PADMA DESAI: ECONOMISTS' ECONOMIST

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

This month, for a 90th birthday Leo Hurwicz fête, 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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