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The last quarter century of Russian history, as you all know, has been full of surprises, surprises that were very difficult for us as scholars or as observers comprehend. First, there was the surprise of Mikhail Gorbachev, who came into this dreary scene of Communist domination and introduced programs of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Then there was the totally unanticipated surprise of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of Gorbachev and the rise and the election of Boris Yeltsin. Then, equally unanticipated and equally striking was Yeltsin's commitment to radical economic reform and the program of introducing a market economy and democratization into Russia. And finally, just as difficult to predict was the resurgence of the Russian economy following the difficult transition in the 1990s, a resurgence that has seen 6-7 percent rates of economic growth for a long period of time. Now, I must tell you, for those academics or scholars or politicians who are in the business of understanding this, this is just far too many surprises and unpredicted events in a short period of time.

And, perhaps not surprisingly, people, economists, political scientists, politicians, did not cover themselves with glory in analyzing or understanding or characterizing these events. There were some, many of whom were economic historians, who basically stuck their heads in the sand and said there was nothing was going on in Russia that was of any consequence, that it was the same corrupt, despotic state that it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or during the Communist regime despite all the changes that were unveiling in front of their eyes. There were those observers, mostly on the left, who fell in love with Mikhail Gorbachev and the idea that soft communism was going to be the way of the future and who then refused to appreciate or acknowledge the depth and the importance of Yeltsin's reforms and remained critical even to the point of supporting Zyuganov for president in 1996. Then there were others, on the other end of the political spectrum who fell in love with market reforms and the change that was taking place in Russia to the point of failing to acknowledge the dislocation, the social costs, and some of the misery that was brought about by the transition. I think this is not surprising. I think this was just too much change for all of us to handle and to preserve our objectivity and to deal with without bringing our own baggage or bringing our own beliefs to evaluating the situation.

But throughout the last quarter century, there has been one scholar, one observer, one participant in this process who has never lost her objectivity, one person who has always called things as they are, who was critical when things were being done inappropriately – or inappropriately in her opinion – or who was just as capable of praise when she thought that good things were being accomplished. There was one observer who did not bring the baggage of the left or the baggage of the right to evaluating the situation. There was one observer who never wavered in her total unequivocal equipment to the truth in studying, analyzing, and writing about the Russian situation. And that observer is the one we honor today, that is, Padma Desai. So here is to Padma and her unwavering commitment to the truth.