Chapter 2

WILLIAMS’ THEORY OF CULTURE

Raymond Williams is a powerful intellectual voice of England in the twentieth century. He started writing at a crucial juncture when the limitations of the ethos of criticism of the thirties compounded as it was of vulgar Marxism, bourgeois empiricism and romantic idealism had not only been sufficiently exposed, but a search for an alternative mode of social commitment for art and literature had in fact started in right earnest. The study of Williams’ work becomes important since his engagement with literary and cultural issues formed a part of this search.

Before we come to Williams’ thinking on literary issues, his theory of culture needs to be understood in its entirety, as his theory of culture has wide implications for his literary theory. Williams argues that even if cultural theory and literary theory look separate and different from each other, they are inextricably linked at the deeper level. This, according to Williams, is “the central challenge of any social theory of culture.” He finds the concept of culture very complex and throughout his career, he continued to inquire into the changing meanings related to this key word. In his *Culture and Society*, which came out in the earlier phase of his career, he stresses the complexity of this word. He observes: “The idea of culture would be simpler if it had been a response to
industrialism alone, but it was also, quite evidently, a response to new political and social developments, to Democracy.”

According to Williams, culture is a dynamic process--always in the state of making. In any society, economic system and political system interact with each other and this in turn affects and influences the cultural institutions. But it does not mean that culture does not affect and influence the ‘base’. Williams recognizes the dialectical relationship with his emphasis on cultural institutions being an integral part of the total process of social interaction and social transformation. In Williams’ methodology culture is a basic term or concept for understanding literature, particularly its relationship with society. He has been continually changing his position in regard to the notion of culture. In *Keywords* Williams suggests an alternative definition of this word in order to highlight the complexity of meanings it has subsumed within itself. First it is “a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development.” Secondly “a particular way of life of either people, period or a group”, thirdly “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.” Through these definitions, Williams tries to situate literature in a socio-historical context without the use of terms that might invoke an especially Marxist methodology.

Williams is outrightly opposed to the tendency towards reductionism associated with the vulgarized versions of Marxism. He feels that the formula of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’, as it is usually interpreted in the Marxian framework, is inadequate to
express the ‘objective reality’ which is always changing. This formula, Williams says, is very ‘rigid, abstract’ and of a static character. All Marxists believe that social being determines consciousness and not the consciousness of men which determines their existence. This means that we cannot change our consciousness without changing our social being. On the contrary we can change consciousness by changing social being, although this may not be automatic or easy. Since culture belongs to the sphere of consciousness, it is usually treated by the Marxists as a category separated from the sphere of social being. This, according to Raymond Williams, is a mechanical way of abstracting the superstructure from the base. Many orthodox Marxists do not take into account the complex interrelation between base and superstructure and they thus vulgarise ‘historical materialism’ into crude economic determinism by establishing a direct correspondence between economic base and the literary works of a specific period.

Williams takes a different position and recognizes the complexity of the processes by which our consciousness is formed and how these processes are related to our conditions of social existence. He also underlines the reciprocity of interaction between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ and invokes the authority of Engels for doing so. He turns to Friedrich Engels’ clarification of the matter in a letter to Joseph Bloch in 1980. Engels writes:
According to the materialist conception of history, the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis but the various elements of superstructure— also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.

Williams calls for a thorough reassessment of ‘the received notion of the base’. In orthodox Marxist theory ‘the base’ has come to be considered as an object in its own right, as the mode of production in a particular stage of its development. But Williams says that we have to realise that “when we talk of ‘the base’ we are talking of a process and not a state”, of the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures rather than “a predicted prefigured and controlled content.” For Williams the base is a process so “culture is far from secondary and reflective, it has rather a constitutive force.”

Williams thus resolves the base/superstructure dichotomy by accepting the ‘indissoluble’ connection between material production, political and cultural institutions and activity and consciousness. They are not to be reduced to different categories. These elements are not sequential but in practice ‘indissoluble’. According to Williams they can be distinguished for the purpose of analysis but in a decisive sense they all constitute an inseparable whole. Marx had himself made the point against reduction of the base to a category. “Unless material production itself is understood
in its specific historical form, it is impossible to grasp the characteristics of the intellectual production which corresponds to it or the reciprocal action between the two."

While discussing Williams' cultural theory, it is very necessary to discuss the concept of 'mediation, which is an important component of his cultural theory. This concept implies that art does not reproduce the surface details of the objective reality in a matter-of-fact manner; rather art reflects the reality behind the outward forms. The reflection theory posits a direct resemblance between the form of objective reality and the form it takes in one's consciousness when idea and value are being formed. This is a questionable assumption. Raymond Williams takes recourse to the idea of mediation in order to counter the idea of direct reflection.

