CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

“Most people do not start with comparative literature,” writes Susan Bassnett but “end up with it in some way or other, travelling towards it from different points of departure” (Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction 1). She adds that some of them find their single subject-areas to be “too constraining” and at other times “a reader may be impelled to follow up what appear to be similarities between texts or authors from different cultural contexts” (1). This statement is true in the case of the present researcher. He started with Nikos Kazantzakis’ The Odyssey and while proceeding found striking similarities with Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri and subsequently undertook a comparative study of the mystical elements present in both the epics.

Sri Aurobindo: The Making of a Mystic

Sri Aurobindo, one of the prominent mystical writers hailing from the Indian sub-continent, has been introduced by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history in the following manner:

Not only Sri Aurobindo ‘the greatest living philosopher on earth’ . . . not only Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri ‘probably the greatest epic in the English language’ . . . His many-faceted personality, as it casts its lambent flame on his poems and his letters and his luminous essays and his massive treatises, attracts us and fascinates us, and at times even awes us. (20)

Aurobindo Ghose (Sri Aurobindo) was born in Calcutta on 15 August, 1872 and left Bengal for England at the age of seven for his studies. At Manchester, he was
taught privately by Rev. William H. Drewett and Mrs. Drewett who grounded him in English, Latin, French and History and at St. Paul’s (London), Dr. Walker, the High Master himself, took a deep interest in his education and pushed him rapidly in his Greek Studies.

It was a fruitful period for him, for besides securing the Butterworth Prize in Literature and the Bedford Prize in History, he won a scholarship that enabled him to proceed to Cambridge where he made a notable impression on Oscar Browning, passed the I.C.S. open competitive examination (although he could not finally join the Service) and secured a First in classical tripos at the end of his second year. To his proficiency in the classics and English were now added a growing acquaintance with German and Italian and also some knowledge of Sanskrit and Bengali. He read widely, spoke at the Majlis and wrote poetry. He left England in February 1893, having received an appointment in the service of the Maharaja of Baroda in India.

He spent the next thirteen years (1893-1906) in Baroda State Service. He taught French for some time and ultimately became a Professor of English and the Vice-Principal of Baroda College. Gradually he began to re-nationalize himself and started writing columns in Indu Prakash under the caption “New Lamps for Old”. According to Iyengar, in these early prose writings of Sri Aurobindo one can find “the sinuosity and balance, the imagery and colour, the trenchancy and sarcasm that were to distinguish the maturer prose writings of the ‘Bandemataram’ period” (Indian Writing in English 146).

In 1901, Sri Aurobindo married Mrinalini Bose from Calcutta but his hectic political and spiritual activities did not allow them to live together. He was
away from home most of the time and they lived almost in separation until Mrinalini succumbed to a severe attack of influenza in December 1918. Iyengar in *Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history* comments on the difficulties in their married life due to his highly spiritual nature: “For a girl, it is always a cross . . . to marry a man of genius; and Sri Aurobindo was more than a man of genius. He was afflicted with Divine madnesses . . .” (66).

In April 1906, Sri Aurobindo attended the Barisal Political Conference and took the plunge into politics at last. In August of the same year he left Baroda for Calcutta and became the editor of the *Bande Mataram*, an English daily started by Bepin Chandra Pal. By 1908, he had come under the influence of Yogi Lele and had his first realization of the Vedantic-Advaitic experience of utter silence of the mind for three whole days. On 4th May 1908 he was arrested in connection with the Muzaffarapore bomb outrage and was detained in the Alipur Jail. It was during these days that he had the ineffable mystic experience of “Narayana Darshan,” and this insight caused a profound change in his entire world-view. Commenting on this vision he writes:

> I walked under the branches of the tree . . . but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva . . . I looked at the prisoners in jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them, I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies. (qtd. in *Indian Writing in English* 147)

After his acquittal in the Muzaffarapore bomb outrage, he launched a weekly, *Karmayogin*, in the middle of 1909, but felt the strong pull of spiritual life and in February 1910 left Calcutta and ultimately reached Pondicherry (then a
French possession) on 4th April 1910 and remained there for the rest of his life. During his first years at Pondicherry, he was associated with the Tamil revolutionaries V. V. S. Aiyar and Subramania Bharathi. He was joined in 1914 by a French lady, Madame Mirra Richard (later known as the ‘Mother’), who recognized in him the guru of her own quest. On 15th August 1914 both of them launched *Arya*, a monthly philosophical journal devoted to the exposition of an integral view of life and existence. After 24th November 1926 (when he experienced the descent of Krishna in himself), he withdrew into complete seclusion for twelve years (1926-1938).

He continued his spiritual quest and literary work comprising poetry, drama, philosophical, religious, cultural and critical writings unceasingly till his death on 5th December 1950. Rabindranath Tagore who visited him on 29th May 1928 made the following remark which shows the greatness of Sri Aurobindo: “At the very sight I could realize that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through this long process of realization had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration” (qtd. in *Indian Writing in English* 151).

Sri Aurobindo’s Major Works

The Life Divine is Sri Aurobindo’s most famous and principal philosophical work in which he presents a theory of spiritual evolution culminating in the transformation of the human being and the advent of a divine life upon earth. It first appeared serially in the monthly review Arya from August 1914 to January 1919. Book I titled “Omnipresent Reality and the Universe” consists of
twenty-eight chapters and mentions the perennial human aspiration and the human being’s ultimate destination:

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation . . . manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of secret immortality . . . The earliest formula of wisdom promises to be its last—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality. (5-6)

While commenting upon the special feature of *The Life Divine*, Iyengar remarks that “the Indian preoccupation with the Spirit and the Western preoccupation with material life are adroitly and convincingly gathered in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy into a greater affirmation that denies neither Spirit nor Matter, but sees them both in the one utterly inclusive arc of Omnipresent Reality” (*Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history* 441).

*The Synthesis of Yoga* is a major work on Yoga and examines the traditional systems of Yoga and highlights Sri Aurobindo’s method of Integral Yoga. It first appeared serially in *Arya* from 1914 to 1921. According to him, “it will appear that a synthesis of all of them [the principal Yogic schools] largely conceived and applied might well result in an integral Yoga . . .” (41).

