CHAPTER VII
SHEILA ROWBOTHAM

Sheila Rowbotham is a British author. She is generally considered as the key figure in the British Feminist Movement. She has played a pioneering role in initiating women's movement around 1969-70 and has carried out - besides her major books - lot of pamphleteering activity. She was born in Leeds in 1943 and educated at a Methodist School near Filey and at St. Hilda’s at Oxford. She has taught in technical and further education colleges, and at a Comprehensive School. She has also taught at Workers' Education Association. Since 1963, she has been active in the socialist movement. She was on the editorial board of Black Dwarf, and also a member of the Women's Liberation Workshop.

Rowbotham was brought up in a middle-class environment. In a partly autobiographical account of the emergence of women's liberation movement in England, she has described the atmosphere and the conditions of life which ultimately led her to write extensively about the women's problem. She writes that "When I was seventeen feminism meant to me shadowy figures ... very prim and stiff ... From dim childhood memories I had a stereotype of emancipated women. ... Feminism was completely sexual ... Feminism seemed the very antithesis of the freedom I connected with
getting away from home and school. When I saw myself able to live as I wanted I did not have any specific idea of myself as a woman doing whatever I would be doing." (Rowbotham, 1976, 12).

Rowbotham has also given us valuable information about the development of her personality. She tells us that The Feminine Mystique was very much a part of her life and she consoled herself "by retreating into an intellectual inner world of mysticism and reverie." She states: "I picked up an insistence on direct experience and feeling. I was inordinately suspicious of reason and analysis. Only moments of intense subjectivity seemed to have any honesty or authenticity. All removed ways of thinking appeared to me as necessarily suspect."

(Rowbotham, 1976, 14). She points out that politically speaking the immediate implications of this way of seeing were "extremely reactionary", and in reality, she led a very escapist kind of a life. (She came to realise this of course much later in her life). Then she went to the university where she was exposed to varieties of marxist "tendencies" and "life styles" representing a world of totally bookish, romantic and coffee house revolutionaries. But then she left the university and went to live in London by joining Young Socialist, there she encountered a Marxism in practice in which "There was no single orthodoxy but much disputation." She explains that "Now
it makes some sense - then it made none. I remained bound to the group by the peculiar blend of guilt and masochism which builds up in such circumstances." (Rowbotham, 1976, 19). She spent about three and half years of her life from 1964 to 1967 in such an atmosphere. It was only after 1967 that she got herself involved in the workingclass movement. There she came across older Marxist people who connected "Politics to the way you lived." As she puts it: "Most important, some of these people were women. The socialism I discovered from them was one which was explicitly committed to human dignity and which assumed that women should be as proud and as responsible as men. Through them I relived a politics which I had never known - and did not relate to my own immediate experience."

(Rowbotham, 1976, 20).

Rowbotham's emergence as a feminist

But it was in this very period of political turmoil and the New Left bickerings, Rowbotham began to develop a sense of herself as a woman. As a result of her experience and reflection, she began to distinguish herself essentially as a "woman". She states that: "I was struck with the tragedy of the sexual divide and the way it had hobbled me. I went backwards and forwards to no place in particular." (Rowbotham, 1976, 20). She has provided us with a revealing description of the process whereby she ultimately emerged as a feminist. "But more than that it
meant a new kind of political movement. The atmosphere around '68 was very much one in which culture and consciousness were emphasized at the expense of the objective circumstances in which we found ourselves. Despite the dangers of this it meant that all kinds of questions which had been forced out of Marxism when there were only the small groups to keep it alive came in again. In England the slowly accumulating influence of the old new left was very important, but also people branched out into unexplored territories. The rediscovery of our early perception of ourselves and our own sexuality entered politics - not as a theoretical question but as passionate and practical demand. ... This helped us to connect a sense of femaleness of our sense of ourselves as political animals. Our bodies at least were female.” (Rowbotham, 1976, 23).

At this stage of her personal development Rowbotham was deeply influenced by the writings of R.D. Leing, and in particular, of Karen Horney. She writes that she was fascinated by Horney's *Feminine Psychology* because she described areas of sexual experience - "I had never seen written." Horney's clear statement of male cultural hegemony made a deep impact on Rowbotham. She states "Just as Marxism had made sense because it made the experience of class suddenly something you could understand and describe historically, so my sexual situation became
socially comprehensible." (Rowbotham, 1976, 23). As a combined result of her experience in radical politics and the writings of Reich, Laing and Horney, on the one hand, and of Fanon, Sartre and Gramsci on the other; Rowbotham finally decided to write about women's liberation. (Rowbotham, 1976, 25).

Rowbotham's Work

Rowbotham's first noticeable leaflet devoted to women's problem was published by May Day Manifesto Group in Summer 1969 as a Spokesman Pamphlet titled *Women's Liberation And The New Politics*. It was followed by an introduction to a pamphlet of Alexandra Kollontai and published by The Spokesman in June and July 1970. Then she published her first book in 1972. This narrative history of feminism is titled *Women, Resistance and Revolution*. In the next year, she published *Hidden from History*. It tells the story of 300 years of British women's oppression and their fight against it. It is a study of the changing position of women in England from the Puritan Revolution up to the 1930s. It calls for the enhancement of women's capacity "to relate to the working-class and the action of working-class women in transforming women's liberation according to their needs." This was followed by *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*. In fact, the bulk of this book was written in the Summer of 1971 as a part of *Women, Resistance and Revolution*. But as it grew
too big, Rowbotham published it as an independent book in 1973. (Rowbotham, 1976, vii). She has also published in the same year a historical bibliography on the Women's liberation movement up to 1972 with the title *Women's Liberation and Revolution*. She is a prolific writer and one of her recent noticeable contribution is her article "The Women's movement and organising for socialism" published in 1979 in an anthology with the title *Beyond The Fragments* edited by herself, Segal and Weinwright. (Rowbotham, Segal and Weinwright, 1981).

**Rowbotham's general position on Woman's problem and her methodology**

Unlike all the feminist authors which we have studied so far, Rowbotham is not at all interested building up a comprehensive and integrated theory or ideology of women's situation in human history. As we will see later she has self-consciously refrained from such an endeavour. She has preferred to operate as a modest social historian of the history of women's consciousness. As a result she has not yielded a single eye-catching slogan or a neat phrase of analysis for the women's liberation movement. Yet there are two reasons for her inclusion in our study. The first is, her wide-spread and recognisable impact - including the theoretical one - on British and thereby the world-wide feminist movement. The second, and a more important reason, is the more long lasting and deeper impact of her work as a theoretical reference point for the feminist thought in
the future. Her modesty has helped her to avoid some of the theoretical and polemical excesses of the feminists from both the camps—radical feminism and socialist feminism. Her identification of some of the problems which feminist theorists will have to resolve makes a convincing reading and her own efforts in this direction, howsoever tentative and arguable, at least do not put us off from the project.

Mary O'Brien has pointed out that "Sheila Rowbotham has a better understanding of the historical significance of the social relations of reproduction. As a Marxist, she is concerned with the failure of Marxism to comprehend the inadequacies of a rigidly economist historical model of class struggle ..." (O'Brien, 1983, 76). Rowbotham is therefore interested in theoretical reconsideration of both the process and relationships of production and reproduction. She has also shown interest in working out "...the precise relationship between the patriarchal dominance of men over women, and the property relations which come from this, to class exploitation and racism." (Rowbotham, 1976, 117). Roberta Hamilton has noticed "The most thorough attempt at synthesising Marxism and Feminism" is made by Rowbotham. Hamilton has identified another noticeable theme in Rowbotham's writings namely women's work as wage labourers and as house workers. (Hamilton, 1978, 90).
Hamilton has also noticed the positive gains which Rowbotham secures through her modest historical method. She notes that "... systematically worked out ..., her perceptiveness, her willingness to be personally vulnerable, her often poetical descriptions and her method break through the boundaries of her theoretical framework. By alternately getting close to her subject and then backing off she reveals not only the theoretical dimension of female labour but also its subtleties, the way the system works in its day-to-day operation, the means by which women are in turn defeated and find new ways of railing against their situation." (Hamilton, 1978, 90). Rowbotham is also interested in developing a theory of patriarchy within the marxist framework. She once again, does not directly attempt to develop a theoretical model of her own but provides an implicit direction by marshalling of what she considers the significant historical data in that direction.

Before we come to her understanding of the nature of the probable synthesis of marxism and feminism we must note an occasional and implied defence of irrationality which mars the quality of her work. Janet Radcliff Richards, a specialist student of philosophy writing as a "Sceptical Feminist", writes that "... in approving of a contrast being drawn between vision and logic (in
Women's Consciousness, Man's World) is going further than that: she is regarding the two as a rival means of finding things out, and must mean that the intensity of feeling is a guide to reality which no argument can vitiate. But that certainly is a defence of irrationality, since it means that no arguments must be allowed to count against anything which is believed passionately enough." Richards has also cited another example from Howbotham's other book, Women, Resistance and Revolution to support her argument. Richards notes that the ideas of the primacy of experience are immediately recognisable as characterising much of recent feminism. (Richards, 1982, 33-35). We must add that while party to the charge, Howbotham remains probably the least guilty of all the six authors whom we have studied.

Howbotham on the relation between marxism and feminism

As we have already noted howbotham's conceptual framework and her theoretical and practical concerns are guided by marxism and feminism. So we must first note her understanding of the problem. She is, first, appreciative of the beneficial impact of Marxism for the women's movement. She has noted that "... Marxism and the revolutionary movement which developed towards the end of the nineteenth century had a fundamental effect on the terms of the debate between women's liberation and the socialist revolution." She warns us that when we must and
have to criticise Marxism in our context, "It is necessary to keep a balance between connecting with a tradition and the inadequacies of that tradition. ... We must always examine the chinks and the crevices and look into the light." (Rowbotham, 1972, 97-98). Yet she asserts that "The connection between feminism, the assertion of the claims of women as a group and revolutionary socialism is still awkward. Their synthesis cannot merely be intellectual, but will come out of the ideas we make practical, dissolving, preserving and exploding our present conceptions of both." Then Rowbotham has made an important statement. She states that feminism and marxism "cohabit in the same space somewhat uneasily. ... They are at once incompatible and in real need of one another ...

Marxism was developed as a means of understanding the way in which capitalist society functioned and how it could thus be changed. However, it retained a certain ambiguity about the liberation of women. ... Marxists have in general assumed that the overthrow of capitalist society will necessitate a fundamental transformation in the organization and control of production and the social relations which come from the capitalist mode of production. Women's liberation implies that if the revolutionary movement is to involve women, not as supporters or attendants only, but as equals, then the scope of production must be seen in a wider sense and
cover also the production undertaken by women in the family and the production of self through sexuality." She adds that "That is, in fact, reassertion of Marx’s concern to study how human beings reproduce their lives in a total way. It is also a crucial part of any strategy to be employed against advanced capitalism." (Rowbotham, 1972, 245-246).

