The analysis of Hardy's poetry in the preceding three chapters shows how man withdraws from his biological environment, society and his own self in quest of selfhood. In the course of their struggle for self-realization, Hardian protagonists find sustenance in their strong will-power and determination to act. They exercise their freedom of choice with a sense of commitment, striving to attain self-realization.

In the present chapter, an attempt is made to examine how a self-alienated man animated by a spirit of independence, struggles for self-realization, taking into consideration the means that he uses and the consequent results of his action.

The Hardian protagonist's struggle for self-realization does not run a smooth course as it is beset with difficulties in this world. In the course of their struggle, his protagonists try to overcome their psychological and moral conflicts in order to harmonise their life -- the quality of thought, nature of choice, style of action and sense of responsibility. As a result, they become more conscious, heroic and responsible and adopt the proper way of action. But they never try or desire to submit themselves to
the surrounding forces either in Nature or in Society. Hardy's protagonists live in the world with a sense of 'stoic-resignation' which is similar to Albert Camus' concept of 'lucid-indifference'. In spite of their mental agitations, Hardy's protagonists never try to follow the traditional way of life or the beaten track of religion. But they are aware of their limitations and do not aspire to reach beyond their means. As they are guided by their own conscience and heroic action in this world, their future lies entirely in their own hands. They can either make or mar their own life. In this sense, they submit entirely to their innate selves, to achieve peace, harmony and enlightenment. In this way, they try to overcome their self-alienation. This aspect of the Hardian protagonist's enlightened vision of their existence is evident in several of his poems.

'Wessex Heights', one of the most famous poems of Hardy, shows a forlorn man's peaceful life on his favourite Wessex heights. The poem shows how a man, frustrated in life, can get consolation and contentment amidst his biological environment. Here, a memory-haunted figure, wandering on the heights meditating over the past, is much happier and freer from the 'phantoms of the plain' as the calm and clear atmosphere is spiritually more stable, steady and sure to provide him joy and solace. Indeed, an aspect of Wordsworthian benevolence of Nature is evident in the poem:
So I am found on Ingpen Beacon, or on Wylls-Neck to the west,
Or else on homely Bulbarrow, or little Pilsdon Crest,
Where men have never cared to haunt, nor women have
walked with me,
And ghosts then keep their distance; and I know some liberty. 1

Similarly, man's harmonious and creative life
based on his doctrine of 'stoic-resignation' is vividly
delineated in Hardy's nature poems 'On a Fine Morning', 'An
August Midnight', 'The Darkling Thrush', 'The Milkmaid',
'From Her in the Country', 'Let Me Enjoy', 'Weathers' and
'Great Things'.

In these poems, Hardy thinks that co-existence is
possible for man amidst Nature if he is willing to sacrifice
himself to her. According to him, 'Man-Nature' relationship
based on love, veneration, regard and reciprocity may
certainly lead man to fruitful co-existence. As a result,
man may live amidst Nature's setting and he may make his life
more human and endurable. But, in this context, Hardy
supports the view of Aristotle that man should not depend on
Nature for everything as she herself is imperfect. But he
should make her a true companion and co-existent, for he is a
product of his biological environment. In this regard,
E.R. Oxford observes, "Man is held to be a part of Nature, a
product of the definite and orderly evolution which is
universal" and, "It is his destiny to understand and control

1. Thomas Hardy, Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics and
Reveries, op. cit., p. 320.
Another critic, D.R.Bhandari maintains, "Man is not alien to Nature in spite of its working against his plans and projects."  

In the first poem 'On a Fine Morning', a man tired of his life in worldly affairs consoles himself thinking of the solace that he may get in his ideals of life ('gazing at the gleam') whereby he hopes to forget 'Time's monitions' i.e., worries (as 'gray things golden seem'). According to him, this is possible only amidst Nature. As a result, he thinks that the 'earth was made for man':

But as nothing other than
Part of a benignant plan;
Proof that earth was made for man.  

The poem undoubtedly shows the primitive spirit that 'man' and 'Nature' are not alien to each other in spite of their differences.

Similarly, how a man passes his time amidst Nature's innocent creatures is depicted in the poem 'An August Midnight'. The man portrayed in the poem seems to be

4. Thomas Hardy, Poems of the Past and the Present, op. cit., p. 130.
a writer who is visited by various creatures as he sits
writing at night. His communion with these creatures assures
him joy and solace, as they reveal to him the mystery of
Nature that is unknown to human beings:

On this scene enter-winged, horned, and spined-
A longlegs, a moth, and a dumbledore;
While 'mid my page there idly stands
A sleepy fly, that rubs its hands........