An attempt was made to solve this problem through the use of terms 'realism' and 'naturalism' in the nineteenth century. The function and place of art was defined in these terms. Williams tries to understand how this distinction can be helpful although the solution that is offered in terms of this distinction was far from satisfactory. In order to grasp the validity of the distinction between realism and naturalism, Williams underscores "the crucial distinction between 'mechanical materialism—seeing the world of objects and excluding activity—and 'historical materialism'—seeing the material life process as a human activity.'" Williams suggests that the simpler theories of reflection were based on mechanical materialism where it is forgotten that the 'real world' is
more than the static and isolated objects. It is actually to be understood as a "material social process with certain inherent qualities and tendencies." According to the more complex meanings to be given to the concept of "reflection", art can be seen as reflecting not "separated objects and superficial events but the essential forces and movements underlying them."  

Williams believes that this difference clears the ground for the distinction between 'realism' and 'naturalism'. The former is dynamic and the latter is static. It is at this point that he feels the necessity to invoke the notion of mediation. This notion can explain and express an active process where the interconnection between the base and the superstructure does not have to be that of direct correspondence or reflection. The notion effects reconciliation and synthesis between opposites, 'adversaries and strangers' within a totality. Thus mediation can be seen as a term to describe the process of relationship between 'society' and 'art' or between the base and the 'superstructure'. Sometimes this term is also understood negatively, particularly with the support of psychoanalytical concepts such as 'repression' and 'sublimation' and by 'rationalization' in a sense very close to the negative sense of ideology. So Williams stresses the need to understand this concept in the right perspective. He avers that "mediation is a positive process in social reality, rather than a process added to it by way of projection, disguise or interpretation."  

In short, Williams' theory of mediation goes beyond the passivity of the reflection theory and it does not involve any idea of
superimposition or projection. In almost all cases, it promotes a basic dualism. Culture is a mediated process where the objective conditions of existence in a society and the multifarious and contradictory aims and purposes of the members of the society are present in the form of a dynamic and dualistic unity.

In his discussion of the formation of culture, Williams makes an effective use of the concept of 'structure of feeling'. This concept not only gives us important insights into Williams' theory of culture but also establishes a link between his literary theory and cultural theory. It is one of the most notable theoretical innovations in *The Long Revolution* and Williams has consistently used and developed it in the long span of time from that book right up to *Marxism and Literature*. At the outset he defined the term in *The Long Revolution* as follows:

The term I would suggest is structure of feeling: it is as firm and finite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity. In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organisation. 12

Williams also uses this term in *Preface to Film*. It was introduced there to make a link between dramatic conventions and written notations. Drama including film and television involves relationship between notations and dramatic conventions. There exists a relationship between the conventions of a period and what Williams calls 'structure of feeling'. The structure of feeling is the total or common experience of a period. In *Preface to Film* Williams observes:
To relate a work of art to any part of that observed totality may, in varying degrees, be useful, but it is a common experience, in analysis, to realise that when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there yet remains some element for which there no external counterpart. This element, I believe, is what I have named structure of feeling of a period and it is only realisable through experience of the work of art itself, as a whole.  

Though sparingly used in *The English Novel* this concept occurs fairly often in *The Country and the City* and *Marxism and Literature*. It refers to a relation between social and literary facts. This relation is not a matter of content so much as of mental structures “the categories which simultaneously organise the empirical consciousness of a particular social group and the imaginative world created by the writer.”

Williams also uses this concept to express an experience which is not a fixed entity but a process. In other words, it refers to subtle, and delicate changes which are taking place at a given time and which are not arbitrary and come out through a complicated process from the initial objective situation, but cannot easily be reduced to the terms which initially originated them. Although it is used to express the pattern of responses of the individual, it corresponds roughly to the shared responses of a group or the culture of the time. At any particular time, there are three levels of ‘structure of feeling’ in operation belonging roughly to three generations living at that time. It has elements of the “dominant, residual and emergent characteristics of a culture and is at first taken as personal.” It is only later that this takes shape as an institution or a formula that can be recognised as social. In other
words it refers not to “feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought.”

