Chapter Six

Back to Religion and then to Humanism

The Adamic myth does not end with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. It still continues and merges with the stories of all human beings who sin and become unworthy to have fellowship with God. Adam and Eve till their death tilled the land and earned their livelihood with the sweat of their brow. They had children of whom one killed the other out of spite and jealousy; they experienced untold misery and suffering and finally moved in different direction in search of their individual destiny. In due course, as the Bible says, God took pity on this suffering humanity and sent into the world his only son, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, to lead them on the path of virtue and redeem them from eternal damnation. The Bible says: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Trinitarian Bible St. John 3:16). When Jesus started preaching he told the multitudes: “A new commandment I give unto you. That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (St. John 13:34). Martin Luther has given expression to God’s inordinate love that sent Jesus down to the earth to redeem the sinful humanity in the form of a small poem which is worth quoting in this context:

Then God in everlasting grace
Did look on me so wretched
And mercy talking judgement’s place
To me its help outstretched.
The Father’s heart to me was stirred
To save – not with a sovereign word –
His very best it cost Him.
He said to His beloved Son;
’Tis time for meditation,
Go hence, My heart’s most precious Crown,
Be to the lost salvation.
His heavy sins take Thou away
And death, his cruel foe, do slay,
And make him with Thee rising. (qtd. in Estborn 87)

Once the Apostolic Church was in the in the world, but today the world is in the Church. The Bible reiterates that salvation and redemption of man from his strongholds of sin and evils has its origin only in the love of God. The Bible emphasises: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (I John 3:16). The Biblical view is that as there is an inseparable love relationship between God and man there should be a similar relationship between man and man. Today, the Church has fully realized the problems of the suffering humanity and efforts are being taken to humanize it as much as possible. The theologians put more emphasize on “Social Action”.

The present world gives pictures of the most frightening realities of life. But in the centre of it there stands the cross, the most abominable among the tools of torture, a true symbol of human cruelty and also a true symbol of God’s love for the erring
sinners, the instrument of the divine self-sacrifice through which men can once again
gain true fellowship with God and tell others “oh people, I am your brother. Jesus
loves me. We are saved” (T.L. Osborn 55). The humanist element in the Christian
religion in now emphasised more and more and Christ is now very often called “The
Good Shepherded” and “The Good Samaritan” – one who goes out of His way to heal
the wounded and save the suffering in spite of all differences.

At present, in India, we, very often hear about religious and communal clashes.
Many, including the religious people, have realized that the solution for this lies in the
humanization and secularization of religion. Swamy Vivekananda has turned
Hinduism into “Practical Vedanta”. Swamy Swahananda, one of his disciples
observes:

This worshipful attitude to man as God, has been described as the
socialization of the Ultimate Reality . . . which in its expression, is both
individual and social. This realization is individual but men of
realization see God everywhere as the Spirit, as the sum total of all
souls. Seeing God in society, thus, becomes a spiritual discipline. (22)

According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan “religion which is devoid of humanity has
no use”. He writes: “Religion is all or nothing. Every religion should have sufficient
respect for the dignity of man and the rights of human personality . . . Religion is the
perfection of the truly human. Humanism today is in search of a soul” (Our Heritage
50). According to him, the real purpose of religion is to humanize human beings. That
is why he says: “The only concern of a true man is to be as human as possible” (qtd. in
Nazeer Siddiqi 53). A man worth the name must be sensitive to the needs of others
and compassionate towards the suffering people of the world. This is what Radhakrishnan means by “inward religion” which he exhorts men to develop. He does not believe in outward or hypocritical religion. Seeing the gradual disappearance of religion from the world, he predicted that if religions are to continue to have their original appeal, they must adapt themselves to the needs of the time. He has said that stagnation is bound to overtake a religion unless it is alive to the changes taking place around it. He also made it clear that “if religion is to be effective, it should not be a block to rational thinking and social progress” (53-54).

In Hinduism, constant and continuous efforts are being made to humanize it and to emphasise the oneness of all religions. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, the Guru [master] of Swamy Vivekananda has indicated in his speeches and parables the oneness he had noticed in religions, particularly in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. His biographers say that for sometime he ived as a Muslim and as a Christian. This specific trait in him had drawn towards him a number of Western thinkers and scholars like Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Romain Roland etc. Spiritually refreshed by the teachings of the Guru, Swamy Vivekananda travelled all over India on foot and saw the miseries of the poor people. His trips made a deep impression on him and he was yearning to do something for them. In the meantime, he travelled to the West and in 1893 he attended the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. There, he emphasised the universality of religions and pointed out the need for religious harmony. He spread the message of his master in the West and also secured funds to help India meet the grave conditions of poverty and deprivation which confronted her. He was a brilliant man and he was highly honoured and praised wherever he went.
P. Fallon says: “Swami Vivekananda’s religious enthusiasm, his zeal for social 
reform, his ardent nationalism, his fiery oratory, his evident selflessness and purity of 
life, his magnetic personality, made a deep impression upon all those who came in 
contact with him” (327).

Unlike his Guru Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, who had no interest in 
anything but God-realization, Vivekananda insisted on alleviating the sufferings of 
humanity and on universal love. He had a burning desire to improve the conditions of 
India’s down-trodden millions. He had a highly developed social consciousness and 
deep compassion for the suffering humanity. He was convinced that we can change 
our tragic situation if we realize that we are divine in essence. He said that when we 
consider the other person also as a manifestation of God, then love and service flow 
automatically. He preached that God can be found wherever there is loving concern 
for others and activity on their behalf. He wanted religion and spirituality to manifest 
themselves in service and social uplift. According to Vivekananda, one cannot be 
saved if one does not try to seek the salvation of one’s brothers and sisters. To realize 
these ends he founded both the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission.

Both Greene and Joshi who deal with the alienated people try to accommodate 
them in society and bring them back to normal life. Their protagonists’ quest to find a 
hold in mass movements, organizations, their trials to find solace through love, sex, 
lust and married life do not offer them any way out. Even in their commitments, they 
do not very often succeed and continue to lead a cocooned life.

Hence, both the novelists suggest that the religion the people follow should be 
humanized as much as possible so that their accommodation may be complete and
 entire. Greene even goes to the extent of according a religious sanctity even to the worst sinners and criminals. Joshi tries to spiritualize the sinners by instilling in them religious virtues like faith, purity and sacrifice. He also tries to cleanse people “of egoism, selfishness and stupidity” (The City 263).

Like our religious leaders who have human concerns and who try to make religion “homo-centric” Greene and Joshi also show in their works their preference to humanism. It should be understood in this context, that in both the novelists humanist elements override religious values and their alienated heroes at the end come back to life and accept humanity after becoming aware of the meaning of life through some kind of religious experience.

