

Caste, Class, and the Contradictions of Capital in Mahasweta's *Dhowli*

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Introduction

One might say that there is a rift between the Marxist feminisms of the East and West. This seems due largely to what a certain radical Marxist feminist tradition perceives as the increased reliance of feminist theory on bourgeois identity politics¹, which engage cultural positionality at the expense of critical engagement with class. This tendency is notable in the work of some postcolonial feminist writers, assuredly in response to the failure of early western Marxist feminisms to account for non-western feminism in difference (and, indeed, non-white feminisms in the west itself)². Attention to ethnic or racial identity has also emerged as a result of the many manifestations of patriarchy that appear in various parts of the capitalist world. Scholars that focus on the particularity of woman's culturally determined position in socio-economic hierarchy account for the fact that the disenfranchisement of woman is not experienced in commensurate terms across the globe. However, we are witnessing a renewal in attempts to shore up the division between the aforementioned Marxist feminisms in the face of a growing neoliberal assault on the rights of the working class. In recent years, research on feminism in difference has proliferated widely, and brings orthodox Marxist concepts such as class into conversation with identity categories of caste, race, ethnicity, and gender in their specific economic dimensions.³

The role of literature in navigating worker emancipation is not immediately evident, particularly given that scholars in the autonomous feminist tradition have often theorized around instances of concrete political agitation.⁴ These theorizations are based on shared experiences of struggle, experiences which expand the social imaginary and wrench into view alternative futures.⁵ Yet, these struggles have been marked by their geographical specificity and present challenges to the theorization of widely inclusive radical feminist theory. What literature offers—and particularly to those women who find their global mobility restricted by the conditions of their labor—is a forum for the dissemination of shared experiences of oppression and injustice. While culturally specific in its own sense, the representational dimension of literature allows mutability and portability of common struggle that cannot be communicated through localized instances of agitation. The writings of Bengali activist and fictionist Mahasweta bring to the fore precisely the common struggles of the disenfranchised woman in a society coming to grips with industrial modernity.⁶ Furthermore, given that present attempts to reconcile various Marxist feminisms aspire towards a revolution yet to come, one has no choice but to rely on the speculative in order to account for international solidarity.

I do not endeavor in this paper to provide a summary of the various theoretical formulations of caste and class in South Asia, nor is this the venue to rehash existing scholarship theorizing the relationship between unwaged, gendered labor and primitive

accumulation.⁷ What I demonstrate in what follows is how the position of the Dalit woman— ascribed markers of class, caste, and gender— throws into relief a constitutive contradiction of capital. While I acknowledge the significant bodies of research that address this hypothesis on the basis of *either* class, caste/ethnicity/race,⁸ or gender, I want to temporarily set these literatures aside in order to argue the following: that analyzing the disenfranchisement of the Dalit woman yields a more comprehensive understanding of what Nancy Fraser has termed the “boundary struggle” of financialized capitalism, and that this struggle is played out even in those parts of the world not generally thought of as centers of capitalist accumulation. Namely, that the tension between the spheres of socially reproductive work— primarily undertaken by lower-class, ethnically and racially marginalized women— and economic production is evident even in rural peripheries of the global south. My analysis consequently strives to decenter Marxist accounts of capitalist contradictions that take for their object of study the conditions and relations of labor in the West.

Contradictions of Capital and Care

I want to begin with a brief overview of what I refer to as the “boundary struggle” of financialized capitalism. This concept is derived from Nancy Fraser’s essay “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” in which she unfolds a definition of the boundary struggle as it obtains to what she calls the “crisis of care”:

Often linked to ideas of ‘time poverty,’ ‘family-work balance,’ and ‘social depletion,’ [the “crisis of care”] refers to the pressures from several directions that are currently squeezing a key set of social capacities: those available for birthing and raising children, caring for friends and family members, maintaining households and broader communities, and sustaining connections more generally. Historically, these processes of ‘social reproduction’ have been cast as women’s work, although men have always done some of it too. Comprising both affective and material labor, and often performed without pay, it is indispensable to society. Without it there could be no culture, no economy, no political organization. No society that systematically undermines social reproduction can endure for long. Today, however, a new form of capitalist society is doing just that. The result is a major crisis, not simply of care, but of social reproduction in this broader sense. (Fraser 99)

Framed as a “crisis” of social reproduction, the boundary struggle of financialized capitalism is what Fraser articulates as a tension between the unwaged sphere of social reproduction and the waged sphere of economic production. There are several “pressures” in the financialized system of waged labor that “squeeze”— constrain, tax, minimize— the social capacities of individuals (and primarily women) to perform reproductive labor outside of the sphere of waged work. This tension amounts to a crisis because the failure of financialized capital to adequately sustain unwaged care work results in the reciprocal breakdown of economic accumulation. If there are no sustained mechanisms by which to reproduce laborers and labor-power, the gears of the capitalist system grind to a halt.

Contrary to the immanent contradiction of class— in which the revolution arises from *within* the system that produces the proletariat— the contradiction of care arises in a space contiguous with, but *separate from* the sphere of economic production. Fraser contends that this division is imperative, arguing that “capitalism’s economic system depends on social reproductive activities external to it, which form one of its background conditions of possibility” (99). This contention takes precedent from the work of scholars like Silvia Federici and Kathi Weeks, who argue both that unwaged care labor is a driver

of accumulation, and that the spheres of social reproduction and economic production are continuous, not discrete. In her essay "Social reproduction theory: History, issues and present challenges," Federici raises the concern that recent Marxist feminist theorizations of labor "obfuscate the political significance of [social reproduction] and its ability to describe the changes that have taken place in the production of labour-power in the present phase of capitalist development" (55). This effectively prevents analyses that take seriously the economic value of socially reproductive work—all the more important because it is unwaged—and use this to account for coeval changes in the realm of production.

Kathi Weeks' *The Problem with Work* underscores the value of socially reproductive labor in the context of what she calls the "privatization of work" (3). Weeks exposes that work is no longer—and perhaps, has never been—confined to the realm of economic production, to the factory halls and office cubicles. Work is a concretizing regime that consolidates one's position in capitalist society in that it necessitates certain behaviors on the basis of one's conditions of employment:

Work is, thus, not just an economic practice. Indeed, that every individual is required to work, that most are expected to work for wages or to be supported by someone who does, is a social convention and disciplinary apparatus rather than an economic necessity. (Weeks 7)

Work masquerades as purely economic, when in reality it is only feasibly undertaken when fueled by various social engagements of care. What Weeks reveals—and what I take as a focus for this essay—is how the regime of work, in its exclusion of socially reproductive labor as "nonwork," genders socially reproductive labor:

[The gendering of the work ethic] was enabled by the historical processes through which work in the United States became equated with waged work, waged work was linked to masculinity, and unwaged domestic work was reconceived as nonproductive women's work. This lack of recognition of feminized domestic labor emerged with early industrialization, as unwaged household work came to stand as the (naturalized and feminized) model of nonwork that served to contrast and thereby sustain a (now masculinized) concept of work.... The work ethic could then be embraced as a masculine ethic while nonwork—a rather more expansive category including everything from leisure practices and consumption work to unwaged agricultural, household, and caring labor—was devalued by its association with a degraded femininity. (Weeks 63)

In short, the contradiction of care within capitalism is that socially reproductive work which sustains practices of accumulation and is predominantly undertaken by women is disregarded as a central driver of capitalist production. Fraser sees this as the creation of "institutional basis for new modern forms of women's subordination" (102), by which woman is always seen as epiphenomenal to the process of accumulation but never as part of it. And ultimately, this socially reproductive work falls to racialized, poor women in the rural peripheries of society (Fraser 114).

