CHAPTER-IV

Man and Society

'We wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!' 1

When Nature becomes a destroyer of harmonious human existence, preventing human beings from attaining perfection, man turns to his fellow-beings for harmonious co-existence through which he hopes to attain selfhood. And, as a result, his attachment to his community becomes inevitable.

In Hardy's presentation of human beings and their mode of existence, we clearly observe his protagonists' struggle to adjust with others after their inevitable psychic detachment from their biological environment. Many critics are puzzled as to why many of Hardy's protagonists do not adjust with Nature.

The reasons for the failure of 'Man-Nature' relationship are varied and different. However, there are mainly two reasons which unfailingly spoil 'Man-Nature' relationship. The first reason is that man himself is hostile to Nature on account of his materialistic attitude and his desire for mastery and control over biological environment. As a result, he has begun to live at the cost

of natural phenomena. In fact, he has become ambitious to lead a luxurious life which is promised by modern science and technology. In turn, this has resulted in the second reason — Nature's consequent indifference towards human existence. Owing to man's injudicious exploitation of Nature's beauty and bounty, a kind of natural imbalance is created. Subsequently, this leads to natural calamities like floods and famines, and disrupts human lives in a considerable way. Therefore Hardy says, "... to model our conduct on Nature's apparent conduct, .... can only bring disaster to humanity." Thus man feels that Nature is not only neutral but also indifferent to his wishes. Therefore he withdraws himself from Nature in order to lead a happy and harmonious life amidst his own fellow human beings.

These two connected reasons have characterized 'Man-Nature' relationship as 'I-It' rather than 'I-Thou'. Accordingly, man who has realized that he can never lead a peaceful and fruitful life amidst Nature, has actively alienated himself from her. This is vividly shown in Hardy's nature poem 'In a Wood', where the protagonist resolves to move away from Nature and live amidst his own folk as the things in Nature appear to be at discord:

Even the rank poplars bear
Lothly a rival's air,
Cankering in black despair
If overborne.

There at least smiles abound,
There discourse trills around,
There, now and then, are found
Life-loyalties.3

The poem, thematically opposed to Wordsworth's poem 'Tables Turned', displays the clash between Nature's different species which ultimately leads to rivalry and destruction. This convinces man of his need to reconcile himself to his own fellow-beings for 'life-loyalties'.

Man's alienation from his immediate biological environment compels him to have personal and social relationship in society. As a result, an individual tries to have sexual and social relationships with 'Other' and 'Others' respectively. Here, the 'Other' stands for one's sexual partner and the 'Others' for the community.

In the philosophy of existence, an individual's personal relationship with his spouse is built more on biological and sexual factors than on economical and sociological grounds. Subsequently, the partner is not a means, but an end and the relationship between man and woman is to be based on love, veneration, regard and sacrifice.

Moreover, the negative emotions such as cruelty, selfishness, disregard and hostility have to be avoided. Even the discordant distinctions like class, caste and creed, which are based either on economic factors or dogmatic beliefs, should be avoided. Similarly, there should not be sexual incompatibility between man and woman. In existentialism, this mode of 'Man-Woman' relationship is characterized by 'I-Thou'. On the whole 'Man-Woman' relationship has to be ideal if man and woman are to attain selfhood.

Wessex poems delineate 'Man-Woman' relationship on a broader scale and in a variety of social setting. While dealing with 'Man-Woman' relationship, Hardy thinks that there must be equivalence, openness, confidence, willingness and mutual understanding between man and woman for harmonious co-existence. There must not be egoism, indifference, disbelief, disunity and sexual incompatibility between sexual partners as these vices cause serious psychological tensions and widen the rift between them. But Hardy gives more freedom to woman, partly because of her necessity to bring up children, and partly because of her weakness and gentleness. He categorically affirms the indispensable role of woman in man's life. "Without women, the beginning of our life would be helpless; the middle, devoid of pleasure; and the end, of consolation." 4

Even in existentialism, philosophers like Jaspers and Sartre give priority to womanhood for the betterment of familial life.

