CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The poetry of Nineteen Thirties is generally considered to reflect the concern of the contemporary poets about the social, political and economic realities of the times. In fact, the pronounced dramatic thrust of events in this period demanded a response which had a more direct and specific connection with the actualities of social life than the abstract and general response to the problems of their times we find among the poets of the preceding decade. The prominent poets of the thirties - W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, C.Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice promptly responded to the major socio-political and economic developments of the period because they felt that these developments could not be viewed from a distance and precluded detachment. These poets made a sincere attempt to grapple with the contemporary issues from a fresh angle. They formulated bold and new techniques to lend an extra-dimension to their commitment to the social causes. Their direct involvement in some of the topical developments and the strong commitment to the cause of society they displayed resulted very soon in their being recognised as a group of socially-conscious poets.
Their attempt to confront the urgent and immediate challenges of the times compelled the poets of the thirties to react very sharply to the aesthetics prevalent in the preceding decade. Their poetry, in fact, could be seen as emerging in direct contrast to the poetry of their immediate predecessors. Unlike the poets of the previous decade, this younger group of poets assumed a radical posture to counteract the unpleasant realities of the contemporary scene and refused to look upon art as a sanctuary or safe haven from the turmoil, turbulence and decay of actual social life. Clifford Dyment underlines the essential difference between the poets of the twenties and the thirties by showing how the world-outlooks or perspectives in the two cases are significantly divergent. He suggests that the poets of the nineteen-thirties commended Eliot's achievements and were ready to be benefited by the technical innovations introduced by them in the art of poetry, yet their world-view was markedly different from religious outlook adopted by T.S. Eliot. They took note of Eliot's sharply critical picture of contemporary civilization, but they also recognised that this criticism emanated in large part from a distaste for vulgarity which as a man of cultivated sensibility he saw around him. The younger poets felt that something more disturbing than vulgarity was involved here. They also felt that withdrawal from contemporary scene was a mistake on Eliot's part.¹
The poets of the thirties showed a radical concern for public issues. They did not allow their poetic talents to be confined to the expression of their private anxieties. The poets of the twenties, on the other hand, felt that there could be only a personal and private solution of the problem of spiritual sickness which they saw around them. They brought to bear upon their survey of modern scene a spiritual outlook which demanded from each, individually, a stance of transcendence and disengagement from the spectacle of dreadful decay. They were least interested in changing the external social conditions which, to them, were only a manifestation of the rottenness at the core of an individual's spiritual being. This is evident from the following famous lines from Eliot's *The Waste Land*:

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What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
you can not say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the Sun beats
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief.
And the dry stone no sound of water.  
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The ideological thrust of the poets of the thirties, on the other hand, was towards re-orientation of society on leftist lines which would be an anathema to older poets like W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot for whom recapturing of tradition, religion and mythical beliefs by the individual was the real answer. This change in the social perspective of the younger poets determines
the basic content of their poetry as well as the manner of expression adopted by them. These poets acknowledged the overpowering sense of moral confusion and spiritual uncertainty that had overtaken modern man, but they chose to take upon themselves the specific task of investigating the social causes that had lead to this phenomenon. Instead of limiting themselves to the expression of intense anguish and an ever growing sense of desolation over a situation which was visualised as an abstract and external catastrophe, they believed in concrete action. The following lines of Stephen Spender illustrate the viewpoint of these poets:

Who live under the shadow of a war,
What can I do that matters?
My pen stops, and my laughter, dancing, stop
or ride to a gap.}

These lines suggest that Spender could visualize the approaching disaster of war even in early thirties and could suggest a line of concrete action to meet the challenge. In contrast with the theoretical approach adopted by the modernists of the twenties, who turned their back upon the concrete social realities in their preoccupations with cultural and spiritual values, the poets of the thirties came to grips with the down to earth realities of their times:
The hooters are blowing,
No heed let him take,
When baby is hungry
T's best not to wake

Thy mother is crying
Thy dad is on the dole.
Two shillings a week is
The price of a soul.

Since the subject matter dealt directly with the day to day issues, the manner of expression was also forthright and straightforward. The overall impact of social developments on their sensibility was reflected in their poetry with its full immediacy. Stephen Spender highlights the difference in their approach in relation to that of the previous decade when he suggests that the poets of 1920s appeared to be making a leap in the dark and their vision of greatness of European past actually implied contempt and hatred for the present. Their emphasis on tradition, according to him, was merely a projection of their hatred for fragmented modern civilization and opposition to the whole idea of progress. A conservative political stance was implicit in their poetry and some of them went to the extent of looking upon the fascists as supporters of tradition. As against this, the poets of the thirties incorporated in their vision an urgent determination to uproot fascism. They considered it a necessary and immediate task for poetry to become instrumental
in the fulfilment of such an over riding social cause. Spender adds that the poets of the thirties identified themselves completely with the pressing social causes of their time.5

Critics like F.R. Leavis had reacted in their own way against the modernists' transcedentalist outlook on life. Like the modernists, they too recognised the seriousness of the crisis and felt deeply concerned about the decline and decay of cultural standards on account of the spread of mass civilization. The awareness of contemporary crisis in the case of the Leavisites was atleast as acute as that of the modernists but instead of feeling merely baffled by the painful dilemmas created by the modern conditions of living or finding easy solace in some religious dogmas, they emphasised the need for strenuous moral resistance on the part of every sensitive individual in defence of his humanity. They insisted on finding solutions to the problems and actively advocated moral reform based on individual efforts. F.R. Leavis's Scruting group aimed, primarily at rescuing through a collaborative effort the moral, intellectual and humane values which had come under threat on account of growing pressure of mass-civilization. Such a collaborative effort was viewed by them as the minimum necessary assertion on the social plane for the fulfilment of vital human needs of the sensitive elites. Leavis's position could be considered on the social consciousness front as a step ahead of T.S. Eliot whose approach had centred on
mysticism and abstract spiritualism. The leavisites, of course, advocated only individual effort to resolve the prevalent crisis and stopped short of contemplating a directly political collective action.