Thus meet we five, in this still place,
At this point of time, at this point in space.
-My guests besmear my new-penned line,
Or bang at the lamp and fall supine.
'God's humblest, they!' I muse. Yet why?
They know Earth-secrets that know not I.\textsuperscript{5}

Another poem in a similar spirit which has
attracted a large number of readers and admirers is 'The
Darkling Thrush'. The poem, which reveals the mysteries of
the present, past and the future, was written at the turn of
the 19th century bringing for posterity hopes and inspiration
for life which were absent in the monotonous and chaotic life
of 19th century.

This lyric was inspired by P.B. Shelley's nature
lyric 'To a Skylark' and John Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'.
Hardy seems to think that these birds have revealed the
mysteries of happier worlds to the respective poets who were
rather disillusioned by the pain, misery and suffering around

\textsuperscript{5}Thomas Hardy, \textit{Poems of the Past and the Present}, op. cit.,
p. 146-147.
them. Similarly, the 'Thrush' aged, frail, gaunt and small 'in blast-beruffled plume' obviously born for death and which moved Hardy the poet to prophecy, is not an ordinary bird. Indeed, this is a bird which knows more than man.

John Keats in his 'Ode' wished to leave the world and fade away into the happier world of the bird for getting transcendental bliss. Likewise, P.B. Shelley felt that the 'Skylark' is in a much happier condition than he is. Hardy also thinks that the 'Thrush' though weak in body, is happy and ecstatic as it knows 'some blessed Hope' which he does not know.

The fervourless protagonist of the poem hears somewhere a full-hearted 'Thrush' singing joyfully to announce new hopes and aspirations to the new century:

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;

Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

The poem is autobiographical so far as it reveals Hardy's personal crises at this time (1900). He was disgraced by the invidious critics upon the publication of his novels Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure. Secondly, he was unhappy in his married life with Emma Hardy.

6. Thomas Hardy, Poems of the Past and the Present, op. cit., p. 150.
Finally, he was not satisfied with the life of his age which was chaotic and disharmonious.

The poem is striking because it closely reflects his vision. W.H. Auden and Dylan Thomas, his followers, admired it. The former remarks, "To see the individual life related not only to the local social life of its time, but to the whole of human history, life on the earth, the stars, gives one both humility and self-confidence". He also thinks as the difference between an individual and Nature is so slight, man should reconcile himself to her and work for his earthly evolution. Another critic, Tom Paulin thinks that the poem 'The Darkling Thrush' is similar to John Keats' 'Ode to Nightingale' ('The weariness, the fever and the fret') and Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' ('turbid ebb and flow of human misery'). Indeed, at a close glance, Hardy's poetry is of an agnostic humanist's but not of a puritanical Christian's.

Man's harmonious co-existence with Nature is still deep in the poem 'The Milkmaid' where the under-currents of joy and pain of a milkmaid in the beautiful natural phenomena are shown. She is not only a companion to Nature but also a true part of it. Like the life of Deggory Venn of Hardy's

novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*, her life is peaceful. Her virtues like simplicity, nobility and sacrifice make her an authentic individual. The poem reveals feminine power, grace and presence of both the milkmaid and Nature:

Upheaves and falls; the milk purrs in the pail;  
Few pilgrims but would choose  
The peace of such a life in such a vale.

The maid breathes words - to vent,  
It seems, her sense of Nature's scenery,  
Of whose life, sentiment,  
And essence, very part itself is she.  

Similarly, a woman in 'From Her in the Country' speculates that life in the beautiful countryside is more harmonious than in 'Crass clanging town'. Here, her very annoyance of the commercialization of life ('city din and sin') finds expression:

I said: How beautiful are these flowers, this wood,  
One little bud is far more sweet to me  
Than all man's urban shows; and then I stood  
Urging new zest for bird, and bush, and tree;

Nature's benevolent intercourse with human existence is shown in the poem 'Weathers'. Here, the protagonist is shown in perfect harmony with his biological environment. He is a companion of not only of his fellow-beings but also of birds, beasts and trees. He is a true

part of his natural surroundings:

THIS is the weather the cuckoo likes,
   And so do I;
When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,
   And nestlings fly:
And the little brown nightingale bills his best,
And they sit outside at 'The Travellers' Rest',
And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,
And citizens dream of the south and west,
   And so do I.