Rowbotham has identified the concrete historical context which governs the present dualism between marxism and feminism. She notes that the principal task for women today is to transform the whole cultural conditioning of women and to raise their consciousness. "But the crucial feature of this new feminism as an organizing idea is that these changes will not follow a socialist revolution automatically but will have to be made explicit in a distinct movement now, as a precondition of revolution, not as its aftermath. This is obviously different from the emphasis of the orthodox Marxist tradition. The fact that no socialist revolution has occurred in the countries of advanced capitalism inevitably leaves us only with an imponderable dilemma. Similarly the general problems of all societies in which there have been revolutions have become so completely intertwined with the specific problems of women that it is difficult to disentangle cause from effect." (Rowbotham, 1972, 247).

Rowbotham has typically added a personal note. She
states: "As a feminist and a Marxist I carry their contradictions within me and it is tempting to opt for one or the other in an effort to produce a tidy resolution of the commotion generated by the antagonism between them. But to do that would mean evading the social reality which gives rise to the antagonism." Because she is clear that "The connection between the oppression of women and the central discovery of Marxism, the class exploitation of the worker in capitalism, is still forced. It is still coming out of the heads of women like me as an idea. It is still predominantly just a notion in the world."

According to her judgment "I believe the only way in which their combination will become living and evident is through a movement of working-class women, in consciousness resistance to both, alongside black, yellow and brown women struggling against racism and imperialism. We are far from such a movement now." (Rowbotham, 1972, 244-247).

In *Women's Consciousness, Men's World* also, Rowbotham has made similar observations. She has noted that her generation, who came to Left politics immediately before the eruption of student revolt, had inherited a Marxism which had only continued in the Western Capitalist countries as a defensive body of orthodoxy. She has added that it gave the impression of suffering from disillusionment, sectarianism, and bitterness. (Rowbotham,
1976, IX). To her, it appeared that Marxists were impatient with the claim that middle-class women were oppressed and confident that feminism was a deviation from class politics. She makes it clear that the distortion both of the feminist past and of the part women have played in the revolutions confused the whole discussion. The significance, therefore, of social experience which had given rise to women's liberation was neglected. (Rowbotham, 1976, IX). She also felt that "... the drying up of Marxism during Stalin's rule made any attempt to introduce new areas of human consciousness difficult." (Rowbotham, 1976, 11).

Rowbotham has also identified some concrete issues which created some problems and tensions in the interaction between marxism and feminism. She states that the assumption that Marx had expressed in Capital that the industrial revolution would lead to a higher form of family, and of the relation between the sexes would sweep away the economical basis of parental authority, has remained only partially correct: the division of labour between the sexes has fundamentally remained the same. The early marxist hope that the female involvement in public production would create a proletarian consciousness has not been realised. Socialization of child-rearing has not taken place. In all, Rowbotham is of the opinion that the orthodox Marxism has yet to come to terms with
the insights of feminism. (Rowbotham, 1976, 103-105).

And yet, Rowbotham does not reject Marxism. In her opinion, "In order for Marxism to prove useful as a revolutionary weapon for women, we have at once to encounter it in its existing form and fashion it to fit our particular oppression. This means extending it into areas in which men have been unable to take it by distilling it through the particularities of our own experience." (Rowbotham, 1976, 45). As we will presently see, Rowbotham believes that this synthesis of marxism and feminism is possible only through the concrete and patient movement for the liberation of women in which working class women will form a majority. She, therefore, avoids abstract and esoteric exercises in re-working or manipulating categories of marxian analysis. What she does in all her books and pamphlets is to keep her marxism in background in connecting class, colonial and sexual oppression. She wants to argue that marxism in general has provided an adequate historical analysis of modes of production and a valid critique of capitalism. But it has failed to pursue Engels' view concerning the socially formative aspects of production and reproduction. As a preparatory step towards creative application of marxism to women's problem, Rowbotham considers that her principle task is to delineate the evolution of woman's consciousness in modern times.
WOMEN's LIBERATION AND THE NEW POLITICS

In an introductory note to the second edition of the book *The Body Politic* compiled by Micheline Wandor, Rowbotham has taken the opportunity to provide some background information about her first major leaflet on the women problem. The book is essentially a record of the British feminist movement for a specific period. What Rowbotham has to say about "Women's Liberation and the New Politics" gives us an idea how Rowbotham started carrying out the above-mentioned task relating to the study of women. She emphasizes that the article was written in June 1969 "when there was no Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, only a few small groups." She also makes it clear that her own preoccupations have changed since then and the questions she would ask about the women's movement have shifted somewhat. But she also insists that the concerns of this article are still relevant to the feminist movement.

Rowbotham wants to find answers to the following questions which are, in her opinion, "vital for the revolutionary movement as a whole.": "How do people come to a new consciousness of themselves in the world? How does a new concept of what it is to be female come about? How are new ideas made social through the practical activities of a movement? How is social transformation communicated to the individual psyche?" (Wander, 1978, 3).
Before we proceed further we must note two things about the way in which Rowbotham has presented her pamphlet. The first, she bases her argument on material drawn from impeccable authorities. Thus for this article her careful and detailed footnotes reveal that she has consulted authors like E.E. Evans - Pritchard, Edith Thomas, E.J.P. Hyre, Karl Mannheim, E.P. Thompson, Frantz Fanon, Mao Tse Tung, Simone de Beauvoir, R.A.J. Schlesinger, Trotsky, Juliet Mitchell and many academic researchers and active feminist writers. Yet Rowbotham avoids altogether even a remote resemblance to academic language and presentation. As a good pamphleteer, she uses a very simple and a lucid style. In short, her work appears to be deceptively simple but in reality is based on a logical rigour and hard facts. The second thing to be noted is her self-conscious refusal to indulge in abstract theorising.

We must begin by noting the way in which Rowbotham uses the term feminism. She states that there are two possible interpretations of this term - one ideal, the other historical. According to her feminism in the first sense is utopian. It exists as a vision but not as a political movement. It visualizes society in which the roles of dominator and dominated are reversed, and in which women take over the superior status of men. The second type of feminism appears to be more sedate. This feminism wants to compete more fairly with men and is
expressed in the struggle for equal rights. Rowbotham in her typical fashion presents in a nutshell the historical evolution of this kind of feminism from the fourteenth century up to nineteen sixty eight. She perceives two phases in the evolution of historical feminism. In the first phase we notice the emergence of the religious and moral idea of the individual worth and dignity of women. Then comes the second phase from the second half of the 19th century when feminism worked for specific legal, educational, political and other reforms.

Rowbotham thinks that feminism in this second liberal-radical political phase suffered from two crucial weaknesses. First, it could not come to terms theoretically with social class. Secondly, it could not define itself except in terms of the dominant group. It therefore failed to produce a real social emancipation which could include all women, or to create a consciousness through which women could appreciate their identity as a group. While appreciative of their historical role and achievements, Rowbotham concludes that this approach obscures the real contradiction of the woman's position now. (Wandor, 1978, 14-16).

Rowbotham's review of situation of the housewife and the women worker

In order to overcome the inadequacies in the liberal-radical feminist approach, Rowbotham asks us to "examine the real conditions from which the change could develop."
She adds: "It is necessary to look more closely at the situation of the housewife in the family, at the position of the woman at work and the means by which women are thingified in the head, here and at this moment, in order to begin to find out what can be done." She makes it clear that "Such a separation (between a housewife and a woman worker) is for convenience only, in fact they are completely intertwined." (Wendor, 1978, 17-18).

Rowbotham has made a following observation about the situation of a housewife. She insists that the real contradiction in the women's situation is most clearly expressed in the situation of a housewife. Her social position is not very positive for two reasons. First, she is not a producer of commodities but of people. But those who make people rather than things are not valued in our society. She further points out that the relationship of production is connected closely with the relationship of distribution. This is obscured because the housewife receives money from the husband. In other words the society pays him to pay her. Thus the relationship is at once that of economic, social, and psychological dependence. In her opinion the exploitation of women at home becomes clear when it is seen in a social way. The individual man acts as a kind of a middleman to the rest of society. She virtually becomes a social attachment.
Rowbotham also notes that the family situation reflects in microcosm the deprivation of men at the work. Man translates the alienation and frustration he finds in the external world into the home. The woman experiences the reflected alienation. We must note that as a feminist, Rowbotham strikes a new note at this point. She points out that it will be a mistake to conclude that the mere elevation of poverty will do away housewife's alienation. This loss of self is experienced not only by the poor working-class women but by upper-class women as well. The woman at home, she concludes, is thus a victim of the reflected alienation of the man's work situation and also of an alienation of her own. Only significant structural changes can radically affect this. The production relations of the man would have to change, the woman would have to be paid directly by community and the social division of labour would have to be transformed. Such changes would necessitate social ownership as well as control. Improvements are not enough; struggle is needed. She concludes that the objection to the bourgeois family is the necessary dependence and isolation of the woman, the internalization of the competition and struggle for dominance, the tension and the possessiveness of man and woman directed towards the children. Rowbotham argues that the way in which the family has developed in capitalism is so closely related to the system that only
a total revolution will solve the problem. (Wendor, 1978, 19-20).

Once again Rowbotham will depart from orthodox marxist position at this point. She says that we must not wait for a total and immediate solution but undertake specific and concrete experiments: "Drawing from the experience of the socialist countries, she warns that we must not use marxism as an ideology, as a clear guide but as a method. It is therefore that we must experiment, so that socialism will emerge as a natural and necessary development. She notes that problem of family relationship is complex while our thinking operates on the primitive level.

A Woman Worker

Rowbotham reiterates her position that any real change for the woman at home would have to be social. It would involve a fundamental recreation of the structure of society and the ways in which people relate to each other. According to her judgement, when the position of women as worker is considered the case becomes conclusive. She once again notes the contradiction between the "role" as a woman and the "role" as a sub-man is most marked. She states that the woman has to run the home and go out to work as a sub-man. The working woman is subordinated both as a woman and as a worker. She suffers discrimination in wages, grading, training opportunities, promotions, and
other privileges. She is made to experience a special and peculiar secondariness. This is true even in the case of the middle-class highly educated women occasionally finding a top birth in job market. Rowbotham states that the socialization, education and opportunity for development and expression of women is such that even she is made to assume this kind of secondariness. She concludes by pointing out that the assumption is that women exist through their husbands, and the whole work situation is geared to this. (Wendor, 1978, 20-21).

But once again as a non-orthodox marxist-feminist she emphasizes the social rather than the economic dimensions of the problem. (i) She thus states that equal pay is a vital demand not because it will solve the situation of working women, but because it will expose more clearly the nature of the oppression. She agrees with the orthodox marxist opinion that equal pay must be phrased in terms of the social distribution of the wealth. But she warns that the securing of equal pay alone would not solve the problem unless the whole social subordination of women is challenged. (ii) She insists that even within the framework of marxian analysis and particularly with reference to the specific experience in the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, “there is still very much to be done.” Her most important observation is the urgent need for marxism to explore new areas of woman’s experience. In a
passage which virtually defines her approach to the whole problem of a potential synthesis of marxism and feminism, Rowbotham states: "Structural changes will interact on the way the woman sees herself and call into question the assumption of social secondariness. But unless the internal process of subjugation is understood, unless the language of silence is experienced from inside and translated into the language of the oppressed communicating themselves, male hegemony will remain. Without such a translation, marxism will not be really meaningful. There will be a gap between the experience and the theory. ... Marxism will prove incapable of speaking for the silence in the head for the paralysis of the spirit. If women are to be convincingly mobilised it is necessary for marxism to extend into unexplored territory. The struggle is not simply against external mechanisms of domination and containment, but against those internal mechanisms. It is the struggle against the assumption that men make and define the world, whether it be capitalistic or socialist. Unless this is made explicit and conscious, revolutionary politics will remain for most women something removed and abstracted." (Feminor, 1978, 22-23).