The poets of thirties not only attacked the modernists for adopting a passively gloomy or cynically bitter attitude towards the challenges posed by the contemporary society. They also championed collective socio-political action as a remedy for the grave problems created by the existing situation. Underlining the importance of active involvement in the social issues of the times in the case of these poets, C.M. Bowra remarks that in the twentieth century crowded as it is with international and civil wars, social revolutions and awakening continents, vigorous and comprehensive reappraisals of what man owes to himself became inevitable and the poets in such a situation could hardly be expected to keep clear of politics or remain indifferent to public affairs. It is not surprising that in such objective circumstances Rex Warner, a poet of the thirties, should sing songs of revolution:

Now you can join us, now all together sing All power not tomorrow but now in this hour, All power to lovers of life, to workers, to the hammer, the sickle, the blood. Come then companions, this is the spring of blood, heart's hey-day, movement of masses, beginning of good.
Of course, in the twenties as well as the thirties, the poets were oppressed by an acute sense of social disintegration and decay of civilization, but there was sharp distinction in the approaches they adopted for reintegration and rejuvenation of the shattered contemporary civilization. The poets of the thirties definitely had a more sharp awareness of the social factors which had generated this crisis and were also guided by a firmer conviction in the need for collective intervention for the purpose of meeting the challenge of the situation. The poets of twenties, on the other hand, showed only a vague grasp of the social processes through which the crisis situation had emerged and the interpretation of chaotic society they offered did not enjoin upon them the duty to make any collective intervention on the political plane. The radical responses of the poets of the thirties to the contemporary situation deserve a closer scrutiny than has been made by the critics so far. Through a systematic analysis we have to understand the basic features of the subjective response to the situation given by each poet, define the nature of the social commitment being advocated in their poetry and characterize the specific perspective or world-view which governs their distinctive responses to the situation. Before undertaking this important task, it would, however, be imperative to relate the poetry of the period to the socio-political and economic scenario of the times.
Regarding the emotional impact of the contemporary situation on the sensibility of the poets of the thirties, Virginia Woolf points out that in the 1930s, young men studying in colleges could not go on discussing aesthetic emotions and personal relations. They realized that the ivory tower of art and amenities of life was founded upon injustice and tyranny and it was wrong for a small class to possess what other people paid for, wrong to stand upon the gold that their fathers had made from their bourgeois professions. These poets, accordingly, felt emotionally disenchanted with the values of their class and wanted to make a break with the liberal tradition.

The Great War had already created a haunting sense of desolation in the poets of the twenties. They felt that everything was done for and no real solutions were possible. As D.E.S. Maxwell points out, materially and spiritually the great war had proved a ruinous adventure. Inherited modes of conduct and belief had lost their validity. But it seemed to the poets of the twenties that there was nothing to replace the fragmented traditions. The pressure of the situation was further aggravated in the 1930s. When the decade opened, Britain was under the vicious spell of the Wall Street crash which led to a grave economic crisis and widespread misery. This economic collapse had resulted in large scale unemployment and poverty. Stephen Spender could capture the grimness of the economic crisis in the lines:
They lounge at corners of the street,
And greet friends with a shrug of shoulder,
And turn their empty pockets out,
The cynical gestures of the poor.

(Collected Poems 1928-1985, P.45)

G.S. Fraser suggests that these poets saw around them a world which offered a sense of safety which was treacherously false. They naturally turned away from that apparent safety to images of danger courageously faced and visualised actions which were imbued with a consciously shared human purpose. They found it impossible to remain passive when confronted by an England slugged by the slump, full of the unemployed leaning against the walls, reading papers, with delicate cautious puffs, a single cigarette. They wanted to make men more alive to the tensions and dangers of the time and encourage them to see the possible power and beauty of the world in their time also.10

The socio-cultural milieu presented a bleak picture. The rise of a technology based culture and the positivistic rationalism on which its edifice was based led to a questioning of accepted social beliefs, conventions and traditions. Instead of generating confidence in man's capacity to build up through his reason a new value system in accordance with the needs of the times, the growth of science and technology merely produced in the middle classes a levity and cynicism, which discarded all values as fake
and irrational. Consequently, confusion and uncertainty prevailed in every sphere and man stood completely dazed. The advent of Freudian psychology added a new dimension to the study of human behaviour with its emphasis on the unconscious operations of the mind. Freud and his followers had come out with new knowledge and understanding about sexual attitudes and responses. This also served at that juncture merely to aggravate the tendency towards deep cynicism. As a result of the sensationalism introduced by Freudian theories, flippant legitimization of distortions and perversions in the matters of sex became a fashion. Man-woman relationships grew mechanical and devoid of any genuine emotional richness. Even in a period of economic crisis, emancipation of women was confused with frivolity and escapist entertainment. Old authoritarian patterns of conduct were disintegrating but in the absence of their replacement by more rational norms, whole armies of uprooted and alienated young men and women emerged on the scene and they did not know what to do with themselves. They kept waiting inertly:

In netted chicken forms, in light house  
Standing on these impoverished constricting acres,  
The ladies and gentlemen apart, too much alone.

Accepted patterns of social relationships collapsed and an atmosphere of uncertainty and disdainful rejection of positives prevailed. This social and emotional chaos which invaded the
ruling middle class had to be exposed. The smart alecks who were 
shallow beneath their brilliant facade had to be given a shock 
treatment. The socio-economic disparities had become so large 
that they had created a social segregation resulting in injustice, 
inequality and exploitation of the unprivileged at the hands of 
privileged ones. Even the educational institutions provided strong 
evidence of discrimination which created a big hiatus in human 
relationships:

On sour cream walls, donations. Shakespeare's head, 
Cloudless at dawn, civilized dome riding all cities, 
Belled, flowery, Tyrolean valley. Open-handed map 
Awarding the world its world, And yet, for these 
Children, these windows, not this world, are world, 
Where all their future's painted with a fog. 
A Narrow street sealed in with a lead sky, 
Far far from rivers, capes, and stars of words.12

All this impelled the poets to visualize an alternative 
social set up where healthy human relationships, free from the 
stifling distortions of the existing system, could become 
possible.

