CHAPTER THREE

A GENDER CRITIQUE OF THEORY
Case for Revisiting Women’s Organisation

In this chapter we highlight the androcentric projections of conventional social science theorists. Beginning with those considered as ‘founding fathers’ to more recent theorists, the chapter offers a feminist critique of mainstream, ‘male-stream’ theory. It makes a case for a feminist theory of organisation which acknowledges women’s work, accepts non-hierarchical methods of organising and points in the direction of equity.

3.1. Feminist Encounter with Theories of ‘Founding Fathers’

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), in his books The Social Contract and Emile first published in 1762, argued that, in the polity, no ‘man’ should surrender his freedom (Rousseau 1968). He opined that the government should be based on a social contract in which citizens under law are as free as in the state of nature. However, within the household, he held, the man must rule and the woman must submit to this rule. Rousseau also maintained that women must be trained from the beginning to ‘serve’ and to ‘submit’ to men. Since the essence of being fully human was for Rousseau being free from submission to the will of another, women were to be denied the essential condition for being fully human. Rousseau felt that if women were accorded equality with men in the household (which was the only domain open to them), it would bring about the dissolution of society. These are just a few illustrations of the androcentric thinking of Rousseau who is upheld as one of the founding fathers of conventional social science theory. Philosophers have defined their activity in terms of the pursuit of reason. However, with the ‘maleness’ of reason there is more at stake than the simple fact that past philosophers believed there to be flaws in the female character. Many believed women to be less rational than men.

Philosophers of the past have predominantly been male and mostly been churchmen, men of letters or university professors (Lloyd 1999). The philosopher
Auguste Comte, born in 1798 in the South of France, published his work titled *The Course of Positive Philosophy* in 1830, which established Sociology, the science of society. Comte argued that it was necessary to create a ‘positive science’ based on the model of other sciences. All phenomena are subject to natural laws, and it was the task of the sociologist to use observation to uncover the laws governing the social universe. His work greatly influenced John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer and even Emile Durkheim. Durkheim believed that social science should provide guidance for specific kinds of social intervention and made clear distinctions between ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ social phenomenon. His work *The Division of Labour in Society* has come under a lot of attack from feminist sociologists (Gould 2000).

Anthony Giddens’ critique of structural approaches such as that of Durkheim within sociology (1984) has contributed to the recognition that social structures do not exist in some abstract sense, but are drawn upon by human agents in their social activities. Giddens’ critique ran parallel in many ways to that of Michel Foucault. Foucault (1984) argued that power should not be seen as the product of a stratifying system, which is located in the macro-structures of society. Rather, power should be seen in ‘relational’ terms, as a set of discourses and strategies operating in particular contexts. Power is not a ‘single, all-encompassing strategy’ (ibid.: 103) but works through specific institutions. Neither Giddens nor Foucault explicitly drew out the implications of their arguments for feminism. However, subsequent feminist work has been based on these ideas and has also examined how gender inequalities relate to other inequalities such as those based capitalism and racial inequalities, for example.

Max Weber is considered one of the greatest classical sociologists and of particular importance is his work produced in the early 1900s (Turner et al. 1995) on social stratification. Although Weber discussed how the structure of inequality in modern societies is interrelated with the nature of domination, he referred only to the distribution of power within different classes, across different status and political parties. Women were ignored in his work. Feminist work within sociology developed within, and as a critique of stratification theory (Craib 1984). Stratification theory was primarily preoccupied with analyzing social divisions in terms of class, but did so through an analysis of inequality as part of a wider stratification system. This stratification system
was seen as based in a macro-level social structure, such as capitalism, or in the structural-functional approach, the social system. Stratification tended to be seen as anchored in wide-ranging social structures, such as between wage labour and capital, or in the system of norms and values. Feminists were critical of the gender blindness of this work.