It is in this context that Rowbotham sets out to explore the nature of women's containment to examine the ways out and to see how these ways out relate to a total social transformation. She repeats that "At the same time
it is necessary to try and understand the awkwardness with which Marxism has touched upon the situation of women, which of necessity involves questioning the emphasis of some species of Marxism. To think of providing final answers would be absurd. But hopefully it should be possible to begin enquiry." (Sandor, 1978, 4). She states that while Marxism has paid some attention to the material dimensions of the woman-problem, they have ignored another important aspect of it - how it feels in the head. She affirms that if the external social situation subdues us it is our consciousness that contains us. She insists that as a result of the dominant ideology, the conception of change is beyond the notions of the oppressed. They lack both the idea and practice to act upon the external world. As a result of the hegemonic control of the dominant, women find themselves in a situation of "wrapped-up consciousness."

It is at once clear that Rowbotham has assimilated Gramsci's notion of hegemony and has applied it to the woman-problem. She states that in order to see how this relates both to the situation of women in a traditional state of complete social dependence and to the situation of the woman in the process of casting off this dependence, it is necessary to consider the ways in which these women understand the world and the ways in which they communicate their understanding. Rowbotham notes that all oppressed
and the women in particular face a serious problem at this juncture. They lack control over concepts, vocabulary, words etc. as they are made to reflect the interest and the point of view of the dominant class. She adds that communication for people who have no name is always a difficult business. She states in a graphic manner that "Thinking is difficult when the words are not your own. Borrowed concepts are like passed-down clothes: they fit badly ... first there is the paralysis. Their words stick in your throat ... this is of course not peculiar to women. It is part of the common condition of the subordinated." (Wendor, 1978, 5-7).

Rowbotham further adds that women along with other oppressed face a still more serious problem in overcoming the dominant ideology. The theory represents the experience of the dominators. It sums up their model of existence, ideology and social position. Rowbotham, therefore, argues that a new programme of action is called for. She declares: "Thus the struggle to take hold of definitions, the tools of theory, and to structure connections, model-building, is an essential part of the politicization of the oppressed. Without this it is impossible to shatter the hold of the dominators and storm their positions of superiority." (Wendor, 1978, 7).

Unlike most of the marxist-feminists and the socialist-feminists, Rowbotham then argues that this will of course
be realised only through concrete, patient struggle. She maps out various strategies of consciousness-raising noting that movements develop in the process of communicating themselves through such struggles.

Rowbotham's description of the present image of a woman projected by the dominant ideology and its impact

According to Rowbotham, the first mistake of superior people is to equate the silence of the oppressed with stupidity. The second is to assume the "inferiority" of experience—knowing to theoretical understanding because the former has been associated with those lower down. She says that all the three characteristics especially associated with women and often regarded as marks of inferiority—giggling, gossip, and old wife's tales—make sense only in the environment of the dominated. Dominant male culture imposes "the language of silence" on women. Her fragmentation, isolation and lack of identity makes it impossible for a woman to relate her own situation to that of any other oppressed group, or to seek a way out. Rowbotham points out that trapped in such a situation, woman turns round and repeats the process of domination within her own group. She translates the outer authority inward, repeating what is done to her by men to other women. This process divides women. (Sandor, 1978, 7-8).

Rowbotham states that in our present male-dominated
culture, femininity becomes synonymous with frivolity, stupidity and narrowness. The books, the films, the other media constantly reaffirm this image. Rowbotham then suggests that the educated women usually opt out for easy solutions. She has noted two typical examples of such false alternatives. The first is the path of spurious freedom some women take. They accept the assigned woman's role not as given but as a matter of choice. They therefore adopt a supportive role to men in the name of freedom. They describe their choice as an indicator of mature integration. Rowbotham argues that they are simply avoiding the issue in a peculiarly complicit and false way. The other easy way which some women take is a search for emancipation "doing without men". Rowbotham's description of this process is one of the more well-known passages of her work. She states "Obversely we become the popular 'distorted' image of the suffragette. A tweedy, sensibly-shod battle-axe with a severe hair style and a deep voice, advancing aggressively on the male world and the board room. The corollary of this is the retreat into lesbianism. Both share a profound distaste for the male. Emancipation is doing without men. Our other retreat is into sexuality." (Wandor, 1973, 10-11). Because women have been traditionally denied control over their bodies, some women try to prove that they have secured a control over their life including body by indulging in "liberated"
and "free" sexual life. Rowbotham observes that this false option is not only not representative of real freedom but in fact expresses "the very essence of our secondariness: and the destructive contradictions in our consciousness." (Wendtor, 1978, 11).

Rowbotham notes a third path the upper class women take in such a situation. They take refuge behind the privilege of class and education, using the manner and accent of the rulers to secure respect and serious consideration. Rowbotham terms this kind of freedom and securing of dignity "a protected dignity at the expense of the working class."

Rowbotham sums up her analysis of these various paths of the false freedom by stating that as a result: "In their existing form such 'emancipations' can no more provide the means of transforming the situation of women than the dreams of the traditionally dependent women. Consciousness is atomised, the situation is met at the moment of psychological aloneness. The free women merely exchanges fantasy for neurosis." Rowbotham then makes a point which practically sums up in simple words her whole understanding of the practical strategy of the Women's Liberation Movement. As we will see presently, her statement denotes the basic reasons why she rejects radical feminism. She notes that as a product of the above situation "Not surprisingly ... such a false freedom is never
attractive to the vast mass of women, even those whose position of class privilege would attain to it. They see the emancipated woman as a kind of a fake male, as someone playing at being a man. They feel a certain revulsion and do not trust her." (Emphasis added; Wendor, 1978, 11).

**Howbotham's Remedy for Resolving the Woman Problem**

The above statement regarding Howbotham's understanding of the woman problem makes it clear that her emphasis is on the urgent need to understand and transform individual's perception and comprehension of themselves and the world as a first and basic step towards liberation. She argues that in order to secure a significant shift in the social structure individuals will have to combine and collectively create a new consciousness together. There must be some kind of interaction – discussion and action – interlocking-organization. She further points out that if this is not to defeat its own purpose the initiative must come from the group most immediately concerned – women themselves. A movement is thus an essential form of group expression. It is the means of finding a voice (Wendor, 1978, 12).

But when Howbotham talks about the need for women's movement as a communist, she is not asking women simply to merge their identity with the communist movement. No doubt she emphasizes the considerable dangers in pursuing the women's movement on a separatist basis: Yet, unlike the orthodox marxists, she insists that the achievement of
a new consciousness calls for a *creative* application of marxism to the problem. She states "A marxist approach to the situation of women can be justified only in its ability to illuminate our (women's) position and the way out, not as some kind of moral imperative". (Women, 1978, 24).

Rowbotham notes that mere one-sided emphasis on raising consciousness will lead to idealism. There is a compulsive need to have a political movement which relates to all the groups. In fact, Rowbotham makes it crystal clear that communism is a necessary condition of women's freedom. Yet she adds that the subordination of women cannot be reduced simply by reducing women's exploitation *either as a class or women's exploitation at work*. According to her perception of the problem, "The woman question is not comprehensible except in terms of the total process of a complete series of repressive structure." She insists that "In order to comprehend this it is necessary to replace a mechanical model of social change (base/superstructure) by a complex and interrelated self-regulating revolutionary model." (Women, 1978, 26-27).

Revolution will involve the creation of a new consciousness, on the one hand, and fundamental material change on the other. Revolution therefore needs the particular experience of women and the resultant feminist consciousness as much as any other thing. Rowbotham argues that "Such a leap in consciousness would undoubtedly shatter whole
layers of comfortable paternal authoritarian assumptions within the revolutionary movement." (Wendor, 1978, 27). Thus the need for "breaking the silence" of women forms the core of Rowbotham's analysis of the women's question.

In this article Rowbotham has tried to describe even the various phases of the eventual growth of such a consciousness. First, there is a simple moral protest against oppression. Secondly, there is a material demand of the privileged among the inferior to be allowed to complete equally with the dominant group. This is conceived as equal rights. Thirdly, there is the realization that the real liberation of the oppressed group can only be achieved through the transformation of the economic base and of social relations. This is the discovery of marxism. Fourthly and closely related is the realization within marxism of the inter-locking nature of oppressions and the significance of hegemonic control. (Wendor, 1978, 13).

**WOMEN, RESISTANCE AND REVOLUTION**

In the above article Rowbotham has suggested that "In order to locate the situation of women more exactly, it is necessary to examine what kind of movement has been created in the past, what relevance it has now, in the present, and, finally, how marxism relates to our liberation". (Wendor, 1978, 13). Rowbotham carried out this task in her first major work *Women, Resistance and*
Revolution. It was published in 1972 and made a mark as an earnest, straightforward documentation of the rise of women's consciousness in the modern age. She makes it clear that it is not a proper history of feminism and revolution. (Rowbotham, 1972, 11). As she looks at it, she has tried to trace the fortunes of 'a very simple idea' "... with which we have lost touch, that the liberation of women necessitates the liberation of all human beings."

The book is produced as an attempt "to touch, recognise and communicate the effort to go beyond" a certain kind of "paralyses" of women's revolutionary consciousness which inevitably and recurrently takes place in today's male-dominated society. The situation develops as follows. Rowbotham points out that women came to revolutionary consciousness by means of ideas, actions and organizations which have been made predominantly by men. Women live in societies in which masculine power and masculine culture dominate. She states that the language which makes women invisible to 'history' is not coincidence. It is a part of their real situation in a society and in a movement which they do not control. The result is that women's subordination gets deeply internalised. In turn, it moulds the consciousness of women who actively seek liberation in a way that usually generates "two immediate responses" to the situation.
One is subservient acquiescence to the male revolutionary definition of women's role in the revolution. It plays down the need and significance of "the explicit female consciousness" and pretends that the specific oppression of women does not exist. As a result, "Out of 'loyalty' or the need to preserve 'unity' we allow our doing and imagination, so briefly and recently released, to be once again restricted and held down, continuing ourselves with token acknowledgement." The second response takes the form of an angry denial that "their" movement has anything to do with women. It isolates female consciousness from any other movement for liberation and pretends that men are not oppressed in the world outside. As a result, women decide to seek their new selves alone - in isolation from men.