On the political front, the liberal government proved 
inefficient to meet the existing challenges. Then, as if to 
accentuate the crisis, the Spanish Civil war broke out. The 
mounting pressure of fascism on the international plane also 
posed a standing threat to the very existence of liberal democracy.
On top of all this, there was a growing sense of anxiety about the impending threat of another world war. Samuel Hynes points out the threat of impending war when he suggests:

By 1936, war was a part of ordinary consciousness; it thrust itself into the major literary works of the year. And as the threat became clearer and more vividly documented, the efforts to find a way to prevent it became more strenuous and more partisan.13

These major developments of the period set the literary sensibilities of the prominent poets of the period afire with a revolutionary zeal and contributed to the articulation of a response from them which carried within itself an acute awareness of political responsibilities. The impact of these developments can be seen directly or indirectly in the works of these poets. Samuel Hynes finds something new in their determination to act, even among negations, and, the hope for a poetry of new beliefs.14

There was a clear rejection at this juncture of the earlier ivory tower approach in favour of an action oriented approach. The peculiarity of the 1930s was, as Spender observes, not that the subject of a civilization in decline had been taken up for the first time but that the hope of saving or transforming the society had now arisen and it was combined with a firm determination to withstand social oppression and tyrannies.15
On the ideological plane, the poets of the thirties were driven to the left. They found the Marxist view of society, art and culture, the most appropriate frame work for understanding the existing social dilemmas. This left-wing trend imparted a new social significance to their poetic vision and sharpened their technique. Thus, the spectrum of their literary preoccupations reflected an attempt to integrate their poetic creations with society and its immediate problems. Defining the purpose of committed art and the role of artist visualised under it, Maxwell observes that within the framework of leftist theory, a work of art may reflect the disruptive elements prevalent in the society, may help in identifying the social issues and may speed up the ushering in of a new society. Stratchey's book *The coming struggle for power* (1932) which underlined the application of Marxist ideas to the history of Britain strengthened the faith of these poets in the inherent virtues of the working class and made them adopt a favourable attitude towards the Soviet Union. Under the same inspiration they could recognise with greater clarity the need for collective resistance against fascism. But their attitude towards peace pledge union founded by cannon Dick, Peace Ballet undertaken by League of Nations, Peace News Journal, Peace Marches and Peace demonstrations remained negative. Surya Nath Pandey maintains that with Auden and his associates Marxism was more a matter of expediency than of conviction. They were attracted towards it by the compulsion
of events and soon after the Spanish civil war, they felt disillusioned about the efficacy of the Marxist Ideology in solving the problems of the world. During the thirties, however, the thinking of these poets was definitely influenced by Marx. Their contact with his writings served to broaden the range of their thinking and helped them in understanding the depth of the social chaos in the midst of which they lived.

Apart from the ideological and philosophical influences of Marx and Freud, the poetic sensibility of these poets was shaped by numerous other literary influences which they had instinctively imbibed through their wide range of readings. Hopkins, Wilfred Owen and T.S. Eliot were some of the major influences working on them. These poets were faced with the problem of expressing revolutionary sentiments in a new style. Richard Hoggart suggests that these poets were not only concerned with the philosophical analysis of contemporary culture but with the technical problem of finding effective methods of communication of that analysis.

The poets of the twenties took recourse to an obscure and allusive style to extend their sensitivity to the complexities of contemporary life. They employed allusions to project the apocalyptic vision of the society. The poets of the thirties, on the contrary, chose direct and simple language, which could be
easily intelligible to the common masses. Their poetry was prompted by a sense of urgency which they conveyed through exhortations and warnings. Since their main objective was to establish a direct rapport with the public which could accelerate the process of establishment of a better society, theirs was to be a poetry of commitment which necessitated a technique free from aesthetic subtleties and niceties. To this effect these poets made consistent use of imagery taken from contemporary scenario.

The political ideology of Karl Marx, the analysis of man's consciousness by Freud and the tradition of radical protest against the modern exploitative culture jointly contributed to making their poetry subversive and revolutionary. These poets often used machine imagery. However, in their case, it is a reflection of their intention to abandon old ideals and enter into an age of science and technology. For Eliot, the introduction of a steam engine or a city typist had been a matter of irony and disgust but for the poets of the thirties the industrial civilisation with 'aeroplanes' and 'Express trains', was cheerfully moving towards its ultimate goal and industrialization as such did not look horrifying to them. What concerned them more was the serious problem of poverty created by capitalist exploitation or the shallow selfishness and parasitism generated by the system among the more affluent sections of the middle classes.
Auden attempted an interpretation of the socio-political problems in psychological terms. By a synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis, he believed, the writer should be able to write about society as a whole and not about the individual severed from his background. He employed not only traditional forms but also made certain innovations in technique to suit his themes. As a poet, Spender is more socially committed and, therefore, less interested in the innovation of technique than W.H. Auden who actually blazed the trail and created the appropriate climate for the poets of the thirties. Instead of displaying the boldness of Auden, Spender is extremely cautious and careful in the manipulation of words and images. His poems on technology "The Pylons", "The Express" and "The Landscape Near An Aerodrome" are effective manifestations of machine imagery, but they read like straight descriptive poems and are free from teasing ironic twists and turns or cryptic condensations and gaps which we find in Auden's poetry. C.Day Lewis, like Auden, shows interest in complicated working of group psychology. His "From Feathers to Iron" reveals the influence of surrealism and can not be read as a straight descriptive poem. MacNeice is even more surrealistic than C.Day Lewis. It is an essential part of the technique used by him to juxtapose images in a surrealistic pattern. Spontaneous emergence of images from the subconscious regions without the intervention of ratiocinative reflection and unexpected
complications created by the intrusion of memory or heterogeneous experiences from the past are familiar features of MacNeice's poetry.

