CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Raymond Williams was a man of decisive and potent intellectual force who happened to write in the critical period immediately after the Second World War. From the large body of his work it is evident that the ingenuity of his thought and the range and versatility of his writings is beyond an easy parallel. During his stay at Cambridge University from 1961 till his death in Jan. 1988, he produced a vast body of work which challenged many of the elite culture’s central assumptions, “not only as they appeared in English studies, but also as they informed the dominant modes of thinking about politics and society.” The relevance of his thought is so immense that his work evoked and generated intellectual debate among critics/thinkers belonging to divergent schools of thought. When he died the whole western intellectual world mourned his death and underlined his accomplishments as a writer, an academic, a cultural critic, and above all a genuine thinker.

Stuart Hall, his long time friend and colleague, believes that Williams was “a socialist intellectual who refused to be captured by any tendency.” Anthony Barnett appreciates Williams’ approach—cultural materialism—according to which culture “which was regarded as ‘superstructure’ by Marxists, was in fact central to structures of change, control and democracy.” Terry
Eagleton, though disapproves some of Williams’ theoretical formulations, appreciates Williams’ range and versatility of thought and maintains: “Almost single-handedly, he transformed socialist cultural studies in Britain from the relative crudity of the 1930s Marxism to an impressively rich subtle and powerful body of theory.” Perry Anderson holds Williams in high esteem and admires Williams’ contribution to socialist thought. He observes: “Perhaps the most distinguished socialist thinker to have come from the ranks of the western working class itself has been a Briton, Raymond Williams.” Stephen Heath also acknowledges Williams’ greatness as a thinker. He laments the death of Williams in the following words:

The death of Raymond Williams was a great loss for the British and the European left. He was the most important thinker on society and culture in Britain; indeed he decisively transformed our understanding of those two concepts and of the ways in which the realities they offer to describe relate to politics and ideology.

Williams is, no doubt, no more in this mortal world, but he is still alive in his large body of work. The scope and nature of his work is so varied that they cannot easily be categorised. He wrote so extensively and distinguished himself in various fields—English studies, sociology, politics, adult education, culture and media studies. There are at least five regions within Williams’ work which are contiguous but distinct. There are books on drama—Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (1952) later extended to Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (1968); Drama in Performance (1954) and Modern Tragedy (1966). Second are his findings in literary
criticism which are explicated mainly in *Reading and Criticism* (1950); *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970); *The Country and the City* (1973) and *Marxism and Literature* (1977). Third, there are his novels—*Border Country* (1960); *Second Generation* (1964); *The Fight for Manod* (1979); *The Volunteers* (1978); *Loyalties* (1985) and *People of the Black Mountains* vol.1 and ii. Fourth is his political writings—*May Day Manifesto* (1961) and *Towards 2000* (1983). And last but not the least, there is his general theory of culture which has been his main concern throughout his life. The books which highlight his theory of culture are: *Culture and Society* (1958); *The Long Revolution* (1961); *Communications* (1962); *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974); *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976) and *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (1980). After Williams' death a number of edited books were published containing papers, lectures and reviews that had been written throughout his life and published in a wide range of places. These books are: *The Politics of Modernism* (1989) edited and introduced by Tony Pinkney; *Resources of Hope* (1989) edited by Robin Gale with an introduction by Robin Blackburn and *What I Came to Say* (1990) edited by Neil Belton, Francis Mulhern and Jenny Taylor.

The views and opinions expressed by Williams in his theoretical writings are of great relevance and importance as they go a long way in understanding and explication of his literary theory which is inseparable from his theory of culture. From the
beginning of his writing career Williams intended to produce a body of work which challenged the existing canons of literary theory and turned it upside down. He wrote not only against the official culture of liberal and conservative studies, he also wrote in opposition to what he read as the orthodoxies of Marxist thinking on literature, culture and politics. In *Politics and Letters* Williams clarifies his position: “If you look at the implied relationships of nearly all the books I have written, I have been arguing with what I take to be official English culture.” Williams adds further: “I know perfectly well who I was writing against: Eliot, Leavis and the whole of cultural conservatism that had formed around them—the people who had pre-empted the culture and literature of this country.”

Though Williams’ work cannot easily be categorised, his wide range of writing and thinking can easily be grouped by themes which emerge chronologically. The first group is the most engaged and its commitment becomes more exact through time. The dominant theme of the books in this group is that a cultural transformation of the capitalist society is possible by winnowing the ‘seeds of life’ from those of ‘death’ as Williams puts it in the final paragraph of *Culture and Society*. “There are ideas, and ways of thinking, with the seeds of life in them, and there are others, perhaps deep in our minds, with the seeds of a general death. Our measure of success in recognising these kinds,— the measure of our future.”
Its argument was continued in the second volume of the set, *The Long Revolution*: an ambitious attempt to ‘review the nature of our whole common life’. In this book Williams argues that society is more than a political and economic order (systems of decision and maintenance, as he calls them). He points out that there is a system of learning and communication and a system of generation and nurture. There is a possibility for an alternative human order only if we think in terms of the complicated relationships between all these systems. Williams celebrates the expansion of education and literacy because it is a crucial element for the growth of common culture. The book entitled *Communications* which was revised in 1966 extended a major emphasis in both the books. Williams underlines the importance of press, broadcasting and television. For him they are means of communication which can effectively be used for the cause of culture. In fact, Williams perceives a close relationship between the means of communication and social relations. For him “any real theory of communication is a theory of community.”

