

Preface

Kazantzakis, as the representational writer of Greece in twentieth century, was the voice of his time which was marked by social upheavals and political unrest. His novels are narratives of human struggles to gain freedom from social and religious suppression just as they are celebrations of the dignity of man, justice and freedom of expression. Deeply meditative, his soul was a battleground of spiritual and philosophical conflicts which motivated him to seek the purpose of individual life which he found in the salvation of humanity. Away from the humdrum of the contemporary world shaken by cultural decadence and social disorder, he set out on a spiritual odyssey only to discover that life is a constant struggle for freedom at three levels – political, spiritual and religious. He created heroes who strive to liberate themselves from the shackles of outworn values and antiquated canons which posit obstacles in the path of self actualization.

Like a mystic, he tried to discover his own God and interpreted religious and political dogmas in the light of a profound wisdom accumulated through omnivorous reading and extensive travel. The urge to effect the reformation of the world and the redemption of the mankind from poverty and suffering propelled him. His novels reflect the Nietzschean philosophy of will to power and overman and the desire of Deleuze and Guattari which trigger

the protagonists to posit constructive critique of life and to rise above their narrow nationalistic and religious confines. Life as transubstantiation of matter into spirit is the foundation of his writings and he believed that love and mercy are the panacea for the evils of society. His hermeneutic reading of God as the fighter of evils beyond the religious periphery and his contention that man contains God within himself represent a higher philosophic point in Modern Literature.

Kazantzakis had his own notion of art and he was neither a propagandist nor a follower of the art for art's sake school. He was pressured to use social realism in his novels but he never conceded to it promulgating instead his own idea of novel and life. At the same time, he never agreed that art should glorify beauty alone as he felt that a real artist was a rebel who always carried the great responsibility of social commitment. He advocated a virile amoral paganism. He, like Nietzsche, worshipped the iron-willed men of history and despised the modern day-democratizing and socializing children of the state. Aristocratic nationalism held sway over him because of the Nietzschean assumption that leadership must emanate from those personalities whose sublime qualities differentiate them from democratic herd. Theodora Vasils comments:

What he has to say about the follies of nations, about the blindness of religious passions, about self-righteousness, about

ignorance and greed, and about thoughtless inhumanity can still instruct us. What he has to say about the shortcoming of his own people (wherever they may happen to be found) also continue to warn us. (270)

The fusion of the divine and the natural in his mind, engendered through his knowledge of Classical and Byzantine Greek philosophy and art, provided him with sense of humanity and artistic vitality and kept him away from the corrupting influence of modernism. Through the protagonists of his novels Kazantzakis explores the meaning of liberty and fraternity and the eternal hope of redemption, deliverance and salvation. They are destroyers and preservers; soldiers, philosophers, pragmatists and idealists. As the epitaph on his tomb reads 'I hope for nothing, I fear nothing, I am free,' his heroes battle for the ultimate aim of their lives - freedom and salvation and they actualize it through their martyrdom. Kimon Friar notes:

A man, writes Kazantzakis, has three duties. His first duty is to the mind which imposes order on disorder, formulates laws, builds bridges over the unfathomable abyss, and sets up rational boundaries beyond which man does not dare to go. But his second duty is to the heart, which admits of no boundaries, which yearns to pierce beyond phenomena and to merge with something beyond mind and matter. His third duty is to free

himself from both mind and heart, from the great temptation of the hope which both offer of subduing phenomena or of finding the essence of things. A man must then embrace the annihilating abyss without any hope, he must say that nothing exists, neither life nor death, and must accept this necessity bravely, with exultation and song. He may then build the affirmative structure of his life over this abyss in an ecstasy of magic joy. (xiii)

The failure of communism to provide a new course for the human spirit forced him to embark on a fresh action plan for a better life based on movement, heterogeneity, novelty and creation. His philosophy of meta-communism which is the merger of spirituality and communism is manifest in the ideals of his heroes. Kazantzakis conceived art as a force which can enable man to rise above the constraints of science, reason, empiricism and logic so that he can achieve sublimation of life which is, for him, the transubstantiation of matter into spirit. Through the invention of new myths, legends and history, art provides meaning and order to the world which is troubled by the violent socio-political undercurrents of the age.

Kazantzakis was an ardent admirer of Nietzsche whose ideas of will to power and the overman are pronounced throughout his oeuvre. Life in Paris refined his world view through the introduction to the philosophies of

Nietzsche and Henry Bergson and, consequently, his insight into the ontology of human beings and the world at large experienced a radical alteration. Kazantzakis projected Nietzsche's qualities of sincerity and immeasurable egoism in his characters which made them guardians of justice and alleviators of misery.

Nietzsche's philosophy of will to power and Deleuze's desire are best understood as theorisations of the ontology of becoming, and as attempts to redeem its reality. All events, movements and the process of becoming itself could be understood as a fixing of relations of degree and power, and as a constant struggle therein. They form the essence of life and can be encapsulated as the meeting point of the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, and form-giving forces that give fresh direction to individual lives.

Will to power and desire trigger a passion in the individual to actualize his/her life through a goal specific progress. Together they designate a theatrical space where the endless play of unequal and colliding power centres and a continuous shift of power relationships unfold. The domination through power, which elevates an individual from the herd, is the outcome of a relentless self-overcoming of oneself. He/she is to forfeit the customary gratification of material life for the pain of sacrifice which acts as a catalyst to reach higher planes of ascendancy and of self actualization.