Many critics of Greene consider him primarily as a Catholic novelist dealing with religious themes and showing ways and means for the redemption of sinners of all kinds. His reputation as a Catholic novelist was firmly established after the publication of his Catholic trilogy, Brighton Rock (1938), The Power and the Glory (1940) and The Heart of the Matter (1948). In these novels, Greene very freely discusses Catholic themes like grace, sin, salvation, damnation, confession, faith, sacraments, baptism, communion, good and evil etc. The Catholic characters who figure in these novels have their inner religious strength and resources to fall back upon. For instance, Elizabeth in The Man Within with whom Andrews, the protagonist of the novel, falls in love, is a true Christian symbolizing its innate virtues of holiness, purity, piety, chastity, serenity etc. The characters we find in these novels believe in miracles, Catholic rituals, rites, God’s endless mercy and His constant search and concern for those who sin and run away from Him. The characters also undergo a
certain mystic religious awakening, and even some sinners turn over a new leaf in life and become saint-like. For instance, Sarah Miles, the mistress of Bendrix in The End of the Affair at the end gives up her excessive sensuality and dies as a martyr. Frank Kermode calls this “the unwilling sanctification of Sarah” (186).

No wonder, that a number of critics who have read these novels have acknowledged Greene as a Catholic novelist. Marie-Beatrice Mesnet, for instance, says: “It is only by bearing in mind and heart, the Christian views of life, that a reader will appreciate the profound significance of his [Greene's] work” (81). Herold C. Gardiner points out that Greene’s primary concern is with “the geography of the soul” (12). A. Wichert’s finding is that Greene “wants God to have the last word” (183), and A.J.M. Smith maintains that “the very crux of Greene’s plots is the true cross” (17).

However, in his real life though Catholicism gave Greene a sense of belonging it did not make things easier for him. As Keshava Prasad observes:

Religion was called upon to do what psychoanalysis had failed to do. . .

The new faith might have given him some spiritual assurance. But it has not equipped him for his battle with the intractable world. For Greene has found it increasingly difficult to harmonize his experience with Catholic myth, reality with the orthodoxy of belief. (22-23)

Greene himself has written in his Journey Without Maps: “I had not been converted to a religious faith. I had been convinced by specific arguments in the probability of its creed” (263). In 1798 he told people “I’ve always found it difficult to believe in God. I suppose I’d now call myself a Catholic atheist” (Ivasheva 236). In
his In Search of a Character: Two African Journals Greene has observed: “I would claim not to be a writer of Catholic novels, but a writer who, in four or five books, took characters with Catholic ideas for his material” (24).

Before his marriage with Vivien, a Catholic, Greene took instructions from Father Talbot about Catholic beliefs and doctrines (A Sort of Life 118). Yet, his “difficulty was to believe in a God at all” (120). It proves that Father Talbot has not totally succeeded in his mission. This could be taken as a reason to prove that many of the Catholic priests found in his fictional works are inefficient. Father Rank in The Heart of the Matter and Father James in The Living Room are ineffectual. The poems in his Babbling April (1925) also support the view that Greene’s conversion to Roman Catholicism has not compromised his spirit of revolt.

In Greene’s short story “Under the Garden”, Javitt advises young William: “Be disloyal. It’s your duty to the human race” (A Sense of Reality 48). It only means that those who are disloyal to their religion have the freedom to roam through the human heart, and understand its emotions and feelings. This is exactly what Greene says again and again in all his novels and short stories. In short, Man and his human heart are more important to Greene than Catholicism and its rigid doctrines and dogmas which work against man and his earthly interests. One has to read in this context the words uttered by Father Rank after the death of Major Scobie in The Heart of the Matter. He tells Scobie’s wife: “For goodness’ sake, Mrs.Scobie, don’t imagine you – or I - know a thing about God’s mercy . . . the church knows all the rules. But it doesn’t know what goes on in a single human heart” (296-97). The implication is that the Church knows only rules and regulations, but it does not know anything about
what is going on in a human heart. The words uttered by Father Rank faithfully reflect what Greene has in his mind. He has inverted Christianity throwing to the winds all its stiff, unbending and inhuman rules and rituals to accord a place even to the most rotten sinners within the fold of the Christian Church. In other words, he tries to humanize Christianity to as much extent as possible with the view to find a place for even the most depraved sinners, criminals and the outcasts within the Church and places humanism and its values above the values of the Christian Church.

Joshi has also suffered a similar fate. Many of his critics have taken very seriously what Joshi himself has said that life’s meaning is to be found only in the mysterious underworld which is the human soul (The Strange Case 8). Purabi Bannerji, for instance says that Joshi’s existentialist leanings have led him to “like Hinduism and love The Bhagwat Gita which is existential” (“A Winners Secrets”). In an interview with Arun Joshi, Sujatha Mathai remarks that “Joshi feels that his ethos is essentially Hindu” (qtd. in Siddhartha Sharma 123). Referring to Joshi’s novel The Last Labyrinth Mani Meitei makes the following observation:

*The Last Labyrinth* is unparalleled in the treatment of a subtle Indian theme based on the import of Hindu religious philosophy as advocated in the holy scriptures like the *Gita* and the Upanishads. The book is about man confronted by the four paths of life: *dharma* (duty), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desire) and *moksha* (liberation). It is based on the *karma yoga*, the attainment of liberty by the soul by abandoning *kama* (desir), *krodh* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (allurement), *mada* (lust) and *aiswarya* (pride) the six enemies of man. The book is so deeply
influenced by the Hindu religious scriptures that all that happens in the
book is guided by the principles of *Hindu Sastras* and thoughts.

(“Indian Ethos” 83)

While commenting on Joshi’s *The Apprentice* C.V. Venugopal and M.G. Hegde
reveal that the novel deals with the “progress of the Soul – from innocence through
ignorance to knowledge – reflecting the Upanishadic injunction of the movement from
untruth to truth – which is artistically worked out in the life of Ratan Rathor, that gives
*The Apprentice* its peculiar significance” (141). Quoting Arun Joshi’s words:

“Whatever happens the Lord will not forsake you, nor will work be fruitless”,

B.D. Sharma and S.K. Sharma observe that Joshi’s *The City and the River* “gives
people hope and enlightenment and the readers of English literature are not likely to
let them die” (127). Madhusudan Rao in his article “The Hindu Existential Concern in
Arun Joshi’s Fiction” analyses all the novels of Joshi from the point of view of a
Hindu mind enriched with the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads and
comes to the conclusion: “Arun Joshi’s fiction . . . formally and thematically expresses
an existential concern which is basically a Hindu concern and not a mere offshoot of
modern existentialist movement” (161). Vachaspati Dwivedi in his *The Fictional Art
of Arun Joshi* after interpreting Joshi’s last novel *The City and the River* makes the
following observation:

*The City and the River* . . . does not constitute a departure from Joshi’s
interest to explore the existential predicament of man but goes one step
further in suggesting man’s metaphysical reconciliation as an answer to
all his worries, agonies and alienation. He affirms the relevance of God
to man in his life . . . . The final message of the novel is summed up in
the Great Yogeshwara’s words: ‘His is the Will, His is the Force’ . . .
and so an unquestionable faith in God and surrender to Him is the only
solution to our threatened existence. The City and The River by its
theme and execution proves that Joshi has been deeply influenced by
the Hindu existential vision and the novel continues the spiritual quest
of his earlier novels through measured rhythms of myths, legends and
archetypes. By the time we reach the end of the novel, we feel like
completing a quest and it is universal human quest for affirmation
through negation of self. (142-43)

A close reading of the novels of Arun Joshi reveals the fact that like Greene, he
is also, first and foremost, interested in man and his manifold problems of existence.
Shyam M. Asnani in his “A Study of Arun Joshi’s Fiction” pinpoints Joshi’s humanist
interest as follows: “With the publication of his first novel, The Foreigner, Arun Joshi
has emerged as an important Indo-English novelist. His skill lies in his ability to
describe human experience in human voice so that the texture of the experience comes
through, and in his ability to convey the philosophical-moral complexities of human
life without losing the life itself” (271). Abdul Saleem says that Joshi’s “indictment of
the materialistic drive of the spiritual sterile society appears to be deeply rooted, not in
any religio-philosophical attitudes but in the simple fact of man’s deviation from his
own elemental self” (20). He quotes from an article entitled “The Art and Vision of
Arun Joshi” which avers that Joshi’s novels: “Delineate more of human problems
than issues arising out of regional loyalties” (Saleem Arun Joshi’s Fiction 20). Arun
Joshi’s primary interest is to deal with the existential situations in which the characters
get themselves lost. This is in keeping with the favourite image of the maze in Post-
Modern literature. Gabrial Josipovici writes: “From the cunning passages, contrived
corridors and issues of ‘Gerontion’, through the mazes of Kafka, Proust, Borzes and
Robbe Grillet, the labyrinth has been the favourite image in modern literature” (qtd. in
A. Ramakrishna Rao 13). This image and its themes occur again and again in Joshi’s
novels The Last Labyrinth and The Foreigner. Viewed in this sense, Joshi’s approach
is humanistic. His main business as an artist seems to pull out humanity from the maze
into which it has fallen.

Like Greene, Joshi has also used religion to prop up his humanist ideals. As a
writer who has had varied experiences both in the East and in the West, he has
understood the absurdity of the human situation and the need for exercising human
responsibility, commitment, freedom and choice. These are essentially human values
and Joshi strongly believes in them. He asserts: “I strongly believe that individual
actions have effects on others and oneself. So, one cannot afford to continue with an
irresponsible existence but has to commit oneself at some point” (qtd. in Mukteshwar
Pandey 28). As one who has understood the existential predicament of modern Man,
like Albert Camus, he feels that everyone should have a personal value system.

“Meaning has to be created, not found, and it has to be created by the individual”
(Cruickshank 7). It is this fact that Sartre hints at when he remarks: “Man is nothing
else but that which he makes of himself” (Existentialism and Humanism 124). It is
only to get support for such ideas that Joshi turns to the Hindu views of life embodied
and enshrined in the Gita, myths, legends and archetypes. To insist on the importance
of human action and commitment Joshi refers to the Hindu theory of Karma. But the
Hindu critics of Joshi are oblivious of his intentions and put their emphasis on what is extraneous. Thus, Sujatha Mathai remarks: “The karmic law seemed to be central” (“I am a Stranger to my Books”). Viewed from this enlightened perspective Joshi’s objective in his novels seems to be bringing back the alienated man from his prodigal ways to the normal life by spiritualizing him and then by instilling in him the importance of cherishing humanist ideals of love, compassion, pity, proper human relationship, etc. However, like Greene, Joshi does not exhort anybody to be disloyal to his religion to understand the human heart. He knows from personal experiences the crisis of character in his country.

Joshi laments the vanishing sense of values and the progressive rampancy of corruption in every walk of Post-Independent Indian life. He highlights in his novels the basic contradictions of the Post-Independence Indian society with its scientific and technological progress, growth of materialism, spiritual degeneration and confusion of values. His novels deal with the problems of Westernized Indians who have lost their traditional and spiritual mores and suffer from all kinds of strange sickness – cynicism, alienation from the community and alienation from one’s own self and intellectual doubt and crisis of faith. His novels also deal with institutionalized corruption, general moral decline and erosion of values. Tapan Kumar Ghosh points out that during his interview with Sujatha Mathai, Joshi has admitted that he is “concerned about the values and attitudes of the young today” (183). He adds that while commenting on the significance of Billy Biswas’ death he has told Purabi Banerjee: “Billy’s death is metaphorical. The modern Indian city is disoriented that kills sincerity . . . . This kind of killing goes on when the social organism does not
know its values. We only understand the values of money and power” (183). Joshi is painfully aware of people’s shortcomings. The deep moral earnestness and the religious sense of the past is now gone. Most of the people are now living like butterflies on the surface of life. Joshi, therefore, feels the need for moral regeneration of the present humanity through spiritual education. In short, as in Greene, religion becomes in Joshi also a handmaid to put a strong emphasis on the humanist values of life.

In a number of his novels, Greene first brings his characters within the Christian fold and then finding Christianity inadequate for solving their problems, he makes them move to embrace the values of humanism. In his most remarkable novel The Power and the Glory, Greene reveals how human love makes even a sinner an adorable saint. The protagonist of the novel is a Catholic Priest, commonly known as “Whisky Priest” (60). The whole of the novel revolves round him. He is the last Priest doing God’s work in the Godless universe of Mexico. The totalitarian government there has either killed or banished all the Catholic Priests. Some of them have married and settled in life with their wives and children. In such a place, the Whisky Priest alone is the only representative of God’s glory and power. But he is weak and a bad Priest and its seems that he is subsisting only on liquor. Once, in the novel, Captain Fellows asks him if he is “hungry” (38). The Priest replies: “A little. It does not matter . . . A little brandy” (38). “What a religion”, Captain Fellows asks: “Begging for brandy. Shameless” (38). Later Coral, Captain Fellow’s little daughter offers the priest “a bottle of beer . . . and some food” (39). When she asks him why he is not afraid of police, he replies: “A little drink . . . will work wonders in a cowardly man. With a
little brandy, why, I’d defy – the devil” (42). A conversation between an old man and the Whisky Priest goes like this:

‘Never mind. Anywhere to lie down’.
‘Can you give me – a little spirit?’
‘Coffee, father. We have nothing else’.
‘Some food’
‘Never mind’. (43)

The Priest is not ashamed of his drunkenness. He takes liquor to drive off the fear of the police. It promises him a “temporary relief from fear, loneliness, a lot of things” (59). When the police come, he bites a raw onion to cover up the smell of brandy. Greene uses so many epithets to drive home the moral depravity of the Priest. He is “conceited”, “overbearing”, “a bad priest” (118); “a proud, lustful greedy man” (95); “a damned man” (60); “a common man” (61), “a beggar” (62) with “a buffoon’s face” (59) and with hands “as hard as a labourer’s” (75).

