Introduction

Today, owing to technological advancements, the ever-increasing number of sophisticated means of communication, transportation facilities and services and widening industrial and commercial activities that cross national frontiers, the different nations of the world have come close and the world has shrunk in size that we very often speak about globalization at various levels. Cultural values are now in a melting pot merging into a pronounced homogeneous whole reducing to the minimum racial and national discriminations. In achieving this end, Comparative Literature plays a significant role. It promotes cultural synthesis which ultimately leads to the realization that we all belong to a single large human family. As Fritz Strich puts it in his Goethe and World Literature: Comparative Literature “is a literary bridge over dividing rivers, a spiritual highway over dividing mountains” (5).

A comparative study of a similar area or phenomenon in the literary works of two different countries helps us understand in a better light, by equipping us with a more clear insight, the underlying unity behind the world’s historical process and concomitant issues such as the natural process of social and literary development in general. Such a comparative study of literatures gives an opportunity to pose in a wider perspective a number of important questions relating to the history and theory of literature.

A comparative study of similar areas in two or more literatures of different countries naturally gives a chance to explore literature in its totality which ultimately expands our vision of life and widens our perspectives and paves the way for the
establishment of what Goethe called “World Literature”. When the scope of the study of Comparative Literature widens, there arises a certain possibility for a synthesis and an interaction and interconnectedness between various cultural, racial and linguistic values. The following observation of S.V. Subramanian is worth quoting in this context:

. . . Comparative literature, with its conceptual framework clearly drawn and its scopes, priorities and perspectives carefully defined, can play a role more constructive and creative than that of sages and seers, statesmen and social reformers, religion and sciences, in shaping the collective human destiny. (257)

Comparative Literature studies have been taken up with much interest and enthusiasm by scholars studying and working in several Indian universities and colleges. They have given it the needed impetus that it has become a widely recognized and much respected discipline in Indian literary circles. It can be proud of having numerous adepts and experts who are deeply engrossed in exploring its values. Many of them have come out with several studies using innovative comparative methods and perspectives and established the reputation of many writers who were earlier found to be either obscure or insignificant. The earliest instance of literary research of this kind using the method of comparison goes as far back as 1964 when Dr. T. Prabhakaran submitted to the university of London his dissertation on the influence of Indian thought and culture on Robert Southey’s “The Curse of Kehama” (Manavalan 4).
By closely following the theories and methods put forward by such eminent comparatists like Ulrich Weisstein, Henry H.H. Remak, J.T. Shaw and others, a sincere attempt is made in this dissertation to foreground two of the novelists of the West and the East, namely Graham Greene, an English novelist of repute, and Arun Joshi an Indian English novelist, for a comparative study of the existential strain that runs through the entire corpus of their works. Greene wrote most of his works from the thirties to the nineties and he is now no more. Arun Joshi came out with his first novel *The Foreigner* in 1966 and he is known for five novels and one short story collection entitled *The Survivor* which came out in 1975. He died prematurely in 1993.

Greene’s novels have already received much critical attention, the bulk of which has been directed mainly towards certain Catholic themes which critics think form the core of his artistic and literary expression. Critics and theologians like Alastair Flower, Walter Allen, Anthony Burgess and Frederic Karl have probed deeply into Greene’s insight into the meaning of Sin, Salvation, Suicide, Crime and Damnation and the treatment of some of his obsessional themes like the eternal conflict between Evil and Good, God, the relentless pursuer of the fleeing sinner, Man pitted against an evil world of violence, fear, despair and death and God’s inordinate mercy and compassion even for the worst sinners. Critics like David Pryce-Jones, on the other hand, highlight the social burden of Greene’s art paying scant regard to his religious and theological preoccupations. Pryce-Jones’ observation that “his [Greene’s] Catholicism offers little hope or joy but only fear and danger” (Graham Greene 1) assumes relevance in this context. Commenting on Greene’s social
consciousness, he says that in Greene there is an element of social sympathy and an “undergraduate communism” (10). James L. McDonald is of the view that Greene’s abiding concerns “have always been social and political” (“Graham Greene” 201). The Soviet critic V. Ivasheva asserts that Greene in his novel The Quiet American promotes Communism “as a distinct alternative to fascist reaction, as the ideology of the future” (20th Century English Literature 234). In short, Greene has been looked at from a number of angles and perspectives – as a Catholic novelist, a social realist, a romantic anarchist, a Marxist, a heretic and even as a burnt-out Catholic.

