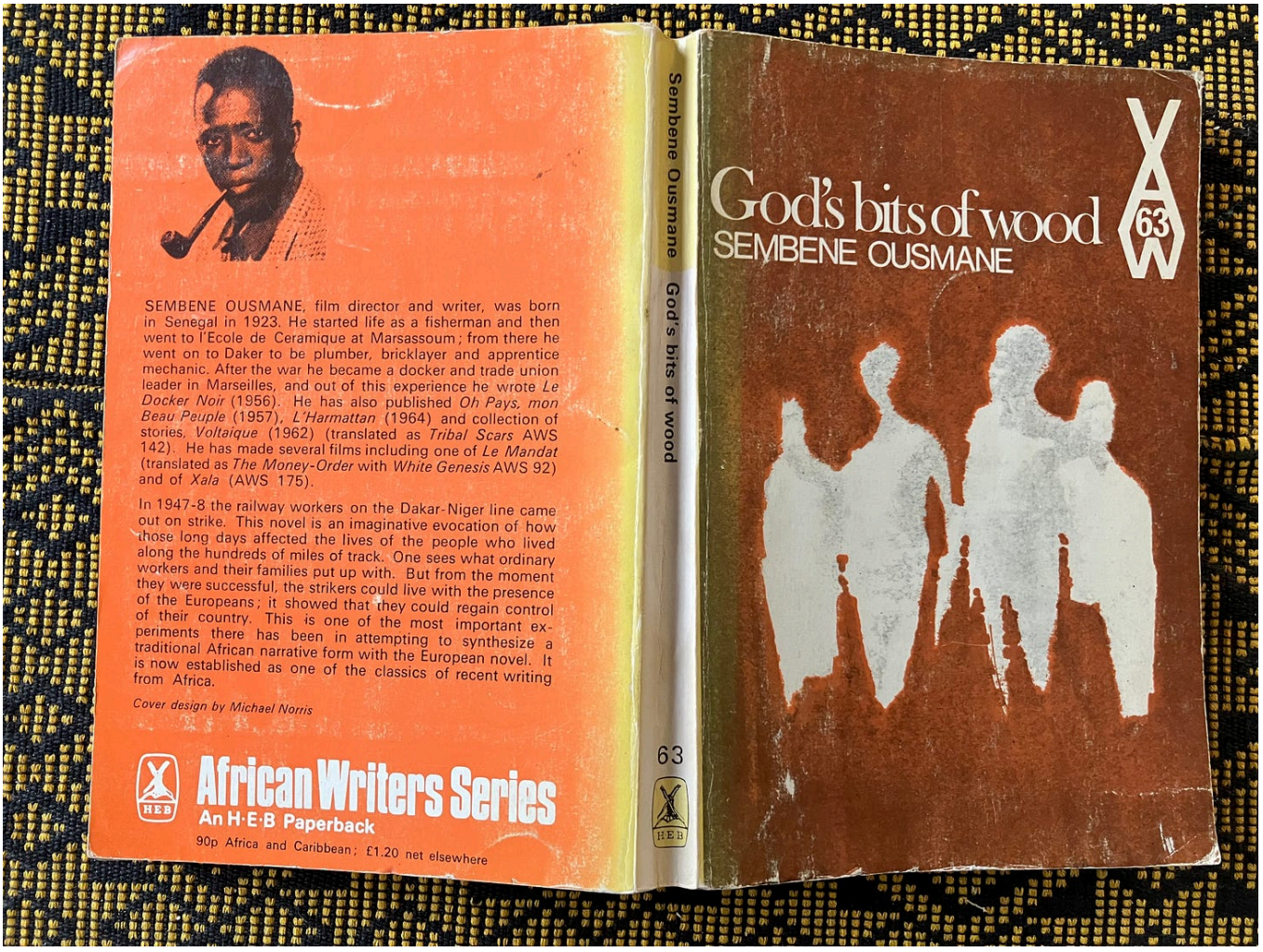
IMP #4. Marriage Under Pressure

thirdworldecon.substack.com/p/the-private-life-of-the-professional

Rohith Jyothish July 26, 2025



Introduction: When the Personal becomes Structural

We often invoke the phrase “the personal is political” to emphasise that private life (love, marriage or parenthood) is not beyond the machinations of power. But we miss how the political becomes personal in return. How economic forces shape our most intimate breakdowns, how care is driven by guilt and the structure is a kind of silence.

This fourth and final essay in the series traces the emotional and structural weight borne by families in post-liberalisation India. While earlier essays looked at academia, private institutions and their public counterparts, this one looks at the home, the place we return to after work.

The Privatisation of Social Reproduction

The term social reproduction refers to the often invisible labour, usually gendered, unpaid, or underpaid, that keeps society going like cooking, caregiving, emotional support, schooling, and elder care. In India, this has historically been held together by extended families, caste networks, informal labour, and gendered expectations.

