



From Vision to Reality-: Evaluating Mahamana's aspirations for women empowerment in India

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Abstract

This research paper examines the journey of women's empowerment in India through the lens of Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's vision, emphasizing the significance of education and public participation in uplifting women. Despite the notable advancements in women's status over recent decades, gender inequalities persist, particularly in relation to men. Utilizing data from the National Family Health Survey-5, the study analyzes indicators of empowerment among currently married women aged 15 to 49. Findings indicate increased participation in decision-making, with approximately 80% of women involved in household choices, and improved autonomy in mobility, as 50% of women can travel independently. Literacy rates for women have risen to 72%, yet disparities in employment remain, with women still less employed than men. The paper highlights the impact of changing viewpoint of society and increase in women empowerment and ongoing efforts to fulfill Malaviya's aspirations. While significant progress has been made, challenges such as gender-based violence and wage gaps continue to impede full empowerment. Ultimately, the research underscores the necessity for sustained action and societal shifts to achieve true gender equality in alignment with Malaviya's ideals, showcasing a promising trajectory toward a more equitable future for women in India.

Keywords- Women, Empowerment, decision making, access to Education, Employment.

1. Introduction

India as a nation is revered in a feminine form i.e. 'the Bharat Mata', the first citizen of our country presently is a women. It is said the worth of a civilization can be judged from the position that it gives to women (Beniwal 2013). Over the time Indian society has witnessed various shifts in the status of women. In recent years, there has been a growing realization that development goals cannot be realized unless gender inequalities are removed and women are empowered to choose and decide about their own welfare, the welfare of their families, and the communities in which they live, .The journey of women's empowerment in India has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, shifting from a welfare-centric approach to one focused on equity and empowerment (Kishore et al 2003). This evolution emphasizes the process through which women gain control over their lives, resources, and

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ideologies. Empowerment is essential for cultivating self-worth, confidence, and the ability to make independent choices, allowing women to engage fully in education, society, economics, and politics.

Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, a pivotal figure in the Indian renaissance, passionately advocated for women's upliftment and education, recognizing their essential role in families and society. He supported women's rights to education and public participation, believing that educated women would become influential educators and leaders for future generations. His advocacy included promoting women's suffrage, opposing practices like purdah, and fighting against child marriage. As the founder of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in 1916, Malaviya viewed education as crucial for women's liberation and societal progress, establishing women's colleges and encouraging their active roles in various sectors. His efforts contributed to the growth of feminist movements and increased female enrollment in educational institutions. Malaviya's ideals remain relevant today, emphasizing the importance of women empowerment in addressing gender inequality and inspiring ongoing efforts for women's rights in India. This research paper will examine Malaviya's aspirations for women's empowerment, focusing on his vision for their education and employment, and evaluate how these ideals are manifested in modern society.

2. Understanding women empowerment:-

Women empowerment is the process of enhancing women's social, economic, political, and educational strength. It emphasizes equal opportunities, supports women's rights, and ensures their involvement in decision-making processes. Empowering women not only promotes gender equality but also improves their overall well-being and benefits society at large (Jaysawal et. al 2023).

In India, evaluating and promoting women's empowerment is crucial for several reasons. Women play a vital role in household health and nutrition, making their empowerment essential for the well-being of families. Furthermore, women's empowerment is key to India's development, as it increases the quality and quantity of human resources available. Effective development efforts rely on equitable access to resources for both men and women, which is influenced by societal gender relations.

Empowerment can be defined as the process through which those who are marginalized gain greater control over their lives, including resources and ideologies. This involves building self-confidence and fostering an inner transformation that helps women overcome external barriers. Ultimately, empowering women means creating an environment where they can make informed choices that benefit both themselves and society as a whole.