Greene assigns to such a Priest the highest mark of heroism, not by presenting him as a dogmatic Catholic Priest, but by making him a victim of human love. He has an illegal wife and a child called Brigitta. Realizing his love of humanity, Marie-Beatrice Mesnet remarks:

Greene himself has said that his purpose, like Francois Mauriac’s, in choosing the weakest, the most abandoned human beings as material for his creative imagination, was to throw a brighter light on god’s infinite mercy and His power to turn even evil – etiam peccata into good. (79)
Greene shows that only through his immersion in sin and corruption and the consequent suffering and remorse, the Priest emerges as a real human being to have inordinate love for those who face problems similar to those of himself. “Then, in his innocence, he had felt no love for anyone, now in his corruption he had learnt . . .” (The Power 129). He has enormous love for his child “connected with his crime” (61). “. . . his heart beat with its secret and appalling love” (61-62). He even prays for her: “O God, give me any kind of death – without contrition, in a state of sin – only save this child” (82). “Oh God help her. Damn me. I deserve it, but let her live for ever” (207). This prayer of the Whisky Priest recalls to our mind the prayer made by Sarah Miles on behalf of her lover Bendrix and the prayer made by Major Scobie when he finds a dying child. In the case of the Whisky Priest the love for his child expands into love for all. While in the prison “overcrowded with lust and crime and unhappy love” (125) “as a criminal among a herd of criminals” (128), he “was moved by an enormous and irrational affection for the inhabitants of this prison” (127).

In addition to his great love and compassion for the suffering people, the Whisky Priest has the humanist trait of finding God on the face of everyman and woman, whether good or bad. The mestizo is bent on betraying him to the police, but the Priest has no hatred for him. He finds him having “God’s image” (101) and he experiences “a driven tenderness” (101) and “a contemptuous affection” (184) for him. “Poor man, the Priest thought, he isn’t really bad enough . . .” (184). As Graham Smith observes the Priest “is unable not to love . . .” (86). His love for the mestizo leads him to a greater understanding of God: “Man was so limited: he hadn’t even the ingenuity to invent a new vice: the animals knew as much. It was for this world that
Christ had died: . . . – it needed a God to die for the half hearted and the corrupt” (The Power 97).

Greene comments on the character and the behaviour of the Priest and reveals his love of humanism in a passage which is central to the understanding of the novel’s import:

But at the centre of his [the Priest’s] own faith, there always stood the convincing mystery – that we were made in God’s image. God was the parent, but He was also the policeman, the criminal, the priest, the maniac, and the judge. Something resembling God dangled from the gibbet or went into odd attitudes before the bullets in a prison yard or contorted itself like a camel in the attitude of sex. (The Power 101)

Commenting on the Priest’s humanist trait of finding the divine in all, Adele King remarks:

The Priest takes the biblical saying that man was created in God’s image literally; not only is man like God in his spirit but in his body. Thus he imagines God dying, God having sexual relations. Most Christians would think such an interpretation absurd; to the priest, however, it is a way of seeing the divine in all life, even in the most sordid, and therefore, a path toward the love of his fellow men. (55)

While emphasizing this special sense with which the Priest is blessed, Rama Rao makes this observation: “Seeing god in the lowliest of the low is the apogee of spiritual evolution. The Bhavadgita characterizes the spiritually evolved man in a
similar vein: The learned hold as equal in their sight a Brahman gifted with wisdom and humility, a cow, an elephant and even a dog and a dog-eater too” (64).

Greene reveals both the divinity and the humanitarian concerns of the Priest by comparing him with Christ. Like Christ, the Priest too submits himself to the will of God. His return by mule to Tabasco reminds one of Christ’s journey to Jerusalem on a mule followed by his disciples and other Jewish believers. While carrying the cross to Mount Calvary, Christ stumbled under its heavy weight and fell down. Similarly, often the Priest’s legs are not under his control for he is too much under the effect of fear and also because of his drunkenness. Adele King comments: “His life may recall Christs’, but he is too human, too weak” (47). Graham Smith also opines that the Priest has “. . . the Christ like acceptance of the lower depths of human degradation . . .” (80).

Greene has great admiration for the Priest’s humanism which includes his selfless love, sense of duty and spirit of service in a totalitarian State which has banned all religious activities and closed down all the Churches. He does not escape from the country. Nor does he marry anybody and settle in life. Wherever he goes, he does his duty and narrowly escapes arrest. In the prison also he performs his priestly functions. Morton Dauwen Zabel points out his dedication to his service: “. . . the hunted, shameless renegade priest . . . trailing his desecrated sanctity through the hovels and jungles of the Mexican State yet persisting in his office of grace, and, so embracing the doom that pursues him” (281-82). R.W.B. Lewis calls him “The chaste and fiercely dedicated priest of the godless society” (252). Collins refers to his “undying power and glory” (255), “however flawed by weakness” (225). An old man
wants to know whether he can bring women for confession. The Priest tells him: “‘Oh, let them come, - Let them all come’” (45). “He put his hand over his eyes and began to weep” (45).

What Greene does with the Whisky Priest who is a sinner by all Christian standards cannot be easily accepted by dogmatic and conventional Christians. The “aged, painful, and ignorant faces” (The Lawless Roads 44) which Greene saw in Mexico attending the Church and committing all kinds of sins at the sametime made Greene understand that even the priests who do God’s work in such places cannot give up some of the vices and sins of the common humanity. To Greene, humanization of religion in places known for human depravity is a social necessity. He thinks that in the present day world there are possibilities for man to stray away from conventional, dogmatic and institutionalized religion and even the most exalted and sanctified persons who do God’s work may also have quiet inevitably traces of some evil and filth in their character. As such, Greene believes there cannot be any facile dichotomy between evil and filth on the one hand and sanctity or sacredness on the other. This means, that Greene clearly transcends the boundaries of conventional theology and religion for the purpose of establishing firmly his humanist vision of life.

In Greene’s novel The Honorary Consul Father Rivas, a priest, becomes the leader of a rebellious group out of his compassion for the poor and the needy and out of a sense of justice. He is a Catholic priest who does evil out of love for the suffering people. What is peculiar about him is that he finds the image of God on the faces of men. The following passage reveals his character:
‘I believe in the evil of God’ Father Rivas said, ‘but I believe in His
goodness too. He made us in His image that is the old legend . . . so I
too believe in an old legend which is almost forgotten. He made us in
His image – and so our evil is His evil too. How could I love a God if
He were not like me? Divided like me. Tempted like me’. (227)

About Dr. Plarr, Father Rivas says: “he was young enough to be my son” (267), for he
bears a true image of God.