It is very pertinent to note that the whole cultural process depends on the dynamic interaction between its historically varied and variable elements—dominant, residual and emergent. The residual element, according to Williams, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process. Now it is not an element of the past but an effective element of the present. It is manifested in certain experiences, meanings and values which cannot be verified in terms of the dominant culture. They are lived and practised on the basis of some previous social and cultural institutions or formation. The emergent element pertains to the fact “that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created.” Williams feels that it is very difficult to distinguish between the elements which belong to the dominant culture and those which are alternative or oppositional to it. The dominant culture may neglect, repress, oppose or even may not recognise those meanings and values which were created in ‘actual societies and actual situations’ in the past. But their significance cannot be undervalued as they represent areas of human experience, aspiration, and achievement which remain important. It is true that in the structure of any society particularly its class structure, there is a strong social need for elements of the cultural process which are alternative to the dominant elements.
This need has been rightly felt in the central body of Marxist theory. The formation of new class or the coming to consciousness of a new class needs and creates this emergent structure of feeling. As a result there is the emergence of elements of a new cultural formation. For instance the emergence of the working class in England in the nineteenth century was immediately evident in the cultural process. New social values and cultural institutions are always being created though their contribution in the total cultural process may be uneven. A new class is always a source of emergent cultural practices though as a class it is relatively subordinate. It emerges by degrees and is oppositional in nature. However the process of attempted incorporation also gradually begins. It is manifested in contemporary England in the effective incorporation of a radical popular press. It is further evident in the emergence and incorporation of working-class writing. The apparent basis of incorporation in such cases, is the effective predominance of received literary forms but behind the literary forms, there are also present some felt needs of the oppositional social formation to make compromises and respond to accommodational signals coming from the dominant group. This incorporation conditions and limits the process of emergence of the new 'structure of feeling'. As Williams puts it: "What matters, finally, in understanding emergent culture, as distinct from both the dominant and the residual, is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form."
John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge make an interesting observation in this regard: “Williams’ pervasive concern was with the capacity of dominant social orders to incorporate residual and emergent cultures. This was a process which Williams judged to be very effective and penetrating in advanced capitalist societies.”

In his theory of culture Williams is deeply influenced by Antonio Gramsci whose notion of ‘hegemony’ corresponds to Williams’ concept of ‘structure of feeling’. The traditional definition of hegemony is political rule or domination especially between states. Marxism extended this definition of rule or domination to relations between classes. Gramsci made a fine distinction between rule (domine) and hegemony. Rule is expressed in directly political forms and in times of crisis by direct or effective coercion. But hegemony also includes processes of influence which apart from those of direct control by force are social and cultural. According to Williams ‘hegemony’ is a concept which at once includes and goes beyond two powerful earlier concepts. One is of culture as a whole social process in which “men define and shape their whole lives”, the other is ideology which is “a system of meanings and values” created and projected by a particular class interest. Thus hegemony goes beyond culture and ideology. According to Williams, hegemony like ‘structure of feeling’ works in a subtle manner and influences an individual’s responses to everyday life situations and his relationship with others. Hegemony is “a realised complex of experiences, relationships and activities, with specific and changing pressures
and limits.” This differs remarkably from ideology in the sense that it does not solely depend on its expression of the interests of a ruling class but also on its acceptance as ‘normal reality’ or ‘common sense’ by those in practice subordinated to it.” Williams states that hegemony is always a process. It is not a static system or structure as we generally take it to be. In other words, hegemony can never be singular and it cannot be reduced to a formula. To quote Williams:

Its internal structures are highly complex as can readily be seen in any concrete analysis. Moreover it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.

By adopting this concept Williams is also able to examine the political angle of culture in general and of literary works in particular. Williams not only accepts and appreciates this concept of hegemony but also adds to it the concepts of counter hegemony and alternative hegemony which are real and persistent elements of social and cultural assertion.

Another important component of Williams’ theory of culture is the concept of ‘productive forces’. This concept is as complex as the concept of culture because all the derivatives of the word ‘produce’—product, production productive—have acquired new meanings and new dimensions in the course of the development of capitalism. To analyse capitalism is at once to see it as a distinct process of ‘production’ and to refer to a general process of change of which it is a particular historical kind. But the irony of the
situation is that the general process is still defined in the specific and limiting terms of capitalist production. Marx stated clearly that there was a difference between ‘production in general’ and ‘capitalist production’ and his attack and criticism was always directed towards the latter. Marx says that ‘production in general’ is an abstraction which highlights the fact that ‘material production’ can be separated from other categories such as consumption, distribution and exchange. All these categories can be further separated from the social relations. But in a capitalist society material production is a specific form, determined and understood in the forms of capital, wage labour and the production of commodities. Thus the specific form of material production has been produced by the social development of particular forms of production. Williams clarifies that ‘production’ in capitalist society is not confined to production of commodities alone. A ruling class uses a significant part of material production for establishing and sustaining a political order. The social and political order that maintains a capitalist market is necessarily based on a specific form of material production. Williams tells us in this regard:

From castle and palaces and churches to prisons and workhouses and schools; from weapons of war to a controlled press: any ruling class, in variable ways though always materially, produces a social and political order. These are never superstructural activities. They are necessary material production within which an apparently self-subsistent mode of production can alone be carried on.24