The second group is concerned with drama. The work in this category, though very important, is usually not properly acknowledged because of its divergence from the dominant trend in literary criticism in the university. The books which constitute this group are: *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* later extended to *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, *Modern Tragedy* and *Drama in performance*. Williams is justified in claiming that all these books should be considered together since they embrace a general discussion of
changes in dramatic expression between different epochs. Williams not only attempts to reassess and revaluate orthodox views on drama in general but he also reassesses his own previous critical outlook and methodological approach. It is evident from two versions of the first book. Williams’ writing style and critical approach to drama matures with the passage of time and this development reflects Williams’ commitment throughout his work to the nature of process. John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge rightly sum up Williams’ position: “Rather than looking at the work of a specific dramatist as a settled, finished, given product, Williams examines drama in terms of a continuous, while interconnected, movement of styles, themes, methods, language and, perhaps above all, of feeling.”

Williams sees a close relationship between the ‘structure of feeling’ and the dramatic forms. Art forms or dramatic forms never remain unaffected by the changes taking place in the society. Any change in society will have a direct bearing on the development of art forms. In other words there exists a complex relationship between the social and artistic changes. In The Long Revolution Williams argues that drama is not “a social art, but a major and practical index of change and creator of consciousness.” This argument of Williams forms the basis of his literary theory.

The third group includes The Country and The City and The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence. The first book of this group shows Williams’ growing rapprochement with Marxism. Indeed it is the only book in which Marxist positions constitute the
very terms of debate. This book is a successful realisation of the idea of committed academic writing which Williams has always practised in his practice as a literary critic. The first section of the book deals with the history of pastoral writing. It highlights the images of country life as projected in the poetry of Hesiod, Theocritus, Virgil, Crew, Johnson, Pope, Crabbe and Wordsworth. The second section concentrates on representations of the city and of city life. It examines the development of ways of seeing and representing the city through the fictional work of Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. From this book it is evident that Williams judges literary forms in their social and historical contexts. In Politics and Letters he emphasized his intention behind The Country and the City: “My project—was to try to show simultaneously the literary conventions and the historical relations to which they were a historical response—to see together the means of production and the conditions of the means of production.”

This group also analyses language and society—English society in particular and language in general. The book entitled Keywords can also be added to this group. Although this is not about literature, it constitutes the vocabulary of Culture and Society shared by the writer and the reader. Williams accords special importance to language which, according to him, is not made of arbitrary signs; rather it is a ‘constitutive activity’. It is a shaping force in social production. It is not separated from the social reality.
Marxism and Literature—the book in which Williams announced his reaffiliation to Marxism—which contains Williams' famous article "Base and Superstructure", forms the last group in the development of Williams' thinking on issues related to his literary theory and its intricate relationship with his theory of culture. The book is divided into three sections—Basic concepts, Cultural theory and Literary theory—each of which is further divided into chapters. The book, according to Williams, is "not a summary; it is both a critique and an argument." In this book Williams seeks to reconcile the difference and dichotomy between 'base and superstructure', individual and society, material and ideal and between artistic domain and social domain. He does not see these categories in isolation and tries to effect a synthesis between these seemingly opposite tendencies both in art and society. And it seems to be the common principle of Williams' thinking in various fields.

Various themes which emerge chronologically from the body of Williams' work finally converge on his theory of culture which has a direct bearing on the evolution of his literary theory. Williams argues that even if literary theory and cultural theory look separate and different from each other, they are inseparable and indissoluble at the deeper level. Williams observes: "Literary theory can not be separated from cultural theory, though it may be distinguished within it." In fact the concept of culture is central to Williams' thinking. He finds this concept very complex and much of the complexity, according to him, arises from the fact that it is
not something static but a dynamic process. In 1960s, he saw it as ‘a creative activity’ and as ‘a whole way of life’. The fact that idea of culture is a response to, and not just a reflection of, change, was crucial to Williams’ attempt at distancing himself from what he understood as the cruder models of Marxist interpretation. In 1970s he moved to the theory of ‘cultural materialism’ which he defined as “the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production.” In other words, cultural dimension is not a secondary but a constitutive dimension of society. It is recognized as a primary force in the reproduction of any existing social order. It is not a passive reflection of the economic and political system, rather it is “the signifying system through which necessarily a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored.”