The Superior in Greene’s *A Burnt-Out-Case* is a humanist par-excellence. His
view is that when a man loves another man he becomes God. He says: “When you
love it is Yezu who loves, when you are merciful it is Yezu who is merciful. But when
you hate of envy it is not Yezu, for everything that Yezu made is good . . . when a man
loves he must be klistian . . .” (81). He further says: “only remember that the love you
feel and the mercy you show were made in you by God” (81-82). The priests, the
Superior and Dr. Colin in the novel are known for their selfless service to the poor
lepers in the colony of misery, heat and mosquitoes. They do not build Churches, but
they strive for the betterment of the human condition of the people in the place where
they work.

In Greene’s novel *The Heart of the Matter*, it is human love that triumphs over
man’s love for God, the Church and its rites. Scobie, the protagonist, of the novel feels
that he is born to suffer for others. “To be a human being one had to drink the cup”
(106). Even the fear of eternal damnation in hell, and his separation from his wife does
not prevent him from bearing the burden of others. When he finds a dying child, he is
reminded of his own dead child and he prays: “Father, look after her. Give her peace
... Take away my peace for ever, but give her my peace” (106). Again, it is pity and compassion for others that make him fall in love with Helen Rolt, a nineteen-year old widow rescued from a wrecked ship. Ultimately, it is this characteristic trait in him that sets him against his wife and God. There is something sacrificial, vicarious and Christ-like about Scobie’s love for others. O’Brien says that his pity for others is “a simulacrum of the passion” (76). His essential loving goodness asserts itself when he says that “he could believe in no god who was not human enough to love what he had created” (The Heart 102). Scobie also finds God in man. Seeing Ali’s dead body he cries: “You’ve have served me all these years and I’ve killed you at the end of them” (221). Greene comments “God lay there under the petrol drums and Scobie felt the tears in his mouth” (221).

Greene’s novel The End of the Affair gives a glorious picture of human love. In it, Sarah Miles’ love for Maurice Bendrix turns to be agape-like because of her supreme act of charity. At first Sarah and Bendrix totally “eliminate God” (56) from their life. But during an air-raid, when Bendrix falls down unconscious, Sarah gets over all her carnal love for him and cries to God to save his life: “I knelt down on the floor: I was mad to do such a thing... Dear God, I said -... Let him be alive, and I will believe. Give him a chance. Let him have his happiness” (79). This is the highest kind of human love which can vie with God’s love for man. This is the kind of love the Bible advocates that one must have for one’s fellow beings.

In all the novels of Greene discussed above, Greene has placed the individual above the established authority of the Church and its rigorous dogmatic teachings.
Wilhelm Hortman says that Greene has inverted Christianity to ease his own inner “spiritual tension”:

Over the period of ten years from *Brighton Rock* in 1938 to *The Heart of the Matter* in 1948, the attempt to humanize one of the central doctrines of the Church with ideas and writings, that were at least in part, beyond the borderline of heresy, must have built up a spiritual tension in the author, which he could not endure forever. The point would have to come at which, he would have to decide where he stood in relation to the teaching authority of his Church. (69)

Eagleton also points out that in Greene “Orthodox Catholicism is denied in the name of ‘humanism’ . . .” (109). Green might have felt the need for the humanization of Catholicism during his sojourn in Mexico. “In a Cathedral at San Luis Potosi, as he describes in his non-fiction, *The Lawless Roads*, he saw poor peasants, “Population of heaven” (44) attending the Mass. They all preserved their faith, in spite of very severe religious persecutions raging there at that time. It was in Mexico that Greene met the real Whisky Priest: “. . . the hunted priest had worked for so many years, hidden in the swamps and forests” (114).

By placing humanism above religious orthodoxy Greene is, perhaps, trying to solve a personal problem. In his autobiography *A Sort of Life* Greene says that he became a Catholic to marry Vivien Bayrell. Louise in *The Heart of the Matter*, tells Scobie, her husband: “Ticki, I sometimes think you just became a Catholic to marry me. It doesn’t mean a thing to you, does it? (16). Greene’s religious conversion should not be taken too seriously. One is led to assume that his conversion has helped him to
look at human misery and suffering from an entirely different angle, from a humanist perspective.

Joshi is also a religious novelist dealing with the teachings found in the Gita and the Upanishads. Siddhartha Sharma asserts: “His fiction is an expression of a distinctly Indian voice where one finds the richness of Indian heritage. Joshi’s vision is essentially Hindu. His philosophical leanings are towards Hinduism” (123). In an interview with Arun Joshi, Sujatha Mathai remarks that “Joshi feels that his ethos is essentially Hindu”. In his first novel The Foreigner, critics find Sindi Oberoi preoccupied with the Hindu philosophical and religious problems of “involvement” and “detachment”. In Billy Biswas’ search for his missing self in the woods, critics say, one can see the Sankhya principle which is essentially Hindu. In The Apprentice the critics finds Ratan Rathor doggedly following the Karmic principles as enshrined in the Bhagavad Gita. In The Last Labyrinth Som Bhaskar, the protagonist “hovers between two worlds – the world of religion and spirit and the world of science and realities” (Indira Bhatt 68).

Pointing out the religious strain in Joshi’s works, C.V. Venu Gopal and M.G. Hedge observe: “Finally, Joshi has admirably worked out . . . the struggles of a sensitive soul inching its way, against formidable odds, . . . towards self-realization and attainment of grace. It is this progress of the Soul – from innocence through ignorance to knowledge – reflecting the Upanishadic injunction of the movement from untruth to truth – which is artistically worked out . . .” (141). According to M. Mani Meitai The Last Labyrinth is: “Unparalleled in the treatment of a subtle Indian theme
based on the import of Hindu religious philosophy as advocated in the holy scriptures like the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*” (83).

M. Madhusudan Rao also says that to understand Arun Joshi’s fiction “familiarity with the basic assumption and premises of Hindu philosophical thought is a necessary preliminary” (“The Hindu Existential” 149). To affirm his views he quotes from William Barrett who has said:

Even today, the motive for an oriental’s taking up the study of philosophy is altogether different from that of a western student: for the oriental, the only reason for bothering with philosophy is to find release or peace from the torments and perplexities of life . . . Philosophy is the soul’s search for salvation . . . deliverance from suffering and evils of the material world. (149)

Commenting on Joshi’s last novel Vachaspati Dwivedi says: “*The City and The River* by its theme and execution proves that Joshi has been deeply influenced by the Hindu existential vision and the novel continues the spiritual quest of his earlier novels . . . “ (143)

At the same time a close reading of the novels of Joshi reveals the fact that like Greene he also places humanism above religious values. Joshi’s primary interest is protecting human values which constitute a healthy and meaningful culture. A sensitive reader of Joshi may understand that like Greene, he has grafted religious values on his most cherished humanist values. The most relevant critical interpretation leading to such a conclusion has come from Mukteshwar Pandey who has rightly said:
“Arun Joshi believes that Hinduism is highly existentialist-oriented philosophy since it attaches so much importance to the right way to live . . . It is because of the existentialist leanings that he was led to like Hinduism and love *The Bhagvat Gita*” (28). A proper study and analysis of Joshi’s *The Apprentice* may reveal the truth that it is not Hindu religious philosophy that is at its centre. The novelist clearly shows the movement of Sindi from inactivity and indifference to a state of acceptance and action. At the end, Sindi properly understands not any religious value but he reaches to have the realization “that involvement and action rather than non-involvement and passivity are the basic ingredients of human life and human relations” (T. Prabhakar *The Indian Novel* 273).

