

AMCHA BAAPANI AMHI

Their Father and Them

A book on how an unlettered Dalit inspired his children to excel in life wins wide acclaim

By SMRUTI KOPPIKAR

WHEN the adolescent boy said he wanted to be a writer, elders in the family scoffed, saying he'd perhaps end up begging for a living. But his father said: "I'll never ask you to do this or that. All I have to say to you is: reach the top in whatever it is you are doing. You want to be a thief? No problem. But be such a thief that the whole world will salute you." Years later, son Narendra Jadhav has ransacked his past, dipped into his father's innate wisdom, and weaved a tapestry of life's lessons into a book that the Marathi literary world is saluting.

Called *Amcha Baapani Amhi* (Our Father and Us), the book, written in Marathi, is a moving tribute to a father from his children. But it is also an evocative portrayal of how an unlettered Dalit inspired his children to reach for the stars. That inspiration came from within, largely based on his experience of life at the very bottom of a caste-conscious society.

First released in December 1993, the book has crossed the 10,000 mark—it's now into its third edition—and is fast setting a record for sales in the Marathi publishing world. It has also inspired a feature film—with Nilu Phule, star-actor, in the lead as father Damodar Jadhav—that will be ready early next year. Discussions for a tele-serial are under way. And translations have just begun into five Indian and two foreign languages: Hindi, English, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, French and German.

"The response has been far more overwhelming than I had expected," says Jadhav, 41, who holds a Ph.D. in economics and works as economic adviser to the RBI. In

fact, he is the youngest ever person in that position (see box). He attributes the success to his father's inspiration. "In our idiom, we call it the search for excellence. For my father, it was simply a part of his outlook."

That outlook and the self-taught

"An ordinary man, my father changed his mindset and succeeded in changing his next generation."

Narendra Jadhav, Son



SUCCESS STORY

A Ph.D. in economics from Indiana University, USA, Narendra Jadhav was adjudged the best international student there for his record marks in the subject. Today, he is the adviser to the RBI's Department of Economic Analysis and Planning—the youngest ever person in the position. Jadhav authored the RBI report that led to the part convertibility of the rupee and the relaxation of gold-import norms by the Government. He has four books on economics to his credit.

philosophy to combat social oppression form the central theme of the book. Damodar Jadhav, who had no formal education, came to Bombay from Ojhar near Nashik. It was a village so polarised along caste lines that Dalits could not wear slippers since that offended the upper castes. In Bombay, he worked by turns as a porter, newspaper vendor, mason, carpenter, cabinman and fourth-grade worker in the port trust.

He died in 1989 and his children are the living examples of his philosophy. Jadhav's eldest brother, J.D. Jadhav, is in the Indian Administrative Service and is currently the municipal commissioner of Bombay. Another brother, Dinesh Jadhav, is a deputy municipal commissioner. The other children have settled down in self-made, comfortable lives.

All could easily have been like their cousins back in Ojhar village, toiling as landless labourers and living at the very edge of society. "The difference was my father's vision and his dream," says Jadhav.

It was a dream born out of B.R. Ambedkar's one-line directive to Dalits: educate, unite and fight back. In a sense, Ambedkar is the real hero of the book; it is as much about him as the Jadhav family. The book is also a saga of an unknown Dalit and a collective autobiography of the underprivileged. Around the autobiographical anecdotes penned by his father, Jadhav wove two sections: the first comprises the children's impressions of their father; the second is where they write about themselves. Recalls Jadhav: "When my father retired, he would tinker around the house. That would irritate the women. To keep him busy, I gave him a pep talk and told him that he should write his personal experiences." The senior Jadhav