This is the weather the shepherd shuns;
   And so do I;
   And so do I.

And rooks in families homeward go,
   And so do I. 10

The poem shows man's love of Nature is not for
profit but for pleasure, harmony and contentment. The
protagonist's love for Nature is simple but noble and
spiritual. In fact, he loves Nature for the attainment of
grace and solace. This aspect of human love and veneration
for natural phenomena is still deeper in the poems 'Let Me
Enjoy' and 'Great Things'.

In the first poem, 'Let Me Enjoy' man accepts life
in all its grey and green hues. Though the earth has other
aims than his delight, like the protagonist of the poem
'Great Things', he resolves to make Nature a companion for
its benevolence and gracious presence:

10. Thomas Hardy, Late Lyrics and Earlier, op. cit., p. 563.
LET me enjoy the earth no less
Because the all-enacting Might
That fashioned forth its loveliness.\textsuperscript{11}

Just the same, the protagonist of the second poem, 'Great Things' loves Nature as he loves Wine and Woman:

\begin{quote}
0 cyder is a great thing,  
A great thing to me!  
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
0 dancing is a great thing,  
A great thing to me!  
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
0 love is, yes, a great thing,  
A great thing to me!  
\end{quote}

Will these be always great things,  
Great things to me? .......
Let it befall that One will call,  
'Soul, I have need of thee:'  
What then? Joy-jaunts, impassioned flings,  
Love, and its ecstasy,  
Will always have been great things,  
Great things to me!\textsuperscript{12}

In these poems particularly, 'Weathers', 'Let Me Enjoy' and 'Great Things' a kind of Wordsworthian benevolence to human existence is shown. Here, man's love for Nature leads to his love of fellow human beings. For instance, the love of the protagonist of the poem 'Great Things' for natural objects like wine (Cyder) leads to his love of dance and woman. As a result, he thinks human love is greater than

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Thomas Hardy, \textit{Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses}, op. cit., p. 238.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Thomas Hardy, \textit{Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses}, op. cit., p. 475.
\end{itemize}
all the things. This is evident in the last four lines of the poem.

The poems 'Great Things' and 'Let Me Enjoy' bear direct witness to man's pleasure in the simple sensuous joys of the world of Nature. This is also an autobiographical poem where the poet expresses the delight of his early days. On account of his optimism expressed in poems like these, Hardy is considered not a life-denier. His theory of human reality as expressed in his poems like these shows man's interest in earthly evolution in every shape and sound. Supporting Hardy's optimism, Jean Brooks asserts, "Only a man who loved life in every fibre of his being could feel so keenly the betrayal of its potentialities in the sight of a starving thrush, a blinded bird, or an unwanted pauper child".13

These poems reflect man's special love, compassion, respect and regard for Nature on account of her gracious presence, spiritual awakening and stability. Nature has been shown as a divine power and personality for the progressive redemption and enlightenment of those who co-exist with her. Hardy thinks every part of Nature is

indispensable for the enrichment of human existence, and human existence on the earth is hardly possible without Nature.

As Hardy's knowledge and experience of life matured, his view of, and attitude towards life underwent considerable changes. His attitude towards life became more mature and humane. He considered Nature's flora and fauna as an inseparable part of human existence. Like the Romantic poets he came to think that Nature is not an alien to human existence in spite of her neutralism and occasional malignity.

Our close study of the pastoral aspects of Hardy's poetry reveals the fact that man's life is only possible and fruitful in his environment primarily in consonance with the natural environment. In fact, everyman's life in the country is absolutely dependent on the woods, air, earth, sky, sun, rain, snow, wind, dawn, darkness, seasons and so on. They are for him the masters, acquaintances, personal assistants and instructors.

In a similar spirit, the existentialist thinker Jaspers feels the indispensibility of Nature for man's happy and harmonious existence. He thinks that man in order to lead a peaceful and creative existence, should live like lower animals without any rivalry or conflicts. This view is shown in Hardy's poems 'The Darkling Thrush' and 'An August Midnight' which have been quoted above. In these poems,
Hardy recognises that the humblest creatures can have joy and insight beyond the reason of human senses and intellect.

If we subjectively analyse Hardy's Nature poems, we come to the conclusion that Hardy was of the same view as Jaspers and Ponty. It is only another matter that he exposed the drawbacks of Nature on account of her lack of adequate system.