'Man' and 'Woman's harmonious life characterized by love, faith, respect and regard is depicted in Hardy's poem 'The Dance at the Phoenix'. In this poem a woman named Jenny is quite happy with her husband, as 'love' is a means of transcendental bliss:

She kissed him long, as when, just wooed,
She chose his domicile.
She felt she would give more than life
To be the single-hearted wife.5

Their cordial relationship is a key that opens the door to their fulfilment and selfhood. In this connection, Hardy stresses one more virtue, that is, love blended with mercy and sacrifice for a closer relationship between man and woman.

But the majority of Hardy's poems are about the failed human relationship on account of either man or woman's lack of congenial virtues like love, fidelity, self-sacrifice, endearment, adjustment and willingness to cooperate with the spouse.

5. Thomas Hardy, Wessex Poems and Other Verses, op. cit., p. 47.
Many of the leading thinkers of the ages have hotly debated over the issue of the failure of 'Man-Woman' relationships. But none of them has given adequate justification and solution to this eternal problem. Nevertheless, some thinkers have tried to trace the causes of these broken relationships or an individual's alienation from others. Existentialist thinkers believe that the reason for this crisis is man's superiority complex, desire to dominate others and to amass wealth for personal glory. They also opine that the society as a collective entity becomes responsible for an individual's ruin. It is true, since the dawn of human history, all civilized societies have been dominant on account of the doctrine 'might is right' (Social Darwinism). Subsequently these vices i.e., 'male dominance', 'greed for possession' and 'indifference of society' have created everlasting confusion and conflict in human relationship.

Corresponding to the levels on which human beings exist, three reasons may be noted for man's alienation from his fellow-beings:

1. Psychological reason corresponding to the psychological level.
2. Social reason corresponding to the social level.
3. Sexual reason corresponding to the instinctual level.

On the psychological level, 'cynicism', erratic behaviour, maladjustment and misunderstanding of either man
or woman, can often hinder the course of their harmonious relationship. Eventually this leads to continuous conflicts and clashes between the two, and it would result in the defeat of both. Hardy attributes this kind of irregularity in relationship to man's inflexible nature. Therefore he states, "We cannot change the essence of our being .... (by education).... but we can .... make our faults useful", and according to him, "To do this is the great problem & secret of e\n(education)". In a similar spirit, Buber thinks man can never change the nature of others according to his desire. This is an eternal problem. This sort of psychic failure between man and woman is reflected in Hardy's sonnet series 'She, to Him'. In these sonnets, which depict failure of 'Man-Woman's relationship, a gentle woman submits herself to her husband, but the hard-hearted man does not respond to her desires. However the scene is genuine:

I WILL be faithful to thee; aye, I will!

But he says,

THIS love puts all humanity from me;
I can but maledict her, pray her dead,\n
Similarly, the poem "A Broken Appointment" reveals misunderstanding as the chief factor for the failure of 'Man-Woman' relationships:

YOU did not come,
And marching Time drew on, and wore me numb.
Grieved I, when, as the hope-hour stroked its sum,
You did not come.

You love not me,
And love alone can lend you loyalty;
You love not me? 8

The repetition of the lines 'You did not come' and 'You love not me' emphasizes the lover's disappointment, loneliness and grief in the absence of his beloved. The poem is vivid and moving and bitter in tone.

Secondly, social distinctions, such as class (Europe), creed (Africa) and caste (Asia) mar peace and harmony in 'Man-Woman' relationships. The rigid structure of these social systems deprive man and woman what they truly deserve. As a result, the partners are estranged from each other leading to mutual ruin. This is reflected in many of Hardy's poems. It is due to the erratic marriage system that Tess suffers in the poem 'Tess's Lament' (PPP-p.175) and in Hardy's novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles. It is her confession that lands her in trouble just as it does in the

8. Thomas Hardy, Poems of the Past and the Present, op. cit., p. 136.
novel of that name. In this connection, Hardy thinks 'male dominance' and the 'rigidities of marriage system' lead the innocent to dabasement and unwilling submission. That is why he writes in his preface to Jude the Obscure: "... a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties." 9

The Poems 'A Poor Man and a Lady' (HS-p.791) and 'The Revisitation' (TL-p.191) display how the rich ladies reject poor men when they propose marriage. In the first poem, a poor man asks a rich lady to marry him in vain:

We could do no better; and thus it stood
Through a time of timorous secret bliss,
Till we were divided, and never a kiss
Of mine could touch you, or likelihood. 10

This story about an aristocratic lady's indifference and coldness towards a poor man was the theme of Hardy's first novel A Poor Man and a Lady which was never published and was later turned into a long short story.