*Essays on the Gita* is an exposition of the spiritual philosophy and method of self-discipline of the *Bhagavad Gita*. In the last chapter titled “The Message of the Gita,” he summarizes the entire message of *Gita*:

Follow then the law of your Swadharma, do the action that is demanded by your Swabhava whatever it may be. Reject all motive
of egoism, all initiation by self-will, all rule of desire, until you can make the complete surrender of all the ways of your being to the Supreme. . . . The Divine and not you will enact his own will and work through you, not for your lower personal pleasure and desire, but for the world-purpose and for your divine good and the manifest or secret good of all. . . . The battle will be his, his the victory, his the empire. (593)

In *Letters on Yoga*, he explains his teaching and method of spiritual practice and deals with the problems that confront the seeker. *The Secret of the Veda* is a study of the *Ṛg-Veda* and its mystic symbolism, with translations of selected hymns. *The Upanishads I and II* are his translations of and commentaries on the *Isha, Kena* and other Upanishads as well as Vedantic texts.

*The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture* explain the value of Indian civilization and culture. *The Human Cycle* is concerned with the individualistic and subjective stages in the evolution of society. *War and Self-Determination* deals with social and political philosophy and the evolution of human society and the possibility of the unification of the human race.

Sri Aurobindo’s poetic career is generally divided into three phases. The Early Phase covers the poems written during his stay in England and the Baroda-period. *Songs of Myrtilla* is his first published volume of verse. Many of the poems written during the early phase were published later as *Poems* and *More Poems* in 1967 posthumously. The proposed twelve books of *Illion* (only eight and part of nine were completed), an epic entirely on the Homeric pattern, are set against the backdrop of the Trojan War in which the clash between Achilles and the
Amazonian Queen is depicted. *Urvasie, Love and Death*, and *Baji Prabhou* are three longer poems of this period which deserve a serious consideration because they handle one of his favourite themes “Love conquers Death”.

*Urvasie* is a poem of 1,500 lines and is divided into four cantos and is a metrical romance in blank verse. The original story is taken from Kalidasa. Iyengar highlights the beauty of the poem by saying that “the words move like winged squadrons, radiating a nervous potency of suggestion romantic to the marrow” (*Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history* 99).

*Love and Death* runs to about 1,000 lines and is taken from the *Mahabharatha’s* Adi Parva but Sri Aurobindo changed the name of the heroine from Pramadvura to Priyumvada. The story has its affiliation with the Hellenic myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. It is simple but fatal: Ruru, Sage Bhrigu’s grandson, loves Priyumvada, daughter of Menaca. During their lovely days Priyumvada is suddenly bitten by a snake and dies. Ruru goes in search of her to *Patalaloka* and is asked to enter into a contract with Death if he wanted to gain her back. Ruru gives half his life as ransom and brings his beloved Priyumvada back to life.

*Baji Prabhou* is a heroic poem. After fighting a disastrous battle, the Maratha King Shivaji goes to Raigurh to bring reinforcements, leaving Baji and his fifty men to guard the pass. A mighty army of Pathans, Moguls and Rajputs attack them and Baji, though mortally wounded, saved the situation with only three of the defenders left. Shivaji returns and takes charge of the battle at the end of the poem, but Baji dies and becomes, by the very act of losing his life, an
inheritor of immortality. The poem is rich in tragedy and triumph and ennobles and exalts the subject.

Some best-known mystical lyrics of the Middle Phase, like “The Bird of Fire”, “Thought the Paraclete”, “Rose of God” and “Ocean Stillness,” writes Naik, are “charged with an emotional rapture, a verbal exuberance and a passion for audacious technical innovation comparable to Hopkins in his most characteristic vein” (A History of Indian English Literature 48). In the Last Phase, Sri Aurobindo published his Last Poems, a collection mostly of sonnets. But most of his time during this period was taken up by Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol.

According to Sheo Shankar Jaiswal, Sri Aurobindo’s plays can roughly be divided into three periods, namely, pre-Baroda Period (before 1893), Baroda Period (1893-1906), and Pondicherry Period (1910-1950). The dramas belonging to the first period, The Witch of Ilni and Achab and Esarhaddon, contain intimations of the emergence of a better world. The predominant theme of the dramas of the second period, The Viziers of Bassora, The Maid in the Mill, The Birth of Sin, The House of Brut, Perseus the Deliverer, Rodogune and Prince of Edur is deliverance, obviously because of its political implications. While discussing Rodogune, Jaiswal observes that “the true feelings of Antiochus . . . who considers the national interest supreme and is ready to sacrifice his all for it, has its origin in the nationalist feelings of the dramatist himself. (Sri Aurobindo’s Plays: a Thematic Study 246). In the dramas of the last period, Eric and Vasavadutta, love is the major theme.

The Future Poetry (1953) is his poetics and shows at every step his acuteness as a literary critic and reveals his profound knowledge of poetry and
poetical art. The chapter on the Victorian Poets concentrates on the big three, Tennyson, Browning and Arnold. Then follow four chapters on “Recent English Poetry,” the focus of interest is on Whitman, Carpenter, Tagore, Philips and W. B. Yeats. Among them, Whitman is given the largest amount of space and Sri Aurobindo interprets his poetry with understanding and insight. His concept of the future poetry can be found in the following statement: “An intuitive revealing poetry of the kind which we have in view would voice a supreme harmony of five eternal powers, Truth, Beauty, Delight, Life and the Spirit. . . . The poetry of the future . . . will kindle these five lamps of our being . . .” (203-04).

**Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol**

The entire career of Sri Aurobindo may be seen as a long and arduous preparation for the writing of his *magnum opus, Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* (first definitive edition in 1954). It is an ambitious epic of 23,813 lines, in twelve books and forty-nine cantos, on which the poet worked for fifty years and more, although a part of the poem remained incomplete at the time of his death. It is an epic of humanity and divinity, of death and the life divine. *Savitri* is a retelling of the well-known legend of prince Sathyavan and Savitri, his devoted wife, who rescues him from Death, narrated in about 700 lines in the *Mahābhāratha* and is a story of pure love conquering death. It occurs in the *Vanaparva* of the *Mahābhāratha* (Cantos 291-297).

The poet makes no substantial changes in the outline of his narrative so far as the external action is concerned; but he invests the major characters with a symbolism all his own and adds a new dimension of a highly complex inner action to the original. M. P. Pandit elaborates on it in his *Introducing Savitri:*
Satyavan is one who carries the truth— satyam vahati iti. Satyavan, man carrying the divine soul, has descended into this kingdom of death. And Savitri the saviour is the daughter of Savitri, the Creator, the creative splendour. She is the divine Grace in human form. . . .

And he calls it a legend and a symbol: a legend about something that has taken place in the history of man and a symbol of what is going on and of what is going to be. (3-4)

Aswapati’s yoga, mentioned in the poem briefly, is expanded to fill slightly less than half the poem. Similarly, Savitri’s penance and her confrontation with Death are also expanded more than ten-fold so as to enable the poet present his spiritual message.