Williams believes that cultural practices are of the nature of material production, so they cannot be relegated to secondary place.

It is evident that Williams’ position does not fully accord with the mainstream of Marxist exposition. He has, in fact, a lot in common with neo-Marxists or unorthodox Marxists who question and correct both orthodox literary studies and orthodox Marxist thinking. A key characteristic of Williams’ theory of culture is its bringing together the three dimensions of intellectual analysis and enquiry which are generally kept apart to the detriment of all. These three dimensions are: the textual, the theoretical or conceptual, and historical. Contemporary structuralism, as
Williams understands it, tends to focus on the theoretical over the historical and in a curious sense over the textual. Often texts are assigned the role of examples in the demonstration of the ‘truth’ of theory just as in some historical analysis texts are regarded merely as ‘illustrations’ of a historical truth. According to Williams these partial approaches ignore the productivity of the text—the productivity which means that texts could contest as well as articulate or embody given ideologies. This, in turn, shows the fact that the constitutive role of culture in the production and reproduction of society is badly understood. In Williams’ opinions the task of cultural materialism is to seek to integrate the three usually separated dimensions of textual, theoretical and historical analysis. Only through this kind of integration could the fundamentally social role of language and communication be fully understood and asserted against the separated and reified analysis of both bourgeois and mechanical Marxist literary and cultural theories.

Critics have approached Williams’ work from different points of view and we witness considerable variations in their interpretation and evaluation of Williams’ thinking on literary and cultural issues. There are critics who are looking for ready-made solutions and answers to the problems raised by Williams. There is a set of critics who approach Williams’ work with their mind prejudiced with old and outdated notions regarding his literary and cultural theory. And there are critics who try to evaluate Williams’ work objectively and dispassionately. From this point of view,
available criticism of Williams’ work can be said to fall mainly into three categories. In the first category are a set of critics who adopt a more questioning attitude towards Williams’ work but their priorities and emphases are completely different from those of Williams’, they tend to misinterpret and misunderstand him. The second group includes critics who adopt a piecemeal approach towards Williams’ thinking on literary and cultural issues. They end up focusing their attention on the weaknesses of Williams’ work and they tend to underplay the positive contribution made by him to enhance the intellectual tone of our age. The third category includes those critics who try to offer honest and objective appraisal of Williams’ work. These critics, no doubt, offer valuable insights into Williams’ work but instead of evaluating Williams’ work in totality, they tend to study Williams’ thinking on various fields separately. This approach accounts for the hostile criticism of Williams’ work. In fact, Williams examines each element as part of a continuous and interrelational process. For instance, he does not deal with the concept of culture separately and always focused his attention on the relationship between culture and politics. He, more than once, has said that these two areas of practice are bound up with each other in a multitude of discernable forms. Since in practice, politics and culture do not exist separately, so Williams did not deal with them separately.

Terry Eagleton, Williams’ disciple, belongs to first category of critics who underestimates Williams’ work. He complains that Williams has “bypassed Marxism during the last twenty years.”
He does not justify Williams’ break from the main line of Marxism for a couple of years. Furthermore, he complains that Williams’ recent rapprochement with Marxism is still evidently a “fraught, dissentient, intellectually unclarified affair.” He does not welcome Williams’ honest, sincere though eclectic approach. Another charge that he brings against Williams is one of being a populist. He spots many ambiguities and faults in his writing and all these are attributed to one source: Williams’ romantic populism. But Williams has a healthy respect for working class people and this attachment is not the same as populism. Williams rather explicitly rejected populist beliefs. In *Culture and Society* he wrote: “Traditional popular culture---is small in quantity and narrow in range. It exacts respect, but it is in no sense an alternative culture.” In fact, there is no wrong in recognising creative capacity and potential in the working class people. All Marxists share the belief that no revolution is possible without the effective support and sympathy of working class people. Eagleton attacks Williams on another point where he is most susceptible. Williams, like Lukacs, did not deal with poetry and Eagleton instead of recognising Williams’ contribution in the field of novel, drama and criticism, points out the inability and incapacity of Williams to deal with poetry. A writer cannot be at home in all fields of English studies. The charge that Williams restricts himself to the novel and drama does not, however, amount to a serious limitation.

Fred Inglis also fails to appreciate Williams’ position with regard to working class people. Williams, Inglis argues, attempted
to redefine historical materialism in order to benefit “the still so obviously exploited and resentful members of the working class.”