The theme of broken 'Man-Woman' relationship with a little variation, is echoed in the poems 'The Orphaned Old Maid' and 'Her Father' (TL-p.244 & 223). In the first poem an ill-willed father prevents his daughter from marrying, so

9. Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1951), Preface VIII.

10. Thomas Hardy, Human Shows, Far Phantasies, Songs and Trifles, op. cit., p. 792.
that she will look after him in his old age. Later, after his death it is too late to marry and the daughter remains unmarried. Hardy has delineated her tragic tale with great clarity and ingenuity.

The poems 'Cross-Currents' (LLE-p.675), 'The Difference' (SC-p.311) and 'The Division' (TL-p.221) demonstrate that married life can hardly run smooth. These poems show that married partners fall apart on account of disunity caused by the trials and tribulations of life. In these poems, partners lack genuine virtues. Hence their life is disintegrated and their joy and progress are spoiled. Hardy's critical assessment of the marriage system, divorce and other social rigidities takes a philosophical colouring in poems like 'A Poor Man and a Lady' (HS-p.791) and 'A Question of Marriage' (WW-p.897). It is true that on account of his bitter experience in married life which is explicit in "Poems of 1912-13" subtitled Veteris Vestigia flammae in Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics and Reveries, Hardy came to the conclusion that social distinctions and disparities hardly enable human beings to lead a happy and harmonious married life.

A close inspection of Hardy's poems reveals that 'Man-Woman' relationship can suffer on account of incompatibility. Hardy admits that man and woman may fail to come close together even though they are on the same social and intellectual level because of sexual incompatibility. This is clear in his poems 'Lost Love' (SC-p.318) and 'The Burghers' (WP-p.24)
These poems show different aspects of 'Man-Woman' broken relationships merely on the ground of sexual factors.

For instance, in the poem 'Lost Love' a woman feels frustrated, for her husband has failed to satisfy her earthly desires:

So I wait for another morn,
   And another night
   In this soul-sick blight;
   And I wonder much
   As I sit, why such
A woman as I was born!11

The theme of sexual incompatibility and its evil consequence are best revealed in the poem 'The Burghers'. Here a woman's need and the consequent elopement puzzles her husband. However, the understanding husband lets her go with her lover. He also allows her to take her belongings; and bids them adieu as if his head as well as heart were cold:

With eye and cry of love illimited
Upon her Heart-king. Never upon me
..... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
'I'll take you to the doorway in the wall,
   And then adieu,' I told them. 'Friends, withdraw'.
They did so; and she went-beyond recall.12

11. Thomas Hardy, Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics and Reveries, op. cit., 318.
12. Thomas Hardy, Wessex Poems and Other Verses, op. cit., p.25.
The scene recalls the situation of the estrangement between Richard Phillotson and his wife Sue Bridehead in Hardy’s last novel Jude the Obscure. In these poems, Hardy thinks married life often undergoes strange vicissitudes due to sexual incompatibility. The theme affords Hardy an admirable opportunity to display his dramatic power.

In addition to sexual incompatibility, the evils of marriage system further complicate and worsen the matter. As a result, social rigidities hardly allow man to reconcile his differences.

But Hardy offers a solution to this crisis. According to him, youths who are eager to marry must think whether they will succeed in their married life before they enter the marriage bond. He advises the youths to understand their respective partners and try to adjust themselves with them. He also thinks married people must have knowledge about sexual problems and must be equally capable of solving them. Even the existentialist thinkers Sartre and Jaspers are of the same view when they emphasize the virtues of love, fidelity, equality, respect, regard and mutual understanding between the married partners.

Hardy attributes failure of 'Man-Woman' relationship to haste and misunderstanding. He writes, "... marry in haste and repent at leisure". According to

critics, many of Hardy's poems have themes of disastrous or betrayed or merely boring sexual relationships. J.I.M. Stewart aptly observes, "Alike in love and marriage, the characters of Hardy's poems are perpetually getting themselves into luckless situations." 