Joshi himself has admitted that he was influenced by Albert Camus, Sartre, Kierkegaard and other Western and Eastern existentialist writers. He has put his own philosophical vision of life into the mouth of Som Bhaskar, the protagonist of his fourth novel, *The Last Labyrinth*. The following quote very clearly reveals that Joshi’s vision of life is essentially existentialist and his concern is how to redeem man from the abyss of ignorance, despair and loneliness into which he has fallen:

. . . it reminded you of that core of loneliness around which all of us are built. It might have emerged from the slums of Benaras but centuries had gone into its perfection. It rode the night like a searchlight, lighting up the ruins of an ancient abandoned city with which I, too, was familiar. All my life, at intervals, I, too, had flown across its blacked out skies, flapping my weary wings, not able, for all the striving, to chart a course. This city, at least, we had in common, Azizun and I.
And through Azizun, I shared it with the other two, who sat at once intent and lost, in a cloud of cigarette smoke. I could see, with sudden and unparalleled lucidity, that our differences apart, shares or no shares, we belonged to the same benighted underside of the world. (The Last 54-55)

Abdul Saleem puts more emphasis on this fact and says that Joshi’s “... indictment of the materialistic drive of the spiritual sterile society appear [sic] to be deeply rooted, not in any religio-philosophical attitudes but in the simple fact of man’s deviation from his own elemental self lost in the fun house of the sheerly materialistic pleasures, luxuries and carnal gratification” (20).

O.P. Saxena in his “The Art and Vision of Arun Joshi” says that Arun Joshi’s concern is primarily humanistic. He is of the opinion that his novels:
delineate more of human problems than issues arising out of regional loyalties. His characters step out of themselves and question not only the atmosphere which impinges on their consciousness but their own self indulgent attitudes keeping them away from facing the truth. His condemnation of the industrial, the civilized and the materialistic world is not guided by a sentimental extolling of Indian Philosophy and values of life but by a genuine faith in the integrity of the primitive values of sensuousness, passion and action. (102)

Tapan Kumar Ghosh is also of the view that Joshi’s vision of life is man-oriented. While analysing the last novel of Joshi The City and the River he says:
In reply to the question of the Minister: ‘What is God?’ the Hermit says: ‘Let me not labour the point. Can we not say He is the noblest thing each of us can imagine, each according to his light . . . Can we not say God is the highest Truth as it is known to each one of us?’ . . . This is the highest point of Arun Joshi’s quest for spiritual commitment. But his vision is presented not as abstruse metaphysics or as philosophical tact, but in fictional terms through the human drama of character and situation. It is organic to the action of the story and arises from it inevitably. (182-83)

Ghosh comes to the conclusion:

Arun Joshi’s fictional world is an informed and artistic portrayal of individual minds overpowered by conflicting urges within themselves. It highlights the basic contradictions of the post-independence Indian society with its scientific and technological progress, growth of materialism, spiritual degeneration and confusion of values. (183)

The above discussion points to the fact that one has to concur with the view that a re-reading of the fictional works of Joshi is imperative to assess and highlight his humanist interest and place it above his interest in religious values. The novels and some of the short stories of Joshi are analysed in the following pages keeping this perspective in view.

Joshi’s Sindi has been very much praised for his adherence to what is called “detachment” which is a religious value emphasized by the Gita. For instance, Kamal N. Awasthi and Lalit M. Sharma in their “The World of ‘Outsiders’” say: “in his quest
to resolve the dichotomy between attached and detached, participation and withdrawal, love and hate, pain, suffering and happiness, Sindi comes closer to any religious hero” (106). In the novel, Sindi does make a difference between pleasure and pain, gain and loss and victory and defeat. He wants to enjoy pleasure, gain and victory and runs away from pain, loss and defeat. As pointed out by B.D. Sharma and S.K. Sharma “to justify his actions he takes the help of the concepts of Karma Yoga” (92). The Bhagavad Gita preaches: “To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction” (II: 47). Sindi forgets the last tenet altogether. He acts, sleeps with June, but refuses to accept the fruit of his sin and refuses to marry her. In truth, Sindi wants to become a Yogi without acquiring the pre-requisites for becoming one. Sindi cannot be called a religious man simply because he often talks about “detachment”. He acts out of lust.

Again, Sindi has no belief in God. The following conversation between him and June Blyth reveals it:

She asked me again if I believed in God. I said I didn’t know, but I supposed I didn’t.

“I thought every Hindu believed in God”

“They ought to”, I said. “But some of them get mixed up about it”.

(The Foreigner 31)

Sindi gives up his “detachment” when Mr. Khemka’s business fails. He feels sorry for the poor labourers working for Mr. Khemka: “It was a sad sight. The workers’ clothes were falling off in rags and sweat poured off their backs as if they
had just had a shower . . . These are my people, I thought and yet I moved among them as if I were a stranger” (197-98). His sympathy for the poor increases when he visits Muthu’s family. “. . . the accumulated despair of their weary lives” (226) makes him take over the business of Mr. Khemka. He says that he has been dropped “on a sinking ship and charged with the impossible task of taking it ashore” (226). His earlier “detachment” with the world is now replaced by unselfish attachment. He surrenders himself to serve for the cause of others. Now he calls himself not “Surinder Oberoi”, but “Surrender Oberoi”. Like Sartre, Joshi emphasizes the significance of man’s existential freedom that entails responsibilities for others. Sindi is now interested in action that is concrete and immediate and useful for others. He shifts his attachment from his “self” to the world. The sense of guilt that has oppressed him ever since the death of Babu and June Blyth is now erased from his mind. What triumphs at the end is not any spiritual value attached to Sindi’s “detachment”. Muthu says in the novel “Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved” (225). As O.P. Mathur writes “. . . the novel portrays the progress of a Sartrean protagonist attached only with his own self towards a realization of humanity . . .” (New Critical Approaches 45). Sindi’s movement towards humanity and his selfless service to its cause is called “humane technology” by Shivani Vatsa and Rashmi Gaur. They comment: “The cure of all the evils and ills of modern society lies in the establishment of humane technology. It is only in and through the cultivation of humane technology that the salvation of mankind is possible. The ultimate goal of humane technology is the welfare of the entire human race” (39).
In his novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* Joshi makes a scathing attack on the materialistic value system adopted by the Post-Independent Indians who have become corrupt and ineffective due to the influences of Western civilization. Billy, the protagonist of the novel, as R.K. Dhawan aptly observes: “In a bid to seek communion with the primitive world . . . opts out of the modern world” (“The Fictional World” 21). He yearns for a sense of harmony and belonging with his civilized surroundings. He does not get it even after his marriage with Meena Chatterji who talks “almost entirely in English in that unique, rather flat, accent . . .” (*The Strange Case* 37). He is totally dissatisfied with her because she possesses “a rare degree of empathy or even a sufficient idea of human suffering” (185). This is the most unkindest cut of all. This is the first sin Billy commits. Then, he seduces Rima Kaul. “The shameful affair with Rima shows his fraudulent nature and his abysmal degradation” (Siddhartha Sharma 44). He himself realizes it and says: “After it was over I looked into her clear trusting eyes, and I had a first glimpse of my degradation” (*The Strange Case* 188). This is not the act of a Yogi- a religious man. He has become a “common rogue” (188). Only this “shocking realization expedites his flight from civilization” (Siddhartha Sharma 44).