On another level, Hardian protagonists realize their mistakes and try to reconcile themselves with society. They resolve to co-exist with their fellow-beings with a view to enriching their human relationships. Whatever may be the aftermath, they turn to others for human love, compassion, consolation, contentment and solidarity. In this connection, they experience inner 'dread', 'angst' (anxiety or mental neurosis) and 'nothingness' on account of their reconciliation with the broader community. They readjust themselves with the society and sacrifice their desires in the hope of either mutual benefit or common betterment. In other words, this may be called their 'Social Service' or 'Sacrifice' in a broader sense. But this aspect of co-existence requires higher virtues like suffering, sacrifice, endurance, simplicity and nobility.

This way of life amidst his fellow-beings in society has another dimension. It involves co-existence with people of different nature and distinction. As a result, an individual in society must have virtues like love, respect,
regard, reciprocity and sacrifice. He should be right in his way of life and style of functioning. Moreover, he should be aware of the limits of his freedom, his sense of duty and responsibility.

This mode of 'Mar-Society' relationship with a view of an individual's rational and enlightened progress in society has been depicted on two planes in Hardy's poems. On the first, there is 'Man-Woman' relationship, and on the second, 'Man-Society' relationship.

As far as 'Man-Woman' relationship is concerned, human love, faith, mercy, forgiveness, sacrifice and willingness play a significant role. In fact, these virtues become a kind of guidelines for the establishment of 'Man-Woman's' personal and sexual relationships. This is shown in the poems 'Ditty' and 'The Dance at the Phoenix'. The first poem 'Ditty' which is one of Hardy's most lovely and homely of the heart-stirring shorter lyrics dedicated to his first wife Emma Hardy, evinces the happy life of two true companions. The refrain 'where she dwells' produces an atmosphere at once cheerful and gracious. Here, Hardy's protagonist uses love as the most elementary passion for transcendental bliss. His protagonist's love and romance have found their cathartic expression. Hence, the poem denotes the spiritual power and healing spirit of love and it ends on a philosophical note:

Upon that fabric fair
'Here is she!'
Seems written everywhere
Unto me.
He feels he is lucky to have got such a companion
who is both lovely and gracious:

And Devotion droops her glance
To recall
What bond — servants of Chance
We are all.

I but found her in that, going
On my errant path unknowing,
I did not out-skirt the spot
That no spot on earth excels,
Where she dwells!14

Ernest Brennecke Jr., commenting on this love
lyric, says, "It is a poem that does not suffer by
comparison with the best of Wordsworth's Lucy poems ('She
dwelt among Untrodden Ways') though the touch of pathos is
lacking."15

Similarly the poem 'The Dance at the Phoenix'
expresses something about special love which can become a
means of ensuring spiritual and mutual awakening and
stability. The poem is about a soldier's love story, in
which Hardy dwells upon the impression of 'true love' in
providing orderly life and perfection. This is shown in the
poem, in which Jenny, a maid though not pure before her
marriage, believes and respects her husband for he makes life

17-18.
15. Ernest Brennecke, Jr., The Life of Thomas Hardy, op.
cit., p. 136.
more harmonious and endurable. Indeed, she succeeds in winning her husband's 'loving-kindness' and also tries to be his 'honest wife in heart and head from bride-ale hour to grave':

Wedded they were. Her husband's trust
In Jenny knew no bound,
And Jenny kept her pure and just,
Till even malice found

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.16

The poet's portrayal of love which provides man 'life-loyalty' is, indeed, noteworthy. Hardy thinks that true love in reality is spiritual awakening of man and woman's creative life. His concept of true and noble love is comparable to that of the Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo, "Love is not love if it acquiesces in evil; great and true love is a power, and it can break the doors of captivity; it can change dross to gold, it can defy death or it is not love".17

There are many love poems such as 'To Lizbie Browne' (PPP-p.130) 'To Louisa in the Lane' (WW-p.839) and

16. Thomas Hardy, Wessex Poems and Other Verses, op. cit., p. 44, 47.
the poem '1967' (TL-p.220) which illustrate Hardy's gospel of love, that love if justifiably pursued will bring joy, bliss, hope and inspiration to human existence. These poems also throw light upon the question why man follows the path of love for his self-purification and self-realization. In the last poem '1967' written a century earlier in 1867, Hardy asserts that love must be passionate and gracious. Such a mode of love which he calls 'loving-kindness' surely enhances and enriches human existence:

A century which, if not sublime,
Will show, I doubt not, at its prime,
A scope above this blinkered time.