In this way, 'Man-Woman' relationships on the grounds of psychological, social and sexual factors fail and culminate either in estrangement or in mutual ruin. According to Hardy, this is because of man's egoism, enmity and rigid taste and temperament. He remarks, "As to error, we are always changing it, but we never get rid of it ..." Thus it is due to man's inherent weakness and limitations, 'Man-Woman' relationship fails. Nevertheless love once thought to be a means of man's harmonious life, has ceased to be so. This is attributed either to man or woman's greed for 'possession' and 'domination'. As life is measured according to its practical values, all life-generating values are either ignored or misused on the pretext of material advancement. This is revealed by the study of the conflict of the sexes in Hardy's poems written with different social settings.

Hardy thinks love cannot lead to 'life-loyalties' in a society which is based on social rigidities. Indeed, in his poem 'I Said to Love', the protagonist speculates that love in the bygone days was 'one who spread a heaven beneath the sun'. But the modern way of life, which is largely materialistic, has turned the good old way of life into misery and suffering. Therefore, in his poem love is asked to depart from the human heart:

'Deport then, Love! .......
- Man's race shall perish, threatenest thou,
Without thy kindling coupling-vow?
The age to come the man of now
Know nothing of? -
We fear not such a threat from thee;
We are too old in apathy!
Mankind shall cease. - So let it be,'
I said to Love.16

Indeed, a deserted lover in the poem 'Revulsion' (WP-p.14), affirms his 'heart's table bear no woman's name'. Likewise, a lover in 'Song to Aurore' (WW-p.885) thinks 'Life is a labour' and 'Kisses are caresome things!'. Therefore, the poet thinks that the power of love neither leads to psychological ascendency nor to the attainment of selfhood.

On the other hand, man's relationship with society is found to be on the decline. Hardy, as well as existentialist thinkers, opines that 'Man-Society' relationship will succeed if virtues like love, faith,
friendship, sacrifice, broad mindedness, mutual understanding, respect and regard are adopted. This mode of social relationship which is characterised by 'I-Thou' in existentialist terminology, brings peaceful and productive co-existence between an individual and society. In case these virtues are neglected, a happy relationship between an individual and society will be impossible. Therefore, an individual must try to adjust with the larger community in order to achieve his object. If he thinks that he is superior to community he will involve himself in everlasting conflicts which, in turn, will make him an alien to his community. Therefore, Hardy says every one either in a family or in society should try to understand one another and should not try to possess something unlawfully or dominate others. In this regard, he quotes the meaning of a Flemish poet Jakob Van Marlant's untitled poem: "Two words exist in the world, mine & thine. If they could be suppressed peace would reign & all would be free". 17

Some of Hardy's poems celebrate harmonious social relationship characterized by love, veneration, respect, regard, equality, liberty and fraternity. This mode of life based on humanitarian doctrines, carries man very far on the road of harmony and progress.

Hardy's poem 'Queen Caroline to Her Guests' displays a person's desire to have companions for peaceful and worthwhile co-existence. Here, a rich lady requests her guests to remain with her for spiritual betterment:

Dear friends, stay!
Lamplit wafts of wit keep sorrow
In the limbo of to-morrow:
Dear friends, stay!  

Indeed, as a social being man requires a good society. In this direction, Hardy emphasises the need of a healthy society based on individual spontaneity and prosperity-oriented values. "I consider a social system based on individual spontaneity to promise better for happiness than a curbed and uniform one under which all temperaments are bound to shape themselves to a single pattern of living. To this end I would have society divided into groups of temperaments, with a different code of observance for each group."  

Man is a social animal. His cognitive activity is not an end in itself but is intended to subserve the needs of his purposive life. He is not a mere 'spectator' in the world, but an active agent who is involved with others and

19. Thomas Hardy quoted by F.E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (1892-1928), op. cit., p. 23.
his cognitive observation arises only in the course of his purposive activities in life. Consequently, man's existence and 'attainment of essence is closely related to the social phenomena'. This involvement of man's existence with others is fundamental for the realization of selfhood and transcendental bliss. Hardy's autobiographical poem 'Conjecture' illustrates this point:

IF there were in my kalendar
   No Emma, Florence, Mary,
What would be my existence now-
   A hermit's? - wanderer's weary?-
How should I live, and how
Near would be death, or far?

