
Somewhere between Human, Nonhuman, and Woman

Shanta Apte's Theory of Exhaustion

ABSTRACT In 1939, at the height of her stardom, the actress Shanta Apte went on a spectacular hunger strike in protest against her employers at Prabhat Studios in Poona, India. The following year, Apte wrote a harsh polemic against the extractive nature of the film industry. In *Jaau Mi Cinemat?* (Should I Join the Movies?, 1940), she highlighted the durational depletion of the human body that is specific to acting work. This article interrogates these two unprecedented cultural events—a strike and a book—opening them up toward a history of embodiment as production experience. It embeds Apte's emphasis on exhaustion within contemporaneous debates on female stardom, industrial fatigue, and the status of cinema as work. Reading Apte's remarkable activism as theory from the South helps us rethink the meanings of embodiment, labor, materiality, inequality, resistance, and human-object relations in cinema. **KEYWORDS** actress, caste, embodiment, exhaustion, Indian cinema, labor, Shanta Apte, stardom, strike

On May 10, 1938, three extras, or background artists, drowned to death during the shooting of the stunt film *Veer Bala* (Brave Girl, 1938). The incident took place at Powai Lake in Bombay after seven male actors, all “good swimmers,” entered the water to film a swimming scene.¹ According to a newspaper report, “Hardly had 30 feet of film been shot when three of them showed signs of exhaustion and sank within a short time.”² They were K. G. Shastri (age thirty), Sheikh Abdulla (twenty), and Abdul Salam (twenty-five). Only two of the bodies were retrieved. It takes approximately twenty seconds to run thirty feet of 35mm film at twenty-four frames per second. Moreover, the men “were swimming only twenty feet away from the shore.”³ So why would three competent swimmers drown within mere seconds? If the news report is to be believed, these men were at the limit point of human exhaustion.

How should media theory address the body as it exists at the limits of cultural practice and technological mediation? In turn, what can somatic states such as exhaustion tell us about the history of cinema—its forms, techniques, and place in the world? This essay discusses exhaustion as a material trace of

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practice. Exhaustion is, as the poet Mangalsh Dabral writes, “what’s left in the end.”⁴ It is the residue that accrues in the shadow of cultural techniques, often quite literally as the “exhaust” or waste that is expelled from a technical ensemble during the course of its operation. Cinema, as this essay suggests, is an ecological assemblage that transcends ontological boundaries. As such, cinema is constituted by productive energy relations between machines and organisms, humans and nonhumans.⁵ The exhaustion that builds up within this ecology offers us a generative analytic to expand film history toward a history of embodiment as production experience.

Cinema has historically been a site for the activation of people and things, for setting them into motion. The viewer’s body is impacted by the screen: she may be moved to tears or to laughter, or transported into reverie. At the same time, a vast ecology of off-screen practices also participates in cinema’s web of energy relations. As an employer, cinema has the power to put bodies to work. The cine-ecology is at once energized and consumed by practices required to bring filmed images to a commercial screen. Running a camera motor, transporting imported raw stock, waiting for the next lighting setup, or writing continuity are actions that depend on energy-intensive encounters between humans, electricity, celluloid, climate, paper, oil, and buildings. These off-screen energies are transmuted, or re-materialized, into on-screen images and box office revenues. Energy transfers, therefore, undergird the existence of movies in the world and are central to the historical status and significance of cinema and its projects of world-making. Thinking about exhaustion as corporeal depletion allows us to see connections between the image and the labor that produces it. At the same time, we are also able to reconceive cinema’s relation to modernity with attention to the specificities of other places in other times, in other bodies, in other circuits of power and practice.

In what follows, I plot an intricate map of practices, performances, and theories of exhaustion in order to draw out the connections between film as work, as representational apparatus, and as commercial enterprise. My main protagonist is a 1940s star actress from India, Shanta Apte (pronounced Ap-tay). The figure of the film actress has been the leading symbol of Indian cinematic glamor since the silent era.⁶ During the 1930s, as silent cinema transitioned into the talkies, the singing and speaking filmic female body added a new affective charge to the figure of the actress. The spectacularized sounding body of the woman on-screen was a resolutely energetic body, a marker of the vitality of an indigenous film industry and a nation on the cusp of political independence. Through her writings and activism, Apte interrogated the logics of vitality that

dominated the aesthetic and industrial address of early talkie cinema in colonial India, and demonstrated that it is the discourse of energy that enables the extraction of labor.

Tiredness, for several thinkers on exhaustion, “exists as a threshold, always at the edge of something else, often allied with a drift or fall toward sleep at one end or a rebounding rejuvenation at the other.”⁷ For Roland Barthes, weariness is “the opposite of death,” since it points to that which is “livable in the body,” precisely because it can grow tired.⁸ But there is always also another possibility with exhaustion—to drift into death, to transit from a threshold condition that defines life, to the end of all sensation and potential. As a concept and a material phenomenon that lies between life and death, exhaustion forces us to think of the relationalities between the living and the nonliving, rather than see them as oppositional ontologies. Nevertheless, ideas of fatigue, depletion, and exhaustion have been mobilized over the decades precisely to *reinforce* distinctions between the living human and the nonliving thing. This ideological binary between human and machine played a significant part in the Bombay cine-ecology’s vigorous moves toward industrial consolidation in the 1930s.

In the early twentieth century, the concept of fatigue wound its way from metallurgical discourse to industrial labor considerations, from whence it branched into multiple public and private trajectories. During World War I, terms such as energy, output, and fatigue were used to address not only machinic productivity but also the efficiency of factory workers. By the 1930s, these terms entered into the discursive struggles for legitimacy being fought by India’s cine-workers. Film practitioners and commentators struggled to retain the status of “art” for cinema against comparisons with factory work and machinic toil. Within this milieu Shanta Apte seized on exhaustion as the critical threshold that distinguished the cine-worker from the other stuff of cinematic production such as props and equipment. In 1940 she wrote and published a polemical text titled *Jaau Mi Cinemat?* (Should I Join the Movies?), which was marked by the idea of finitude, considered by N. Katherine Hayles to be “a condition of human being.”⁹ Writing as an actress-singer, Apte pointed out that a film performer’s physical capacities suffer depletion with time—her looks and her voice change, making her career and popularity ephemeral. Apte therefore asserted that the question of exhaustion is also the question of the individual. Embodiment was the philosophical and material core of Apte’s unprecedented text, and she developed her argument by constructing ontological and agential boundaries between human and nonhuman participants in the cine-ecology. At the same time, Apte’s industrial negotiations as a female singing star

accentuated another vector of labor, one that is gendered, though Apte refused to explicitly acknowledge it.

This essay positions Apte's text as theory from the South that helps us rethink the meanings of gender, embodiment, affective labor, inequality, and human-machine relations at a critical phase in the career of cinema. I historicize Apte's insistence on maintaining a human-object demarcation—an insistence that is at odds with my own emphasis on the relationalities between multiple and multispecies actants. At the same time, I maintain that it is important not to lose sight of individual subjects—singular actors whose practices shaped and transformed the networked cine-ecology of energy and exhaustion. In dialogue with Apte, I think through the materiality of the off-screen world of film work and parse her insistence on embodiment as grounds for resistance. An ethics of relationalities is most successful when we recognize that assertions of singular individuality constitute the ecological process, and that for some historical actors, these assertions constitute the right to life itself.

STRIKE! AN ACTRESS CONFOUNDS

On the evening of July 17, 1939, Shanta Apte went on a hunger strike against the management of Prabhat Studios, Poona, charging them with “what she considered to be arbitrary and uncivil treatment accorded to her by the directors” and choosing “the verandah of the outpost of the studio” to stage her protest.¹⁰ Prabhat's executives denied the allegations. After two consecutive nights of fasting in situ, she was advised by her doctor to stop.

Apte's rebellion was unprecedented in its form, and elicited multifarious reactions. Large crowds turned up at the Prabhat gates to witness the scene. A constable had to be posted there to keep ardent fans in check. Newspapers from as near as Bombay to as far as Singapore and Australia covered the event.¹¹ Prabhat issued an official statement that subtly characterized Apte as a verbally abusive woman who was unable to convey “what exactly she wanted.”¹² The editor of the popular *filmindia* magazine, Baburao Patel, declared the strike a tasteless publicity stunt, concluding that “everyone was surprised to note that the star should have adopted this procedure instead of coming to an amicable settlement with her proprietors. In fact, this procedure did the star no good except giving her some newspaper publicity.”¹³ Overall, commentators were at a loss to explain the meaning of Apte's public protest, and its gendered dismissal is the only coherent line running through contemporaneous reportage.

