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STUDY OF EMPOWERMENT STATUS AND THE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES OF WOMEN NGOS

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ABSTRACT

NGOs in India, especially women NGOs, are expected to play a very significant role in the process of women empowerment. The present study is undertaken with a view to analysing and interpreting the role of leadership qualities of the women leaders in this empowerment process, as perceived by their activists. This report presents the results of the research undertaken in four women NGOs, with their prior permission, which have been in the field for more than eighteen years and each one of them is engaged in, on an average, ten different projects with a view to servicing the society in general and empowering women activists in particular. The study is in two parts: the study of the status of empowerment of the activists in women NGOs; and, the study of the leadership qualities of women leaders in these NGOs, with the Objective to identify a set of common leadership qualities that enhances the empowerment of their activists. This report discusses the leadership qualities that have emerged as a common set, evident in each of these NGOs, which boosts the status of empowerment of their activists.

KEYWORDS

Leadership qualities, women activists, women empowerment, and women NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

The word "empower", although a contemporary buzzword, is not new, having arisen in the mid-17th century with the legalistic meaning "to invest with authority". Shortly thereafter, it began to be used in a more general way to mean "to enable" or "to permit". Both of these uses survive today. Its modern use originated in the civil rights movement, which sought political empowerment for its followers. The word was then taken up by the women's movement, and its appeal has remained intact.

The *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of the English Language* defines the word "empower" as to give power or authority to act. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines "empower" as to give someone more control over their own life or situation. Women's empowerment has been conceptualised differently by different writers. However, for all of them, the goal of the empowerment process is to address issues relating to women's subordination, inequality, and inequity.

Empowerment as conceptualised by Moser, Kabeer, Batliwala, and Rowlands can broadly be categorised as coming from the individual end of the continuum. Here, empowerment is located within the notions of "power-within", "power-with", and "power-to", which conceptualise power in variable-sum terms. From this perspective, the total amount of power in society is seen as variable and residing with members of society as a whole. Based on this concept, empowerment can be achieved within the existing social order without any significant negative effect upon the power of the powerful.

Empowerment entails having: one, economic and social rights and, two, political and civil rights. However, to be able to exercise these rights, one must possess certain capabilities. These human capabilities that enable one to use both the rights and live empowered life can be two-fold. At the first level, come the capabilities that enrich one's life, such as, being able to live full and healthy life, being able to move about unhindered, being free from sexual harassment and domestic violence, etc. At the second, come those capabilities that enhance the standard of one's family and social life; for example, having right to property, having equality at work place without any discrimination, and being able to participate in politics freely.

Empowerment can be defined as "a process of capability building leading to greater participation, effective decision-making, and control, resulting in transformative action. This involves ability to get what one wants and to influence others on one's concerns."

Women's empowerment covers their lives at multiple levels, family, community, market, and the state. Importantly, it involves, at the psychological level, their ability to assert themselves. The most common definition of empowerment in relation to women can be "the ability to exercise full control over one's actions in all the spheres of activity". Hence, it could be stated that the empowerment of women simply means their becoming creative and self-dependant individuals.

Empowerment process begins when women of their own accord start confronting the ways in which they are subordinated and when they start assisting groups and individuals to realise that they have a legitimate role to play in decisions affecting their lives. This will lead to acquiring personal empowerment for them, contributing to increased "power-to" and "power-with". Empowerment is not something that can be done by outsiders to people, implying that such power cannot be "bestowed upon", but, has to be self-generated. As individuals alone cannot effect such societal structural changes, collective solidarity strengthened through vertical and horizontal networks and movements is rendered as an important means. It emphasises the importance of women and their groups empowering themselves to make their own choices, speak out for themselves, and control their own lives. In this process, women and their groups become "agents" and "participants" rather than remaining mere "clients" and "recipients". Women's own aspirations and strategies, thus, occupy the central position.