Women have always been integral to society, and their participation in various sectors is a reflection of a nation's progress. Without women's involvement, social, cultural, and political advancement can stagnate. Women make up half the global population and contribute significantly to the workforce. Empowerment leads to greater access to knowledge, resources, and decision-making capabilities, allowing women to navigate their rights and opportunities effectively. Empowerment fosters increased literacy, educational achievements, and awareness of rights, active economic participation, improved healthcare, and better living standards. It represents a shift from vulnerability to strength, enabling women to bring their unique perspectives and priorities to the forefront.

3. Review of literature.

Gupta and Kishore (2004) analyzed data from the National Family health Survey 2 (NFHS-2) to examine women's empowerment in India, both overall and across the 26 states defined by 1999 boundaries. It concludes that the average woman in India remains disempowered both in absolute terms and in comparison to men, with little change over time. However, there is notable variation in empowerment levels across different states and indicators. The study focuses on ever-married women aged 15 to 49, analyzing indicators of empowerment, access to resources, and contextual factors influencing empowerment. The findings reveal that women continue to be disempowered regardless of the measurement approach—whether through indicators, resources, or contexts. Furthermore, significant disparities in empowerment exist between states, and even within a single state, achievements can vary widely across different indicators. These results highlight the necessity for all states to enhance their performance in promoting women's empowerment, including those that are currently performing relatively well.

Gupta and Yeshudian (2006) analyze data from the Indian National Family Health Survey conducted in 1998-1999 to examine women's empowerment in India. The survey gathered information on various dimensions of empowerment from ever-married women aged 15 to 49 across all Indian states. Using these data, four indices were created: the Household Autonomy Index, Mobility Index, Attitude towards Gender Index, and Attitude towards Domestic Violence Index, which measure different aspects of empowerment. The analysis highlights the socio-economic and cultural disparities present within India and employs multiple logistic regressions to identify key determinants of women's empowerment. The findings indicate that nationally, 43% of women have high household autonomy, 23% have significant freedom of movement, 40% have no gender preference, and only 43% recognize domestic violence as a concern. However, there are notable differences in empowerment levels across states and socio-economic and cultural contexts. Education level emerges as a crucial predictor for all four dimensions of empowerment, while media exposure and age are significant predictors for certain dimensions.

Ravi N. Kadam(2012) have studied about the scenario of status of women and efforts made for women empowerment in past and present and found that the status of women is not even in all the times. There status and role is changing throughout and there is a need for women empowerment. Government of India is trying to empower the women's through various schemes and program but still there is a need to remove many hurdles that comes in the direction of women empowerment.

Anju Beniwal (2013) examined the concept of gender discrimination and its impact on women's empowerment in the Indian context. Indian society is characterized by a hierarchical and patriarchal structure. Even in matrilineal areas, such as parts of the Northeast and South, the prevailing political perspective tends to focus on elevating women's status politically, rather than economically or socially. The paper discusses various challenges and solutions related to women's empowerment, highlighting that, despite significant resources being allocated towards it, there is a need for a reality check regarding the disparity between documented initiatives and the actual situation on the ground. It emphasizes that to achieve meaningful progress in women's empowerment, fundamental social attitudes that foster gender inequality and bias must change. While many government programs and initiatives

exist, more work is required to effectively promote women's empowerment in India. A small step today can pave the way for significant progress in the future.

Angala Eswari (2019) has studied the role of women in work force for the economic development country in different states on the basis of available secondary data for the time period 2012-16 and found that 75% of women of nation are engaged in non-productive activities which are not considered as income generating activities for the economic development of country empowerment of women socially, politically, economically is a big need.

4. Objective of the Study

- 1.To understand the concept and need of women empowerment.
- 2.To examine the impact of various socio economic indicators on women empowerment.
- 3.To evaluate the current situation regarding various socioeconomic factors influencing women empowerment.

5. Methodology

The present study is based on descriptive research design. The data has been collected from secondary sources like journals, books, government reports, newspapers and various papers. This paper also uses data from national family health survey 5 which was conducted in India in 2019-20 to document women empowerment in the country and to find out the present status of indicators of women empowerment. Simple mathematical tools like average and percentage are used and data is presented in bar graphs and tables.