Shanta Apte was born in 1916 in the town of Dudhni, and her singing talent was apparent at an early age. Orphaned at six years old, she was cared for by her

older brother, Baburao, a schoolteacher determined to transform her into a musical star.¹⁴ Apte trained at the Maharashtra Sangeet Vidyalya music school in Pandharpur and regularly sang at local religious festivals. With the advent of talkies, she found a lucrative new avenue for her vocal skills and was cast as Radha in the mythological film *Shyam Sunder* (Beautiful Lord Krishna, 1932) at the age of sixteen. She soon became “one of the great singing stars in the pre-playback era.”¹⁵ In 1934 Apte signed a six-year contract with Prabhat and appeared in some of the most famous films of her career, such as *Amrit Manthan* (The Great Churning, 1934), *Amar Jyoti* (Eternal Flame, 1936), and *Kunku* (official English title *The Unexpected*, 1937). These films offer us a representative sample of the aesthetics of vitality that characterized Apte’s star persona—a vitality that she performed using posture, gesture, stance, and voice (fig. 1). They also contributed greatly to public perceptions of Apte’s “fighting nature,” an image of a fiery woman who defied hypocritical social norms and advocated for gender equality.¹⁶ In *Kunku*, for example, she plays a young woman, Neera, who is tricked into marrying a much older man. Appalled by her situation, Neera treats her marriage as a performative arena for embodied dissent. In a move that echoes the mode of the hunger strike, she refuses to consummate her marriage and asserts control of her body as an exercise in self-determination.

By all accounts, Apte’s hunger strike was “unique,” “strange,” and perhaps even “unparalleled in the film-history of the world.”¹⁷ Apte mobilized contradictory symbols to make her point. She appropriated the security guard’s bench at the entrance to Prabhat, right by the studio’s time clock. Dressed in trousers and a sports shirt, she looked quite unlike her on-screen sari-clad avatar, provoking a reporter to describe her outfit as “hunting attire.”¹⁸ Journalists found it “embarrassing” to approach the female star as “she was reclining herself on a narrow bench perusing a picture magazine.”¹⁹ As Neepa Majumdar points out, “while her attire was a violation of gender norms, her location [on the guard’s bench] violated class boundaries.”²⁰ Furthermore, what was the appropriate political genealogy for this perplexing event of performative self-depletion? Some pointed out that it was a cinematic “equivalent of the classic practice of sitting *dharna* at the doorsteps of the oppressor.”²¹ A vague Hollywood precedent of a “sit-down” strike was cited, as was Mahatma Gandhi’s use of the fast “as a soul-purifying source or perhaps a political weapon.” Reporters found a pattern between Apte’s protest and her feisty screen image as a principled opponent of social injustice, suggesting that she was simply “living the part of the spirited young lady which she so successfully portrayed in the Prabhat Film Co.’s first social, *The Unexpected*” (fig. 2).²²



FIGURE 1. A publicity portrait of Shanta Apte on the cover of *Mirror* magazine's April 1939 issue. Her simple cotton sari, minimal jewelry and makeup, and trendy blouse mark her as a sensible (rather than frivolous) modern woman. Image courtesy the National Film Archive of India.

There is no evidence of individual or collective strikes by film employees in India in this period, making Apte's protest indeed exceptional. Yet from a cinecological perspective, her strike connects to a wide range of similar modes of struggle and defiance in late colonial India. In 1939 the hunger strike was a

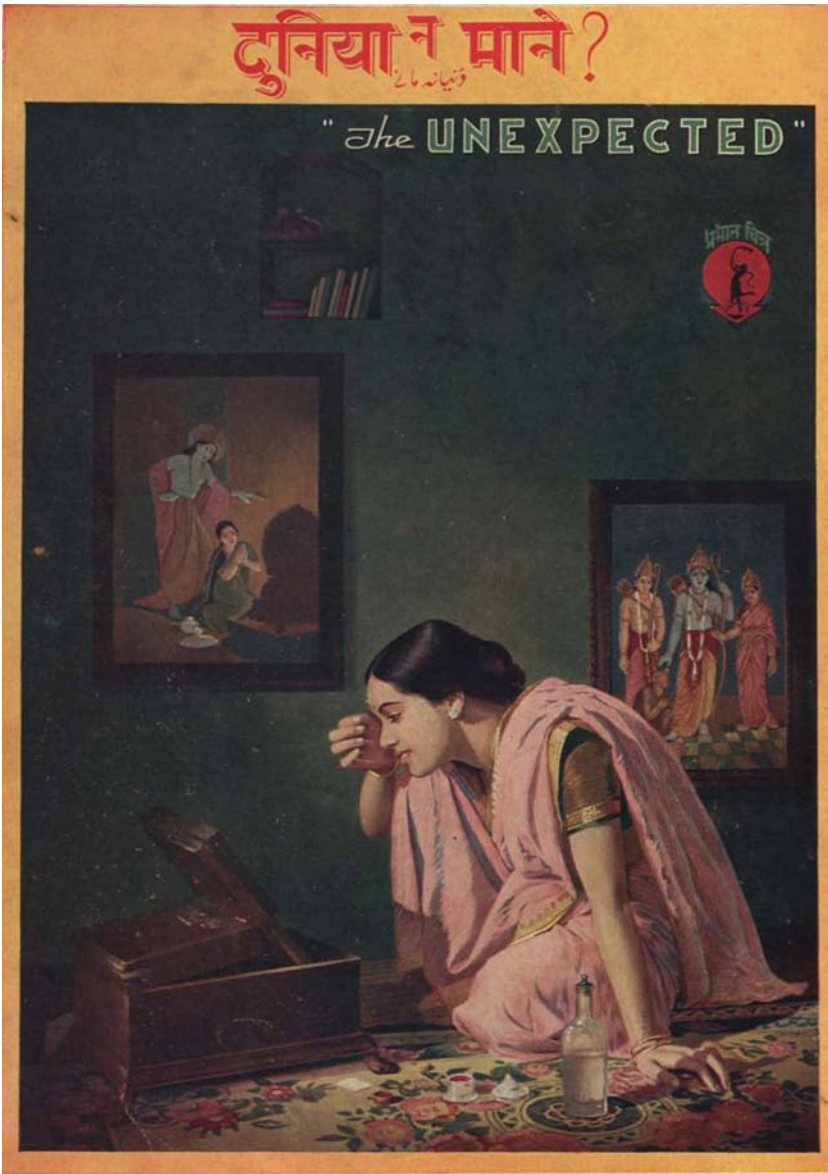


FIGURE 2. Song booklet cover for *Duniya Na Mane*, the Hindi-language version of *Kunku/The Unexpected* (dir. V. Shantaram), 1937. Song booklets were essentially slim publicity pamphlets that carried miniaturized versions of the film poster, cast and crew credits, synopsis, and song lyrics. Image courtesy the National Film Archive of India.

recognizable form of dissent in British India, closely identified with Gandhi's politics of passive resistance and his philosophical approach to protest as penance and self-purification. Gandhi's fasting body was photographed widely and constituted a visual event, as performative as Apte's in its power and sensory address. At the same time, the strike as refusal of work and demonstration of proletarian solidarity had become a spectacular feature of growing industrial agitation in the Bombay region. Through the 1920s and 1930s, Bombay's millworkers resoundingly demonstrated their ability to execute powerful solidarity actions, leading to the consolidation of a radical labor movement in interwar Bombay. It is between these various iterations of the strike—the anti-colonial and the anti-capitalist, the individual and the collective, the inwardly purifying and the outwardly political—that Apte's isolated, individualized gesture of resistance must be positioned. In the end, however, as an individual fast undertaken as a mode of principled protest against a mightier opponent, marked by modern masculine dress, muddled by Apte's conspicuous femininity, and contrary to her energetic star persona, this event may be truly unfixable. In the rest of this article I attend to this unfixability by pinpointing what was most ineffable in the performance: the staging of bodily depletion, that is, an insistence on embodiment as the grounds for resistance.

