

Chapter I

One Greek Passion

“The way he appeared to me that first day is the way he remained all through his life. Full of contradictions, yet always moving along the same path, without compromise, humble and demanding, hospitable and solitary; loving luxury because it had enabled great artists to flourish; execrating the rich who yielded nothing to the poor; living like an ascetic because he could not preach one thing and do another”.

(Helen Kazantzakis, *Nikos Kazantzakis: A Biography* 20)

Nikos Kazantzakis who was a controversial author and an enigmatic individual, was born in Herakleion, Crete, the then part of Ottoman Empire, on February 18, 1883 to Mihalis and Maria. It was the day of souls and the midwife declared that one day the child would become a bishop but instead he became a writer. His real life was enriched with insights born out of human pain and joy and they inspired him to ascend higher levels of authorship. He considered his life an ascent to the mountain of destiny and to him everyman, worthy of being called a son of man carried his cross and mounted his Golgotha. It was the duty of everyman to reach the summit of Golgotha to be crucified, resurrected and thus save their souls. Afraid of the crucifixion,

people collapsed fainthearted in the middle of the journey ignorant of the fact that the cross was the only path to resurrection. Crucifixion and resurrection do not entail the physical imitation of Christ's passion; it is a process of liberation from the ego and self-will and the consequent transubstantiation into a resurrected existence here on earth. Crucifixion and resurrection are intimately connected with each other and both are to be experienced in this life. Lewis Owens states in *Creative Destruction*: "Resurrection is not an otherworldly existence but a renewed, authentic approach to this world: to see, as Kazantzakis phrases it in the *Spiritual Exercises*, 'with new eyes, with new ears, with a new sense of taste, smell, touch, with new brains'" (96). Kazantzakis acknowledged that the decisive steps in his ascent were Christ, Buddha, Lenin and Odysseus.

His father whom he eternalized as Captain Michalis in *Freedom and Death* was a ferocious fighter in the freedom struggle in Crete against the Turks. His mother was warm and loving. He describes his parents in *Report to Greco*:

On my father's side my ancestors were bloodthirsty pirates on water, warrior chieftains on land, fearing neither God nor man; on my mother's, drab, goodly 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)

Kazantzakis harmonized the two rival hereditary traits of his lineage and tried to reconcile these irreconcilables as part of his duty in life by turning his ancestral darkness into light. He believed that just as God processed and transubstantiated clay into a living thing, man is bound to transubstantiate his flesh into love, valour and freedom to become the Son of God. He admired his father who hosted an undying spirit of vengeance against the Turks and fought with them whenever he got a chance. His father hated priests and when he met them on street, he crossed himself to exorcise the unfortunate encounter. He never attended the Mass, but would enter the church and light a candle every Sunday after everyone had left the church. His mother was a saintly woman who epitomized patience, endurance and sweetness. He felt the presence of his parents in his two hands – his right hand was very strong, completely lacking in sensitivity and absolutely masculine and his left hand was excessively and pathologically sensitive – his father in his right hand and his mother in his left. Kazantzakis says in *Report to Greco*:

Both of my parents circulate in my blood, the one fierce, hard and morose, the other tender, kind and saintly. I have carried them all my days; neither has died. As long as I live, they too will live inside me and battle in their antithetical ways to

govern my thoughts and actions. My lifelong effort is to reconcile them so that one may give strength, the other her tenderness; to make discord between them, which breaks out incessantly within me, turn to harmony inside their son's heart.

(49)

The struggle between Crete and Turkey influenced him more than the schools and teachers and without it his life would have been a different one. The ongoing battle between Christians and Turks ever since his birth left a profound impact upon him. As he heard old men narrate wars, massacres, heroic deeds and the freedom of Greece he internalized it all to help him grow as a man of action. Freedom was his greatest desire. The lives of saints in pamphlet editions which he read during his elementary school days revamped his world view and he learned to scorn happiness and fear of death and started to look beyond the world to the supreme good. The reading also instilled in his mind an unquenchable thirst for distant voyages and travels during the course of which all experiences including martyrdom was welcome. As he grew older, things began to change for him and the legends of saints began to stifle him because he found them submissive and were continually bowing their heads before God to say yes to Him. Kazantzakis talks about his change in *Report to Greco*: "The blood of Crete had awakened inside me. Without elucidating this clearly in my mind, I had a presentiment that the true man is

he who resists, struggles, and is not afraid, in time of great need, to say no, even to God” (78).

