

Gender Justice and Empowerment: A Study of Chhara Bootlegger Women of Ahmedabad

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Abstract : This paper is an impact assessment study of the rehabilitation work done for Chhara women in the rural precincts of Ahmedabad. The Chharas constitute a denotified tribe and live in abject poverty. The women of this community are infamous absconders of law and active bootleggers of locally made liquor. As part of a psychological study with a local NGO, the authors headed a training program aimed at rehabilitating and providing these women alternate modes of employment, thereby driving them away from a life of crime. The paper centers on the idea of women entrepreneurship and women empowerment. It notes the importance of handholding in a conflict situation. Most of the research on Chharas is either focused on victimising them for state-sponsored violence or mostly makes a plea on reconditioning them in the mainstream. Going against this trend, this paper which documents the study argues that making these poor women self-dependent is a panacea for their sluggish development. The alienation caused due to the demonisation of the community has made them abandon traditional modes of employment. This has further led the community astray into making illegal country liquor causing further damage to their reputation. Women are at the centre of this vicious circle facing much repression and ostracisation. The study conducted by the PDP team was an attempt to change this dogmatic alienation of these poor women. It was found that with consistent support and reformist approach towards law, it is possible to drive these women away from a life of penury repression and crime. The aforementioned study uses empirical tools to verify this claim. Placed at the confluence of the sociology of gender and psychology, this paper is a good way to argue that law enforcement cannot be effective without sensitisation to the ground realities of conflict. The study conducted from which the paper borrows was a scientific survey focused on markers of gender and caste realities of the Chharas. The paper mentions various dynamics involved in the training program that paved the way for the successful employment of the women. In an attempt to explain its uniqueness, the paper also has a section on comparing similar social experiments.

Keywords : employment, gender, handholding, rehabilitation

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