Inglis does not mince words when he comes to analyse Williams’ work. For instance, he describes *Marxism and Literature* as “his (Williams’) unreadable book.” Keywords, an important book by Williams, is a ‘misconceived’ book in his estimation. Tony Pinkney misinterprets Williams’ thinking on drama. He says: “It was expressionism that aesthetically formed Williams.” But it is not the whole truth. No doubt, Williams expressed his liking for the ‘early Soviet drama’ which had always seemed to him to be “the major work that took up the original nationalist project.” But it does not mean that Williams had unreserved and unconditional admiration for German expressionism. In *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* he seems to distance and dissociate himself from this dramatic mode. In fact, Williams is a practising literary critic who tests the efficacy and potential of one literary form after the other and if he finds one form inadequate to express the contemporary ‘world-view’, he shifts his preference to another literary form. Thus Williams’ literary criticism is at once a criticism of orthodox methods and accepted values. This approach is obvious in Williams’ enthusiasm and preference for realism as a literary and dramatic form. Williams encourages realism ‘in the Brechtian sense’, an artistic method which seeks to expose apparent reality and thus ideally suggests the possibility for change. It is also a reassessment of the history of literature which challenges dominant
modes of analysis and dominant definitions. It is the governing principle of Williams' literary theory.

Victor Kiernan and Frank Kermode belong to the second category of critics who see little merit in the works of Williams. Kiernan criticises Williams for failing to define the term 'Industrial Revolution' and for neglecting the crucial importance of class in the ideological debates which he analyses. Kiernan feels that Williams also neglects the three absolutely essential components of any historically based survey of nineteenth century culture. These three components are: religion, nationalism and imperialism. Kiernan, in fact, takes a narrow and restricted view of Williams' work. These charges stand refuted if one reads Williams' *The Long Revolution*, a book which Williams planned and has written as a continuation of *Culture and Society*. Frank Kermode also presents hostile criticism of Williams' work. He wrote a review of *Modern Tragedy* and found it "a strange work deeply personal but drily argumentative eschewing rhetoric---, mandarin to the point of perversity." In fact, Kermode isolates *Modern Tragedy* from the body of his dramatic writing and this fact may account for this hasty judgement.

There are a host of critics belonging to the third category who tried to offer honest and objective assessment of Williams' work. They are: John Higgins, Aijaz Ahmad, E.P.Thompson, Anthony Barnett and Alan O'Connor, to name only a few. John Higgins understands the limitations of a writer and he knows that priorities and points of emphasis vary from writer to writer. So he
does not overstate Williams’ weak points and instead appreciates the positive contribution made by him particularly in the field of literary studies. He stresses the need for a historical and theoretical assessment of Williams’ work. He observes: “The analysis of his work can best be made in terms of its cultural, conceptual and political means and conditions of production, in line with the theory of (or at least Williams’ theory) of cultural materialism.”

Higgins maintains that concept of cultural materialism is the product of Williams’ deliberate opposition to orthodox Marxist thinking, both on cultural and ideological theory in general, and on literature in particular. Alan O’Connor also attempts a comprehensive critique of Williams’ work. He endorses Williams’ argument that means of production (press, radio, theaters, films etc.) should be publicly owned. He also shares Williams’ apprehensions that cultural institutions can fall into the hands of vested interests and they can be misused to the detriment of common culture.

Aijaz Ahmad also shows a mature understanding of Williams’ work. He describes Raymond Williams as a major intellectual influence in England in the post-Second -World -War scenario. According to Aijaz Ahmad, Williams preserved the integrity of his mind and never lost sight of his commitment—his preoccupation with the active relationship between literature, culture, society and history. Anthony Barnett also attempts an objective assessment of Williams’ work and brings out important features of Williams’ thinking on literature and culture. Barnett
thinks that the paradox of Williams' work is that while he is an idealist in the role he assigns to culture in his political account of society and history, he has, at the same time, been materialist in his treatment of practices within culture. At times he has been ethereal in his insistence upon communication as a solvent of conflict yet he has been a realist when he has examined the actual forms and types of communication, from vocabulary and dialects to newspaper formats and the architecture of the stage. The tension between his materialism and his idealism is always present in his work. The earliest edition of Drama in Performance discusses the material effects of the interposition of stage and action upon the relationship between script and audience. The Long Revolution provides a true account of the reading public and the list can be extended through all his works. But an idealist component has never been absent from his work, for instance, his discussion of 'human practices' in his essay entitled "Base and Superstructure". But as Williams grows mature, the balance between idealism and materialism gets altered towards an increasingly material emphasis. In the first group of his writings his idealism is undoubtedly dominant. In the third group, the one concerned with literature, his materialism gains the upper hand. In practice, idealism and materialism are not separate categories and their co-existence with its tension and dynamism constitute the beauty of Williams' work.

It is evident from the available criticism on Williams that excessive and misplaced emphasis has been placed on Williams' thinking on culture and politics. It has led to a serious neglect of an
important component of Williams’ thinking i.e. his literary theory which is deeply embedded in his theory of culture. Some critics, particularly those belonging to the third category, tried to explore and explicate Williams’ thinking on literature. But their approach to Williams’ work suffered from one lacuna—they did not see Williams’ work in totality. And they looked upon his literary theory as an independent area of inquiry, having no connection with his theory of culture. This fact may account for the casual appraisal of Williams’ work by various critics. Since Williams’ death not a single full-length study devoted to the detailed analysis of his literary theory has appeared although stray articles focused on this side of Williams’ work may be found here and there.