In the traditional psychoanalytic view of Sigmund Freud, when a girl perceives her lack of a penis, she instantly desires one and subsequently defines herself and her mother as lacking, inadequate, castrated. A boy, however, instantly knows having a penis is better and fears loss of his own (Freud 1924). According to Nancy Chodorow (1999), one’s ‘core gender identity’ or, in other words, a cognitive sense of gendered self is established in the first two years along with the development of the broader sense of self. Later evaluations of the desirability of one’s gender and of activities and modes of behaviour associated with it, or of one’s own sense of adequacy at fulfilling gender role expectations are built upon this fundamental gender identity. Most people develop an unambiguous core gender identity, which is a sense that they are either male or female. Chodorow goes on to illustrate how ‘our own sense of differentiation, of separateness from others, as well as our psychological and cultural experiences and interpretation of gender or sexual difference, are created through psychological, social and cultural processes, and through relational experiences’ (ibid.: 38).

Carol Gilligan (1993) in her discussion of Jean Piaget’s work opines that girls were of interest insofar as they were similar to boys and confirmed the generality of Piaget’s findings. The differences noted, which included a greater tolerance, a greater tendency toward innovation in solving conflicts, a greater willingness to make exceptions to rules, and a lesser concern with legal elaboration, were not seen as germane to ‘the psychology of rules’, and therefore were regarded as insignificant for the study of children’s moral judgment. Further, Gilligan argues that most research in the past, whose assumptions have shaped psychological thinking, have been based on an all-male sample as the basis of generalizations that have been applied to both males and females.

The German born philosopher, economist and sociologist Karl Marx, as we have already discussed in Chapter 2, held production, to be the basic necessity for survival. But in a capitalist society, the forces of production namely technology, raw materials and
scientific knowledge are owned by a minority elite group and they in turn influence the state bureaucracy which invariably represents the interests of that elite class. Because of this, Marxian theory saw state bureaucracy as a repressive means of control of the poorer masses, and therefore advocated that it be overtaken and replaced by a new truly democratic institution. Marx believed that to resolve the inherent problems of capitalism, eventually a communist or socialist society would develop where the forces of production would be collectively owned and the wealth or the fruits of the labour would be collectively shared.

Feminism’s relationship with Marxism has often been referred to as the ‘unhappy marriage’ (Benhabib and Cornell 1987: 1), as feminist theory has had in Marx both a strong ally and a serious opponent. Marxist feminists drew from Marxism, to formulate theories to explain the subordination and exploitation of women in capitalist societies, though they did recognize that Marx’s category of ‘production’ took no account of many of the traditional activities of women. In response, some have argued that it is necessary to augment the meaning of ‘production’ to include work that might be otherwise categorized as ‘reproduction’. While Marx, more than most economic theorists, was aware of the interconnection between family, state and economy, his theories were, gender neutral. In discussing ‘labour power’, Marx’s references were to male workers. He adopted, in fact, a naturalistic approach to women’s unpaid domestic work. According to Linda Nicholson (1987),

feminists can employ much of the historical work of Marx and many Marxists in comprehending the separation of family, state and economy as a historical and not natural phenomenon, and in comprehending the interaction of these spheres even in the context of their separation. On the other hand, Marx’s philosophical anthropology, by continuing and indeed reinforcing our modern assumptions of the autonomy of the economy, raises serious obstacles for Marxisms understanding of gender (ibid.: 17).

The subordination of women preceded capitalism and Marx was unable to adequately explain why women continued to be excluded from the public sphere and why they were the main unpaid workers in the private/domestic sphere. Marxist feminists however, opine that capitalism ensures that no change takes place to women’s unpaid work as this unpaid work, caring for the labour force and raising the next generation of workers benefits capitalism.
Central to Jurgen Habermas’s social-theoretical framework is the distinction between the symbolic and the material reproduction of societies. Habermas talks of ‘social labour’ for the material reproduction of society and socialization of the young, the cementing of group solidarity and the transmission and extension of cultural traditions for the symbolic reproduction of society (Benhabib and Cornell 1987). According to Habermas, in capitalist societies, the activities and practices which make up the sphere of paid work count as material reproduction activities since, in his view, they are, ‘social labour’ and serve the function of material reproduction. On the other hand, the activities and practices, which in our society are performed without pay by women in the domestic sphere count as symbolic reproduction activities. This example illustrates how housework or the household was not considered a site of labour. Today feminists argue that domestic labour is unremunerated, undervalued and unrecognized as labour. Theories as mentioned above, do not make visible the fact that in the paid workplace, as in households women are assigned to distinctively service oriented and sexualized occupations. They also ignore the fact that in both spheres women are subordinated to men. Even with regard to Habermas’s theories on social and system integrated action contexts, feminists have shown via empirical analyses of contemporary familial decision-making, handling of finances and wife-battering that families are thoroughly permeated with… the media of money and power. They are sites of egocentric, strategic and instrumental calculation as well as sites of usually exploitative exchanges of services, labour, cash and sex, not to mention sites frequently of coercion and violence (Benhabib and Cornell 1987: 37).