Rowbotham argues that both the above responses are understandable but one-sided and wrong-headed in character. She states that "The paralysis of a male-defined revolutionary movement is as evident as the paralysis of a consciousness which can comprehend only the liberation of women. Both are caught in their particularity". Rowbotham believes that a history of the attempts to go beyond this paralysis in the past is part of the task of overcoming it in the future. A proper theory and practice of women's revolutionary consciousness proves, in her opinion, the need for such a look. (Rowbotham, 1972, 11-12).
Rowbotham in her typical modest way considers women, resistance and revolution as "a tentative first step" towards correcting the masculine bias in the story of "our" revolutionary past. Rowbotham insists that "It will be a useful book only if it is repeatedly dismantled and reconstructed as a part of a continuing effort to connect feminism to socialist revolution." (Rowbotham, 1972, 11). In short, her purpose is to describe the circumstances in which a notion (that the liberation of women necessitates the liberation of all human beings) has come about and manifested in history. Rowbotham's method is deliberately simple. She tells us that "I have tried to pursue it (the above notion) as a living reality as it came into and out of the lives of particular men and women, and as a political reality as they organised to act upon it". (Emphasis added, Rowbotham, 1972, 11).

We must, further note that Rowbotham has written this book with two firm convictions. The first is that it is only when women start to organize in large numbers that women become a political force. An individual "emancipated" woman is therefore an incongruity. The second is in the possibility of "a truly democratic society in which every human being can be brave, responsible, thinking and diligent in the struggle to live at once freely and unselfishly." Rowbotham argues that "Such a democracy
would be communism, and is beyond our present imagining."
(Rowbotham, 1972, 12-13).

In *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, Rowbotham deals with the rise and development of women's consciousness from the Puritan Revolution in England and America up to the Cuban Revolution under Castro. She has also dealt with the growth of feminism in Colonial countries with special reference to Algeria and Vietnam. Country-wise, she has reviewed the history of feminism in general in England, France, America, Germany, Russia, Italy, China; and Algeria, Cuba and Vietnam. In the course of her presentation she has touched upon a wide range of themes such as abortion, birth control, childcare, communes, women's relation to consumption, women's education, divorce, the family, free love, role of women in industry, marriage, pregnancy, prostitution, protective legislation and sexuality.

As the book deals with a general history of feminism we will not report the historical details which she has provided but concentrate on her argument and conclusions. With reference to feminism during the puritan revolution in England and America she states that there was no common experience for women of the effects of early capitalism. It tended to differentiate interest and expectation rather than a unifying feminist consciousness. Feminism at this stage was still an aspiration, an idea amongst a
small group of women. But it had no possibility as a movement. However, Rowbotham argues that despite this conflict and diversity of women's situation the grounds for feminist attack were laid in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. They relate closely to the values associated with early capitalism. These up and coming values were as relevant for women as they were for men. But, Rowbotham emphasizes that the difference was in the material situation of men and women in relation to production. According to her, in daring to invade the men's sphere the early feminist was in fact threatening the basis of the division of labour which assigned the world of reproduction and child-rearing to women and the world of production to men. She notes that the separation of family from work had occurred before capitalism, but as industry grew in scale it appeared in its most clear and distinct form. (Rowbotham, 1972, 34-35).

In her outline of French feminism during the French Revolution and thereafter, Rowbotham once again notes how the feminist aspirations of the privileged encountered the traditions of collective action of the unprivileged women. Side by side with this analysis, Rowbotham has also discussed the rise of the cult of the romantic woman beginning with the writings of Rousseau. She states that the resultant romantic image of women is a complex and pervasive phenomenon which has persisted right from
Rowbotham then proceeds to narrate the story of women's movement from the later half of the eighteenth century up to the middle of the nineteenth century. She has dealt at length with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, William Thompson, Fourier, Flora Tristan and Margaret Fuller. We must note that she has described the achievements and limitations of these figures under the label of "utopian proposal." Her argument is that by the 1840s connection between the social revolution and the liberation of women had been made. But it was vaguely worked out. An alternative feminism to that aligned with socialism was beginning to develop. She insists that it was apparent that the interest and intentions of some women who spoke of freedom for themselves and nothing to do with the emancipation of the workers, and was often explicitly opposed to the rights of labour. Rowbotham sums up her analysis in these words: "How did women as a group relate to the movement for a free and egalitarian society? How could they act to change society in these direction? These two were amongst the great unanswered questions of revolutionary feminism." (Rowbotham, 1972, 58).

Rowbotham then proceeds to describe the rise of marxism in the nineteenth century and its impact and implications for women's emancipation. As a self-declared
Marxist-socialist her comments are noteworthy. She first points out that we find in Marx's writings several approaches to an analysis of women's oppression. According to her, Marx's followers like Engels, Bebel and other nineteenth-century revolutionaries tried to synthesize and elaborate on these approaches.

Rowbotham's assessment of Marx's and Engels's work in terms of their relevance and utility for the problem of women's oppression is as follows. According to her, Marx and Engels left an important theoretical commitment for the liberation of women's potential as a human being and the connection of this to communism. They contributed to a better understanding of the nature of women's oppression in the nineteenth century, both in the anthropological and in the economic sense. (Rowbotham, 1972, 76). In the German Ideology in particular they created a basis for a more concrete study of women's condition as an historically changing aspect of the material situation.

Yet Rowbotham suggests that we must not treat Marxism as a dogma. She insists that there are many questions that Marx and Engels had left open and also took some ideas for granted which appear incredible now. Many crucial questions regarding women were left unanswered. Rowbotham therefore pleads for an extension of Marxist theory in general as a part of revolutionary feminist praxis. She
states that she accepts Juliet Mitchell's statement in *Women's Estate* that the liberation of women has remained marginal in Marxist theory and made dependent on the emancipation of the working class.

According to her the limitations of Marx's and Engels's work arose from the following factors. *First*, both of them were, after all the products of their time. Thus while they made decisive breaks with earlier ideas, they shared none-the-less many of the romantic conceptions of utopian socialism. They could not escape the bourgeois atmosphere in which they lived. *Second*, they naturally could not envisage the impact made by the major developments to come after them in the twentieth century: (i) The extraordinary transformation of social revolution, (ii) The rise of bourgeois psychology, (iii) The new technology of contraception or (iv) a movement like women's liberation. *Third*, Marxist sociology has tended to concentrate on work relations rather than family relations. The worker's consciousness is seen as developing only at the point of production. It is forgotten that the worker came from a particular family, and that we conceive the world through the relationships in the family. Rowbotham argues that the implications of study of the social relationship of reproduction are of immense importance for a theory of consciousness. (Rowbotham, 1972, 76). Rowbotham also thinks that followers of Marx and Engels have also failed
to develop proper Marxist psychology. Fourth, her further argument is that Marxists have ignored the important point about reproduction. They tend to ignore the crucial fact that as an important aspect of the material world reproduction also acts as a determining factor in history. Fifth, Rowbotham also raises doubt about the feasibility of some of the projections made by Marx and Engels about the future. For example, Engels has argued that women must be involved in production as a precondition for emancipation. Rowbotham points out a hundred years later this becomes less obvious and convincing. Mere inclusion of women in production does not guarantee control over it. All these limitations of Marx, Engels and their followers call for a creative application of Marx's method to our present-day problem.

Rowbotham in fact has identified some questions which the present-day Marxist theory need and must handle in order to achieve credibility and vitality. These questions are: Does it follow that changes in the ownership and organization of production in fact change the social relations of production, and consequently effect a revolutionary change in women's position? Given that women's oppression pre-dates capitalist society, can it be assumed that a revolution which changes the economic basis of society in a socialist direction would affect her sexual role? Is it not rather necessary for women to organize
round their specific experiences as women actually in the course of revolutionary struggle against capitalism? What form should such organization take to be most effective? How far can the revolutionary argue for women's involvement in productive work when for working class women this is invariably the most boring and lowest paid work? Rowbotham states that these and similar questions must be answered to secure women's emancipation. She in fact declares that "The Women's Liberation Movement directs attention to precisely these areas which have remained in theoretical obscurity within Marxist theory." (Rowbotham, 1972, 76-77).

At the same time Rowbotham, as a loyal Marxist, warns that while we must question and examine Marx's and Engels' silence or analysis on many issues, we must not thereby accept the liberal position which denies any meaning to history. The issues and questions before women and revolutionaries are so complex that they cannot afford to ignore the historical method. What Rowbotham has in her mind is not the rejection of Marxist theory of revolution but rejection of Marxism as a dogma.

In the next chapter, Rowbotham has reviewed the post-Marxian socialist movements at the end of the century in Russia, America and England. She has paid particular attention to Bebel's and Emma Goldman's writings. Rowbotham makes it clear that women's liberation emerged
as a live and explosive issue in the emerging socialist movements at the end of the nineteenth century for every practical reasons. As soon as women began to take a more active part in these movements, their problems inevitably assumed some importance. Their participation raised some practical problems and created some questions which required proper answers. Rowbotham lists them as important problems on the agenda of even the present-day revolutionary programme. These questions are: From what basis and in what manner can women act together as a group which can be the agency of revolutionary change? Where is there a necessity to act from the logic of women's own socio-historical situation? In what sense can women be regarded as a group with interests in common? What are the particular experiences of oppression peculiar to women? Are there such experiences? If so how can these be expressed in terms of revolutionary struggle? In what way does the conception of a communist society imply the liberation of women? How far do existing socialist societies approximate to this? What is the manner in which women can participate fully in a revolutionary movement? And ultimately can the essentially personal and emotional understanding of pain be translated into political action, or is the tragic vision the only consolation for the daughters of the dream? Rowbotham argues that correct answers to these questions will emerge only if women will develop the
courage to face "Our own cruel contradiction". She explains this contradiction in these dramatic words: "One of the most compelling facts which can unite women and make us act is the overwhelming indignity or bitter hurt of being regarded as simply 'the other', 'an object', 'commodity', 'thing'. We act directly from a consciousness of the impossibility of loving or being loved without distortion. But we must still demand now the preconditions of what is impossible at the moment. It is a most disturbing dialectic, our praxis of pain". (Rowbotham, 1972, 98).

Before she proceeds to deal with feminism in socialist and colonial countries, Rowbotham devotes a full chapter to the summing up of feminist experience of ordinary, common women whom she calls "the silent people of no name." She does it with the conviction that "An essential task of a revolutionary, feminist movement is the investigation of the past of the women of the people who have been neglected because of their class and because of their sex." (Rowbotham, 1972, 101). Rowbotham justifies her review of the "specific situation" of such women with the following reason. She states that revolutionary political movements have repeatedly proved incapable of relating to experiences of the ordinary women trapped in the ordinary routine of life. Rowbotham argues that revolutionary feminist consciousness will never be complete and sound
until it assimilates the experiences of common women. Common women do not think in terms of future and have no idea of how to act upon the world. They join and participate in political movements usually moved by economic concerns which affect them in their position as housewives. But even then they do not challenge in any way their customary role as women. However, very easily in such movements the new conception of commitment sometimes upsets what most of them regard as the proper women's sphere. Thus by taking the revolution seriously ordinary women are forced to take up feminist positions not only against the immediate political enemy but also against the prejudice and suspicion of the men on their own side.