In the eyes of many readers Greene remains only as a Catholic novelist and a religious writer. Such readers are never tired of pointing out his commitment to Catholicism, seeing him in the popular image of a loyal Catholic who is out “to justify the ways of God to Man” (A.M.J. Smith 17). It is true that Greene has written novels like Brighton Rock (1938), The Power and the Glory (1940), The Heart of the Matter (1948) and The End of the Affair (1951) in which the dominant characters are Catholics. But the paradox is that their “religion” with its so-called rigid systems, principles, values, beliefs and dogmas do not offer them any satisfactory solutions to their existential problems. What happens in these novels, when viewed without any bias to religion is: “Orthodoxy is submitted to the test of experience and its inadequacies exposed . . .” (Terry Eagleton 112).

Seen in an enlightened perspective, Greene is, first and foremost, a creative artist exercising a wide appeal over a vast range of readers including the non-Catholics, because in reality, he does not deliberately and openly propagate any religious doctrine. Even in the above-mentioned novels which deal with certain clearly
pronounced Catholic themes and consciously present a number of “religious”
characters, one may find Greene going out of his way to defend even the worst sinners
including those who commit adultery and suicide. Scobie in The Heart of the Matter
and the Whisky Priest in The Power and the Glory impress themselves on many
readers not by virtue of their religiosity but by virtue of their innate humanness and
compassion for those who suffer in life. Greene’s confessions to Marie-Francoise
Allain, throw ample light on his objective as a writer of fiction: “I don’t as a rule write
to defend an idea. I’m content to tell a story and to create characters . . . I don’t want
to use literature . . . My so-called ‘Catholic’ novels are [not] written to convert
anyone” (15).

As G.S. Frazer suggests most of the works of the thirties have an immediate
topical reference. They “. . . reflect a state of social tension” (133). Like that of Auden
and Spender, Greene’s concern is also about the “horrors of the brutality and rushing
confusion of the world” (Greene The Lost Childhood 35). The writers of this period
felt the moral responsibility of redeeming man from the fundamental human situation
in which he is pitted against all kinds of evils both within and without. As Keshava
Prasad has observed: “creative writings in the thirties was an act of faith. To write was
to be human . . . Greene was fully aware of his moral responsibility” (40). Greene’s
works show in unmistakable terms how Man placed in an existential predicament
lives, suffers and finally comes back to life and society to embrace the values of
human love which he earlier eschewed. The problems which are generally faced by
many of the existential protagonists placed in labyrinthine predicaments in life in
contemporary fictional works seem to occupy the very centre of Greene’s fictional art
and since they have not been so far sufficiently explored to understand their varied nuances, his works call for a detailed and an in-depth analysis and study.

It is disheartening to note that Arun Joshi’s reputation as a novelist has not been so far fully and firmly established. Pier Paolo Piciucco points out that “. . . Joshi never found the right fulcrum to climb the scale of success” (“Fictional Technique” 30). He adds that Joshi is “an introvert and reserved person” (30). Joshi himself has admitted in an interview that he did not “consider himself connected with the world of writers” (30). This estrangement has had an adverse effect on both his critics’ and readers’ reaction to his works. His literary values, philosophical views and vision of life, as a result, have been acknowledged only by a “restricted circle of scholars” and “his name paradoxically remains unknown to a wider audience . . .” (30).

Joshi’s critics have divergent views regarding his attitude to life. Evidently, they have lost sight of his central existential concern and vision. O.P. Mathur, for instance, affirms: “Among the contemporary Indian English novelists, Arun Joshi has highlighted most effectively some of the eternal metaphysical and ethical questions” (New Critical Approaches 26). Mathur finds Joshi as a novelist much influenced by the Gita dealing with its major themes of “action – inaction, attachment – detachment, involvement – non involvement” (27). Bhatnagar who differs with Mathur writes: “But he [Joshi] is against the outworn mode and style of detachment and renunciation so laboriously built up by the Raja Rao metaphysics and its followers” (“The Art and Vision of Arun Joshi” 49). Harish Raizada who finds in Joshi’s works a double vision of fantasy and reality comments: “Arun Joshi generally begins his novels like plausible pieces of reality but soon after exaggerates them to the point of fantasy or
introduces a set of flamboyantly irrational associations typical of a powerful fantasy” (“Double Vision” 102). Indira Bhatt has quite a different view. Summing up her findings in her scholarly work Arun Joshi’s Fiction: A Critique she observes:

We notice that Arun Joahi’s novels are to certain extent autobiographical. He speaks out his beliefs, ideas and experiences of life through his characters. Joshi is antimaterialistic and dislikes possession in any form. His dislike of material values is clearly seen in his second novel The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, where the protagonist disowns all the material values for primitive life. Though Joshi had his education abroad, he does not fully approve the western way of life and the western values. The Foreigner is a clear example of his rejection of these values. The struggle, torments, estrangements of his characters seem to highlight some of the phases of the novelist’s life where he too underwent such a struggle. The novels of Joshi depict the dilemma of an Indian with the western orientation and education. (96-97)

Prempati points out that the antimaterialism attacked by Joshi is essentially Indian and not Western. She says:

The Strange Case is a study of the total alienation of its protagonist Billy Biswas from the modern bourgeois society of India. The achieved significance of the novel lies in the conscious espousal of an anti-bourgeois outlook . . . A rare spiritual regeneration is what the novel structurally lives through, each device dramatizing the central
contradiction between spiritual regeneration and spiritual decay. (“The Strange Case” 187)

Devinder Mohan points out that Joshi is mainly concerned with “the image of death” “making it a fictional object” (“Arun Joshi’s The Foreigner” 174). To Lokesh Kumar, Arun Joshi “has successfully delineated his contemporary philosophic, religious, political and social problems . . .” (Arun Joshi’s Novels 141). A.A. Sinha says that like Kamala Markandaya, Joshi is exploring “the multifoliage dimensions of the intercultural situation” (16). The Hindu religious elements in Joshi have been also overemphasized. For instance, Hari Mohan Prasad in his analysis of Joshi’s novel The Last Labyrinth says that it has an “Upanishadic-advaitic framework” and he comments that:

The presence of Krishna in the mother’s room [in the novel] in the human forms of the dancing pair on Janmastami day in Benaras, in the mountains, in the blue flame burning since ages, is an implicit demonstration of the essence of Indian spiritual heritage that the Atman [Brahma, God] is in every atom. (“The Crisis of Consciousness” 236)

O.P. Mathur also says: “The protagonist of The Last Labyrinth Som Bhaskar embodying a synthesis of sensuality and reason, progresses from agnostic materialism to faith, marked by an atmosphere replete with suggestive religious symbols” (“The Contemporary and The Cosmic” 147). Mani Meitei points out: “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” (“Indian Ethos” 161).
However, a number of Joshi’s critics have attempted to analyse his novels in terms of Western existentialist thoughts and concepts. His novels have been labelled variously as dealing with “the theme of alienation” (Srivastava, “The Theme of Alienation in Arun Joshi’s Novel” 15), “anxiety and alienation and the predicament of modern man” (Mathur and Rai 149), “inner crisis of modern man and the problem of meaningfulness” (Pathak “Human Predicament” 104-42) and “crisis and quest” (H.M. Prasad 231-39). R.K. Dhawan’s anthology The Fictional World of Arun Joshi introduces Joshi’s fiction in the following terms:

His writings reveal an unambiguous influence of Camus, Sartre and other existentialists. Joshi’s fictional world is characterized by frustration, disintegration and disillusionment. Like Conrad, Melville, Graham Greene and Naipaul, Joshi is preoccupied with the themes of alienation, of rootlessness of individuals and purposelessness of existence. (vii)

Recently Mukteshwar Pandey has published a book entitled Arun Joshi: The Existentialist Element in His Novels. This is the only book, among the many, which examines Arun Joshi as an existentialist thinker and a social reformer. He says:

Like the existentialists, Joshi points out that the age-old traditional world-view and worn-out values have outlived their utility and are almost meaningless in the face of the widespread sense of absurdity, and that only existential values like the worth and dignity of the individual, his freedom of choice, his quest for identity have significance. (Blurb)
A close reading of the novels of Joshi reveals the fact that he too like Greene places humanism above his spiritual interests. Like Greene, he is also basically concerned with Man who has lost the meaning of his existence in a world that is cruel and chaotic. Like Greene, Joshi is also primarily interested in human predicament and he too is highly critical of “a society without norms, without direction, without even perhaps a purpose” (Joshi The Apprentice 74). Shivani Vatsa and Rashmi Gaur while commenting on Joshi’s humanism says that “he [Joshi] endeavours to develop a humane technology in the society for the better and healthy development of individual in this ostentatious and hypocritical world” (“The Concept of Humane” 28). The words of Billy, the protagonist of Joshi’s novel The Strange Case of Billy Biswas are really the words of Joshi, the humanist, who wants life to be simple and graceful:

I do not think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed-up lot of people. Artistically, they were dry as dust. Intellectually, they could do no better than mechanically mouth ideas that the West abandoned a generation ago. Their ideas of romance were to go and see an American movie or go to one of those wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty year old tune. Nobody remembers the old songs or the meaning of the festivals. All the sensuality was gone. So was the poetry. All that was left was loud mouthed women and men in threepiece suits dreaming their little adulteries. (197)

Joshi’s novels are a brilliant satire on modern civilization like Thomas Moore’s Utopia. They successfully portray the old idealistic mode of life. Joshi’s last novel The City and the River is a satire on those who work against human interests. In this novel,
Joshi’s human interest is explicitly obvious. Indira Bhatt and Suja Alexander point out this very clearly when they say:

When the evils on the earth increased beyond limit, God tried to control it in the form of epidemic or deluge. The tyranny of the Grand Master had become destructive and unbearable and the only means to end his tyranny was to destroy him along with the ill-fated city. But the cyclic march of humanity continues and a new city springs up on the ruins of the old city with a new Grand Master and thus the history repeats. (84)

One can say with certainty, that like Greene, Joshi’s human interests also override his religious interests. Like Greene, Joshi is also torn between God and humanity for sometime and finally like Greene he also moves towards the side of the suffering humanity finding in it an ultimate anchorage for the troubled “self”.

Hence, it is appropriate that a sincere effort is made in this dissertation to bring together both Greene and Joshi under the existentialist umbrella and see how they look at Man’s existential problems from their personal, cultural, psychological and social points of view.

Greene is a prolific and a more sophisticated writer. He has written more than thirty novels, four short story collections, five plays and five autobiographical works. Joshi has only five novels and one short story collection to his credit. As such, in this dissertation, only those novels of Greene which serve the purpose of highlighting his existential vision are alone taken up for consideration.
The dissertation comprises seven Chapters. The first Chapter “The Making of the Existentialists” reveals the circumstances that shaped and deepened the existential vision of both Greene and Joshi. It throws light on the unhappy and sad experiences which Greene had as a boy both at home and school, his perception of Evil wherever he turned, the frustration and the boredom caused in him by his failures in sexual affairs, his attempts to kill himself because of the manic-depressions, his readings of the existential philosophers, his marriage with Vivien Bayrell, his conversion to the Catholic religion etc. Greene had carried over to his novels all his bitter life-experiences, his rebellious spirit, fear, perplexities and despair. The result is that almost all his protagonists get themselves alienated from themselves and from others and lead a lonely and meaningless life. Joshi did not have the early bitter experiences of Greene. But he had worked in a mental hospital in the US and seen a number of schizophrenic cases. He had also worked in a few industries in India and as such like Greene he had rightly understood the existential crisis of many of the people with whom he had personal contacts. He had also witnessed the evils that have come into existence in the Post-Independent India. The Chapter shows that despite all difficulties and problems, the protagonists of the two novelists try to lead an authentic life by asserting their individuality and subjectivity and by establishing genuine human relationships with others around them. In short, the details given in this Chapter help one understand the origin and the nature of the existential vision of the two writers which colours and moulds the thinking and the activities of their protagonists.

The second Chapter entitled “The Behavioural pattern of the Existential Protagonist” proves that existentialism is not just a philosophical fad but a real life-
experience of everybody born in this world. It is a part of human life and it is mainly anchored in individual human dilemma. The existentialist experience which Adam and Eve had in the garden of Eden provides a pattern having a few well-marked stages like man’s alienation from God, his loneliness, his anguish and anxiety, his search in the world for the meaning of life, his involvement with others and his final redemption. In the light of this pattern, the Chapter analyses a number of myths, legends and literary works, both Western and Eastern, and shows that in many of the modern literary works the last stage in the pattern is at times taken up by what is called “humanism”. The Chapter also shows that Hindu religious works, particularly, the Bhagavad Gita is existentialist-oriented in nature and it also gives a similar pattern which gets itself reflected in a number of Hindu philosophical works, myths, puranas and epics. The Chapter does not take into account the various philosophical tenets propounded by the well-known existential philosophers like Sartre and Kierkegaard.

The third Chapter “The Alienated Self” shows how the two novelists find the world as a totally ravaged place unfit for human existence. Greene and Joshi bring into their novels a number of seedy and sordid images which picture the world as a veritable hell. The characters who are set against such a squalid background become a part of it and inherit from it all its evils. In Greene, images come one after the other in great number and they accumulate to create what is called by the critics “Greeneland” which is a variant of Eliot’s “Wasteland”. Joshi creates very apt images to show how India after her independence has become a breeding place of all kinds of vices. Living in such a world, the protagonists of both the novelists lose their primeval innocence, independence, individuality and freedom to choose their own course of life. They
come under the control of people more powerful than themselves and lose their innate,
God-given virtues. The two novelists also deal with “familial alienation” and show
how people get themselves alienated because of more powerful parents and the other
indifferent members of their families.