Williams realises that this process is quite complex in advanced capitalist societies where it isolates ‘production and
industry' from the comparably material production of defence, law and order, welfare, entertainment and public opinion. 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 not only manual or mechanical but are also intellectual. Any change in the forces of production, therefore, has its implications at the level of culture which either becomes an instrument of change or itself gets changed as a result of the changes in the forces of production. Furthermore there exists a complex inter-relationship between the forces of production and relations of production. The forces of production include natural resources, labour power and scientific and technical knowledge. The relations of production are those which men in society enter into in the course of production of material necessities. Division of classes and groups that stands in specific legal political relations to the means of production is the concrete expression of the relation of production in class societies. Williams makes an enlightening observation in this regard:

There is a profoundly necessary job to do in relation to the processes of cultural hegemony itself. I believe that the system of meanings and values which a capitalist society has generated has to be defeated in general and in detail by the most sustained kinds of intellectual and educational work. This is a cultural process I call the 'Long Revolution' and calling it the 'long revolution' I meant that it was a genuine struggle which was part of the necessary battles for democracy and of economic victory for the organised working class. People change, it is true, in struggle and by action. Anything as deep as a dominant structure of feeling is only changed by active new experience.
In his theory of culture Williams attaches due importance to the modern communications system which plays an important role in the shaping and propagation of culture through well-established institutions in advanced capitalist societies. They are as important as the institutions of industrial production and distribution. A close study and analysis in the context of modern imperialism and neocolonialism reveals the fact that capitalist economic activity and cultural production are inseparable. In other words, means of communication are themselves means of production. There is no doubt about the fact that the means of communication from the simplest physical forms of language to the most advanced forms of communications, for instance, internet and websites etc; are always socially and materially produced and reproduced. They are, in fact, not only forms but also means of production. And communication and its material means are an integral part of human form of labour and social organization which is specific to capitalist mode of production in its present advanced phase. It is also evident that productive forces and social relations are inextricably linked with each other although for purposes of analysis we can distinguish one from the other. Williams argues that means of communication, both as produced and as means of production are directly subject to historical developments in its larger and more comprehensive form. The means of communication have a specific productive history which is directly or indirectly related to general historical phases of productive and technical capacity. Williams rightly observes in this regard:
This is so, first, because the means of communication have a specific productive history, which is always more or less directly related to general historical phase of productive and technical capacity. It is so, second, because the historically changing means of production have historically variable relations to the general complex of productive forces and to the general social relationships which are produced by them and which the general productive forces both produce and reproduce. 26

Williams seems to suggest that there is a strong relation between communication technologies and social institutions. Technical inventions are made in the society and they are used for the society. Social life and patterns of communications cannot be seen in isolation from each other. They are inextricably intertwined. Books, theatre, films, radio, television compact discs, video and advertising—all of these go to make up what we collectively term the media, that is to say the means of communication as they exist today in their present developed form.

But Williams is very sensitive about the ownership and control of the media of communication. He argues that media of communication forms a delicate apparatus which needs careful handling. If the media fall into the hands of vested interests, they will be misused and the region of ‘new things, new ideas and experiences’ will remain unexplored. He expresses his apprehension when he underlines the distinction between popular culture and synthetic culture.

In the worst cultural products of our time, we find little that is generally popular, developed from the life of actual communities. We find instead a synthetic culture or anti-culture, which is alien to almost everybody, persistently hostile to art and intellectual activity, which it spends much of its time in
misrepresenting, and given over to exploiting indifference, lack of feeling, frustration and hatred.27

Williams strongly disapproves a culture which advantages a small section of society and disadvantages the majority and which discriminates people on the basis of caste religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. He favours a democratic common culture that will ultimately overcome the class distinctions in society. This process must enlist and engage the efforts of the people themselves: “To create a society whose values are at once commonly created and criticised, and where the discussions and exclusions of class may be replaced by the reality of common and equal membership. This still, is the idea of a common culture.”28