Habermas, by contrasting the modern family with the capitalist economy, ‘blocks the possibility of analyzing families as economic systems’ (ibid.: 37) and is therefore gender blind in his conceptualization.

### 3.2. The Feminist Dialogue with Androcentric Theory

There exists a vast body of literature today on the androcentric nature of conventional social science theory, particularly since the 1960s, which, as we have discussed in Chapter 1, in the section on *Waves of Feminist Thought*, marks the beginning of the Third Wave or phase of feminism. This explosion of feminist scholarship in
various disciplines has re-examined and revisited the production of knowledge in those
disciplines. The focus in the Third Wave of the Women’s Movement has included
revolutionary changes in education and curriculum, apart from challenging discrimination
in the public sphere particularly unequal remuneration, and arguing for equal privileges
for the same work as well as attempts to stop domestic violence and rape. Sara Delamont
(2003: 3) shows how feminist theorists in this phase of the Women’s Movement
challenge ‘the epistemological basis, the methods, and the content, of ‘mainstream’ or
‘malestream’ knowledge’ (ibid.: 3). Attention has shifted from equity issues to that of
women’s absence as knowledge producers and decision makers and there has been an
increase in work towards remedying this situation. Feminist research on housework,
working from home, the link between productive and reproductive spheres, the sexuality
of organisations, the gendered nature of ‘skill’ and so on are just some examples of the
contribution to the recent rethinking of the workplace (Tancred 1995). Feminists now
question the extent to which the historical under-representation of women as scholars has
skewed the choice of research problems and biased the design of research and, therefore,
also the interpretation of results.

According to Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, ‘after an initial phase of
“deconstructing” the Western intellectual tradition, in which feminist theorists uncovered
the gender blindness as well as the gender biases of this heritage, the task of feminist
theoretical “reconstruction” began’ (1987: 1). According to Liz Stanley and Sue Wise
(1983), theory and practice within social sciences generally omits or distorts the
experience of women. Pamela Abbott and Claire Wallace (1990: 2) present a critique of
what they refer to as ‘malestream sociology’ and opine that the ‘feminist challenge to
malestream sociology is one that requires rethinking of the content and methodology of
the whole enterprise, one that recognizes the need to see society from the position of
women as well as from the standpoint of men’. The same authors critique sociology on
the grounds that it is

1. mainly concerned with research on men;
2. all-male samples are generalized to the whole of the population;
3. issues of concern to women are often overlooked or seen as unimportant;
4. women when included, are often presented in a distorted and sexist way and,
5. sex and gender are seldom seen as important explanatory variables.
Recognition of the importance of using women’s experiences as resources for social analysis obviously has implications for the social structures of education, laboratories, journals, learned societies, funding agencies – indeed, for social life in general. And it needs to be stressed that it is women who should be expected to be able to reveal for the first time what women’s experiences are. Women should have equal say in the design and administration of the institutions where knowledge is produced and distributed for reasons of social justice: it is not fair to exclude women from gaining the benefits of participating in these enterprises that men get. But they should also share in these projects because only partial and distorted understandings of ourselves and the world around us can be produced in a culture which systematically silences and devalues the voices of women (Harding 1987: 7).