He thinks in their absence:

   O were it else than this,
   I'd pass to pulseless sleep! 20

Hardy, tender and genial at heart and jovial in personal life, thinks that society is indispensable for the enrichment of human existence. This view is reflected in existentialism. Sartre, who insists on individual's liberty, agrees that man's being-in-the society is basically being-with-others. Both Hardy and Sartre seem to think that man's co-existence with society is a basic phenomenon of life.

Nevertheless, on many occasions, man's relationship with society is not easy and worthwhile. This is because of the hostility of society towards a flourishing

individual. Secondly, as an individual, man is also responsible for his failure to succeed in inter-personal relationships. His ambition to lead a luxurious mode of life even at the cost of others automatically spoils his relationship with his community. The two factors, 'society's indifference' and 'individual's greed for domination' which strain inter-personal relationships in society also bring hostility and mutual ruin.

It is true, man's relationship with his community is not in perfect harmony. Hardy says 'Man-Society' relationship will not be harmonious so long as man and society do not agree about values such as love, fidelity, respect, regard, sacrifice, liberty, equality, brotherhood, help and co-operation. If there is no proper understanding between an individual and community, man's inter-personal relationship is bound to fail. This aspect is revealed in poems like 'In Tenebris' I, II and III and 'Wessex Heights'.

In the poem 'In Tenebris I', a deserted man is mourning his disgrace in society. He has no more hopes either in his family life or in community life as neither of them provides him 'life-loyalties'. Hence, he waits in 'unhope':

Black is night's cope;  
But death will not appal  
One who, past doubtings all,  
Waits in unhope.  

The alienated man neither loses his strength nor is he afraid of death. His heart is smitten and withered like grass. Here the very images 'leaves' and 'grass' symbolize the fragility of human existence. Moreover Nature is depicted as bleak, but that does not frighten him as he has already separated himself from it. But the horrible thing is that his fellow beings are bleaker within their own souls. The poem is a successful lyric emphasizing the futility of human existence in society.

The second poem 'In Tenebris' has longer lines which highlight the greater depth of the alienated man's bereavement. His life has become a nightmare as he has been abused by society for his adventures and condemned to solitude. However, the protagonist does not think that 'the world is a bad place'. He feels that evils exist in order to spoil human harmony and progress. Though the people think that 'All's well' the protagonist realizes that he is a man 'born out of due time' and he has no calling in the society. The reason for this is that the society 'exacts a full look at the Worst' and happiness, a delicate thing, is 'cramped by crookedness, custom, and fear'. So, he questions himself:

Then what is the matter is I, I say. Why should such an one be here? ..... 22

In the poem the 'Clash of the first' refers to the biblical legend in which Abel was killed by his brother Cain. Hardy seems to have used this allusion to reinforce the fact that man is basically cruel towards his neighbours and other lower creatures. However, Hardy does not deny the possibility of happiness through an authentic mode of existence. Supporting this view, Merryn Williams affirms, "Hardy is asking that human beings should be honest about the imperfect state of the world they live in, rather than insisting that everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds."23 The Latin motto of the poem 'In Tenebris' II "'Considerabam ad dexteram, et videbam; et non erat qui cognosceret me ...... non est qui requirat animam meam.' "24 means: "'I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me ... no man cared for my soul'"25. Thus the poem shows the indifference of society towards an individual.

Similarly in the third poem 'In Tenebris' the protagonist dislikes man's greed for knowledge which brings more pain than pleasure. He seems to think that knowledge

may be true in the abstract but doubtful in its application to human existence. Moreover, he desires to die rather than live in the present society which is a welter of futile doings. This view is corroborated by Hardy when he states, "People are not more humane, so far as I can see, than they were in the year of my birth." Hardy, a staunch humanist finds solution to this conflict between man and society through peaceful negotiation and reconciliation. His love and compassion for the isolated individual has really been much appreciated. Indeed, these fine lyrical poems show man's loneliness and pain, unrelieved both by Nature and Society.