6. Indicators of women empowerment

Given the vast amount of data NFHS- 5 provides, there are a very large number of indicators we can define. In this paper we will present and analyze the indicators that best presents the women empowerment in India. An important factor guiding the actual selection of indicators is that NFHS- 5 and even NFHS- 4 have collected individual level data only from ever married women. Hence indicators selected are those that are most relevant to married women. In this study we have selected the indicators such as women's participation in household decision making to show their control over resources, freedom of movement, their access to education and employment have been taken.

6.1 Participation in household decision making

The first indicator assesses women's involvement in household and personal decision-making, a crucial measure of empowerment that reflects their autonomy in areas such as healthcare, finances, and education. This participation not only enhances family welfare and economic stability but also challenges traditional gender roles and promotes civic engagement. It fosters personal development, boosting women's confidence and skills, which positively influences family dynamics and societal progress (Kishore 2003).

According to NFHS-5 data there is an increase in their involvement in healthcare decisions (from 75% to 81%) , as well as women's participation in major household purchases increased from 73% in NFHS-4 to 80% in NFHS-5, and visits to family (from 75% to 81%) over the same period. 70% of currently married women participate in decisions regarding their own healthcare, major household purchases, and visits to family or relatives, either alone or jointly with their husbands, while 11% do not engage in any of these decisions (Table 6.1.1). Women's

participation in decision-making has increased since NFHS-4. To be considered active participants, women must make decisions alone or jointly in all three areas mentioned.

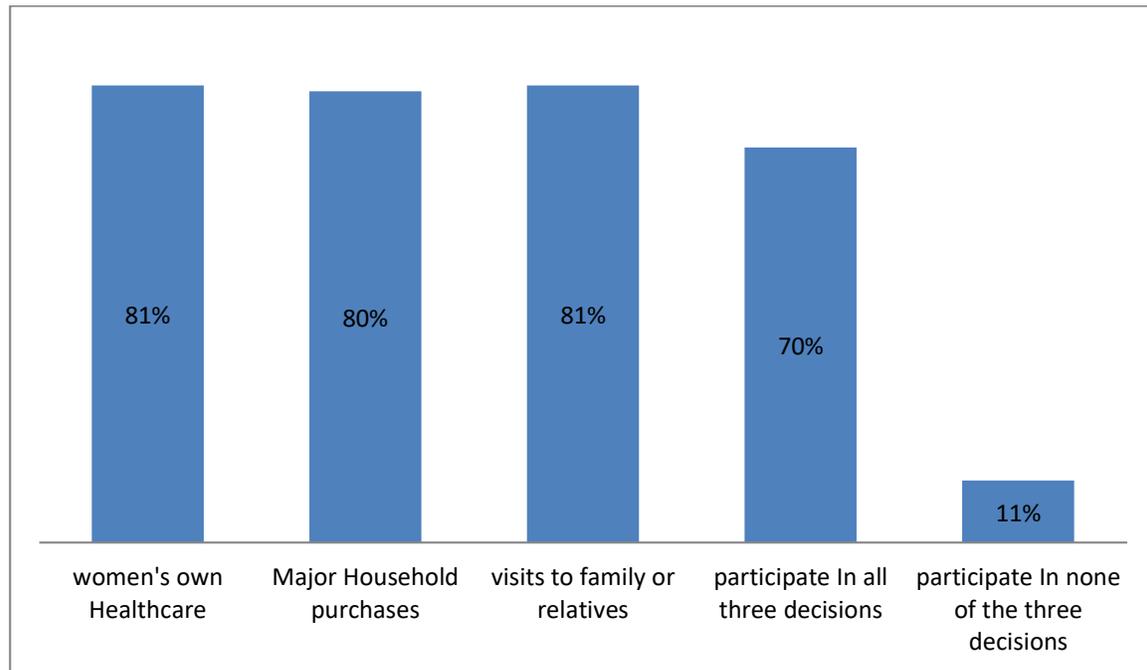


Table – 6.1.1 Women Participation in Household Decision making (aged 15 to 49).