Ann Oakley (1974) talks of the male focus of sociology and the reduction of women to a ‘side issue’. She says that this could be explained by the very origins of sociology, which had its base in sexist interests and personalities of its ‘founding fathers’. Then, she argues, like Pamela Abbott and Claire Wallace (1990), that sociology is predominantly a ‘male profession’ and that it either ignores women’s presence in social reality or presents women in distorted or sexist ways. Work of feminist sociologists, such as Oakley (1974), Joan Acker (1973) and others have opened up new areas for research and inquiry. Issues like housework, caring, money, domestic violence, food, drink and cooking, childbirth, emotional ‘work’, leisure and control of time have become focus areas of feminist research. Dale Spender (1978: 4) argues that the feminist perspective should be concerned with developing new criteria for what accounts as ‘knowledge’, rather than knowledge about females being ‘tagged on to’ existing sexist knowledge. In Chapter 1 we have already discussed the work of feminists such as Betty Friedan (1963), Acker (1973) and Walby (1986) and the development of the feminist slogan ‘the personal is the political’.

Dorothy Smith (1987), a feminist sociologist, makes a noteworthy contribution to carving out a standpoint for women in relation to the discipline of sociology. She talks of a distinctive feminist epistemology and discourse based on women’s experience and engagement with the social world within patriarchal structures. She opines that the emergence of sociology, like other academic disciplines, was part of a general historical move to transform actualities into abstracted conceptual forms. This, she says, was a
gendered process, as women were pushed outside the relations of ruling. She, however, outlines the importance of women’s role in the existence of the realities on which these concepts are based.

If men are to participate fully in the abstract, conceptual mode of action, they must be liberated from having to attend to their needs in the concrete and particular. Organising the society in an abstracted conceptual order, mediated symbolically, must be articulated to the concrete and local actualities in which it is necessarily and ineluctably located…The place of women, then, in relation to this mode of action is where the work is done to facilitate men’s occupation of the conceptual mode of action … At almost every point women mediate for men the relation between the conceptual mode of action and the actual concrete forms in which it is and must be realized, and the actual material conditions upon which it depends (ibid.: 83).

3.3. How Biases about Women’s Work Fuel Androcentric Positions

The definition of ‘work’ has often been limited to paid work and has mainly been with reference to the productive sector, ignoring therefore women’s dominant work experience. We find in statistics, such as the census, an exclusion of the labouring activity of a significant proportion of the population, namely, women. Take for example, data on the sex-wise composition of the work-force, classification of workers and the work-participation rate such as that collected by the Census of India. The data obviously does not take into account the considerable amount of unpaid labour that is undertaken by women. Besides, women’s work in the domestic sphere, and in the voluntary sector, are completely excluded from all definitions of ‘work’.

Feminist writings during the second wave have discussed the nature of housework (Oakley 1974; Luxton 1980), and the market related work that takes place within the home, the ‘informal economy’ (Cohen 1988). Marjorie Cohen, disagrees with the commonly made argument that industrialization has brought a separation between home and work place and argues that economic growth has brought women’s productive efforts increasingly into the market sphere (ibid.: 10). According to Harold Benenson (1991), however, the whole nature of the productive sphere is based on the assumption that someone else is looking after the reproductive sphere and this is reflected in what is termed as ‘family wage’. The ‘domestic labour debate’ of Wally Seccombe (1974)
highlighted that while domestic labour is not productive in the strict Marxist sense of the word, it ‘… contributes directly to the creation of the commodity labour power while having no direct relation with capital’ (ibid.: 9). Miriam Glucksmann’s ‘total social labour’ is a ‘unified and internally coherent analytical framework capable of examining women’s position both in social production and in private reproduction, in paid employment and in the household’ (1990: 17).

Feminists’ opine that it is these gender biases that get perpetuated in society through lived experience and get sanctioned through theory which has been formed through these experiences. Feminists have, therefore, stressed the urgency to critique existing theories and change practices that are discriminatory to women.