Part I of Savitri is an exposition of Aswapati’s spiritual quest cast in the form of a retrospective narration. Part II narrates Savitri’s birth and upbringing, her marriage with Satyavan and her short but happy married life till the fateful day of his death. The meeting and union of Satyavan and Savitri blend the qualities of Romantic, Platonic and Christian love. M. V. Seetaraman explains it in the following words: “The intensity of romantic love, the ascending amplitude and impersonality of Platonic love, the spiritual and transcendent personal grace of Christian love are fused by a divine alchemy and used for the transformation of the earthly tenement to shape it into a fit tabernacle of the Lord” (Savitri, The Mother: Essays on Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri, The Book of Yoga 30).

Part III describes the struggle between Savitri and Death and the final defeat of the latter. The debate between Death and Savitri is one of the highlights of the epic. Death tries to convince her that all is transient and that there is no God
and no truth in life; all ends in death. But Savitri exposes the fallacies in his argument. When Death asks her to reveal her true nature and power “a mighty transformation” comes on her and Death retires defeated. Then, Savitri sees and hears a radiant God who offers her eternal peace and bliss. She recognises him to be none other than the God of Death with his mask torn off. And she returns to the Earth along with Satyavan. She refused the highest heavens in order to return to the Earth which is indeed the intention of the Supreme. R. Y. Deshpande is of the opinion that Savitri tackles the deep-rooted problem of death. According to him, death is tackled differently by the three protagonists: “Aswapati invoking the divine grace, Savitri carrying out successfully the occult battle, and the soul of the earth called Satyavan stepping into the world of knowledge mark the unfoldment of the epic’s theme” (Perspectives of Savitri Vol. II xlix).

Sri Aurobindo turns the simple legend of Satyavan and Savitri which depicts conjugal fidelity into a memorable story of the conquest of death for humanity. In this endeavour, divine grace descends on earth and fights against the lord of Death on behalf of humanity. In this process, Sri Aurobindo, according to Pandit, is describing “his own spiritual odyssey and the saga of the Mother’s spiritual adventure in working for the evolution of a new step in consciousness beyond the mind, the vijnana, the gnosis, the supermind, and . . . a transformation of life—of death into life, of darkness into light, of non-being into being” (Introducing Savitri 6).

A similar idea is shared by Makarand R. Paranjape in The Penguin Sri Aurobindo Reader when he, commenting on Sri Aurobindo’s world-view writes that “there is a ladder of consciousness, reaching upwards from the very depths of
matter and inconsciene, through life and mind, to regions above the mind, the Overmind planes, finally to the full manifestations of Divine Perfection and glory . . .” (xxvi). He adds, “Denying nothing, including everything, yet transforming matter, life and mind, Sri Aurobindo believed that humanity must press onwards to a more glorious future” (xxx).

The glorious future that awaits human beings at the end of the long march is already experienced by the mystics here. Commenting on the destiny of this march, Nolini Kanta Gupta writes, “The human consciousness has been fleeing the Hound of Heaven down the corridors of Time, yet it will be caught in the end and wholly transmuted in the divine embrace into the substance of the Divine Himself” (On “Savitri” 25).

Nikos Kazantzakis: A Modern Odysseus in the Making

Nikos Kazantzakis (1883-1957), prominent among the modern Greek writers, was born at Heracleion, in Crete on February 18, 1883. His father, Michael Kazantzakis, a primitive farmer was unsociable and taciturn while his mother Maria from the Christodoulaki family was a sweet, submissive and saintly woman. Kazantzakis writes in his autobiographical novel Report to Greco about his special descent. On his father’s side, his ancestors were “bloodthirsty pirates on water, warrior chieftains on land, fearing neither God nor man” (24). On his mother’s side, his forefathers were innocent peasants who “bowed trustfully over the soil the entire day, sowed, waited with confidence for rain and sun, reaped, and in the evening seated themselves on the stone bench in front of their homes, folded their arms, and placed their hopes in God” (24).

The twin currents of blood, Arab from his father’s which was “fierce, hard,
and morose” (Report to Greco 30) and Greek from his mother’s which was “tender, kind, and saintly” (30) intermingled in him and battled “in their antithetical ways to govern” (49) his thoughts and actions all through his life. This dual influence helped him to formulate the concept of an ideal man as follows: “Hero together with saint: such is mankind’s supreme model. Even in my childhood I had fixed this model firmly above me in the azure sky” (71).

When he was a boy he wanted to become a “hero together with saint” (Report to Greco 71) and sold all his toys to his friends in order to buy the “Lives of the Saints” in popular, pamphlet-sized editions. These readings influenced him deeply and he admits it in his autobiography: “Be hard, be patient, scorn happiness, have no fear of death, look beyond this world to the supreme good: such was the insuppressible voice which rose from these popular editions and instructed my childish heart” (72). Furthermore, he also began to exhibit “a vehement thirst for furtive departures and distant voyages, for wanderings filled with martyrdom” (72).

Kazantzakis had his elementary education at Heracleion. Later, the Rising of 1897 in Crete for gaining freedom from the Turks forced his family to take refuge in Naxos. That was a blessing in disguise for he could join the French School of the Holy Cross directed by Franciscan monks where he learned French and Italian and assimilated the rudiments of Western culture. Completing his High School in Naxos, he studied law at the University of Athens from 1902-06. Concerning his legal studies he later wrote in Report to Greco: “The courses at law school failed to answer my soul’s needs to the slightest degree, nor did they even satisfy my intellectual curiosity” (133). He adds, “I craved some other good,
something beyond women or learning, beyond beauty—but what?” (133). These words underline the inner quest of Kazantzakis for higher things.

He studied philosophy in Paris during 1907-09. There he attended Bergson’s lectures and wrote his doctoral dissertation in 1908. He appeared in the Greek world of letters for the first time with his Serpent and Lily (1906), a novella in which flaming passion, idealization of voluntary death and romantic self-adulation get prominence.

He married Galatea from the Alexiou family and lived with her from 1910-1924. During those fifteen years he was frequently absent from his home and in 1924 was separated from his wife. He served in the Balkan war of 1912-13 as a volunteer but did not take part in actual fighting. Along with Angelos Sikelianos, a fellow poet, he undertook a long pilgrimage during 1914-15 to the holy places of Greece and was saturated in Greco-Christian spirit and Christ was his role model during this phase.