Among married men, 84% participate in decisions about their healthcare and major household purchases, with 4% not involved in either. Specifically, 90% of men make healthcare decisions, and 91% are involved in household purchases, with one-third making healthcare decisions independently, compared to only 10% of women.

Trends show an increase in women's participation in major household purchases from 73% in NFHS-4 to 80% in NFHS-5, as well as a rise in their involvement in healthcare decisions (from 75% to 81%) and visits to family (from 75% to 81%) over the same period.

Participation varies with background characteristics: involvement increases with age, from 51% among women aged 15-19 to 75% among those aged 40-49. Women employed for cash are more likely to participate in all three decisions (75%) compared to those not employed (70%) and those employed but not for cash (69%). Wealth also influences participation slightly, with 71% of women in the lowest wealth quintile participating in all three areas compared to 74% in the highest quintile. Additionally, women's participation varies significantly across states and union territories, ranging from 48% in Ladakh to 95% in Nagaland.

6.2 Freedom of Movement

Women's freedom of movement is a vital indicator of empowerment, reflecting their autonomy and ability to engage in society. When women can move freely, they gain access to education, work, and community activities, thereby improving their economic and social status (Shetty et al 2015). On the other hand, restrictions on movement signify systemic barriers and gender inequality, limiting women's choices and fostering dependence. To evaluate freedom of movement, it's essential to consider legal frameworks, social norms, and physical barriers, which reveal societal attitudes towards gender equality. Promoting women's mobility not only enhances empowerment but also supports gender equity and sustainable development.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) did not directly assess women's freedom of movement; instead, it inquired whether women needed permission to visit the market, friends or relatives, and locations outside their village. Women are considered to have freedom of movement if they are generally allowed to go alone to all three of these destinations: the market, a health facility, and outside the community. Among women aged 15-49, 56% reported being allowed to go alone to the market, 52% to the health facility, and 50% outside the village. Overall, only 42% of women are permitted to go alone to all three locations, while 5% are not allowed to go alone to any.