3.4. A Gender Critique of Organisation Theory

Just as women have been left out of most mainstream literature on ‘work’, they have been left out of mainstream organisation theory. While ‘organisation theory’ has its beginnings in the 1800s, a gendered analysis of organisation, whether it is looking at the role women play in organisations or at how women organise or a feminist analyses organisation theory, is of very recent origin. It can be traced back not more than four decades. Yet in these few years there is a considerable body of knowledge that has been generated which is largely neglected in mainstream organisation theory. Classical theories of Bureaucracy and Scientific Management have been gender blind and so also has even the Human Relations School. However, as contingency theory explains, knowledge based industries, like the modern Information Technology industry, have made more organic systems or less structured systems of organising a necessity. In light of this, it would be significant to study the contribution of organisation such as ‘women’s activist groups’ that have been functioning with a firm commitment to egalitarian methods and non-hierarchy as part of their ideology against patriarchy and similar symbols of power.

‘Gender and gender relations have long been deemed to be absent or relatively unimportant within the study of organisation’ (Hearn et al. 1989: 1). Until the 1980s there was little or no dialogue between organisational studies and feminist research. According to Anne Witz and Mike Savage (1992: 4),
This was partly due to the different research cultures of the two disciplines - the former a well funded and resourced subject largely staffed by male academics servicing male managers and geared to thinking about specific organisational problems; the latter a critical, anti-establishment discipline which appeals specifically to women and helps expose the embedded nature of patriarchal relations throughout the entire social fabric.

Today, however, the two theoretical schools have increasingly begun to engage in dialogue and there is a growing body of literature that argues that organisational processes are central to the understanding of gender relations, and at the same time that organisations are gendered (Kanter 1977; Ferguson 1984; Hearn et al. 1989; Brown 1992; Iannello 1992; Mills and Tancred 1992).

Kathy Ferguson (1984: 5) says that for an adequate critique of bureaucracy one needs to consider a feminist perspective. According to her, understanding patterns of dominance and subordination that exist between men and women will help in comprehending the subtleties of power and control within bureaucracies. Ferguson’s argument is that a feminist project lays the ground for an alternative to the bureaucratic discourse which is influenced by women-centered ways of organising activity.

Organisations are the immediate context within which most wage labour takes place. Because of this, household labour has been neglected in most studies of the ‘workplace’. Feminist literature argues that the public and private are interdependent (Kanter 1977; Margolis 1979). They have pointed out that the firm impacts on the household sector both directly, in terms of employment and wages, and indirectly, in terms of promotions and culture, decisions about child bearing, competing obligations, changing definitions of family roles, etc.

Almost all the earlier theories on organisations assumed hierarchical structures and bureaucracy to be a necessity. R.M. Kanter (1977) argues that there is no intrinsic reason why women need to be subordinated even within bureaucratic structures, and Ferguson (1984) argues that bureaucratic structures are inherently patriarchal. Feminists hold the view that, without understanding the gendered nature of organisational rules, it is impossible to fully grasp the operation of the firm and the consequences for women and men within it. It is now more widely being accepted that organisations can only be understood by considering both their implicit, informal ordering, as well as their formal procedures. According to Ferguson (1984: 208-09), ‘To challenge bureaucracy in the
name of the values and goals of feminist discourse is to undermine the chain of command, equalize the participants, subvert the monopoly of information and secrecy of decision making, and essentially seek to democratize the organisation’. Today we have enough evidence from several organisations, particularly knowledge-based organisations like those related to Information Technology, that they are moving towards less hierarchical and structured organisation models. Women’s organisations, particularly activist organisations, eco-feminist groups, etc. function with a clear opposition to hierarchy and formal structure. Some of these groups started as consciousness-raising groups. They often function as collectives where the structure, if at all, is one of a web and not a hierarchy where the leading is from the centre and not the top. Decisions are by consensus instead of vote and the human values associated with reproductive labour are consciously maintained.

The traditional view of organisations is based on the fundamental premise that most workers in the public sphere are male. As we have seen in the theories that have been discussed in the earlier pages, traditional approaches to organisational theory are gender blind. These interpretations on how organisations operate are, therefore, flawed. Even those theories that place ‘the individual’ at the centre of their analysis such as the Human Relations School or the Interactionist model of organisation have excluded gender from their discussions. Even the micro-studies that have been conducted over the years and that have contributed to organisational theory have not been concerned with the female labour force. What is required is a gender analysis of organisations, which will include both men and women and place gender at the centre of the explanatory framework.