-Yet what to me how far above?
For I would only ask thereof
That thy worm should be my worm, Love! 18

Similarly, on the other plane, 'Man-Society' relationship is shown as fruitful. Many of the Hardian protagonists, as soon as they return to society, adjust and reconcile themselves with their neighbours. They try to help others; they love and respect the people around them; and they also sacrifice something for common betterment. In a similar spirit, they try to overcome their antipathies and follow a kind of ethic which Hardy calls 'Positive Religion'. According to him: "The Positive Religion - contains the only

18. Thomas Hardy, Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses, op. cit., p. 220.
laws capable of regulating the Present with a view to the Future on the basis of the Past.\textsuperscript{19} In existentialism, this doctrine is called as 'Stoic-resignation' or 'lucid-indifference' or 'life in meditation of isolation' which will eventually stabilize man's life even in the case of society's inhumanity towards an individual. This aspect of Hardy's ethic of human reality is reflected in his poems such as 'Friends Beyond', 'Conjecture' and 'Wessex Heights'. Though it is a picture of dead people, the first poem shows how some people by nature are self-sacrificing. In this transitory or unreal world, William Dewy, Tranter Reuban, Farmer Ledlow, Squire and Lady Susan who lie in Mellstock (Stinsford) churchyard, sacrifice everything they had in a dramatic manner:

W.D. - 'Ye mid burn the old bass-viol that I set such value by'.

Squire - 'You may hold the manse in fee, You may wed my spouse, may let my children's memory of me die'.

Lady S. - 'You may have my rich brocades, my laces; take each household key; Ransack coffer, desk, bureau; Quiz the few poor treasures hid there, con the letters kept by me.'\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} Thomas Hardy, "Literary Notes I", edited by L.A.Bjork, The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, Vol. I., op. cit., P. 74 (723).
\textsuperscript{20} Thomas Hardy, Wessex Poems and Other Verses, op. cit., p.60.
If the people of the first poem 'Friends Beyond' are fictional or unreal, the people of the second poem 'Conjecture' are real and autobiographical. In this poem, the poet Hardy himself states if he had no Emma (his first wife), Florence (his second wife) and Mary (his sister), his life 'could pass to pulseless sleep!'

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? 21

Indeed, Hardy means that man without the sunny atmosphere of his fellow-beings, can never lead a happy and harmonious life on the earth.

The poem 'Wessex Heights' gives a contrasting picture as it shows, the Har-dian protagonist's lonely but happy life in isolation. The hero, disgraced from society, alienates himself from it and lives on his favourite Wessex heights. His life like that of Robinson Crusoe is in a state of physical isolation.

However, Hardy like existentialist thinkers considers society a necessity for the happy and harmonious human existence. He seems to think that human virtues such as love, compassion, respect, regard, help, co-operation and sacrifice harmonise all human relationships — 'sexual' and

'personal' and 'social' -- and make them fruitful.

A deep study of Hardyian metaphysics supports the fact that in human life which is vain in long thoroughfare of sad humanity, 'Love' can only lead man to 'life-loyalties'. For this reason Hardy advocates that man should live with others in perfect harmony. This is what the poet calls his 'scientific humanism' and is endorsed by existentialist thinkers. In this connection, Jaspers remarks, "Remoteness from the world gives an inward distinction; but immersion, on the other hand, awakens all that is human in selfhood...... This historical immersion... is to be encountered in the energy of veneration, as concentration in occupational work, and as exclusivity in erotic love." Sartre too means the same when he asserts that man is not to live at the expense of others. As man's concept of freedom and responsibility involves others, others are indispensable to his existence. Sartre thinks, if man is aware of the limit of his freedom, duty and responsibility, he will also be aware of others'.

So far it has been closely observed how Hardyian protagonists lead a happy and prosperous life in different dimensions. In this connection, the question is whether Hardyian protagonists follow the beaten track of tradition with a view to achieving self-preservation and self-

realization. But our study of Hardy's view of life supports the argument that many of his protagonists are in search of new ways and means for the perfection of their lives instead of following the old order of life. Accordingly, though people inherit a tradition, they are in search of a new order of life for the attainment of selfhood. They are in need of a true bond of love and fellowship, truth, morals and creativity which are the traits of greatness. They are certainly in need of a full and purposive life. Indeed, they are working for the attainment of rational, enlightened and progressive human evolution which will enable them to become 'supermen'.