Life in Paris as a graduate student fixed his world-view and he became committed to the things he considered worthy of following: the future and the spirit. His works derived their energy from his active involvement in the political events of the time. His strategy as a responsible writer was to divine the nature of the present age, then to formulate the future by creating archetypal incarnations of truth and heroism. Peter Bien in *Politics of Spirit* says:

As he himself once declared, “Driven by [my] duty as agitator, I compel myself in my work to set heroic models before the people They alone incarnate the claims and hopes of the famished and the persecuted, and are capable of showing the people the way toward salvation” (Elen Kaz.1968a:530). In sum, the meta-political writer can serve contemporary political reality even though he focuses on the future. By helping man’s imaginative conceptions (the spirit) to stay out ahead like a bag of fodder in front of a horse, he inspires contemporary reality to catch up. (1:22)

In Paris he came under profound influence of three philosophers, William James, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson. William James offered him anti-rationalism which stressed the intellect's inability to solve ultimate questions. Kazantzakis learned that truth was not an abstract idea and that it did not lie outside us as a finished product so that we would discover it. The truth, to James was a compromise resulting from our every day struggle with reality itself which was invented and created and not discovered. The pragmatism extended by William James helped Kazantzakis to formulate his personal vision with respect to the state and politics.

The most memorable experience he had in Paris was the introduction of Nietzsche by a strange girl who opined that he looked exactly like Nietzsche. He read *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and got acquainted with the ideas like eternal recurrence and superman. Kazantzakis narrates his reading of Nietzsche in *Report to Greco*:

His pronouncements struck me as impious blasphemies, his Superman as the assassin of God. This rebel had a mysterious fascination, however. His words were a seductive spell which dizzied and intoxicated; they made your heart dance. Truly, his thought was Dionysiac dance, an erected paean raised triumphantly at the most hopeless moment of the human and superhuman tragedy. In spite of myself, I admired his affliction,

mettle, and purity, as well as the drops of blood which bespattered his brow as though he too, the Antichrist, were wearing a crown of thorns. (319)

The influence of Nietzsche on Kazantzakis was outright and overwhelming. He himself acknowledged how he devoured Nietzsche's books which taught him to re-evaluate all optimistic theories. Nietzsche's philosophy problematized his faith in Christianity and corroborated his subsequent political thinking and development. He found in Nietzsche a true philosopher and identified his own struggles and anguishes in his life. Nietzsche reinforced his urge to re-evaluate, challenge and overturn the old order and morality to create a new value system to develop a more viable culture. He considered Nietzsche not as a virus spreading the cancer of nihilism but as a physician working to diagnose the sickness of modern age and attempting to cure it. Bien in *Kazantzakis' Nietzscheanism* substantiates:

Emerging from all this are two important points, both of which are confirmed beyond a doubt in the dissertation. The first is that Kazantzakis found in Nietzsche not just a thinker whose ideas he could borrow, but full human prototype in whose joys and anguishes he could see his own struggles glorified. In short, we are dealing here with a personal affinity extending far beyond the intellect. The second point is that Nietzsche's chief

usefulness to Kazantzakis was as a destroyer of the old. For the basic structure of a new, positive world view Kazantzakis tuned elsewhere, primarily to Bergson. Nietzsche was a negative force, an ally in Kazantzakis' conviction that the old order must be evaluated, challenged and overturned in the interest of developing a new and more viable civilization. (249)