One or two points made by Rowbotham in her survey of the development of ordinary women's consciousness during the last two hundred years are worth noting. They help us to understand Rowbotham's general position about the requirements of women's liberation movement. Her first point is that by and large revolutionary movements have welcomed the participation of women as a supportive force. But if women move from their passivity into the conscious and active roles of militants, they meet with resistance. The second point which Rowbotham notes is the recurrent tendency among the feminist movement to isolate itself from other movements. She notes that in the face of the
above experience, feminist isolationism may appear to be a natural and an arguably defendable response. Rowbotham thinks that none the less such a tendency brings harm to women themselves. The price which women's movement has to pay is big. First by only talking about the specific oppression experienced by women, such isolationist feminists ignore the oppressive character of the total social system as such. Keeping in mind these two tendencies, Rowbotham wants the working-class revolutionary movement not to treat specific problems of women as of secondary priority while she warns the feminist movement of its latent isolationist tendency. It is within this framework of analysis that Rowbotham has attempted to describe how the exclusion of the broad mass of women from the feminism or revolutionary movements has lead to inevitable failures in the past.

The final observation which is of some theoretical relevance is Rowbotham's argument that we are in need of a revolutionary theory which will present an integrated theory of women's oppression and exploitation both when they work inside the home and outside the home. In her opinion, failure to develop such a theory will weaken both the feminist and the working class movements in a critical situation. We must note that Rowbotham has linked up this issue with the problem of revolutionary consciousness. Her argument in this matter needs some more attention.
She states that because the oppression of women operated as much on a personal as on a public level, of necessity women were inclined towards demands and modes of organizing in which these two levels combine. She adds that "... because there was no theory to connect, explain and extend the practical discoveries of revolutionary feminism, the significance of the women's activity was obscured and forgotten. ... The implications of sexual repression and authoritarianism could not be worked out convincingly in the nineteenth century context." According to Rowbotham, the root cause of these failures then and now is clear. She states: "... The question of the manner in which the external world of revolutionary practice penetrates the inner world of consciousness, and how this affects the revolutionary's action, has not been answered satisfactorily. Nor have the consequences of this interaction been seriously discussed in terms of their effect upon organization. Yet the course of revolutionary movements indicates that this is a vital question." (Rowbotham, 1972, 126-127).

Rowbotham then surveys the various twentieth century socialist revolutions to know how they had tried to tackle the problem. In presenting the history of Russian women from 1917 to 1972, Rowbotham has given us the usual account of the progressive deadening of the original impulse to secure in reality women's total emancipation. Her account,
therefore, does not warrant any further attention. One or two observations will suffice. Rowbotham treats the fate of ideas about the liberation of women and the slow retreat as a sensitive barometer of the revolution itself. (Rowbotham, 1972, 162). Rowbotham identifies some factors which, in her opinion, account for the failure of the Russian experiment to realise its original goals regarding the emancipation of women. Marxist ideas about the family assumed a completely different historical tradition from the cultural realities of Russia after 1917. In underdeveloped countries, traditionalism, superstition and the old authorities had a real hold. It was difficult for people to keep their nerve throughout this process of sexual-cultural revolution. The belief that the creation of new economic forces would allow men and women to make their own communist culture, and that personal relations could not be subjected to the same kind of organization as the external affairs of life, gave way under pressure. (Rowbotham, 1972, 152-153).

The other factor which adversely affected the total emancipation in the Soviet Union was the adverse material conditions of life. The immediate task of creating a communist society from the chaos of the Soviet Union in the twenties created an urgency and a mood which left no room for reforms in this area. Lacking a fully worked out revolutionary theory of women’s emancipation, the communist
party allowed itself to surrender to "The good old virtues of the bourgeoisie in early capitalism: hard work, obstinacy and repression." Closely following Wilhelm Reich's analysis of the situation, Rowbotham concludes that "... the revolutionaries faltered at the very moment when those external (material) changes started to penetrate the inner consciousness. Within the Communist Party conflict emerged about the means by which the new sexual culture should be created. Absence of a clear theory led to the victory of the orthodox party. (Rowbotham, 1972, 153 and 146).

The final point which Rowbotham wants to put on record is about two positive gains which Russian women have made. Rowbotham notes that Russian women have achieved a lot in two areas of emancipation namely the right to work and welfare facilities for the children. Yet we must note her overall assessment of the Russian scene. She states "It would seem from the Russian experience that the existence of a large female labour force, improvements in women's education and the welfare facilities for children, have not been able really to overcome other features of Soviet Society in which inequality and competition are marked." (Rowbotham, 1972, 167).

Rowbotham's history of the development of women's consciousness in China is basically sympathetic. Yet one
gets a clear impression that she writes it self-consciously as a Western woman separated so much from the Chinese women in terms of space, time, and culture. She for example states that the Western and the Chinese women come from different past and the kind of socialism and liberation that they can conceive differs greatly. In fact, she emphasizes that Chinese experience should not be considered as "Some formula for Western capitalism, or the other socialist countries ... but should be understood as a part of a particular process of development." She wonders whether it is possible to estimate how far it is possible to achieve human liberation "when the margins between socialist reconstruction and the starvation are still all too close." (Rowbotham, 1972, 198-199). She thinks that the Chinese revolution secured economic independence, equality, within the family, social welfare, improved working conditions — and most important, "their own voice." But she admits that "much more complex is the problem of sexual liberation." (Rowbotham, 1972, 189). In her opinion, the mass of Chinese women are, for the first time in history, in a situation where sex can be separated from reproduction. She credits this achievement to the development of contraceptive facilities in present-day China. Rowbotham also argues that the development of the communes has some what improved the position of women in the family. Communal forms of living and communal
facilities are responsible for this change. Rowbotham yet wants to make it clear that "... although many of the traditional functions of the family were socialised there was no conscious intention of creating a new basis for the family, nor was there an effort to break down the distinction between male and female roles in relation to small children." (Rowbotham, 1972, 192). Rowbotham notes that a very strong puritan streak exists in the Chinese women's movement. The ethic of service, thrift and industry emphasizes abstinence and control. Rowbotham explains this tendency in terms of the limitations imposed by China's poverty and the urgent need for the reconstruction of the country.

Survey of the Chinese scene is followed by Rowbotham's presentation of the development of political consciousness in the colonial world. Some general comments upon the interaction between colonialism and the female oppression are followed by some more detailed comments upon the situation of women in Cuba, Vietnam and Algeria. Once again we will ignore all the historical information she conveys and concentrate upon her comments of a semi-theoretical nature. The first point which Rowbotham makes is that certain similarities exist between the colonisation of the underdeveloped country and female oppression within capitalism. There is the economic dependence, the cultural-takeover, the identification of dignity with resemblance
to the oppressor. Paternalism is common. The second point which she wants to drive at is the emergence of a series of racial and sexual hierarchies in these countries where women emerged at the bottom doing the list responsible lowest paid jobs. The third thing which happens is the combination of the national liberation movement with the demands for social revolution including the demands for the betterment of women's situation.

Rowbotham states that in the 1920s and 1930s an incipient feminism emerged in developing countries which resembled the early "equal rights" feminism of middle-class women in capitalist society. However, the lack of a strong bourgeoisie meant that it rarely became significant. Still Rowbotham acknowledges the role of the national independence movements which have created the impetus for the active involvement of the women outside the small social elite.

Rowbotham's final point is expressive of her marxist bias. She states "Bourgeois nationalism has proved consistently incapable of answering the needs of the poor in the Third World. This is particularly true of the needs of poor Third World women. It is only when national liberation struggles have become revolutionary movements that the real problems of women's liberation have even begun to be considered. (Rowbotham, 1972, 205). We must note that Rowbotham has not provided any evidence or further analysis to explain and justify her statement.
Rowbotham’s concluding observations at the end of Women, Resistance and Revolution

Rowbotham has disclosed the uneasiness which she has felt throughout the book in treating the problem of women’s consciousness in revolutionary, socialist societies. She is very self-conscious about her position as an outsider. So she is always on her guard to avoid an air of patronage in treating the problem of women in those societies. She states that "As a Marxist and as a feminist I cherish the elements in bourgeois humanism which Marx incorporated and transformed in his thinking. I do not want the revolutionary movement to push them aside. But at the same time I am conscious of the difficulty which Western Marxists have in distinguishing between our own cultural heritage of assumed superiority and the importance of insisting that communism is the kingdom of freedom not necessity. Because so far all revolutionary movements have had to settle for something less, because they have to solve such material and fundamental problems and because the experience of the Soviet Union provides no clear alternative, it is often difficult to maintain the tension between solidarity and honesty." (Rowbotham, 1972, 244-245).

Rowbotham is frank enough to note that she has her doubts about the success of these revolutions in emancipating women. She states "I am doubtful of asceticism, I am puzzled about the exact experience of
polygamy, I am confused about the relevance of fashion, clothes and make-up. I don't know what it is like to be a Vietnamese, or Cuban or Algerian. I have many ignorances and much hesitancy, which cannot be cleared just by thinking about them." (Rowbotham, 1972, 245).

Rowbotham is conscious of the fact that the liberation of women has never fully been realised, and that "the revolution within the revolution remains unresolved." She states that "the connection between the feminism, the assertion of the claims of women as a group, and revolutionary socialism is still awkward." Yet it seems that she is clear about one thing that their synthesis cannot merely be intellectual. According to her, it will come out of the ideas "we make practical, dissolving, preserving and exploding" our present conceptions of both - socialism and feminism. (Rowbotham, 1972, 145, 146). She argues that "They are at once incompatible and in real need of one another." She notes the constant temptation in finding a way out by taking a one-sided view of things. But she is clear that it would mean evading the social reality which gives rise to the antagonism.

Rowbotham emphasizes the fact that marxism retains a certain ambiguity about the liberation of women. She also suggests that marxism is proving inadequate in explaining modern capitalism. Rowbotham notes that marxist
critique of capitalism is centred around the process of production. Rowbotham argues that Marxism therefore will have to include further study of the total process of the reproduction of human life as a crucial part of any strategy to be employed against advanced capitalism. In the context of women's emancipation, Rowbotham therefore demands that "Women's liberation implies that if the revolutionary movement is to involve women, not as supporters or attendees only, but as equals, then the scope of production must be seen in a wider sense and cover also the production undertaken by women in the family and the production of self through sexuality." (Rowbotham, 1972, 246).

Rowbotham identifies some difficulties faced by women particularly from advanced capitalist countries in achieving a proper synthesis between feminism and socialism. In the first instance their connection is still seen not in terms of a practical need of a developing revolutionary movement. As she puts it "It is still coming out of the heads of women like me as an idea. It is still predominantly just a notion in the world." The second difficulty is that as no socialist revolution has taken place in the countries of advanced capitalism, women find it difficult to relate the specific problems of women in the advanced capitalist country to the problems of women in socialist countries where revolutions have taken place.
in backward capitalist conditions. And the third difficulty is that in reality many women in women's liberation are not revolutionaries.