The poets, in this way, invented fantastic imagery to focus attention on the complexities of the modern experiences which they believed can be properly understood if we relate them to the tensions and distortions created by the use of technology by an exploitative socio-political system. In the poetry of these writers, it is the choice of contrast and not the technical innovations which plays the dominating role. As the present study is intended to be a thematic one and the primary attempt here is to determine the social perspective of the British poetry in the nineteen thirties, an analysis of the attitudes reflected in the choice of content will receive greater emphasis than the discussion of its formal patterns. We shall limit references to the stylistic devices used in this poetry to the extent to which they are necessary for a proper understanding of the social-content.

The study is based on the assumption that for a correct understanding of the social message that the group of committed writers in the thirties wanted to convey through their poetry, it is necessary to identify the social perspective they adopted in looking upon the contemporary social scene and responding to the realities of their time. In fact, the relationship of the
The artist's overall views formed during a life-time of experience in a particular society and under particular historical circumstances give their qualitative distinction and shape to his ideas and observations.

Infact, the artist's standpoint in looking at things determines, to a large extent, both what he sees and the manner in which he responds to what he sees. A proper identification of a writer's perspective, therefore, broadens and enriches our understanding of the writer's work. It also proves helpful in examining the artistic merit of the work produced and in any case without defining the perspective we can not determine the precise nature of an artist's commitment to the particular cause or causes he seems to champion in his work.

In attempting to analyse the parameters of an artist's social perspective we find that an artist with a social perspective is profoundly interested in the lives of people and the fate of humanity. He feels an irresistible urge to jump into the fray when he is confronted with a situation where a conflict of
interests of different groups demands that he should take sides. He makes a thorough study of contemporary social milieu and seeks to uncover the hidden logic of the pressures of social change. He can not afford to be apathetic to the burning social issues and uses his poetic talent to highlight them in his literary creations. He also seeks to use his poetry as an instrument for social changes and looks upon it as a form of intervention for bringing about a qualitative change in the existing socio-political and economic set up and usher in an order where healthy and meaningful human relationships may flourish. But the real substance of his subjective intentions in this regard is determined by the perspective he has adopted in viewing the social reality around him. The perspective adopted by the writer will enable us to judge the quality of his preoccupation with social reality and the seriousness of his commitment to bring about social change. It will also enable us to measure more precisely the power and force of his poetic intervention and know to what extent, he can influence society. In a nutshell, it is the proper identification of the social perspective of an artist which will provide us the real clues for knowing the strengths and limitations of his understanding of the objective social conditions of his times and the quality of his concern about the future of mankind.

Critics, no doubt, recognise the social credentials of the poets of the thirties but they express divergent views
regarding the nature and character of their commitment. The critical opinion on these poets largely falls into four categories. One group of critics has taken it for granted that these poets were Marxists and their poetry faithfully reflects their Marxist perspective and political orientation. Some other critics discern a conflict between their poetic talent and their political commitment and regard them as mere propagandists whose political concerns prevented a genuinely creative engagement with vital human issues of our time. Their poetry seems to these critics to represent mere rhetoric unbacked by adequate understanding of the issues of genuine human concern to us. Still another group of critics believe that these poets wrote poetry more out of aesthetic considerations than any serious social or political considerations and the political pretensions can easily be ignored as mere excrescences. In addition to all these diverse responses, there are also the comments of contemporary poet-critics regarding the poetry of the thirties in general and the poetic contribution made by each individual writer. These comments reflect a better understanding of the poetry of this period than what we find in the writings of any one of the critics covered by the four groups mentioned above.

Critics of the first category evaluate the poetry of these writers by assuming that their poetry does, in fact, spring from their political concerns as Marxists. Among the major names
associated with this line of thinking are critics like James Burnham, Bernard Bergonzi, C.M. Bowra and George Watson. All these critics believe that the poetry of the thirties genuinely reflects the strengths and limitations of a creative endeavour rooted in Marxist perspective. James Burnham calls these poets a representative "group" of communists..., wishing to work in their own way towards a classless society. Bernard Bergonzi regards them as socially and politically conscious poets who were deeply influenced by Marx and Freud and wrote about public themes under the compulsion of their Marxist commitment. Bergonzi, however, believes that poetry written under the influence of communist ideology is bound to be weak and superficial. C.M. Bowra appreciates their intrinsic faith in communism and feels that this enabled them to assert the innate sense of human worth when it was being undermined by the dominant social trends. He feels that Auden and his group were driven to Marxism not due to any fear of their own safety but out of their concern for human dignity. He underlines that their reactions were the outcome of their outraged consciences and their integrity. Watson goes to the extent of condemning the critics who think that the intellectuals of the thirties were merely naive victims of Soviet Propaganda and did not have any understanding of Marxist thought. He challenges the view that these poets were simply led away by youthful enthusiasm for the weaker sections of the society without realising the full implications of what they were doing in
accepting Marxism and were bound to feel totally disillusioned. He argued that the left-wing intellectuals in the thirties were not ignorant dupes of communism as is now generally assumed but deliberate supporters not only of Marxist theory but also of the whole apparatus of what he calls the stalinist terror.23

It is important to note that the Marxists regard class struggle as the central driving force behind the changes and developments taking place in society. An artist who is not conscious of this, in their view, touches only the outer surface of social life and will fail to grasp the logic which governs the working of different social institutions and shapes social reality. Marxists are conscious that a proper awareness of class struggle in society and its impact on human consciousness provides depth and sharpness to a writer's work. Critics like C.M. Bowra and Bernard Bergonzi vaguely refer to the poets of the thirties as Marxists without ascertaining from the evidence available in their poems whether these poets do really subscribe to the basic tenants of Marxism or not. They have not properly defined the character of radicalism found in the writings of the poets of the thirties. They appear to have mistaken bourgeois radicalism of the poems as a reflection of Marxism. Marxism attracted these poets because of their idealistic fervour under which they wanted to improve the lot of the individual in modern society. They were aware that the help of the working class was needed in this
radical endeavour. That, however, did not make them Marxists in their perspective and outlook. The Marxist phraseology that these poets attempted to incorporate in their poetic patterns should not by itself elude us into thinking that they had, in fact, adopted the Marxist approach to life.

