hers to the Supreme Lord by passing through the experience of Nirvana, the extinction of all separative individuality and delimiting finitising movement of the instrumental members of the personality” (Perspectives of Savitri Vol. II. 86). Highlighting the perfect effect of such identification he adds, “Her identification with the Lord is so complete that she no longer reacts in any sense of the word. All outer and inner
response born of a separate individual formation in personality or instrumentality has given place to an absolute stillness and immobility . . . ” (87).

In the union between Satyavan and Savitri, Pandit sees a realm beyond the sensual relation of lovers. He writes: “Both are lost in each other and become one. The wedding of the eternal Lord and his Spouse has taken place once again on earth and the Two begin a greater Age” (A Summary of Savitri 117). Satyavan’s total self-surrender to and union with the Absolute takes place through his mysterious union with Savitri who is the incarnation of the Divine Mother. In brief, Aswapati’s mystical union is with the Divine Mother whereas Satyavan’s is with Savitri, the incarnation of the Divine Mother.

Moving towards Odysseus’ self-surrender, one notices a major departure from the protagonists of Savitri. Odysseus, unlike Aswapati, Savitri and Satyavan, is a man of vitality and tremendous physical action. Kazantzakis depicts him as a man who is vigorously immersed in bodily functions. Hence, it is difficult for him to make a complete self-surrender. For almost half the poem, he is shown as a man of revolt, rebellion and war. Only with the destruction of his ideal city (Book XVI), does he become a renowned ascetic and gradually realizes the futility of human efforts and actions. This incident is the turning point in his life and helps him to surrender himself before the Absolute.

Friar writes that “Odysseus now falls into the ‘terror of thought,’ an inner contemplation which blazes with light, and identifies himself with all of nature, the snakes and the grass, the ruthless laws of death and destruction, the seeds struggling toward light” (The Odyssey 799). His self-surrender is not to any particular God or Goddess. By the end of the poem he transcends freedom itself:
“and the great mind leapt to the peak of its holy freedom, / fluttered with empty wings, then upright through the air / soared high and freed itself from its last cage, its freedom” (775). His uniqueness is that his self-surrender is offered to the ‘eternal Silence’ and his union with the Absolute takes place by transubstantiating his flesh to pure spirit.

A mystic experiences the disappearance of confusions, contradictions, dualities and all other opposing categories. Mystics effortlessly pass through the contradictions and dualities in life whereas the ordinary people are unable to reconcile themselves to dualities. In other words, mystics are able to synthesize everything and perceive the essential unity of everything.

After attaining a higher vision of life, Aswapati is liberated from the experience of dualities. He receives a unified vision where dualities such as good and evil, life and death, light and darkness, matter and spirit, one and many and He and She disappear. Savitri too undergoes a similar experience. After her self-surrender, the problem of one and the many is resolved. Truth and error, wisdom and ignorance and death and life seem to her as one reality. She even has a vision of the true face of Death and addresses him: “O Death, thou too art God and yet not He, / But only his own black shadow on his path” (656).

Odysseus too was plagued by dualities for almost half the poem. He struggles hard to synthesize the opposing elements both in him and in the world. Kazantzakis in the Prologue to The Last Temptation writes:

My principle anguish and the source of all my joys and sorrows from my youth onward has been the incessant, merciless battle between the spirit and the flesh. . . . I have fought to reconcile these
two primordial forces which are so contrary to one another, to make them realize that they are not enemies but rather fellow-workers, so that they might rejoice in their harmony—and so that I might rejoice with them. (7)

Odysseus fights dualities such as life and death, mind and heart, salvation and destruction, good and evil, and beast and god. However, by the end of the poem, under the influence of the mystical vision, he realizes that the same essence runs through all dualities. This is noted by Poulakidas in his essay “Kazantzakis’ *Spiritual Exercises* and Buddhism” where he analyses Kazantzakis’ *Spiritual Exercises* which is considered by scholars as the prose counterpart of *The Odyssey*: “All are one and the one is all. . . . This is how Kazantzakis ended his *Spiritual Exercises* in 1923. The world of becoming and the world of being, the Abyss and the time-space, the mind-heart element almost merge and meet. Intellect and intuition almost become one consciousness” (215).