His previous impression of Nietzsche as a decadent victim of *mal de siècle* never dissuaded him, instead he was propelled toward the philosopher when he encountered the political forces in Paris for the first time. The German philosopher was not an epitome of sickness of the age but an avid crusader against that sickness. The sciences were not helpful to Kazantzakis as it explained the 'how' and not 'the why' and Darwinism proved to be failure, for it explained the mechanics of evolution, but not the cause or the goal of evolution. The Christian conception of providential universe and its ethical system asserted that human beings were the centre of creation and reinforced the dichotomy between truth and falsehood, morality and immorality, compassion and cruelty and kindness and malice to impose a culture which did not have the overt support of biology and physiology. To Nietzsche this antinomy created a sickness in humanity and to counter it he developed nihilism with all the negative and positive aspects amalgamated. Nietzsche, following the homeopathic philosophy, regarded nihilism as essential to the

ultimate purpose of affirmation and healing. Kazantzakis was convinced that nihilism could be a homeopathic weapon for the cure of contemporary decadence and was not just a symptom of that decadence. Nietzsche's negativism helped him to accelerate the dissolution of the table of values that were no longer consistent with scientific knowledge about the universe. Kazantzakis pursued Nietzsche's notions about the six categories: man, the family, the state, religion, morality, and the law and realized that Nietzsche's critique of six categories was intended to create a new and better society where will to power and the overman exerted their impact and influence. Bien details Nietzsche's superman in *Kazantzakis' Nietzscheanism*:

By definition, the superman is the he who can heroically shake off the present table of values and develop all of man's qualities to the utmost, placing as the purpose and centre of his life the tendency to surpass himself. Because war is the strongest instrument of progress and selection, he will preach cruelty instead of compassion. Rest, for him, will be preparation for new wars, new conquests. He will seek trials of increasing danger and heroism, and will in this way leave the stamp of his ego on the age. But he will be harsh toward himself as well as towards others. He must destroy the present table of values in himself, rejecting all previous consolations

such as religion, the afterlife and free will. Without becoming discouraged, he must be grateful for sorrow as well as joy, blessing life in its entirety. (261)

Nietzsche's definition of life as a constant movement and his proposition that a vibrant man needs eternal unrest which should lead to his self-overcoming influenced Kazantzakis. Bien writes in *Politics of Spirit*: "Specifically, he encouraged Kazantzakis to make war against democracy, pacifism, and feminine emancipation; against man as 'God's darling'; against free will, immortality, Christian meekness and compassion - all in the interests of renewed vigour for the individual, the family, and the state"(1:35).

Coming across Nietzsche was a turning point for Kazantzakis as he understood that Christ and Antichrist were identical. Both figures got fused in his mind proving that they were not eternal enemies. The higher and deeper levels of reading of Nietzsche revealed three steps which he describes in *Report to Greco*:

The first step of initiation, I said was this: good and evil are enemies. The second and higher step was: good and evil are fellow workers. The highest step, the highest I was able to reach at present was: good and evil are identical! On this step I halted, shuddering from a terrible suspicion that flashed across

my mind: perhaps this Saint Blasphemer was prodding me to join him in his blasphemy! (320).

Nietzsche's despiritualization of modern man and the celebration of the superman inspired Kazantzakis to derive an alternative to the decadence and bourgeois materialism permeating Europe and to the hollow forms of institutionalized Christianity. Kazantzakis's admiration for Nietzsche prompted him to undertake a pilgrimage to the place of birth and the places where Nietzsche had lived which he considered as a formative Golgotha in his transformation into a writer and a philosopher. Nietzsche's famous proclamation that God is dead opened his eyes to the abyss, the void of nothingness that he had sensed in his adolescence and Nietzsche's declaration of his era as the beginning of a new world – a world without God – revealed to Kazantzakis how Christianity had enslaved, dehumanized and devitalized man. He took the exaltation of tragedy as the ecstasy of life from Nietzsche who glorified the tragic optimism of the strong man who was delighted to discover that struggle and pain were the eternal law of life. But contrary to Nietzsche, he had intense love for common man and believed in a socialist society working for the eradication of poverty and oppression and to lead humanity to a promised land. Nietzsche's philosophy gave his thought an affirmative outlook, a figurative and symbolic brilliance, incisive edge and a critical sharpness.