Williams suggests that this state of common culture is not easy to achieve, particularly in an industrialized society with capitalist mode of economy. The capitalist mode of production promotes the tendency for profit which weakens our sense of togetherness and solidarity with fellow human beings. It is centered not on social production but on the reproduction of capital and maximisation of profit for those few who own the means of production. Unfortunately they also own the media, that is, means of communication. It may promote the interests of one class at the cost of the other. Unless the whole process—culture, communication and within it the means of production—is democratised and socialised, it is bound to widen the class differences and promote the domination of one class over the other.
In short, in a capitalist society, there is every likelihood that the cause of common culture would be undermined. But it does not mean that Williams deplores and decries the Industrial Revolution which began in Europe in the early eighteenth century and which transformed the whole world. Williams makes a bold acceptance of the growth of democracy and industry, despite the fact that democracy as a political system and industrialism with its capitalist mode of production were under heavy attack at that time, particularly from conservative thinkers who were in the line of Burke and Carlyle. Burke attacked democracy and argued that in a democratic set-up people “seem deserted by mankind, overpowered by a conspiracy of their whole species.” Cobbett was also not far behind in attacking democracy and industrialism. In his call for democratisation of social life and culture, Williams also breaks away from the tradition of Arnold and Leavis. For Arnold, culture is “the pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know--- the best that has been thought and said in the world.” This is a visualization of improvement or change primarily in the subjective realm of thought and feeling, values and attitudes of individuals as separate entities with minimal awareness of the need for this change to spill over to the objective realm of the structure of society, institutions, production processes and mode of governance. Leavis deplores the decline in the quality of life and standards of aesthetic value in an industrialised society but the concern here, too, remains confined, by and large, to the subjective realm.
Williams thinks differently and seems to suggest that the remedy lies not in the rejection of industrialised society but in the acceptance of the new society and intimately linking the realm of thoughts, feelings, attitudes and values to what the objective structure of an industrialised society permits as a live possibility. One way to overcome the weaknesses of the capitalist mode of production is to bring about a cultural revolution within the limits of this possibility and from the starting point making systematic efforts to achieve finally the state of common culture. The idea of common culture cannot be materialised overnight. The potent forces of democracy, industry and culture have to work in unison to achieve this goal. Special care has to be taken to ensure that these forces are not misused and they are utilized to benefit the maximum number of people in a society. This is the theme which had been discussed in *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution* as well. Williams refers to three revolutions: industrial revolution, democratic revolution and cultural revolution. Industrial revolution with the growth of industry and scientific advancement transformed the English society in the late eighteenth century. The democratic revolution, though working in unison with cultural revolution with the spread of education and literacy and consequent electoral reforms, contributed in a decisive manner to the changes which have taken place in British society. Williams argues that these revolutions are not to be seen in isolation from one another, if the process of change, which is still going on, is to be understood.
For Williams democracy is the necessary condition of a genuinely human culture. However, the struggle for democracy is not an end itself. It is part of the larger project of human liberation from poverty and oppression. It is one of the powerful forces which have changed and are still changing our world. Williams maintains that in the present century the politics of the world has changed beyond recognition. There have been revolutions either for liberation of the colonized people or for the extension of parliamentary suffrage. As a result people became conscious of their political rights and there were uprising in many parts of the world. Indian freedom struggle and consequent independence is one of these political movements. It is another matter that the demand for more political rights has been and is being very powerfully resisted “not only by the weight of other traditions, but by violence and fraud”.31 Williams further says that this democratic revolution is still in its infancy and much still needs to be done.

Industrial revolution with its latest inventions in science and technologies commands our economic attention. It is a potent force which emerged in the eighteenth century and which has transformed the world and is transforming and will continue to transform the world. Its expansion varies from country to country, from region to region. In advanced countries its aims and methods have been almost universally accepted but the rest of the world is still far behind the stage actually reached in the developed countries. In other words, this revolution in its broad sense is also at a comparatively early stage. According to Williams, there is
enough potential for its further expansion particularly in Asian and African countries.

Here it is important to note that its co-relation with the growth of democracy is by no means simple. Apparently it seems that industrial development is a powerful incentive to new kinds of democratic organization. But Williams argues that:

The apparent needs of industrial organization at many levels from the process of accumulating capital to the status of the workers in a very extensive and divided technical system, sometimes delay, sometimes frustrate the aspiration to share in the making of decisions. The complex interaction between the democratic and industrial revolutions is at the center of our most difficult social thinking.32

There is no doubt about the fact that the relation and co-relation between these two revolutions is far from simple and direct. Besides these, Williams recognizes the third revolution too; that is cultural revolution. And this is “the most difficult of all to interpret.”33 It is difficult in the sense that it is part of ‘the long revolution’ which had begun about two hundred years ago and which is still continuing ‘transforming both men and institutions’. The long revolution is neither for democracy as a political system alone nor for equal distribution of products nor for general access to means of learning and communication. Long revolution, for Williams, means more than that. It is related to “conceptions of an open society and of freely co-operating individuals who alone are capable of releasing the creative potentiality of the changes in working skills and communication.”34 Williams attaches great importance to cultural revolution, but he does not undervalue the
other two revolutions. 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.\(^{35}\)

Williams knows that this revolution is at a very early stage. Education, literacy and newly developed means of communications are yet to reach the common people. He recognises the fact that education is a potent force which can pave the way for common culture. He was aware of the fact that millions of people working in industries did not have easy access to education—formal and informal. Williams started the Adult Education Movement for providing working class people with the elements of a broadly political education. The struggle for democracy, for Williams, was as real a social struggle as any ‘struggle for subsistence or food or shelter’. He took a teaching job with the Workers Education Association (W E A) in 1946 and taught extra mural and WEA classes up to 1961, the year in which he shifted to university teaching at Cambridge. As Williams recalls in his Tony MacLean Memorial Lecture of 1983:

> The impulse to Adult Education was not only a matter of remedying deficit, making up for inadequate educational resources in the wider society, nor only a case of meeting new needs of the society, though those things contributed. The deepest impulse was the desire to make learning part of the process of social change itself.\(^{36}\)
According to Williams, Adult Education was not only providing education to the working class, it was also contributing to the process of social change. It will play a decisive role in the 'long revolution'. For Williams all education participates in the reproduction of social consciousness. And it can give some of the intellectual tools for challenging and countering existing social consciousness. In other words, Williams sees literacy and within it adult education as a means to cultural empowerment and political emancipation. He therefore unites the connections between education and politics.