Another important outcome of mystical attainment is the acquisition of wide knowledge and an enhanced vision about everything. Mystics possess a deep knowledge about the inner connections between the universe and God and gain extraordinary wisdom which is normally inaccessible to the common people. In *The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, Rishabhchand writes about the three principal grades of knowledge in the Indian tradition. They are: “ātmajñāna or knowledge of one’s individual soul or self; brahmājñā or knowledge of the universal and transcendent Self or Spirit; and bhagavatjñāna or knowledge of the Divine, the sole and supreme Being” (375).
Aswapati, through integral yoga, acquires all the three grades of knowledge. Consequently, his vision undergoes a radical change. Purani writes: “Aswapathy finds . . . that man is not only cosmic but something beyond the cosmos too: he can ascend to a plane of consciousness where he can be identified with the supreme divine” (Lectures on Savitri 10). The following lines from the poem highlight the elevated position of Aswapati where he passes through endless knowledge and an enhanced vision of life:

His knowledge an invview caught unfathomable

............................................

He communed with the Incommunicable;

His brain was wrapped in overwhelming light,

An all-embracing knowledge seized his heart. (301-302)

Savitri too is blessed and reaches this status of endless knowledge and an enhanced vision through her Yoga. Her knowledge and wisdom comes to the fore in her long struggle with Death. It is described in 125 pages which cover all the Cantos of Books IX, X and XI.

Death argues with Savitri as a clever sophist and brings forth all possible stances taken from various philosophical systems such as nihilism, existentialism, realism, idealism, vedantic mayavadam and cynicism. But she retaliates with befitting arguments and finally defeats the God of Death. Highlighting the wise arguments of Savitri, Mangesh Nadkarni writes in Savitri: A Brief Introduction:

Savitri cannot be silenced. She points out to him [Death] that if this creation has arisen out of the meaningless void, if matter can come forth from energy, and life from matter, and mind from life, and if
soul can peep through the flesh, what is wrong in hoping that the
imperfect man of today will some day transform himself into the
perfection of God. Even now there are seen in man glorious hints of
the coming perfection. (68-69)

Kazantzakis’ Odysseus also attains endless knowledge and an enhanced
vision. But the major difference is that unlike Aswapati and Savitri, Odysseus
attains this status not with the help of Yogic practices but by largely following the
path of action and contemplation. Prevelakis highlights the mystical turn in
Odysseus’ life and the knowledge and vision gained by him thereafter: “His
attitude may now be called *metaphysical*: only the essence of things now interest
him” (*Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey* 76).

There are notable differences in the mystical elements present in *Savitri* and
*The Odyssey*. Aswapati and Savitri share the same world-view whereas Odysseus
has a different one. But, all three are detached from the world and possess a higher
vision of God and the universe.

An important trait of the mystic way of life is the ability to overcome
bodily travails and death. Both *Savitri* and *The Odyssey* highlight this theme. Why
is there pain and suffering in this world? What is the purpose behind it? Underhill
tries to answer this question. For her, pain indicates “a profound disharmony
between the sense-world and the human self. If it is to be vanquished, either the
disharmony must be resolved by a deliberate and careful adjustment of the self to
the world of sense, or, that self must turn from the sense-world to some other with
which it is in tune” (*Mysticism* 19).
A mystic alters his/her self radically and calls bodily sufferings “the wings on which man’s spirit can best take flight towards the Absolute” (*Mysticism* 19). When asked by Savitri’s mother about the problem of pain in the world, Narad replies:

Pain is the hammer of the Gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal’s heart,
His slow inertia as of living stone.
If the heart were not forced to want and weep,
His soul would have lain down content, at ease,
And never thought to exceed the human start
And never learned to climb towards the Sun. (443)

Those who lead a mystic way of life are aware of this principle and are ready to endure any pain and suffering and also have the resources to overcome them.