Another group of critics held the view that the commitment of these poets to Marxism is not very deep although at the conscious level they had adopted the Marxist approach. These critics feel that there is an uneasy equation between their political commitment and their poetic talent. This is the reason why, according to these critics, the poets remain mere propagandists. In their idealistic revulsion against the corruption and callousness in the social circles amidst which they moved, these poets got disenchanted with their own class and took to writing revolutionary poems only to get rid of the sense of vacuity created by their disillusionment. Their work, these critics believe, established no rapport with the working class and could cause no revolutionary ferment. On the other hand, A.T. Tolley considers these poets mere propagandists because he finds in them a lack of spontaneous urge for the social cause they seem to espouse with so much superficial vehemence. He feels that the overtly political thrust in the poetry of the period too often remains merely theoretical aspiration and we are left with a feeling that the political concerns of these writers serve
merely to block the growth of his poetic talent and divert the true impulses of his creative genius. Tolley, thus, concludes that their social consciousness was a fashionable contemporary feature.24 Maxwell seems to reiterate A.T. Tolley's view when he suggests that talking of leftist politics became fashionable among the younger intellectual artists and writers, though, they did not fully grasp the theoretical assumption of Marxist philosophy, they took themselves to be Marxist revolutionaries.25

The main assumption of the critics subscribing to this line of thinking is that the poets of the thirties wrote social poems, raised social issues and attacked the middle classes largely because it was fashionable to broach these issues in poetry and give vent to their anger against the ruling middle classes. For F.R. Leavis and his school, who believe in individual effort to bring about social reform and were opposed to collective action, these poets were liberals divided between the ideas of individual development and social conscience. Emphasizing upon their liberal character, Julian Symons suggests that they brought into their works the language and attitudes derived from their own class backgrounds.26 C.H. Sisson too defines the character and tone of the poetry of the thirties as a combination of revolution and privileged self-interest though he underlines the primacy of personal milieu in Auden's poetry.27 Robin Skelton is a little more sympathetic to their left-wing orientation but he
too concludes that the liberal's concern for the solitary human being was at the heart of the crusading zeal of these poets. Robin Skelton cannot hold back the temptation to make the observation that these poets knew that much of their political activity was born of private necessity rather than public conviction. These poets, Richard Hoggart suggests, were all extremely aware of themselves in society and their leftist orientation was not merely a naive enthusiasm, although it may not have been an authentic Marxist creed. He, however, concedes that they made strenuous efforts to become aware of their exceptionally difficult and odd social position and tried to counteract against the forces which had produced the isolation they felt so acutely.

Virginia Woolf adopts a dismissive and hostile attitude towards these poets when she remarks that the poets of the thirties were class-conscious, self-pitying and angry at the same time. According to her, they became political-minded because they needed some scape goats on whom they could cast the blame. These poets, she caustically observes, had no idea whatsoever of a classless society:

Trapped by their education, pinned down by their capital they remained on top of their leaning tower, and their state of mind as we see it reflected in their poems and plays and novels are full of discord and bitterness, full of confusion and compromise.
She, in fact, suggests, that their anger was just an expression of their frustration. Monroe K. Spears, too, dismisses the political commitment of these poets as only moderate and temporary phenomenon. 31

The critics grouped under this category, despite their diverse standpoints, agree that the poets of the thirties were not genuinely committed Marxist poets. At the most they were typical liberal intellectuals. Their revolutionary fervour was a mere propaganda stance or a temporary outburst of anger and not a permanent feature of their sensibility. If they sounded left-wing it was because of the revolutionary rhetoric they employed. Actually some of their poems suffer from pomposity and are no more than exercises in superficial slogan-raising. They often bring into their poetry slogans which they had acquired from books but which had not been fully assimilated into their own experiences. A tendency towards tubthumping, which occasionally shows itself in these writers, has led many critics to believe that the poets of the thirties are no more than mere propagandists.

The third category of critics is of those who have examined the works of these poets on the basis of aesthetic standards and have come out with the conclusion that there is frequently a clash between the aesthetic aspirations of these poets and their
political persuasions. We can include in this category critics like Blackburn, Dyment Clifford, Francis Scarfe, Maxwell and Samuel Hynes. They start with the assumption that these poets were often swayed by aesthetic considerations in a manner which conflicted with their social or political commitments. Blackburn's analysis of Spender's poetry reveals that Spender's sensitivity and delight in colour of the word sometimes gain a priority over his social themes. He suggests that when Spender's deeper sympathies are not involved with his theme, he tends to use it as a nucleus round which his sensitivity and delight in colour of words can wear a dazzling mesh, which one might be tempted to call a kind of literary candy floss. He, in fact, seems to suggest that even in Spender's social poems aesthetic delight in sights and sounds predominates.

While making an assessment of the poetic output of C. Day Lewis, Clifford Dyment also looks for aesthetic integrity and points out that his political ideology stands in the way as 'rough places' and impairs the artistic beauty of his poems.

Francis Scarfe, on the other hand, seems conscious of the poetry of the thirties being a representation of the disintegration of bourgeois aesthetic values. But his analysis of Spender's poetry is overshadowed by an extra emphasis on the sensual element in his poetry. In his analysis of the so-called political poems
of Spender, he concludes that even when Spender tried to go into
difficult details of ideology, he often imperceptibly finds an
escape into sensual imagery: a relief in this way which can easily
be called in the Freudian sense of the term a 'compensation'.
Regarding C.Day Lewis's commitment, Francis Scarfe feels that in
the fabric of his poetry, it carries very little weight and we
can appreciate his excellent lyrics about love and nature without
taking any note of the politics which has been put into them.
Scarfe, in fact, skips over the question of the poet's commitment
and concentrates his attention on those subjective poems where
the stuff of poetry can be easily cut off from the public issues.
Maxwell ranks MacNeice's poetry between perfectly humanitarian
sentiment and honestly selfish pleasure in a world irreconcilable
with altruistic ideals. Judging MacNeice's poetry in the light
of aesthetic parameters, Samuel Hynes observes that MacNeice
exulted in a world of ordinary pleasures suited to the ordinary
sensuous man-in-the street.