Albert Mills and Peta Tancred (1992) have pointed out that organisational theory right till the mid 1970s was almost exclusively dominated by ‘male-stream’ approaches and ways of viewing organisational reality. ‘Taylorism’, for example, they say, looked at the human as a ‘genderless machine’; in the Human Relations School also, the worker has no gender and a ‘paternalistic’ concern is shown towards the worker. Organisational psychologists too did not ascribe a specific gender to the worker. However, the same authors discuss the radical approaches which made their way in the mid 1970s into organisation theory such as the ‘radical humanist’ school which basically focused on
exposing the ‘ideologically dominating character’ of organisation, as being at variance with the alternative ‘liberating’ ways of life and the ‘radical structuralist’ school which focused on systems and structures. This school sought to expose capitalist organisations as ‘systems of oppression’ within the broad framework of domination. However, although the focus was on domination and oppression it was very much in the same ‘male-oriented’ approach and not from a gendered perspective.

These alternative approaches did, however, inspire a lot of feminist work in the late 1970s and after. The focus was earlier women’s segregation within the workplace. This occupational approach viewed women’s participation in the paid labour force as being reflective of the broad societal divisions of labour. Thus, the concern was the nature of women’s paid labour, its resemblance to domestic labour, the extent to which this was biologically or culturally determined, the benefits for capitalism with this division of labour etc. Feminists later were concerned with a broader meaning of ‘women’s work’ (both paid and unpaid) and its relationship with the social structure. According to Roslyn L. Feldberg and Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1979: 527), ‘For men, it is assumed that economic activities provide the basis for social relationships within the family and in society generally. For women, it is assumed that family care-taking activities determine social relationships’.

Until Joan Acker’s work in 1974, not much had been written on organisational analysis from a feminist perspective and her work exposed the sexist nature of organisations and also of organisational analysis, including the design, methods and results of organisational studies (Mills and Tancred 1992). The subsequent contributions made by R.M. Kanter (1975a, 1975b, 1975c, 1977) and Janet Wolff (1977) have enhanced our understanding of the relationship between gender and organisation. Kanter (1977) for example, has raised vital questions about the impact of organisational structure on opportunities for women and their sense of self. Kanter focused on the structural causes of inequity within organisations and argued that numbers, power and ‘opportunity structure’ contributed to the way that women (and men) come to view their worth within the organisation. A concentration of women in the lowest clerical or manual grades coupled with an absence of women in management positions sends a definite and negative message about the relative worth of females within the organisation. Besides
this there is often a disparity in power. While there are a few women in managerial positions, most often these women have less discretion and decision-making powers than men in similar positions.

Janet Wolff (1977: 7), on the other hand, focused on ‘extra-organisational influences’ and states that ‘organisation theory cannot account for the differential treatment and experience of the sexes unless its traditional assumptions about the existence, rationale and functioning of organisations are crucially reassessed’. She stressed that women’s position in any organisation is inseparable from women’s position in society and that the very question of women’s role and position in organisations can only be answered by a macro-sociology which situates the organisation in the society which defines its existence, goals and values (ibid.: 20). Some feminists have pointed out that some organisations have served to reproduce female subordination and have acted to deliberately prevent women from working in specific areas of the labour market. Women in the white-collared labour market were primarily engaged in routine clerical or secretarial work or in positions subordinate to men. Anne Witz and Mike Savage (1992) point out that, when a hierarchy developed between mechanical and intellectual work, large numbers of women were recruited in factories doing mechanical work.

3.5. The Case for Non-Hierarchical Organisation Theory

Formal organisational structures are often assumed to be efficient and effective and believed to function with co-ordinated and controlled activity. Organisation theory, whether it pertains to profit-oriented or human service organisations, tends to focus chiefly on how formal, hierarchical structures are adopted in the efficient or effective running of organisations. Very little information is available on how organisational goals can be achieved through more egalitarian processes, where control and accountability are the powers and duties of every individual and not just the authority of a few. The basis of this assumption about formal structures lies in the belief that a rational theory can be applied to explain all situations, goals, policies, means and also the ends by which to achieve organisational goals. This, however, overlooks important aspects such as the complexities of human behaviour. Theorists on social movements too have argued that,
without organized leadership, struggles remain ‘primitive’ and result in the disintegration of the movement (Hobsbawn 1959).