The ultimate physical travail is death. Mystics however, are never afraid of death. They are able to overcome it. The central theme of *Savitri* is the rescue of the human soul from the bondage of Death. Rohit Mehta in *The Dialogue with Death* throws light on Savitri’s struggle to conquer death: “Savitri was not in search of the secret of Death; she was out to defeat Death in its own kingdom. And for this she had no other weapon but the weapon of Love” (285).

Odysseus tries to conquer death in a manner different from Savitri’s. Savitri fights with death not for herself but for Satyavan, the representative of the human soul. Odysseus faces death for the sake of the entire humanity for he too represents humankind.
Although Sri Aurobindo and Kazantzakis focus on the immortality of humankind, both present their vision in different styles. The former believes that some kind of a divine intervention (Divine Mother’s incarnation as Savitri) is necessary to save the human soul from the slavery of Death but the latter thinks that man by his own efforts or rather God, in and through man, can defeat death transubstantiating the flesh into spirit. Kazantzakis declares that it is the universal creative power, namely, God which struggles and progresses upward in the evolutionary growth of man.

Savitri regains Satyavan from the God of Death’s grip and returns to Earth. But in *The Odyssey*, Death is mocked at by Odysseus because it finds nothing in Odysseus to plunder except dregs. Before the arrival of Death, Odysseus had already transformed his flesh into spirit. Nothing material remains in him; he has become a flame and disappeared into the air. Death who had been accompanying him right from his birth feels terribly deceived. Bien writes: “The divine flame is gradually liberated from its prison of flesh, until the final face has no features at all - ‘for all its flesh had turned to soul, and soul to air’!” (*Nikos Kazantzakis* 30). This is how Odysseus defeats death.

Mystics experience ineffable bliss and joy. Concerning the nature of the bliss and joy attained by a mystic, Pandit writes: “When the divine felicity pours into the being, in the course of yoga, it does not merely stay in the breast as a heavenly joy. It floods the entire system and sets it aflame in an intoxication of pure bliss” (*Yoga in Sri Aurobindo’s Epic Savitri* 210-11). He adds, “Even the most material tissues and flesh begin to share in the unending beatitude. It is an overpowering possession by the Lord of Ananda, the Soma of the Vedic mystic”
Rishabhchand in *The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo* brilliantly depicts this beatific state where God and the human soul are united in love:

He [God] is our Master and Lover and Friend and Helper and Guide, who holds us in His embrace of beatific Love even when He uses us as manifesting channels of His supernal glory upon earth. He unites us with Himself in the closest union of rapt ecstasy in which we become completely identified with Him in all the ways of His being, and yet lets us keep up a certain unimaginable, mysterious difference-in-identity which permits of the sweetest relations of a termless, fathomless, unutterable love. He is at once the Lord of our being and the Architect of our becoming. (385)

Sri Aurobindo’s protagonists have had this God-experience. On Aswapati receiving his blessing by the end of his spiritual journey, the poet writes: “A mystic happiness trembled in the breast / As if the invisible Beloved had come” (290). As a result the whole world becomes a heavenly place. Savitri too receives this beatific experience in her life. She lives in a new orbit of divine love and bliss. Even her union with Satyavan acquires a new perspective now. Seetaraman observes in *Savitri, The Mother*: “Her joy is now not the pleasure of limited sensation of the contact of the finite with the finite but the joy of union of the Spirit with the Spirit, the Brahman in the subject with the Brahman in the object” (115). He adds that Savitri’s “joy on earth is a bridge between earth and heaven. The heavenly Ananda of the Supramental flows into the body of Savitri who lives on this earth” (115).
In *The Odyssey*, a similar state is attained by Odysseus, though less intensely, when compared to Aswapati and Savitri. But unlike his counterparts, Odysseus is not able to sustain and perpetuate the blissful state. For him, ecstasy and rapture are only guests who visit him now and then.

