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**Time Use Data in Feminist Political Economy Analyses:
Gender and Class in the Indian Time Use Survey**

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Abstract: The literature on agrarian change in India has largely employed class categories based upon data on land, assets and occupational status. Land and asset data tend to exist at the level of households, while occupation categories have neither fully counted reproductive labour nor accounted for diversified livelihood strategies. As a result, categorizations of class in the literature on agrarian change tend to collapse women's class relations into those of male household heads. The recent completion of India's first ever national time use survey provides an opportunity to address these longstanding gaps. This paper examines whether and how the 2019 Indian Time Use data lends itself to an understanding of class relations that i) can better accommodate an expanded conception of work as including reproductive labor ii) better accommodate the highly diversified livelihoods of rural Indians iii) better grasp the articulation of caste and gender differentiated labor processes with capital. In this paper, we are able to show i) and ii). The third goal is somewhat stymied by the absence of qualitative data that contextualize time use data. We compare the class relational mapping obtained from time use data with that obtained from land and occupational data and examine the possibilities and limits of employing time use data to deepen feminist political economy analyses of agrarian change.

Keywords: Time-use, India, Social Reproduction, Class, Gender

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Introduction

As an extensive literature documents, dominant frameworks in 20th century bourgeois and some Marxist perspectives sought to understand work primarily in the form of ‘productive’ labor employed in the service of capital, even as the specific conditions of economies around the world have challenged and expanded this understanding. In the Global South, the neoliberal period has generated increased informalization and “self-employment” with its attendant challenges (Breman and van der Linden 2014, Scully 2016, Basole 2019). The rise of the gig economy has intensified these challenges in the North as well. Thus the ‘real subsumption’ of labor as conceptualized within more traditional Marxian analyses is far from the only form that surplus extraction takes today (Banaji 2014). The homogenizing tendencies of capitalism have not completely flattened labor to its abstract form but rather, multiple labor processes are interwoven with each other and articulate with capital in different ways (e.g. Bhattacharya and Kesar 2020; Sanyal 2014; Ossome and Naidu 2021).

In the agrarian Indian context, which we focus upon in this paper, there are vigorous discussions on whether these labor processes may be best characterized as petty commodity production (e.g., Harris-White 2014), as formally subsumed labor (Banaji 2014; Mathew 2020), or as disconnected from or “excluded” from capitalist surplus production altogether (e.g., De Neve 2019; Sanyal 2014). These are debates that echo and overlap with longstanding feminist debates over “domestic” production and its relation to capital, and the usefulness of thinking about ‘reproductive’ labor processes as analytically distinct from, even if ontologically intertwined with, ‘productive’ labor processes (Mezzadri 2019, Pattenden 2022). All of these literatures contribute to the understanding of class we employ in this paper, perceiving workers not as inherently coherent and homogenous but as ‘classes of labor’ (Bernstein 2006) or as ‘working people’ (Shivji 2017), socially differentiated along multiple axes. We particularly draw on Carmen Diana Deere’s work on the role of women in peasant households, livelihood diversification, and the importance of acknowledging intra-household class differences (Deere 1976, 1990, 1995).

As John (2021) argues, in the Indian context labor is best understood as a site of multiple contradictions: of class, gender and caste. This more expansive understanding of labor as the site of multiple contradictions does have political implications. Differences in the forms of subsistence/reproductive labor, as much as differences in forms of production, shape the kinds of resistance to social hierarchies that might emerge, and thus the contingencies of any solidarities that such resistance may be based upon.

For those who hope for a more careful understanding of the role of gender caste and class in these labor processes through the analysis of quantitative data, one significant barrier has been the design of major household surveys in India. These surveys provide data on so-called ‘principal occupational status’ or the occupation followed for more than 183 days in a year, and ‘secondary occupational status’ (the occupation followed for less than 183 days in a year). However, these categories are both highly aggregative and premised on narrow, productivist understandings of work and thus occupation (Rao 2021).

For national, quantitative analyses, until recently there has been little by way of an alternative to the use of this data (see Jain 1996, Hirway and Jose 2011, Swaminathan 2020a, Rao and Raju 2020) for examples of village level/sub-national time-use surveys). As a result, most such analyses have used definitions of class based upon landholdings and occupational status that exclude the labor of the majority of Indian women. This literature has analyzed class only at the aggregate household level, collapsing women's class relations into those of male household members and limiting our ability to examine the overlapping contradictions of class and gender that Indian working peoples must negotiate as part of their everyday lives.

In 2019, the NSSO conducted its first ever national Indian Time Use Survey (ITUS). Despite some significant critiques of this survey, including from the feminist perspectives (Swaminathan 2020b), it is a new development and one with some potential to allow us to uncover specific labor processes and thus generate different understandings of the articulation of class, gender and caste in working peoples' lives. The ITUS allows us to observe labor at a more fine-grained level, one that can potentially escape limiting definitions of work as solely 'for pay or profit' and go beyond the formulation of 'principal status occupation' that available employment data from the Indian National Sample Survey Organizations is based upon.

