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Memoirs of an 'outcaste'

From NITIN KADIA (Our business correspondent)

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MUMBAI - When he was a kid, living in the congested chawls of Wadala in central Mumbai, the discrimination was blatant. Today, he is one of India's leading economists, a successful professional, yet he can sense the discrimination, which these days is rather subtle.

"Of course, sometimes it can be very blunt," remarks Dr Narendra Jadhav, principal adviser to the Reserve Bank of India. "The mindset is still the same. However, I tell myself, I am liberated, they are not. You have to just pity them."

Dr Jadhav - "my name tells my caste," he remarks - besides being a prominent economist, is also a writer. His book, *Outcaste: A memoir*, was published in English recently, just a year after a Paris-based publishing house brought it out in French. About 20,000 copies of the book in French have been sold so far.

Dr Jadhav recalls the instances of 'subtle discrimination' that a 'Dalit' - in a city like Mumbai even in the 21st century. Last year, for instance, his family hired a maidservant. She came to their posh apartment in south Mumbai, saw portraits of Dr Ambedkar, and bluntly asked him whether he was his follower.

When Dr Jadhav confirmed it, she said she would not like to work in a Dalit house, and left. "Of course, such things don't hurt now," remarks the renowned economist. His latest book - he has so far written half a dozen books, mainly on economic matters - is part-autobiographical, talking about three generations: his parents, himself, and his daughter.

The book was first published in Marathi - *Amcha baap ani ami*, (Our father and us) - and sold over 40,000 copies. The first edition of the book was sold out on the first day itself, a record for a Marathi book. The book is today compulsory reading for students of MA in Marathi in Mumbai University.

When Dr Jadhav was posted to Washington as principal adviser to the Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund - between 1998 and 2002 - he decided to write the book in English. "It is a book of inspiration to the millions of Dalits." His father went on a hunger strike, demanding that a school in Mumbai admit his eldest son, virtually forcing the school to give him admission. He

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says: "I do not feel any bitterness," he notes, referring to the discrimination that his family and he faced all these years. If you have a burning desire to come up in life, if you are determined, and if you work hard, nothing can stop you from climbing up," he adds.

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