Mystics live in the eternal present and in the eternal here. Space and time do not bother them. Aswapati, Savitri and Odysseus experience this spacelessness and timelessness, though in varying degrees. Talking about the existence of different kinds of spaces, Mukherjee writes: “There are many more spaces than this gross physical space, *sthūlākaśa*. Indian mystical tradition has named them as *cittākāśa*, *cidākāśa*, *vyoma*, etc.” *(The Ascent of Sight in Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri* 16-17). He points out that,

> every object of vision, even a physical object . . . exists at the same time in all these different spaces with, of course, inevitably attendant changes. Now if you try to look at an object placing it in the background of a particular space you will have a different kind of sight depending on the space selected. (17)

Aswapati and Savitri transcend space and time through their Yogic practices. Commenting on Savitri’s experience in Canto Seven of Book Seven, Purani declares: “Savitri had gone not only beyond Ignorance and found her Soul but that Soul was Cosmic, it was also Supracosmic-Transcendent. She lived in it and so was beyond Time and space - and yet was omnipresent in Time and space” (309).

Compared with Aswapati and Savitri, Odysseus rarely gets this experience of transcending space and time. He is reported to have experienced it only twice
whereas Aswapati and Savitri are in this state almost permanently. This is a major difference between the Eastern and the Western points of view as far as mysticism is concerned. The East believes in the stillness of time while the West underlines the passage of time.

Deification or the life divine is the ultimate stage in the mystical way of life. It is also known as the unitive life. Illustrating St. Catherine’s view in this regard, Underhill writes:

Standing at the highest point of the mystic ladder which can be reached by human spirits in this world of time and space, looking back upon the course of that slow interior alchemy, that ‘noteworthy order’ of organic transformation, by which her selfhood had been purged of imperfection, raised to higher levels, compelled at last to surrender itself to the all-embracing, all-demanding life of the Real; this is St. Catherine’s deliberate judgement on the relative and absolute aspects of the mystic life. (442)

The life divine or the unitive life is the central theme of Savitri and The Life Divine as well. Commenting on the last chapter of The Life Divine, Pandit writes: “That is Sri Aurobindo’s conception. Divine life is a progressive divinisation of life. Ultimately all life is turned into a divine life, divine play” (Talks on the Life Divine Vol. II 596).

Odysseus too would like to become divine. Even when he was a child he had strongly expressed this wish. But the terminology of Kazantzakis is a little different from that of Sri Aurobindo. While the former speaks of matter being transformed into spirit, the latter stands for the human becoming the divine.
Although the terms are different, both poets argue that the ultimate point of human life is deification or apotheosis.

The point of convergence here is that both the poets believe that the end of human evolution is the life divine. Both are well aware of the scientific theory of evolution and have incorporated an evolutionary vision of life in their epics. *Savitri* and *The Odyssey* testify to this fact and the protagonists in both the works aspire for the life divine or transubstantiation of matter into spirit.

Mukherjee in *From Man Human to Man Divine* writes that Sri Aurobindo strongly believed in evolution and the possibility of the life divine on earth. He writes: “The evolutionary progression is thus bound to continue till Supermind, the original ‘creative medium’ of the Divine, and the triune glory of Sachchidananda stand evolved here in the material universe” (235). Kazantzakis shares the Aurobindonian vision of human life and evolution. Friar, in his introduction to Kazantzakis’ *Sodom and Gomorrah* and *Comedy: A Tragedy in One Act*, writes:

The theme of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, like the theme of all of Kazantzakis’ major works, is this savage struggle to the death between Man and God. . . . At times he will weigh it down with his own evolutionary concept of God as the *élan vital* in Nature itself, as a vision of the ever progressing, spiritual refinement in man and nature toward which the entire universe is moving, and not as a static symbol of perfection to which man might attain. (4)

Hence, it is clear that the protagonists of both *Savitri* and *The Odyssey* aspire for divine life on earth.
Another major difference between Savitri and The Odyssey is that when even after attaining this divine life Aswapati and Savitri are allowed to continue their life on earth. But Odysseus attains this state only at the end of his life and it is in death that he fully realizes this experience. Hence he is not able to come back to earth as in the case of Savitri and Satyavan. While Sri Aurobindo believes that a life divine is possible on earth Kazantzakis thinks that it is possible only at the threshold of death.