What was the compelling reason for Apte's performative resistance? The immediate cause she cited was the nonpayment of her salary for a number of days when she had not visited the studio. Prabhat was rumored to be transitioning from a partnership into a limited company, altering the legal responsibilities of the partners, and Apte had inquired about her status in the future scheme of things.²³ The studio failed to respond to her queries, and so she stayed away from the premises for two weeks. When she arrived to pick up her salary on payday she was asked to sign a receipt acknowledging her absence. Apte agreed to sign the receipt on the condition that she would record the circumstances of her absence in the salary register itself, claiming that she was "entitled to stay away because there was no definite written reply from the management."²⁴ This angered the management and they threatened to withhold her salary as disciplinary action. Apte went on strike. Journalists and studio executives implied that she had deliberately exacerbated the situation in order to break her contract with Prabhat. And indeed, contract issues were at the core of Apte's dissatisfaction with the film company.

Up until the 1940s, film actors, even stars, were hired by Indian film companies on a salaried basis. Employment contracts were multiyear and restrictive in nature, binding the actor to a particular studio in exchange for a fixed monthly

remuneration. Contracts could quantify the actor's labor in terms of a stipulated number of films that had to be completed within the contractual timeline, or in terms of the number of years that the studio exclusively owned the actor's labor. Public awareness of studio contracts was widespread; tabloids and film trade magazines regularly gossiped about contractual negotiations. Rumors about the inter-studio migrations of popular actresses such as Sulochana, Leela Chitnis, Padma Devi, Durga Khote, and Rattan Bai made for significant news. Around the time of her hunger strike, Apte too was being competitively wooed by studios in Bombay and Lahore, and her assessment of her market value, augmented by rival offers and fan adulation, was at odds with Prabhat's casting decisions. Despite the major success of her heroine-centric, dual-language film *Kunku/The Unexpected*, she was passed over in favor of the lesser-known Shanta Hublikar as the heroine in *Aadmi* (official English title *Life's for Living*, 1939). For her last acting obligation at Prabhat, *Sant Dyaneshwar* (Saint Dyaneshwar, 1940), Apte was relegated to second heroine. By all standards, she was underemployed at Prabhat, averaging one film a year while stars such as Devika Rani and Gohar Mamajiwala averaged three films a year at the height of their talkie stardom. With one year remaining before her contract expired, Apte's strike was catalyzed by frustration with long periods of inactivity, a desire to seek better work and higher compensation elsewhere, and an acute sense of the temporality of an actress's bodily capacities.

It is difficult *not* to see Apte's hunger strike as a loud critique of contemporaneous studio-actor relations, or management-labor relations. Apte strategically staged her protest at the limits of the studio and the world outside, with the studio clock that monitored work time ticking dramatically overhead, marking her durational fast as time that the studio could not monetize. If the symbolism and material specificities of Apte's strike seem legible to us today, in her day they led to much confusion, even derision, at least for the journalists whose accounts provide our main access to the event. These accounts indicate a struggle over meaning—not only What does this mean, but How does it signify?

Neepa Majumdar has argued that the dominant discourse on “respectability” in the Indian cine-ecology called for a kind of “moral and cultural labor” from stars, particularly women, who were required to demonstrate decency and education. Journalists and producers thus tried to trivialize Apte's strike by pointing to the supposed impropriety of her behavior. Further, the respectability framework “completely bypassed the legal discourse of stardom as material labor.”²⁵ This is an important point. Even though film businesses across the world use legal tools to contractually own, rent, or restrict a film star's labor, public discourse

around stars deliberately disavows their labor.²⁶ For most viewers, an actress's labor remains unseen even though it is starkly visible as acting on the silver screen and continues into the off-screen world in the form of interviews and public appearances.²⁷ This invisibility is supported by the capitalist mode of the film business, where labor must be relegated to the fringes of recognition; the labor of stars is camouflaged by a deflecting focus on their glamor and surface appeal, and the labor of the extra is rendered invisible through its literal positioning on the edges of the screen and the cine-ecology.

In order to understand stardom as labor, we have to see the on-screen and off-screen as relational and frequently *discontinuous*, rejecting the manufactured illusion of the seamless continuity of the star image from screen to world. Shanta Apte's hunger strike staged the actress's body as vulnerable to depletion, thereby reminding her spectators that the star body participates in everyday material rhythms of energy and exhaustion. Her act befuddled journalists precisely because it juxtaposed conflicting concepts—stardom and labor, an energetic star aura and a depleting live body.

DURATIONAL DEPLETION: SHANTA APTE'S THEORY OF LABOR POWER

A year after her hunger strike, still at the height of her stardom, Apte published a fierce polemic against India's film studios.²⁸ This Marathi-language monograph, long out of print, combines political economy analysis of the increasingly capitalist film business with an unusual consideration of the body at work. In the preface Apte declares that her primary motivation for writing the text sprang from the hundreds of fan letters she received every day, each asking the same question, "Jauu mi cinemaat?" or, "Should I join the movies?" The text was her public response to the film fan who longed to transition into a film worker. Meant more as a warning to aspirants than as an instruction manual, *Should I Join the Movies?* is an insider's exposé of the film industry's institutionalized bad practices and was absolutely without precedent in the archives of Indian cinema. While I have not found any direct record of Apte's reading habits, the text is marked by what has been termed a "Marathi Marxist" vocabulary, a set of words and phrases that were popularized in the interwar Bombay region since the 1931 publication of the first Marathi translation of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848).²⁹ At the same time, she crafts her own theories of film work and labor, exploitation and resistance, which mark her text as an original expression of political thought grounded firmly within Bombay's intellectual milieu. What is most striking is that, despite its overall hyperbolic tone, *Should I Join the Movies?* eschews the sensational for the mundane, giving the reader case

studies of durational forms of workplace depletion rather than singular tales of injury and death. Apte focuses on the *work* of acting and describes the everyday treatment of labor, the steady withering away of human faculties due to temporally accruing overexertion on one hand, and underuse on the other.

Should I Join the Movies? was written at a time when Apte was reflecting on, and chafing at, the position of the salaried actress in the film studio. A chapter titled “In the Furnace of Capitalism” presents a series of anonymized case studies that explicate Apte’s corporeal-psychic diagnosis of cinema’s extractive effects, as business. The most affective complaints are reserved for a studio’s deliberate underuse of its human resources. In one example Apte describes the plight of a young actress, likely based on her own experience at Prabhat:

Days and then months passed like this. The poor girl would come in every day and ask, “No work for me today?” and go home, resigned, in the evening. The period of the contract was almost over and still the young woman was given no work. She was made to just sit around for a year or two. . . . Who then thinks about the mental state of the actress who is kept on merely as a substitute? It gnaws at her mind: to come to the studio day after day and get no work. She must not speak to anybody, but has to stay shut up in a tiny room. Nothing to read, no other means of passing the time; she has to sit there staring at the ceiling. To come each morning with hope, and return home in the evening bored and disappointed. . . . But what did the producer care? We are paying her a salary, we will give her work or make her sit idle, it’s for us to decide.³⁰

The depletion that Apte describes here is psychic and durational, the kind of worker-depression that has been theorized as the malaise of immaterial labor in the twenty-first century, but afflicts workers in any system of production that sunders work from pleasure, labor from sovereignty.³¹ Her diagnosis is that of unfreedom, of being rendered incapable of productive activity or the growth of individual potential.

The development of one’s potential was a personal mantra for Apte, and her main advice to film aspirants was that they strive to improve themselves: “One’s form is a gift of the gods, which means it is not in one’s hands to acquire. Still one can make efforts to look good, to be attractive. To keep one’s body trim and proportionate is always in our hands.”³² A physical-culture movement was spreading across India at this time, paralleled by interest in nutritional science.³³ Apte, too, subscribed to modern ideas of bodily productivity, enhanced by disciplined exercise, a regulated diet, and voice lessons. In a rare first-person account in *Should I Join the Movies?* she declares, “I had a daily routine which I never

changed, whether I had work or not: for the last seven or eight years I kept my diet regulated, I performed two or three different exercises daily, practiced singing at least three hours a day without fail, and took great care that my health would remain good and my voice would be unaffected.” But this is not a celebration of the vital body for its own sake. Apte explains that “those qualities [form, fitness, artistic skill] are what allow us to live with dignity. They are what give us our success, our money and fame.”³⁴ Apte thus conceives of an actor’s physical capacity and proficiency as the locus of artistic sovereignty and political subjectivity. What she is describing here is labor power, which she terms *karya-kshamta*, or the capacity to work, a concept that had captured the global industrial imagination in the nineteenth century.