Like his contemporary poet A.E.Housman, Hardy writes about the theme of hostile social relationship with an individual, and man's eventual alienation from it. In fact, Hardy highlights the fact that there is always a kind of clash or conflict between an individual and society.

Similarly in the poem 'Wessex Heights', the hostility of society towards an individual is portrayed. Here, the belligerence of society towards a peace-loving man is at its height:

In the lowlands I have no comrade, not even the lone man's friend-

In the towns I am tracked by phantoms having weird detective ways-

They hang about at places, and they say harsh heavy things-

Men with a wintry sneer, and women with tart disparagings.27

These long twisted lines certainly denote the protagonist’s frustration and disappointment in society. In the town he is tracked by phantoms of cynical eyes as it (society) is filled with 'men of a wintry sneer'. As a result, he alienates himself from the society in search of transcendental bliss.

The indifference of society to an individual who is in search of selfhood causes his alienation from it altogether. Moreover, the co-incidence of fate also hinders such man’s happiness, peace and prosperity, and according to Hardy, it piles chance on chance to take man unaware. However, such an alienated individual should not be bothered of, and instead, he should be confident of getting a new mode of life in isolation. In this regard his unhappy life in society is counterbalanced by his will-power, superior consciousness, right thought and choice, heroic action and responsibility.

Existentialist thinkers uphold man’s alienation from society as they think man in order to lead a free and

27. Thomas Hardy, Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics and Reveries, op. cit., p. 319.
responsible life should alienate himself from living in society which is an "arrested mode of life". Therefore, Jaspers thinks non-alienation from society throws man into frustration and the abyss of nothingness. Hence, he considers alienation as a "means of encounter with 'Transcendence'". In a similar spirit, Sartre opines that life in society is something 'unbecoming' of the dignity of human existence. Similarly, Heidegger regards alienation, a necessary condition for free and responsible human existence. Indeed, a kind of 'ethical alienation' in which the individual becomes intensely aware of his own individuality, freedom and responsibility is insisted upon as the most desirable condition of human existence.

This view is clearly reflected in Hardy's poem 'Wessex Heights' where the protagonist who is meditating over his past on his favourite Wessex Heights, does not wish to go to the 'great grey plain' that is nothing but 'society':

I cannot go to the great grey Plain; there's a figure against the moon,
Nobody sees it but I, and it makes my breast beat out of tune;

However, the aftermath of alienation brings a sort of dread, anxiety, anguish and nothingness. In this situation, everything seems to be in confusion. As a result, man feels despair whenever he has to take a momentous decision of immense consequence. In fact, as Heidegger observes, to such a man, "The whole world seems to be slipping away from oneself in this mood of dread."30

The aftermath of alienation that brings a kind of 'dread' and 'anguish' which threaten human existence, is reflected in the following line of the poem 'In Tenebris' II:

The blot seems straightway in me alone; one better
he were not here.31

Indeed, man's alienation from society becomes indispensable on account of society's hostility towards his progress and enlightenment. Therefore Kierkegaard asks, "Is the individual supported, in his quest for selfhood, by the solidarity of human society" (?).32 In a similar spirit J.S.Mill, a renowned social reformer of England states, "Society ..... practises a social tyranny more formidable

30. Martin Heidegger, quoted by G.Srinivasan, Philosophical Perspectives: East and West, op. cit., p. 41.
than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. 33

An utter indifference of society towards an individual is vividly delineated in Hardy’s poem ‘The Church-Builder’. In this poem, a theist who sacrifices everything for the glorification of God, is severely criticised by his neighbours:

The deeper thinkers sneer and smirk,
And give my toil no mind;
From nod and wink
I read they think
That I am fool and blind. 34

Another aspect of Hardy’s poetic thought found in this regard is his dislike of ‘Social Darwinism’. Though, Charles Darwin who published his monumental work, The Origin of Species in 1859, did not uphold the view, that ‘might is right’, the later materialists have upheld the theory of the ‘survival of the fittest’. Particularly the British glorified this theory of evolution with a view of upholding their imperialism. However, the theory, not

33. J.S.Mill, quoted by Merryn Williams, A Preface to Hardy, op. cit., p. 84.
34. Thomas Hardy, Poems of the Past and the Present, op. cit., p. 171.
justifiable in nature, was accepted everywhere, and as a result, people of weaker sections were oppressed.