Both Sri Aurobindo and Kazantzakis have many things in common as far as mystical expressions through images and symbols are concerned. Right from the selection of the theme, there are many similarities. Sri Aurobindo has taken the Satyavan-Savitri legend from the ancient Indian epic of Vyasa called Mahabharata. Kazantzakis has chosen the legend of Odysseus from Homer’s The Odyssey. Both poets have used this theme to convey a unique and relevant message to the modern world and both have used the genre of epic poetry. However, they differ in certain regards. Though Sri Aurobindo has faithfully followed the original legend in a broad sense he has considerably altered its focus and has underlined the austerities of Aswapati and Savitri. Their quest and mystical experiences cover almost three quarters of the poem whereas the story itself is described in just a few pages.

On the contrary, Kazantzakis takes off from where Homer left off. Hence, his epic The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel is an imaginary account of the travels and tribulations of Odysseus. Kazantzakis brilliantly grafts the new story on to the stem of Homer’s Odyssey chapter XXIII. But what follows depends upon his imagination and has nothing to do with the original legend even though some of
the characters and incidents re-appear here. Unlike Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, in *The Odyssey* the physical action of the protagonist is given prominence and almost half the poem covers it.

Epics deal with perennial themes. Both *Savitri* and *The Odyssey* are great philosophical epics. *Savitri* is a quasi-divine figure (incarnated Divine Mother) whose action is decisive to redeem the soul of Satyavan (human soul) from the clutches of Death. Odysseus is the representative of the new man who is successful in transubstantiating his flesh into spirit.

Aswapati, Savitri and Odysseus have similar objectives in their lives. They are involved in a life-long search to find out the Absolute. All three are representatives of the human race who, following slightly different paths, aspire for the same end. Aswapati performs an exteriorized Yoga and Savitri an interiorized Yoga; Odysseus is immersed in an active worldly life with travels, wars, conquests, rebellions and so on. He does not follow the conventional path of mysticism like Aswapati and Savitri. But, then, there are non-conventional paths as well to attain a mystic vision of life.

One should be familiar with vitalistic mysticism to understand Kazantzakis properly. He was greatly influenced by Heracleitus, Nietzsche and Bergson and follows the vitalistic mystical tradition and his protagonist symbolizes “becoming”. Hence, one can conclude that while Aswapati and Savitri follow the Eastern mystical traditions, Odysseus practises vitalistic mysticism which is prominent in the West.

Aswapati is the king of Madra and Odysseus is the king of Ithaca. Aswapati takes up his quest for eighteen years and Odysseus spends many years on his
voyages. The former is alone in his search whereas the latter is accompanied by his close friends until the middle of the poem. After that he also becomes a lonely figure and starts his inner journeys. Critics have agreed upon the fact that Aswapati is Sri Aurobindo’s double and Odysseus that of Kazantzakis. In Greek Poetry, Trypanis comments on Kazantzakis’ The Odyssey: “The Odyssey clearly represents Kazantzakis’s own journey through the world of thought; Odysseus is none other than the poet himself in epic masquerade” (678-679).

Both Aswapati and Odysseus possess and also represent the insatiable quest for God. Trying to establish the relevance of Savitri for the modern world, Nadkarni states in Savitri: A Brief Introduction that this work touches intimately the life of each one of us because Sri Aurobindo has symbolized through this legend of Satyavan and Savitri the inner significance of our lives as well. Satyavan is the aspiration in us for God, Light, Freedom and Immortality while our lives are in bondage of fate, ignorance and death. (41)

Parkes in his article “The Tendencies of Bergsonism” expresses a similar view concerning Odysseus: “The vital flux is like a cavalry charge in which man, mounted on animality, will overwhelm all opposition, conquer perhaps even death itself, and become master of his destiny” (423).