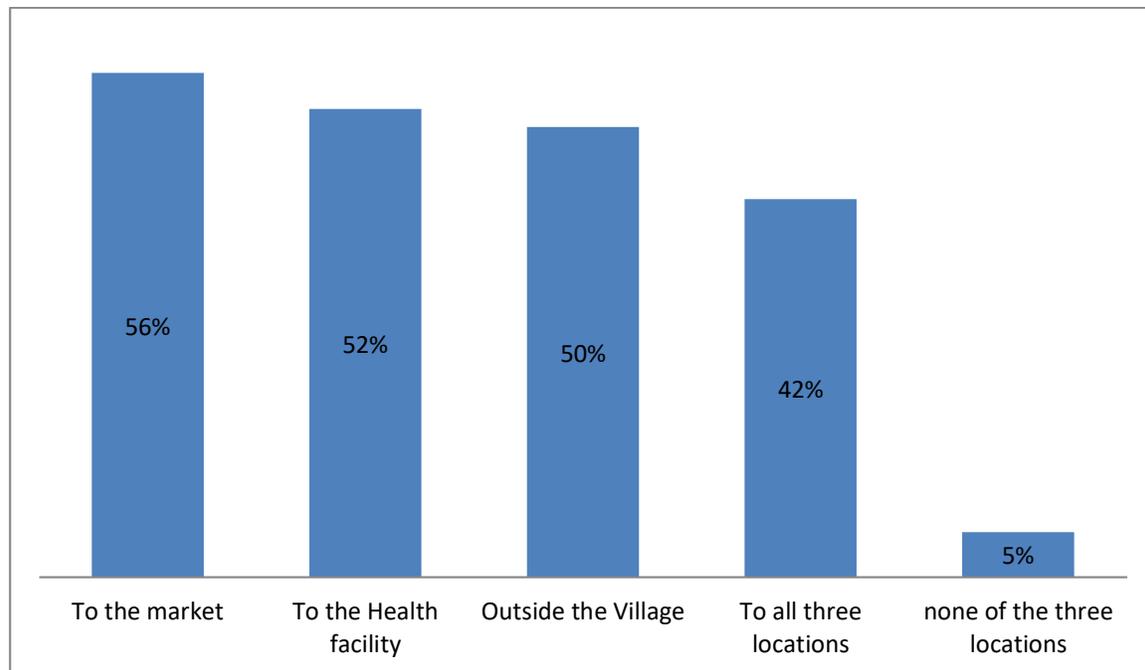


Fig. 6.2.1 Women's freedom of movement (age 15 to 49).

Trends show a slight increase in freedom of movement over the past four years; in NFHS-4, 41% of women reported such freedom, which increased to 42% in NFHS-5. This freedom tends to rise with age, from 26% among those aged 15-19 to 55% for those aged 40-49. Additionally, women's freedom of movement correlates with household wealth, increasing from 40% in the lowest wealth quintile to 50% in the highest, though it does not consistently vary with education levels. There are significant regional disparities in freedom of movement. In Himachal Pradesh, 82% of women can go alone to all three locations, while only 2% in Lakshadweep, 15% in Kerala, and less than one-third in states like Goa, Odisha, Manipur, Nagaland, and Karnataka report the same.

6.3 Access to Education

Access to education is crucial for women's empowerment, providing them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to engage in society and the economy. Educated women are more likely to enter the workforce and focus on their children's education and health, creating a cycle of empowerment (Das 2023). However, obstacles such as cultural norms, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure often limit educational access. Addressing these challenges is vital for achieving gender equality and sustainable development.

Education is not just a fundamental right; it is also a powerful means for women to make informed decisions, advocate for their rights, and achieve economic independence. It boosts their presence in the workforce and

contributes to national productivity and economic growth. The advantages of education go beyond basic literacy, becoming more significant with higher educational attainment, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for individuals and society.