Rowbotham ends her analysis with three crucial statements about the character of the emerging interaction between feminism and socialism. (a) An understanding is coming out of women's liberation of the way in which the present organization of the family holds women down, together with the recognition of the need to alter dramatically the system by which work is divided between the sexes. Such a change immediately raises the need to transform the whole cultural conditioning of women and, hence, of men, as well as the upbringing of children, the shape of the places we live in, the legal structure of our society, our sexuality and the very nature of work for the accumulation of private profit rather than for the benefit of human beings in general. (b) In her second statement, Rowbotham has tried to define the basic character of the new feminism. She states that "... the crucial feature of this new feminism as an organizing idea is that these changes will not follow a socialist revolution automatically but will have to be made explicit in a distinct movement now, as a precondition of revolution, not as its aftermath. This is obviously different from the emphases of the orthodox Marxist tradition." (Rowbotham, 1972, 247).
(c) Rowbotham however seems to be certain about one point.
She insists that the only way in which the combination of marxism and feminism will become living is through the movement of working-class women. In conscious resistance to both, alongside black, yellow and brown women struggling against racialism and imperialism. She concludes by saying that only "... when the connection between class, colonial and sexual oppression becomes common place we will understand it, not as an abstract imposed concept, but as something coming out of the experience of particular women." (Rowbotham, 1972, 247).

WOMAN'S CONSCIOUSNESS, MAN'S WORLD

Rowbotham’s next book was published in 1973. As we have already noted in the earlier section of this chapter, it virtually grew out of her first book - Woman, Resistance and Revolution. Her new book pursues the same search for a synthesis for feminism and marxism. She finds the new element in contemporary women's liberation movement crucial in our understanding of the problem. As compared with the older equal rights feminism, Rowbotham argues that this new consciousness among women is a product of a social reality which is peculiar to the kind of life in advanced capitalism.

Rowbotham states that "This (new) book is an attempt to describe the form which this consciousness has taken, and some of the social changes which force its growth." She defines her own position in the following words. She
declares that "In trying to describe what is specific to the female consciousness which has appeared in women's liberation, I am not suggesting that biology is destiny. I do not believe that women or men are determined either by anatomy or economics, though I think both contribute to a definition of what we can be and what we have to struggle to go beyond. An emergent female consciousness is part of the specific sexual and social conjuncture, which it seeks to control and transform. But its very formation serves to change its own material situation." (Rowbotham, 1976, X).

She has divided this book in two parts - In the first two chapters of the part I, she has described the two tendencies which acted as a block, in her opinion upon the emergence of revolutionary feminism. The first tendency operated within the rational equal-rights feminism of the suffragette era. The second tendency operated within the marxist orthodoxy of Stalin's rule. Rowbotham ascribed their failures in terms of their inability "to come to terms with the insights of Freudianism and cultural studies of non-capitalist societies." (Rowbotham, 1976, X). Rowbotham has in passim emphasized in detail the failure of marxism in Britain to operate as a creative and living force in the mid-sixties when new feminism emerged. In the third and a final chapter of this part she tries to examine the way society communicates to the individual
and in particular to the oppressed individual. She finds the development of "a new woman, a new culture, and a new way of living," becomes difficult in the face of a persistent utopianism of both of the right and of the left. As a result, Rowbotham further argues, women are idealised and it makes the task of concrete development of a new culture not only for women but for all the members of society difficult. In short, Rowbotham is searching for a realist and a practical revolutionary path for resolving the problem of women's oppression along with the general oppression prevailing in class societies.

Rowbotham devotes part II of the book to the study of the peculiar nature of female production in advanced capitalism, and about the part that the sexual division of labour and the family play in maintaining commodity production. She insists that "An understanding of the way women reproduce the forces of production and their own lives in capitalism is integral to an understanding of the exploitation of the wage labourer." (Rowbotham, 1976, xiii-xiv). Rowbotham has tried to sketch in Part II what happens to women in capitalism.

Rowbotham's Theoretical Position

As in the case of her first major pamphlet, Women's Liberation and the New Politics, Rowbotham states in clear terms her own theoretical position. She states: "I consider the solution to exploitation and oppression to be
communism, despite the hollow resonance the word has acquired. It seems to me that the cultural and economic liberation of women is inseparable from the creation of a society in which all people no longer have their lives stolen from them, and in which the conditions of their production and reproduction will no longer be distorted or held back by the subordination of sex, race and class." (Rowbotham, 1976, xvi).

In spite of the continuous failure of the orthodox marxist theory to relate to the changing conditions of life in advanced capitalism, Rowbotham is hopeful of a new all round Marxist-feminist movement for two reasons. She in fact has presented *Women's Consciousness, Men's World* to answer five questions in this connection. How can we mobilise the resistance of many different sections of society? How can we bring together in our practice the separations in ourselves which paralyse us? How can we connect to our everyday living the abstract commitment to make a society without exploitation and oppression? What is the relationship between the objective changes in capitalism and our new perceptions of social revolution? What are the ways in which we can organize together without sacrificing our autonomy? (Rowbotham, 1976, xv-xvi).

In part I Rowbotham has provided an autobiographical, emotive and a populist presentation of "the cultural
colonization" of women in advanced capitalism. Since she has followed the line of argument followed by contemporary feminist authors including all the five women writers in our study, we will avoid the restatement of her position and come straight to her conclusion. There is another reason which reinforces our decision. Rowbotham has herself made clear in the third chapter of part I that her argument at this point is based upon her pamphlet *Women's Liberation and the New Politics* which we have dealt with at length in the first half of this chapter. Her realization of how the process of women's colonization takes place leads her to draw the following conclusion. She state: "To recognise that we are the victims of our own masochism is our political beginning. We cannot begin to find our way without the help of other women and ultimately without help from men. We can only break the hold of masochism when we experience the collective self-assertion of a movement for liberation. But we will only realise our own new collectivity by connecting politically with other groups who are oppressed." (Rowbotham, 1976, 42).

Rowbotham's analysis of the structuring of women's consciousness in capitalism

Rowbotham argues that women will have to secure a correct understanding of the role played by them and by the family in a capitalist society to create a self
reliant women's liberation movement. In her opinion in the present day capitalist society men and women are brought up for a different position in the labour force: the man for the world of work, the woman for the family. This difference in the sexual division of role in the society means that the relationship of men as a group is different from that of women. For a man the social relations and values of commodity production predominate and home is a retreat into intimacy. For the woman the public world of work belongs to and is owned by men. She is dependent on what the man earns but responsible for the private sphere, the family. In the family she does a different kind of work for the man. The family now only rarely produces goods for exchange. Instead the woman's production is for immediate use. In short, the social relationships of family mode of production are different from those outside, although they hinge upon commodity production. (Rowbotham, 1976, 61).

Rowbotham now argues that these differences in the way in which production is structured serve to shape the consciousness of men and women. She insists that even in the case of women who go to work, the main responsibility is still the home. Rowbotham notes that the resultant relation of husband and wife appear to be feudal in character. There is an exchange of personal services. The woman essentially serves the man in exchange for care
and protection, though the specific balance between them is personally determined. The social relations within the family mode of production are not directly based on the cash-nexus.

Rowbotham argues that "because the particular division of labour which developed after the industrial revolution divided home from work, and removed the man from the home, leaving women who worked in the factories a double responsibility, the consciousness of women retained elements of the earlier forms of production. And yet, Rowbotham pleads, that the present nuclear family must be considered as a product of capitalism imposing the appropriate process of socialization of women. She states: "Because the family mode of production coexists within the dominant mode in a completely subordinate and dependent relation, the alternative notion of value which comes from is as powerless to counter the dominant ideology of the commodity system as the family is to maintain itself in isolation from the production of commodities for exchange." (Rowbotham, 1976, 65). Rowbotham therefore concludes that the dependence of the family mode of production on the production of commodities means that the family can maintain or restrict the expansion of capital, but it cannot initiate change from itself. Rowbotham therefore comes to the conclusion that "it is only by the transformation of social relations in the
whole society that this subordination can be dissolved." (Rowbotham, 1976, 66).

This conclusion may produce the impression that in spite of all her reservations about the orthodox marxist approach to the woman-problem (as stated in the earlier part of the chapter), her conclusion and remedy do not differ much from the orthodox marxist call for the abolition of the capitalist mode of production as the basic condition of women's liberation. Yet we must note that they arrive at this common conclusion through entirely different routes and that makes the whole difference. We must remember that the whole thrust of Rowbotham's argument is to demonstrate the fact that "Women's liberation has been formed by the conflicting pressure of these antagonisms upon the life and social relations of women. This means we have a unique opportunity of attacking the consequences of capitalist society not only at the point of production, but also at the point of procreation." (Rowbotham, 1976, 66).

We must reiterate her argument to locate the point of her departure from traditional marxist position. In her opinion, "The family is the place where women work. It also determines the amount of labour which can be released for commodity production, and plays a crucial part in forming consciousness. The family is both essential for capital's reproduction, and a brake on its
use of human labour power. The values of the family are both rational for the maintenance of the inhuman relations of commodity production, and irrational for a system of organizing the reproduction of human labour which is completely designed to produce commodities efficiently and has freed itself from all earlier property relations.” (Rowbotham, 1976, 66).

Rowbotham admits that the manifestations of the specific manner in which the dominant relations and values of capitalist society penetrate the supposedly "personal" and domestic areas of human life are still largely unexplored. She argues that three questions are crucial for a correct understanding of this issue. (1) What is the nature of women's production in the family and how is this reproduced in consciousness? (2) How does the demand for women's labour in commodity production and the type of work women do in industry affect the consciousness of women? (3) What are the ways in which capitalism is undermining the traditional contained sphere it has allotted to women since the industrial revolution, and what political consequences do these have?

Rowbotham however does not proceed to answer these questions with logical rigour at all. She simply states that "These are huge questions and what follows is the beginning of an answer." (Rowbotham, 1976, 66). As we will presently argue in the concluding section of this
chapter, this is not an accident. We will note that Rowbotham has steered clear away from all the theoretical knots whose solution may weaken the edge of immediate programme of raising women's socialist consciousness. What she does is to simply describe the following state of affairs governing women's production in the family and in the factory. She states that family operates as a place where female labour power is consumed by the men and capitalism at the cost of women. Her labour power is not given its true value. She cites with approval the conclusions drawn by Margaret Benston on "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation" which appeared in Monthly Review, 1969 which argues that women's work at home outside of trade and market place is not considered a "real work". Once again we should note that Rowbotham has refused to involve herself in what is now known as "the domestic labour debate" triggered by this article. Rowbotham simply states that female domestic work is kept invisible to maintain cultural hegemony of men over women. Like many other socialist feminists she argues that capitalism permits this system of male power and control over women's labour at home as it is convenient for the perpetuation of capitalism itself. Rowbotham further states that domestic labour has a connection to commodity production but once again it is concealed by the present male dominated capitalist culture.
Rowbotham is of course aware of the crucial theoretical problem raised by the domestic labour debate like the nature and character of the domestic mode of production, the problem of women's domestic work with reference to the women's surplus theory of value etc. She in fact states that "At this stage we really only have moral descriptions of long hours; except for the crude recognition of its necessity to commodity production, we have no means of measuring labour time consumed in housework in social terms. The construction of such an analysis is an important part of the task of women's liberation." (Emphasis added, Rowbotham, 1976, 69). We should note once again that Rowbotham however does not even attempt to work out her own answers to the relevant questions. Yet she has taken care to define her general position with respect to this debate. She first notes that "Within the process of class struggle there is a conflict between men and women which necessitates the reorganization of domestic as well as industrial work. Even if the means of production are socially owned and controlled, women remain part of the means of production for the individual man in the family. This has been disregarded by Marxists writing about women because the theory of surplus value, while relating clearly to the dominant capitalist mode of production, is difficult to apply to production within the family which is governed
by quite different conditions and circumstances." Rowbotham argues that "Rather than straining Marx's categories of exploitation and surplus value, worked out to explain commodity production, into the family mode of production and quibbling about the use of oppression and exploitation in this context, we have to analyse women's labour in the home on its own terms and develop new concepts." (Rowbotham, 1976, 69).

