

Aggression to Empowerment: A Journey through Education

Dr. Tanu Tandon¹

ABSTRACT

Empowerment is a journey which goes through various phases and stages and leads to emancipation. Women empowerment is all about achieving and exercising one's own rights and freedom to make choices and live life on one's own term and its ultimate goal is to attain emancipation, to be able to empower others. Education is a medium which helps women rise above their situations and take control of their lives and it is also a channel through which empowerment can be spread and manifested among all. This paper will discuss the case studies of such women, who not only overcame their helplessness, fought their circumstances and used their aggression to empower themselves, carved their path, using the tool of education but also helped other women, by empowering them and helping them to make their own path. Methodology adopted here, to study lives of these women is Grounded Theory Methodology, qualitative approach to study the women and role education played to transform them from aggressive to empowered.

Keywords: *Aggression, Empowerment, Education*

Women Power in India is at its Peak today. Six of the key political positions are held by Women in our country. In the corporate world also, the flag of women Power is high and women Rule. The status of woman in India is sort of a Paradox. If on one hand she is at the peak of success, on the other hand she is lying at the end of social equality ladder, suffering silently.

A woman has been given the status of "Goddess" and is worshipped as "*Shakti*", without whom even '*Shiv*' is incomplete, the underlying emotion being, that even creator of universe is incomplete without his '*Shakti*'.

On the other hand a Quote in Manu Smriti states "*Na stree Swathantryam Ashati*" meaning, women is undeserving of independence. This quote is a reflection of feudal and double standards prevalent in our Indian society. The society, which worships women as Devi, does not hesitate to kill her, the men who take blessings of Devi, treat the women of household as their slaves or '*Dasi*'. The land of "*Jhansi ki rani*" and "*Razia Sultan*" is also the land of "*Sati*" and "*Dowry deaths*".

¹ Asst Professor, Amity Institute of Education, Amity University, Lucknow

Aggression to Empowerment: A Journey through Education

The strong male chauvinism and patriarchy is woven intricately into fabric of our society, giving it deep shades of discrimination against women. Going by the nature's rule, women should be at the centre of Matriarchal society, but have been pushed to the peripheries of the artificial, Manmade Patriarchal society.

Every woman carries with in her ability and desire to be a nurturer. They have strong influence on families, communities and society. Every woman should be encouraged and challenged to live and experience her life fully and she should be expressive about her goals in life and should pursue them passionately and accomplish them. We do have examples of women who have pushed the boundaries and broken the shackles and stereotypes created by male dominated society, like Kiran Bedi , first IPS officer of India or Aung San Sui Ki, recipient of Nobel Prize for Peace, or "*Mukhtar Mai*" tribal Pakistani woman who rose from being victim of rape to "Messiah" of downtrodden girls. These women and others like them have reinforced that women are equal as men and are capable of achieving same heights as men, even more and deserve equal status as men. The fact that "women hold up half the sky" does not give them position of dignity, equity and equality, the world in which we live in, is characterized by deeply unequal sharing of burden of adversities between men and women. Sprawling inequalities persists in women's status, their access to education, financial resources, health care and opportunities.

Since ages women have been at the receiving end of violence. Violence is a coercive mechanism to assert ones will over another, in order to prove or feel a sense of power. The violence against women, be it any form, spring from the structure of patriarchy, defined broadly as a system of male dominance legitimated within the family and society through superior rights, authority and power. The process of subordination of women is achieved by devaluing women's contribution, while at the same time extracting a significant contribution from them, and also through a powerful ideology of rigidly assigned roles for women, which act as boundaries for all their actions.

Various efforts done by Government through Constitutional provisions, various legislative acts and schemes for the betterment of women, like Mahamaya, Swayam shakti, National Policy for the Empowerment of women, and efforts by human rights and women's activists have indeed brought awareness and sensitivity about women and their situation in our society. It has led to a movement where in women have found courage to come out and demand their rights and status in society. Women are showing their pains and wounds and are asking for their solutions. While some women are emerging as strong and confident, in control of their lives capable of raising their voices, majority are still suffering silently.

The dream of gender equality is miles away from reality, even today "*Mainstream*" remains very much "Male Stream".