Williams suggests that the spread of education and literacy is resisted overtly or covertly by the dominant class. Even means of communication are misused to benefit one section of the society. The reality and truth are deliberately distorted. All these create serious obstructions in the achievement of the goal of cultural revolution. Williams strongly opposes these tendencies which, he feels, undermine the cause of common culture. He argues that there are three types of control systems which affect the way the institutions of communication operate; “the authoritarian, the paternal and the commercial”\textsuperscript{37} Williams clarifies that the authoritarian system serves as a means of transmitting the ideas, instructions, and in short, ideology of a ruling group. The means of communication that are also means of censorship are in the hands of the Government. This type of system does not leave any space for alternative or oppositional views.
The paternal system, according to Williams, aims to guide and instruct the readers or viewers. Its control is aimed at directing the development of the majority in ways thought desirable by the minority. It is a political and cultural task. The values of minority are seen as representing the public interest. This minority is projected as a guardian of the society’s central values. Its activities are promoted in the spirit of public duty and service. This system is more democratic than the authoritarian one as it leaves some space for dissent, at least the kind of dissent which can function as a safety valve. Williams cites the example of B.B.C which fits into this category.

The third category in this regard is the commercial system that is opposed to authoritarianism and paternalism. It aims neither at state control over the individual, nor at guidance or enlightenment of the viewers. It is impelled by the notion of free market where people buy and sell what they want. This freedom enlarges the range of choice for consumers and thus enhances the opportunities for producers. Ironically in a capitalist society there are impediments to a free market which in practice constrain human choice in relation to both production and consumption. The commercial system of communication is in the hands of those who can afford to buy it and then make profit out of it—the owners, the advertisers etc. Generally they take recourse to populist rhetoric, that is, people can decide what they want and not to be told from above what is good for them. Williams senses a danger here and sees in it not a genuine democratic participation of the common
people but the construction of a synthetic culture driven by money and speculation. Williams further argues that despite the rhetoric of democracy “the cultural apparatus was falling into irresponsible hands—speculators not interested in the health and growth of the society but in exploiting the technology of communication and organizing it for quick profits.”

Nowadays television, a popular means of communication, is being used for commercial purpose—for advertising various products. Primarily television is a tool for the dissemination of information, education and awareness and it can contribute to the development of a healthy society. But its use for commercial purposes, Williams says, leads to ‘trivialization’ of the television and reversal of priorities; profit becomes the primary concern and the larger aim of education, information and awareness takes the back seat. For Williams, as Alan O’Connor says, “Television, radio, and newspapers are in the broadest sense educational institutions.” The commercial attitude (or commercialisation of these ‘institutions’) fails to recognise the difference in aesthetic tastes, cultural values and moral standards. It promotes unthinking conformism and results in erosion of critical faculties of the viewers. Alan O’Connor rightly observes in this regard: “The relationship between hegemony and resistance is central to the analysis of Williams’ writing on television. The hegemonising relations come in very subtle forms.”

The same can be said about the press as well. The newspaper was the creation of the commercial middle class, mainly in the
eighteenth century. Now the people have easy access to the press partly because of the expansion of education and consequent growth of a middle class reading public and partly because of cutthroat competition among various newspapers which are now being sold at the lowest ever prices. The circulation of these newspapers was multiplied by multiple readerships and was made financially viable by advertisement revenue. It is not a surprising thing that newspapers are now sustained by advertisement revenue and not by the sale of copies to the readers. Williams seriously doubts the intentions of those people who own the newspapers—the people whose products, that is, consumable goods or ideas are advertised through these newspapers. The profit earned by the newspaper may go to the individuals who have nothing to do with the growth and health of the society. Williams is not happy with this kind of misuse of the mass media. In *Communications* he goes to the extent of saying that "the means of production and distribution of news, music, film, video, information of all kinds, must be controlled collectively by cultural workers themselves." But he also expresses apprehensions that this formula may not work and resistance can be offered against this proposal by those who are benefited from the undemocratic and profit-oriented arrangements which presently exist. Alan O’Connor rightly suggests:

The immediate policy must be to defend social provision against the current policy of increasing the commercial control of newspapers, radio, television, film, and the new electronic systems. The aim must be to reduce the control of the advertising which in the long term pushes the culture in its own direction and priorities.
In the study of culture and mass media and means of communication in general, Williams has both affinities and differences with Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson, F.R Leavis and Q.D Leavis. Williams and Hoggart discuss several social technological factors which account for the production of modern forms of communication. They hold the view that technological advance and universal literacy are two important factors which give birth to modern forms of communication, the other being increasing self consciousness and increased consumption of goods.