A parallel critique applies to the four rigid categories of caste employed in most of our national household survey data. These categories once again limit the extent to which we can say anything about the role of caste. Unfortunately, while time use data do allow us a more nuanced and intricate picture of gendered labor, an important caveat to our analysis is the fact that the caste categories used in this particular time use survey are the same as in prior NSS surveys, and thus hinder our ability to fully flesh out caste contradictions.

It is notable that most recent analyses of time use data in the Indian, as well as other global South contexts, have tended to use time use data within non-Marxian frameworks. Despite the fact that time-use studies were very much part of 1970s debates over the role of domestic labor within capitalism, the majority of the contemporary feminist literature employing time-use data tends not to use terms such as capitalism, class process or surplus. Meanwhile Marxists, whether feminist or not, seem not to have sought out time-use data as much. Given the central role of labor time in Marxian analysis, this is somewhat surprising. Our paper is thus also an attempt to fill this gap². We turn to ITUS data to explore the possibilities and limits of time-use data in helping us i) better accommodate an expanded conception of work as including reproductive labor ii) better accommodate the highly diversified livelihoods of rural Indians iii) better grasp the co-constitution of caste, gender and class.

Building on the work of Carmen Diana: Gender, Class and Livelihood Diversification

From the perspective of one of those axes of differentiation, gender, many empirical formulations of class in the Indian use land holdings or occupational status for the household as a whole (often coincident with that of a male worker) to assign class status and women are

² As mentioned above, the ITUS unfortunately continues to use the same four rigid categories of caste as in previous employment surveys, thus limiting our ability to produce more nuanced analyses of the role of caste.

assumed to embody this household-level class status. Thus, categorizations of class are located at, and limited to, the level of the household. Further, NSSO data on occupation are based upon narrow understanding of productive work, completely excluding work that was classified as ‘domestic’ or ‘domestic and allied’ from any occupational classifications (NSSO 2019). Since most Indian women report doing precisely such ‘domestic’ or ‘domestic and allied’ work for a majority of the year, household level classifications of principal occupational status end up being the occupations reported by male members of the household. As a result, categorizations of class based upon principal occupation tend to collapse women’s class relations into those of male household members.

Marxist-feminist critiques of the then emerging ‘peasant studies literature’ in the 1970s and 1980s addressed the problems with both aggregation at the household level, as well narrowly productivist understandings of work. Carmen Diana Deere’s careful field and archival work was key to these prescient critiques. Deere (1976, 1995) pointed out the problems with assumptions of income pooling and consumption sharing within the household arguing that the ‘overwork and underconsumption’ believed to be critical to the survival of the peasantry was in fact based upon patriarchal controls that shifted the burdens of both onto younger, female members. Thus, aggregative household level analyses glossed over the intra-household negotiations and power imbalances that meant that gender and generation shaped the degree to which individual members contributed to and benefited from these strategies (Razavi 2009).

Looking within these households also undermined another basic assumption: that members of peasant households were primarily engaged in a combination of agricultural production and artisanal craftwork. It turned out that the survival of the ‘peasant household’ depended upon the engagement of different household members in varying livelihood strategies that went far beyond just agriculture (Deere 1990, O Laughlin 1996). Gendered and generational divisions of labor were thus critical to the survival of peasant households. In some cases, households termed ‘peasant’ were actually receiving a majority of their income from activities other than cultivation.

Today neither a Chayanovian ‘family labor’-dependent peasantry, nor a Lenin-esque landscape of capitalist farmers and landless wage workers captures the empirical reality in most of the global South (White 2018). Certainly in the Indian case, many of rural households are characterized by ownership and cultivation of (a shrinking amount of) land, alongside a diverse collection of livelihood generating activities across household members (Naidu and Ossome 2016; Rao 2018). The fact that there is no single, unified occupation for the household as a whole, as indicated by the term ‘classes of labor’, and the fact that non-agricultural work is a significant component of the labors of almost all households validates the feminist insight that looking within the household is key to understanding processes of agrarian change.

Deere (1990) also argued that class relations are a property of individuals, leaving room for intra-household differences in class relations. In the case of cultivator households, access to land is certainly mediated through the household-family (for both men and women) in ways that enhance the direct impact of the household upon each member’s relationship to processes of surplus production, appropriation and distribution. Aggregative understandings of class at the

level of the household miss intra-household differentiation in economic activities by gender and generation.

Deere's insistence on examining labor processes, and thus class as process, rather than class as a fixed property of individuals or households, was also prescient given the extent to which livelihood diversification has become a condition of existence of working peoples in the global South (Deere 1990). This means not only that different members of a household may be engaged in different, potentially contradictory class relations, but that a single member of the household may switch from own goods production to wage work, for example, in a way that makes each individual's labor itself a site of contradictory class relations.