Joshi tries to redeem such a sinner and bring him back to humanity. The first person he employs to do this is Tuula Lindgren who is educated and humane. Unlike Meena and her ilk, she has a “total disregard of money” (*The Strange Case* 177). Billy is greatly influenced by her belief that the search for truth is a lonely business: “. . . you had to be prepared to go it alone if you really wanted to be honest to yourself” (177). She tries to give him a Hindu mind.
A great change comes upon Billy when he reaches Dhunia’s hut and sees Bilasia there. The Hindu mind acquired from Tuula suddenly vanishes and Billy gets totally enamoured of Bilasia’s sensuality. She pours out a sexuality that is nearly as primeval as the forest. It is nothing but pure lust for her body that binds him with her. Abdul Saleem says: “His love which has remained unspelt and inarticulate so far, now blows with the wild breeze” (75). The critics who uphold Joshi as a religious writer read too much into this and bring sankhya system of Indian philosophy into the novel and say that the physical union between Billy and Bilasia is the union between “Purush” and “Prakrit”. They say that Bilasia is Billy’s “Shakti” [female energy]. H.M. Prasad, for instance, observes “Meena deadens his senses, Rima corrupts him and the material civilization kills his innate natural instinct. It is Bilasia who causes explosion of senses – the proper medium to reach soul” (Arun Joshi 46). These critics forget the fact that Billy all through his life is actuated by Bhoga [lust] and Kama [sexual desire]. They refuse to accept the strain of immorality that is self-evident in Billy’s life. Joshi quite deliberately and unconsciously makes Billy a Yogi endowed with a “Hindu mind”, and becomes emotional to the extent of calling the relationship “the intense beauty of this human relationship” (The Strange Case 143). He also makes him a mangod, an avatara [incarnation of God]. He makes Billy perform miracles like warding off a tiger, curing children and helping the tribals out of their worldly and spiritual troubles. To the primitive people, Billy is “like rain on parched land, like balm on a wound” (159-60). In Joshi’s hands a sinner has become a saint.

Among the primitives, Joshi’s Billy is seeking divinity in man. Like Greene’s Whisky Priest Billy also heals himself and heals others and attains the highest state of
self-realization. Like the Whisky Priest, he too, moves from place to place helping people and performing miracles. In other words, he becomes a humanist who works for the welfare of the people. Billy’s tragic death is highly deplorable. He is killed like a common criminal. Billy’s final verdict of the so-called civilized people is “You bastards” (233). Romi, Billy’s friend makes a revealing comment on Billy’s death highlighting his essential human qualities: “Gradually it dawned upon us that what we had killed was not a man, not even the son of a ‘Governor’ but some one for whom our civilized world had no equivalent. It was as though we had killed one of the numerous man-gods of the primitive pantheon” (236). In short, the novel tells the story of a sinner who becomes a saint and a man who has no equivalent and dies while selflessly serving for the welfare and well-being of the primitives in a remote hilly region.

In his novel The Apprentice Joshi comes very close to Greene in placing humanist values above religious values and points out that the alienated and isolated people can achieve redemption only by becoming highly compassionate and intensely sensitive to human situations. Ratan Rathor, the protagonist in The Apprentice first turns to religion. He visits a temple of Lord Krishna and watches the rituals. He cries: “Help me, O God help me. I am in trouble and I have come to your door. Give me refuge. Give me courage. Just for a day lend me your courage. Help me” (118). The pujari [priest] sings a song and the crowd joins him. Ratan thinks that the pujari can help him and find a way out for his problems for he is “an agent of God” (119). But quite paradoxically the pujari takes hold of Ratan’s hand and begins to narrate the problems of his son. His son is a contractor and he has built three hundred houses for
slum-dwellers, but the engineer concerned has stopped the payment saying that excessive sand has been used in the mortar. The pujari wants Ratan to help his son. Ratan replies that he works in a different department. The pujari lowers his voice and says that he is ready to bribe the authorities concerned. Ratan is terribly shocked. He never expects that a religious man will ever do such a thing. After this incident, Ratan stops going to any temple. “Well I turned without another word. And since that day I have not been inside a temple. The closest I come is the threshold, where they leave the shoes. Heaven knows what ogres may accost me if I ever venture further” (120).

Later, when Ratan meets the Sheikh he tells him about the nature of the society that has completely cheated his entire family. He tells him: “You are bogus, Ratan Rathor . . . from top to bottom. Your work, your religion, your friendships, your honour, nothing but a pile of dung. Nothing but poses, a bundle of shams” (131). According to the Sheikh there is no cure from God. “But where was God, he cried out again, suddenly excited, his voice ringing with despair. What was god? And where?” (140). However, finally, he gives Ratan one good piece of advice to get over his difficulties. He tells Ratan that he must be “useful” to people. “Try to put yourself to use, Ratan Rathor . . . It might be too late. You have been too long the slave. . . But give it a try. One lost nothing” (141). The advice goes deep into the heart of Ratan who earlier considered life as a “zero” (142). He firmly decides upon putting himself to social use and thereby expiate his sin. But the question is: how to put oneself to social use and to have faith in what kind of God?

The Superintendent’s God is no use. Of that I am sure. Whose God then? The God of Kurukshetra? The God of Gandhi? My father’s God,

(142)

Finally deciding to be of use to others, every morning, before going to work, he comes to the temple and sits on one of the steps and wipes the shoes of the congregation. He does it “Without vanity and without expectations and also without cleverness” (143). He never enters the temple. He says: “I am not concerned with what goes on in there” (143). He only says: “Be good. I tell myself. Be good. Be decent. Be of use” (143). He concludes saying: “How deserted the temples looks. Frozen, petrified, like our civilisation itself” (144). Ratan also says that the youngsters in India should be “Willing to learn from the follies of their elders. Willing to learn and ready to sacrifice. Willing to pay the price” (144). Like Greene, Joshi also pins his faith on humanity and not on orthodox religious values.