Anson Rabinbach has given us a valuable account of the discovery of labor power by modern society. According to Rabinbach, a singularly powerful idea that defined nineteenth- and twentieth-century notions of work and productivity was that of the human body as a motor, which supplied a metaphor of work and energy that allied the body with modern industry and allowed scientists, philosophers, politicians, social reformers, and physiologists, of varied ideological persuasions, to apply concepts of energy conversion and conservation to the working body. The modern Western idea of labor power derives from this thermodynamic model and describes a quantifiable, mechanical potential for energy expenditure. Apte saw labor power not as mechanical and abstract potential but as organic and individualized latency. In *Should I Join the Movies?* the mechanical is the inhuman and the film industry is an “inhuman mechanical city” (*amanush yantranagri*) that uses various techniques to “squeeze the life out of poor people.”³⁵ Her use of the concept of labor power is material and embodied, rooted in experience and affect, even as it is firmly located within a transactional regime of value. It is important to note here, as Rabinbach does, that even in Marx, labor power is “a purely quantifiable output of force, subject only to abstraction. As mechanical work, as ‘Arbeitskraft,’ labor power is entirely indifferent to the nature of its material form.”³⁶ For Apte, on the other hand, labor power is qualitative and embedded in the singularity of material biology. It is a delicate relation between slowing down and speeding up, wherein each body has its own velocity, where bodies are vulnerable to tiredness and exhaustion but also capable of being revived with a careful touch.

Apte’s commitment to the self as worker makes *karya-kshamta* much more than simply physical wellness, and she veers away from liberal and Vedic notions of physical health as personal responsibility. Labor power is the capacity to produce monetary value for an employer, and hence, the worker alone

cannot be held accountable for the sustenance of labor power. In an interview Apte directly asked: “Who is responsible for the development of the abilities of an actress? Does this responsibility not fall on the institution—the film concern—to which the actress belongs?”³⁷ She elaborates in her book, “What have the owners and managers of these film companies done to ensure that the labor power of actors increases, that their lives have some security? Is it not their duty to take care of their bodily health, to teach them the art of acting, to train their singing voices, to provide libraries so that they can improve their knowledge, furnish them with sports equipment, and generally look after the welfare of the actors?”³⁸ It is worth noting that labor power, for Apte, is simultaneously physical and intellectual, joining the mind with the body. She passionately argues that film producers’ reluctance to spend any capital on developing and nurturing the work potential of their employees ensures that actors, particularly children, are routinely tossed out “on the rubbish heap of the film industry.”³⁹ The exhaustion of creative labor potential, thus, creates its own kind of human waste, a kind of dead labor.

In a chapter derisively titled “The Inanimate Are Superior to the Animate!” Apte addresses the specificities of the human body, its possibilities and limitations within a film production milieu:

The owners and managers of the film industry do not look at actors, actresses, and children as if they are human! They look at these people in the same way that they would glance at a piece of furniture in the studio! . . . Does the shape of wooden statues ever alter? Does the voice of a sound machine ever change? Even so, they will pour their soul into ensuring that these inanimate objects should remain intact. They will take the greatest care of them. But an actor’s qualities do not remain static, they undergo change, and that is because the actor is a human being.⁴⁰

Apte’s critique rests on deconstructing the film industry’s energy economy of human exhaustion and vulnerability. Thus, she posits a fundamental separation of human and object in formulations that, although rife with internal contradictions, are significant for their conceptual and political claims. For Apte, the capacity to change, to change negatively—that is, *to be depleted*—serves as the ultimate distinction between the human and the machine, where the machine is understood in its most basic sense as a technical object that is designed by humans to perform certain tasks.

In his well-known text *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (1958), Gilbert Simondon investigates this question of the relation between technical

objects and humans. Simondon's opening proposition is that there is a crisis in human society because culture and technology have been falsely sundered, divided into two separate realms of meaning versus utility, resulting in a state of alienation: "While the aesthetic object has been considered suitable material for philosophical reflection, the technical object, treated as an instrument, has only ever been studied across the multiple modalities of its relation to man as an economic reality, as an instrument of work, or, indeed, of consumption."⁴¹ For Simondon, human and machine, or natural objects and technical objects, are different but imbricated in a coextensive web of processual relations that can be called technics. The term "technics" indicates that technologies and humans are fundamentally entangled, and that the techniques that link one to the other also transform and define both. According to Simondon, it is because we do not recognize this processual entanglement that society looks on the machine with either fear or euphoria, as a savior or a subjugating force. Historically, humans as tool bearers invented machines to take on the tool-bearing function but soon grew anxious about being replaced by the machine or even being enslaved by technology. These framing concepts of enslavement and domination mask the reality of the human-machine relation, which is ideally one of working alongside rather than above or below.

Simondon's theories were a response to decades of techno-utopianism alternating with techno-phobia in industrial centers across the world. Twentieth-century Bombay was tied to this network of industrial centers by global capital and European imperialism. It is no surprise, therefore, that Bombay's human workers were also compared to machines in the 1920s, as in the United States or the Soviet Union: their capacity for work was measured and calibrated, and their identities abstracted into quantifiable categories such as energy and fatigue. Apte's interest in the humanness of her labor was an explicit rejection of the dehumanization of fatigue and the machinization of the human in contemporaneous industrial discourse. She seized on exhaustion as the ultimate arbiter of the boundaries of human and machine. In this she was not alone. Fatigue was "the permanent nemesis of an industrializing Europe . . . the most evident and persistent reminder of the body's intractable resistance to unlimited progress and productivity."⁴²

DEFINING FATIGUE, DEFINING THE WORKER

Bombay city, in the years that Apte entered the cine-ecology, was becoming the foremost center of industrial activity in India and the site of a growing militant labor movement. The postwar boom led to an expansion of the local textile

industry from 1918 to 1922, but depression soon hit the sector, leading to irregular rhythms of production and an increased demand for casual labor.⁴³ Mill owners, desperate to maximize short-term profits, increased their use of machinery and intensified their use of labor, in keeping with new rationalization schemes.⁴⁴ Bombay city in these decades was witness to unprecedented and massive demonstrations of worker solidarity, strikes, and subsequent clampdowns by the industrial-colonial complex. Apte's hunger strike and her discussion of labor power as organic and fundamentally human unfolded against this backdrop. Her specific use of weariness as the key to exposing the reification and exploitation of labor drew on a larger discourse of fatigue that circulated in Bombay in these first decades—the same years as cinema's implantation as a powerful public institution and a large-scale employer.

In *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (1986), Wolfgang Schivelbusch delineates how the idea of fatigue took on a technical connotation in the mid-nineteenth century at the height of the Industrial Revolution.⁴⁵ The emergence of the concept of material fatigue was, like labor power, dependent on the emergence of the "machine" and notions of the machinic that centrally implied a repetitive, dynamic, and intensified expenditure of energy. By the 1910s, material fatigue was routinely conceptualized as a *problem* in Bombay's print-mediated public sphere. During World War I, the constant demand for large-scale production of heavy machinery increased journalistic coverage of metal fatigue. Newspapers regularly discussed the latest research that shed light on the problem or offered a solution. By the end of the war, however, the focus of this public discussion, as observed in articles and op-eds, had subtly shifted to the question of *worker* fatigue. Human fatigue was defined as "a state of diminished efficiency occurring after labor and partly dependent on it, the degree of fatigue being determined partly by the duration and character of labor performed."⁴⁶ The 1920s saw a surge in articles advocating statistical research on fatigue in India. This call was a reaction to long-standing racist-climatological beliefs about the lack of vitality (read: indolence) of the Indian worker. Indian journalists and labor advocates hoped that scientific fatigue experiments would dispel these tenacious myths: "The heinous charge brought against the Indian operative, that he is incurably lazy, still stands, because no one has tried to find out what he would do under different conditions."⁴⁷

The idea that human vitality is connected to the climate is a long-cherished one. Peter Redfield, among others, has amply discussed "climatic theories of action" that started to consolidate around the *fin de siècle*.⁴⁸ A case in point is

Ellsworth Huntington's *Civilization and Climate* (1915), which posited a direct causal relation between climate and racial inferiority.⁴⁹ In fact, theories about the capacity of climate to affect human bodies, and through bodies to affect social customs, technological capacities, and intellectual development, go back at least to eighteenth-century ideas about environmental determinism. Compared to colder climes, the tropics were considered particularly unfavorable, as heat and humidity supposedly engendered indolence and lustfulness. Such beliefs were foundational to the racial-geographic epistemology of colonial science and the imperial projects it sustained. In Bombay's dynamic industrial economy, racial stereotypes of the Indian worker's inferior physiology were mobilized by mill owners to justify longer work hours. The discourse on labor reform also toed the climatological line but argued for uncertainty, citing the need for scientific experimentation before passing the final verdict on the Indian worker's productivity. From 1916 until 1922, newspapers regularly reported on new statistical data that correlated numbers of work hours with percentage increases or decreases in production output (fig. 3).⁵⁰

Debates on best practices in India's manufacturing sectors continued through the 1930s, with all sides privileging scientific findings and empirical research over ethical or social frameworks for approaching the labor question. For Schivelbusch, the migration of the concept of fatigue between physiology and technology "demonstrates how the two realms exerted a mutual influence upon each other."⁵¹ The physiological meanings of fatigue took on an "exactitude" through the technological interest in machine and metal fatigue. While this is certainly true, I want to highlight that in 1930s urban India, the Taylorism-inspired scientific discourse on energy and fatigue helped displace the social problem that was raging across large-scale industries, namely, the problem of embodied worker distress. The comparison of the human body with the machine, coupled with the allegedly Indian problem of lethargy, permitted factory owners, labor committees, and politicians alike to abstract the question of embodied labor into one of energy, efficiency, and output. It is essential, therefore, to consider Shanta Apte's preoccupation with exhaustion within this discursive history.