This view of labor as a site of multiple contradictions is further reinforced when, as feminist political economy urges, work is broadly understood to include the labors of reproduction as well as production. In this paper, we understand reproductive labor as 'life making' i.e. the labor processes involved in reproducing and maintaining life, or the effort expended for biological, daily, and generational reproduction of the labor force as well as its provisioning and caring needs (Norton and Katz 2016). This does not preclude the labor involved in the reproduction of social relations, which is essential to participate in daily reproduction. We understand the family or household as one of many sites where the renewal of labor power takes place, albeit the one most illuminated by the particular time use dataset we are employing in this paper (Mitchell et al 2003).

As O'Laughlin (1999) reminds us both are surely, equally, work, but the distinction between production and reproduction, "is an ideological product of the sharp division between labor and labor power under capitalism, where the latter becomes a commodity that can be bought and sold" (O'Laughlin 1999, 29). This approach both acknowledges the common character of work for production as well as reproduction (e.g., Akram-Lodhi 1996; Mitchell et al 2003; Naidu forthcoming), while also seeking to explore where and how, under capitalism, the lines between the two are drawn and re-drawn.

In the Indian context, as many have argued, it is just as important to incorporate into our analyses the stigmas associated with certain forms of public labor, rooted in caste hierarchies (e.g., Gopal 2012; John 2011). Mary John (2021) points to the provisional nature of class analyses as a whole – where we keep our eye squarely on capitalism without giving it a place of singular authority (vis a vis casteism, patriarchy etc). Thus, we examine how these labor processes are cross-cut by caste and gender.

To the extent that the distinction between labor and labor power is at the center of capitalist social relations, the attempt to maintain a distinction between 'reproduction', as the production of labor power itself, and 'production', is also central to capitalism (O'Laughlin 1999). As Marxist-feminists have argued, understanding how that distinction is maintained, and when and how it may be challenged, is thus an important political project, without which the project of critiquing capitalism is incomplete. These forms of labor are ontologically intertwined so closely as sometimes to be indistinguishable for those actually performing the labor, as the time use data below shows very clearly (Naidu forthcoming; Pattenden 2022).

Dataset: The Indian Time Use Survey 2019

The Indian Time Use Survey of 2019 was administered to 138,799 households (59% of whom from rural areas) for a total of 447,250 persons above 6 years of age. In this paper, we restrict our analysis to rural, working age (age 15-65) men and women only. In each case, respondents were asked to fill out up to a maximum of three activities for each half hour slot in a 24-hour period spanning 4am the previous day to 4 am on the day of the survey. Reported activities were coded following the International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics (ICATUS) of 2016.

The ITUS, like other NSSO surveys also provides us with limited data on caste (NSSO 2019). We have no information on the more complex concept of *jati*³, instead the ITUS classifies respondents into one of four caste categories: Dalits and Adivasis, India's most marginalized caste groups, OBC or other backward castes, and FCs or forward castes.

ITUS data: Individual 'principal occupation' status

While the ITUS reports time diaries for respondents, it also categorizes each respondent's 'principal occupation status' based on the same (limited) criteria as previous NSSO employment surveys. This provides us with the opportunity to compare the category of 'principal occupational status' with that of the livelihoods/occupations that emerge in the time use data and examine the extent to which the latter provides us with insights missed by the former.

ITUS data: Types of Labor Processes

We focus on 6 labor processes here. The first three are components of what the ITUS groups into 'employment and related activities', but as discussed above, constitute potentially different relationships to capital.

- i. Casual wage labor, whether in agriculture or non-agriculture
- ii. Salaried/regular wage labor, which is typically more stable and yields higher wages
- iii. Non-waged labor employed in activities at least in theory 'for profit' rather than for a wage, which are reported under the employment and related activities category of the ITUS.
- iv. Labor engaged in production of goods for own use rather than market. This includes collection of fuel or water, own use production of agricultural goods, as well as the rearing of livestock for own use. As Swaminathan(2020) has noted, in the Indian context a clear distinction between production for own use and for market may be difficult to establish, but in this paper we take these categories at face value.

³ *Jati* refers to the complex subdivisions within the commonly provided caste categories that have historically determined social interactions, status, and occupations. Official data, however, only provide broad categories that do not reveal the nuances associated with the caste system in India.

- v. Labor engaged in unpaid care, which includes the care of children, the elderly and other dependents and non-dependents.
- vi. Labor in unpaid domestic activities which includes unpaid cooking, cleaning, washing and maintenance of textiles. The ITUS distinguishes this category from domestic work and production for own use.

We also construct a category ‘total work time’, an expanded concept of work time consistent with past feminist literature which includes all of the six components of work listed above. During the analysis we below, we analyze how the shares of total work time spent on each of the six component types of work vary by caste, gender and class.

Labor processes and Class

Workforce, Occupation and Class

Most existing agrarian analyses employ a class categorization based on ‘principal occupation’ and landholdings. We employ the following categories that roughly map onto prior literature (see Table 1).