Situation and plight of women made me sit up and look at the scenario closely. The gap between 'haves' & "have not" not only between men and women, but between empowered women and

Aggression to Empowerment: A Journey through Education

subjugated women made me more curious about women's life and the factors that separates the two. I become restless to delve deeper into lives of women, to find out, what motivates some to revolt and demand their rights and some to quietly accept subjugation as their destiny and suffer silently

Discrimination and violence against them starts even before their birth and continues throughout their life, with its form and intensity changing. This subjugation and discrimination has resulted into built up of aggression in women.

Manifestations of Aggressions: Varied Expressions.

Years of subjugation and oppression have resulted into build up of aggression inside women, due to the various efforts done by Government and human rights and women activists, society has become aware and sensitized towards plight of women, the aggression pent up inside women has found identity and also empathetic eases and sensitive hearts. Women are no longer ashamed to accept and express their aggression. Their aggression has been accepted as a natural human tendency, it's no longer considered a trait unheard of for women, but how are they expressing their aggression?

Our society is already becoming increasingly violent day by day and to add to it, women, who were considered as gently sex, they are also coming out with their aggression ready to erupt like volcano making the situation volatile and serious.

I tried to find more about different expressions of women aggression. The expressions were varied spread over a continuum, on one end women were surrendering to the violence, and committing suicide on another staging protests and even committing crimes against women, like mother in law torturing, killing daughter-in-law.

I started pondering over these examples, what are the main causes of women aggression? How are these women utilizing their aggression? The most important aspect was what is the purpose of this aggression? Why are women getting aggressive? Looking at the destructive manifestations of aggression I wounded aloud- what are they doing with their aggression? Women are aggressive because of denial of rights and injustice done to them; they are getting more aggressive because they want this injustice to stop and equality to prevail, but by injuring and harming themselves and other, would they be able to achieve this?

The most intruding question was how have women taken to this oppression and subjugation inflicted upon them since ages? I started looking for answers, and didn't have to probe much or look far, as instances were in front of my eyes. Newspapers, television, magazines, entire media is full of stories of women revolting against injustice, raising their voices against atrocities done to them.

Aggression to Empowerment: A Journey through Education

I also felt that the same powerlessness which causes aggression is also the reason for women empowerment. Empowered women and the non-empowered women both started their journey from the same point of subjugation and oppression but they took different routes and eventually reached different destinations. This difference started troubling me. I started thinking what causes one woman to accept defeat and another to fight it out? I started analyzing role of education in bringing transformation in lives of women, from being subjugated to being empowered, leading to emancipation.

I started thinking what causes one woman to accept defeat and another to fight it out? One woman uses her oppression to destroy herself where as another uses it as stepping stone to success? What motivates them to go on? They could have succumbed to atrocities and followed the same path, treaded by millions of women. What made them take the road less travelled? Did their aggression helped them in this, by motivating them? All these questions and more started haunting me. I started observing women and being person of education my attention went to the education aspect. What role education has played in their lives? Has Education been instrumental in transforming their aggression to empowerment? What role education has played in channelizing their aggression?

I become curious to know more about such aggressive empowered women to explicate and explicate and explore how they changed their lives, how they used their aggression to become empowered. At this point I felt the need to study their women very closely in their national context. So explore their minds and lives, I felt the need of a research method which can help me in delving into minds of women and to see and understand their perspectives and point of view.

QUALITATIVE APPROACH AND GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY

To penetrate deep into lives of women and to understand issues. I selected Qualitative approach as it is subject oriented and can help me in bringing subjects perspective and views on surface. Qualitative approach is more 'humane' and is interested in people's lives. The methodology I reached upon is Grounded theory methodology (GTM). GTM seeks to construct theory about issues of importance in people's lives (Glaser, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this method, I have the freedom to conduct my study in subject's context and through conversations with them, issues of subjects interest will emerge out from their stories and incidents. This method lays emphasis on the dictum "All is data" and analyzes the data by constant comparison with each other. To sum it GTM believes that theory is grounded or embedded in data which emerges out once data is analyzed.

Thus this method is most appropriate for my study as I want to explicate what is hidden and embedded in aggressive and empowered women's lives and thoughts and my theory will be made out of that itself.