Varying imaginations of the self as worker, the body as repository of labor power, and the conflict between capital and labor permeated 1930s and 1940s Bombay through print and cinema. Against the background of Bombay's general strikes, the *mazdoor* (worker) became a symbol of subaltern agency and revolutionary potential. Films such as *Mill* (1934), *Mud* (1940), *Hamrahi* (Co-travelers, 1944), *Neecha Nagar* (The Lowly City, 1946), and *Bhookh* (Hunger, 1947)

FEEL FIT AND FRESH IN THE EVENING



Scientific experiments showing the degree of fatigue resistance under treatment by Sanatogen have recently been conducted by an eminent phy-

sician (See *Medical Echo*, Jan, 1925). The gain in physical fitness was very evident and the postponement of fatigue remarkable.

A Fatigue Test

A fatigue test was made on a group of workers—non-Sanatogen users—after working for six hours. They had then exhausted 86% of their energy.

The same people were tested again after they had taken Sanatogen for a fortnight, twice daily. After six hours work they then had used up only 20% of their energy. Without Sanatogen they had only little of their energy left to enjoy the rest of their day, while with Sanatogen they were practically as fresh and fit as when they started work.

Here then is indisputable proof that Sanatogen is a mighty nerve food and energiser. Sanatogen will enable you to do your day's work practically without fatigue, and to come to your hours of recreation full of the joyous energy of healthy life.

SANATOGEN

The True Tonic-Food

Sold at all Chemists and Bazaars.

FIGURE 3. This advertisement for the health tonic Sanatogen draws on the current circulation of fatigue research to make an ostensibly scientific appeal to consumers. *Times of India*, March 13, 1930, 7. Image courtesy Proquest LLC.

presented sharp views on the exploitation of the urban proletariat. What is most striking in this cinematic trajectory is the fact that none of the left-inclined screenwriters and directors responsible for these films turned their activist gaze toward the cine-worker.⁵² But, after all, could there be a conception of a cine-worker when cinema itself was not considered labor?

If the forced fracture of the vital and the mechanical was endemic to twentieth-century modernity, then its contradictions were exacerbated in colonial India, where nationalists struggled to construct artificial limits between the authentic and the foreign, the inner and the outer, art and industry.⁵³ The question of social validation of the film form was an industrial crisis of a high order in the early talkie period, and a variety of stakeholders joined in the effort to recuperate cinema as a worthy cultural object. Positioning film as art was one of the strategies they employed. However, ossified divisions between art and industry precluded any possibility for commentators and practitioners to recognize that cinema could be *both*. For an industry that had long suffered a crisis of image, the definition of film work became the locus of industrial anxiety and cultural status. This definitional anxiety became particularly clear when attempts were made to include film studios under the Factories Act of 1934. The key terms that defined a factory were “workers,” and “manufacturing process,” and it is on these terms that a new debate erupted within the cine-ecology. Was a film studio a factory? Were film practitioners workers?⁵⁴ These questions were aggressively debated in trade journals, with the most vociferous resistance articulated by Ram Gogtay, editor of *The Lighthouse* weekly magazine and secretary of the Motion Picture Society of India. Gogtay claimed that film production was not a “manufacturing process” and that hence, “the individuals employed in the various processes ancillary to the production of a film cannot be termed *workers*. They are either artists or technical experts. . . . Moreover, a worker by the very word implies a laborer, an individual who has more brawn than brain, a manual worker who only knows how to traverse the prescribed turnstiles.”⁵⁵

Gogtay deemed that there were no manual workers in the film industry, as all film practitioners are skilled “artists or technical experts.” His characterization was consistent with the industrial respectability project to re-signify Indian cinema as a techno-aesthetic form served by a workforce of artists and technical specialists, as opposed to a lowbrow commercial form that could be associated with dancing girls, uneducated laborers, and venal financiers. Gogtay rejected the very idea that cinema was an industrial form on the belief that films are not commodities, for instance “soaps, hosiery, clothing, hardware,

footwear, or any other article of mass consumption, hundreds of which can be produced per day,” but works of art. He asserted that “the motion picture not being an article of consumption, the studio in which it is produced after months of artistic labor, cannot be said to be carrying on a manufacturing process.” Polemically, he concluded that those who think otherwise are “enemies of the motion picture.”⁵⁶ In his zeal to position cinema as an art form, Gogtay disavowed several categories of manual work regularly performed by cine-workers, hence demonstrating the fallout of opposing the aesthetic and the mechanical, brain and brawn. Thus it is remarkable that within a cine-ecology where journalists, producers, and even leftist film writers were unwilling to concede that film work was labor, Apte treated the category of “film worker” as a given.⁵⁷

TRANSLATION: CASTE, CLASS, AND THE BODY OF THE CINE-WORKER

An early chapter in *Should I Join the Movies?* titled “Saptavarna” (The Seven Castes), likens the film industry’s organizational structure to the discriminatory caste hierarchies entrenched in modern Hindu society. According to Apte, the film industry could be divided into seven caste groups: Capitalists, Companies (including managing directors), Distributors, Exhibitors, Advertisers, Workers (directors, assistant directors, technicians, camerapeople, developing, printing, editing, recording actors and actresses, music directors, other musicians, and extras), and Publics.

At the top of the caste pyramid she situated the *bhandavalwaley*, or capitalists, who “are born in the house of Lakshmi, goddess of wealth” and “naturally get first place among the upper castes.” They “only look to whether the capital they have invested will fetch the expected interest.” For all practical purposes, the first five *varnas* could be considered a mighty quintet, an “impermeable cartel” whose members had “full freedom to eat together” (a reference to the exclusionary social practice of in-caste dining for fear of social “pollution”). At the opposite end of the spectrum are the “workers,” who are the “slaves or serfs” of the dominant castes. The worker is completely dependent on the upper-caste quintet, and “must take the money that is given and do whatever work he is told to.”⁵⁸ Apte labels all salaried as well as daily wage employees of a film studio as “workers,” a term she uses in English. Workers can be further divided into two subgroups: actors and actresses, and other workers or “servants.” The servant class includes “those that earn big salaries” as well as “those who are laborers.”⁵⁹

In Apte’s taxonomic vision of the power asymmetries in the cine-ecology, laborers and the public together constitute the most undervalued and oppressed class—the *paddalit* (crushed underfoot) (out)castes of cinema, a term that was

used by prominent anti-caste thinkers such as Jyotirao Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar. Actors and actresses are just a little above film laborers, but still within cinema's working class. The nuances between different types of film work and technical expertise are irrelevant for Apte. Her agenda is to point to the broad battle lines of class conflict within the cine-ecology—that is, between the agents and the foot soldiers of capitalism. Thus, complex internal differences of training, creative agency, and salary on one hand, and class, ethnic, linguistic, gender, even caste divisions on the other, are subsumed under the idea that all workers have a precarious vocational existence. The worker is one who can be exploited at will and dismissed at will, because she needs those with capital and the means of production to purchase her labor. This precarity marks the body and everyday life of the film worker, transcending the industrial and social boundaries of above- and below-the-line work that are in use in the fields of media industry studies and production studies today. In this, Apte anticipates current critiques of the “creative economy” by scholars such as Vicki Mayer, who asserts that “deconstructing the rhetoric of the creative economy and its implicit material inequalities in the first instance means breaking down artificial distinctions between the mental and the manual, between skilled labor and organic labor, between above the line and below the line.”⁶⁰

The framing of cinema's industrial hierarchy as a seven-tier caste system allowed Apte to magnify the crisis of class oppression. But there is more to Apte's analogy than the immobility of caste. As an embodied historical figure, the film worker's identity as a systematically depleted *paddalit*, or downtrodden form of life, has deep connections to the history of caste experience and identity in India. Dalit (formerly “Untouchable”) identity and caste history are inextricable from embodied experiences of stigmatization and degradation. While Apte does not, and cannot, equate the cine-worker's somatic status within a capitalist structure with the social and psychic stigma of the “caste body,” she tries to create an equivalence through images of the suffering body.⁶¹ Her focus on embodiment pinpoints the dehumanization of so-called untouchables by the caste system as the point of comparison with the treatment of the cine-worker under capitalism.