Hardy, as a staunch humanist, has criticised social Darwinism. He also criticised the imperialistic design which England imposed in her colonies. He referred this to the "... great & eternal incongruity of man's existence - the conflict of a spiritual nature & such aspirations as man's with conditions entirely physical." 35 This is evident in his poems written on Boer, Napoleonic and the first world wars. His poem 'The Man He Killed' shows modern man's cruelties perpetrated in pride of power and glory. The poem illustrates this point of view when a soldier kills his companion just because he was in the enemies camp:

'I shot him dead because-
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although. 36

According to Hardy, man's desire for turning 'red war into redder' can never be silenced unless the majority wants it. Moreover, this task cannot be done either by God


36. Thomas Hardy, Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses, op. cit., p. 287.
or religion as both seem devoid of power in modern times. It is true, man's life can be made harmonious in society, only by his peaceful negotiations.

Like Gautam Buddha, Hardy proposes the middle path for the solution of social conflicts. According to him, there must be a moderate social and moral order of life in society for the welfare of mankind. He seems to think that man to make his life fruitful should harmonise his relationship with society, otherwise, his life becomes miserable. He affirms this by quoting Spencer's sarcastic statement "The highest life (is) reached only when, besides helping to complete one another's lives by specified reciprocities of aid, men otherwise help to complete one another's lives." 37.

Even, existentialist thinkers criticise 'Social Darwinism' for it excludes humanity and violates life-generating values like 'equality', 'liberty' and 'fraternity'. Moreover, it leads to 'misunderstanding' and 'social anarchy'. It is true, man's attachment to 'Social Darwinism' widens the gap between man and society, only to lead mankind to general extinction. Therefore, Hardy remarks, "Civilization ..... an organism ..... wh(ich) if not 

surrounded with the proper conditions of life, will perish ..." Thus society which is based on disorder and rigidities engages itself in constant killing and devising ways and means of torturing an individual.

After Nature and Society have deserted and condemned man to solitude and mental depression, the Hardian protagonist considers whether religion and God can console and encourage his existence for the attainment of selfhood. This never happens as both of them are meant to entangle man in other ways. Whatever little faith Hardy had as a child in conventional religion, he lost once he read J.S. Mill, Charles Darwin, T.H. Huxley and Herbert Spencer. Supporting Hardy's loss of belief in God and Christianity, F.R. Southerington writes, "... the notion of life as a perpetual struggle for survival, with the down-treading of the weak or incapable, affected his outlook to such an extent that it contributed powerfully to the death in him of Christianity." After his loss of faith, Hardy comes to the conclusion that the religion-oriented old way of life can never yield any positive values to man. In support of this view he quotes John Morley: "Religion, whatever destinies may be

in store for it, is at least for the present hardly any longer an organic power. It is not that supreme, penetrating, controlling, decisive part of man's life."\textsuperscript{40} Then what of the churches, like Nietzsche, Hardy thinks, they are nothing but graves and gravestones of God. So, he concludes, "Religions are transitory and tentative, church of the future lies primarily in human breasts, and its teachings are there also."\textsuperscript{41}

Then what of God? Sartre, an atheist who defied even the beliefs of charity and goodness, claiming that both end in humiliating the receiver, said God was a useless and costly hypothesis, while Nietzsche declares, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."\textsuperscript{42} Similarly, Hardy records, "I have been looking for God for 50 years,

\footnotesize{\begin{enumerate}
\item Thomas Hardy, "Literary Notes II", edited by L.A.Bjork, The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, Vol. II., op. cit., p. 104 (2081).
\end{enumerate}}
and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him".  

The death of God, religion and allied beliefs is variously depicted in Hardy's poems, novels and short stories.

Hardy's poems such as 'Hap' (WP-p.9) 'The Bedridden Peasant', (PPP-p.124) and 'New Year's Eve' (TL-p.227) show how the existence of God weakens man's hardihood and sense of responsibility without making his position secure, stable and endurable in society.