Aggression to Empowerment: A Journey through Education

This research is based on premise that issues about women aggression and empowerment are grounded in their experiences and life and it is also based on assumption that new issues and realities will be discovered through this study.

Since my study is based on women and is about women, conducted by me, a woman I would be able to relate, empathize and understand more about them. As weiler (1988) has pointed out that "it is essential for women researchers to initially establish their research, beginning from the recognition of their own oppression, they were subjected to as woman in men dominated society". I would be able to relate with subjects trauma and pain, as being a woman myself I have also suffered discrimination at some point or other.

My study have subject's experiences as starting point of research, the importance given to women's experiences and their views and perspectives will be most valued. To really understand their lives, it is essential to see their world from their eyes, more over since women have been often relegated to the private arena; their actions in everyday life define them.

This study is also focused on improving women's status and life therefore it is also based on "Commitment to Praxis", thus my study also takes the flavor of '*Feminist research*' done by the woman, on the women, for the benefit of women.

To penetrate deep into lives of women and to understand issues of their interest, I selected Qualitative approach as it is subject oriented, and Naturalistic Inquiry so as to study women in their natural, socio cultural context. To report the nuances and expressions, words and gestures of women and the meanings hidden in their silences and voices, I used exploratory case study mode.

CASE STUDIES

I selected seven aggressive empowered women symbolizing 'Strength', 'Passion', 'Courage', 'Determination', 'Daring', 'Compassion' and 'sincerity' and generated data using open ended interviews, conversations, participant observations. The life of these women has been an ever going, ever-growing journey, from state of helplessness to emancipation. It has been an awakening and enlightening process for the women, under study. Their Journey has been to the 'self', which has taken them inside themselves, to know their desires, wishes and to acknowledge themselves as competent woman. The journey has been also about 'self', to know about their strengths, their rights, status and their place in their social world and society at large. It has been a well rewarding journey, where in they have not travelled alone, but with their families, society and have tried to stretch their boundaries, reach beyond themselves and have not only empowered themselves but also those around them, achieving emancipation in return.

Their journey from aggression to empowerment started with awareness. Being aware of their position and their rights made them more sensitive about the disparity that existed between the two, which built up the aggression in them even more. Another reason was the awareness and

Aggression to Empowerment: A Journey through Education

knowledge of their rights, which these women acquired. This enlightenment, that they also deserve equal status and rights, made them more aggressive. Understanding of their plight and deprivation made them raise their voices against injustice done to them and demand their rights as woman. Analysis of their circumstances gave them insight about their aggression and causes behind them. This in turn helped these women to look at their aggression objectively and rationally. Women aggression has relational context, various studies have proved, women are more likely to aggress in situation congruent to gender role orientation, such as family settings. In fact, strong evidence of women aggression have been found in intimate relationships and threat to a woman's self concept and self definition causes build up of aggression. Jack (1991, 1999) has suggested in her studies that most critical factors affecting aggression arousal and expression are in interpersonal context. Fehr and colleagues (1999) surmise that "women's greater propensity to be angered in close relationships, may reflect their greater motivation to achieve intimacy in these relationship, as well as their reported tendency to derive self esteem from close relationships."

A woman's world is her home where as a man has a larger context, in form of social world to prove his authority, therefore woman's self esteem and confidence is closely related to her partner and family, rejection, abuse and subjugation from them, leads her entering into "learned helplessness cycle", causing her to tolerate more and more abuse, suffering more at the hand of partner and family. These women under study, went through the same turmoil and trauma. In an attempt to prove themselves in their relationship, they became submissive, which led to getting trapped in "learned helplessness" cycle.

Women under study used their aggression as an instrument to attain empowerment, in personal, social and economic sphere and they did not stop at themselves, instead they reached to others and empowered other.

Education: Tool to achieve empowerment.

Journey of women from aggression to empowerment had been long and ranging from one continuum to another. Their education helped them to transform their aggression to empowerment, a closer look at their lives reveal that their situation has been similar to many women, who succumbed to oppression but what made these women stand apart was their education.

