

Women Empowerment Issues and Reflections

**Edited by
Ranjana Sarkar (Ghosh)
Radha Ghosh**

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"Evolution of Women Empowerment in India" : Sociological Perspective

**Suranjita Sur &
Anuradha Banerjee (Dasgupta)**

The concept of "*empowerment*" traces its history in the mid-17th century with the legalistic meaning "*to invest with authority*". Thereafter, this concept was modernized to mean "*to enable or permit*". Empowerment refers both to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence, and to recognise and eventually to use their resources and chances. Women's empowerment is a new phrase in the vocabulary of gender literature. The phrase is used in two broad senses i.e. general¹ and specific². According to the country report of the government of India - "*empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power. It would promote women's inherent strength and positive self-image*".³ The concept of women's empowerment implicitly assumes that in all societies, men control women—or, to be more precise, men control at least some of the women of their social class, particularly those in their households and families. In this view, women are a "*class*" in the (two- class) gender stratification system, a system that is governed by shared norms and values, i.e., it has a cultural as well as relational and material component (Smith 1989). This view of women's empowerment is part of a sociological conception which recognizes that individuals belong to and are strongly influenced by social collectivities that are integrated by common ideological or normative systems. After 1980's, the novel concept of measuring economic development through "*human development*" focusing on "*political empowerment*" linkage with feminist discourse went a long way in shaping the idea of "*women's empowerment*".