All along his life, Kazantzakis was in search of God and was well aware of the ultimate aim of his life. He writes, “I had found it necessary to purge my bowels and expel the demons inside me—wolves, monkeys, women; minor virtues, minor joys, successes—so that I could remain simply an upright flame directed toward heaven” (Report to Greco 252).

Kazantzakis, like Sri Aurobindo, was briefly involved in politics. He was appointed the Director General of the Ministry of Public Welfare from May 1919 to November 1920. Meanwhile, he undertook a national mission of organizing and restoring the Greeks evacuated from the Caucasus to their native land in 1919. He went to Vienna and stayed there from May to August 1922 where he was under the
influence of Buddha and started writing a verse play titled *Buddha*. From September that year to January 1924 he was in Berlin and wrote *The Saviors of God* in which his world-view and philosophical thinking are clearly depicted. Gradually, he renounced nationalism and later began to doubt even Christ and Buddha. Lenin began to interest him and Pandelis Prevelakis comments: “A new god rose in his mind, with the name of Lenin. . . . Lenin’s political activity attracted him as being an example, effective for our age, of how the prophet could be linked with the people” (*Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey* 18). At the same time the materialistic basis of communism did not win him over completely.

In January 1924, Kazantzakis left Germany to wander in Italy. The legend of St. Francis fascinated him and kept him at Assisi for two and a half months. From July 1924 till the spring of 1925, he was in Crete and took part in an unsuccessful illegal political action with the local Communists. When there was pressure from the authorities he withdrew to a remote house by the sea and started composing his *Odyssey*.

The long awaited journey to his dreamland Russia took place in October 1925 and he stayed there three and a half months. He served as the Greek Minister of Education for a short while in 1945 and was the President of the Greek Society of Men of Letters. In 1947-48, he was the Director of UNESCO’s Department of Translations of the Classics.

He met Eleni Samios (later Helen) in 1924 and visited her frequently in different places and from 1928 until his death they lived together. He finally settled down in Antibes with Helen and spent most of the later years of his life in France. He narrowly missed out on the Nobel Prize for literature by one vote in 1956.
Taken ill on his way to China for a second time in October 1957, he died of leukemia in Freiburg and was buried at Heracleion, his birthplace. The epitaph on his tomb reads: “I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. I am free”.

Kazantzakis was influenced by many thinkers and masters. Frederic Nietzsche led him to the furnace of existentialism. Henri Bergson convinced him about the primacy of the spirit over matter. Karl Marx attracted him with the theory of dialectical materialism and class struggle. Buddha urged him to renounce the world and Christ haunted him with his all-embracing love. He attempted to synthesize these apparently disparate world-views. Novelist, dramatist, poet and journalist, Kazantzakis’ philosophy consists largely in a pioneering attempt to retain a spiritual world-view.

He, being a versatile genius has produced novels, dramas, poetry, travelogues, essays and translations. The prominent novels are: Serpent and Lily (1906), Toda Raba (1929), The Rock Garden (1936), Zorba the Greek (1943), Christ Recrucified/The Greek Passion (1948), Fratricides (1954), Freedom or Death (1949-50), The Last Temptation (1950-51), Saint Francis (1953) and Report to Greco (Autobiographical Novel 1955-56). The Masterbuilder (1909), Comedy (1909), Nikephoros Phokas (1915), Odysseus (1915), Christ (1915), Othello Returns (1937), Melissa (1937), Julian the Apostate (1939), Buddha (1943), Prometheus the Fire-bringer; Prometheus Bound; Prometheus Unbound (trilogy 1943), Kapodistrias (1944), Constantine Palaiologos (1944), Sodom and Gomorrah (1948), Kouros (1949) and Christopher Columbus (1949) are his important plays. Terzinas (1932-37) and The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel (1938) are his contributions to the poetic genre. He has a good number of essays to his credit:
The Sickness of Our Age (1906), Friederich Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Law and the State (1908), H. Bergson (1912), Spiritual Exercises/Saviors of God (1923) and Rosa Luxemburg (1927). Letters from Paris (1907-8), Impressions of Soviet Russia (1927), Spain (1933), Japan and China (1935), Contemporary Greece: Journey to the Morea (1937), England (1940) and Journeying (posthumously published in 1961) are his travelogues. His translations are Dante’s Divine Comedy (1932), Contemporary Spanish Lyrical Poetry (1933), Goethe’s Faust, Part One (1936). Homer’s Iliad (1942) and Odyssey (1943-44) that he translated with Prof. I. Th. Kakridis.

Kazantzakis’ Major Works

The soul of man is the prime concern of Kazantzakis. He writes: “My entire soul is a cry, and all my work the commentary on that cry” (Report to Greco 15). A brief account of Kazantzakis’ major works will help us to understand him better.

His tragic play The Master Builder is heavily influenced by Nietzschean ideas which, according to Prevelakis, is the depiction of a superman hero who “molds his destiny like dough, sacrifices domestic happiness to his work and dedicates himself to purity for the sake of his ideal” (Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey 15). After a visit to Mount Athos, he wrote a verse play called Christ in 1915. This was followed by two further tragedies, Buddha and Odysseus in 1922. In these, he illustrates the need for a new spiritual orientation after World War I.

The Saviours of God: Spiritual Exercises (1927) contains the philosophical kernel of his subsequent poetry and prose. In the Prologue he writes:

The goal of ephemeral life is immortality! In the temporary living organism these two streams collide: (a) the ascent toward
composition, toward life, toward immortality; (b) the descent toward decomposition, toward matter, toward death. . . . But both opposing forces are holy. It is our duty, therefore, to grasp that vision which can embrace and harmonize these two enormous, timeless, and indestructible forces, and with this vision to modulate our thinking and our action. (43-44)

Passing over to Kazantzakis’ fictional works, we come across the autobiographical novel Report to Greco (1961). It is one of the last pieces he wrote before he died. It paints a vivid picture of his childhood in Crete, still occupied by the Turks, and steadily grows into a spiritual quest that takes him to Athens, Assisi, Jerusalem, Paris, Vienna, Berlin and finally back to Crete. In the introduction to this work he informs the readers:

During my entire life one word always tormented and scourged me, the word ascent . . . the decisive steps in my ascent were four, and each bears a sacred name: Christ, Buddha, Lenin, Odysseus. This bloody journey from each of these great souls to the next is what I shall struggle to mark out in this Itinerary . . . (15)

This novel, written in the form of a report in 31 chapters along with a prologue and epilogue, is submitted to El Greco, one of his ancestral grandfathers.

