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JUSTICE, HUMAN DIGNITY, AND EQUALITY AMONG DALIT WORKING WOMEN IN TIRUPPUR: A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Dalit Working Women, Human Dignity, Justice, Equality, Dalit Theology, Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, Pastoral Care, Tiruppur.</i>	Dalit women are multi-marginalised by caste, gender and class in the unorganised textile and garment sectors of Tiruppur. Despite the fact that the textile sector has been a significant contributor to the economy of the region and nation, women are still faced with poor working conditions with less wages, job insecurity and a hazardous working environment. This study examines the experiences of working Dalit women through Dalit, liberation, feminist and womanist theological prisms. This survey investigates these experiences especially from biblically and theologically. This research used the qualitative research theological methodology to explore the socio-economic status of Dalit women with reference to various biblical texts that advocate for human dignity, justice, equality, and the preferential option for the poor and oppressed by God. The results demonstrate that caste exclusion, gender discrimination, labour exploitation, and social vulnerability are all interlinked, which collectively alter the denial of dignity and equality of opportunity. Christian teachings are thus founded in a robust theological reasoning originating in the creation



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	narrative, Exodus, prophetic call to justice, as well as the ministry of Jesus Christ to resist oppressive social structures and to affirm the intrinsic worth of every human being who is made in the image of God. According to the report, the church has a crucial and prophetic ministry responsibility to foster social justice, support labour rights, empower dalit women with education and leadership skills, and construct inclusive communities that reject caste and gender discrimination. This study examines how theology may be meaningfully engaged with the social reality of our times. It additionally contributes to discussions of faith-based social transformation. In conclusion, the report suggests some recommendations for different actors including the church, policymakers, civil society, and industry for promoting justice, dignity, equality and sustainable empowerment of the Dalit working women in Tiruppur.
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1. Introduction

Tiruppur located in Tamil Nadu seems to be popular for knitwear and hence is also called the Knitwear Capital of India. Knitwear goods are available in the markets here. The district is a major contributor in textile exports from India and plays an important role in national economy by producing knitted garments for the domestic and export markets. The rapid industrial growth in Tiruppur has given job opportunities for countless workers in particular spinning mills, knitting units, garment manufacturers, dyeing units and other related production. A significant bulk of this workforce works in the unorganised or informal sector, which is characterised by short-term contracts, limited regulation and the absence of effective legal protection. Although the industry created wealth and economic growth, it failed to provide fair treatment of working people and social justice for all the workers, especially women from marginalized groups.

Men and women working in the organised and unorganised sector both face different kinds of forms of unequal treatment that can be called discrimination. Whether it is caste oppression, gender discrimination, lack of material resources, poor education, or lack of access to formal jobs, all of these affect the participation of these groups in informal work. A large number of Dalit women are forced to work at a low wage owing to poverty, family obligations and other inaccessible means of livelihood. Their hard and difficult work does not meet even the basic needs of their families. Even if you want it to be lasting, it is not. Their employment experience continues to be marked by one or more of the following employment instability, long working hours, occupational health hazards, inadequate maternity benefit, no social security and limited scope for promotion. Furthermore, many women are forced to juggle a paid job with an unpaid domestic job, re-enforcing current inequalities in the workplace and home.

The difficulties faced by Dalit working women cannot be understood just by money. The intertwining of caste, class and gender in a deep manner makes them victim of many forms of



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discrimination which greatly shapes their lives and diminishes their dignity and social participation and human rights. Even though it is ensured in the Constitution that people are equal and all workers are also equal, discrimination on the basis of caste and gender plays a role in hiring, wages, and access to welfare. Consequently, the triumph of the textile industry often conceals the ongoing neglect of those whose assistance facilitated its success.

According to those beliefs, every individual possesses inherent dignity by being created in the image of God. The Bible speaks often of God's regard for the poor, the beaten down and the treated unjustly. Meanwhile, Jesus Christ's entire ministry is one of restoring dignity, inclusion and hope for the excluded. The oppressors' anti-theologies like Dalit Theology, Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology and Womanist Theology aspire for justice and emancipation of the oppressed. The study of lived reality of Dalit working women calls for a theological imagination to enable social action.

This study analyzes the socio-economic condition of dalit women employed in the unorganized textile and garment sector of Tiruppur in the light of the Bible and modern Theology. The study aims to see how moral considerations of justice human dignity equality and liberation can enliven pastoral responses through the joining up of the world of facts and the world of theologies for greater social inclusion, labour justice and community empowerment. The aim of it is to add value to existing discussion on faith-based advocacy by showing how churches, places of worship and religions can help realise the rights and wellbeing of Dalit working women.