In a recent book on the history of India's welfare, Louis Tillin argues that the country's welfare regime has always been partial, tilted towards the "productive" industrial workforce, from the days of development planning. With liberalisation, the shift towards privatised education, healthcare, and even housing meant that the costs of social reproduction now started being felt even among the better off middle class households.

If you are, say, in Delhi NCR or Mumbai or Bengaluru, this is a shock. Intergenerational mobility was sold as a promise, but increasingly looks like a burden. Young professionals find that without financial support from their parents, or the ability to fall back on family land, caste capital, or wealthier relatives, it is nearly impossible to raise a child, afford rent, take care of aging parents, and maintain dual careers. The cost of living has increased, but the cost of *reproducing* life, emotionally, physically, generationally, has become nearly unsustainable. We see a symptom of this often misdiagnosed as "population explosion".

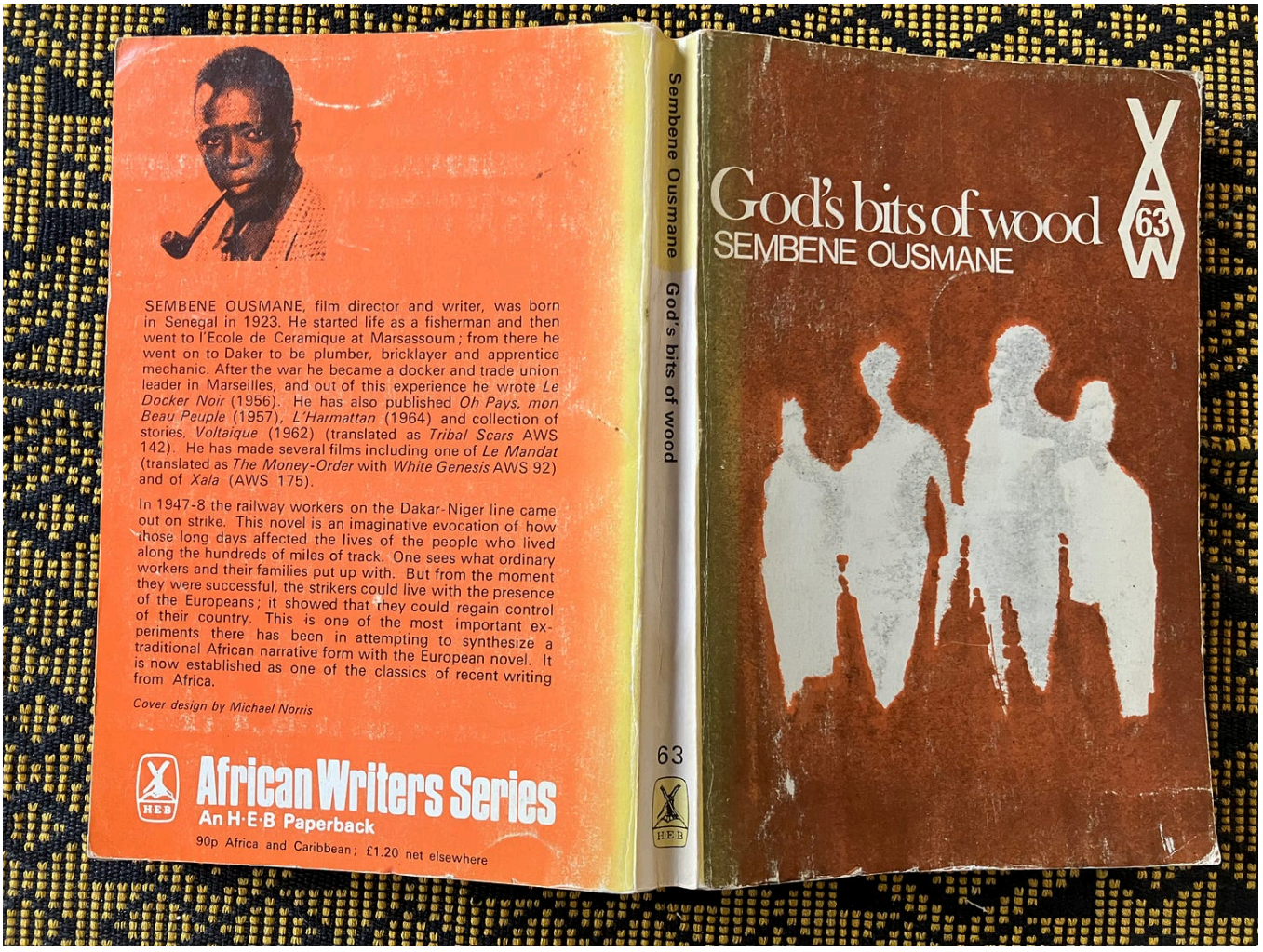
This is visible across households. If you are trying to make a career in Europe having studied in public institutions in India, you get married, but your wife cannot work in the same country unless she learns the language. If you have a child in those circumstances, taking care of the newborn is supported temporarily by one of the mothers-in-laws who has flown from India. A software engineering couple in Bengaluru struggle to balance corporate targets with childcare, but hiring a nanny in a different state has issues. In each case, the absence of state (or employer) support makes kinship feel like both a lifeline and a trap. Not being able to manage this is seen as the failure of the household unit. But, this is a system that outsources risk, responsibility and recovery to families, and within them, to women.