Henri Bergson cast a different influence on Kazantzakis. The force driving the universe was an ever increasing vitality that transubstantiated flesh into spirit. Nietzsche had prepared him for Bergson by insisting that our value system must be centred not on chimera but on the true nature of the circumambient universe. Kazantzakis yearned for a vision that went beyond empirical sciences and was not happy with Darwinism which had demolished the Christian world view. Under the tutelage of Bergson, he asked the 'where' questions like where have we come from and where are we going which he eventually tried to answer with Bergsonian insight and Nietzschean radiance. Bergson propounded the concept of a pre-existent life force (*élan vital*), a pure energy that wills to become alive where it must collaborate with matter to become animated. For Bergson, *élan vital* is like a jet of stream that surges upwards, but loosing energy it falls down solidified into drops. The upward stream denotes the ascent of the *élan* while its descent stands for the congealed spirit – materiality – which forbids its upward movement. Owens points out: "The *élan vital* and matter are not two independent entities. Matter is congealed spirit that has lost the energy to continue its surge upward towards self consciousness; it is thus devoid of life. Perpetually creative life therefore attempts to 'unmake itself' in the sense of freeing itself from the matter into which it has congealed" (60).

Life is a vital current loaded with matter that constitutes the indurate parts of its own substance. Once life force has created life, it tries to divest itself of its solidity in order to return to pure energy and life advances towards increasing spiritualization by means of transubstantiation. Death is life's crown as the destitution of matter releases the primal force from the weight of its own heterogeneous congealment. Kazantzakis developed his own concept of god with the philosophy of Bergson. Matter and energy are one as in monism though he speaks about them as distinct entities – life force surging upward toward creativity, motion, heterogeneity and consciousness and matter pressing toward stability and homogeneity. Life is the meeting of these two. He realized that in the temporary living organism, these two streams collided with the ascent propelling towards composition, life and immortality and the descent pointing towards decomposition, matter, and death. God is the harmonious synthesis of these two indestructible forces.

Kazantzakis found solution to the mal de siècle envisaged by Nietzsche in the philosophy of Bergson. Both Nietzsche and Bergson were philosophers of evolution who desired humanity to transcend its limitation. Bergson rejected any attempt to understand the human self using static, abstract concepts as it would lead to the failure of the revelation of the dynamic and evolutionary character of the self. He asserted that the mechanical and

materialistic philosophies of his time failed to offer a true representation of the self's inner dynamics.

The impact of these three philosophers on Kazantzakis was inerasable as they offered him the way to form a theory of the world and human destiny. William James's pragmatism was an extension of Bergson's teaching that one must honour the intellect's role in practical affairs and the most important truths are those that are felt and lived before being thought. Nietzsche opened his eyes to the fact that the person who harbours either hopes of the heaven or fears of the hell is unable to be free. The Nietzschean idea of transvaluation of values sparked new ideas in Kazantzakis to conceptualize contemporary politics and nation state differently. The teaching of Bergson augmented his learning of Nietzsche with the discovery of a new God which is vividly reflected in his novels.

He sojourned in Vienna where he was haunted by Buddha who taught that everything like the desire, love, virtue, hope and 'you' and 'I' were flames burning man. This Buddhist world view was not focused on the political, cultural, and social life of man, but on the sanctum of infinity. His Buddhist period was a complete apolitical experience. Empathy which was the cardinal guide of the Buddhist philosophy was the only means to deliver man from his bodies, demolish differences and merge with nothingness. Kazantzakis says in *Report to Greco*: "Of all the people the earth has begotten, Buddha stands

resplendently at the summit, an absolutely pure spirit. Without fear or sorrow, filled with mercy and good judgment, he extended his hand and, smiling gravely, opened the road to salvation” (348).

His Vienna days witnessed a paradigm shift not only in his cultural, artistic, mystical, and theological perspectives but in his political views as well. The scenes of frightful poverty agitated his mind, so did the shamelessness of the rich stuffing themselves with beefsteaks. The high inflation in post World War I period revealed the failure of capitalism for which the only solution was communist revolution. He accepted that a terrible end was far better than terror without end. Unable to keep aloof of politics he showed deep interest in politics at every step of his career and it was manifested profoundly in his books.