There are also studies, however, that have proved that often formal organisations ceremonially conform to institutionalized rules, conflicting therefore with efficiency and efficacy (Meyer et al. 1992, 1997). In hierarchical organisations, the structure has clearly defined patterns of authority, rules and procedures, a clear division of labour and a centralized decision-making body. This formalized process of communication and functioning often causes human needs to be ignored, thus resulting in a negative impact on employee involvement, satisfaction, motivation and overall performance. In non-hierarchical organisations, the structure is fused with the organisational processes. Communication styles and patterns, decision-making, involvement, availability of information, acceptance of decisions, co-ordination of activities, inter-group relations, conflict, co-operation, etc., are joint responsibilities of the members of the group and attention is given to human needs, skills and capabilities in maximizing productivity.

The biggest management challenge is managing the performance of a diverse workforce. Persons in power are often under threat from those who are being dominated upon, and there are examples from liberation struggles, trade unions, worker uprisings and revolts against authoritarianism to support this fact. Organisation development, human resource development, personnel management, etc., are fairly recent methods that are being incorporated by hierarchical organisations to combat this problem. Strategies are being adopted to increase individual motivation, commitment, development and fulfillment, to increase productivity and to better the achievement of organisation goals. Even organisation culture is given importance, as its role in overall performance has been acknowledged. However, in actual practice, most human resource management activities are chiefly oriented towards remedying an existing problem rather than anticipating, and therefore, planning for the prevention of problems (Bernardin et al. 1993). The idea of participatory or collaborative management was sown long ago (Argyris 1957, McGregor 1960, Likert 1961), but the presumption about formal organisations being more efficient, and therefore, successful, is pervasive.
3.6 Issues of Power and Non-Hierarchical Organising

Power has been a complex and challenging question for feminists. By this, we do not imply that feminists have not theorized power but have distinguished between feminist or legitimate power that is for the benefit of women and coercive or oppressive power. Feminist have not only been engaged with naming the different kinds of power (Kanter 1977; Ferguson 1996) but have also been questioning the kind of power that produces conditions of oppression, discrimination and exclusion of women. Within the women’s movement, feminists have strived for power that is egalitarian, peaceful and inclusive. Feminist power is ability, energy and strength arrived at from tapping women’s potential and through channeling collective resources for women’s empowerment. In short, it implies, enabling people to do what they could otherwise not do. There is a clear distinction here between this enabling power and coercive power which really implies making people do what they would not do by using oppressive force. As Kanter (1977) has pointed out, power as domination supports and is supported by hierarchy the result of which is that power remains vested in a few persons at the top of that hierarchy. Others are limited by this in their ability to act or be effective affecting therefore the whole system of effectiveness. With feminist interpretation of power people can maximize their potential: ‘ … empowering more people through generating more autonomy, more participation in decisions, and more access to resources increases the total capacity for effective action rather than increasing domination. The powerful are the ones who have access to tools for action’ (Kanter 1977: 260). The term that is used today to distinguish feminist power from coercive kinds of power is ‘empowerment’. Empowerment is associated with the notion of self-control while power is associated with the notion of control over the other. It might be because of this that in the organisations we have seen that have focused on empowerment members monitor themselves more than in hierarchical organisations which have a formal administrative set up to monitor employees. It must be mentioned, however, that often during the life of the collective there have been instances when the line between the ‘legitimate’ use of power for women’s benefit and the oppressive use of power have been blurred. However, it is the consciousness of this that forces the collective to constantly negotiate these realities to
work out the best solution given the circumstances and empowerment and equality are always held as primary factors in making this decision for a solution.

Often influenced by the leftist ideology, most social activist groups and women’s organisations, particularly feminist organisations, function collectively, with a firm commitment to egalitarian values. Characteristic also of such groups or organisations is an articulated opposition to hierarchy and other symbols of domination. Although activist groups and social movements are often founded on the principle of collective functioning, these experiences are rarely documented and made available to encourage and facilitate its replication. In the case study that we present we try to record some of the processes and attempts to analyse these methods of organisation so that they may have a wider application.