Love in the Age of the Stalled Revolution

In the *Second Shift*, Arlie Hochschild describes how women's participation in the workforce increased dramatically in the 20th century, but cultural expectations around domestic labour and emotional caregiving did not keep pace. The result was not equality, but overload.

Indian middle-class families post-liberalisation are living through their own version of this. Dual-income households are becoming the norm, but care work remains feminised and invisibilised. The emotional labour of planning meals, remembering birthdays, managing emotions, soothing egos, still disproportionately falls on women, even if they work the same hours outside the home. Deshpande and Kabeer (2024), on the basis of a time-use survey in 2019, have argued that **women spend on average twice as much time on unpaid care work and three times more on unpaid domestic chores compared to men**.

Marriage in this context becomes a site for negotiation, tension, and silent transactions. Who picks up the child from school? Who skips the meeting? Who apologises after a fight? These are not just interpersonal questions, but decisions shaped by structures of time, money, and labour.



Source: https://www.zammagazine.com/boekenclub/1787-favoriet-sembene-ousmane

Men, too, are caught in a contradiction. They are often emotionally unequipped to process the demands of caregiving, even when they want to. Some turn to religion, alcohol, or withdrawal. Others perform helpfulness but leave the emotional centre of the home to women. Hochschild reminds us that these patterns are not about bad individuals. It's what happens when revolutions stall and when economic change outpaces social transformation.

In India, the burden of this contradiction is often borne silently. The marriage doesn't break, but care becomes an intergenerational debt paid in silence. Parents who helped you survive the brutal 1990s now expect the same in return. But unlike them, you have no pension, no stable job, and no extended family to lean on. You are their safety net and your child's launch pad. And in between, your own needs erode.

Faith, Exhaustion, and the Right

Something else needs to be discussed here: faith. The Left has often made the mistake of treating religion as irrational, a distraction from material struggle. But in India, faith is not only spiritual, but it is a form of infrastructure for emotional comfort. It offers care when the state withdraws, and when the family becomes a burden. It builds community where the market isolates. It promises certainty in a time of precarity.

This is why the Right has succeeded in weaponising faith through religious polarisation and a form of moral reassurance. You maybe exhausted, but your suffering is meaningful. You maybe lonely, but your rituals connect you to something larger. You may not understand the policies, but the nation is in divine hands.

The liberal response, to defend the Constitution and to restore its institutions, feels abstract in comparison. The Left's rationalism, though historically necessary, feels hollow when people are falling apart inside their homes. When childcare collapses, when parents are sick, when jobs are insecure, when marriages fray, the Right offers meaning. The Left offers critique.

Faith, like care, is not inherently reactionary. But both have been captured by forces that thrive on this exhaustion.

Epilogue: Notes from an Institutional Memory Project

This essay series began as a personal reckoning, but it is ending as a form of institutional memory.

In universities, we speak of research, rankings, and respectability. But behind closed doors, faculty stagger under caregiving responsibilities, delayed salaries, opaque contracts, and endless metrics. Students burn out trying to meet impossible expectations with no emotional support. Administrators perform inclusion while enforcing silence. The everyday is quietly brutal.

The Institutional Memory Project is a record of these small violences. It is a long-term effort to document the structural transformations, silences, and everyday coercions within Indian academia especially as they unfold in elite private universities, state universities under duress, and the broader ecology of higher education shaped by caste, capital, and authoritarian nationalism.

It is not an official history. It is an oppositional archive.

The project aims to record:

The disciplining of dissent through hiring practices, curriculum design, and subtle administrative retaliation;

The infrastructures of exclusion: caste networks masquerading as merit, unpaid care work disproportionately borne by first-generation academics and women, and the role of family capital in determining academic mobility;

The affective cost of survival: the professionalisation of silence, the quiet humiliation of being told you are too angry, too emotional, too much;

The cultural shift within institutions: how solidarity has been replaced by careerism, and how "diversity" and "well-being" are often weaponised to mask hierarchy and control.

This archive will include annotated syllabi, anonymised testimonials, policy critiques, and reflections like these essays all grounded in political economy but informed by lived experience.

It will not name individuals. But it will name patterns because what looks like personal failure is often the effect of systemic design.

I see this as a living, evolving repository, not just for catharsis, but for political clarity. For students who suspect they are not imagining things. For early-career scholars who think they are alone. For those who still want to do this work without being broken by it.

If you have stories, documents, or frameworks that speak to this, I invite you to write, to share, and to remember.

Please write to `theinstitutionalmemoryproject@gmail.com`.

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