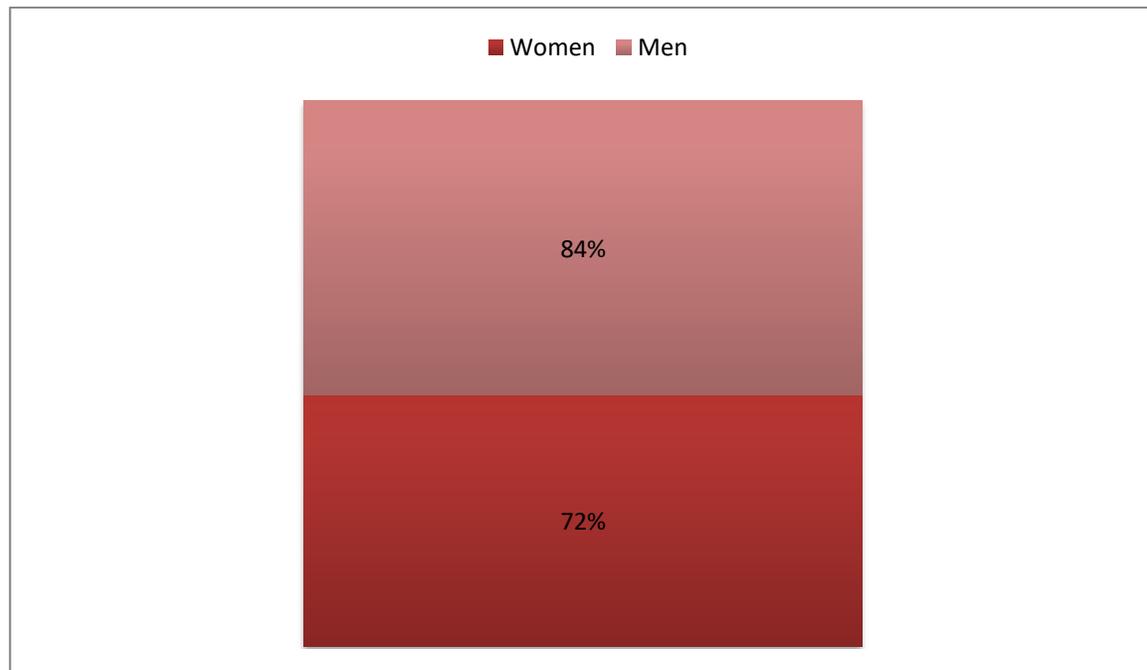


Fig. 6.3.3 Literacy rate among Men and Women (age 15-49).

According to NFHS-5, literacy rates are 72% for women and 84% for men, with 41% of women and 50% of men having 10 or more years of schooling. Since 2015-16, school attendance and educational completion have improved for both genders, narrowing the gap. Urban women generally have higher education levels than rural women, with 27% of rural women never having attended school compared to 13% of urban women. Additionally, 20% of rural women have completed 12 or more years of schooling, versus 39% in urban areas.

Educational attainment increases with wealth; only 6% of women and 10% of men in the lowest wealth quintile have completed 12 or more years of schooling, while over half of women (55%) and men (62%) in the highest quintile have. Literacy rates are lowest among those living in rural areas, aged 40-49, widowed, divorced, or in the lowest wealth quintile, especially among scheduled tribes. Bihar and Kerala highlight significant disparities in literacy levels: Bihar has the lowest rates at 55% for women and 76% for men, whereas literacy is nearly universal in Kerala.

6.4 Access to employment

Access to employment is crucial for women's empowerment, allowing them to fully participate in the economy and society. By obtaining jobs, women achieve financial independence, enhancing their decision-making power within families and communities. This economic engagement enables them to support their families and invest in their children's education and health, fostering a cycle of empowerment.

Employment also provides women with opportunities to acquire new skills, build professional networks, and challenge traditional gender roles, thus promoting advocacy for women's rights and gender equality (Fatima 2016). However, challenges such as discrimination, inadequate childcare, and societal norms often hinder women's access to jobs. Addressing these barriers is vital for achieving greater gender equality and sustainable development.

The participation of women in economic activities, particularly outside the home, is seen as essential for their social and economic empowerment. Although studies show that women's labor force participation in India is increasing, there remain significant gaps.