NGOs play an important role in bridging the gap between the Government, its agencies, and the society. In a vast country like India, this role of the NGOs acquires even greater significance. The World Bank defines NGOs as "Private organisations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development". In wider usage, the term NGO can be applied to any non-profit organisation, which is independent from Government. NGOs are typically value-based organisations, which depend, in whole or in part, on donations and voluntary services. In this study, the term women NGO means "a non-profit making organisation that is independent of Government, founded by women for women, where all policy decisions are taken only by women". Women activists, as far as this study is concerned, mean "all such women as are involved in the regular, day-to-day functioning of the women NGO they belong to".

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The reviews at both the national and international levels reveal that all the UN member countries, including India, have conceptually committed themselves to bringing about equality between men and women by empowering women, which is apparent in their policies, plans, and programmes. It is also accepted that the active participation of the NGOs is extremely essential to translate this into reality. The National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) corroborates exactly this. It is felt that the period between 2001 and 2011 is sufficiently long to ascertain whether or not the NGOs in Maharashtra have played any significant role in this journey towards women's empowerment. If yes, how? This study was undertaken with a view to understanding the role played by the leadership qualities of the leaders in the women NGOs, in the process of the empowerment of their women activists.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study has initially focused on qualitative research to conceptualise the issues involved in the process of empowerment of women and the functioning of women NGOs. The exploration of the secondary data and the qualitative study undertaken through focus group interview technique produced a few hypotheses, which were later tested through survey method under quantitative research. To conduct the study, the primary data were collected through structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were prepared specifically for the study. Two questionnaires were designed to collect information about the empowerment status of women and leadership qualities of the leaders in the NGOs under the study. To evaluate the opinions and views of the women activists about the empowerment status of themselves and their non-NGO women counterparts, a dual response, three-choice questionnaire comprising 16 statements on various criteria of empowerment was administered. Each statement was to get any one of the three answers, namely, always, sometimes, or never. 157 women activists in four NGOs were contacted personally for collecting the data. The questionnaire, tested for alpha reliability, revealed coefficient 0.77. The second questionnaire was designed to collect the information about the leadership qualities. It comprised 15 different leadership qualities, grouped in three categories, namely, behavioural, attitudinal, and visionary. The respondents were to identify five of the total 15 qualities and were to rank them as 1 to 5 in order of significance. A total 270 activists of the four NGOs were surveyed by collecting the responses personally. To conduct the data analysis, the test of significance of difference between the means of two large samples, and the chi-square test were applied for testing the hypotheses. Qualitative judgments were used to interpret data collected through focus group interviews. Simultaneously, available published text books, related journals, reports, web pages, magazines and research works were consulted.

FIGURE 1: EMPOWERMENT SURVEY

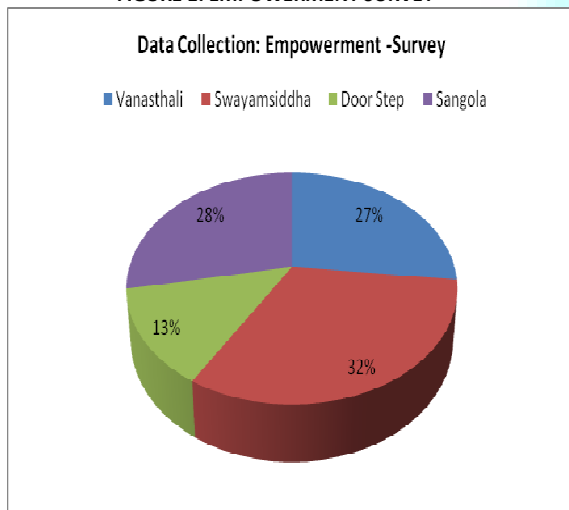
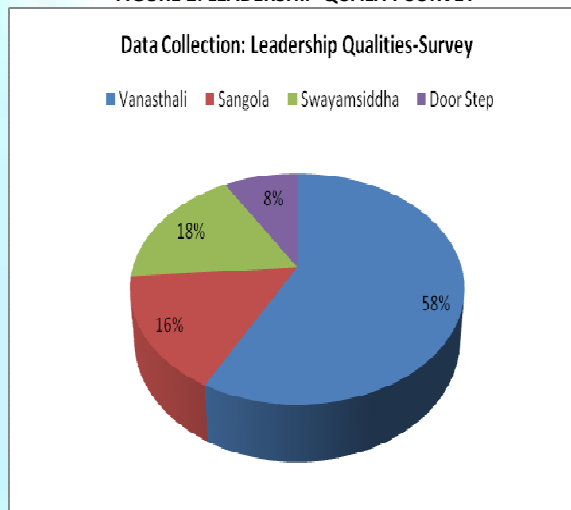


