Nobody has tried so far to study Hardy's poetry in the light of existentialism and this thesis will throw new light on Hardy's theory of human existence. For the assessment of Hardy's poems in the light of existentialist ethic, the thesis has been divided into seven chapters and elaborated them in detail.

Thomas Hardy is an important writer and thinker. Though he has not formulated any philosophy of his own, he is certainly a humanist and an existentialist thinker. Because of his hearty response to human existence with an unflinching courage of mind and heart he is worth noting. However, many invidious critics, who did not understand him, accused him as a pessimist and non-conformist. Therefore the immediate concern is to defend him against the charges made by his invidious critics. It is true, Hardy himself has often stated that 'he is not a pessimist, but an evolutionary maliorist', who believes in the gradual evolution of the world. It is also true that a close observation of Hardy's poems reveals the fact that Hardy is undoubtedly a humanist and an optimist.
The main objective of this thesis is to understand what Hardy has written about man and woman and their relationship with the biological environment, material world and the inner self. An attempt is made to explore whether Hardy tries, through his protagonists, to create a new moral and social order of life. In this world according to Hardy man inherits no tradition, no religion and no God, and he creates all by himself an order of life that will provide him 'life-loyalties'. In this new world everything will be healthy, harmonious, orderly and authentic. This is the conception of an order of life that is clearly reflected in the philosophy of existence.

This is a novel approach to the study of Hardy's poetry since the emphasis is on its existential aspect. It is also an endeavour to establish Hardy as a forerunner of existential writers.

In chapter I a brief sketch of Thomas Hardy's life, achievements and literary merits is given. Similarly, a short survey of Hardy's diction, prosody, imagery and architectonics and something about the plan of the thesis is detailed.

In chapter II, the philosophy of existence which is a way of life, has been discussed in some detail.
Existentialism, one of the philosophical trends in human thoughts, is a reaction to the Hegelian idealism. Existentialism is based on the subjective interpretations of life trying to solve human problems. It thus tends to be humanistic, atheistic and radical.

A bird’s eye-view of the major exponents of existentialism and their ideas with a view to highlighting the importance of existentialism in the modern world of science and commerce is attempted.

The section Existentialism in Literature gives a brief sketch of the impact of existentialism in the literature of the 19th and 20th centuries of all major languages. In the next section, Hardy and Existentialism, a brief survey of Hardy’s life and works in the light of existentialism is delineated.

In the following chapters, the major themes of existentialism in relation to Hardy’s poems, are discussed.

In chapter III, the relation between man and Nature which is a tragic phenomenon of our time is studied.

Man is no doubt a part and parcel of his biological environment, but on account of his material advancement, he has begun to exploit the beauty and bounty of Nature in every possible manner. As a result, a kind of
biological imbalance is created. Therefore, Nature has become neutral and even indifferent to the misery and suffering of human beings. This aspect of 'Man-Nature' relationship is expressed in Hardy's poems 'A Backward Spring' (MV-p.498) and 'In a Wood' (WP-p.64). Owing to this implicit indifference of Nature towards human existence, man alienates himself from her altogether.

Chapter IV deals with man and his relation to society. Here, man's relationship with his fellow beings is viewed from two angles, viz, man's relationship with the 'Other' and with the 'Others'.

As far as man's relationship with the 'Other is concerned, the 'Other' is his life partner. This 'Man-Woman' relationship which is based on biological and sexual factors will be successful so long as man and woman are in perfect harmony with each other. Similarly, man's relationship with the 'Others' that is Society, which is based on social and economical factors will be successful if it is based on the notions of 'liberty', 'equality' and 'fraternity'. This aspect of man's relationship with woman and society is reflected in most of Hardy's poems.

However, a majority of married protagonists in Hardy's poems either on account of their own psychological factors or social or sexual disparities, fail to succeed in sexual and personal relationships, resulting in separation of
man or woman from the respective spouse. This is reflected in Hardy's poems 'A Broken Appointment' (PPP-p.136) and 'Lost Love' (SC-p.318). On the otherhand, man's relationship with the community fails on account of either individual limitations or social codes. As a result, an individual who is in quest for selfhood, alienates himself from his society altogether. This is clearly delineated in Hardy's poem 'Wessex Heights' (SC-p.319).

In chapter V the relationship between man and his own self is elaborated.

Man after his alienation from Nature and Society, remains essentially alone. In this state of dread and loneliness, he is haunted by his mental and moral tensions. This state of his existence brings about a conflict between his inner consciousness and outer commitments or a kind of self-alienation.

In this context, the concept of 'alienation' and the question whether to allow an individual to work for his cause or to restrict his freedom and responsibility is dealt in detail.

Man's quest for selfhood is delineated in chapter VI.

Since, man's life is nothing but a desperate struggle for self-realization, he tries to be heroic. In the
course of this struggle for existence, an individual alienates himself from his biological environment, society and his own self as it has already been seen in the preceding chapters.

It is in the state of loneliness that an individual realizes his limitations and comes to know the significance of his biological environment and material world. As a result, he tries to readjust with Nature and Society and reconciles his differences with a view to mutual welfare. Similarly, he realizes the significance of his inner resources and uses them judiciously with a view to achieving self-realization.

The concluding remarks make the chapter VII. In this chapter, a brief review of the conclusions arrived at the end of the foregoing chapters has been made in order to arrive at Hardy’s existentialist perception of man who, by his inner resources alone, can achieve his self-realization.

Thus this work, attempts to study Thomas Hardy’s poetry in a new perspective. As a result, the poems of Hardy have been examined in the light of existentialism. For the sake of convenience, Hardy’s poems have been considered in a logical order rather than in a chronological order as it is often misleading.