Whether their formal education or education acquired through informal and non formal means like, from Religious books or from people around them from mass media even from me during our conversations, spanning over a period of time. Their education guided them towards this transformation. It made them aware of their strengths and weaknesses, made them sensitive towards their situation problems, knowledge about their rights, understanding of the disparities made them work towards bridging the gap and bringing the change.

Aggression to Empowerment: A Journey through Education

Education affected the route their aggression took which made all the difference. If they would have acted impulsively their aggression would have come out in hostile and reactive manner leading to destruction, but they chose the thoughtful action and utilized their aggression as an instrument to achieve their goals, the same aggression, which was aroused due to their unfavorable conditions become their tool to end the same unfavorable conditions. Instrumental aggression is like operant conditioning, where goal is important and is the reward. Instead of fighting violently these women made their situation favorable to gain advantage over their aggression and to improve their life, but they could do so only because of their education. Their education guided them towards this transformation. It made them aware of their strengths and weaknesses, made them sensitive towards their situation problems, knowledge about their rights, understanding of the disparities made them work towards bridging the gap and bringing the change. Their education gave them the ability to think logically, and rationally. Instead of wasting their energy, they utilized their aggressive energy purposely and systematically. After weighing pros and cons they took the actions and this wisdom and decision making ability could develop into them only because of their education. As these women said "*Education prepares for life*".

Education not only gives the ability to think, acquire knowledge, gain understanding and apply to practical life, to improve life. Education also influences the 'Affective' state, concerned with emotions, which in turn help to acknowledge, accept and use emotion for benefit. Control of their emotions and thoughts and their channelization led to empowerment. The aggressive drive was used by these women as "Self Preservation" drive, as a defense mechanism to attain a free, equal status. Outcome of their aggression, when passed through the route controlled by education, was of "reappraisal", 'Conscious choice' and 'thoughtful action'. Women moved up in the need hierarchy as described by Maslow in his "Theory of self Actualization" there by achieving high self esteem, and striving for highest need of 'self actualization', it was their education which helped them push beyond physiological and safety needs. They satisfied these primary needs, came out of their self imposed doubts, boundaries and limits and reached out to achieve higher self esteem and strived for perfection and achieving their maximum potential, by helping others they touched the self actualization paradigm, attaining emancipation. Jack (1999) has rightly said that when women use their aggression consciously and constructively for their self protection and bringing aggression positively and constructively into relationship, it results into feeling of well being, self regard and empowerment.

All I can say is that transformation of aggression to empowerment has been possible because their journey passed through channel of education, bringing changes at Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor levels.

Education gave the ability to think, acquire knowledge, gain understanding and apply to practical life, to improve life. These women came out of their self imposed doubts, boundaries and limits and reached out to achieve higher self esteem and strived for perfection and achieving their maximum potential, by helping others they touched the self actualization paradigm, attaining emancipation.

REFERENCES

- Baron, R.A. & Byrne, D. (2004): *Social Psychology: India* : Pearson Education.
- Baron, R.A. (1997): *Human Aggression*: New York: Plenum Press.
- Baumeiser, R.F. Smart, L & Boden J.M. (1996) : Relation of threatened egotism to violence and aggression: the dark side of high self esteem: *psychology review* : 103 : 5 – 33.
- Berkowitz, L. (1993) : *Aggression It's causes, consequences and control* : New York : Mc Grow Hill.
- Bhasin, K. (1985): *Women's education in development from welfare to empowerment convergence*: 21 (4) : 5-17
- Buss, A.H. (1961): *The psychology of Aggression*: Newyork : wiley
- Charmaz, K. (2000): *Grounded Theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods*: In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln: *Handbook of qualitative research (2nd ed)* : Thousand Oaks, C.A. : sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2006): *Constructing Grounded Theory : A Practical Guide through Qualitative analysis* : London : Sage : P.P. 43 – Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) : *Hand book of qualitative research* : Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967): *The Discouvery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative research* : Chicago : Aldine.
- Jack, D. (2001): *Behind the mask: Destruction and creativity in women Aggression*: Harward: Harward university Press : P.P. 43-44, 158.
- Weiler, K. (1988): *Women Teching for change: Gender, Class and power* : Massachussts : Bergin & Gravy Publishers : p.p. 61 – 63.