The Dalit Question

In what follows I articulate why it is that the Dalit woman provides such a fitting figure through which to understand this constitutive contradiction of capital and care. Insofar as this contradiction describes an entropic relationship between accumulation and reproduction, there are three aspects through which the contradiction is inflected through the figure of the Dalit woman: class, caste, and gender.

The relationship of class and the Dalit is a vexed one. While certain orthodox strands of Marxism would consider the Dalit as part of the uncritical *lumpenproletariat*—that class beyond the classes comprised of common criminals, prostitutes, and the unemployed—certain leftist traditions would make the case for the Dalit's—and, indeed, the *lumpenproletariat's*—importance in the revolutionary struggle.⁹ These distinctions, made on the basis of whether the Dalit “works,” is complicated by the aforementioned demonstration that there are forms of labor performed outside of the sphere of economic production, but are integral to it. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's famous *subaltern* or *subproletariat* of the essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is the most widely accepted account of the class of the Dalit, which synthesizes both the Dalit's inclusion as part of the *lumpenproletariat* and the subject position accorded to the Dalit by the European imperialist. She argues that the very notion of the capitalist subject is a western one, even as philosophers try to conserve the subject of the west by “pretend[ing] that it has no ‘geo-political determinations’” (Spivak 24). As such, the classed subject—which possesses the ability for revolutionary agitation, and is recognized in its work—takes for its referent western, colonial forms of social individuation, belonging “to the exploiters' side of the international division of labor” (Spivak 24). There is no place in the class system for the Dalit subject (who is not properly interpellated as S/subject, as it were), who is marked as a “pointing to an irretrievable consciousness” (Spivak 28). What this formulation of the Dalit achieves, however, is to indicate the class position of those individuals who perform kinds of socially reproductive labor that fall to the *lumpenproletariat*: sex and care work, housework, reproduction and child care, etc. These workers, positioned as they may be through social relations as upper, middle, or working class (through a logic that one might refer to as bourgeois identity politics), perform labor that properly falls within the domain of the *lumpenproletariat* given that this labor is not seen as contributing towards the project of accumulation. This destabilizes the neat categories of class as based on the economic productivity of the worker.

The Dalit's position in the caste system is similarly one of externality. Excluded from the four-caste *varna* system¹⁰, the Dalit people form a fifth, “depressed” caste of deeply disenfranchised peoples¹¹ subject to performing menial, unwaged labor as their source of livelihood. Caste and class are inextricably intertwined in the economies of South Asia, as argued by Kalpana Bardhan in her essay “Women: Work, Welfare and Status.” Their interplay is most evident in rural peripheries of the country, described by Bardhan as follows:

Broadly speaking, village society in India is stratified along two axes: by the relations of production (class) and by social status hierarchy (caste-cum-ethnicity). It is far from being a homogenous, predominantly peasant society. Increasing class differentiation combines and interacts with the traditional hierarchy of castes, the still-abiding dimension of social stratification. The age-old concentration of land ownership, combined with the recent processes of agricultural capitalism and tenant eviction, have generated a vast and growing mass of rural wage laborers on one side, and an increasing set of farmer-employers on the other. The latter are distinct from traditional landlords. As profit-oriented entrepreneurs rather than patrons of a more or less tied clientele of tenant-laborers, they have contributed, along with the technological displacement of sections of the artisanry, to the proletarianization of the rural landpoor. (4)

Caste consequently functions in coeval terms with class in India, where they mutually constitute one another. The relations of production are coterminous with and inextricable from the relations of social status hierarchy. Further, the proximity of caste to land

ownership reveals the relations of caste as moving beyond mere social stratification to occupy a structuring role in political economy. The obfuscation of the relationship between political economy and land ownership is underscored by Karl Marx as that which obscures and mystifies the inevitability of various forms of exploitation under capitalism:

Precisely because political economy does not grasp the way the movement is connected, it was possible to oppose, for instance, the doctrine of competition to the doctrine of monopoly, the doctrine of craft freedom to the doctrine of the guild, the doctrine of the division of landed property to the doctrine of the big estate—for competition, freedom of the crafts and the division of landed property were explained and comprehended only as accidental, premeditated and violent consequences of monopoly, of the guild system, and of feudal property, not as their necessary, inevitable and natural consequences. (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*)

Marx contends that political economy positions the pervasion of its mechanisms as “accidental” to the conception of private property rather than articulating that the concept of private property is generated only through the economic mechanisms of political economy. Land ownership masquerades as an effect incidental to industrial capital rather than its constitutive condition. Therefore, the relations of caste cannot be understood as comprising a purely social sphere epiphenomenal to the relations of production. They are assuredly economic as well, or at least contribute significantly to the structuring productive organization of class, in a manner perfectly consistent with the play of market forces:

In a stratified society, discrimination of wages and jobs/occupation by caste and sex is not a feudal remnant.... If the wage-and-access differentials follow the lines of traditional privilege, then attention gets conveniently deflected from the adaptive dexterity of capitalist exploitation processes to the stubbornness of feudal values, when it is actually a symbiotic relationship between the two. (Bardhan 5)

The consideration of caste as separate from the realm of production “conveniently deflects” from the mechanisms of capital that maximize the potential of any and all social divisions of labor. This logic is also, incidentally, that which prevents meaningful discussions of race in terms of accumulation. Caste and race (both understood here as functions of ethnicity), while correctly theorized as socially determinative categories of bourgeois identity politics, have also been subsumed as criteria for the ascription of economic responsibility. Namely, caste/race/ethnicity have been significant in determining to which parts of society unwaged, socially reproductive labor falls.¹²

The inflection of the contradiction of capital and care through gender in the Dalit case needs least explication. Women have long fought for the recognition of their unwaged labor, as Weeks accounts for in the efforts of second wave feminists to “revalue unwaged forms of household-based labor, from housework to caring work” (13). This is no less true of the Dalit woman in Indian society, whose labor remains unacknowledged by patriarchal capital while contributing to its development. Bardhan notes,

patriarchy—the ideology and the material instrument for the subordination of female labor—combined with the caste and class hierarchy to sustain differentiation in the labor market and in access to employment options. The combination is not only consistent with, but actually conducive to, the ongoing practices of capitalist accumulation in post-colonial India. (4)

The denial to recognize female Dalit labor—more so for her positions of class and caste—is simply another iteration of patriarchy’s sustained disavowal of women’s work (in which

I include both gendered socially reproductive labor, and other kinds of work performed by women). That this disavowal has been the historic basis of women's subjugation is well-documented¹³, more salient being the renewal of efforts to account for "the variety of subjugated social locations which women occupy" (Przybylowicz, Hartsock, and McCallum 6) given that capitalist patriarchy attempts to hold the interests of women separate based on class/caste distinctions. As Bardhan observes,

In a society divided by economic inequality and permeated by hierarchy, women hardly constitute a collectivity with shared interests and needs. They are stratified... by enormous differences in material resources, in the options available to them, and by the norms of status-appropriate work tied to their class and caste locations. Issues like unionization, subsidized food rations, and slack season jobs that are urgent to outcaste and tribal landless women would meet with indifference, if not hostility, from peasant women, not to mention women of landed families.... In urban areas, professional and salaried women are classes apart from women factory workers, day laborers, and petty producers and traders." (3)

The stratifications of class and caste that divide women otherwise subject to similar conditions of exploitation is all the more evident in the case of the Dalit woman, who only finds solidarity with others of her position¹⁴. She falls outside the realm of economic productivity, always adjacent to it and imbricated within it but never recognized by it, but cannot relate to—and at times is actively excluded by—other women who face a similar devaluation of socially reproductive work.