FIGURE 2: LEADERSHIP-QUALITY SURVEY



HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Considering the objectives stated above, the following two hypotheses and corresponding seven sub-hypotheses were developed.

HYPOTHESES

STATUS OF EMPOWERMENT AS PERCEIVED BY THE WOMEN ACTIVISTS OF NGOS

H₀: The activists in women NGOs find themselves as empowered as their non-NGO women counterparts in the society

TABLE 1: 4 SUB-HYPOTHESES UNDER HYPOTHESIS 1

<p>H1: The individual empowerment of Women, both activists of the NGOs and non-activists, is the same (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 14).</p> <p>01: They travel alone, if required. 02: They express opinions in groups. 03: They do the assigned task independently. 05: They identify the sources of getting required information. 07: They find some time for self every week. 14: They participate in community meetings, and gatherings.</p>	<p>H3: The social empowerment of Women, both activists of the NGOs and non-activists, is the same (4, 6, 9, 12, 13, and 15).</p> <p>04: They get the task done. 06: They read and write to gain and give knowledge. 09: The community consults them while resolving social issues. 12: The community invites their views and opinions on social problems. 13: They participate in collective efforts to solve the social issues. 15: They have adequate awareness of social issues.</p>
<p>H2: The family-related empowerment of Women, both activists of the NGOs and non-activists, is the same (8, 10, and 11).</p> <p>08: They take part in decision making at home 10: They participate in decisions about children’s career. 11: The family members seek their views and opinions while taking decisions at home.</p>	<p>H4: The overall empowerment of Women, both activists of the NGOs and non-activists, is the same (16).</p> <p>16: They possess proper and adequate knowledge of the responsibilities at home and outside.</p>

QUALITIES OF THE LEADERS, RECOGNISED AND RECOLLECTED, BY THE WOMEN ACTIVISTS OF NGOS UNDER THE STUDY, ARE THE SAME

H₀: There is a common set of leadership qualities which is necessary for the empowerment of women activists in women NGOs

TABLE 2: 3 SUB-HYPOTHESES UNDER HYPOTHESIS 2

<p>H1: The behavioural qualities, recognised and recollected by the women activists of NGOs, under the study, are the same (1, 5, 6, 8, and 10).</p> <p>01: Persuasive and effective oratory 05: Indefatigable nature 06: The skill to motivate others to work 08: Impressive and Disciplined personality 10: Secular nature</p>	<p>H2: The attitudinal qualities, recognised and recollected by the women activists of NGOs, under the study, are the same (2, 3, 4, 14, and 15).</p> <p>02: Firm and decisive nature 03: Willingness to take risk 04: Willingness to understand and to solve the problems of others 14: Urge to find a way not taken 15: The nature of understanding the views and opinions of associates</p>	<p>H3: The visionary qualities, recognised and recollected by the women activists of NGOs, under the study, are the same (7, 9, 11, 12, and 13).</p> <p>07: Excellent awareness of social issues 09: Strong dedication 11: Urge of women empowerment 12: Urge of rural and educational development 13: Urge of development of activists along with the institution</p>
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RESULTS OF HYPOTHESES ANALYSED

STATUS OF EMPOWERMENT AS PERCEIVED BY THE WOMEN ACTIVISTS OF NGOS

H₀: The activists in women NGOs find themselves as empowered as their non-NGO women counterparts in the society.