- i) Agricultural worker whose principal occupation is listed as agricultural wage work.
- ii) Non-agricultural wage worker whose principal occupation is listed as non-agricultural wage work.
- iii) Small farmer whose principal occupation is listed as self-employed in agriculture and whose household landholding is between 0.5 and 5 acres.
- iv) Salaried workers whose principal occupation is salaried work.
- v) Non-agricultural producers whose principal occupation is non-agricultural production.
- vi) Large farmer whose principal occupation is self-employed in agriculture and whose household landholding is greater than five acres.
- vii) No occupation/ those whose principal occupation is unpaid ‘domestic and allied activities’.

Table 1 here

Of working age rural women, 72% are excluded from any class categories defined based on ‘principal occupation’ and household land holding. As Deere (1990) pointed out for Peru, the majority of rural Indian women drop out of class analysis altogether if no additional conceptual and empirical attempts are made to account for their labor. This is not just an ‘accounting’ issue, but rather one that is important for political mobilization – an important objective of Marxist-Feminist anti-caste analysis. In Table 2 we compare this occupation-land categorization with data on participation in labor processes and offer the following observations.

Table 2 here

First, time use data reveal high shares of participation in non-waged employment as well as own goods production. The latter, as we have already mentioned earlier is difficult to separate from non-waged employment that is often considered to be ‘for profit’ production. However, the relative importance of each varies for women and men. A higher proportion of men participated in non-wage employment relative to own-goods production whereas the converse was true for women.

Second, we observe relatively high participation in the ITUS category of ‘own goods’ production for women, even amongst those in the ‘undefined’ principal occupation group, of whom 30% report engaging in own-use production of goods. Examining the category of own-use goods production more closely, per the ITUS, fuel and firewood collection are an important component of women’s own use work. 55% of women who report own use production are engaged in water and fuel collection, 36% report livestock care for own use, and 20% report cultivation for own use. However, for men who report own use production, 46% report cultivation for own use, 44% report livestock rearing for own use, and only 18% report water and fuel collection. The forms of ‘own use’ production that women report more often are thus more dependent upon access to the commons.

Third, while The ITUS data is a snapshot at a particular point in time, but as a cross-section it confirms that real subsumption of labor as represented by salaried wage work, and to some extent casual wage work, constitutes a minority of men’s as well as women’s labor. Amongst men, we see the clear dominance of non-waged work (nominally ‘for profit’ forms of petty production/formally subsumed labor), with 63% of men overall reporting engagement in such labor. The extent of engagement in non-waged work is masked by ‘principal occupation’ data, which indicates, for example, that 55% of men are classified as principal occupation casual wage or salaried workers. That is, using time use data reverses the relative ranking of participation in non-waged and wage work, with the former now emerging as more important even for men.

Fourth, the extent of livelihood diversification even within that group becomes clear when we look at time-use data. 55% of men classified as agricultural wage workers performed non-waged work, and 22% engaged in own-use goods production. Even amongst salaried men, 58% in this cross-section reported performing some non-waged employment. For women as well, we see relatively high shares of women across principal occupation categories who participate in non-waged employment (nominally ‘for profit’, petty commodity production/formally subsumed work), even if their principal occupation is casual wage or salaried labor.

Fifth, equally striking are comparatively high shares of unpaid care and domestic activities for men as well as women. Unsurprisingly those are extremely high for women, but even for men, participation in unpaid domestic activities (34%) is higher than participation in casual wage labor activities, largely because, as with women, unpaid domestic labor participation is relatively evenly distributed across men in different principal occupation categories. This aspect of the work undertaken by men across class and caste (as we later discuss) is masked by the limited data that was available in previous NSSO data, which listed only around 1% of men as engaged in principal occupation unpaid reproductive labor. The NSSO classification flattens the laboring lives of men and women.

Table 3 here

If we look at data on labor processes by caste presented in Table 3, unsurprisingly Adivasi and Dalit men as well as women have above average shares of participation in casual wage work. Adivasi men and women clearly stand out for their greater engagement in the production of

goods for own use. Adivasi women also have the highest women's participation in non-waged employment, which is not the case for Adivasi men. There is, however, no clear caste-based variation in unpaid labor and salaried work.

Should the relatively circumscribed influence of these caste categories surprise us? Perhaps not, even setting aside the problems with the rigid caste categories the ITUS uses. Differences in caste-based labor are likely to be much larger when it comes to the conditions of work and valuation of labor, rather than participation per se. This is true of the kinds of reproductive labor the NSS classifies as 'unpaid domestic work' and 'unpaid care work' as well. As we know, the reproductive labor performed by class and caste elites may be similar in quantity but very different in quality. For example, the kinds of elaborate cooking or cleaning practices that elite households engage in imply that despite access to productivity improving technology, or the ability to outsource this labor, the worktime involved does not fall dramatically.

