Yeats represents for us the literary side of the Irish national movement. He sparked off an entirely new romantic current in modern English literature and injected into it a most unusual and interesting new personality. He believed in his own genius and believed that genius knows no law but its own. He believed that civilization represents tyranny for the free spirit of the individual. He did not rail against his age but chose to bring to its attention his own superbly different world of the spirit.

The greatness of W.B. Yeats is now an accepted fact. His permanence is assured. The large body of critical literature that has grown round him in recent years is a measure of his greatness, as well as of the keen interest his poetry has aroused all the world over. But he is still far from being a popular poet. For the Indian students specially, he is still a far off remote voice speaking with strange, unearthly accents. This is so because much of his poetry is difficult and complex. Platonic philosophy, Theosophy, Occultism, Indian mysticism, Magic, Buddhist doctrines, The Wisdom of the East and West, the mythologies, Greecio-Roman and Celtic, French symbolism and English aestheticism, have all gone into the making of it. The Dantesque terseness of his style is another stumbling block in the way of his readers. The need for a popular study was paramount and the present work is an attempt at satisfying this need.
It is a commonplace of Yeats's criticism that in the rank of the poets of the present century he occupies a paradoxical position – firstly, because he was an Irishman and 'Irishness' remained throughout a strong tincture of his poetry; and secondly, because he was rooted in the romantic tradition, yet he grew into a modernist poet of tallest stature. It, therefore, follows that his modernism was modified by his Irish and romantic prepossessions. This much has been accepted by the critics of Yeats. But the nature of this modification and the resultant difference in regard to style, technique, imagery and theme which distinguishes the poetry of Yeats from that of an accepted modernist poet in contemporary England or France, have not received adequate attention from the critics and commentators who have written at length and written well on the poetry of W.B. Yeats.

Then, Yeats being a symbolist poet, deriving his symbols from sources obscure and out of the way, and using them in different poems with subtle variations of their implications, it is but natural that many of his poems should lend themselves to diverse interpretations. This diversity is apt to breed confusion in the minds of uninitiated students and the confusion is bound to increase as they wade deeper and deeper into the vast critical literature which has accumulated round these poems. The present work, besides dealing with the salient features of Yeats's poetry, gives a detailed, clear and consistent exposition of these poems,
In the hope that such an exposition can form a sound base for the readers, capable of keeping their understanding steady under all the cross-currents of critical ingenuity and conflicting viewpoints.

PLAN OF STUDY:

This dissertation is divided into Five chapters.

In the first Chapter, which is an introductory chapter, I discussed not only the chief trends in English poetry of the age of Yeats but also the following topics relating to Yeats's poetry: the literary and social background of Yeats's poetry, Yeats's life and his principal poetic works, the principal figures behind Yeats's work, his occultism, his romantic temperament and the various traits of romanticism in his poetry, his theory of the mask and his poetic progress - the various phases of Yeats's poetry.

In the second Chapter, I discussed how Yeats was influenced by John O'Leary, Maud Gonne and Lady Augusta Gregory to join active politics. In addition to this I discussed the political lyrics written by Yeats.

The third Chapter deals with Yeats's love poems. Love is a major theme of Yeats which most of the time revolves round Maud Gonne. His love poems echo his bitterness and frustration.
The fourth Chapter is about Yeats's symbolism and his major symbols. In this chapter I discussed the nature and function of symbolism, the two kinds of symbols, a few definitions of symbolism given by Yeats in his prose works, the influence of the French Symbolist Movement on Yeats, the distinguishing features of Yeats and the French symbolists and the complexity and richness of his symbols. In addition to this I discussed the major symbols used by Yeats in his poetry.

In the fifth Chapter, which is a concluding chapter, I summed up Yeats's achievements as a poet. In this Chapter, I made passing references to the bulk, variety and uniformity of Yeats's poetry, his escapist and romantic early poetry, his realistic later poetry, his mysticism, his symbolism and imagery, his myth-making quality, his nationalism and patriotism, his craftsmanship, his shortcomings and his permanence.