The hypothesis was tested on the basis of four sub-hypotheses developed by focusing on the main hypothesis above. The mean-difference test and the X² test results (Table 1) show that at 1% level of significance, the hypothesis is rejected when the calculated values of Z and X² are greater than the table values; and, it is accepted, when the calculated values are smaller than the table values for the relevant degrees of freedom.

It was found that there was a significant difference in the mean empowerment scores of women activists of NGOs and those of their non-NGO women counterparts in the society; and, when the different criteria of empowerment were considered, the NGO activists found themselves significantly more empowered than their non-NGO women counterparts in the society. A detailed analysis of this is given below.

FIGURE 3: EMPOWERMENT STATUS

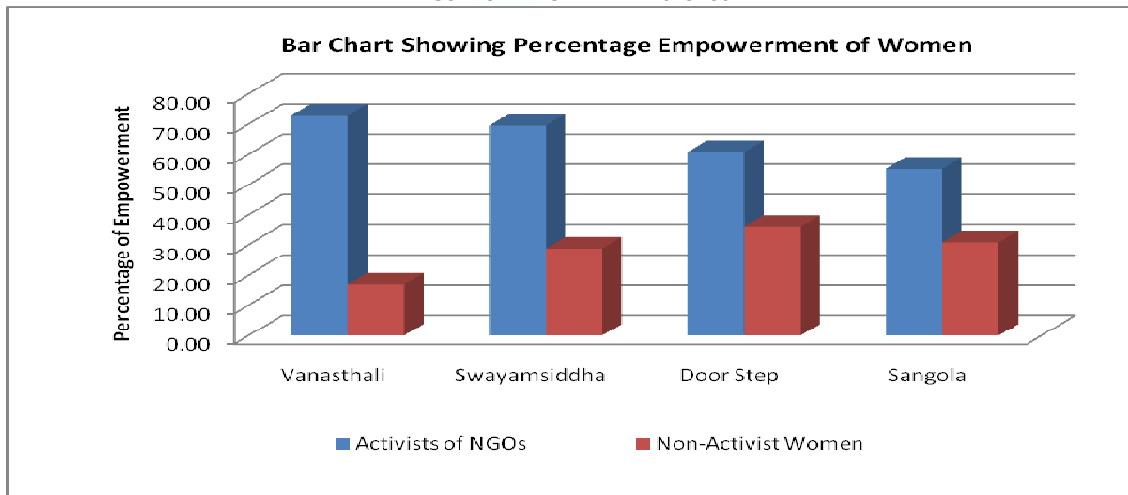


TABLE 3: FINDINGS AND RESULTS OF THE TESTS OF SIGNIFICANCE FOR 4 SUB-HYPOTHESES UNDER HYPOTHESIS 1

	S. E. (X ₁ -X ₂)	Calculated Value of Z	Table Value of Z @ 5% level of Significance	Hypothesis
H1: The individual empowerment of Women, both activists of the NGOs and non-activists, is the same (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 14)				
Mean Empowerment Score is the same	00.21	(-).39.60	1.96	Rejected
		$df=(C-1)(R-1)$ $= (C-1)(R-1)$ $= (4-1)(2-1)$	Table Value of X ² @ 5% level of Significance	Hypotheses
01: They travel alone, if required.	08.55	3	07.82	Rejected
02: They express opinions in groups.	09.36	3	07.82	Rejected
03: They do the assigned task independently.	08.81	3	07.82	Rejected
05: They identify the sources of getting required information.	16.66	3	07.82	Rejected
07: They find some time for self every week.	32.33	3	07.82	Rejected
14: They participate in community meetings, and gatherings.	29.24	3	07.82	Rejected
H2: The family-related empowerment of Women, both activists of the NGOs and non-activists, is the same (8, 10, 11)				
08: They take part in decision making at home	16.15	3	07.82	Rejected
10: They participate in decisions about children's career.	05.95	3	07.82	Accepted
11: The family members seek their views and opinions while taking decisions at home.	06.26	3	07.82	Accepted
H3: The social empowerment of Women, both activists of the NGOs and non-activists, is the same (4, 6, 9, 12, 13, and 15)				
04: They get the task done.	26.76	3	07.82	Rejected
06: They read and write to gain and give knowledge.	10.08	3	07.82	Rejected
09: The community consults them while resolving social issues.	14.69	3	07.82	Rejected
12: The community invites their views and opinions on social problems.	17.33	3	07.82	Rejected
13: They participate in collective efforts to solve the social issues.	11.61	3	07.82	Rejected
15: They have adequate awareness of social issues.	17.26	3	07.82	Rejected
H4: The overall empowerment of Women, both activists of the NGOs and non-activists, is the same (16).				
16: They possess proper and adequate knowledge of the responsibilities at home and outside.	06.21	3	07.82	Accepted