Rowbotham has provided a kind of a rationale for the position which she has adopted about the problem of domestic labour. She states that "Ultimately the only way of establishing an alternative value of female human beings is to shatter the system of capitalist production at home as well as at work. Only when the notion of human value can become general in a society without exploitation can both the relationship between men and women and the relationship of human beings to nature cease to be relations determined by the needs of commodity production". (Rowbotham, 1976, 70). Rowbotham's implicit assumption is that the notion of measuring the value of human beings by the money rate of human labour is a product of capitalist production and will disappear with the introduction of socialism.

Rowbotham's further description of housework as invisible, repetitive, demeaning, sterile and obsessive is a common feature of all feminist writings and so we
will not repeat it. She is aware that the "psychological bondage" which "the myth of house work" generates and remains even after its economic rationale has dissolved. But she does not fully work out the implications of this position.

Rowbotham's Analysis of Women's Role in Commodity Production

Rowbotham has given some attention to the problem created by women's participation in industrial work for the women's liberation movement. She notes that the demands for more and better opportunities for women to work in the commodity system have been an important part of feminist programmes. She is also correct when she states that Marxists have generally supported women's induction in industrial labour and a basic condition for creating a proper class consciousness and class solidarity among women. Rowbotham is however of the opinion that simply working in commodity production is not going to free women. Because it is still determined by the essential production women are responsible for the family. Rowbotham notes that the needs of advanced capitalism force it to induct more and more woman-power as an integral and essential part of commodity production. Yet the notion of woman's work as an extension of women's role in the family serves to conceal the fact that much of women's work in industry is hard, dirty, unskilled and lowpaid. The myth of housewife enables employers to exploit
paternalistic forms of control over women workers and extract more labour power from them at cheap cost. Thus women are looked upon as reservoirs of labour power and nothing more. Thus the expansion of women's opportunities at work has not been a matter of linear progress but has come with changes in a structure of capitalist production. Rowbotham emphasizes the need for the demands for equal pay. Yet we must note her distinct position in this matter. She wants women to secure equal pay for women not only to deny the capitalist exploitation of them but also as a measure to improve self-image of themselves in the presence of male workers. But once again Rowbotham wants women not merely to catch up with the present privileges of men defined by capitalist system of production. She states that women cannot of course afford the misconceived purity which does not go for immediate gains. But she insists that what women basically need is the development of notions of what an alternative society would be like. She argues that "The contradictory encounter between the public sphere of labour and industry and the private family production of self and of goods and services for immediate use have made a new female consciousness possible." (Rowbotham, 1976, 102).

After exploring the changing character of sexuality under conditions of advanced capitalism Rowbotham concludes that the maintenance of the separation of male and female
conditioning has assumed a new acuteness. This is partly because the existing sexual division of labour is still necessary to capitalist production, but also because of the deep and long-established nature of female-subordination, and the hold it has over both men's and women's notions of their very identities, any challenge touches on deep and intensely personal areas of consciousness. In other words, sexual love has assumed significance in containing many aspects of social relations incompatible with the work-discipline of commodity production. The increasing frankness about the right to sexual pleasure is seen by the capitalists as a threat to commodity production. Rowbotham is aware "That the cult of free sex" contains many distortions and much mystique and illusion. Yet she wants to note the far reaching implications of this shift in consciousness for the future of mankind. She argues that "The social expression of this release and the shape it assumed in consciousness will depend on the activity of revolutionary human beings in history." (Rowbotham, 1976, 114). Rowbotham further argues that it is not necessarily beyond capitalism to integrate even this consciousness. So she wants women to remain more alert in safeguarding and expanding this new consciousness about the sex.

Rowbotham’s concluding observations

Rowbotham’s lucid but popular survey of woman’s
consciousness in the men's world leads her to draw the following conclusions. According to her the predicament of being born a woman in capitalism is specific. Women are not the same as other oppressed groups. Unlike the working class, who have no need for the capitalists, under socialism, the liberation of women does not mean that men will be eliminated. Rowbotham insists that sex and class are not the same. The oppression of women differs too from class because it has not come out of capitalism and imperialism. The sexual division of labour and the possession of women by men predates capitalism. But Rowbotham argues that patriarchy is contradicted by the dominant mode of production because in capitalism the owner of the capital owns and controls the labour power but not the persons of his labourers. She argues that although capitalism temporarily strengthened the control over women by the middle and the upper class men in the 19th century by removing them from production, it has tended to whittle away at the economic and ideological basis of patriarchy. The integration of women - even married women - testifies to the tendency for capital to seek new reserves of labour. The accompanying rise of a nuclear family and the development of the contraceptive technology have forced an examination of the relationships of men to woman and parent to child. Rowbotham concludes that the result in terms of the women's consciousness at
work is only now beginning to be felt, but in future it
will certainly produce revolutionary changes.

Rowbotham wants to make it clear that as a short term
measure capitalism is ever ready to use the traditional
prop of patriarchy to maintain the subordination of women
as a group. Capitalism finds male domination over female
convenient in terms of the resultant low wage bill and
the resultant emergence of family as a place for mindless
consumption. Rowbotham points out that the advanced
capitalist societies therefore find themselves in a
peculiar situation. Capitalism has eroded the forms of
production and the property ownership which were the basis
of patriarchy. But it has still retained the domination
of men over women in society. The domination continues
to pervade economic, legal, social, and sexual life.

Rowbotham states that it is impossible now to predict
whether capitalism could accommodate itself to the complete
elimination of all earlier forms of property and production
and specifically to the abolition of patriarchy. But it
is certain that the kind of accommodation it could make
would provide no real solution for women. A feminist
movement therefore, in Rowbotham's opinion, which is
confined to the specific oppression of women cannot, in
isolation, and exploitation and imperialism. So Rowbotham
insists that women must go beyond particular reforms and
join hands with other revolutionary forces.
Rowbotham notes that the traditional Leninist Socialism has realized the futility of the attempts to secure revolution through the proletariat who holds position of power at the point of production. It is in search of groups whose consciousness of social dimensions of oppression makes them crucial in a revolutionary movement. Rowbotham argues that women constitute precisely such a group. Because of women's unique social situation women are forced to find means of going beyond their specific oppression. To be brief, Rowbotham is arguing for the alliance of the working class and the women. She realizes that the problem of how to safeguard women's autonomy while making a strategy of organizing women is a persistent dilemma in a women's movement. She says there are no short cuts. Rowbotham concludes her book with the observation that "the political process of making an effective movement for the liberation of women - which means a movement in which working-class are in the majority - is an essential part of this task." (Rowbotham, 1976, 126).

**BEYOND THE FRAGMENTS**

_Feminism and the Making of Socialism_

Rowbotham's second book, _Women's Consciousness, Man's World_, was swallowed by the publication of an important pamphlet with the title _Beyond The Fragments_ in 1979. It provoked wide-ranging discussion of issues that were
lurking beneath the surface of the New Left politics in England. The issues at stake had a vital bearing on the make-up and future of various left organizations. The pamphlet was devoted to number of issues which the author thought were crucial to the task of making of socialism. It examined the relationship of the women's movement to the male-dominated left. It suggested the ways in which the traditional left had organized for socialism and what was meant by socialism. More importantly, it tried to encompass and make sense of the breadth of experience and struggles that had been part of the anti-capitalist movement throughout the 1960s. Fundamentally, it challenged the contemporary validity of Leninist politics and form of organization. The argument was based on the belief that the demands and insights of the women's movement were vital to any present or future socialist movement. It searched for ways and means of creating the kind of mass socialist consciousness that is deemed to be an essential part of any socialist movement. It was based on the belief that any genuine, new form of socialist organization will grow from and must be based on actual political experiences.

In a way, the pamphlet is as much devoted to - perhaps even more - the organizational problems of the left politics as to the women question. Yet we will present a very concise summary of the argument as it makes rather novel and bold claim of studying relations of power anew based
on the new consciousness generated among women by the contemporary women's movement. In fact, the collective which produced this book states: "If the left is to achieve the change in consciousness and the growth in self-organization which is a condition for resolving the problem of power, then there is much that socialists can learn from the women's movement's values and ways of organizing." (Rowbotham et al., 1981, 2). This interesting theoretical claim certainly demands some attention. Rowbotham recognizes the need for the autonomous women's movement. Yet she insists that unless women's demands are integrated with the need for other oppressed groups it is unlikely that women's demands will ever get the support necessary to take on the powerful vested interest they are up against.

As Hilary Wainwright points out "The method by which Sheila Rowbotham theorizes the problems of socialist organization is very different from that which has dominated discussions within and between left groups; though it is not hostile to these discussions. Her argument draws on a variety of past experiences of creating socialist organizations - including but not restricted to the Leninist tradition. It draws critically from the classical theorists of social organizations. But her central contribution is to theorize and give political credence to many of the organizational principles and
insights of what most political organizations would treat as a 'sectoral' movement, of significance only within that 'sector'. (Rowbotham et al., 1981, 6). In other words, while the women's movement is focussed on a specific oppression namely the oppression of women as a sex also has a wider significance for the way socialists are organized.

Rowbotham admits that **Women: Resistance and Revolution**, in asserting existing involvement in women in revolutionary movements tends to dismiss the various currents within feminism both in the 19th and 20th centuries. So while it challenges women's position in socialism, it does not raise the relationship of socialist organizations and the feminist movement. She adds that because it was written just as the women's liberation movement was emerging in Britain (1969-71), it inclines towards seeing the particular understandings of the new feminist movement as a synthesis with answers that evaded movements in the past. But now she insists that ten years after it is possible to have a perspective in the modern movement which enables us to see our weaknesses as well as our gains. (Rowbotham et al. 1981, 151). Now she is very positive in recognizing the unique understanding which was achieved by the women's movement. She feels bold enough to state that "No 'vanguard' organization (like a Leninist or a Trotskyist party) can truly anticipate these
understandings. For example, no such organization had any real understanding of the subjectivity of oppression, of the connections between personal relations and public political organization, or of the emotional components of consciousness, until the women's movement had brought these issues to the surface and made them part of political thought and action. (Rowbotham et al., 1981, 7). The principle thrust of Rowbotham's argument is that the women's movement arose to resist an oppression which comes from inequalities of power and from a hierarchical division of labour. It experienced how oppression is built in interpersonal relations. It has therefore been intensely sensitive and self-conscious about inequality and hierarchy in the creating of its' organisation forms. In this process the women's movement has made important insights which are directly relevant to how socialists organize themselves. Thus "... the women's movement has radically extended the scope of politics and, with this, has changed who is involved in politics and how." (Emphasis added, Rowbotham et al., 1981, 13). Much of the oppression of women takes place in 'private', in areas of life considered 'personal'. The causes of that oppression are social and economic. When the women's movement made these issues concerned with everyday life a part of socialist parties, it began to breakdown the barriers which have kept so many people, specially women,
out of politics. It meant a different way of organizing, which does not restrict political activity to 'the professional'. To sum up, the insights of the women's movement then do not simply concern the issue of 'sexism' in a socialist organization. They could contribute in general ways to creating a more democratic, more truly popular and more effective socialist movement than was possible before. (Rowbotham et al., 1981, 13-14).

