The present research entitled ‘Sociolinguistic Study of Thomas Hardy’ is carried out by the researcher with the purpose of investigating and analysing the social and linguistic influences surrounding five novels of Thomas Hardy namely, 'Far From the Madding Crowd', 'The Return of the Native', 'The Mayor of Casterbridge', 'Tess of the D’Urbervilles' and 'Jude the Obscure'. The main focus of this topic is to approach the five most famous novels of Thomas Hardy from the point of view of sociolinguistics. The point of view is that linguistics can determine the sociological background of a speaker through various speech habits and patterns. The approach is meant to ascertain the social background of Hardy’s characters and the correlation to Hardy’s method of language use.

The thesis is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: It is the general introduction to the thesis. This chapter serves as the general introduction to the thesis as a whole. In the beginning of the chapter an effort is made to state the aims and objectives of the study. It also includes the rationale and significance of the study, scope and limitations, selection of the author and his novels. Then the chapter sheds light on the life and works of Thomas Hardy. It discusses in detail the novelist's philosophy of life, his major works, and the nature of the society in which he lived i.e. Late Victorian England (1840-1920). It clearly
spells out the methodology and techniques to be used towards the end of the chapter.

As the thesis is about the relationship between language and society, the researcher has emphasised the language/dialect(s) of his native place and its relationship to rural society.

**Chapter II:** The chapter is devoted to the Theoretical Framework. It deals with sociolinguistic theories which form the foundation of this study and are useful for the interpretation of Hardy’s five selected novels. The history of sociolinguistics as a discipline and its theory is included in the chapter. As this project has taken up the issue of the sociolinguistics of Hardy’s characters, namely their dialects and the relationship between that and their society, it discusses the various aspects of languages and dialects used by both the major and minor characters. It is generally assumed by models of sociolinguistics that dialect or *patois* is used by minor characters for the purpose of humour or to distinguish their roles and placement in society. Hardy’s minor characters – the rustics like Joseph Poorgrass and Grandfer Cantle speak the dialect of Wessex. Various critics and scholars on this subject have been cited. They are Edward Sapir, Chambers, Bernstein, Labov, Trudgill and others.

Further the researcher points out Charles Dickens and George Eliot’s characters’ dialects similar and antithetical to that of Hardy’s. Realism in modern English and American literature requires a true portrayal of characters. Thus, the authors mentioned along with Thomas Hardy have endeavoured to portray the
characters in their natural settings with a more or less accurate description of regional dialects. Interlaced in this chapter are studies of dialects used by the authors, such as Yorkshire, etc.

Chapter III: This chapter highlights the sociological background of the characters in the selected novels. It has been observed that a person’s sociological background affects his style of speech which is a clear indication of his background. Hardy’s characters are divided into major and minor and their sociological background is discussed in detail. 'Far From the Madding Crowd' has wide assortment of characters. It has also broad social spectrum. Gabriel Oak, Boldwood, Sergeant Troy are major characters while Fanny Robin, Joseph Poorgrass, Cain Ball, Matthew Moon, Laban Tall, Jacob Smallbury are minor characters. Casterbridge, the town of Dorchester is local for The Mayor of Casterbridge. It is described as a ‘centre of an agricultural community’. Williams M. in his book 'Thomas Hardy and Rural England' comments “'Casterbridge' is an image of Dorchester, the nearby town of Hardy’s youth, and his presentation of it derives from local recollection a turning from the precarious present to a stable past.” Michael Henchard, Donald Farfrae, Susan belong to countryside. Tess of the D’Urbervilles is a young daughter of a rural working class family. She is referred to as ‘Daughter of Nature’. Almost all the actions of the novel take place against the pastoral background. Major characters like Tess, Alec and Angel belong to it. Retty Priddle, Marian, Izz Huett. Tess’s parents work on farm and belong to the category of minority. The setting for 'Jude the Obscure' is Berkshire an arable and natural terrain. Jude is lower-class young man who dreams of becoming scholar. Arabella Donn is a coarse, sensual young
woman. She works on her father's pig farm. She is also a barmaid. The setting for 'Return of the Native' is, like Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights, a wild and mostly uninhabitable place like Egdon Heath. Clym Yeobright, Eustacia Vye, Thomsin Yeobright, Diggory Venn are the major Characters. John Nunsuch, Susan Nunsuch, Charley, Grandfer Cantle, Christian Cantle, Timothy Fairways, Sam are rustics. The rustics in Egdon Heath serve as a group rather than as individuals. They play the roles of commentators.

Chapter IV: This chapter deals with sociolinguistic features of Thomas Hardy's novels. A detailed study of language and linguistic experiments made by Hardy is focused. The researcher begins with the linguistic variations, including vocabulary, pronunciation etc., of Hardy's dialect with appropriate examples. George Gissing, William Archer and N. Page's general comments about speech, language and dialect are included in the chapter. In the beginning of the chapter, N. Page, R.W.V. Elliot and R. Chapman's critical comments add to reader's knowledge about dialects used by Hardy's and Dickens's characters. These scholars have provided a detailed and intriguing account of terms and sources Hardy used for his novels. Education, Age, Social Class, Gender, and Ethnicity influence a character's speech that's why examples of each of the above mentioned factors are given with elaborate information as a background. Phonological, Morphological and Syntactic features of Hardy's language are studied afterwards. At the end of the chapter comparison between major and minor characters have been made. Rustics like Joshep Poorgrass, John Durbeystfield etc. use the dialect or variation of
English consistently whereas major characters such as Michael Henchard, Tess Durbeyfield, Sue Bridehead, Jude Fawley use the standard language and the dialect at different intervals and according to different situations. It demonstrates both the concept of social climbing and the relationship between speech and context or situation of the speaker. Further, the chapter highlights N.F. Blake’s analysis of non-standard language, which according to him is the language of minor characters. He comments:

"Because non-standard language is not usually used extensively, it is often given to minor characters, such as taxi drivers [or rustics], (brackets are researcher's) who naturally have little to say in the work as a whole. Since the standard language is an educated language, non-standard language has almost always been regarded as uneducated and unsophisticated....Hence non-standard language has been a marker of class and of comedy, for we are generally sufficiently self-satisfied to laugh at those who cannot match our own educational attainments and who reveal this through the way they speak."

Chapter V: This is the concluding chapter and it comprises the major findings of the present study. It also states the pedagogical implications of the study. Further possibilities of research in this area are also stated towards the end of the chapter. Besides, it summarises the thesis and reflects on the data of both the introduction and the other chapters.