The fourth Chapter “The Lost Lonely Questers” explores how the protagonists
of the two novelists go through the ravaged world in quest of meaning for their life.
The protagonists understand that revolutions, political agitations, all “isms” like
Communism, social institutions, Welfare Associations, Capitalism, Industrialism,
love, lust, sex, married life etc fail to give them any anchorage and lead them to self-
realization. The two novelists are of the opinion that all these deprive man of his
essential individuality, authenticity and basic humanity. They also point out that man’s
desire and longing to go back to the primitive world of childhood where innocence
and peace prevail also end in smoke.

The fifth Chapter entitled “The Question of Commitment” reveals the
conviction of the two novelists that man during his quest for meaning comes out of his
hideout putting an end to his alienation and engages himself in some kind of
commitment. Violence and brutal killing during a war time, generally, pull out the
protagonists from their exile, make them see the sufferings of the people and lead
them to involve themselves with the lives of others. The sight of the sad plight of the
people around shakes them completely, rouses them up from their long sleep of
alienation and makes them feel that they are alone responsible for the sufferings of
others. The two novelists, in doing this, follow what Sartre has said about
commitments and responsibilities. The two novelists believe that all kinds of “isms”
which work against human values of love and compassion are useless. They are of the opinion that any commitment should be motivated by the individual’s personal desire and not by any abstract political ideology. They have great admiration for people who serve others selflessly. Their learning of the Bible and the Bhagavad Gita respectively inspires them to emphasise humanism, human concern and a committed life. They have great aversion for people who remain uninvolved.

The sixth Chapter “Back to Religion and then to Humanism” studies in detail how the alienated heroes of the two novelists finally put an end to their exile and isolation and accept humanity after learning the meaning of life through some kind of spiritual experience. Greene has learned the values of humanism from the Bible which says that Christ came into this world to save the sinners. The Bible also says that man should have strong bonds of love with others as God has with everyone born in the world. The Church has also today felt the need to restructure itself to accommodate the erring humanity and the most depraved sinners. In Hinduism also at present there is great emphasis on humanizing it so that there may be enough possibilities to reduce the sufferings of the sinful humanity. Greene and Joshi bring into our focus a number of characters and point out the need to place humanism above the values of our religions.

The seventh Chapter “Summing Up” recounts all the findings made in the various areas of the current project of research. It concludes by saying that Greene when compared with Joshi has a wider canvas and scope, a highly sophisticated language and a profound aesthetic vision of life. This is because he is a prolific writer with as many as thirty novels, short stories, travel books and autobiographical works.
Joshi, on the other hand, has written only five novels and one volume of short stories. Yet Joshi meets Greene at various points and deals with almost all the issues of existentialism dealt with by him. Like Greene, Joshi also off and on shifts his point of view to present a rounded and a holistic vision of the existentialist situation of man. Though Joshi is mainly concerned with the existential crisis of man in the Post-Independent India, at times, his vision enlarges and comes very close to that of Greene.

Besides using comparison and contrast, the two major tools of critical methodology, in the analysis of the works of the two novelists and their characters, all sound and valid critical approaches namely, Historical, Biographical, Sociological, psychological and Moralistic as well as some of the modern sophisticated critical trends like Structuralism, Feminism, Modernism, Post-Modernism and Post-Colonialism have been applied wherever necessary. While analyzing the anguish, anxiety and anger of some of the women characters of Greene who experience love and sexuality, the present research student shows a fresh understanding of a particular type of feminist behaviour which she calls “Existential Feminism”. She hopes that her concept of this new womanhood will soon gain currency and scholars and students may come forward to apply it to many of the feminist characters in literary works and look at them from a new perspective and add an additional dimension to the feminist literary works.

Though the present study is mainly concerned with the novels of Greene and Arun Joshi, ample references have been made to their short stories and non-literary pieces, whenever they are called for. References to and discussions of other relevant
works by other writers are also made in suitable contexts. There is no separate Chapter dealing with the various techniques employed by the two writers. However, they are brought in wherever they serve a purpose.

The methodology used in the preparation of the dissertation is in accordance with the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Sixth Edition) by Joseph Gibaldi. As per the guidelines given in it the titles of religious works like the Bible, the Gita, the Bhagavad Gita, the Vedas, the Upanishads are not underlined in the text of the dissertation.