In this study, no claim is intended to cover every aspect of the extraordinary range of Williams’ writing and thinking. His work deserves a much more comprehensive survey than has been possible here. But the constraints of this project do not allow me to discuss all the areas of Williams’ writing. The issues which have been deliberately excluded from this study are: an assessment of his fictional writing and analysis of his specifically political ideas and activities. Williams’ important contribution to media studies has also been left out. Though these areas are deeply connected with his literary thinking and they have never been lost sight of in this study. In fact, this study is limited to Williams’ literary theory which is deeply rooted in his theory of culture. The motivation for the present study comes from a realisation that this aspect of Williams’ work deserves an extended and systematic treatment.
Williams’ view that art forms are never created in a vacuum and they never remain unaffected by the changes taking place in society forms the central point of Williams’ literary theory. Before we come to Williams’ literary theory, the components which go to make his theory of culture need to be underlined briefly, as his theory of culture has a direct bearing on the development of his literary theory.

In his discussion of the formation of culture, Williams makes use of the concept of ‘mediation’. This concept is an improvement on the concept of ‘reflection’ used by the traditional Marxists whenever they discussed the formation of ideas and values. The concept of ‘mediation’ explains and expresses an active process where the interconnection between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ does not have to be that of direct correspondence or reflection. ‘Structure of feeling’, one of the important elements in Williams’ methodology is a socio-cultural term which has been used frequently by Williams in the discussion both of drama and the novel. This concept not only gives us important insights into Williams’ theory of culture but also shows the intricate connection between his theory of literature and theory of culture. In other words, it enables us to study Williams’ literary theory in relation to his theory of culture. All art, Williams opines, is made from “the ‘structure of feeling’ that is lived and experienced but not quite arranged as institutions and ideas.”27 In other words a literary text can be taken as a concrete instance of the ‘structure of feeling’ of a particular society at a specific historical moment. It is easy to relate
the ‘structure of feeling’ to the content of the literary artifact but it cannot be simply reduced to it. Williams’ concept of ‘productive forces’ also gives important insights into his theory of culture. Williams maintains that ‘production’ in a capitalist society is not confined to production of commodities alone. He perceives a close link between the mode of production and productive relationships and their interaction determines the cultural process in a remarkable way. According to Williams, change in the mode of production signifies not only a change in relations of production but also in the forces of production which are never only manual or mechanical but are also intellectual. In other words, forces of production and relations of production are “elements of a whole material social process.”

In his theory of culture, Williams recognizes the importance of modern communications system which influences the culture in a remarkable manner. He perceives a close relationship between the means of communication and social relations. For him communication systems are always social institutions. The technical innovations and inventions have changed the social institutions and this has a direct bearing on the character of the cultural institutions. Anthony Barnett rightly observes: “Williams has perhaps been more responsive to technical developments in culture than any Marxist critic of this century.” Here the main emphasis of Williams’ argument is that education and communication are not the exclusive property of elite groups in a society. There is, therefore, a need to consider the role of ‘the great
tradition’ which is the concrete shape, the collective culture of the society takes when it has been shaped and processed by the communication systems controlled by the ruling elites. Culture freed from the distortions and evasions of the great tradition is a common inheritance which should be extended as widely as possible through an effective use of education and communication. Williams does not approve of elite culture. If it exists in any society, he wants it to be replaced by a democratic common culture that will ultimately overcome the class distinctions in society. Williams takes culture to mean an ever-evolving process arising out of a whole way of life.

In *The Long Revolution* he explains that there are three levels of culture operative at any particular time. The ‘lived culture’ of a particular period is only experienced by the people then alive, the ‘recorded culture’ is manifested in arts, buildings and the dress, etc. of a society and finally the culture of the ‘selective tradition’ which is constituted by a selected appropriation of the recorded culture of the past and is passed on as the preservable component relevant to the future needs of the society as it moves forward. The hegemonic process involved in the selection or rejection of elements from the past heritage in order to constitute this tradition depends on the effective dominant culture which operates at all levels of society at any particular point of time. According to Williams, it is very important to understand the working of ‘selective tradition’ and only then a cultural revolution
can be brought about. Speaking of cultural revolution Williams observes:

When we speak of cultural revolution, we must certainly see the aspiration to extend the active process of learning, with the skills of literacy and other advanced communication, to all people rather than to limited groups, as comparable in importance to the growth of democracy and the rise of scientific industry.30

This revolution, according to Williams, is at a very early stage and education and newly developed means of communication are yet to reach the common people. Sometimes the dominant class resists the spread of education and literacy overtly or covertly. This domination operates at all levels. It is a hegemonic process "which exists not only in the political and economic institutions and relationships but also in active forms of experience and consciousness."31 The hegemonic process, Williams points out, includes not only economic and political factors but also cultural factors. And this is the central argument of Williams' theory of culture.