Kazantzakis did not begin writing novels until after his sixtieth year. Zorba The Greek (1946), his first successful novel, became so popular that it won the prize for the best foreign novel published in France in 1954. In it, he makes a philosophical analysis of the divide between the Apollonian and Dionysian strands of Hellenistic culture. It tells the story of Zorba, a magnificently vital man who is
immersed in the pleasures of the flesh. He is sensual, very active and energetic. It also presents Zorba’s master who is the author himself. He is a man of reading and contemplation. He is passive and inactive. Kazantzakis applies Bergsonism in creating Zorba and his master.

H. B. Parkes explains the core of Bergsonism in an essay titled “The Tendencies of Bergsonism”: “Human life oscillates between two poles—the pole of drunkenness whose god is Dionysus and the pole of dream whose god is Apollo” (424). In this novel, Zorba represents Dionysus and his master stands for Apollo. The principal theme of Zorba the Greek is the conflict between action and contemplation.

Freedom and Death (1953), another important novel, deals with the concept of liberty, told through the story of a dour resistance fighter in the Cretan struggle for independence from the Turks. Roderick Beaton in “Of Crete and Other Demons: A Reading of Kazantzakis’s Freedom and Death” writes about the three new dimensions that emerged from the novel in recent years:

Once seen as a patriotic evocation of the Greek nationalist struggle . . . can now be seen to revolve around a number of interrelated conflicts: sexual (in the overlapping, triangular relationships of Michalis-Nuri-Emine and of Michalis-Polyxigis-Emine); internal (Michalis’s struggles with his ‘demons’); and ideological/psychological (the ‘gravitational’ pull of Crete and the ancestors versus the centrifugal, enlightening trajectory of Kosmas). (195)

Christ Re-crucified (The Greek Passion) (1954) is a reenactment of Christ’s passion set in a Greek village, Lykovrissi. The faithful in that village gather every
Easter Sunday to select persons for the key roles of Jesus and the disciples and they prepare the whole year for the next passion narrative. Manolios is selected for the role of Jesus. The author makes a clever twist in the plot. The selected villagers are compelled to live the passion narrative in their lives. They support a band of refugees from the neighbouring villages uprooted by the Turks against the will of their local religious leaders. In the climax, the clash becomes intense and Manolios is killed by the local people under the leadership of Pope Grigoris with the permission of the Turkish Agha. Moved by Manolios’ death, Pope Fotis, the refugee Christians’ leader, sighs: “In vain, my Christ, in vain . . . two thousand years have gone by and men crucify you still. When will You be born, my Christ, and not be crucified any more, but live among us for eternity?” (467).

The Last Temptation (1955) is a controversial novel in which Kazantzakis tries to present the temptations of Christ with imaginative illustrations. It got an entry into the Roman Catholic Index of Forbidden Books. It pained the author much because he did not want to despise Christ; on the contrary, he wished to highlight the attacks of the Devil against Jesus. In this novel, he also presents the predicament of Jesus in the making of the Messiah.

Through Saint Francis (1956), Kazantzakis paid homage to his favourite hero, St. Francis of Assisi. In this novel, he presents an impressive picture of St. Francis, a man who negates his flesh completely and transforms it into spirit. It also shows how far a man can ascend in spiritual life.

Kazantzakis has also written a good number of travelogues. They are not merely descriptions of landscapes but are the faithful recordings of his
philosophies and thoughts during his entire life span. Commenting on his travelogues, Prevelakis in *Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey* writes:

Two different types of writer here work together: the one has gleaned from land and sea, the other has studied the literature of the ages. On the one hand there is exactness of observation and precision of expression, and on the other hand there is a quotation from a buried text, the verse of a forgotten poem. Into these travelogues more intellectual themes are introduced: morality of civilizations, psychology of peoples, heroes of thought and action, monuments and landscapes; and besides these themes, love of beauty, yearning for universal justice, wrestling with the problem of existence—the endless daydreams of an ardent soul. (20)

*The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*

Kazantzakis’ magnum opus *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* (1938) is a philosophical epic. It continues the story of Odysseus from the point where Homer’s *Odyssey* leaves off. It is three times the size of his predecessor’s original consisting of 33,333 lines of an extremely unfamiliar seventeen-syllable unrhymed iambic measure of eight beats. W. B. Stanford is of the opinion that “both the works of Kazantzakis’s *Odyssey* and Joyce’s *Ulysses* are concerned with the modern man in search of a soul, and both utilize the framework of Homer’s *Odyssey* as reference, though in strikingly different ways” (qtd. in *The Odyssey* x). In an earlier novel, *Toda Raba*, Kazantzakis wrote: “You know that my particular leader is not one of the three leaders of the human spirit, neither Faust, nor Hamlet, nor Don Quixote, but only Don Odysseus” (*The Odyssey* xxvi).
The publication of this epic poem consisting of 24 books (one for each letter of the Greek alphabet) received mixed responses in the academic circle, for the poem was filled with disturbing innovations such as simplified spelling and syntax, ruthless removal of accentual marks retaining only the acute accent for certain syllables and the inclusion of a special lexicon of almost 2,000 words unfamiliar to the academics but used by the shepherds and fishermen of the islands and villages of Greece. Justifying the seventeen-syllable line, Kazantzakis writes: “this followed more truly the rhythm of my blood when I lived the Odyssey. A verse is not a garment with which one dresses one’s emotion in order to create song; both verse and emotion are created in a momentary flash, inseparably, just as a man himself is created, body and soul, as one being” (The Odyssey xxvii).

According to Kimon Friar, the translator, “Kazantzakis and Odysseus are creatures of double vision . . . one ever ascending toward composition, toward life, toward immortality, and the other descending toward decomposition, toward matter, toward death . . .” (The Odyssey xxvi). Although the Greek original is suppler flowing with liquid polysyllables and easily formed compound words, the English version is perhaps stronger, due to condensed lines and the greater prevalence of monosyllables based on Anglo-Saxon roots. “At the core of Kazantzakis’s thought and his Dionysian method,” writes Friar, “lies Bergson’s concept of life as the expression of an élan vital, a vital or creative impulse, a fluid and persistent creation that flows eternally and manifests itself in ever-changing eruptive phenomena” (The Odyssey xvi).
A Note on Comparative Literature

This thesis being a comparative study of the mystical elements in Savitri and The Odyssey, it is necessary to give a brief account of Comparative Literature. According to Bassnett, comparative literature “involves the study of texts across cultures . . . it is interdisciplinary and . . . it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space” (Comparative Literature 1). A scientific definition of comparative literature will end up in a difference of opinion between the French school and the liberal American school. The main representatives of the French school are Paul Van Tieghem, Jean-Marie Carré and Marius-François Guyard and the prominent scholars in the American school are Henry Remak, Newton Stalknecht and Horst Frenz.