George Balhike discerns in Auden's poetry a steady and
pleasurable pre-occupation with the absurdities and
inconsistencies of human experience. He feels that it derives
its real aesthetic values from this comic awareness of
contradictions underlying human experience which the writer so
robustly displays in his work.38 His search of integrality of conception in Auden's poetry enables him to offer new reading of his poems which look very persuasive.

Maxwell too lays emphasis on the aesthetic aspect of the works of the poets of the thirties, although he does not, like some other critics in this group, completely ignore the presence of vital social interests there. He believes that the aesthetic concerns prevail in the poetry of the thirties despite its socio-political and economic content. He suggests that by setting up new categories of value, the poets of the thirties only carried to a new phase the modern movement in literature initiated by writers like Eliot, Pound and Joyce.39 Maxwell, thus, admits the fusion of Marxism into the politics of the thirties but finds that this politics itself tends to disappear or gets transmuted when the poets are really inspired by a creative afflatus and write good poetry under the sway of genuine aesthetic concerns. He goes to the extent of suggesting that generally the literary Marxists of the thirties found it easier to go along with Marxism in the field of politics, but in art they unconsciously showed serious reservations about it and Spender's art is typical in this regard.40

If we carry the view of these critics to its logical end, Art should have no other function than giving delight through
sensuous richness and intuitive affirmation of some eternal verities. We must remember that poetry is neither pure intuition nor pure sensuous delight, it is condensed rendering of the full complexity of human experience, of the sense of life that works creatively in the artist's consciousness until it is made manifest in some external embodiment. In the thirties, there was a growing realisation that art ought to have a purpose in view, a commitment that must go beyond the bare aesthetic frontiers. There prevailed a feeling in those days that art must relate itself to the objective social, political and cultural conditions of the times. The poets of the thirties stood in revolt against the idea of writing pure poetry and believed that the problems of aesthetics can be correctly understood only in terms of the intimate connection poetry has with the social life of man through the live concerns which disturb the writer both as an artist and as a citizen. Hence the approach in their case has to be different from that of the aesthetes. We shall, therefore, have to take into account the social import of their poetry before we arrive at any plausible judgement regarding their literary value and their human significance.

We may make a brief mention here of fourth category of progressive liberal intellectual critics who appear over sympathetic to the poets of the thirties. These are the contemporary poets themselves writing about one another. As these
poet-critics shared common philosophical beliefs and attitudes they were not in a position to locate the inner contradictions in the attitudes of their fellow writers. Spender observes:

From the point of view of the working class movement the ultimate criticism of Auden and the poets associated with him is that we have not deliberately and consciously transferred ourselves to the working class. The subject of his poetry is the struggle, but the struggle seen, as it were, by someone who whilst living in one camp, sympathises with the other; a struggle in fact which while existing externally is also taking place within the mind of the poet himself, who remains a bourgeois.41

Spender further adds that this position of being immersed in subjective problems and having active interest in external reality of the social world is one of the most creative, realistic and valid positions to be taken by the artists in our time.42

C.Day Lewis while commenting on the revolutionary content of Auden's poetry suggests that no contemporary writing shows so clearly the revulsion of the artist from a society which can no longer support him, his need to identify himself with a class that can provide for his imagination an adequate writing place.43

There are certain characteristics of the poetry of the thirties which need to be emphasised briefly. So that the adequacy of the endeavours of critics belonging to different groups made
for understanding this poetry could be properly assessed by us. This poetry was essentially social in character. The situations and themes, the conflicts and struggles with which these artists deal arise primarily out of contradictions inherent in contemporary social life and the existing milieu. We can not, therefore, understand this poetry properly without viewing it as a response to the problems arising out of this crisis-ridden social situation.

Modernists like T.S. Eliot had also recognised the crisis but they sought spiritual solutions to the socio-cultural crisis. The approach of the Leavisites is more practical than that of T.S. Eliot because they sought solutions to human problems on this material earth, rejecting transcendentalism altogether. They believed in individual effort for finding a solution to the social crisis and condemned the collectivist approach adopted by the Marxists. Radical liberals consider themselves Marxists. These middle class liberal intellectuals are unable to rise above the limitations of sensibility and perspective imposed by their social background. These poets confront the crisis with a full sense of responsibility, explore its various dimensions and after a deep pondering, frequently make a choice in favour of collective action. They are not liberal humanists in the Bloomsbury mould or those who were only a little more progressive than that as is sometimes alleged. They constitute what can be appropriately
called the radicalised section of the middle-class intellectuals who are genuinely involved in transforming the social order, though their class-consciousness too often hampers their ideological thrust for radical social change and brings about certain contradictions and inconsistencies in the positions they take on vital issues.

We feel that in their analysis of the poetry of the thirties, critics have not been in a position to define the real character of the radicalism of the poets who wrote out of a sense of social commitment. It is not sufficient to recognise that these poets are all socially committed. It is also necessary to examine the precise nature of this commitment and this is not an easy job. Even if somebody carried the official label of being a Marxist, the sensibility as revealed in his creative writing may tell a different story. Some of the poets in this group were members of the communist party of England and had accepted communism as their political credo. These poets, in fact, personally visited Spain, joined the International Brigade to fight for the Republic and came out with creative output about the Spanish civil war. Even in their case the actual social perspective governing their creative writing may turn out to be other than Marxist. These poets took their themes out of the conditions of the contemporary times and took images from contemporary scene. They took recourse to Marxism to find solutions
to the contemporary chaos. All this together would have led the critics to think of them as socially committed poets. We may here emphasise that an artist's conscious ideology, no doubt, gives us a rough idea of his perspective but mere preference for a particular ideology does not show the real character of his sensibility and outlook. It is imperative that in the case of a socially committed creative writer the complicated process of his emotional needs and moral aspirations should be ascertained with some care and an attempt should be made to see how these urges and aspirations are linked with the interests of larger social groups and with the direction in which society should move if the objective needs of the most deprived and oppressed groups are to be accommodated.