2. Literature Review

Dalit women suffer from multi-layered and overlapping discrimination, which denies them access to education, jobs, social mobility, human dignity, etc. Dalit women occupy a contradictory position at the confluence of caste, gender, and class inequalities. James Massey¹ The Dalit movement for identity, dignity, and social justice cannot be divorced from the struggle for liberation from caste and patriarchy, the author(s) argue(s). Gabriele Dietrich² It shows how Dalit women face oppression of particular kinds, while Monica Melanchthon³ As per them, these readings of the Scriptures pay attention to the experience of women oppressed and are towards justice and liberation Women who work in the informal sector would hardly earn decent wages., and Jan Breman⁴ Despite entire industries continuing to grow, economic vulnerability and labour exploitation still happen. E.g.

¹James Massey, *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity, and Liberation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1997).

²Gabriele Dietrich, *Dalit Movements and Women's Movement: Reflection on the Women's Movement in India* (New Delhi: Horizons India Books, 1992).

³Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Dalit Women and the Bible: Hermeneutical and Methodological Explorations," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*, ed. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 148–65.

⁴Jan Breman, *The Labouring Poor in India: Patterns of Exploitation, Subordination, and Exclusion* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).



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Tiruppur, Grace Carswell⁵ The Fact that now more Dalit women are working in Industry does not mean that their working conditions, wages or prospects have improved.

Dalit Theology is created by Dalits in response to oppression by caste and for dignity. Arvind P. Nirmal⁶ According to him, the theology should arise from the tangible circumstances of Dalit communities and reflect the compassion of Christ for the weak, the powerless, and the marginalised. M. E. Prabhakar⁷ It calls for social change like other theories to restore human dignity. Interpretation of Liberation Theology. K. C. Abraham and Gustavo Gutiérrez⁸, Through His mercy, God cares for the poor and social justice is the adequate horizon for theological reflection.

Feminist and Womanist theologians critique unjust systems that exclude and discriminate against women and instead advocate for equality and inclusion. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Letty M. Russell⁹ It highlights the need for inclusive, shared leadership in the church and in society while underscoring the sanctity of human dignity. Delores S. Williams¹⁰ work demonstrates the bearing of marginalisation and injustice on specific religions and how the marginalised women defy and resist structures of power. The current research stands out since it seeks to combine three strands that are rarely combined in the existing literature scholarship on Dalit women, on labour exploitation, and on theological analysis of oppressive structures into a single reading of the situation of Dalit working women in Tiruppur. Very few studies thus far have brought caste, gender, labour and pastoral concern into sustained conversation. This paper attempts to fill that lacuna by reading the experience of Dalit working women through a biblical and theological lens in order to formulate a pastoral response oriented towards justice, dignity, equality and empowerment.

3. Biblical and Theological Framework

3.1 Creation and Human Dignity

For the Dalit working women of Tiruppur, the theology of the creation offers powerful theological validation that their dignity cannot be rendered meaningless by oppressive social orders or by exploitative forms of work. Everybody is equal in the eyes of God although society considers some inferior based on their caste or profession, scripture state. It is not God's doing that Dalit women endure unsafe working conditions, social exclusions, and low wages. The Biblical message is read

⁵Grace Carswell, "Dalits and Local Labour Markets in Rural India: Experience from the Tiruppur Textile Region in Tamil Nadu," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (2012).

⁶Arvind P. Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology* (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1990), 55–64.

⁷M. E. Prabhakar, *The Search for a Dalit Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1988).

⁸K. C. Abraham, *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990); Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).

⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993).

¹⁰Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).



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differently by Dalit Theology, which furthers this understanding. God is claimed to stand by everyone who suffers from injustice and marginalisation. Therefore, all forms of practices that deny the dignity of Dalit women need to be rejected by the church and society, and equality, justice and inclusion should prevail in all spheres of life.

3.2 God as Defender of the Oppressed

God does not have a choice but to feel pity for the oppressed for their continuous, constant oppression. An example of the clearest one can find in Exodus 3, verse 7 and 8, where it states that God has seen the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt. God has come down to free them from bondage. God does not sit idly by when humans suffer, his not simply a passive observer. The God who gives justice to the oppressed and food to the hungry, who frees those in chains, who supports the widow and the stranger, is the one whose praise we sing. (Psalm 146:7-9)

These biblical affirmations are essential for Dalit working women who are economically insecure and face discrimination and labor exploitation daily. The experience of oppression by marginalized people is not merely social, economic, or even political, but also theological. This is because oppression, in whatever form it takes, frustrates God's plan for justice and the flourishing of all humankind. Liberation theologians believe the Exodus narrative literally. God favors the poor so much and this statement indicates so. In addition, true faith that places confidence in God stands against injustice. As in other parts of India, Tamil Nadu also has its own brand of theologies Dalit theology has its inception in the sufferings caused by caste oppression that Dalit communities faced in India. Through this, Dalit theology asserts that God continues to listen to the cries of the castes and the poor.