Historian and social theorist Anupama Rao has examined the place of the body within Dalit emancipatory politics, noting that Dalit political subjectivation repeatedly returns to the affective meanings of the stigmatized caste body, claiming political space by exposing somatic suffering as the ontic identity of the Dalit self. Rao argues that Ambedkar's critique of caste grappled with the corporeal politics of thinking untouchability as a “peculiar kind of *body history*.”

The principal tension lay in the paradox that the more the stigmatized body was mobilized to assert identity, the more intractable became the problem of shedding that corporeal stigma. Further, as Rao highlights, stigma “is a form of embodiment that cannot be abstracted, or universalized,” while the emancipatory potential of a universalized category called the “proletariat” depends on the abstraction of labor. Ambedkar therefore “struggled with caste and class, stigma and labor as supplemental, yet *incommensurable* categories.”⁶² This tussle between the abstract and the embodied, the universal and the particular, is central also to Apte’s polemics. Whereas Ambedkar negotiated the materiality of the stigmatized caste body with the universality of labor, Apte makes the reverse move of *rematerializing* labor power as embodied experience by using caste as a metaphor for proletarian subjection. At this point it is important to highlight that though Apte and Ambedkar were separated by caste, gender, education, vocation, and political influence, both were thinker-activists intent on theorizing humanity and dehumanization as the locus of social justice. Apte repeatedly returns to ideas such as the right to dignity and self-respect as the basic conditions for an equitable film workplace, thus homing in on dignity as the key arena for the constitution of the actor as human, much as the Dalit movement focuses on dignity in the fight to recognize the Dalit as human—that is, a subject with rights to citizenship and justice.⁶³

The question of caste in Bombay cinema is woefully under-analyzed and constitutes a particular gap in the field of production studies. This gap is amplified in historical studies of cinema, partly because of the recalcitrance of conventional archives. There is ample evidence to suggest that cinema as a workplace enabled the social mixing of peoples from diverse caste backgrounds. It is harder to assess the nature of this inter-caste mixing and the everyday life of caste in the cine-ecology. Film magazines of the 1930s regularly shared information on the religious, linguistic, and ethnic identities of actors. Even if caste categories were not always explicitly named, much was implied for those who could read the codes of naming and description. *filmindia* magazine could therefore suggest that some actresses were “respectable girls” from “first-class families” while referring to others as “lower types of women.”⁶⁴ Readers regularly inquired about actresses’ real names, as opposed to their screen names, in order to identify their religious and caste status: “Is Renuka Devi a Muslim girl? What is her real name and where is she from?” or “What is the age of Vasanti and to what caste does she belong?”⁶⁵ Caste prejudice added another vector of pressure to the film industry’s respectability project.

In the realm of filmic representation, several talkie social films took up anti-touchability positions that signaled the modernity of Indian cinema (fig. 4).

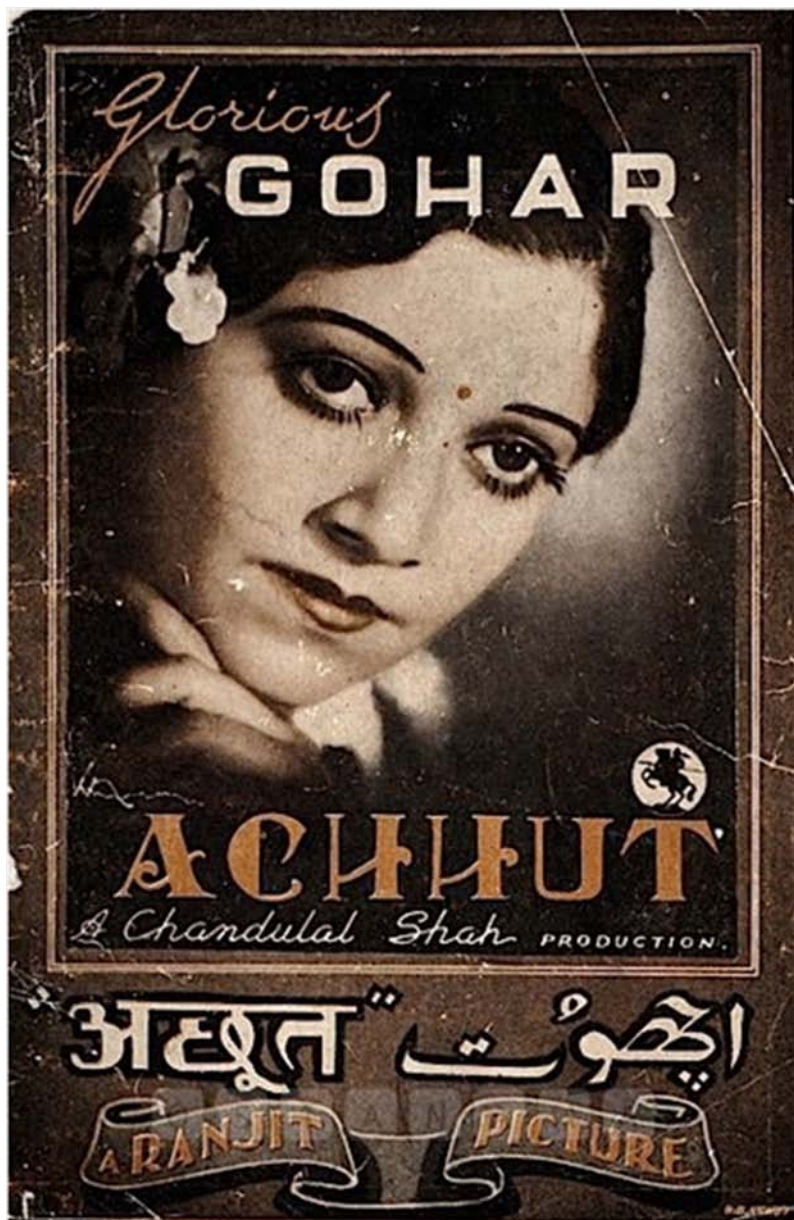


FIGURE 4. Song booklet cover for Ranjit Movietone's *Achhut* (Untouchable, dir. Chandulal Shah), 1940, starring the hugely popular "Glorious Gohar." *Achhut* was part of a series of early social films that took up anti-untouchability positions and signaled the modernity of Indian cinema. Image courtesy Osianama Archive and Library Collection.

Nevertheless, the respectability agenda that was chosen as the film industry's priority plank for industrial legitimacy encouraged caste consolidation in various material ways. The most self-consciously respectable studios, such as Bombay Talkies and New Theatres, were dominated by an executive class drawn from the privileged castes. Further, if we were to study the demographic composition of vocational and technical subgroups, caste hierarchies would reveal themselves in the historical preponderance of certain caste groups in certain work profiles. In such a scenario, the admixture of caste and class consciousness in Shanta Apte's book marks a critical moment in Indian intellectual, social, and political life.

Apte was born into a Chitpavan Brahmin family from Pune and was simultaneously upper caste and lower middle class. On the one hand, Apte's focus on the depleting human body suggests that her class location altered her relation to her bodily subjectivity. She does not hesitate to add actresses to her metaphorical caste group of "workers," mixing up traditional vocational (and caste) distinctions between musicians, carpenters, scribes, performers, and technicians under the same umbrella. In fact, the caste-ing and uncaste-ing of the actress's body was an ongoing social and industrial reality. An article in the *Chicago Defender* from 1930 explicitly noted this: "The educated woman [in India] is forbidden by caste and religion to appear before the public on either stage or screen. Only three classes of girls are eligible for a stage career, the nautch girls, Eurasian (half castes) and sweeper women. The latter have no caste at all and after cleaning up food remnants and garbage can appear as any female character."⁶⁶ All actresses, by association, were thus rendered outcastes, and this is certainly true in terms of social suspicion, even ostracism. As an actress, Apte invited the readers of *Should I Join the Movies?* to join in affective solidarity with this worker caste, a social category defined by the taint and the structural inequalities of film production.