Under these circumstances, the Hardian protagonist tries to establish a harmonious human relationship with his fellow-beings. Here, Hardy speaks of man's return to society -- of course, on a different level than that of an ordinary man. It is a return of an individual to society at the existentialist level as the authentic man who has encountered inwardness in solitude, and longs for a communion with others. According to him, the authentic man joins the society in order to overcome his negative emotions and to recognise his own self. In support of this view, he quotes Goethe: "We first know that we exist when we recognise ourselves in others."23 In a similar note, Russian

existentialist thinker, Berdyaev states, "The Ego longs to emerge from its prison house in order to meet and identify itself with another Ego." Similarly, Heidegger and Jaspers state, for the realization of selfhood, man must establish a harmonious co-existence with his society. Jaspers thinks man's harmonious co-existence with society is 'Communication'. Another existentialist thinker, Buber who does not accept Sartre's view of freedom, says that his idea of freedom leads man to his (man's) mutual 'Cummunion'. He goes one step further and says that the possibility of 'Man and Man' contact facilitates the possibility of 'Man - Society' relationship. Here, the 'society' stands for the 'eternal presence' or 'real speech' as he called it. His idea of 'interpersonal relationship' is called 'Dialogue' which is similar to Jaspers' idea of 'communication' and Hardy's concept of 'social relationship'. According to this hypothesis, an individual and community are inter-dependent and one cannot live at the expense or exclusion of the other. So one's progress or regress is wholly dependent on others. It is true, social relationship (Dialogue) is necessary to man for his existence in relation to transcendence. Even more, primal satisfaction comes to an individual with the establishment of a 'Dialogue' between man and society which, in fact, enables him to live in a state of mutual relationship with the world.

Indeed, the concept of 'Dialogue' provides the true foundation for an authentic mode of life in society. Kierkegaard also believes that for man's salvation, his bond with the world must not be abandoned.

Buber criticises Sartre's idea of 'crowd' (society). He distinguishes the 'community' from the 'crowd' and opines that "Man's existence in the community is not bundled but bound." He means man's relationship is not with the crowd, but with the systematic community, and man has nothing to do with society at large. It is true as our experience and observation of life proves, man is only intimately bound to 'others' at a personal level without losing his individuality, which carries him to the greater bondage with the community but not with the crowd. And this can only be done by man, a superior human being in the cosmos. This is supported by the traditional view that man is a rational and social animal who can mould his future according to his predetermined plans and projects.

Here, the concern of both Hardy and existentialist thinkers is to know how individuals can establish an adequate human relationship with society as a preliminary to the attainment of selfhood.

As far as man's struggle for perfection of life is concerned, Hardian protagonists do not stick to the idea of religion. They hardly turn either to religion or God for whatever psychic consolation and concrete help they may require. They even deny the existence of supernatural forces. In their view, the very sanctity of religion is obliterated; and the transcendental bliss of religion is no more extant. Now religion is not a spirit or force, but a farce. Therefore it has met with scathing criticism in the works of both Hardy and existentialist thinkers. Indeed, "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 a man's life."  

In many of Hardy's poems man's dislike for religion, rituals, churches and clergy is vividly portrayed. His poem, 'The Impercipient' and 'Unkept Good Fridays' show man's dislike for the religion-oriented way of life. In the first poem, a man's loss of faith in the old way of life is delineated. The protagonist of the poem is unable to see and believe the things which his comrades do, for they seem to him mere fantasies. His blindness to see and inability to enjoy happiness are because of his loss of faith in the

traditional mode of human existence based on religious absurdities. His loss of belief in Christianity and traditional way of life is also indicated by the imagery of the poem. The final image, 'a bird-deprived of wings go earth-bound wilfully!' denotes his atheism but not his ignorance. He thinks, the world is still darker so that his soul is 'consigned to infelicity'. Therefore, like Nietzsche, he thinks accepting Christianity is a 'self-deception', for no Christ breathes blessings:

That He who breathes All's Well to these
Breathes no All's - Well to me.27

The poem reflects autobiographical elements. Hardy's second wife Mrs F.E.Hardy says that Hardy lost his faith in Christianity by the age of 27. He considered the so-called morality as the very cause of man's suffering which he termed as 'positive evil'. He wrote "Unless suffering is the direct and immediate object of life, our existence must entirely fail of its aim"... "happiness of any given life is to be measured, not by its joys and pleasures, but by the extent to which it has been free from suffering from positive evil".28 Hardy was also angry with the dogmatic clergy who