He moved to Berlin and considered the city as a whirlpool with outstanding energy of circles of Jewish communists and German intellectuals. In Berlin Rahel Lipstein, a Jewish woman, introduced him to Lenin who was glorified as the Messiah of the enslaved, hungry and the oppressed class of people because he promised them new hope and life by overthrowing the regime of terror and by creating a better world of peace and prosperity. Her influence in his life is evident as she was original for Noemi in *Freedom and Death* and for the Jewess in *Christ Recrucified*.

He maintained that the bourgeois society rendered itself incapable of meeting the contemporary needs and anxieties of the people as a whole. It was based on the unequal distribution of wealth, on the shameless exploitation of the labour force by the well organized capitalists. The moral foundation of the relationship between individuals crumbled in the bourgeois social paradigm where the individual, social and domestic life of mankind was paralyzed. Successive ruling classes with enormous political power vested with them made all change of law inadequate and superficial. So the duty of a man in power was to educate people, enlighten them and strengthen the ethical values demonstrating the responsibilities and obligations of the people at large. Economic emancipation should not be an end in itself; it has to lead to mankind's psychological and intellectual emancipation. Those who felt compassion for humanity must refuse to tolerate the immorality and injustice of the political, social and economic life of contemporary society and help in crystallizing the common people's right to improve their situation and elevate their life. The goal of life must be to create higher morality, bring justice to the world, and give profound meaning to virtue and honour. The new morality is not the product of the imagination of a social reformer and ideologue but is derived from the profound psychological and material needs of a new totality.

In Germany Kazantzakis embraced communism holding to the internationalist perspective that the common people of one nation should not

fight against that of another, but should unite to overthrow their respective oppressors. Communism was a way to save humanity from injustice and poverty and he believed that man should not fight among themselves but rise up for the welfare of the entire humanity as our ephemeral selves were insignificant. Kazantzakis believed that with Russian Revolution a new era has been inaugurated and the old table of values has been destroyed and a new one created.

Kazantzakis' fervent communism discloses his interest in mythomania. His only hope to escape the dullness of life was the power to change the eyes with which he saw the world. He invented an imaginative creation of successive chimeras using mythomania. But as it became unreal in nature, it caused further tensions in his life aggravating his anguish. He found solutions to intellectual pessimism and agony not in the power to change the world but in substitute for reality and attempted to act as if it was real. Though his solutions turned out to be problems, Kazantzakis was unwilling to turn his back on reality. His early characters, especially in *Serpent and Lilly* and *Day is Breaking*, show the author's subjectivism. The confession Kazantzakis made during the fervent days of communism declared to the world the psychological continuity of his subjective motives operative in different periods. Mythomania acted as therapy to the author who was trapped in world-

weariness out of his burning desire for revolutionary movement and psychological frustration

Despite the truth that he aligned himself with international communists in the early 1920s and admired Lenin, he admired Mussolini also which testifies to his love for iron-willed men. The humiliating defeat of the Cretan people by the Turks in the war of 1897 must have persuaded him to be imbued with the mindset of an arrogant Nietzschean and a neo-romanticist. He became disillusioned with the slavish herd and pinned his hope on the immoral, iconoclastic will of sublimely egoistic individuals, claiming that such egoism was, paradoxically, an altruistic force for social and nationalistic advance. In the beginning Kazantzakis thought that Russian communism was a daylight marking the end of transitional age, but by the end of 1929 Russians appeared to him to be merely a part of the transition whose energetic society was not ready for the right action.

He supported fascism realizing that there was similarity between communism and fascism and above all there was a symbiotic relation too. Kazantzakis was aware that fascism was one major factor which prevented the clash between capitalism and communism with Mussolini serving as a herald of Lenin in Italy. Hence the two ideologies which appeared to be antagonistic on the surface level were unknowing collaborators. In fascist Italy he found people who subjected their lives to a 'supra-individualistic rhythm' which was

similar to the organized energy he experienced in Berlin, Germany. He assimilated 'supra-individualism' as a manifestation of Dionysiac oneness. The essence of fascism and communism was faith beyond logic. Socialism started with class war and set as its goal the triumph of proletariat but fascism started with a rivalry among various productive classes, its thrust being cooperative effort by all classes for the good of the nation. Bien remarks in *Politics of Spirit*: "In short, he viewed Italian fascism (as he did everything else) in a way more religious than political, admiring its conscious and unconscious ritualism as well as its harsh realism about life's cruelties, which for Kazantzakis meant its allegiance to an ascending 'god' totally unlike kindly father" (1:114).