A reader of the works of the two novelists with a penetrating insight can clearly understand the unflinching assertion of their abiding faith in humanity and in human values. Though their characters are lost in sin, both the authors, out of their profound sympathy and humanism, accord them, at the end some religious sanctity and divinity. Their characters, at first come to embrace religious values, but soon they acknowledge their allegiance to humanity and its causes.

Joshi’s novel The Last Labyrinth presents “the conflict between human values and possessive attitude” (Lokesh 94). Som Bhaskar, the protagonist of the novel is a
possessive lover. His love for Anuradha is not genuine. He himself says: “All I wanted was her. I wanted her body and soul, every bit of her” (133). Joshi brings into the novel a number of characters to spiritualize and humanize Som Bhaskar. The first one is Gargi, a deaf and mute ascetic-woman living in a lonely cottage on the other side of the Ganga [a sacred river]. In her presence, Som seems to lose his possessive attitude as the divine atmosphere of the cottage works over his personality. But soon the change disappears and he decides to possess Aftab’s company. During his second visit also, he changes a little and says “May be, I ought to start attending temples every evening” (118). The third meeting takes place in a room and he feels that he is “inadequate” to “deal with” Anuradha (121). Again, his sexual desire for her increases by leaps and bounds and he goes to Aftab’s house and enjoys her to his heart’s content. During the fourth meeting Gargi suggests to him, “There is no harm in believing that God exists” (213). But contrary to her advice, he tries to buy all the shares of Aftab. All these prove that Gargi’s efforts to spiritualize Som Bhaskar fail.

Anuradha also tries to cure Som by telling him about God: “There is a god up there . . . those mountains . . . There is a temple there. On a hill lined with lepers. You must come with me . . . God will cure you” (126). When Som suffers from a massive heart attack, Anuradha comes straight to Gargi and begs her to save him. She persists, begs, weeps and threatens to consume poison in case something happens to Som. One is reminded of the prayer made by Greene’s Sarah Miles to God to save her lover, Bendrix, during an air-raid. Som is shocked when Anuradha totally disappears from his life. He becomes all the more revengeful and with the shares he reaches Lal Haveli. He receives a letter from Aftab which is full of curses. Som is a little touched
in his heart and he makes a fervent appeal to Anuradha to pray to God for him. Yet, he does not experience any total change in his attitude towards life. At last, when the novel ends, Som, shuttled between his possessiveness and human values, makes a suicidal gesture by putting his revolver to his temple, but Geeta, his wife, stops him and shakes him gently as though rousing a man from sleep.

The Last Labyrinth, as Joshi himself has said, is slightly different from the other novels in which the protagonists are ultimately led back to community. But in this novel Joshi’s emphasis is not on religion as shown in the discussion but on “humanness”. Joshi is more concerned with Som’s obstinate refusal to sacrifice his rational approach and intellectual pride. Tapan Kumar Ghosh suggests that Som “does not make any metaphysical leap or leap of faith” (148), but “relies on his reason and intellect” (148). He is a symbolic representation of modern young Indians who assert their individual human values and remain proud of their Western education and cynical about the religious beliefs of their community.

Joshi in his last novel The City and The River also points out the importance of the assertions of the individual. He has admiration for the Boatmen and the brick-people who are religious and who live asserting their authenticity. They refuse to surrender their rights and freedom in order to be obedient to the City people who represent authority and power. The Boatmen prove the authenticity of their selves in Heideggerian and Sartrean terms. For Heidegger, “genuine existence is existence which dares to face death”. The Boatmen very boldly face all the threats and dangers coming from the Grand Master and his associates. They boldly refuse to take any oath he proposes. Their Headman (who is a woman) symbolizes courage, strength and
commitment to freedom. The Headman has to lose her eyes. Every night a few
Boatmen are transported to the prison and this causes both physical and mental pain.
In the prison, “the idea of the self [is] suitably dissolved” (The City 161). Patanjali is
arrested as a substitute of Master Bhoma. He refuses to apologise to the Grand Master.
The Boatmen are imprisoned in the horrible Gold Mines, and killed. They do not
surrender; they maintain their authenticity. In the Sartrean sense, the Boatmen remain
free though they are imprisoned because their liberty consists in their resistance.

To a sensitive reader of the novel what appeals most is the authenticity and the
fearlessness of the Boatmen and the brick-people. To them, safeguarding their
freedom and their individuality is more important than their allegiance to power and
authority. Joshi being a humanist knows well that in the modern industrialized,
commercialized and capitalist world the self is very often threatened and crushed.
Hence, in the novel, he makes the aspect of authentic existence an important issue and
upholds the values of individuality and authenticity.

In this novel, Joshi suggests that the cure for all problems is to be found within
oneself: “The cure, surely is within oneself” (69). Human heart must be pure, and its
purification can come only through sacrifice. Whatever be the problems, people have
no option but to trust and pray to God if they really want peaceful life. In the novel
Joshi puts forward this view through the Astrologer: “Ours is a spiritual civilisation. It
is through prayer and through vows that a man perfects himself” (100). Understanding
brings tranquility and enables us to “learn only by ourselves” (142). A clear
understanding or intuitive self-knowledge unfolds Truth which “destroys the falsehood
at its very roots, [and] leaves all men free to choose as they will” (112). The novel also
explores the relevance of God to man and affirms that “the world belongs to God and to no one else”. “God is the highest Truth as it is known to each one of us” (70). The great Yogeshwara asserts: “His [God’s] is the will, His is the force” (264). He says that the City and the people must purify themselves by accepting God if they do not want to be dissolved in the flood. He points out that they must give up their “egoism, selfishness, stupidity” (263). Through this novel Joshi points out that if people want to become really humane, they should accept God and purify themselves and be free of all evils and corrupting forces. Joshi, however, does not try to bring about any synthesis of religion and humanism. He only indicates that one should be first religion-oriented to become a real and genuine lover of humanity. As S. Radhakrishnan observes: “Whatever our theological beliefs and metaphysical opinions may be, . . . we should be kind and honest, grateful to our benefactor, and sympathetic to the unfortunate” (Siddiqi Iqbal and Radhakrishnan 99).

Greene pleads out of his abundant humanity for a greater degree of flexibility in respect of dialectical and ethical issues in the established Church to accommodate the morally depraved. Joshi makes a plea for a greater accommodation and acceptance for the erring sinners and the lustful males in the new Indian society in which “there are young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders, willing to learn and ready to sacrifice. Willing to pay the price” (The Apprentice 144).