27. Thomas Hardy, Wessex Poems and Other Verses, op. cit., p.67.
defended the evils of religion. L.E.W. Smith rightly remarks, "...What distressed Hardy even more, and this perhaps implies a failure of faith in the 'believers', is their lack of 'Sympathies and Christian charity.'" As a result of which he was accused of being a pessimist, fatalist and non-conformist as Socrates was charged with being Godless and corrupting the youth of Athens. But Hardy was not what people thought of him. In fact, he did not wish to do anything without Christian charity and loving-kindness. L.E.W. Smith again remarks, "If there were true Christians they would sympathise with his 'lack' and 'shortcomings': they could act out of strength, optimism and faith, but yet they accused him." In spite of weakness and deprivation, the agnostic man is ready to act with sympathy and love, in quest of becoming himself. Therefore, he proclaims:

   Enough. As yet discuiet clings
   About us. Rest shall we,

   In the other poem 'Unkept Good Fridays' written on the 'Good Friday' of 1927, Hardy criticises the glorious celebration of Good Fridays. He thinks there are many more

30. Thomas Hardy, Wessex Poems and Other Verses, op. cit., p. 68.
Good Fridays of men who were slain for the goodwill of kings and whose Good Fridays are not observed. However, as the traditional way of life exploits the poor and degenerates the rich, he thinks it is not worth celebrating these nameless Christ's Good Fridays.

Similarly, Hardy criticises the clergy and the churches in the poems, 'She Revisits Alone the Church of Her Marriage' (LLE-p.638) and 'The Levelled Churchyard' (PPP-p.157). Here, Hardian protagonists, animated by heroic qualities rebel against the clergy and the absurd religious institutions which curb man's freedom, duty and sense of responsibility. Whatever, they want to do they resolve to do it independently without any assistance from the established religious institutions or from any incomprehensible forces. Because, they are self-reliant, conscious and hardworking people, they seek consolation and contentment only in their fellow-beings or in their biological environment.

Existentialist thinkers have also criticised the adverse impact of religion, rituals, churches and the clergy. Sartre has considered religion as a bundle of superstitious beliefs, while Kierkegaard affirms, "It must be irrational to become a christian", and "to become a christian is to risk everything, to invest absolutely everything in the venture."31

But one thing should be remembered here, that Hardy has never denied the benevolence and significance of the true spirit of religion which lies in faith, charity, sacrifice, forgiveness and loving-kindness.

Just the same, the Hardian protagonists do not believe in the existence and benevolence of God. In their view, God is not a power who can deliver them power and glory. This aspect of Hardian protagonists' agnosticism and atheism is clearly reflected in poems like 'Hap', 'The Bedridden Peasant' and 'New Year's Eve'. All these poems clearly depict man's fight with God for his progressive enlightenment.

The sonnet 'Hap' denotes how God personified as 'Crass Casualty', 'dicing Time' and 'purblind Doomsters' readily frustrate human desires and endeavours:

-Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan....
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.32

In the same way, the poem 'The Bedridden Peasant' sub-titled To an unknowing God shows how God, who created man and left him to his fate, can be irresponsible. The protagonist of the poem thinks that God is not only neutral, but also indifferent to human existence. Therefore, he declares:

32. Thomas Hardy, Wessex Poems and Other Verses, op. cit., p. 9.
MUCH wonder I - here long low'- laid -
That this dead wall should be
Betwixt the Maker and the made,
Between Thyself and me!33

A close observation of Hardy's poem 'New Year's Eve' in which the victim asks God for his gracious presence, expresses the protagonist's bitter comment on God. The poem attracted many readers and critics alike, for God in the poem is shown as unanswerable to the question why he created man and left him in 'tabernacle groan'. He is shown as a sense-sealed (belligerent) power caring only for the process of Nature which is also indifferent to human existence:

'I HAVE finished another year', said God,
'In grey, green, white, and brown;
I have strewn the leaf upon the sod,
Sealed up the worm within the clod,
And let the last sun down'.

'And what's the good of it?' I said,
'What reasons made you call
From formless void this earth we tread,
When nine-and-ninety can be read
Why nought should be at all?

'Yea, Sire; why shaped you us, "who in
This tabernacle groan"-
If ever a joy be found herein,
Such joy no man had wished to win
If he had never known!'

Then he: 'My labours-logicless-
You may explain; not I:
Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess
That I evolved a Consciousness
To ask for reasons why.

33. Thomas Hardy, Poems of the Past and the Present, op. cit., p. 124.
'Strange that ephemeral creatures who
By my own ordering are,
Should see the shortness of my view,
Use ethic tests I never knew,
Or made provision for!'