TABLE 4: INFERENCES OF THE TESTS OF SIGNIFICANCE FOR 4 SUB-HYPOTHESES UNDER HYPOTHESIS 1

It was found that the mean empowerment of Women activists of the NGOs and that of their non-NGO women counterparts in society differed significantly. The mean individual empowerment score of the women activists of the NGOs under the study was found to be higher than that of their non-NGO women counterparts in society. However, as far as the knowledge possession for fulfilling the responsibilities at home and outside was concerned, the respondent activists felt that the non-NGO women were on a par with them.

Empowerment criteria, about which the respondents felt that their own empowerment status is higher than that of non-NGO women	
Criteria of individual empowerment	
01	They travel alone, if required.
02	They express opinions in groups.
03	They do the assigned task independently.
05	They identify the sources of getting required information.
14	They participate in community meetings, and gatherings.
Criteria of family-related empowerment	
08	They take part in decision making at home
Criteria of social empowerment	
12	The community invites their views and opinions on social problems.
13	They participate in collective efforts to solve the social issues.
15	They have adequate awareness of social issues.
Empowerment criteria, about which the respondents felt that their own empowerment status is equivalent to that of non-NGO women	
Criteria of individual empowerment	
07	They find some time for self every week.
Criteria of family-related empowerment	
10	They participate in decisions about children's career.
11	The family members seek their views and opinions while taking decisions at home.
Criteria of social empowerment	
09	The community consults them while resolving social issues.

Qualities of the leaders, recognised and recollected, by the women activists of NGOs under the study:

H₀: There is a common set of leadership qualities, which is found to be the basis for the empowerment of women activists in women NGOs