The concept of 'knowable community' is very crucial in understanding Williams' theory of culture and its complex relationship with his literary theory. This concept has been invoked as a basic principle in The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence. It concerns perceptions of self and others and ways of comprehending one's place within a social context. Alongside this, the concept embodies a sense of relationship—between people and people, and between people and possibilities. Thus immediate experience is implicit in Williams' concept of the 'knowable
community’, both words arising from and being rooted in available experience. This is the central notion which emerges in Williams’ discussion of the novel and which enables him to make a sharp distinction between the realistic novel and the modernist novel. Williams argues that society is conspicuously absent in modernist literature and man is shown as a solitary figure, unable to enter into relationships with his fellow beings. The realistic novel, on the other hand, shows man well connected with his immediate environment or he has ‘knowable community’ to get himself connected to. In Politics and Letters Williams makes this concept more clear: “Those novels which can attain an effective range of social experience by sufficiently manifest immediate relations possess a knowable community.” Like the concept of ‘structure of feeling’, ‘knowable community’ is used as a tool of literary analysis which enables any critical analysis of a literary text to incorporate some form of social critique. In other words, Williams’ literary analysis provides a social critique and goes beyond biographical and stylistic details to consider “material conditions and changes in the relationship between the individual and society.”

It is evident from Williams’ theory of culture that there has been an evolution in his thinking and world-view. This accounts for the inconsistencies and contradictions which we notice in the position Williams takes on the question of culture. His theory of culture has wide implications for his literary theory which he evolved during his long and active intellectual career of four
decades. Any development in the literary field will, according to Williams, have a vital connection with developments in the realm of culture.

There is no denying the fact that Williams has been influenced by various ‘schools’ of thought in the process of gradual development of his thinking in the field of literature. He has, however, kept the integrity of his own basic viewpoint and distinctiveness of his own concerns and predilections. In the beginning of his career, he was influenced by the Scrutiny group of critics who dominated the intellectual scene from 1932 to 1953. The influence of this group, especially of Leavis is clearly discernible in his *Reading and Criticism* where he whole-heartedly advocates a form of practical criticism which concentrates on the text without any extensive reference to its context. It is only later that he realised the limitations of practical criticism of this type and began to see the text in the context of the social circumstances and cultural environment within which it is produced by the writer and appropriated by the reader. This thinking of Williams becomes the guiding principle of his literary theory. In this regard, the comparison of Williams’ position with that of T.S. Eliot will be very interesting. In his first phase, Eliot practised and preached an impersonal theory of poetry and objective criticism. This makes him by and large a formalist critic. In the second phase (1928-1940) he produced and propagated historical and religious criticism. And finally he bids farewell to the cult of ‘art for art sake’ and produced social criticism which makes him a cultural
critic who takes into account the various social, political and economic issues of the society.

However Williams does not support literature being reduced to propaganda or 'tendency literature'. The critique of propaganda literature is not a case for serious commitment to social reality. So Williams avoids the extremes of 'pure art' and 'tendency literature'. He strikes a healthy balance between these conflicting and contradictory notions. He also argues that the relationship between literature and society is very complex. The consciousness of the time is effectively present in literature but this consciousness is never directly produced by the objective conditions of social existence and gets in work of literature through a complicated process of 'mediation'. This emphasis of Williams' establishes a close connection between his literary theory and cultural theory.

An important formulation of Williams' literary theory emerges from his essay “Base and Superstructure” which was later incorporated in *Marxism and Literature*. This essay challenges the classic Marxist thinking on this issue i.e. the relationship between literature and society. The old notion was that the economic base determines the ideological superstructure or social being determines consciousness and not the consciousness of men which determines their existence. This was taken to mean that we cannot change consciousness without changing our social being and that we can automatically change consciousness by changing social being. And since culture belongs to the sphere of consciousness, it is treated as a category separated from the sphere of social being.
Williams takes a different position and looks upon 'base' as a process and underlines the reciprocity of interaction between 'base' and 'superstructure'. He does not vulgarise 'historical materialism' into crude economic determinism and recognizes the complexity of the process of determinism of our consciousness and its relationship with our conditions of social existence. In *The Long Revolution* he insisted: "All human experience is an interpretation of a non-human reality—not the duality of subject and object—rather, of human experience as both objective and subjective, in one inseparable process." Williams thus resolves the base/superstructure dichotomy by accepting the indissoluble connection between material production, political and cultural institutions and activity and consciousness. This literary principle reinforces Williams' idea that literary theory cannot be separated from cultural theory.