Kazantzakis flayed the two newly evolved characteristics of communism; materialism and the worship of machine, in his novel *Toda-Raba*. He realised that communism was not wholly new and not essentially a change of front in mankind's battle; it was simply the logical consequence of bourgeois civilization which demolished religion and created science through which man must comprehend and subdue natural forces by developing his critical faculties. Communism undid the bourgeois civilization but did not create a new one and maintained the traits of unadulterated materialism with exaggerated rationality and deified practical goals. A true communist, being enlightened and bereft of superficial and excessive hopes should aid

mankind's progress. Kazantzakis, like Bergson, believed that motion was creative and constructive while stability was lethal and suffocating. Although he considered the Bolsheviks as creative forces, later he placed them at the end of bourgeois era which showed a conspicuous shift in his approach to communism. His Bergsonian faith that spiritual energy can push mankind forward, was a blow to his communist leanings.

But a revised version of communism dawned on him later when realized that we must fight neither for ourselves nor for humanity but for the salvation of God where all things and beings- plants, animals, humans and ideas merge together in the mission. Kazantzakis considered it as the only means to the creation of a new world after destroying the present one. Owens clarifies: "Kazantzakis's attraction to communism, however, must be seen within the larger context of his desire for creative evolution: communism was not Kazantzakis's proclaimed goal, but the most effective and dynamic channel enabling 'god' to advance by 'unmaking' and overcoming its material manifestations and restrictions" (108). He appealed for an emergence of post-Bolshevik era where spiritual values would rule and he named it meta-communism which became a beacon of hope for him throughout his life. In *Nikos Kazantzakis: A Biography* Kazantzakis shares his views on meta-communism:

I've finished the essay on Metakommunismus that I wrote you about. That's the name I give it. It will be published later on – because it's a decisive step in my life, and I have to weigh it well. It's a big rupture with Communism – not in a backward direction, of course, but terrifying forward. All my Communist friends will be furious. Those who are in agreement will misinterpret once more. (155)

His approach to the new religion was shaped by his mystical temperament, aestheticism and his intellectual quarrel with science which impelled him to move towards intuitional knowledge rather than the scientific one. He believed in the doctrine of transubstantiation of matter into spirit. Man's duty is to discover the rhythm of god's march and adjust his rhythm of this, transient, life as much as possible, with God's to accomplish eternity. The essential thing in life is the invisible machine of progress on which every organism ride during their short interval on earth.

His basic concerns were god and salvation and the state of meaningful self actualization. If he was a decadent, idealist, incurably religious and above all a war monger to the Greek communists, the Chinese communist party took him as the apostle of peace. The Orthodox Church took him for an atheist and he was a Bolshevik rabble-rouser to the monarchists. He was suspected to be a secret agent of British intelligence in the circle of the communist controlled

resistance movement. At last he himself realized that he was a man who could tolerate no regime and that no regime could tolerate him, in turn.

The aim of true revolution, Kazantzakis held, was to elevate human beings in the evolutionary scale and thus make them come to know what man had understood about ultimate reality. Being never satisfied with the orthodox, materialistic communism, he wanted spirituality and creativity to be the dominant forces of a new epoch. But his philosophy was rebutted by the communists of his time, for them meta-communism could be translated as anti-communism.

Kazantzakis's popularity rests chiefly on the romantic world view he conceptualised immediately after the Second World War. Romanticism endorses that an individual could be a bearer of unreason which goes against Classicism which glorifies reason and gives seeming importance to the uniqueness of individual. Kazantzakis's novels present characters with calibre and courage to revamp the traditional values and morality of society. Freedom and spirituality are their catch words which they attain by the exercise of the will to power. The readers in the post war era imbibed a positive vision of life through the anti-rationalism presented in the novels of Kazantzakis. Bien points out in *Nikos Kazantzakis: Novelist*:

So Kazantzakis's novels appealed because they were non-escapist in their irrationalism yet at the same time escapist in their exoticism. They were seen as positive because they offered post war readers a list of values that, while romantic, had been endangered during the terrible years of Nazism. Kazantzakis's heroes reaffirmed that the individual is infinitely significant; that our yearning for individual significance, although hard to realize in the outside world, may be realized in the inner world of subjectivity; that individual fulfilment of this kind depends solely on one's own strength. (4)

Europe which had suffered from irrational forces began to perceive that those forces could be, paradoxically, spiritual also. Kazantzakis's popularity did not end with the post war period, but reached out to readers of coming decades primarily because his novels transcended realism. Realism, according to Kazantzakis, portrayed the world of things and the true function of an artist was to rise above it to express the vision that lay behind things. Though he maintained that the world of things was essential for a vision, he never faithfully reproduced what he had seen all around him. His novels attempt to make use of the particulars of phenomenal reality as a means to instil the readers with a unique vision of the world and consequently the

success of his novels depends on the harmonious blending of the realistic and visionary elements in them.

Kazantzakis's novels are endowed with a poetic language more intense than prose to deal with fantasy, prophecy, myth, epic exaggeration and linguistic freedom. His novels reflect his tireless effort to be optimistic in an age which witnessed war after war followed by political chaos, economic collapse, intellectual bankruptcy, and religious confusion. Convinced that evil was inescapably followed by virtue, Kazantzakis was never a nihilist or a pessimist. Owens observes: "I will argue instead that Kazantzakis's *religious* philosophy leads him to transcend both communism and nihilism en route to a union with 'god'" (1).

Kazantzakis was of the opinion that there was a great significance to the age in which a person was born and he believed that the years of his life time marked a historical transition. His political ideology, personal philosophy, and literary creations were immensely influenced by the age he lived in. He translated the painful and inexorable pulse of the time into chronicles of words. As a student of Bergson and Nietzsche he upheld with a gifted artistic proclivity that one could effect a contact with reality through art which in itself was a mysterious science. He believed that words would attract and capture the invisible spirit and force it to become incarnated so as to exhibit itself to man. Art was not submission to rules, but a demon which

destroyed and re-created things in its own fashion. An artist will divine the future and immortalize the past producing a new consciousness beyond the boundary of dry logic and historical inhibitions. As a sentinel the artist beholds new developments, fresh horizons, and realities before the others because he is the one who possesses the qualified segments of imagination and sensitivity that give him a profound awareness of the vibration of cosmogenic evolution. James F. Lea says:

Therefore, art with these special capabilities, is the best way to philosophize. Art allows one to rise above the boundaries of science, reason, empiricism, logic, etc., and to experience being/reality and thereby provides the best possible answers to the enduring questions of the spirit of man. Art look beyond the phenomena and transubstantiates matter into spirit. (84)

Art expresses the inexpressible and when it is dissatisfied with the external world, it begins to seek the essence of the phenomena and renders what the restless eye of the soul can assimilate within the visible world. There are two components that constitute the inexpressible essence of the art: the soul of man which takes different characteristics and forms in different ages, and the evolutionary god/spirit of time, space, history and nature. Art makes possible the creation of new myths, legends and symbols required by twentieth century man to give meaning, order, coherence, form, direction and purpose to

his socio-political existence. An artist can address the suffering of mankind and every artist has the responsibility to serve man by filling the vacuum created by the dialectical-scientific mind. He fulfils his responsibility not by looking into past overlooking the present or vice versa because overemphasis on past neglecting the present will generate metaphysics and one track concentration on the present will produce only superficial art. The true purpose of an artist is the genuine reconciliation of past and present to create future. Kazantzakis rejected the idea that the real aim of art was to create beauty because he thought that beauty camouflaged the perversity, injustice and suffering in the world. The artist is privileged to transcend the established canons which mean that literary critics and historians who follow the artist and evaluate his works in tune with previous works or immutable theoretical perspectives are secondary to him. The true artist, who rebels against the critics and the demands of beauty, stays in pursuit of honesty and will never support injustice in the socio-political battle.

