

PADMA DESAI: ECONOMISTS' ECONOMIST

Success has a thousand parents. In academic economics mediocrity is an orphan.

This month, for a 90th birthday Leo Hurwicz *fete*, I wrote: You know you have become emeritus when you hear yourself saying, "I gave Goethe--or Tiger Woods--his first job." Well, I can't quite claim to have been Padma's first American guru.

However, while I was pinch-hitting for ailing Ed Chamberlin at Harvard, Padma was a member of a vintage 1955 Harvard theory seminar. Already she stood out among that bevy of future stars for both depth and energy.

Padma's is an "only-in-America" story. More precisely, "an only-in-modern-America" story. When her mentor, honest Abe Bergson, came in 1933 to Taussig's legendary Ec11 seminar, all women were sent to a rear row ghetto. With but a single exception, each female received a C grade.

That was bad. But it was not much better when I arrived at Harvard two years later. Schumpeter, Taussig's successor, treated women all alike: equal to Jesuits, they each received an A grade.

I go into this distasteful history only to make a point about Padma. Of her, one need not say, "A leading at-the-frontier *woman* economist." She has earned the reputation of being a leading scholar, period.

We in Cambridge mourned the loss to New York City of Padma and Jagdish. Neither, it turned out, had need to sacrifice for the other's career. *Ex post* one recognizes "creative design" at work. The Big Apple provided the optimal stage for two such creative movers and shakers.

I won't dwell on the happy past days of Our Crowd in Cambridge--glory times.

There is an old jazz song which I will tailor to you, Padma:

"Stay as sweet as you are,

Don't let a thing ever change you.
Stay as sweet as you are,
Don't let a thing rearrange you."

And keep turning out more of those new good books!

Paul and Risha Samuelson

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