Laboring Peripheries in Mahasweta's *Dhowli*

My goal in this essay has been to demonstrate that the constitutive contradiction of capital is exceptionally evident in the Dalit context, and more broadly in the laboring peripheries of the world. Here I wish to expand upon this articulation through a critical analysis of Mahasweta's *Dhowli*, a short story narrating the fate of Dusad¹⁵ woman Dhowli, after she engages in an endogamous relationship in her small village of Tahad. In particular, I address the changing socioeconomic positions that Dhowli occupies in order to demonstrate how her labor, firmly in the realm of social reproduction, maintains circuits of accumulation despite her social disenfranchisement.

Dhowli's first obligation takes place prior to the events of the story, about which we receive information only through her recollections. She is married to a Dusad laborer, per the endogamous practices of her community, before he dies of a fever and leaves her a widow. Dhowli's generation of value in her role as wife is threefold. Firstly, she begins to work on the farm as repayment to the moneylender to whom she and her husband are indebted. This work, entirely physical, does not generate a "wage" so much as lessens the degree of debt owed. Secondly, Dhowli is made to do various household work in order to earn her keep in her marital home. This is the case even after her husband dies, her mother-in-law reasoning that "[she has] to work at [her] mother's place too in order to eat. Do the same here" (Mahasweta 190). This labor, too, yields no wage per say, but assures Dhowli food, shelter, and protection. Thirdly, Dhowli undertakes domestic reproductive labor—assumedly for those in her community, since we are not made to think that she has any children of her own from this marriage—traditionally expected of wives, which she describes as a "routine of backbreaking work, with kids in your lap, kids following you around" (Mahasweta 190). This labor, too, earns Dhowli no wage, since it is undertaken in the spirit of communal rearing. In this manner, Dhowli's socially

reproductive labor contributes to the generation of surplus value—in the first case for her husband’s moneylender, in the second case for her mother-in-law, and in the third case for her community—but is denied the privilege of a wage. Her ultimate disillusionment with marriage—“Dhowli had no desire for that kind of life” (Mahasweta 190)—demonstrates that the pressures applied on her by the demands of these various “works” reduces her capacity and desire to perform them, leaving debt unsettled, marital home unkept, and future children unborn.

Dhowli’s second socially reproductive obligation is to Misrilal, her Brahman lover. Here, too, her labor is threefold. The first labor that she performs in their relationship is the regenerative labor of love and companionship. Dhowli becomes Misrilal’s confidante, meeting him daily in the forest during the early afternoon (Mahasweta 192). It is to Dhowli that Misrilal confides his desires and ambitions, dauntless “in the solitude of the forest... telling her of his plans” (Mahasweta 192), and in listening she provides a space for the younger Misra heir to externalize his anxieties about the future. The second labor that Dhowli performs is that of sexual satisfaction, which begins during their first encounter in the forest—“The Misra boy’s voice was imploring, his eyes full of pain and despair. Dhowli was unguarded in mind and body. She gave in” (Mahasweta 192). The third labor that she undertakes, as a natural extension of the second, is to bear and rear Misrilal’s child, who will go on to serve the Misra family in some or other capacity. Yet again, Dhowli is uncompensated for these labors and, in fact, is condemned to death for her social transgressions by Misrilal’s mother—“She’ll be punished for daring to do what she did. She’ll pay. She and her mother will starve to death.” (Mahasweta 193). Ultimately, Misrilal’s betrayal turns Dhowli to prostitution, wherein she surrenders her son to her mother’s care and deprives Misrilal of her companionship and her body (particularly when he returns to Tahad and seeks her out in her new profession). The care work that she undertakes goes unacknowledged and actively disparaged, as a result of which she abandons this work altogether.