Gist of the argument

_Beyond the Fragments_ states that feminist movement has realised the need for form of politics which enables people to experience different relationships. The implications of this go beyond sex - gender relationships, to all relationships of inequality, including those between socialists. In her opinion, the notion of organization in which a transforming vision of what is possible develops out of the process of organizing questions some of the most deeply held tenets of Leninism. The Leninist parties have always resisted such a notion of politics. Instead of adopting a 'pre-Leninist or anti-Leninist' stance, Rowbotham presumably developed a clear 'post Leninist' revolutionary tradition. She wants to develop a new form of socialist organization - based on feelings of love, creativity, imagination and wisdom instead of dogma and heartless hierarchy. Drawing her inspiration from the successes achieved by the consciousness-raising
experiments made by the women's movement, Rowbotham wants a socialist movement to locate relationships in which all the concerned participants will learn to express our power and struggle against domination in all its forms and to find a way to meet person to person so that an inward as well as an external inequality will be realised. Practice and not 'theory' is to be put in authority. (Rowbotham et al. 1981, 145-149). Thus the implications and experience of challenging sex gender relationships has led Rowbotham to develop a critique of power relations within radical organizations and movements. The slogan 'the personal is political' has been important in the women's movement. Its appearance indicates how shifts in the relationships of gender have affected the terms in which notions of individual identity can be seen in modern capitalism. Socialists must learn from this process. The idea of a consciousness-raising group is that you can be vulnerable, and open without being destroyed because you are protected by the group.

Feminists have called this system sisterhood. Rowbotham argues that it carries a more intimate and effective notion of democracy than the usual practice of the Leninist organization. Since the women’s movement has probed the relationship of power which exists between the sexes, it has helped to extend the socialist concept of how power is passed on and held in a crucial area of everyday life.
Rowbotham's entire argument is based upon a certain understanding of the twin processes of consciousness and culture. In her opinion, presenting and tackling consciousness in the compartments of political, economic, cultural, social and personal; makes it impossible to see how the different forms of oppression feed and sustain one another. She insists that feminism has shown how consciousness spills over these boundaries. It must be noted that Rowbotham wants to be very modest in making this claim. She makes it clear that the contemporary women's movement is not an alternate theory of organization or a model of organization to Leninist/socialist movement but merely enriching it's practice from the experience of consciousness-raising. As she puts it "The feminist approach to consciousness perceives it's growth as many-faceted and contradictory. The model of the vanguard does not fit into this way of thinking." (Rowbotham et.al., 1981, 109).

After a brief review of Leninist theory about developing the class political consciousness of the workers Rowbotham has drawn two conclusions. She has acknowledged her theoretical debt to E.P. Thompson. In the Leninist organization one experiences a simple opposition between the theoretical knowledge which is the monopoly of the party and an undeveloped instinct for rebellion among workers. Secondly, the Leninist organization is suspicious about feelings based on day to day experience of life.
Now Rowbotham argues that adoption of consciousness-raising strategies followed by the women's movement will dislodge the superior relationship of the party to various radical autonomous movements and thus the monolithic concept of the party. Rowbotham quotes with approval Bob Cant's statement that "They (socialists) have failed to understand that sexual politics is not just sexual practice but is also intermeshed with questions of power, ideology and culture." (Rowbotham et al., 1981, 101).

Rowbotham states that "The problem is that this sets up as significant two poles of struggle, production (economic) and reproduction (biological) which become the keys to workers' and women's emancipation. This misses out the ways in which these are inseparable from political, legal, cultural and ideological forms of struggle. It creates again a primacy of particular spheres of activity and it assumes that workers are all men and that men have no relationship to reproduction. It makes it possible to see the inadequacies of a simple base - superstructure model. But it is difficult within the terms of this polarized connection of workers' control and feminism to present a different view of how we come to consciousness."
(Rowbotham, et al., 1981, 94). Rowbotham admits that the socialists have no clear alternative of how to combine the advantages of autonomous movements with the strengths
of a more general combination. It requires the conscious creation of cultural forms and a personal vision of politics. Rowbotham concludes that the women's movement has precisely developed such a form of participatory democracy in the form of sisterhood. In her opinion, the contemporary women's movement has proved the superior ability of a democratic organization based on solidarity, creativity and love to resist an unjust and inhuman society.

Rowbotham's position developed over several books and articles may be summed up in the following words. Rowbotham is principally concerned with the problem of relating the women's liberation movement with the revolutionary socialist movement. She wants to identify and, if possible, answer some of the issues which arise in this context. These questions are the question of how theory is conceived, how the political organization sees its relationship to other movements, how consciousness is assumed to change, how the scope of politics is defined, how individual socialists see themselves, and their relationship to other people, now and in the past.

With reference to this set of questions Rowbotham has concentrated her attention only on the question of women's consciousness. Rowbotham is crystal clear on one point. She refuses to treat women only in terms of biology. She notes the need to recognise the implications of biological
distinctness of women. But she refuses to "become involved in an illusory hunt for our lost 'nature'." She therefore does not conceive of women's new consciousness as a matter of biological people, women, scoring over biological people, men. She recognises that feminism is a movement to assert the interest of women as a sex. But consistent with her general position, Rowbotham considers feminism and the new feminist consciousness "as a means of releasing and communicating the understandings" which women subordination holds in check. She makes it clear that "This does not mean that sex-gender relationship can either be dissolved into economic changes in how things are produced or seen as a function of biological difference. ... We are not arguing then either for a biologically universal kind of relationship or for one which is totally contingent on change in the mode of production."

Rowbotham argues that the problem for feminists like her and men affected by feminism is that none of the various left traditions which have been critical of Leninism are concerned specifically with the significance of sex-gender relationship. So they have not worked through the implications of the need to transform these for a theory of organising the revolution. On the other hand, the slogan "the personal is political" has been important in the women's movement. Rowbotham argues that its appearance indicates how shifts in the relationships of gender have
affected the terms in which notions of individual identity can be seen in modern capitalism. These are the shifts which socialists, according to Rowbotham, need to explore more fully. Rowbotham is however convinced on one point. She insists that "the positive potential of the sexual politics which has radicalised men as well as women lies in developing an understanding of how our personal experience of gender is bound up with the politics of class and racial struggles and indeed in our very assumptions of what it means to be a socialist. The inspiration for this understanding was feminism. But such an integration cannot obviously be the work of the women's movement alone."

**Evaluation of Rowbotham's Work by Feminist Scholars**

Various scholars of contemporary feminism have commented upon Rowbotham's work. Balbus notes the moderate tone of Rowbotham's analysis of the role played by patriarchy in serving the capitalist mode of production. As compared with other Marxist-feminist writers like Mitchell and Gardiner, Balbus argues, Rowbotham does not adopt an extreme position and just maintains that although the socialization of domestic labour is not inconceivable, the economic and social cost would mean a capitalism which was fundamentally different from any system known now and would probably be extremely destructive to its own construction. (Balbus, 1982, 72). Zillah Eisenstein
points out that power is dealt with in a dichotomous way by socialist women and radical feminists. It is seen as deriving from either one's economic class position or one's sex. But Eisenstein notes that Rowbotham makes clear that both the social relations of production and reproduction need to be dealt within any revolutionary theory. (Eisenstein, 1979, 6 and 36). Eisenstein has made a specific mention of Rowbotham's usage of the socialist-feminist variant of historical materialism in the study of history. She points out that Rowbotham in common with some other socialist-feminists defines historical materialism in terms of the relations of production in connection with the relations that arise from women's sexuality - relations of reproduction. Rowbotham's approach stands out in contrast to the general approaches of both Marxists in terms of class and radical feminists in terms of sex obfuscate the reality of power relations in women's lives. (Eisenstein, 1979, 25-26 and 39). Jean Gardiner, a feminist writer who has contributed much to the debate about the political economy of housework has taken into consideration Rowbotham's understanding of the problem as revealed in her Woman's Consciousness, Man's World though Rowbotham herself makes no claim of offering any theoretical formulation of the problem. This is another instance of the fact that Rowbotham seems to offer straightforward historical
accounts of the women-problem. And yet, perhaps for the very reason, produces insights which others have to take into consideration. (Eisenstein, 1979, 173 and 189).

Hamilton considers her work as "The most thorough attempt at synthesizing Marxism and Feminism." Yet, Hamilton also states that Rowbotham does not expand her insight that Marxism and feminism cohabit in the same space somewhat uneasily being at once in compatible and in real need of each other. Hamilton also points out that Rowbotham gives full weight to the viability of patriarchy but does not attempt to develop any theoretical base for it. In Hamilton's opinion, Rowbotham endows capitalism with an almost technological rationality. Hamilton also notes that Rowbotham makes a nod in the direction of biological differences but it is cursory and speculative in character. "Rowbotham's framework does not, at this point, provide her with the right questions or concepts, certainly she borrows little, if at all, from radical feminism. At the theoretical level, the synthesis becomes reductionism. It has proceeded out of the need of marxist-feminists for synthesis; it could more properly be called the absorption of feminism by marxism." (Hamilton, 1978, 90-91). Oakley endorses Rowbotham's observations about the potential dangers involved in the programme of consciousness-raising undertaken by the women's movement. Oakley agrees with
Rowbotham that consciousness raising must not be treated as therapy but as a revolutionary theory. (Oakley, 1981, 310).

O'Brien states that "The strengths of Rowbotham's work are the recovery of female revolutionary history, which rejects the notion that women are and always have been politically unconscious; her awareness of the problems of the transformation of consciousness; her insistence on the social significance of reproduction; and her understanding of the particular form of gendered oppression which emerges from capitalist property relations. The weakness of her work is theoretical. She is critical of the shortcomings of Marxism, but never develops a theory of history or consciousness by which the task of working out 'the precise relationship between the patriarchal dominance of men over women, and the property relations which come from this', might be comprehended. Perhaps the initial step is neglected: the comprehension of the relationship of men and women in its original historical development. Rowbotham appears to despair of such an enterprise, ... (Rowbotham) calls for theoretical reconsideration of both the process and relationships of production and reproduction, but, as noted, does not herself offer a dialectical analysis of such relationships. Historically her work is invaluable, just as, anthropologically, Evelyn Reed's work, ..., is provocative.
and importantly informative. What is lacking in both writers is a theoretical model which might both comprehend a feminist commitment to Marxism and, at the same time, provide the material basis for the contention that productive and reproductive functions cannot be simply collapsed into the ditch of a problematically dialectical 'substructure'." (O'Brien, 1983, 76-77).

In our opinion, Rowbotham's modesty in staking any claim to theoretical originality and her simple narrative historical account of the woman-problem have proved to be the source of strength of her presentations. As we have already noted in the introductory part of this chapter, her work has emerged as a reference point for the feminist theory in the future.