TABLE 5: RESULTS ("CHI SQUARE" TEST OF SIGNIFICANCE) FOR 3 SUB-HYPOTHESES UNDER HYPOTHESIS 2

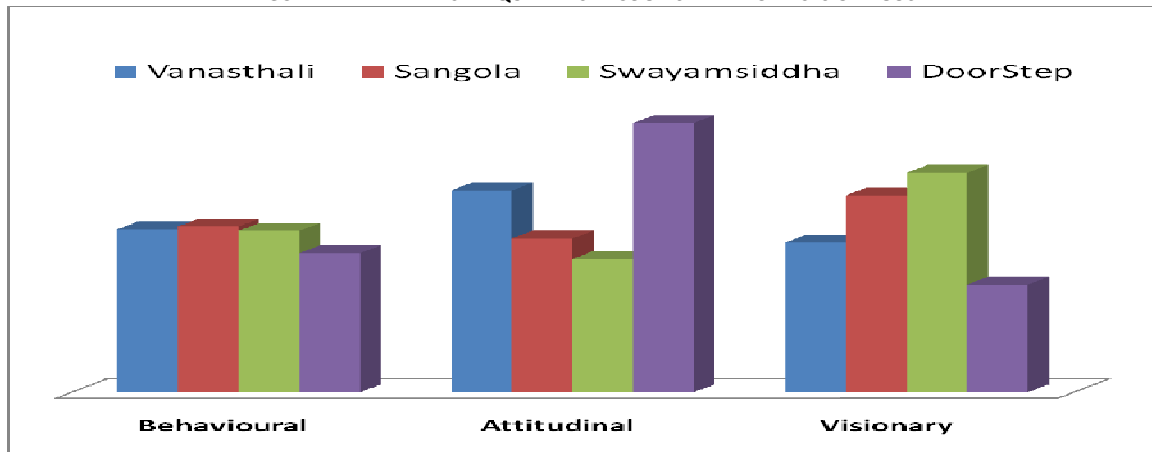
	$X^2 = \sum (fo - fe)^2 / fe$	df=(C-1)(R-1)	Table Value of X^2 @ 1% level of Significance	Hypothesis
H1: The behavioural qualities, recognised and recollected by the women activists of NGOs, under the study, are the same (1, 5, 6, 8, 10).	66.28	(C-1)(R-1) (5-1)(4-1)=12	32.91	Rejected
01: Persuasive and effective oratory	18.93	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Rejected
05: Indefatigable nature	05.96	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Accepted
06: The skill to motivate others to work	06.24	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Accepted
08: Impressive and Disciplined personality	23.00	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Rejected
10: Secular nature	12.36	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Accepted
H2: The attitudinal qualities, recognised and recollected by the women activists of NGOs under the study, are the same (2, 3, 4, 14, 15).	26.11	(C-1)(R-1) (5-1)(4-1)=12	32.91	Accepted
02: Firm and decisive nature	07.83	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Accepted
03: Willingness to take risk	11.25	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Accepted
04: Willingness to understand and to solve the problems of others	30.41	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Rejected
14: Urge to find a way not taken	20.49	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Rejected
15: The nature of understanding the views and opinions of associates	09.05	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Accepted
H3: The visionary qualities, recognised and recollected by the women activists of NGOs under the study, are the same (7, 9, 11, 12, 13).	56.60	(C-1)(R-1) (5-1)(4-1)=12	32.91	Rejected
07: Excellent awareness of social issues	04.53	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Accepted
09: Strong dedication	22.60	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Rejected
11: Urge of women empowerment	45.59	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Rejected
12: Urge of rural and educational development	07.43	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Accepted
13: Urge of development of activists along with the institution	15.52	(n-1)=(4-1)=3	16.27	Accepted

From the analysis above, it would be clear that although there was no significant difference in the attitudinal qualities recognised by the respondent activists of the NGOs under study, there was significant difference in the behavioural and visionary qualities recognised by them. However, a common set of leadership qualities, which is found to be the basis for the empowerment of women activists in women NGOs emerged from their responses, which comprised indefatigable nature, the skill to motivate others to work, secular nature, firm and decisive nature, willingness to take risk, the nature of understanding the views and opinions of associates, excellent awareness of social issues, urge of rural and educational development, and the urge of development of activists along with the institution.

TABLE 6: LEADERSHIP QUALITIES RECOGNISED AND RECOLLECTED BY ACTIVISTS OF NGOS

Sr. No.	Types of Leadership Qualities	Percentage of Recognition of Leadership Qualities by Activists of Women NGOs			
		Vanasthali	Matabalak Pratishtan	Swayamsiddha	DoorStep
1	Behavioural	31.54	32.093	31.25	27.00
2	Attitudinal	39.10	29.767	25.83	52.2
3	Visionary	28.97	38.14	42.50	20.9

FIGURE 4: THE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES RECOGNISED BY ACTIVISTS OF NGOS



CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is worth noting that the women activists in the NGOs under the study are more empowered than other women in society. Even though their empowerment at individual and social levels is high, when it comes to family, they find it difficult to translate their individual empowerment in reality. Does it indicate that our society has still to go a long way on the path of women's empowerment, so as to achieve the gender equality in the real sense of the term? Only women will not be able to achieve this goal. They will require unequivocal support of the whole of the society.

It is remarkable that the study revealed a set of common leadership qualities amongst the leaders of the NGOs under the study. These qualities have without doubt enhanced the empowerment status of their activists. It is also significant that these leaders have achieved this without keeping it on their main agenda. If they had done so, their activists would have identified it as their one of the most basic leadership qualities. These leaders, however, do not show willingness to take risks and the urge to find a way not taken.

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