The poets of the thirties sought to adopt a proletarian viewpoint in the face of their bourgeois origins, University education and comfortable social positions under the complicated logic of their emotional needs and aspirations. They aligned themselves imaginatively with the working class and started looking for a better society. They integrated liberal feelings into communist ideology. They applied Freudianism to resolve the individual's crisis and Marxism to remedy the social ills. They could not perceive any contradictions in this endeavour from the terrain where they located themselves. An attempt at an uncomfortable alliance of their interests and the interests of the
community imperceptibly steals into their poetry and the compulsive need to harmonise the two leads them towards the tactic of blending Freudianism with Marxism. Leftist ideology does define their perspective but somewhere in the middle the bourgeois intellectual alive in them steps in. Their poems reflect a constant awareness that their unconscious habituation to a privileged position intrudes into their credo for social justice and creates a sense of insecurity in them. Their understanding of the middle class pretensions, their desire to shed off inhibitions and prejudices—all this provides a positive basis to them for adopting an attitude of revolt against the existing social order and projecting an ideal of a better society than what they found present then.

In making an assessment of the character of the poets of the thirties let us note that their poems form an intimate and direct representation of an acute awareness of social injustices and evils that afflict modern society. In their attempt to grapple with the topical issues, they strongly felt that the capitalist system based on exploitation of working class was responsible for their own persistent moral dilemmas. In terms of perspective and sensibility the poets of the thirties belonged to a radicalised section of middleclass intellectuals who felt committed to the cause of social betterment of the exploited masses, recognised
the need to resolve the crisis of the times through a collective effort and knew that the struggle involved in this enterprise is very grim and protracted.

Our thesis seeks to establish that the social perspective in their poetry is not Marxist, but it has its own strength and appeal even if it is that of a radicalised middle class liberal. The characterization of social perspective of the poets of the thirties has already been made by Raymond Williams and Christopher Caudwell. Raymond Williams has highlighted some of the weaknesses which emanated from this perspective. He points out how the identification with the proletarian cause in the case of these bourgeois progressive radicals does not often go beyond the terms of a negative identification which implies that these poets wanted to bring about radical changes in the society within the framework of the existing system and their affiliation with the working class is governed more by their revulsion against their own class than by a positive sharing of their attitudes, problems or acceptance of their world outlook. Christopher Caudwell observes:

Their bourgeois art bursts into their proletarian living in the form of extraordinary and quite unnecessary outbursts of bourgeois independence and indiscipline or quite apparent bourgeois distortions of the party's revolutionary theory. It leads to an unconscious dishonesty in their art - as of men exploiting the revolution for their own ends.
It has to be emphasised that even with this perspective these poets raised social issues in a serious and compelling manner and handled social themes effectively in their poems. They stressed the need for collective action. They wanted to bring about radical changes in the society while retaining the existing system.

Our assessment leads us to the conclusion that at a deeper level of consciousness these poets were unwilling to seriously disturb the status quo despite their acute awareness of the flaws in the existing social system. In the final analysis they put individual freedom over and above social justice. Still they came forward to meet the challenges thrown by the times. Their works show that they had overcome the negative pessimism of the preceding decade and this definitely shows moral resilience and intellectual rigour.

Spender himself defends the poets of the thirties with regard to their bourgeois background:

The writers of the thirties are often sneered at because they were middle class youths with public school and posh university backgrounds who sought to adopt a proletarian point of view... But the thirties writers represented a middle class de-conscience. And there is nothing despicable about it.46
The efforts of these writers to rise above their class interests and adopt an attitude of radical dissatisfaction with regard to the existing social reality should not be dismissed as unworthy of serious consideration. The later developments in their attitudes should also not put a question mark on the reformist zeal which they displayed during the thirties. Their poetry of this period put the inhumanities of the social order and the barbarities of war in a sharp focus. We must appreciate the moral seriousness with which they exhorted people to reflect upon an economic order that gives birth to wars, depressions and unemployment. Their faith in socialism, science and technology definitely represented an enlightened and progressive outlook. The radical-liberal attitude they adopted demanded establishment of a social order which could promote harmonious development of man and enhance the scope for interplay of values of love, truth and justice.

Now that we have defined the parameters of the general perspective of the poets of the thirties, it becomes necessary to see how it can help us in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their poetry of social commitment. The perspective could first of all explain the choice of issues they have handled in their poetry and the importance they attached to these issues. They raised concrete issues like poverty, unemployment, economic exploitation, injustice and inequalities, class-distinctions,
love, technology and war with a compelling directness. They attacked public school authorities, puritanical taboos, pseudo-social reforms and distortions and perversions in social life, which stifled human personality. The perspective could also explain the solutions which they were impelled to imagine for the existing problems and the factors they left out completely or underplayed in thinking out these solutions.

In making an assessment of the poetry of the thirties critics lay emphasis on the social import of their poetry in a broad way. The present study is undertaken to make an indepth analysis of the poetry of four representative poets of the thirties - W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, C.Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice with a special emphasis on the identification of the governing social perspective of each case. In this endeavour focus will fall mainly on the degree of the awareness of social realities these poets displayed and the quality of their involvement in the social causes they take up in their poetry.

In this study we shall also make an attempt to underline that though all these poets shared their awareness and experience of social reality and responsibility, there are also important distinctions and discriminations to be made. They have been discussed so far as a group having some common attitudes and a similarity of perspective. But there are important variations
and divergencies at both these levels which should be taken note of. Differences in their treatment of social reality should be analysed in terms of these variations and divergences in attitude and perspective. The tone of cynicism and satire predominates in the poetry of some of these poets, while in the case of others there is sober and even stiff moral rectitude. They were unable to reject their origin and support the cause of the exploited whole heartedly and unable to overcome their prejudices but there are marked differences in the degree of success they achieved in overcoming these limitations.