Death plays an important role in both Savitri and The Odyssey. In Savitri, Death appears as a powerful and authoritarian God. But at the same time Death comes as human beings’ companion and accompanies them until the stipulated time arrives. The Odyssey portrays Death as a weak and feeble character who obeys the orders of Odysseus and listens to the demands of the people. In The
Odyssey Death is quite submissive. But in Savitri, Savitri defeats the God of Death and retains the soul of Satyavan and receives other boons as well.

Savitri is the incarnated Divine Mother. She is human and divine at the same time. Strictly speaking, there is no character in The Odyssey who can be compared to Savitri. In a broad sense, however, Odysseus can be compared to Savitri because, according to the Kazantzakian vision, it is God who is struggling through every man. Hence, it is God Himself (or the vital force) who is present and active in Odysseus just as the divine presence in Savitri is at work in promoting immortality to the human race. The major difference here is that in Savitri God has descended from above but in The Odyssey God is making the ascent. In both the epics, the aim of the protagonists is to enable the human race to lead a life divine.

There are a few less important characters in both the epics. In Savitri, there are Satyavan, Narad and other sages and in The Odyssey one finds Odysseus’ close friends and some representative characters like Buddha, Christ and Lenin. The common factor among them is that some of them have already been endowed with a mystical vision of life while the others are still on the search. Narad is an eternal mystic and Satyavan has received many glimpses of the mystical vision.

Prince Mōtherth (Buddha), The Negro fisher-lad (Christ), Margaro (a courtesan during Buddha’s time), The Lord of the Tower (a hedonist) are in different stages in their quest. So are the Hermit (Faust) and Captain Sole (Don Quixote). The other crew members of Odysseus, namely, Hardihood, Kentaur, Orpheus, Granite and Rocky attain freedom from the Captain later and chart their own individual paths. Odysseus is happy that each of his friends has grown wings and has started his own search. This is the ultimate aim of a master mystic: to
initiate and enable others to find their own paths in the quest for the Absolute. In this regard, Odysseus is more fortunate than Aswapati and Savitri because unlike them he could guide his fellow travellers in their quests.

Although both the epics are highly decorated with images, the focus here is on those images which are directly connected with mysticism. Both Sri Aurobindo and Kazantzakis have made use of Light/Darkness imagery in *Savitri* and *The Odyssey* respectively.

In *Sri Aurobindo: The Poet of Nature and Other Writings on Savitri*, Ganguli observes:

Savitri is a new kind of mystic poetry. It must, therefore, have a new and different technique of imagery, similes and metaphors. To the non-initiate the poem’s imagery and similes may seem vague, hazy and a technical jargon, but readers with some spiritual aptitude shall be transported to new levels of poetic delight. (114)

Light/Darkness imagery dominates both the epics. *Savitri* begins with “the huge foreboding mind of Night” (1) and ends with the advent of “a greater dawn” (724). *The Odyssey* too begins and ends with invoking the sun. Both authors use light imagery in order to depict God, Heaven, Goodness and Life and darkness to denote Satan, Hell, Evil and Death.

Among the five elements, it is fire which is used frequently in both *Savitri* and *The Odyssey*. Pandit in *Yoga in Sri Aurobindo’s Epic Savitri* writes about *agni*:

Agni, the fire of aspiration, the flaming power of will, is to be awakened in our being and kept constantly burning. All movements of life are poured into this central Fire which burns up the dross of
our impurities and enables us to offer the best in us in response to
its call. . . . And as the powers of Agni work to establish these
higher states of consciousness in us, the mortalities and darkness of
our lower nature get naturally displaced. (35)

In *The Odyssey* too fire is a major symbol. Odysseus’ soul is presented as a flame
and God as sun. Once he purifies himself thoroughly his soul leaps like a flame
and disappears in the air.