For the Church, this biblical understanding requires more than kindness. It requires a prophetic action to advocate, show solidarity and practically involve with rights violator. The Dalit working women are empowered by God, who stands in solidarity with them. Also, God is involved in the liberating mission initiated by the Church for establishing justice in the world.

3.3 Women, Labour, and Survival

According to biblical texts, women's labour is considered honourable and valuable. The Bible often presents women who strive for the economic health and well-being of their families and their communities. Consequently, it does not depict them as inactive. The woman talked about in Proverbs 31 is a very industrious woman. She takes care of the house, works hard, earns for the family, and has won the community's respect. Similarly, the Book of Ruth narrates how a woman engages in hard agricultural work to provide for herself and her mother-in-law. It is a picture of tenacity, responsibility and faithfulness in the face of poverty.

Based on the biblical stories, work is dignified and women's work is essential for the social and the economic life. However, the experiences of Dalit women in Tiruppur differ widely within the



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parameters defined by the Bible. Numerous women in garment factories and informal sectors work long hours under unsafe conditions for inadequate wages and suffer from insecurity of employment. In addition to working for pay, they do the bulk of housework and childcare and caring for other family members. Due to this, they get a double burden and have less exposure for development or social involvement.

Feminist theology connects and analyses how the patriarchal structure has undervalued women's labour and excluded them. Womenist Theology highlights the experiences of women who suffer from other forms of oppression like gender, class and social identity. Together with Dalit Theology, these perspectives state that the work of women must be viewed not just in economic terms, but as a reaffirmation of dignity given them by God. Hence, to ensure fair wage, decent working conditions, equal opportunities and social protection of Dalit working women is an ethical and theological necessity.

3.4 Jesus and the Marginalised

Based on the view of the Bible, the ministry of Jesus Christ is one of the strongest foundations for justice, inclusion and human dignity. In the Gospels, Jesus intentionally identified with outcasts rejected by society and deemed unworthy. In Luke 4:18-19, the statement that Jesus made publicly was, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because He has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the captives and recovery of sight for the blind, to set free those who are oppressed..." The statement keys in social justice and human liberation at the heart of the ministry of the Christ.

The Gospel accounts show a Jesus who was a friend to outcasts and the excluded. The Samaritan Woman serves as a powerful example of faith that inspires people to talk to one another authentically about faith, religion, culture and justice. While honouring the woman, He encourages her to rise and gives her back her place in society. In the Mark 5:25-34 story, Jesus cures a woman who suffers from chronic bleeding. He got her healthy again but more importantly restored her social status and spiritual health after exclusion.

The Importance of these gatherings has a deep Religious Significance for Dalit Working Women who continue to be excluded due to caste, gender and poverty. Jesus consistently rejected structures that stripped individuals of their dignity and fostered communities founded on compassion, equality, and reconciliation. Jesus had a preaching ministry that required him to stand with the people at the margins. It confirmed their value and it contested the bureaucracy that created a nuisance for themselves and people with power.

According to liberation theology, the works of Jesus Christ are seen as a commitment of God towards the poor. On the other hand, according to Dalit theology, Jesus is seen as one who stands beside the oppressed. Dalit theology sees that Jesus empowers the oppressed to reclaim their dignity



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in society. Therefore, churches need to embody Christ's inclusive ministry through their prophetic advocacy for labour justice, rejection of caste discrimination, defence of the most vulnerable women, and our own communities where all enjoy equal respect.

3.5 Equality in Christ

The New Testament describes equality as one of the hallmarks of the Christian community. According to Galatians 3:28, God doesn't draw lines in the sand that deprive someone's belonging or identity to Him. As one reading goes, "There Is Neither Jew Nor Greek, Slave Nor Free, Male Nor Female; For You Are All One In Christ Jesus." It doesn't mean that being Jews or Greeks or whatever erases someone's culture or social status. It just means that it cannot define the worth, dignity or inclusion of anyone in the community. Because of Christ, every believer has the same access to God's grace and status in the body of Christ.

In societies with caste and gender hierarchies, biblical teachings can be worlds apart. The Church will be a "discipleship of equals", with relationships marked by mutual respect, justice, shared leadership and inclusive participation. Dalit women's vision strives to challenge the ongoing caste exclusion, gender discrimination, and the system of discriminatory forms of labour.