He sank to raptness as of yore,
And opening New Year's Day
Wove it by rote as theretofore,
And went on working evermore
In his unweeving way.34

Indeed, these poems show the dark aspect of human
existence which is overshadowed by the image of the Godhead
working blindly without logic. Hardy's atheism is also
evident in his novels and short-stories. It is because of
Hardy's atheism, his friend Edmund Gosse wrote, "What has
Providence done to Mr. Hardy that he should rise up in the
arable land of Wessex and shake his fist at his Creator?"35
Hardy seems to have answered Gosse in the following
unpublished poem:

The Gods
Many things they have given & taken
And wrought and ruined many things...36

Therefore, man should not depend either on
religion or God for any concrete help; instead he has to be

34. Thomas Hardy, Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses, op. cit., p. 277-278.
confident, courageous and hardworking. Similarly, he should create his own moral and social order of life. Indeed, "Those who no longer place their highest faith in powers above and beyond men, are for that very reason more deeply interested than others in cherishing the integrity, and worthiness of man himself."37

The existentialist thinker's criticism of God is still more severe, Nietzsche heralds His death, while Sartre denies His existence as he insistently disbelieves in Him. Still there are some people who think that though God exists no ethical principles can be deduced from His existence. Hardy also thinks, "If this (the doctrine of mere probability) were to be allowed then the celebrated saying "O God if there be a God, save my soul if I have a soul" would be the highest measure of devotion:" but who can really pray to a Being about whose existence he is seriously in doubt? 38 It is true, an external force promising peace, prosperity, consolation and salvation is an illusion to curb one's feeling and courage. Moreover, man's ardent faith in God sickens him and destroys his very sense of freedom and

responsibility without diminishing his misery and suffering. A note made in his diary on Dec. 31, 1885 underlines Hardy's valuable advice to human beings: "This is the chief thing; Be not perturbed; for all things are according to the nature of the universal (Marcus Aurelius)." 39

On account of his atheism, Hardy is harshly criticised. G.K.Chesterton (1874-1936) called him 'a village atheist'; Oxford university delayed to honour him; and many copies of his novel Jude the Obscure were burnt in public. It is true, Hardy is an atheist and an evolutionary meliorist. But a close glance at his poetry reveals that he believes in an incomprehensible power that directs the world to a mysterious end, and is rather utterly indifferent to the human desires and endeavours. However, with his atheism goes the belief that man is necessarily alone and he must work out his own destiny.

In a similar tone, an unsigned reviewer in The Academy wrote, "The ordinary agnostic who has serious thought for his fellows offers a hard materialism in the place of the religion in which he finds no solace. Mr. Hardy, who is not ordinary, might be called an unbelieving mystic." 40

39. Thomas Hardy, Quoted by F.E.Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), op. cit., p. 176.

Both Hardy and existentialist thinkers come to the conclusion that man does not inherit any values and his existence precedes essence. Accordingly, God is an essence created by ignorant people after they had gained existence. It is right, man first exists and then only he hurls himself towards a future. At first he is nothing, it is only afterwards, he achieves everything by his solidarity. Hence, both Hardy and existentialists arrive at a similar conclusion that man has to be conscious, heroic, hard-working and responsible for the purpose of self-realization in the purposeless universe. As nobody either guides or helps him, he has to attain whatever he needs by his own choice, action and responsibility. Indeed, there is neither heaven nor hell to grant man either salvation or damnation. There is only one reality i.e., the world, the man and his consciousness. In such a reality, man is his own God. Nevertheless, Hardy regrets that there are some orthodox people who believe in a nether world with a hope of getting a happy life after their death. For these people Hardy has a characteristic retort, "Do you know what it is which makes man the most suffering of creatures? It is that he has one foot in the finite and the other in the infinite." 41

Hardian protagonists therefore denounce a Godhead which is the root cause of their 'sickness unto death' (Kierkegaard). They also disbelieve in the benevolence of religion-oriented traditional way of life which merely weakens human solidarity. His heroes are atheists and transcendentalists. Albeit, after reconsidering their situation once they have alienated themselves from the biological environment and material world, they reconcile and readjust to them with the hope of finding a better relationship of co-existence. Their compromise with the biological world and society overcomes their solitary confinement, dread and a feeling of nothingness. Furthermore, it generates in them a desire for collective life, but 'in identity of their distinct individuality'. In this connection they rebel against the convention and God only to recreate a new moral and social order of life. Indeed, they try to make human existence more endurable for the glorification of their earthly evolution.