What John (2011) terms the stigma theory of labor thus emerges most clearly in the case of casual wage labor, what she refers to as 'public labor', where the share of such labor performed drops amongst so-called upper castes in the case of women as well as men. Caste gradients are much less clear in the case of other forms of labor, including public salaried labor. As mentioned above, this analysis is also limited by the fact that this data does not capture differences in quality as opposed to quantity of labor⁴.

To summarize, time use data presents a very different picture of labor than 'principal occupation' data does, for both men and women. The relatively low prevalence of waged work (as compared to different forms of non-waged work) and the significance of unpaid domestic work and own goods production in the laboring lives of men, as well as women, both come through more clearly in this data. ITUS, however, does not provide us with sufficient details to unpack stigmatized caste-based labor.

The Length of the Workday: Time Data

Table 4 shows us the share of time spent on these different labor process, again organized by principal occupation-based individual class categories.

Table 4 here

For men, we see the extent of livelihood diversification, and thus the contradictory class processes engaged in by individuals, particularly in the case of casual wage workers and small farmers. For these three occupational groups, just a little over 50% of worktime was spent on the so-called principal occupation. Those contradictions were lessened for non-agricultural producers, who spend 72% of their time on their principal occupation, and even more so for large farmers. Large farmers did spend 23% of their time on own goods production, but apart from their greater ability to control the conditions and timing of their work, the spatial contradictions between their two primary labor processes are also likely lower.

⁴ This is confirmed by a gini decomposition analysis which shows that while 'between caste' inequality accounts for over 50% of the variations in casual wage labour participation, that percentage drops below 20% for other forms of labour, and below 10% for unpaid reproductive labour.

Looking at total work time, men whose principal occupation was related to agriculture (casual agricultural wage work, small farmers and large farmers) did appear to have lower overall worktimes, with large farmers reporting the shortest workday. However, this pattern of agricultural labor processes correlating to lower work time is not something we see in the case of women.

In the case of women, the primary axis along which total work time seems to vary is participation in labor processes other than unpaid care and domestic work – what has been theorized as the ‘double burden’ problem. These are the categories in which women work between 1 and 2 hours more than men each day. That gender gap is lowest in the case of ‘salaried work’ and ‘non-agricultural producers’, ironically the two categories that most closely fit the kind of ‘productive’ work the literature on the double burden in the global North is based upon. In the Indian context, these forms of work appear to mitigate this contradiction, most likely because they are associated with higher earnings/incomes in rural India, and thus the ability to substitute some reproductive labor with commodities.

Women in the ‘undefined’ occupational category, who spend almost 70% of their work time on the unpaid domestic work, also have the lowest total work times (although these are still higher than work times for men who are small and large farmers). The time shares of unpaid care work are once again relatively low. The high share of time spent upon unpaid domestic work by women does, however, point to a further level of potential analysis that examines the qualitative and quantitative variations within this category, and thus in the articulations of these labors with capital.

Table 5 here

Looking at worktime shares by caste, one notable new observation is the decline in total worktime for women as you go from marginalized to elite. The accumulation of different contradictions of caste and gender do have an impact on the length of the work day. There is also a clear caste gradient in share of time women perform unpaid care and domestic work.

For men, there is once again a clear caste gradient for casual wage work. In the case of other labor processes, the variations occur within a much narrower band. Non-waged employment takes up the largest time share of men of all caste groups, but it varies in a narrow band from 33-41%. And, to repeat, unpaid care and domestic work account for around almost the same share of men’s time (13% average) across all caste groups. What is striking about the table for men is how diversified labor processes are even within each caste category. This diversification is once again masked by ‘principal occupation’ categories.

The Articulation of Labor Processes with Capital: The limits of time use data

The time-use data above confirms the extent of diversification in livelihood generation in rural India, including within caste categories, and the much smaller role of wage labor than presented by ‘principal occupation’ based categories. It also shows the importance of engagement in unpaid domestic work for both men and women, also made invisible by principal occupation-based data.

This data much more clearly validates a perspective that sees labor as a site of multiple contradictions. We see quite clearly how the length of the workday is increased by an accumulation of contradictions in the case of Adivasi and Dalit women. We can also see that aggregative ‘productivist’ categories of principal occupation flatten these contradictions and our ability to see and understand them. Re-framing these time-use based labor process categories in terms of their articulation with capital, however, exposes the limits of the time-use data, as well as our theoretical frameworks for such an articulation outside the ‘real subsumption’ categories of casual wage and salaried wage work.

Within the Indian literature on class and agrarian change, there is a wealth of analysis of the wage-worker/non-wage worker distinction, with the latter conceptualized as semi-proletarians, formally rather than really subsumed to capital, or as petty commodity producers. Most recently, Bernstein’s concept of ‘classes of labor’ seeks to capture the multiplicity of livelihoods, and thus varying positions along the wage worker/non-wage worker spectrum occupied by most rural Indians, as the data we present validates below.