Owing to this unbearable state of human existence, Hardy never imagines life to be 'a pure delight, all gentle, true and just'. According to him, it is a thorny spot where men are made to live and are called to die and 'Life offers-to deny!'

Hardy, the thinker, describes life's pending plan as one in which hopes dwindle, faiths waste away and none can change life as it is absurd and rootless. Therefore, he does not promise a happy and enduring life to an unborn generation:

Vain vow ! No hint of mine may hence
To theeward fly: to thy locked sense
    Explain none can
Life's pending plan:44

43. Thomas Hardy, quoted by J.G.Southworth, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, op. cit., p. 99.
44. Thomas Hardy, Poems of the Past and the Present, op. cit., p. 128.
In support of the view that man's life is a long labour in an indifferent society Hardy quotes Victor Hugo: "He insists on the smallness of the personal element in life, the powerlessness of the human will in the face of inanimate forces such as superstition, society, or nature; dogmas, codes & things; religion, prejudice, or the elements... Man is not supreme, but a powerless unit in a crowd. Hugo's theme is the predestined fate of human existence the struggle between man & destiny; he insists upon the compulsion of circumstances, the tragic force that overrides the human will." 45

Similarly, Hardy's poems like 'Childhood among the Ferns' express a sense of the burden of being alive and the pain of human need to act and be responsible in a world which is hostile to man's misery and suffering:

"Why should I have to grow to man's estate, And this afar-noised World perambulate?" 46

The sense of burden is also evident in his novels Jude the Obscure and The Mayor of Casterbridge, where Jude Fawley's son Little Father Time and Newson's daughter


Elizabeth Jane respectively ask themselves as to why they were born in the world which is alien to them.

The indifference of society to an individual is also seen in one of his short stories where a character being afraid of society says, "....lack of human beings at night made me less fearful than the sight of them. Directly I saw a man's shape after dark in a lonely place I was frightened out of my senses."47 This story is thematically similar to his poems 'In Tenebris' I, II and III and 'Wessex Heights'.

However, Hardy endeavours to solve the problem of man's dislike for life in society by adopting 'stoic resignation' or 'an isolated way of life'. Upholding this view J.H.Miller affirms, "The world is noise and glare, the threat of an engulfing violence which will shake and twist a man's life. Only if he can remain self-contained, sealed off from everything, can he escape his violence. He must therefore refuse any involvement in the world."48

Hardy's poems raise a number of different personal issues centring broadly around the conflict between an individual and community. His experience also confirms:

"... how strange it is that we should talk so glibly of 'this cold world which shows no sympathy.' "

The conflict between an individual and society is explicitly stated not only in his poems but also in his novels and short stories. In all these works, Hardy’s protagonists suffer miserably though they have not wronged or corrupted or defrauded others.

Indeed, on account of either man or society’s lack of life-generating and sustaining values, man himself withdraws from society and leads a lonely life in mental isolation.

This aspect of society’s insensibility, obduracy and frigidity to the painful existence of man which results in his alienation from it altogether is also widely seen in the works of Sartre, Kafka, Camus and Dostoevsky, who are all existentialist thinkers and writers.

In Sartre’s novel Nausea (1938), the hero, Roquention moves away from society after he had felt the absurdity and inconsistency of life in it (society); while in Kafka’s novel The Trial (1925), the hero, Josef K, suffers due to the erratic system of government. Similarly, in Camus’ novel The Outsider (1942), the hero, Meursault remains in solitude and frustration because of hostile social

49. Thomas Hardy, quoted by F.E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (1892-1928), op. cit., p. 17.
relationships; and in Dostoevsky’s novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866), the hero, Raskolnikov rebels against the disconsolate world. Indeed, in the works of all these great men of letters, man suffers on account of the erratic social order of life.

To sum up, it is correct to say that according to Hardy’s theory of human reality, 'Man-Society' relationship cannot succeed so long as 'man' and 'society' are not in perfect harmony with each other. Owing to this impossibility of 'Man-Society' relationship, Hardian protagonists alienate themselves from the society and lead a solitary life for the achievement of transcendental bliss. This aspect of an individual’s struggle for existence after his alienation from society is examined in the following chapter.