The will to power and desire motivate the individual to strive towards a continuous self overcoming which in turn transforms him/her into an overman, who, in discovering himself/herself also discovers that it is in his/her best interest to reject received notions of values and learns to trust what he/she unearths within himself/herself. He/she creates his/her own sense of good and evil, based on that which helps him/her to succeed or fail: good being the experiences which help him/her to realize his/her potential and evil is that which hampers this effort. Since to Nietzsche and Deleuze everything in the world, including good and evil, are non-metaphysical constructs, they carry the potential of being continually reinvented.

Desire and will to power are not metaphysical impositions but are real and productive drives, prompting men to become free spirits and enabling them to break free from the chain of conventions and social and cultural bondages. They propel an individual to create an identity for himself/herself in society and this process succeeds fully only when the will to power and desire of the subject intervenes in the political structure of the society to reorient the state and elicit far reaching changes in social, political and ethical domains. For the conservative general public this attempt at individuation can be anti-social and immoral. But the individual has to express dissent so that the political structures which are, falsely, regarded as purveyors of virtue and

strength get dismantled to pave way for the creation of new set of virtues and morality.

Kazantzakis presents heroes who lead ordinary lives, but are capable of deeds of higher magnitude which set them apart from the rest. As they face the trials and tribulations in their lives they strive to better themselves by resorting to unique trajectories and become the exemplars of true humanity. On the way to supreme freedom, inimitable subjectivity and endless creativity they break the bonds of the social, moral and religious values.

All the four protagonists selected for the study – Zorba in *Zorba the Greek*, Captain Michales in *Freedom and Death*, Jesus in *The Last Temptation* and Manolios in *Christ Recrucified* – are textualizations of desire, will to power and the overman. Zorba, the epitome of the Dionysian will to power, surprises us through the brave deeds he did during his life time. Captain Michales is driven by a passion to etch his own history and to feel the joy of creative freedom. A reservoir of physical and mental courage transforms him in to a hero and at the end a martyr and his desire to liberate his country from its enemies makes him the Nietzschean overman. Manolios exhibits an intense desire to lead the life of Christ and, consequently, suffering is welcome. As personification of will to power and desire, Jesus like the other three, embraces a life of suffering and meets martyrdom in his attempt to liberate his people. The protagonists of these novels become creative through the exercise

of their will to power and desire which motivate them to realize their potential. Like the overman they turn their suffering into tragic pleasure and maintain a tragic optimism till the end.

The thesis has five chapters followed by the conclusion. Chapter one deals with Nikos Kazantzakis the man, the writer and his conceptualization of life, god and art. His very individual and Nietzschean understanding of the world and its significance in his political philosophy forms the crux of the chapter. The social and political upheavals of his time in Europe, his motherland, had deeply influenced his vision of life. He was influenced by Eastern and Western philosophies, Nietzsche, Buddha, Henry Bergson and the communism of Lenin's Russia. The failure of communism and his subsequent shift to meta-communism saw the emergence of a new man of responsibility who took art as a form of creative enterprise for the liberation of man from the world of social inequity and cultural decay.

Chapter two is about Nietzsche's will to power, the overman and the Nietzschean concept of politics. The will to power motivates an individual to question the binaries of good and evil which are institutionalised and forces him to reverse it to bring on spiritual and temporal transformation. The role of political will to power is analysed to ascertain how it inspires an individual to intervene in the liberation of his country from foreign rule as a matter of personal desire even as pain and death await him. Will to power elevates an

individual to the stature of an overman who invents his own truths and identities and, in order to keep abreast with the times, continuously reinvents himself, making himself always stronger, and more powerful. The overman is an individual who has mastered the practice of overcoming himself/herself.

The third chapter deals with the concept of desire. Deleuze pursues Nietzsche who posited that the transcendent moral opposition between good and evil is to be replaced with immanent ethical difference between noble and base modes of existence. The existence of a man will be considered to be good, free, rational, or strong if he exercises his capacity for self overcoming in such a way that his actions become altruistic. The productive desire of Deleuze is another form of Nietzsche's will to power. Desire is all pervading and is an integral part of the individual but it is constantly repressed by the established order. Desire motivates actualization through a series of practices, bringing objects and events together or separating them, making machines and making new reality all the while disrupting the binary opposition between the thinking subject and the object of thought.

Chapter four is an analysis of *Zorba the Greek* and *Freedom and Death*, to bring out how the characters of Captain Michalis and Zorba fictionalize the Nietzschean will to power and Deleuzian desire. Living dangerously they, like the Nietzschean overman, challenge the established pattern of the right and wrong and transgress it as they are convinced that the

distinction is anachronistic. The orgies of Captain Michales show how desiring-machine propels him to the point of the transformation from the material to the hero. Zorba epitomises the celebration of life through the exercise of Dionysian will to power and the desiring-machine. He becomes the embodiment of dance and music through which he realises himself and the world around him.

Chapter five deals with *The Last Temptation* and *Christ Recrucified* where the protagonists personify the role of desire and the political will to power in the changeover of man to overman and man to martyr. Jesus and Manolios get the strength to fight for a new world order through their political will to power and desire and in this pursuit they have to sacrifice their lives. They become martyrs in the end by actualising themselves and overturning the table of values resulting in a 'revaluation of values' in the society. The crucifixion of Jesus and the death and martyrdom of Manolios are vivid instances of the exercise of political will to power and the desiring-machine which accentuate their transformation as revolutionary and spiritual.

The four characters fictionalise two aspects of will to power – the Dionysian and the political. Humble born, all these characters get transformed, in their own fashion, through their continuous attempts at self overcoming. They make the novels the narratives of political and spiritual freedom through the exercise of will to power and desire. Zorba, though does not become a

martyr, turns out to be the ultimate hero through his Dionysian will to power as he turns life in to a celebration of life on this earth itself.