Apart from this shared social sense, their involvement in socio-political realities of the times shows marked differences in their approach and emphasis. Auden's involvement was more intellectual than emotional while Spender was more emotional and subjective. C.Day Lewis was more optimistic and confident than either Auden or Spender. MacNeice was different from the other three as his political involvement in the social cause was strictly personal and often idiosyncratic. The character of his sensibility was definitely more individualistic than that of the other three poets. He was more concerned with the aesthetic aspects of experience than its social significance.

Each reacted differently towards the communist party and its ideology. Spender and C.Day Lewis had party membership but
Auden did not seek it though he had a stronger sympathy for the working class. MacNeice was a neutral poet without having any kind of political association with communist party.

The final disillusionment that they suffered led to different results in the case of each one of these poets. Auden's left leanings received a jerk when he saw the churches in Spain closed during the civil war. Spender saw dirty politics among the communists in Spain during the civil war when the brave men of the International Brigade were dying. C.Day Lewis was a man of deeper national mooring and hence returned to the traditional poetic heritage more quickly than the other poets. MacNeice's was a more balanced stance. He did not feel the necessity to repudiate his stance of the thirties in his later days.

The strength of their poetry centres largely on the bold gestures shown by them in handling major themes. There, however, remains a gap between what they set out to achieve and ultimately ended in achieving. But the importance of the social analysis they offered in their poetry still remains unimpaired by whatever weaknesses creep into their work.

The thesis purports to establish that we can arrive at a better understanding of the poetry of these writers if we focus
attention on the social perspective which governs it and instead of mistakenly calling it Marxist, recognise it as being that of a radical-liberal.

We have divided our thesis into six chapters. Introduction forms the first chapter of our endeavour. The next chapter is devoted to the study of Auden's poetry. It deals with the social consciousness of Auden in terms of his pioneering effort at making fresh thematic choices and developing a new manner of expression appropriate to his needs. The extent of the impact of Freudian and Marxian influences on Auden's literary sensibility has been sharply outlined. His radical liberal perspective is seen emerging out of three phases of his literary output during the decade. A significant stress has been laid on the consistent social vision of Auden during the decade in spite of fluctuations or shifts in emphasis. Then there is issue-wise analysis of the representative poems, underlining the shifts in emphasis and sometimes making cross-references to other poems for achieving a better grasp of his response. A discussion of the relevance of stylistic devices to the social content of his poetry has been included in the analysis of different poems. The chapter is concluded by clearly defining the radical-liberal character of Auden's social perspective as it is built out of a detailed analysis of his poems and the strengths and weaknesses of his poetry are linked to this perspective and the waverings it witnessed. A cursory
mention of the revisions and omissions has also been made. Finally, the fact that the strength of Auden's poetry really derives from topicality and urgency of the problems he took up as subject matter has also been highlighted.

In the third chapter our effort has been to define Stephen Spender's attitude to the social scene by attempting an analysis of his representative poems. In this chapter we have tried to underline Spender's similarities and dissimilarities with Auden and others while determining his response to the social scene of the thirties. We have focused mainly on those poems which deal directly with socio-economic issues, particularly the value system of the middleclass, economic exploitation, unemployment, poverty and injustice etc. We have also made an evaluation of his response to technological development, war and love which significantly highlight his understanding of the social system. Through an analysis of his poems, we have made an attempt to ascertain the nature of his perspective and sensibility. His perspective, we find, is that of a radical liberal—radical with a bourgeois sensibility. We have sharply outlined the cumulative impact of objective factors on his sensibility. We have made an assessment of the thematic strength and weaknesses of his poems and also looked upon stylistic devices as a secondary supportive element. Our endeavour has been to ascertain the extent to which his poetry can be instrumental in bringing about a constructive change in
the social system. Finally, we have underlined his sincere social vision as it emerges out of his response to the various issues raised by him in his poems.

Chapter four deals with five poem-sequences of C.Day Lewis. It has been developed in a manner which reveals the gradual maturity of the poet through the subsequent sequences on account of a growing firmness in his social perspective. Analysis of poem-sequences - Transitional Poem, From Feathers To Iron, The Magnetic Mountain, A Time To Dance, Noah And The Waters and Overtures To Death has been made in detail to determine the character of C.Day Lewis's commitment and intensity with which it is insisted upon while looking at the world of his poetry. The chapter handles the issues of inner and outer disorder, love, ambition, life and death, war and technology. The solution it offers to the social chaos is in the form of cultivation of rational outlook and faith in the creative power to muster sufficient confidence and control over the stuff chosen as subject matter. The poet weighs the regenerating and recuperating power of love above the forces of death and destruction. Like Auden, he heralds the view that if humanity is to survive it must have strong faith in the power of love. To conclude, this chapter underlines the need for practical approach which can prove feasible in seeking solutions to the pressing problems of which science and Technology can offer proper analysis.
The fifth chapter is a study of Louis MacNeice's poetry during the thirties. We have tried to show how his political involvement was conspicuously different from that of the other radical liberals of the period under consideration. We have underlined the distinct character of his attitude and sensibility which was responsible for his subjective kind of involvement in the social scene. The fact that, despite the different nature of his involvement in the social cause, he was not unconcerned about what was happening around him, has not been overlooked. Unlike Spender, his feelings were restrained and his poetry not hortatory like Auden's. It reflected a mind wide-awake to human miseries.

Then, there is the final chapter of conclusion where the findings about the real character of the social perspective of the four poets and its operation in their poems have been briefly put together.
We have the misfortune or the good luck to be born in one of the great critical historical periods, when the whole structure of our society and its cultural and metaphysical values are undergoing a radical change. In periods of steady evolution it is possible for the common man to pursue the private life without bothering his head very much over the principles and assumptions by which he lives and to leave politics in the hands of professionals. But ours is not such an age.

W.H. Auden