Moving over to botanical imagery, one realizes that both the poets have
used the lotus imagery. In *Savitri* there are plenty of references to the lotus. The
poet writes: “A halo of Wisdom’s lightnings for its crown, / It entered the mystic
lotus in her head, / A thousand-petalled home of power and light” (573). Pandit
interprets this thousand-petalled lotus as follows: “It is a region of pure thought
and light, the seat of the Master of the being, the highest Self. To emphasise its
boundless field, it is described as the thousand-petalled Lotus that is ever in bloom,
opening downwards on the rest of the being” (*Yoga in Savitri* 160). Kazantzakis,
being a Western poet, speaks of roses, instead of the lotus. Indicating the
relationship between God and Odysseus, the occidental poet writes: “for in his
mind dread God distilled like oil of roses” (720).

In the mystical arena, zoological imagery gets prominence and normally
birds dominate the scene. The traditional Christian image of the dove denoting the
Holy Spirit is conspicuous. Kazantzakis uses bird imagery to depict the mystic’s
agile flights and movements. Odysseus is often compared to an eagle. His spirit is
like an eagle and God is like a vulture. In Sri Aurobindo’s “Thought the Paraclete”
(*The Golden Treasury*) one finds this bird imagery:
Past the orange skies of the mystic mind
Flew my thoughts self-lost in the vasts of God.

Climbing high far ethers eternal-sunned,
Thought the great-winged wanderer paraclete

Self was left, lone, limitless, nude, immune. (81)

Moving on to inanimate imagery, one finds in *The Odyssey* “an ivory god / with seven towering heads piled on each other . . .” (149). Starting from the bestial head the ivory rod reaches at the ethereal soul in the seventh. This is the mystical transformation expected of every human being. Odysseus travels gradually from the first to the last stage and ultimately disappears like a flame into the air. In *Savitri*, one finds the “world-stair” which Aswapati uses as he proceeds in his mystical journey. Interpreting the “world-stair” of Sri Aurobindo, Pandit observes in *A Summary of Savitri*:

Looking still inward, Aswapati comes to see an immense world pile, a huge column of worlds upon worlds rising from the plinth of Matter and ascending into the unknowable summits of the Spirit. He perceives in it the great stair down which the Spirit has descended and up which the soul has to ascend. (28)

This “world-stair” is present in each individual in the form of consciousness, starting with the lowest form which is inconscience. Pandit adds, “This graded consciousness—each graded formulation exerting pressure upon others—presses all into an upward movement” (28). Both Odysseus and Aswapati have to ascend
from the lower planes to the higher planes of consciousness and this is exactly in keeping with the mystical quest.

In terms of cosmic imagery, the dominance of sun is found in both the epics. Nandakumar has commented on Sri Aurobindo’s use of the sun imagery. She writes that sun and its subsidiary images like dawn, light and fire (Agni) stand for the mystical nature of the characters and highlight the theme of the poem.

Kazantzakis is also obsessed with the sun imagery. Friar in his introduction to *The Odyssey* writes:

> The sun, flame, fire, and light compose the chief imagery of the *Odyssey*, flowing in a dazzling current throughout the poem . . . the sun revolves around *the Odyssey* in a protean metamorphosis. It stalks like a great Oriental prince . . . at times it is a god whose rays are five-fingered hands caressing the world and reviving the dead.

(xxxii-xxxiii).

In the Prologue to *The Odyssey*, the author expresses his vision using the imagery of the sun: “stones, water, fire, and earth shall be transformed to spirit, / and the mud-winged and heavy soul, freed of its flesh, / shall like a flame serene ascend and fade in sun” (1). It is obvious that the sun here represents the Absolute.

A prominent group of images and metaphors that conventionally indicate the mystical elements are the metaphors of journeys, struggles, wars and destinations. Aswapati travels through the world-stair and Savitri traverses the inner countries. Satyavan’s soul and Savitri travel through the occult worlds of Death along with Death Himself. Iyengar calls Aswapati “the pioneer Traveller of the Worlds, the leader and path-finder of the race” (*Indian Writing in English* 196).
The hero of *The Odyssey* also is a well known traveller. He is known as the world-traveller.