On the other hand, Apte possibly also aimed to outrage readers who found it insupportable that a carpenter, a screenwriter, and an actress should all be forced into the same caste bracket. This possibility is supported by Apte's opening lines in the chapter: "Lord Krishna used his enormous intellect to split Indian society into four *varnas*. . . . Lord Krishna cast the *varnas* according to culture, while in this [film] world they are cast according to power. He who has power falls in the upper caste!"⁶⁷ Apte problematically attributes caste in society to a certain naturalized order of things, while caste in the film industry is described as arbitrary and artificial. Apte's translation of class into caste can thus be seen as an appeal to the caste consciousness of local readers and filmgoers in

an effort to make film industrial hierarchies more visceral, and we must not shy away from the contradictory implications of one woman's very personal and public struggles with the caste question. The journalists who covered Apte's hunger strike were unable to fix its antecedents within recent global or local histories. We might take their befuddlement as a salutary lesson. Apte's actions belonged to an expansive historical force field of protest politics centered on the body—collective industrial strikes, Gandhian bio-moral politics, and even Neera's embodied refusal of a false marriage in *The Unexpected*. Reading across Apte's hunger strike and her book, we see many continuities as well as contradictions, a push and pull of ideas that were hers in her time, and those that are ours today. What is most significant in this dialogic play is that we witness one actress's process of becoming a cine-worker, her attempts at individuation on the terrain of cinema.

Apte's hunger strike eventually led to the termination of her contract with Prabhat Studios and the creation of her own company, Shanta Apte Concerns. And while she may be completely exceptional in her strident public voice, several film actresses during the early talkie years resisted both studio and social control through other means. Jaddan Bai and Jahanara Begum filed defamation suits against gossip magazines; Romilla sued a film studio for nonpayment of salary; and Sulochana, Tara Sundari, and Meena Shorey were hauled into high-profile court cases over alleged breaches of contract and insubordination. In 1942, Apte herself was sued for breach of contract and a suit for recovery of Rs. 100,000 as damages was filed against Messrs. Shanta Apte Concerns.⁶⁸ Industry commentators, predictably, made disapproving noises about litigious women, but the very publicness of these legal "scandals" allowed the film actress to produce herself as a modern worker.

CONCLUSION: A POLITICS OF EXHAUSTION

Though Apte did not directly discuss her status as an actress in *Should I Join the Movies?*, she spectacularized the cultural meaning and economic value of the female body in a fledgling film industry through a performative act of resistance: a hunger strike (fig. 5). Both nationalism and capitalist industrialization framed the body as human infrastructure, and Indian cinema joined this project with its aestheticization of the dynamic female body. Apte deployed the hunger strike as a deliberate and durational staging of bodily depletion in direct refusal of the female body's infrastructural and symbolic role. Apte also keenly felt the temporality of the beautiful, performing human body, one of the central commodities of the film industry and a site of precarity for *female* actors, who



FIGURE 5. Song booklet cover for *Main Abhi Nahin Hoon* (I Am Not a Weak Woman, dir. Shantaram Athavale), 1949, starring Shanta Apte. *Abla* is a feminine noun describing someone weak, helpless, or feeble, but it is often translated as simply “woman” or “the weaker sex.” It is remarkable that Apte’s star persona continued to be associated with female agency and strength a decade after her strike. Image courtesy the National Film Archives of India.

shouldered most of the burden of on-screen attractiveness and its limited shelf life. Moreover, Apte's discussion of film-industrial hierarchies in terms of caste highlights the systemic exhaustion of not just working-class labor but also female bodies across class divides. The simultaneous aesthetic celebration of the vital female body on-screen and the social stigmatization of the actress's working body off-screen created its own peculiar forms of everyday psychic depletion and exploitability, a phenomenon that film historiography has yet to address.

Exhaustion and death can be found at the center of several cinematic anxieties. Our concerns with the death of the medium, the politics of archives, and the problem of film conservation are anxieties that arise from the very exhaustibility of cinema as material. The physicality of celluloid assumes depletion, and indeed, depletion of the film print has been a prerequisite for its projection and continued cultural life. Depletion signals the limits to growth, yes, but it also marks new pathways for circulation and invention that circumvent the temporality of linear progress. The variegated political economy of film in South Asia has historically necessitated the circulation and recycling of the depleted print into second- and third-tier exhibition markets.⁶⁹ A critical look at exhaustion allows us to connect material histories of celluloid and equipment with experiential histories of embodied film practice; together they complicate notions of obsolescence, finitude, and the very temporality of cinema. Exhaustion also intervenes in current theorizations of embodiment in cinema. The weariness of the actor, their capacity for wearing out and "being spent," is an experiential category that pushes us to connect theories of filmic embodiment rooted in studies of spectatorship and representation with embodiment as production experience. In exhaustion, the history of the body intersects with the history of cinema to yield new insights on how mediatic and ideological constructions of the vital body in the 1930s played out alongside legal and economic control of the depleted body. Film work comes into view as labor, and creativity shows itself as monetized labor power, framed by the exigencies of cinema as marketplace, as employer, and as site of production.

Shanta Apte's corporeal politics depended on the difference between the human and the object but not, in my view, on a denigration of objects, or suggestions of human mastery over technological tools. Rather she pointed to the dangers of conflating different modes of existence, and the material implications of reducing the human to the status of the *object-as-commodity* under the specific regime of twentieth-century capitalism. From such a perspective, Apte and the three drowned men—Shastri, Abdulla, and Salam—each occupied different positions of power within an asymmetrical cine-ecology that relies on the

exhaustion of the human as much as it needs the fatigue of cameras, studio buildings, and microphones. ■

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NOTES

1. Bombay was renamed Mumbai in 1995; I use the colonial-era name to stay accurate to the period I am discussing. It is worth pointing out that the renaming politics of the 1990s took on a specifically exclusionary and ethno-nationalist tenor in Bombay, which further complicates an author's decision to use the name Bombay or Mumbai even when referring to the contemporary city.

2. "Film Actors Drowned. Exhaustion during Swimming Scene," *Times of India*, May 11, 1938, 9.

3. "Film Actors Drowned," 9.

4. Mangalesh Dabral, "Exhaustion," trans. Robert A. Hueckstedt, *Indian Literature* 52, no. 4 (2008): 117–18.

5. As I lay out in more detail in my forthcoming book, *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (Columbia University Press, 2020), an emergent cine-ecology, such as the early talkie ecology of 1930s Bombay, comprises a porous ensemble of humans, things, technologies, and techniques moving toward individuation within a specific spatiotemporal topography.

6. I use "actress" rather than the more gender-neutral term "actor" to signal the gender specificity of the work and social meaning of the female actor in this period in India. The word held a congeries of associations, from glamor to scandal, money to morality, and made explicit the power differential between male and female actors. I acknowledge these historical asymmetries through the choice of "actress" as a vocational, industrial, and social term.

7. Elena Gorfinkel, "Weariness, Waiting: Endurance and Art Cinema's Tired Bodies," *Discourse* 34, nos. 2/3 (2012): 315.

8. Cited in Gorfinkel, "Weariness, Waiting" 316.

9. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 5.

10. "Film Star Refuses Food. Protest against Treatment," *Times of India*, July 19, 1939, 10.

11. For instance "Miss Shanta Apte Breaks Fast," *Straits Times* (Singapore), July 28, 1939, 15, mentioned in Neepa Majumdar, "Gossip, Labor, and Female Stardom in Pre-Independence Indian Cinema: The Case of Shanta Apte," in *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 181.