Ulrich Weisstein begins his Comparative Literature and Literary Theory (1968) with the definition given by Carré in Guyard’s La Littérature Compare: “Comparative Literature is a branch of literary history: it is the study of international spiritual relations, of rapports de fait between Byron and Pushkin, Goethe and Carlyle, Walter Scott and Alfred de Vigny, and between the works, the inspirations and even the lives of writers belonging to different literatures” (3). Originally, Comparative Literature was a branch of literary history.

Paul Van Tieghem, an influential critic from the French school, proclaimed his definition of Comparative Literature in 1931:

Comparative Literature aims primarily . . . at studying the works of various literatures in their interrelationship. Conceived in such general terms, it comprises . . . the mutual relations between Greek and Latin literature, the debt of modern literature (since the Middle
Ages) to ancient literature, and, finally, the links connecting the various modern literatures. The latter field of investigation, which is the most extensive and complex of the three, is the one which Comparative Literature, in the sense in which it is generally understood, takes for its province. (qtd. in Weisstein 5)

As mentioned earlier, the French approach was rigid and the scholars belonging to that school even tried to determine the exact province of Comparative Literature and pointed out the exclusion zones. Thus, comparative literary study between two languages, for example French and German or English and Italian, was permitted while a study between two authors working in the same language but of different in their nationalities not acceptable. So, a comparative study between a Canadian and a Kenyan author writing in English was not possible.

René Wellek accuses Van Tieghem and the French group for restricting the scope of Comparative Literature which led to its decline. As a result, the number of literary theoreticians increased whereas the number of comparatists decreased. In 1961, in a collection of essays titled *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective* edited by Stalknecht and Frenz, Remak attempted to define what came to be known as the ‘American school’:

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand, and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g. painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, the social sciences (e.g. politics, economics, sociology), the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the
comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression.

(3)

Charles Mills Gayley, who introduced a course on Comparative Literature named the ‘Great Books’ Course at Berkeley in the 1890s, actually is the forerunner of the American School. He had proposed that comparative literature should be seen as “‘nothing more or less’ than literary philology, and formulated an early version of the American school definition, by insisting on the importance of psychology, anthropology, linguistics, social science, religion and art in the study of literature” (Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction 33).

After World War II, this ‘Great Books’ model of Gayley gained prominence due to its emphasis on the humanizing power of books to bring forth international harmony. François Jost, like Gayley and others before him, proposed Comparative Literature as some kind of world religion. For them, all cultural differences disappear when people read great works and art is seen as an instrument of universal harmony. In their standpoint, a comparatist is one who facilitates the spread of that harmony. Thus, a generation of New World students of Comparative Literature focused on texts rather than contexts.

Wellek who started as a European formalist and ended up as the grand old man of American comparative literature states in his Discriminations that Comparative Literature “is identical with the study of literature independent of linguistic, ethnic, and political boundaries. It cannot be confined to a single method . . . nor can comparison be confined to actual historical contacts” (20-21). He adds
that Comparative Literature “will flourish only if it shakes off artificial limitations and becomes simply the study of literature” (21).

Most Comparative Literature scholars agree that it acquired its name from a series of French anthologies used for the teaching of literature titled *Cours de littérature compare* (1816). Wellek suggests that “the German version of the term, ‘vergleichende Literaturgeschichte’, first appeared in a book by Moriz Carrière in 1854 while the earliest English usage is attributed to Matthew Arnold who referred to ‘comparative literatures’ in the plural in a letter of 1848” (*Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* 12). Arnold, in his inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1857, stated, “Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures” (qtd. in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* 1). Goethe also remarked, “It is becoming more and more obvious to me that poetry is the common property of all mankind” (qtd. in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* 2) and he used the term *Weltliteratur*, Literature with a capital L.

According to Weisstein, either Jean-Jacques Ampère or Abel François Villemain must be “regarded as the true father of a systematically conceived Comparative Literature in France - or anywhere, for that matter” (171). The first journal on the subject titled *Acta comparisonis litterarum universarum* was brought out in 1879 by Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz, a German speaking scholar, and it was a multilingual publication. This was followed by two periodicals edited by Max Koch, *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturgeschichte* (1887-1910) and *Studien zur vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte* (1901-1909).
The first Chair of Comparative Literature was set up in Lyon in 1897 and subsequently other Chairs appeared in France. In the United States, meanwhile, Charles Chauncey Shackwell began teaching a course in ‘general or comparative literature’ at Cornell from 1871 onwards and Charles Mills Gayley taught comparative literary criticism at the University of Michigan from 1887 onwards. But the first Chair in the US was established at Harvard in 1890. As early as 1900, Ferdinand Brunetière remarked that the history of Comparative Literature will sharpen “the understanding of the most national characteristics of our great writers. We establish ourselves only in opposing; we are defined only by comparing ourselves to others; and we do not know ourselves when we know only ourselves” (qtd. in Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction 24). In Brunetière’s opinion, self-knowledge is possible only with an in-depth study of Comparative Literature.

There were also arguments against the validity of Comparative Literature. A prominent attack came from Benedetto Croce in 1903 when he argued that “comparative literature was a non-subject . . . the exploration of ‘the vicissitudes, alterations, developments and reciprocal differences’ of themes and literary ideas across literatures, and concluded that ‘there is no study more arid than researches of this sort’” (qtd. in Bassnett 2). In the same year, Gayley, one of the founders of North American Comparative Literature School, refuted Croce’s views. Later, Wellek and Warren in their Theory of Literature, a book that was enormously significant in promoting Comparative Literature, declared that “there is one poetry, one literature, comparable in all ages, developing, changing, full of possibilities” (43).
Just like the French school, the German comparative school also started as a branch of literary history rather than literary criticism and theory. According to Weisstein, Kasper Daniel Morhof “may be considered as the actual founder of the discipline labeled General Literary History (Allgemeine Literaturgeschichte)” (185). But importance to the comparative mode in Germany was given by Wilhelm Scherer and Erich Schmidt. A more systematic approach to German Comparative Literature can be seen in Moriz Carrière’s book titled Die Poesie, ihr Wesen und ihre Formen, mit Grundziigen der vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte.