F.R. Leavis accords special importance in matters relating to culture to ‘the small minority’ which constitutes the ‘consciousness of the race’. According to Leavis, this elite group, a few intellectuals will bring about the desired changes in the society. He does not stress the need of universal education and neglects the role of the working class in the creation or dissemination of culture. Q.D. Leavis in *Fiction and The Reading Public* (1932) argues on similar lines and maintains that the ‘white man’s burden’ will be borne by the ‘sensitive minority’. The only difference in her case is that the word ‘small’ is replaced by the word ‘sensitive’. She opposes cultural plurality of relativism in aesthetic judgements since it is the modernist elite, the critical minority which should take the acknowledged lead in setting new cultural trends. While Williams appropriates the methods of critical appreciation associated with the Scrutiny group, he strongly opposes the notion of an elite culture. He takes a position which is diametrically
opposed to the approaches of Q.D. Leavis and F.R. Leavis. Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* (1975), like Williams, uses the method of Leavistic literary criticism but he is also a proponent of popular democratic culture. Hoggart invokes the order of working class life and does not approve of the new mass forms of communication like the cinema, radio, T.V. and large scale advertising as all these, in his view, encourage in working class people "an unconscious uniformity and a high degree of passive acceptance." For him the hope lies "in the persistence of the older, local personal and communal way of life."

Unlike Leavis and other liberal humanists, Williams does not glorify the past and he does not find resolution of the contemporary problems through an invocation of pre-capitalist modes of life. He explodes the myth of 'good old days' in his book *The Country and The City*. In this book, Williams dismisses the notion of organic community as a pastoral myth. He countered this nostalgia for the organic community with the argument that "there is more real community in the modern village than at any period in the remembered past." He further argues that moral economy or 'rural economy' which was in vogue before industrialism was based on gross exploitation and severe discrimination. The farmers were exploited by the landlords. They were often reduced to working hands bought and sold from one landlord to another. They grew crops and reared animals only to be looted. In other words, the pre-capitalist mode of economy or rural economy was inadequate to meet challenges of the modern times. Williams says
that much damage to environment was and is being done by the capitalist mode of progressive agriculture and it was “not a crisis of manufacturing industry alone.” There was large-scale deforestation exposing the soil for erosion. The land was overgrazed and reduced to a desert. Williams does not hold the conventional outlook about the city and the country. He does not identify the city with corruption and alienation and the country with ‘purity and innocence’. He puts forward his argument that changes that came through democratic development and through economic struggle have not spoiled the beauty and innocence of the country, but “sweetened and purified an older order.” There is no penetration, transformation and subjugation of the country by the city. If the country has changed, it has been transformed for the better. Now the traditional images of the country and the city have changed. Williams argues in the book:

The common image of the country is now of an image the past, and the common image of the city an image of the future---. The pull of the idea of the country is towards old ways---. The pull of the idea of the city is towards progress, modernisation and development---. We use the contrast of country and city to ratify an unresolved division and conflict of impulses, which it might be better to face in its own terms.

This however, does not mean that Williams considers the capitalist mode of production as an ideal system with no demerits attached to it. For him “capitalism as a mode of production is the basic process of most of what we know as the history of country and city.” Williams also highlights the problems which this system has created. These problems are innumerable-environment
pollution has increased manifold, natural resources are overused to the point of exhaustion, the cities are overcrowded and ever-expanding in size and are exposed to health hazards. Unequal and uneven distribution of wealth has widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Williams neither idealises the city nor denigrates the country. What he, in fact, emphasises is the altering relations of the country and the city as a result of the new economic system which has transformed the world. He also emphasizes the mobile character of the city as opposed to the settled way of life of the country. To quote Williams:

Struggle, indifference, loss of purpose, loss of meaning—features of nineteenth-century social experience and of a common interpretation of the new scientific world-view—have found, in the city, a habitation and a name. For the city is not only, in this vision, a form of modern life; it is the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness.

The city is also associated with a highly developed communication system and concentration of traffic. For Williams communication system is not only the information network. Likewise traffic is not only a technique; it is a form of consciousness and a form of social relation. And there is a close relationship between the means of communication and social relations which are modulated through them. In other words, communication systems are always social institutions. Culture and communication are to be understood as primary and not secondary components of the social totality; constitutive and not reflective in the maintenance and development of a social order. Williams rightly observes: “We can not think of it as marginal; or as
something that happens after reality has occurred. Because it is through the communication systems that the reality of ourselves, the reality of our society, forms and is interpreted."