12. "Prabhat's Statement on Miss Shanta Apte's Hunger-Strike," *Mirror*, July 23, 1939, n.p.
13. "A Star on Hunger Strike," *filmindia*, August 1939, 21.
14. All biographical details are from Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, "Shanta Apte," *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 44; V. P. Sathé, "Shanta Apte," *Filmfare*, January 21–February 3, 1977, 44; "Left an Orphan, Shanta Apte Becomes Leading Film Star," *Malaya Tribune*, November 16, 1938, 19.
15. Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, "Shanta Apte," 44. "Playback" refers to the dominant practice of using dubbed, prerecorded songs in Indian musical films from the late 1940s onward. In the pre-playback era, songs were recorded live, in sync sound, and thus actors with capable singing voices were required. With the emergence of playback or dubbing technologies, the singer and the actor could be two different people.
16. From contemporaneous descriptions cited in Majumdar, "Gossip, Labor, and Female Stardom in Pre-Independence Indian Cinema," 189.
17. "Full Story of the Poona Star's Hunger Strike," *Mirror*, July 23, 1939, n.p.
18. Cited in "Full Story of the Poona Star's Hunger Strike," quoting from an unnamed "leading English daily of Bombay."
19. "Full Story of the Poona Star's Hunger Strike."
20. Majumdar, "Gossip, Labor, and Female Stardom in Pre-Independence Indian Cinema," 184.
21. Cited in "Full Story of the Poona Star's Hunger Strike," 1939, quoting another unnamed source.
22. "Full Story of the Poona Star's Hunger Strike." At this time the "social film" was a capacious industrial genre that referred to films set in modern milieus, dealing with the anxieties and delights of modern life. Prior to *Kunku*, Prabhat was noted for making mythological and devotional films.
23. For more on Prabhat's organizational and business structure see Hrishikesh Arvikar, "Between the Shots, After the Cuts: The Political Economy of Prabhat Studios," *Wide Screen* 8, no. 1 (2019): <http://widescreenjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/view/127>.
24. "Film Star Refuses Food," 10.
25. Majumdar, "Gossip, Labor, and Female Stardom in Pre-Independence Indian Cinema," 192.
26. It might be argued that the obvious exceptions to this disavowal are publicity pieces that highlight a star's death-defying stunts in action films, or a star's commitment to exercise and fitness. However, both genres frame workplace risk and the concern for health as individual virtues—as bravery or self-discipline rather than as actions located within the transactional matrix of commerce, the job market, and power hierarchies. That is, *as labor*.
27. For work on actresses, stardom, and labor see Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Neepa Majumdar, *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only! Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s–1950s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Denise M. McKenna, "The City That

Made the Pictures Move: Gender, Labor, and the Film Industry in Los Angeles, 1908–1917” (PhD diss. New York University, 2008); Debashree Mukherjee, “Notes on a Scandal: Writing Women’s Film History against an Absent Archive,” *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 9–30.

28. Shanta Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?* [Should I Join the Movies?] (Bombay: Shanta Apte Concerns and B. Govind, 1940), 70. All reproduced text has been translated from the original Marathi by Wandana Sonalkar. Thanks also to Madhura Lohokare, who generously helped out during an early stage of translation. Apte’s slim text is often mistakenly referred to as an “autobiography,” but it neither contains a biographical chronology of her life and career nor mentions specific people, institutions, films, incidents, or cities connected with her life except when required to explicate an abstract point.

29. Juned Shaikh uses this phrase in his forthcoming monograph, *Outcast Bombay: The Urban Habitations of Caste and Class, 1898–1984* (Seattle: University of Washington Press). It is certain that Apte’s Marxist vocabulary and some of her ideas were informed by a dynamic Marathi literary sphere that actively translated and circulated socialist ideologies in the interwar period. She uses terms familiar within Marathi labor and socialist circles—*kaamgar*, *majoor*, and “worker” on one hand, and *bhandavalwaley*, *bhandavalsbahi*, *maalakshahi* (capitalists, capitalism) on the other—to characterize the industrial struggle she claims was raging within the film industry.

30. Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 65–66.

31. See for example autonomist Marxist and post-Marxist theory by scholars such as Maurizio Lazzarato, Franco Berardi, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paulo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133–50; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

32. Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 78.

33. On vitality tonics and physical culture in colonial India see for example Douglas E. Haynes, “Creating the Consumer? Advertising, Capitalism, and the Middle Class in Urban Western India, 1914–40,” in *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, ed. Douglas E. Haynes (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010); Joseph Alter, *The Wrestler’s Body: Identity and Ideology in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

34. Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 81, 78.

35. Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 72.

36. Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (New York: Basic Books/Harper Collins, 1990), 4.

37. Shanta Apte, “Films Are Not My Goal But a Means to an End,” *Mirror*, May 14, 1939, n.p.

38. Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 69–70. Apte uses the term *karya-kshamta* rather than the more standard Marathi Marxist term for labor power, *shram-shakti*. I have translated *karya-kshamta* as “labor power” to indicate that the concept had varied ideological and political uses at this time. Thanks to Juned Shaikh for advising me on the circulation of the term *shram-shakti*.

39. Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 49. Apte narrates the story of a young child singer of thirteen who was so overworked by his studio that he ultimately lost his voice, only to be dismissed by the studio and unable to find decent work again.
40. Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 54.
41. Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017), xii–xiii.
42. Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 4.
43. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 119.
44. See Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, “Capital and Labor in Bombay City, 1928–29,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 16, nos. 42/43 (1981): PE36–44.
45. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
46. “Industrial Fatigue: Economics of Personal Labor,” *Times of India*, February 1, 1918, 10.
47. “Efficiency and Fatigue. I – Shattered Factory Acts,” *Times of India*, June 1, 1918, 8.
48. Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 218.
49. Ellsworth Huntington, *Civilization and Climate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1915).
50. This is based on my extensive review of issues of *Times of India* from these years. See also P. R. N. Sinha, Indu Bala Sinha, and Seema Priyadarshini Shekhar, *Industrial Relations, Trade Unions, and Labor Legislation* (Delhi: Pearson Education, 2004), 281.
51. Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 128.
52. In the late 1930s, a group of politically committed and ideologically left-leaning writers, actors, and lyricists entered the Bombay cine-ecology. Most of them were associated either with the Progressive Writers Movement, the Indian Peoples’ Theatre Association, or both. See Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).
53. I draw here on Partha Chatterjee’s argument in a 1989 essay that can be read as a discussion of the feminization of the realm of culture alongside a masculinization of the realm of technology as the way out of the nationalist conundrum with respect to industrial modernity. Partha Chatterjee, “Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question,” in *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 116–35.
54. In 1937 the Labor Department decided to determine whether Bombay’s film companies would be eligible to be deemed factories. Specifically, the government was “concerned with the employment of coolies, carpenters and mechanics of various kinds who are employed in film studios.” Ram Gogtay, “The Motion Picture as an Art,” *The Lighthouse*, December 18, 1937, 5.
55. Ram Gogtay, “Factorization’ of Studios,” *The Lighthouse*, October 9, 1937, 5.
56. Gogtay, “Factorization’ of Studios,” 5.
57. Ultimately, the amended Factories Act did not include film studios. Film processing laboratories, however, were covered under the Hazardous Occupation Rules (1937).

58. Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 26.
59. Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 36. Apte makes special note of “extras” as a subgroup within the class of workers. Extras are performers who “arrive for their day’s work and leave once their work is complete, for instance *bandwalas*, wrestlers, bodybuilders, and junior artists or extras.”
60. Vicki Mayer, *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 176.
61. For this formulation of the caste body see Anupama Rao, *Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
62. Anupama Rao, “Stigma and Labor: Remembering Dalit Marxism,” *Seminar*, no. 633 (May 2012): <https://www.india-seminar.com/2012/633.htm>, emphasis in original. The body that carries stigma is unlike the body carrying labor power and cannot be valorized or mobilized toward the production of value.
63. For example “the actor’s right to live a life of dignity.” Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 71.
64. “Editor’s Mail,” *filmindia*, April 1939, 11; Baburao Patel, “Whither Bound?” *filmindia*, July 1935, 5.
65. “The Editor’s Mail,” questions from S. L. Nawani (Karachi), *filmindia*, August 31, 1939, 17; and D. Kari (Raichur), *filmindia*, November 1938, 19.
66. “Indian Extras Get 18c a Day,” *Chicago Defender*, November 22, 1930, 5.
67. Apte, *Jaau Mi Cinemaat?*, 25.
68. The Lahore-based Pancholi studios sued Apte on the grounds that she had been absent during the last portion of shooting. The defendants maintained that Apte had been injured during a shoot and was convalescing. “Shanta Apte and Dalsukh,” *filmindia*, July 1942, 15. Rs. 100,000 would be approximately US \$1,400 at today’s exchange rates, but it is tricky to make such conversions given that historical inflation and exchange rates are different.
69. For example see Sudhir Mahadevan, *A Very Old Machine: The Many Origins of the Cinema in India* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015), 43–64.