Literature on the women’s movement in India discusses the evolution of the movement, the different ideologies, issues of concern and so on. However, a critique of the organisation methods and information on how the movement, consisting of various women’s groups function as collectives and how their objectives are achieved through this non-hierarchical method of organisation is absent from the discourse. Collectivist or non-hierarchical organisational structure has been viewed as the trademark of feminist organisation. Women’s organisations have been the chief practitioners of the ‘participatory democratic’ mode of social movement organisation and have been influential in spreading this form of organisation to other movements.

3.7. When ‘People’ are the Focus of the Organisation

People need to interact co-operatively with at least one small group, as there is an inherent desire to feel accepted, and informal interactions that take place in work groups significantly affect feelings of satisfaction and competence (French et al., 1989). Group effectiveness is said to be maximized when group members assist each other with effective leadership and co-operative behaviour, as no single leader can perform as well as manage all functions, in all circumstances and at all times. Free communication within the group is said to enhance job satisfaction and personal growth. The key words are interpersonal trust, support and co-operation.
According to Douglas McGregor (1960), an effective, well-functioning group has the following features:

1. the atmosphere tends to be relaxed, comfortable and informal,
2. the group’s task is well understood and accepted by the members,
3. the members listen well to each other; there is a lot of task-relevant discussion in which most members participate,
4. people express both their feelings and ideas,
5. conflict and disagreement are present but are centred round ideas and methods and not personalities and people,
6. the group is self-conscious about its own operation,
7. decisions are usually based on consensus, not majority vote, and
8. when actions are decided upon, clear assignments are made and accepted by the members.

These features would well describe the non-hierarchical, collective organising adopted by feminist organisations.

Organisations are complex networks. Therefore, all organisation methods, formal or informal, may prove to be problematic at certain times and in certain situations. We wish to focus on the informal, non-hierarchical methods of organisation, particularly those methods adopted by women’s organisations. We will focus only on the advantages of this method of organising.

3.8. Feminist Contribution to Critical Theory Summarized

To sum up, the major contributions made by feminist theory to the development of what today is referred to as Critical Theory in the social sciences: Firstly, the crucial focus is on gender as opposed to sex, and the reiteration of the social construction of gender. A clear distinction is made between biological or genetic features which differentiate males from females, and the socially constructed differences in character traits and role expectations for men and women. Although previously the experiences of women and of gender have been relegated to the margins of social theory as demonstrated above, today, gender issues have come to animate and shape contemporary discussion amongst social scientists. Although earlier political and legal theory asserted
the importance of equality, equality of humans historically identified ‘humans’ with ‘men’. Feminist theory has attempted to undo this universality so that it is not consciously or unconsciously biased towards women. Feminist theory has analyzed gender in its socio-cultural and psychological aspects and considers some of the specific ways in which women have been subordinated and oppressed (Bartky 1999; Frye 1999). It has facilitated a reflection on the varying historical forms of masculinity and their relation to male domination as well as female sexual identity in the context of oppression. It has also encouraged the examination of concrete manifestations of gender discrimination by focusing on the family in its historical changing forms in class societies, on the relations between racism and sexism and on the problems of gender in non-Western cultures (Collins 1999; Narayan 1999; Williams 1999). Feminist theory has greatly influenced most disciplines and has led to a revision of all the social science theories in gender-sensitive ways.

The feminist ethic aims at eliminating sexism and sexist bias in conceptualization and it opposes all that advances the logic of domination. The feminist ethic sees discourse and practice as emerging from the voices of people located in different historical circumstances. Giving, therefore, place to women’s voice, with emphasis on the diversity of women’s voice. It also acknowledges that theory is in process and will change over time. It does not claim to be ‘value free’ or ‘objective’, but assumes that it is better to be biased in favour of the oppressed than to exclude those voices. It draws into focus values typically unnoticed, underplayed or misrepresented such as values of caring, love and friendship. And, lastly, it rejects any gender-neutral descriptions of ‘humans’, which mask male bias.