Reading of Galatians 3:28 by Dalit Theology refers to a radical affirmation of equality and caste rejection. Womanist and feminist theologians assert that true Christian discipleship must destroy unjust and exclusive things. Because of the equality found in Christ, Christians must strive to include all marginalised groups in their fellowship worldwide. To guarantee that Dalit Women engage equally in worship, leadership, decision-making and in Theological Education and community development besides advocating their rights in the society.

In conclusion, the Church and the entire community must view Dalit women not just as victims, but as equals with the ability to lead and serve along with being deserving of justice. Christian groups can serve as agents for change to end discrimination and injustice. These groups can structures that are anti-people with the desire to build equality, compassion and solidarity.

4. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, theological action design that combines a primary field engagement with Dalit working women in Tiruppur with a constructive reading of scripture and Dalit, liberation, feminist and womanist theologies. The author needs to acknowledge and include the following: the exact number of interviewees/survey respondents; what sampling method (e.g. purposive or snowball sampling among garment and textile workers) was used; which localities or industrial clusters within Tiruppur were covered; what data-collection instruments were used (e.g. semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions or questionnaires); over which period the fieldwork was done; what institutional/ethical clearance was obtained, if any. The researchers who carried out the fieldwork did a thematic analysis on the data to identify what pattern caste based



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discrimination, gender based disadvantage and threat to human dignity is being faced in the work place. The concerns of Dalit working women must be read in dialogue with Section 3's biblical and doctrinal resources. Together, these resources will inform and be informed by each other through the lived experiences of Dalit working women. Dalit and liberation theology marry the empirical method with the theological method. Thus, it is a reflection that is always grounded in the reality of oppressed people and not in systematic doctrines of some abstract theology.

5. Research Findings and Analysis

5.1 Socio-Economic Conditions of Dalit Working Women

Findings of the study show that issues faced by Dalit women workers in informal sector in Tiruppur are interlinked. A large number of people are employed in the textile production, garment making, construction-related work and as domestic workers, but report inadequate earnings and limited access to steady work. The money that these women make is often the primary income of their families. Nonetheless, they still lack income, education, and other necessary resources. In line with Breman's broader finding, the informal economic growth in India hardly ever brings security to the weakest workers. Industrial growth in Tiruppur benefits the owners and intermediaries, not the workers. The same women who do the work that enables that growth remain on its periphery. Due to their widely unstable incomes, they are unable to invest in their children's education or travel to the health care services they need. In many cases, they also have little cushion against illness, injury or reduced work.

5.2 Caste-Based Discrimination in Workplaces

The report shows that "lower caste" individuals experience discrimination in the workplace at multiple successful A-listers firms in India, according to a report by a consultancy firm Deloitte. Stereotyping specific people in particular ways is the unconscious bias. Companies will be liable for the consequences of caste discrimination. Dalit women cannot negotiate wages or conditions and suffer discrimination due to the caste mark. Forms of hunger and eatable goods are denied to them. These experiences overlap to amplify their marginalization. It shows that caste-based inequalities pervade industrial labour relations, in spite of the sector's formal modernisation. Dietrich's work on caste and gender in the Indian women's movement help us understand how caste discrimination continues in an otherwise modern and export-oriented industry. The caste hierarchy cannot be dismissed as something that is merely rural or agrarian. The structure continues to be reproduced actively in the urban industrial workforce. It is embedded in the recruitment networks and supervisory relationships, and the informal social hierarchy on the shop floor.

5.3 Gender-Based Challenges

Women Dalit workers also face discrimination by gender in addition to caste. Violation of workplace rights were also due to sex-based insults and being told change because 'you are a woman'. This was



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also statistically significant. The contracts held by a large proportion of women are not subject to employment law nor provide any form of social security or legal protection. Moreover, they are consequently especially vulnerable to losing their jobs and financial security. Domestic work largely remains the responsibility of women. The burden of paid informal work and unpaid domestic work is borne by Dalit women. Consequently, they have less time, energy and ability to mobilise and fight for collective interests.

5.4 Human Dignity and Labour Rights

The findings indicate that labour rights and human dignity are closely linked. A hazardous and unstable workplace, along with insecure economic status and low self-worth, can create safety issues. Women often argue that both their labour and their person is deemed disposable while wages and jobs are irregular. Women from Dalit backgrounds who work must be afforded their due dignity at the workplace which respects and treats them equally and provides them a level playing field. Lack of this is not merely an economic injustice. It also has a theological aspect, as it denies workers their dignity that is due to all who are made in the image of God.