Koch and his journal titled Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte founded in 1887 caused a breakthrough in German comparative literature. In the first issue itself, he proposed some relevant areas of specialization in Comparative Literature:

1) the art of translation; 2) the history of literary form and themes, and the study of supranational influences; 3) the history of ideas . . . 4) the ‘ties between political and literary history’; 5) the ‘ties between literature and the plastic arts, between philosophical and literary developments, etc.’; and 6) the ‘science of folklore . . . ’ (qtd. in Weisstein 190)

Passing on to Comparative Literature in Britain, one finds out that the spread of English as the universal language of communication and commerce and the decline of classical languages had a strong impact on English comparative studies. The British scholars, writes Bassnett, “occupied a rather curious middle position, shifting uneasily between the two schools [French and American]” (42).
The most original contribution of British Comparative Literature, according to Bassnett, “is the concept of ‘placing’, the juxtaposing of texts in order to create new readings across cultures” (42). Siegbert Prawer, a prominent British comparatist, defines placing as “the mutual illumination of several texts, or series of texts, considered side by side; the greater understanding we derive from juxtaposing a number of (frequently very different) works, authors and literary traditions” (Comparative Literary Studies 102).

In the 1970s, a drastic change occurred in the field of Comparative Literature with the advent of alternative models from outside the Euro-American tradition. Along with the West, gradually the East and the Latin American countries came to the forefront of the comparative studies but with their own theories and strategies. The establishment of Schools or Departments of African Studies, Oriental Studies, Caribbean Studies, Latin American Studies, Arabic Studies, Slavonic Studies, Central Asian Studies and Scandinavian Studies offer a different set of possibilities for comparative work.

In Bassnett’s view, it is the post-colonial urge that strongly paved the way for Comparative Literature in the Third World countries. She states that the growth “of national consciousness and awareness of the need to move beyond the colonial legacy has led significantly to the development of comparative literature in many parts of the world, even as the subject enters a period of crisis and decay in the West” (8). Comparative Literature employs “both indigenous traditions and imported (or imposed) traditions, throwing open the whole vexed problem of the canon” (8) in places like China, Brazil, India and many other African nations where Comparative Literature has flourished.
Comparative Literature in Africa came to the forefront with writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong’O, Chidi Amuta and Nadine Gordimer. They protested against the European dictatorial attitude concerning the universality of literature. Thiong’O and his colleagues even abolished the English Department at the University of Nairobi and established two broad-based comparative departments to mark their protest. One department focused on the study of languages and the other on the study of literatures. In his essay, “On the Abolition of the English Department,” Thiong’O argued that “by continuing to teach the English tradition in an African context, Africa was turned into an extension of the West” (qtd. in Bassnett 74). In order to avoid such situations any further, they proposed an “Africa-centred consciousness, and a study of literature that starts with Africa and considers other literatures in relation to that African centre” (75). This model of Comparative Literature rejects the old Eurocentric models that refused to compare their literature with non-European texts on account of unbridgeable differences.

Shifting to Indian Comparative Literature, one finds that it is directly linked to the rise of Indian nationalism. Instead of looking at literature from Western points of view, the West is scrutinized from without. The superior stance of the former imperialist nations is being rejected by the present Indian scholars. Starting with their home culture they look outward rather than begin from the European model and look inward. Hence in the Indian comparative context, the main objective is to modernize the literature departments and discover the greatness of Indian literatures.

C. D. Narasimhaiah in his English Studies in India: Widening Horizons (2002) declares: “I have, on various occasions, repeated my conviction that the
future of English Departments in this country belongs to Comparative Literature” (19) and comments that “you can’t find a more fertile soil for Comparative Literature to thrive in than the Indian society with its pluralism and Hinduism in particular, with its ocean-like absorbent quality” (19).

Analysing East-West literary relations, Swapan Majumdar argues in Comparative Literature, Indian Dimensions that Indian literature “should be compared not with any single literature of the West, but with the concept of Western Literature as a whole, while the regional literatures should be assigned the status of constituent sub-national literatures in India” (54). He also argues along with many African, Asian and Latin American scholars that the critical tools borrowed from the West are not suitable for the study of non-Western literatures.

There are a few Euro-American scholars who have realized the depth of the Indian contributions. Narasimhaiah in English Studies in India: Widening Horizons presents the views of a few well-known non-Indian scholars on the status of the Indian writings. He remarks, for instance, that even “T. S. Eliot acutely aware of the absence of Tradition, could turn to traditional societies like the Indian for stimulus. He even claimed that the philosophers of Europe were like schoolboys compared with the Indian thinkers” (12).

Comparative Literature, among other aspects, examines about influence or affinity or tradition of literary works in relation to one another and other forms of human expression as well. It also handles studies of movements and trends. Study of themes and motifs too come under this banner. Indra Nath Choudhuri’s Comparative Indian Literature: Some Perspectives proposes “the study of theory-oriented poetics and text-oriented criticism” (3) as a vital part of Comparative
Most cases of influence, according to Ihab Hassan, can only be considered as affinities and he advises the need for distinguishing the two:

When we say that A has influenced B, we mean that after literary or aesthetic analysis we can discern a number of significant similarities between the works of A and B. . . . So far we have established no influence; we have only documented what I call affinity. For influence presupposes some manner of causality. (qtd. in Weisstein 39)

According to Choudhuri, affinity “consists in resemblances in style, structure, mood or idea between two works which have no other connections, e.g., Shakuntala may be compared to Doll’s House” (9).

The study of themes and movements is on the increase today. The thematic approach, according to Prawer, shows how and why “a theme might appear and disappear across cultures. In other words, the study of a theme ‘should interest students of literature no less than students of society and political ideas’” (116). According to Dasgupta, thematology has received “a new impetus from the psychoanalytic as well as the stylistic schools of criticism, from Bhaktin and his theory of intertextuality, his thematico-formal study of the ‘carnivalesque’ and from the writings of Michel Riffaterre” (Comparative Literature: Theory and Practice 21). He also talks about four broad areas of thematology as stated in Yves Chevrel’s book: “(a) researches on the imaginary . . . (b) studies centered on one or other of the great ‘universal’ thematics . . . (c) studies in typology . . . (d) work centred around key concepts . . .” (22).
Comparative Literature today, according to Bassnett is “alive and well and thriving under other nomenclature” (138), and one of the key areas is Translation Studies. As early as 1877, Lomnitz made a far-reaching statement in favour of translation in the development of Comparative Literature. Koch also saw translation as “a fundamental area of comparative enquiry, and set German literature and its history as the ‘point of departure and the centre of the efforts which the Zeitschrift intends to aid’” (Bassnett 25). The cultural shift in translation studies which took place in the 1980s enlarged the area of Cultural Studies which can be considered the latest offshoot of Comparative Literature.