Williams' literary theory is explicitly manifested in his study and analysis of drama. He started writing on Ibsen and kept on writing on drama for all his professional life. A significant portion of his work is devoted to the history and analysis of dramatic forms. His early studies *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* and *Drama in Performance* were revised, extended and republished in 1964 and 1968 respectively and these were further joined by a new book *Modern Tragedy* in 1966. In fact Williams' work on drama and particularly the early writings are central to the formation of literary theory. Through an effective use of the concept of 'structure of feeling', which is a leit-motif throughout his work,
Williams attempts to analyse literary development in relation to social change. Williams believes that art forms and literary forms are closely linked with the 'structure of feeling', which is always changing in most subtle ways. In his analysis of different dramatic forms, Williams seems to suggest that there are clear social and historical relations between particular literary forms and the societies in which they were produced or created. There are no sudden changes in society and likewise dramatic forms are also evolved gradually. The old forms are broken and rejected and are replaced by new dramatic forms. In a new dramatic form elements of old form are always retained because a new society takes sometime to reach full consciousness and survival of old forms of consciousness makes it useful for the dramatist to use some elements of the old dramatic forms to give expression to new issues and problems which have occupied the center-stage.

Twentieth century, according to Williams, witnessed many social changes and these changes had a direct bearing on the development of different dramatic forms—expressionistic drama, verse drama, epic theatre, absurd drama etc. It points to the fact that dramatic forms are constantly and continually changed, modified and rejected in favour of some other dramatic forms which can adequately express the 'objective reality' which is ever changing. In other words, drama does not belong merely to an isolated aesthetic domain; rather it has a strong and subtle connection with society which is always in the process of change. The same critical perspective governs the book entitled The
Williams argues that if there is a gap or imbalance in the functioning of society, it is bound to be reflected in literature. The tone and tenor of the eighteenth and nineteenth century novel is different from that of the twentieth century novel because the society has changed considerably during this period. In the Victorian novel, characters determined the form and in the contemporary novel, form determines the character.

Williams’ concept of tragedy, which he explicates in his book *Modern Tragedy*, also bears on his literary theory. The concept of tragedy, according to Williams, has acquired new meanings with the passage of time. Tragedy is both historically and culturally specific and this recognition is itself a rejection of received definition. Williams traces the development of the concept of tragedy from Greek tragedy to the concept of tragedy in the modern times. He again shows that there is a close relationship between the concept of tragedy and social reality or in Williams’ terminology ‘structure of feeling’. The concept of tragedy changes with the change in the ‘structure of feeling’. Williams argues that in Greek tragedy the ‘structure of feeling’ was such that the action centered around the royal families belonging to past and the hero was not an individual in his own right but represented the collective personality of a society. The interest in modern tragedy, on the other hand, is directed towards the ‘isolated individual and his condition’ rather than the representative figure in whom the ethical norms and sentiments of the whole society find a concentrated expression.
Williams' thinking about the relationship between individual and society constitutes another basic facet of his literary theory. Williams does not endorse the existential idea of man as a being estranged from himself and from the world in which he lives. He views society and individual in terms of definite and definable relationship. He discovers many significant social dimensions in the existence of each individual and also recognises an active and decisive presence of individual factors in all social formulations and processes. Williams shows his preference for the realistic mode of literature as against modernist literature because in the realistic mode, individual and society are not shown as separate entities, one asserting itself at the cost of the other. Neither the society nor the individual has priority over the other in realistic literature. On the other hand, modernist literature shows individual pitted against a powerful and oppressive system. Williams counters the deterministic view that individual is made by society or society is made of the individuals. He suggests: "every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the quality of the general, yet the general life is seen at its most important in completely personal terms." Thus Williams lays greater stress on the process of interaction and synthesis between the two elements, each influencing and forming the other. The unending process of interaction always continues. The same holds true about author and society relationships. In his attempt to provide a fully social theory of literature, Williams examines each element as part of a continuous and interrelational process.
An important feature of Williams' literary theory, which emerges from the analysis of the works of various novelists—D.H Lawrence, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens etc.—is that he is one of the rare Marxist critics who attaches great importance to the element of language in a work of art. In *Marxism and Literature* he declares that Marxism does not have a theory of language and because of this it goes wrong again and again. He further says: "I believe a way of showing that language is primary because it is material—I believe that language is the material process of society." In other words, the focus on language simply repeats in different terms the emphasis on the centrality of communication to social reproduction which had been a part of Williams' position from the beginning. According to Williams, language is a 'constitutive activity', a shaping force in social reproduction. In *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* Williams recognizes the greatness of D.H Lawrence as a novelist who makes a superb use of language in his novels. According to Williams, his language is at one with the language of his characters. The new language and the new feelings come together and what finally comes out is a community: a man feeling with other people speaking in and with them. Williams calls it "a sort of miracle of language." The beauty of D.H Lawrence's novels, according to Williams, lies in the fact that he allows his characters to speak a language which is produced in the milieu of which his characters are a part. It supports Williams' critical formulation that language and literature are not separated from the social reality.
Signs of which a language is made are not arbitrary; rather they take their meanings from the social context in which they are constructed in the first instance and consequently changed and modified according to the requirements of the society. Here Williams’ contrast with Saussure is very significant. For Saussure language is a system of signs and the relation between the sign and its meaning is arbitrary. Language to Williams is a dynamic process through which social reality and within it human relationships can be gauged and understood. Unlike the Formalists and New Critics, who overemphasized one element of language (form) at the cost of the other (content), Williams avoids the extremes and accords judicious importance to both the language and the social and historical context in which a work of art is produced. Thus Williams’ literary theory not only challenges and rejects the dogmatic formulations of Marxist theory, but also offers an alternative theory in which the long-standing dichotomy between form and content, individual and society, artistic domain and social domain and between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ gets resolved and reconciled.

