

Economist's book on Dalit life makes waves in France

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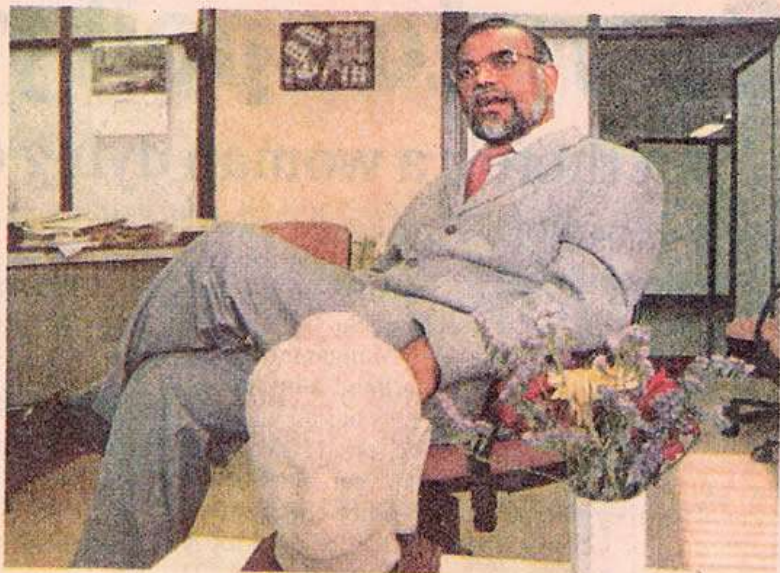
HE fumed when a leading daily asked him to pen his feelings as a Dalit when Sushilkumar Shinde became the chief minister of Maharashtra. "Shinde has many other qualifications apart from being a Dalit," he retorted. He also demanded an apology from this newspaper when it referred to him as a "Dalit economist". "Economists are economists. Why create something called a Dalit economist?" he questioned.

Dr Narendra Jadhav (49) has determinedly shrugged off many such attempts to place him in a caste mould on his way to becoming the in-charge of the Department of Economic Analysis and Police at the Reserve Bank of India headquarters in Mumbai.

Yet, it is his autobiographical account of how a Dalit family living in Mumbai's slums fought social pressures to attain socio-economic well-being that has been making waves recently.

In 1993, Jadhav rocked the Marathi literary world with his novel *Amcha Baap Aan Amhi* (Our Father and Us). Unlike the angst-ridden Dalit writing which spewed venom on a Brahmanical society, Jadhav's book captured the triumph of a Dalit railway cabinman and his family comprising a wife, four sons and two daughters.

The French version of this book was launched in October 2002. Within five weeks, all 3,000 copies of the first edition were sold out, forcing publisher Fayard to order a second edition. Apart from negotiating with publishers in 12 languages, Fayard is also believed to be planning a



The French edition of Dr Narendra Jadhav's book *Amcha Baap Aan Amhi* was sold out within five weeks — Photo by Kevin D'Souza

deal for a movie based on the book.

Jadhav was among the 20 Indian writers invited by the French government in November for the annual prestigious festival, Les Belle E'strangires, along with eminent writers like Mahasweta Devi, U R Ananthamurthy, Upamanyu Chatterjee and Nirmal Verma.

Titled *Intouchable - Une Famille de Parias dans L'Indecontemporaine* (Outcaste - Life and Triumphs of an Untouchable Family in India), Jadhav had to add a few chapters to the original book to introduce and explain Dr B R Ambedkar and his social experiment with the Dalit community to French readers.

"I interspersed the novel with social references like the *satyagraha* of Dr Ambedkar, the conversions etc. So, apart from capturing the history of my family over a 90-year-period, the book also tries to capture the social transformation in Maharashtra," says Jadhav.

Jadhav, who heads a team of 115 economists in the RBI and has

published over 70 research papers on economic issues, believes that globalisation will trigger an unprecedented social transformation in India.

"Globalisation will break the backbone of the hydra-headed caste system, as individuals start making informed choices. The silent revolution has already begun. Around 165 million Dalits in India have realised that education is the panacea for their problems," he says.

His family perhaps serves as the perfect example of this realisation. Jadhav's three brothers and two sisters educated themselves and went on to make highly successful careers, bringing the family out of abject poverty. While elder brother J D Jadhav served as Mumbai's municipal commissioner, another worked as a Deputy Municipal Commissioner, while the third worked with Gulf Air. "My father said that I should strive to be the best. Search for excellence has been my motto," he says with finality.