THE IMPACT OF THE CASTE SYSTEM ON FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: AN INQUIRY INTO KERALA EXPERIENCE (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Many studies have adopted a post-structural feminist perspective to study female entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006; Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Foss, 2010). This perspective builds on the influence of historical periods, cultural climate, aesthetic, theoretical or philosophical tendencies in gender inequality (Beasley, 1999). The constraints imposed by the cultural climate, that is, the caste system, is one issue affecting inequality in India. To overcome the caste-based discrimination, the Indian government implemented policies and programs. This research investigates the nuances of the relationship between the caste system and female entrepreneurship by examining whether the caste system disadvantages female entrepreneurs and whether government programs aid entrepreneurial activity.

**Method**

The study was conducted in the state of Kerala, where many positive changes were implemented through public policies and programs. The study identified 151 participants through random sampling and the data was analyzed using structural equation modeling.

**Results and Implication**

In line with expectations, lower-caste female entrepreneurs incorporated comparatively fewer improvements in their businesses and had less access to finance. Though the government provides support to lower-caste entrepreneurs, our analysis revealed that women with low levels of education and inhabitants of rural areas received government support. Though the government provided support, it did not result in positive changes to the business. This raises the need for the government to investigate the efficacy of these programs. Despite policies to reduce caste-based discrimination, female entrepreneurs from lower castes have greater access to government support but encounter more impediments. This confirms the influence of the cultural climate, and that certain parts of the population appear trapped owing to their limited access to resources. This raises the need for the government to investigate the efficacy of the programs and consider modifying the existing programs for female entrepreneurs to enhance access to resources.

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