Kazantzakis tried to experience all aspects of life and through the alchemy of his sensitive, creative chemistry he transformed those experiences into knowledge, truth, and mobilization of spiritual forces within man. He immersed himself in the lives of his historical, religious, mythological, spiritual and literary heroes and his works centre around the tormented souls who dedicated their lives to love humanity and ameliorate their hardships and

sufferings, occasionally in confrontation with God and destiny. A perfect work of art has the duty of inscribing the harmonious coexistence of man with nature, God, life and death, and flora and fauna to result in liberation of man and the revelation of the creatively conscious movement of man's history.

Art has a dominant role and carries profound implications in the evolution of political reality which is the central element of the historical flow and Kazantzakis reiterated that the genuine role of the politician is not to stop history but to work in tandem with it and that the political and artistic domain must work hand in hand. Lea remarks: "His entire life is a portrayal of the path to freedom, to a higher human existence beyond hope and rationality, and despair and nihilism, through overcoming many obstacles within the contradictions of word-action, mind-flesh, good-evil, mortality-immortality etc., and becoming a higher man of unity with diversity and honesty" (93).

Kazantzakis diagnosed the cancers of the Western civilization of his age and reached the conclusion that insurmountable suffering, injustice and spiritual decadence originated from five major sources – the escapist attitude of the man in search of pseudo ideology and his refuge in institutionalized religion which stunt his growth, the debilitating impact of technocratic, materialistic ethos with its dehumanizing effect, the absence of holistic vision of synthesis among artists, political and religious leaders, and intellectuals who are called men of spirit, the insensitivity of men towards the greatness of

freedom and the ceaseless spreading of bloodshed in the world. His political philosophy attempts to redeem the world from the cancers he diagnosed and bring order to the world.

Kazantzakis constructed a system in which man should create his own fate and the fate of God by saving God because God lives in every cell of the living flesh. Differing from Plato and his followers, Kazantzakis believed that this world was not the vestment of God but was God himself; the form and essence were identical. Actualization of good is the duty of man and is the right way to save God. He considered God as the progressive spiritualization of matter, which gave him the labels the atheist or the antitheist. He was called nihilist for his ascetic inclination, his Buddhism, and his idealism that led him to negate the reality of the world, but ultimately he deserted nihilism. He found the essence of life neither in the interpretation of God by religious men nor in the interpretation of religion by godly men, but through the firm adherence to the political goodness in the world.

Kazantzakis clarified that the predominant theme in all his works was the struggle of man with God. Kazantzakis placed man at the centre of the universe and provided him with an individual as well as a universal significance. He deemed them capable of realizing his potentials and strong enough to overcome indolence and exert his vitality. He can thus save God

and spread the message of revolution in this world, an act of individualistic voluntarism for trans-individualistic ends. Lea observes:

For Kazantzakis the forward push of evolution by man for the transindividualistic ends can come only through one system – submission to a new harmonious and visionary ideal that “summons and commands all our forces: viz., we must follow a rhythm that is higher than ourselves. Only in this way can man’s existence become noble and integrated. Only thus can his energy transcend the stifling limits of the individual” (Spain, 62). Kazantzakis believes that only those who find and obey such a rhythm attain true consciousness. (109)

The heroes in Kazantzakis are those whose volatile emotions prepare the way for new concepts of God and progress for them is indistinguishable from spiritual enthusiasm itself. This inner energy allows soul to break not only with nature, but also with the closed religions and petty pleasures and pains. Kazantzakis was well aware that most people were indifferent to the struggles of the spiritual heroes because the visions of these heroes seemed impracticable even as they proved that the tranquillity and legitimacy of the prevailing religions were fraudulent. His religious heroes have an open soul which is ready to receive divine influence and can stir up other souls as well. But they pose a danger to the societal order and institutionalised religions

because they forge new visions of God with their instinct and intelligence. Bergson inspired Kazantzakis to bypass positivism which propounds that the origin of belief in God starts with fear to insist that belief in God is a reaction against fear.

His protagonists who appear to be bundled with purposeless heroism have their purpose clearly defined and become models of spiritual accomplishment. They inspire others to live a better life and to construct a greater society. Although intangible and spiritual, their actions aim to bring an end to the injustices of the age and can be regarded as the expressions of the desire to the exercise of their will to power for the sake of humanity.