As discussed by Banaji, bringing back Marx’s concepts of real and formal subsumption can help us grapple with this continuum. Nevertheless, the real/formal subsumption distinction is still a distinction between forms of surplus extraction by capital, and thus still focusses more on the production side of the production/reproduction continuum⁵. The ITUS category of non-waged employment, designed to capture self-employment ‘for profit’ maps onto ‘formally subsumed’ production that may be more or less indirectly articulated with capital in ways that the time use data does not reveal.

The ITUS category of ‘production of goods for own use’, notable for the interesting way it is gendered, as well as its significance in the lives of Adivasi men and women, may or not be as easily separable from self-employment for profit. It is possible to think about ways in which certain kinds of labor in this category may be formally subsumed to capital (thus the ‘own use’ agricultural production that men report under this category may involved formal subsumption through debt), while others may indeed be distinct from formally subsumed labor in not generating any surplus whatsoever, whether for a distant capitalist or for the producer him or herself. Furthermore, along with the labor that the ITUS classifies as ‘unpaid domestic’ and ‘unpaid care work’ such labor may indirectly enable greater surplus extraction by capitalists by subsidizing the reproduction of labor power itself. As Federici(2018) has pointed out, this labor, while necessary to a worker’s survival within capitalism, contains within it the potential to survive outside capital, even if it is unable to do so in contemporary rural India.

While a desire to quantify the market value of labor (once again a fundamentally productivist lens) leads the ITUS to treat unpaid care and domestic work as separate from own-use good

⁵ The older Marxist term ‘unproductive labour’, originally understood to mean unproductive of surplus, has been irretrievably tainted both by the equation of unproductive with non-economic, and the historical consequences of that equation in terms of policies and politics that ignore those who perform this labour. Furthermore, from our perspective unpaid domestic labour is not unproductive of surplus but rather indirectly related to surplus production.

production, in fact the latter can be thought of as own-use service production, and thus analytically similar to the ‘own use goods production’ category. To the extent that this is all ‘survival’ labor or the labor of life-making, and it is non-waged, we use the term non-waged reproductive labor to capture it. As discussed above, the ITUS shows us for perhaps the first time the sheer scale of labor time expended in production of both goods and services for ‘own use’ and thus upon non-waged reproductive labor.

The question of how and in what way to include these reproductive labors of these women and men into class analyses is, however, a difficult one for at least two reasons. First, the content and meaning of reproductive labor, and even its indirect relation to surplus production varies. Thus, for example, reproductive labor performed in households whose members have high wage salaried wage work may be subsidizing a particular set of class processes, quite different from those subsidized by reproductive labor in marginalized petty producer households. Second, this labor can vary qualitatively, even if the quantity is similar across caste groups. The same time spent on cooking, for example, could involve cooking luxurious and ‘excess’ food items as status production for elites. That same cooking time may be an exigency of survival for the working class.

Beechey (1987) famously argued that if married women were considered part of the reserve army of labor, this was because they were supported by a family wage earned by an employed family member (usually the spouse). However, it is hard to find any evidence of anything resembling a family wage outside of ‘salaried work’ in rural India today. In fact, there is little evidence that wages can ensure the survival of even an individual worker (Scully 2016). That is, we argue that what the ITUS data shows us is that many women engaged primarily in ‘unpaid domestic work’ act, and a possibly large share of the men and women engaged in ‘own use goods’ production, are best understood not as members of a reserve army of labor supported by the wage paid to their family members, but as actively laboring to prevent what would otherwise be destitution, and a failure to reproduce themselves.

Kalyan Sanyal’s conceptualization of a ‘needs economy’ is an attempt to articulate an economy that is one step removed from capitalist surplus extraction processes and yet not outside of capital (Sanyal 2014). Sanyal’s formulation captures the sense that post-colonial societies such as India occupy a space where, unlike in classical Marxist formulations, capital itself, through the wage paid to workers, does not provide workers with the means of reproducing themselves, raising the question of how this population actually survives. Sanyal’s argument is that state mediated transfers to these populations serve as what Li calls ‘make live’ programs (Li 2010) for an otherwise excluded population, almost entirely bypassed by capital.

However, it is not clear though that the Indian state subsidizes its working peoples on anything even close to the scale required for them to survive (Palriwala and Neetha 2011). This is the conclusion also reached by Naidu (2021) in the aftermath of the COVID crisis. Instead, what we see in the ITUS data is that there is considerable reproductive labor expended on accessing and converting ‘free’ raw materials of nature into use values (and not just converting cash or kind wages into use-values) in ways that are critical to the survival of working peoples. Particularly

where state and other safety net programs are minimal, such indirectly attached labors would be crucial to compensate for the absence of anything even close to a ‘family wage’.