Dhowli’s third obligation is that of sexual gratification to her clients. Tired of the poverty inflicted upon her by her widowhood and her social exclusion, Dhowli seeks out sex work as a lucrative opportunity to improve her lot in life. Unable to secure waged work lugging lumber for the local contractor, Dhowli “opens her door” to the coolies¹⁶ and extracts value from them in the form of cash, corn, lentils, salt, and oil. This is the first and only instance of socially reproductive work—work that allows the coolies to perform their waged labor more effectively, and recover from its physical and mental burdens more quickly—that is compensated in the story. Dhowli is all the more willing to perform this labor because she is compensated as such—“had [she] known [how easy it would be to sell one’s body,] they could have had full meals much earlier; the baby could have been better fed and cared for” (Mahasweta 202). However, Dhowli is prevented from this work when Misrilal discovers her success and is embarrassed at his own comeuppance. He reports her work to the panchayat¹⁷ and she is forced to move to the city of Ranchi and register herself as a prostitute on threat of death. Consequently, the socially reproductive labor that she provided to unmarried Dalit wage-workers disappears when she leaves for the city, where she will assuredly face new discriminations and oppressions for her engagement in sex work by an emerging urban bourgeoisie.

What these vignettes demonstrate is that the denigration of various forms of socially reproductive labor—that contribute to the accumulation of value, just not for Dhowli herself—that Dhowli performs ultimately pushes her to stop performing this labor.

Capitalist economy's free-riding reliance on Dhowli's "activities of provisioning, caregiving, and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds (although it accords them no monetized value and treats them as if they were free)" (Fraser 101, parenthesis mine) undoes her ability and desire to undertake these activities altogether. These activities, which "[form] capitalism's human subjects, sustaining them as embodied natural beings, while also constituting them as social beings, forming their *habitus* and the cultural ethos in which they move" (Fraser 101), provide the conditions of possibility of accumulation in postcolonial India, conditioned as it is by topographies of class, caste, and gender. The failure to reproduce these topographies—and the failure to reproduce more women like Dhowli—is failure on the part of the capitalist system to assure its propagation. The contradiction of capital and care is starkly evident in this case, where complex economic relations of production are threatened by the disavowal of socially reproductive work.

Conclusion

What I have demonstrated in this essay is the articulation of capitalism's constitutive contradiction of care as it intersects with categories of class, caste, and gender in their economic dimensions. Let me conclude by suggesting that this demonstration opens our understanding of capitalist accumulation to include those forms of value-producing labor that are disregarded as productive in the west, but that play a key role in processes of surplus extraction as they are embedded in non-western cultures. The failure of radical Marxist feminisms to account for the economic dimensions of caste and gender has maintained dualist understandings of capitalist development that are unable to reconcile processes of accumulation as they unfold in the global north and south. Namely, in taking for their object western relations of production, the radical Marxist feminist tradition reinforces the system of centers and peripheries, where the rural, developing regions of the world are not considered central stages upon which the tragedy of capitalist exploitation is performed. Paradoxically, my analysis of the labor of the Dalit woman indicates that this exploitation is most stringent in the rural peripheries of the globe, though perhaps obfuscated by a liberal bourgeois reading of the interplay of class, caste, and gender.

As Alessandra Mezzadri indicates in her essay "On the value of social reproduction: Informal labor, the majority world and the need for inclusive theories and politics," it is imperative that we move away from western-centric analyses of labor relations to "study the features of actually existing labor relations for the majority of people globally" (33). The myth that social reproduction is not value producing in the Marxist sense is disproved by such study, which allows us to "appreciate the role that social reproduction plays in processes of labor surplus extraction and value-generation.... from the perspective of the livelihood of the majority world" (Mezzadri 33). If Dipesh Chakrabarty has called for the provincialization of Europe, I would add that we must also strive for the metropolitanization of the "majority world"—to take seriously, as key sites of capitalist development, those societies termed "underdeveloped," "transitional," "developing," or otherwise still in the process of financialization. These societies are not separate from, but are produced by the accumulation of surplus. And, in turn, the accumulation of surplus is accelerated by unwaged forms of work performed in these societies.