Kazantzakis has painted him in a large frame giving him a wide horizon, for Homer’s Odysseus had only limited aspiration—of somehow reaching his native land, Ithaca. But Kazantzakis’ Odysseus leaves Ithaca and for almost half the poem wanders throughout the world. But by the middle of the poem his quest shifts from external journeys to an internal one. The major difference here is that his shift to interior journeys takes place at a later stage whereas Aswapati and Savitri take up their quests at an early stage itself. In other words, Sri Aurobindo gives more importance to the inner quest and has devoted a lot of space to cover the experiences of Aswapati and Savitri while Kazantzakis has dedicated only half the poem to highlight his protagonist’s interior search.

Architectural imagery is used in both the epics. *Savitri* is filled with the descriptions of inner worlds and occult places. Savitri’s interior travels to discover her inner soul is illustrated in the following lines:

The mystic cavern in the sacred hill
And knew the dwelling of her secret soul.
As if in some Elysian occult depth

As if in a rock-temple’s solitude hid. (523)

Kazantzakis has not used much architectural imagery since he was interested in describing external places because Odysseus was a man of “physical” travels. In fact, one finds the names of countries and continents like Sparta, Crete, Knossos, Egypt, Africa, Nile, the South Pole and so on in *The Odyssey*. 
One comes across traditional images of the pilgrim and wanderer in both the epics. Underhill highlights the self’s three kinds of cravings and the consequent roles taken up by three kinds of persons representing the three kinds of cravings:

three deep cravings of the self, three great expressions of man’s restlessness, which only mystic truth can fully satisfy. The first is the craving which makes him a pilgrim and wanderer. It is the longing to go out from his normal world in search of a lost home, a ‘better country’; an Eldorado, a Sarras, a Heavenly Syon. The next is . . . which makes him a lover. The third is the craving for inward purity and perfection, which makes him an ascetic, and in the last resort a saint. (126-27)

In both the epics, one finds the protagonists passing through all the three stages that Underhill has talked about. Aswapati is depicted as a pilgrim and a world wanderer. He is an ascetic who spends eighteen years in tapasya. Savitri is initially portrayed as a lover who meets and unites with Satyavan in a super plane of existence. It is not physical union; rather it is the union of the eternal She and He. After Satyavan’s death, Savitri becomes a zealous ascetic.

It is in Odysseus that one finds the neat sequence of roles as described by Underhill. Odysseus is a wanderer in the strict sense and leaves Ithaca, his homeland and plunges into the vast sea with a crew. During his travels he assumes different roles. Gradually, a change takes place in him and by the middle of the voyage he becomes a renowned ascetic and finally becomes a saint revered by all.

As far as abstract imagery is concerned, the personification of Death gets prominence in both the works. Books Eight to Eleven of Savitri deal with Death
described as a person who snatches away the human soul. According to Sri Aurobindo, death is the last enemy to be defeated by humankind. It is precisely to save Satyavan from the bondage of Death that Savitri came down to earth. She finally accomplished her mission and regained Satyavan and saved the human soul.

Kazantzakis also personifies Death as a person who accompanies human beings right from their birth till the last moment of their lives. Odysseus feels Death’s presence near him and at times even talks to him. But ultimately Death is defeated by him. When the final moment comes he offers himself totally to Death but the latter is ashamed since the former has already turned his flesh into spirit. Death is terribly disappointed because he could not gather anything from him. In both the epics, Death is defeated but in different ways with varied ramifications.

A comparatist is one who makes use of the tools of comparison and contrast consciously. The present researcher has used these two tools while dealing with these two epics. This chapter has attempted a comparative study of the mystical elements in Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri and Kazantzakis’ The Odyssey, in terms of the points of convergence and divergence. The chapter has dealt with all the three mystical elements, namely, the mystical quest, mystical attainment and mystic way in terms of the protagonists’ experiences. And the second part of the discussion has concentrated on the use of images and symbols in depicting the mystical experiences of the characters. The following chapter sums up the major arguments and findings of this thesis.