In our data for rural India, salaried work shows the most signs of being able to sustain households. For both men and women, participation in salaried work is accompanied by less diversification into other forms labor, perhaps pointing to its ability to more successfully ensure at least the reproduction of the individual, if not the family. It is also not entirely masculinized nor concentrated in just one caste category – the share of Dalits in particular who report salaried work is relatively high. In fact, it may be a space where the gender-caste stigmatization of public labor is minimized. However, it does have the lowest participation rate of the six labor processes we discussed.

Casual wage labor processes are both highly masculinized and caste differentiated, being dominated by Dalit men. As we know, the NSSO does not effectively capture temporary migration and thus is likely to be also highly spatially dislocated labor that maximizes the contradictions between production and reproduction. For men and women participation in casual wage labor is accompanied by amongst the highest degree of diversification into potentially contradictory other forms of labor. Thus only a little over 50% of the work time of men whose principal occupation is casual wage labor is expended in casual wage labor, as compared to 62% on salaried labor for those whose principal occupation is salaried work or 72 % in non-waged employment for those whose ‘principal occupation’ is non-agricultural production. Similar degrees of diversification can be seen amongst women engaged in casual wage labor processes as well. When set against what we see for salaried workers, we cannot help but read this diversification as the compulsion of reproduction, and an illustration of the absence of wages high enough to ensure the survival even of individual workers themselves.

Sanyal himself comments on the parallels between feminist analyses of sites of production outside the direct influence of capital, such as the household-family, and his conception of the “needs economy” (Sanyal 2014). But he argues that the critical difference between these two sites is that the labor of reproduction, since it produces potential labor power, is actually eventually expropriated by capital, while the labor of those in the “needs economy” is not. The implication would be that not all household-family labor is the same. That which reproduces the active and reserve army of labor is connected to capital in ways that Marxist feminists have theorized, while that which occurs amongst excluded populations is not.

However, we are not sure that what we find in our data are indeed entirely ‘excluded’ populations. What we see instead are diverse labor processes within a single laboring household, and often engaged in by a single individual, that fall at various points along the real/formal/possibly excluded continuum. If we do take seriously the concept of formally subsumed labor, at least some of what Sanyal terms the ‘needs economy’ may be interpolated into more diverse surplus extraction processes that operate via monopoly and oligopoly ‘rents’, interest payments on debt and unequal exchange (Das 2012).

We do agree that reproductive labor, itself dialectically differentiated by caste, class and gender, is not monolithic, and thus that all of the labors included in the ITUS category of unpaid domestic labor are not the same, and cannot be automatically understood as fueled by the logic of survival rather than accumulation. Nevertheless, it does seem to us that much reproductive labor and own use goods production do not quite fit neatly within the real subsumption/formal subsumption continuum. Is there a way to acknowledge this quality of labor processes that are within capital but perhaps two steps removed from it? And to ascribe this quality to labor processes rather than the laboring populations who move in and out of them?

While we continue to struggle with the answer to this problem, here we propose, at least provisionally, to term this ‘indirectly subsumed’ labor. What the ITUS allows us to do, in the Indian case, is to examine the extent of such indirectly subsumed labor, and the kinds of contradictions that arise as individuals engage in varying combinations of real, formal and indirect subsumption. Again, we note that this continuum of real/formal/indirect subsumed labor processes may include some but not all forms of reproductive labor. Thus we return to the importance of careful disaggregative analysis of particular labor processes and how they are articulated with each other, and with capital. The former is clearly a goal that would be substantially advanced by a more feminist political economy analyses of time use data. The latter requires the kinds of careful historical and contextual field work that Carmen Diana has spent her entire career advocating for.

Conclusion

The paper takes seriously the feminist political economy critique of productivist definitions of labor, and of class categories constructed based on those definitions in the rural Indian context. We also begin to address the gap in feminist political economy method, which has relatively neglected time-use data as a basis for quantitative analyses of such articulations. We use the 2019 ITUS as an opportunity compare the more labor-process based approach with the longstanding ‘principal occupation’ based approach to understanding the forms of surplus extraction in the countryside, as well as to work with time-use data within an explicitly feminist political economy framework. We find that time-use data shows the much greater importance of non-waged, as opposed to waged work in rural India, as well as better showing the highly diversified livelihoods of rural Indians. In the context of this diversification, the time-use data also provide support for class analyses that do not group workers into fixed class categories, but rather think about labor as a site of multiple contradictions of class, caste and gender. These contradictions result in an inter-weaving of different labor processes for a single individual in ways that may be ontologically impossible to separate for that individual. Our ability to grasp the particular ways these labor processes articulate with capital is where we encounter a clear limitation of this particular time-use survey.

We are able to tease out the extent of ‘really subsumed’ wage labor. We are also able to see, through the differing degrees of diversification across participation in various labor processes, the lack of evidence for a ‘family wage’ other than for salaried workers. We do not see much evidence that casual wage work is able to subsidize the women and men who do not engage in ‘productive’ labor. But we do not have enough context to disentangle ‘for profit’ non-waged

labor (what some refer to as formally subsumed labor) from the kinds of survival-based 'own-use' production of goods as well as services that serve not so much to generate surplus, but to ensure the survival of the worker under desperate conditions of need.