5.5 Theological Interpretation of the Findings

God did not leave out any human being with regard to scripture or theology. The scripture as well as theology affirm the dignity of every human and the justice due to him. In Tiruppur, Dalit working women undergo discrimination that is similar to the experience oppression of which Scripture repeatedly speaks. The God of the Exodus hears the cries of the enslaved Israelites (Ex 3:7-8) and more recently perhaps the unheard cries of women denied fair wages and safety. At the same time, Christ's kindness towards the marginalized (John 4:1-42; Mark 5:25-34) provides us with a theological model of how the church may respond to caste and informal labour, Dalit women rendered invisible. Various theologies, such as Liberation, Dalit, Feminist, and Womanist, advocate for the struggle against injustice and strive for equality, empowerment and social change. The consequences mean that the marginalisation of Dalit working-class women is not an incidental feature of the structure of Tiruppur's textile economy but a predictable outcome of caste and gender hierarchies that the church is theologically obliged to name and resist.

5.6 Justice, Equality, and Liberation in the Tiruppur Context

The study shows a greater commitment to justice and equality from institutions and communities is needed. Efforts aimed at addressing issues such as the gender wage gap, workplace discrimination and unsafe working conditions will help bring about genuine change. The research finds that in Tiruppur, a textile region only external pressure via some labour organisation code of conduct or advocacy from civil society has improved the conditions of labour substantially over the years. These changes did not occur automatically with continuous growth in industry. Based on the experiences we have gained while supporting the empowerment of women, we see that equal opportunity,



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protection of labour rights and greater social inclusion of Dalit women will also require targeted sustained intervention. This will need the engagement of business, government, community organisations and religious institutions and not the market.

6. Pastoral Implications

6.1 Church as a Community of Justice

The Church needs to embody and practice justice and equality in the message and reality of man and his dignity. The church ought to mobilise, raise awareness of the marginalised into a welcoming and inclusive community for its members. This is directed towards the Dalit working women suffering from caste discrimination and gender inequalities. To achieve casteless and gender just communities, there needs to be a sustained commitment on the part of church institutions to live out this mission in their preaching, worship and governance. There needs to be a strong institutional commitment to treat caste and gender justice as central to the mission of the church and not on the periphery.

6.2 Pastoral Care for Dalit Working Women

Dalit women face grave economic and social marginalisation in the informal economy. In response, the pastor can pray and bring their support by giving spiritual direction from the prayer group and their churches that offers support and healing. With this in mind, pastoral care must not only tend to spiritual needs but must also do something to address the actual stresses arising out of economic uncertainty, workplace harassment and paid and unpaid work overtime, all of which contribute to a difficult spiritual life for the women concerned.

6.3 Empowerment Through Education and Awareness

LinkedIn Profile Optimization Service can be Empowering Your Brand. The church can undertake efforts that will help Dalit women with legal rights, occupational health, money management and skill development to make informed choices and improve situations. Programs built with women for the women are the most effective programs rather than externally imposed programs. They respond to an expressed need of those women, which is why they do it.

6.4 Advocacy for Labour Rights

The church has an obligation to advocate for fair wages, suitable work conditions and the right to work safely. The church can accomplish all of the above by entering into dialogue with the employer, industry associations, and local government while backing the social participation and organization of the workers toward the advancement of justice and wellbeing at work.

6.5 Economic and Social Empowerment

Assisting Dalit working women with vocational skill training and self-help group assistance. Social empowerment also helps women participate extensively in community life and makes them decision-



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makers. It also helps in the advancement of society. Also, it helps to ensure that the income gains are matched with equally good growth in voice, agency and standing in church and society.

7. Conclusion

The essay examines Dalit women workers in the Tiruppur informal sector from a biblical and theological perspective. According to study findings, industrialisation of Tiruppur had not ensured sufficient protection of the vast number of women workers who are still facing caste discrimination, gender inequality, wage deprivation, labour exploitation, employment insecurity and social exclusion. All of them will impact the dignity of others. In the gospels of all religions, we are taught that all humans are created in the image of God and are equal and entitled to respect due to that. Jesus' ministry and liberation, Dalit, feminist and womanist theologies testify for justice, equality, inclusiveness and denial of oppression. The church shares with society the responsibility of speaking out against injustice and oppression and advocating through pastoral care, teaching and the treatment of workers effectively. It is essential for the Church leadership to work towards the launching and sustaining of programmes for Dalit women to lead in awareness and enhancing their economy. Studies from the past year about comparably developed provinces with similar issues, faith-based empowerment interventions can take place in future. It is important for Dalit working women to have their interests promoted and empowerments undertaken for justice, dignity, equality and inclusion.

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