In this way Williams recognizes the importance of communication systems in the formation of culture and gives them their due weight as vital components of the totality we recognise as culture. Thus culture is a process, a totality and Williams views other issues—the relationship between individual and society, education and British society, growth of the reading public and popular press and analysis of literary forms—in relation to culture which is a unifying and binding force.

The theory of culture as evolved by Williams came to be called ‘cultural materialism’. There is a good deal of confusion which surrounds the term ‘material’. Generally it is understood that materialism is opposed to higher or spiritual values and it promotes greed for money and power. Williams understands this term in the right perspective by stressing that materialism properly understood has nothing to do with ‘private desires’, what is material for Williams is, of course, culture in both its analytical and evaluative senses. ‘Materialism’ is opposed to ‘idealism’ in the sense that the latter is incorporated into the former. Cultural materialism insists that culture does not transcend the material forces and relations of production. Culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system, nor is it something independent of them. It is “a single and indissoluble real process simultaneously integrating economic, social, political and cultural activities.” In fact
Williams is against two traditions, "one which has totally spiritualised cultural production, and the other which has relegated it to secondary status." Williams held that cultural practices are of the nature of material production. Even the political order forms a part of material production. In other words, Williams extends materialism 'full bloodedly' to cultural practices in their full range.

In his contribution to cultural studies, Williams stands very close to The Frankfurt School and the Birmingham Centre. The Frankfurt School initiated critical studies of mass communication and culture and developed an early model of cultural studies. The critics and theorists belonging to this school developed a critical and transdisciplinary approach to communication studies. They combined analysis of political economy of the media, cultural analysis of texts and audience reception studies of the social and ideological effects of mass culture and communication. They coined the term 'culture industries' to signify the processes of mass-produced culture and the commercial imperatives which drove the system. The critical and social theorists recognized the importance of culture industry in the reproduction of contemporary societies. Mass culture and means of communication, they emphasized, play a vital role in the preservation and reproduction of a modern society.

Unlike cultural conservatives, they did not see technologies as a threat to culture. Technologies in themselves could do no harm to the society. The harmful effects of technical study and experiments arose from the existing social relations and the forms
of culture which had crystallized from them. A technical invention as such would have comparatively little social significance. It is only when it is selected for investment towards production—when it moves from being a technical invention to what can properly be called an available technology—that its general significance begins. Technology will be put to use after selection, investment and development. These processes depend on the existing social relations. For example, cinema is a modern invention which can function as a media which could promote the cause of culture, if it is used properly. As Williams observes: “The first audiences for cinema were working-class people in the great cities of the industrialized world. Among the same people, in the same period, the labour and socialist movements were growing in strength.”

Thus film, like socialism itself, can be seen as a harbinger of a new kind of world, the modern world based on science and technology. The film is not merely a popular but also a dynamic, perhaps even a revolutionary medium.

In the analysis of culture the theorists belonging to the Frankfurt School divided culture into high and low categories. Williams disagreed with them and tried to resolve this problematic dichotomy. Williams gave the notion of ‘common culture’ and rejected the categories of high and low culture. He paid serious attention to the artifacts of mass culture and insisted on the need for overcoming the doubts about the uses of mass media which had been strengthened by the influence of the Frankfurt School. Like the critics of Birmingham School of cultural studies, Williams’
work is 'transdisciplinary and subverts academic boundaries' by combining social, cultural, economic and political dimensions. He aimed at situating "culture within a theory of social production and reproduction, specifying the ways that cultural forms served either to further social dimensions or to enable people to resist and struggle against domination."55 Williams looked upon the existing society as a hierarchical and antagonistic set of social relations characterised by the oppression of the subordinate classes on the basis of gender, race and ethnicity by the dominant groups. He refers to the 'selective tradition', which is constituted by a selected appropriation of the recorded culture of the past and is passed on as a 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 time. Williams employed Gramsci's model of hegemony and counter-hegemony to understand better the impact of power structure of a society on culture as a vital realm. He underlines the need for counter hegemonic forces and ideas that could contest and counter the existing hegemony.

Thus Williams' theory of culture which he himself termed as 'cultural materialism'—is "a theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism."56 His position does not fully accord with the mainstream Marxist exposition. He has, in fact, a lot in common with neo-Marxists or
unorthodox Marxists who analyse culture in the context of different academic disciplines such as anthropology, social history, linguistics, politics and sociology. Williams is one of those cultural critics who explore the post-modern condition across disciplines and genre as diverse as philosophy, political theory, architecture, film, T.V., media and contemporary cultural politics, thereby making a valuable contribution to the history of ideas and their relation to social and political change which is not easily matched anywhere else.
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