This study presents an account of Williams’ literary theory as it evolved during his long practice as a literary critic. First chapter underlines Williams’ position with regard to culture and its implications for his literary theory. The key-points of connection between his literary theory and cultural theory have been stressed. An attempt has been made to present Williams’ view that art forms or literary forms are never created in a vacuum. They never remain
unaffected by the changes taking place in society. Any change in society will have a direct impact on the development of art forms. Besides this, an account of criticism available on Williams has been given. Special mention has been made of Terry Eagleton, John Higgins, Fred Inglis, Aijaz Ahmad, Anthony Barnett, Victor Kiernan, Frank Kermode and Alan O'Connor. Some of these critics have attempted an objective assessment of Williams’ work which gives important insights into Williams’ thinking on various issues.

Second chapter explicates Williams’ theory of culture and its various components. An attempt has been made to highlight the fact that Williams’ literary theory and cultural theory may look separate and different from each other, but they are inseparable and indissoluble at the deeper level. The utility and usefulness of mass media—television, radio, press etc.—have been stressed. Besides it, Williams’ departure from the main line of Marxist thinking in the beginning of his career and his rapprochement with it in the final phase of his career have been underlined in this chapter.

In the third chapter the emphasis has been on explication of the critical principles which were gradually evolved by Williams through his study of different dramatic forms. A probe has been made to present Williams’ view that art-forms and literary forms are closely linked with the ‘structure of feeling’ which is always changing in most subtle ways. Artistic domain cannot be insulated from social domain. Any change in society will have a direct bearing on the development of art forms. However, art does not reflect the social reality in a mechanical way. This phenomenon,
according to Williams, can be understood through the concept of ‘mediation’ which is an improvement on the concept of ‘reflection’. A broad treatment of the history of dramatic forms from medieval period to the present has been given in order to bring his argument home to the readers.

The fourth chapter examines Williams’ concept of ‘tragedy’ which, according to Williams, undergoes significant mutations with the passage of time. Modern tragedy shifts its emphasis from man of rank to ‘the common man’. A broad treatment of the concept of tragedy from Greek tragedy to the concept of tragedy in modern times has been given in order to highlight Williams’ argument that there is a close relationship between the concept of tragedy and the ‘structure of feeling’. The concept of tragedy undergoes a change with the change in the ‘structure of feeling’. This point reinforces Williams’ proposition that art forms never remain unaffected by the changes occurring in society.

Fifth chapter highlights a brief discussion regarding Williams’ critique of modernist literature. Williams’ invocation of the terms like ‘naturalism’ and ‘realism’ with their changing meanings has also been commented upon and Williams’ preference for realism over naturalism has been underlined. An attempt has been made to draw out the different implications of the concept of ‘knowable community’ in the discussion of the novel. Special emphasis has been laid on the discussion of the novels written during or after Industrial Revolution to underline Williams’ emphasis on the fact that rapid changes brought about by Industrial
Revolution in social sphere have a direct bearing on the creation of art and literature. In their tone and tenor, the novels written in the eighteenth century are markedly different from those written in the twentieth century. This chapter also highlights Williams’ theory of language which implies that the signs of which language is made are not arbitrary; rather they take their meanings from the social context in which they are changed and modified with the passage of time.

The last chapter concludes the main points of the whole discussion on Williams’ literary theory. The key-points of his literary theory are highlighted and it has been stressed that for Williams art and literature have no independent existence of their own, they must be seen and analysed in the social context in which they are produced. Some minor weaknesses and blank spots which exist in Williams’ discussion of literary issues have also been indicated.
References:


2 ibid., p.1.


8 ibid; p.112.


10 ibid., p.313.


13 Raymond Williams, Politics and Letters, op. cit., p.304.

15 ibid., p.145.


22 ibid., p.249.


26 John Higgins, Raymond Williams, op. cit., p.172.


28 --------, Marxism and Literature, op. cit., p.94.


31 ------, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: OUP, 1976), pp. 80-81.


35 ibid., p. 305.


37 ------, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, op. cit., p. 139.