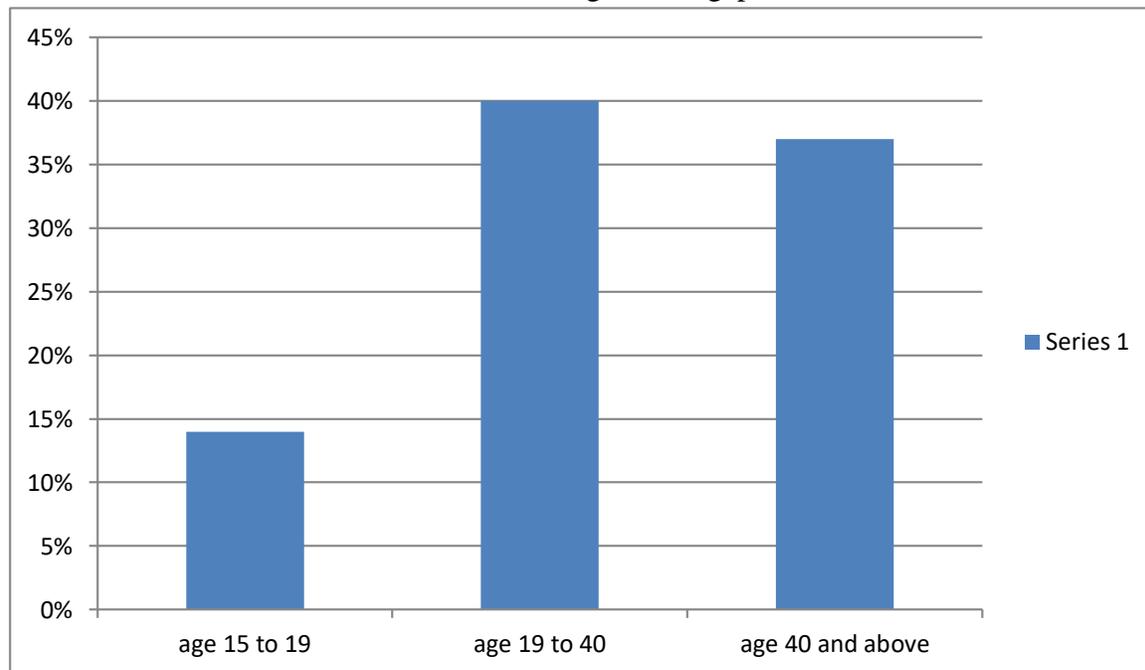


Fig. 6.4.1 Employment status of women in different age group (age 15 to 49).

According to NFHS-5, men are significantly more likely to be employed than women, with only 32% of women currently working compared to 98% of men. Employment among currently married women generally increases with age. From 14% among women age 15 to 19 to 40% among age 40 to 44, but it falls to 37% in the oldest age group.

Among employed women, 83% earn cash for their work and 15% not paid at all.. In the year prior to the survey, 46% of employed women and 32% of men were agricultural workers, while only 11% of women and 9% of men were employed in the service sector. Men are three times more likely to be employed. Employment rates for women are lower across all states.

Since 2015-16, women's employment levels have slightly increased, from 24% to 25%, while men's employment rates have remained unchanged during this period.

7. Findings

This paper presents data on four indicators of women's empowerment across India in order to find out whether the Mahamana's aspiration of women empowerment is fulfilled or not. Overall, while the average woman in India is empowered in absolute terms, but still they are dis empowered relative to men. There have been significant

changes in women's empowerment over time, yet much work remains. Variations in empowerment levels exist among different states.

Data was collected from women aged 15 to 49, focusing on currently married women. The analysis revealed that women's participation in decision-making has risen, with approximately 80% of women involved in household decisions. The National Family Health Survey- 5 shows a notable increase in this area compared to National Family Health Survey - 4.

Regarding freedom of movement, around 50% of women now have the autonomy to travel alone to places like markets or healthcare facilities. Access to education is vital for empowerment, and the latest survey indicates literacy rates of 72% for women compared to 84% for men, reflecting improved educational access.

In terms of employment, while there has been a rise in women's participation in the workforce, they remain less employed than men, highlighting the need for further initiatives to enhance employment opportunities. Despite ongoing efforts and resources dedicated to women's empowerment in India, meaningful change will not happen overnight. It's essential to continue taking action and address the various issues that hinder the effectiveness of existing empowerment programs. Real progress will only be achieved through shifts in social attitudes and norms.

8. Conclusion

Women empowerment is the process of enabling women to take control of their lives, make informed decisions, and access opportunities for personal and professional growth. Madan Mohan Malviya strongly advocated for this empowerment through education, believing it was essential for both individual and societal progress. His establishment of Banaras Hindu University in 1916 aimed to provide women with quality education, empowering them to participate actively in public life and contribute to nation-building. Today, the status of women in India has improved significantly, with rising literacy rates and increased presence in various fields, including politics and business. Programs promoting women's education, health, and employment have contributed to this progress, helping women break traditional barriers. Initiatives like the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme and women's reservation in local governance reflect a growing commitment to empowering women. Moreover, more women are becoming entrepreneurs and leaders, fostering economic independence and social change. While challenges like gender-based violence and wage gaps persist, the continuous efforts to promote gender equality indicate that Malviya's vision is being progressively fulfilled. Women today are increasingly asserting their rights, pursuing education and careers, and inspiring future generations to seek empowerment. This dynamic shift illustrates a broader societal recognition of the importance of women's roles, aligning closely with Malviya's ideals and showcasing a path toward a more equitable future.

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