Choudhuri claims that comparison is the main tool for the study of more than one literature. At the same time, this does not mean that a comparative study should exclusively be comparative on every page, but instead its total emphasis, weight and implementation must be comparative. Along with comparison, contrast also is a tool which helps in this study. Choudhuri adds, “It is generally synchronic and not diachronic because it crosses time and space. Of course, chronology cannot be ignored, but to be blinded by it is to miss the significant parallel across time and space and the interesting differences” (6).

In Chasles’ view, Comparative Literature is “to be before anything else, a ‘pleasure trip’, involving a look at great figures from the sixteenth century onwards” (qtd. in Bassnett 21). Shakespeare, Byron, Balzac, Zola, Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekov, Gorky, Sholokov, Prem Chand, Rabindranath Tagore, Goethe, Thomas Mann, Hemingway, Cervantes, Neruda, Carpentier and Marquez are among the great figures comparatists have already worked on contributing to the expansion of Comparative Literature. Communication,
commingling and sharing were key words in this view of comparative literature which depoliticized writing and aspired towards universal concord.

Writers who made human concerns and situations the subjects of their writings are universally understood and appreciated. Moreover, they have been able to withstand the onslaught of time and space. Comparatists today should dare to navigate through the “labyrinth of corridors” finding out the “deep structures” and undertake valuable comparative studies which will surpass time and space.

**A Brief Note on Mysticism**

The researcher has undertaken a comparative study of the mystical elements in Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* and Kazantzakis’ *The Odyssey*. Both these epics deal with mystical dimensions and their protagonists undertake a quest which leads them to an immaterial and final Being which philosophers call the Absolute and the theologians, God. Evelyn Underhill states that mystics “should claim from us the same attention that we give to other explorers of countries in which we are not competent to adventure ourselves . . .” (*Mysticism* 4). Hence, the researcher tries to focus on the mystical adventures undertaken by the leading characters of both the epics and highlight their spiritual pursuits.

There are different stages in the mystical journey. It starts with the quest which begins with the awakening of the self. This compels a human being to abandon the life of the senses and lead a spiritual life in harmony with the Absolute. Then he/she embarks on a new journey which is drastically different from all others. This search gradually takes him/her to a mystic realm and consequently he/she is endowed with blissful experiences. A detailed discussion of Mysticism can be found in the second chapter.
Survey of Literature

Scholars have approached *Savitri* from different perspectives. Some of them have taken up the psychological perspective such as a Jungian interpretation of *Savitri* and archetypal patterns in *Savitri*. Some others have written their theses on the feminine principle in *Savitri*. Studies of the Divine Mother and Her various aspects in *Savitri* have also been done. The poem has also been studied on the basis of legend, imagery and symbolism. It has been also treated as an epic of the twentieth century. Spiritual aspects and topics like the quest for perfection in *Savitri* and a critical study of *Savitri* from the *vedic* perspective have also been undertaken.

A few comparative studies such as *Savitri* and Dhyaneshwari, The philosophy of the superman in the works of G. B. Shaw and Sri Aurobindo, A study of Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* in the light of the *Bhagavat Gita*, A Comparative study of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Sri Aurobindo, The concept of Man with special reference to F. Nietzsche, H. Bergson and Sri Aurobindo, and The poetry of Bhagawan Ramana Maharishi and Sri Aurobindo: A study in mysticism have also been undertaken.

Similarly, quite a few scholars have focused their attention on Kazantzakis’ works. Most of them have studied his novels. Some have also focused on *The Odyssey*. *Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey: A Study of the Poet and the Poem* by Prevelakis is one of the earliest studies conducted on this poem. Since then very few have taken it for research purposes. As per the literature survey, no scholar has studied this poem from a purely mystical perspective. A comparative study of Sri Aurobindo and Kazantzakis has not been done so far and the present researcher has
chosen these two authors for an in-depth study with special reference to mystical elements in their works.

**Research Gap and Potential**

Sri Aurobindo is familiar to the Indian readers and many scholars have already researched his writings. Some of them have focused on *Savitri* and brought to light various meanings embedded in the poem. But very few have concentrated on the mystical elements and the present researcher found this area of mysticism waiting to be explored.

Kazantzakis, though not very familiar to the Indian audience, is a great writer of Greek descent. His works, especially novels, have been widely used for researches in the West. But only a few have worked on his epic poem *The Odyssey*. The present researcher wrote his M. Phil dissertation on Kazantzakis’ *Zorba the Greek* and Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. Later, while searching for a suitable topic for his doctoral programme he hit upon the idea of comparing Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* and Kazantzakis’ *The Odyssey*. The researcher is amazed to find that these two works promote a similar theme and message and both deal with mystical dimensions. Besides, no study has yet been undertaken on these two works from a comparative angle, especially the mystical perspective.

Sri Aurobindo and Kazantzakis were contemporaries and had almost the same vision of life. Both were trained in the Western educational system and were fond of Homer. Both had been deeply influenced by the philosophical thoughts of Bergson. Both epics address eternal questions such as the origin, meaning and purpose of human life, the inevitability of death and the possibilities of a rebirth or afterlife.
The researcher in this thesis titled “A Comparative Study of the Mystical Elements in Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* and Kazantzakis’ *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*” focuses on the mystical elements present in both the epics. The protagonists of both the epics pass through different phases in their mystical quest, though in varying degrees and methods. The researcher also deals with the images and symbols used by both the poets. Both writers have employed a lot of mystical images and symbols to convey their ideas and visions. Starting from the characters’ symbolism, the thesis focuses on light/darkness imagery, elemental, botanical, zoological, inanimate and cosmic imagery.

The researcher has analysed both the epics individually and also comparatively from a mystical point of view. The comparative approach has enabled him to bring forward the convergences and divergences found in these two epics hailing from the East and the West respectively. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (*7th* edition) has been followed as far as methodology is concerned.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the major works of Sri Aurobindo and Kazantzakis and includes a note on Comparative Literature and Mysticism. It also presents the survey of literature and the identification of the research gap and potential. The second chapter is an in-depth study on mysticism. It also deals with different kinds of mysticism and the ineffability of it and the relationship between mysticism and literature and the expression of mysticism through images and symbols. The third chapter deals with the mystical elements in *Savitri* and their expression through images and symbols. The fourth chapter examines the mystical elements in *The Odyssey* and their
expression through images and symbols. The fifth chapter undertakes a
comparative study of both the epics and examines the points of convergence and
divergence from a mystical perspective. The concluding chapter sums up the major
arguments and findings of the entire thesis.