What the figure of the Dalit woman crystallizes, above all, is the various intersecting matrices of oppression in which non-western women find themselves caught as they navigate an increasingly (dis)connected world. And while this essay has taken the Dalit

woman as its focus, what I indicate is that this multiply-marked condition is typical of the vast majority of women. Theorizations that underscore the importance of socially reproductive labor as considered “from the bottom” are equally inclusive of the Dalit woman in India as they are of the Black woman in the United States, or the Muslim Uyghur women in China, and so on. The tension between the spheres of social reproduction and economic production might also serve as the nexus for renewed revolutionary, anti-capitalist agitation. What these would entail is nothing short of a critical return to conceptualizations of so-called primitive accumulation that posit feudalistic modes of exchange as prior, rather than coeval with, the circuits of financialized capital today.

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Notes

- ¹ For further context, see Nancy Fraser’s *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (2020), where Fraser argues for a reinvigoration of radical feminism in the face of the growing global neoliberal crisis.
- ² This argument was first made famous by Angela Davis in *Women, Race, and Class* (1981).
- ³ See Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser’s *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (2019), Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziadah’s *Revolutionary Feminisms: Conversations on Collective Action and Radical Thought* (2020), and Sabine Hark and Paula-Irene Villa’s *The Future of Difference: Beyond the Toxic Entanglement of Racism, Sexism, and Feminism* (2020), to name a few.
- ⁴ Take for example Selma James’ *Women, the Unions and Work or What Is Not to Be Done* (1972), which was born from the agitation surrounding the International Wages for Housework Campaign, or Alexandra Kollontai’s *The Social Basis of the Woman Question* (1909), from the First Russian Revolution.
- ⁵ See Arjun Appadurai’s *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996) for a detailed overview of the constitutive role of social imaginaries in postcolonial struggle.
- ⁶ Literature might be considered alongside cinema as a “vernacular modernism,” described by Miriam Hansen in “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism” (1999) as that which “combines the dimension of the quotidian, of everyday usage, with connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect, with circulation, promiscuity, and translatability” (Hansen 60).
- ⁷ Kalpana Bardhan’s “Women: Work, Welfare and Status” (1986) remains an authoritative account of the relationship between labor hierarchies of caste and class in India. For a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between gendered labor and processes of primitive accumulation, see Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (2004).
- ⁸ I group these terms together because they seem to operate along similar axes of power in various national and cultural contexts. This entails the mutual intelligibility of research done on caste, ethnicity, and race, evident in recent work such as Isabel Wilkerson’s *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*.
- ⁹ One famous proponent of this view is Mikhail Bakunin, who makes this case in “Marx, Freedom, and the State” (1950).

- ¹⁰ The *varna* system is a Hindu system of social stratification that classifies society into four castes: Brahmins (priests and scholars), Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors), Vaishyas (farmers and merchants), and Shudras (laborers). Those belonging to any of the aforementioned castes are referred to as “caste Hindus” (*savarna*), while those outside of these castes are referred to as “untouchables” (*avarna*).
- ¹¹ The classification of an individual as “Dalit” based on one’s economic means was popularized by Indian social reformer B.R. Ambedkar. For his criticism of the caste system, see his famously undelivered speech, “Annihilation of Caste” (1936).
- ¹² For an extended discussion of the role of race in the process of accumulation, see Nikhil Pal Singh’s “On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation” (2016).
- ¹³ See Gayle Rubin’s seminal “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex” (1975) or Arlie Russell Hochschild’s *The Second Shift* (1990). For an analysis specific to South and East Asian economies, see Peter Custers’ *Capital Accumulation and Women’s Labor in Asian Economies* (2012).
- ¹⁴ For a sustained analysis of intersectional feminism, See Kimberlé Crenshaw’s “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989)
- ¹⁵ The Dusad community is an endogamous Dalit community specific to the Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh.
- ¹⁶ Coolies are unskilled laborers in South and East Asia.
- ¹⁷ Panchayats are village councils and the de facto authority on the settlement of disputes.

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