What we can say for sure is that this labor is significant in terms of participation and the share of time spent upon it, by women of course, but also by men. Analytically, failing to incorporate this labor, and those who perform it into our understand of Indian capitalism is clearly a mistake. Politically, mobilizing those who engage in this labor and mobilizing them around the conditions of existence of this labor may be key to successful working peoples' struggles against capital.

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Tables

Table 1: Class based upon land and principal occupation, individual by gender

Class by occupation/land	Share of Men, %	Share of Women, %
Agricultural wage workers	14	7
Non-agricultural wage workers	21	3
Small farmers	30	10
Salaried workers	15	4
Non-agricultural producer	15	3
Large farmers	5	2
None/Undefined	1	72
N	200672919	215894496

Table 2: Shares of participation in various labor processes, against Class by occupation/land

Men	Any casual wage, %	Any salaried work, %	Non-waged employment, %	Any own goods-production, %	Any unpaid care, %	Any unpaid domestic work, %	% of all rural, working age men
Ag wage	64	9	55	22	17	36	14
Non ag wage	65	17	56	15	22	32	21
Small farmer	6	4	66	44	17	39	30
Salaried worker	9	72	58	9	21	27	15
Non ag prod	8	11	84	12	19	29	15
Large farmer	5	2	72	40	15	32	5
<i>All</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>34</i>	
Women							
% participation	Any casual wage, %	Any salaried work, %	Non-waged employment, %	Any own goods-production, %	Any unpaid care, %	Any unpaid domestic work, %	% of all rural, working age women
Ag wage	62	5	49	27	22	96	7
Non ag wage	59	14	47	26	21	94	3
Small farmer	22	2	52	51	26	96	10
Salaried worker	5	71	49	17	26	91	4
Non ag prod	6	6	74	21	32	94	3
Large farmer	4	1	60	41	26	96	2
None/Undefined	1	1	6	30	41	98	72
<i>All</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>97</i>	

Table 3: Participation in various labor processes, by caste group

Men	Casual wage, %	Salaried work, %	Non-waged employment, %	Own goods-production, %	Unpaid care, %	Unpaid domestic work, %
<i>All</i>	22	15	53	22	16	32
Adivasi	25	13	50	30	17	33
Dalit	31	16	51	19	17	32
OBC	20	14	56	21	17	31
Women	Casual wage, %	Salaried work, %	Non-waged employment, %	Own goods-production, %	Unpaid care, %	Unpaid domestic work, %
<i>All</i>	7	4	18	29	33	93
Adivasi	10	4	23	43	32	94
Dalit	9	4	17	26	34	93
OBC	6	3	18	27	33	93

Table 4: Share of total work time on various labor processes, against Class by occupation/land

Men							
	Any casual wage, %	Any salaried work, %	Other non-waged employment, %	Any own goods production, %	<i>Any unpaid care, %</i>	<i>Any unpaid domestic work, %</i>	Total worktime (hours)
Agricultural wage worker	54	5	19	9	3	9	7.7
Non-agricultural wage worker	56	11	17	5	4	7	8.3
Small farmer	5	1	51	27	3	12	7.1
Salaried worker	7	62	17	3	4	7	8.6
Non-agricultural producer	6	7	72	4	3	7	8.2
Large farmer	3	1	61	23	3	8	7.3
All	23	14	38	13	4	9	8.2
Women							
	Any casual wage, %	Any salaried work, %	Other non-waged employment, %	Any own goods production, %	<i>Any unpaid care, %</i>	<i>Any unpaid domestic work, %</i>	Total worktime (hours)
Agricultural wage worker	37	2	10	5	4	43	9.6
Non-agricultural wage worker	36	7	11	4	3	38	9.8
Small farmer	3	1	26	17	5	48	9.2
Salaried worker	3	43	8	2	5	38	9.6
Non-agricultural producer	3	3	38	4	7	46	9.4
Large farmer	2	1	32	13	6	47	9.2
None/Undefined	1	0	2	6	12	79	7.7
All	4	2	7	8	10	69	7.8

Table 5: Share of total work time on various labor processes, against Caste group

Men	Any casual wage, %	Any salaried work, %	Other non-waged employment, %	Any own goods production, %	Any reproductive labor, %	Total worktime (hours)
Adivasi	25	11	33	18	13	7.7
Dalit	32	14	30	11	13	8.0
OBC	20	13	41	12	14	7.8
FC	16	16	41	13	14	7.7
<i>All</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>7.8</i>
Women	Any casual wage, %	Any salaried work, %	Other non-waged employment, %	Any own goods production, %	Any reproductive labor, %	Total worktime (hours)
Adivasi	7	3	9	12	69	8.7
Dalit	6	3	5	7	79	8.2
OBC	4	2	8	7	79	8.1
FC	2	2	6	7	83	8.0
<i>All</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>8.2</i>