INTRODUCTION

As we all know each of the romantic poets of the early 19th century has to his credit both long and short poems whose prominent quality is lyricism of a high order. On almost every individual poet quite a good number of full length studies have appeared offering illuminating and critical comments on the various aspects of his poetry. Among the various kinds of lyric poetry attempted by them studies of odes have also been made. An amazing lacuna, however, exists in respect of their sonnets. No attempt has been made to study these sonnets either as individual contributions or as manifestations of a common outlook. Almost all the romantic poets tried their hands at the sonnet form but Wordsworth surpasses them all in sheer bulk as well as in variety of subject matter and treatment. He has written 523 sonnets which constitute a sizable unit worthy of being studied together for a full length study. An endeavour has been made in this thesis to study his sonnets in the context of his other poetic works, in the context of the tradition of sonnet writing, and also as a type of lyric poetry existing in its own right.

It is very curious that with the romantic revival which stood for freedom, the sonnet genre was revived. Whereas in the case of those whose output is meagre, it may be thought that the poet wrote the sonnets as a pastime or as an experiment, in the case of Wordsworth we cannot think like that. It was because he did not personally
like too much liberty which other romantics had taken with the poetic forms. His own nature and temperament helped him to feel at home in this form. He also indulged in it as if to get respite from his long political works. He wrote them at various times for over fifty years of his poetic career. All of them cannot be dated with precision because many of them remain undated. An attempt has however been made to study them vis-a-vis the various phases of his life when he wrote these sonnets.

The present thesis aims at a comprehensive study of all Wordsworth's sonnets. Though his sonnets offer a bewildering variety as they are religious, political, reflective, descriptive, narrative and personal, yet they are amenable to various kinds of classification. I have classified them according to the subject matter though classification on this basis cannot be rigid because their boundaries are vague and overlapping. I have also tried to study them chronologically wherever possible. They are also sub-classified keeping in view the general traits of the contents. Because the sonnets are studied in historical perspective, the first chapter surveys the sonnet in general, its emergence with the romantic revival and Wordsworth's choice of it with Milton's influence on him. The second chapter deals with the Sonnets dedicated to Liberty and Independence written during the acme of his poetic powers, and 14 sonnets 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty and Order' written after a long lapse of time. The third chapter deals with the series known as 'Duddon Sonnets'. In the forth chapter his Ecclesiastical
Sonnets are discussed in three parts dealing with the introduction, progress and operation of the church in England. The fifth chapter deals with the sonnets numbering 113, written during four tours of the country and the continent undertaken in 1820, 1831, 1835 and 1837. Chapter sixth deals with sonnets on the punishment of death. These sonnets have a bearing on the contemporary controversy whether capital punishment should be abolished or not. Chapter seventh covers all the remaining sonnets included under the heading 'Miscellaneous Sonnets' in three parts and stray sonnets written at various times and on various occasions. They are dealt with under three sub-heads—sonnets descriptive of nature, sonnets on the names of places and persons and general sonnets on various subjects like human life, topics of temporal or spiritual and local, national and international importance. The Sonnets descriptive of nature are discussed in two phases. First are taken up those sonnets which express his delight in the various objects of nature and in the later phase are discussed those sonnets which are not purely descriptive but contain some thing which expresses Wordsworth's firm faith in nature. Chapter eighth deals with the technical aspects of Wordsworth's sonnets - their structure, imagery, rhythmic pattern, symbols and style in general. The last chapter evaluates his contribution to the sonnet and his influence on the Victorians.