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# 'I have an opportunity to train the brightest minds'

Teaching economics to the best young minds at one of the premier educational institutions in the world, Harvard, has been an enriching experience for the young associate professor of economics, Gita Gopinath, who grew up in Mysore.

**The Inquirer** Reaching where she has after studying in top institutes like the Delhi School of Economics, Princeton and holding research positions at International Growth Centre at London School of Economics and Oxford and visiting positions at MIT, Gita Gopinath spoke to N Niranjan Nikam of Deccan Herald on her experiences about the joy of teaching at Harvard, learning from her PhD students and comparison between India and China. Excerpts:

From schooling in Mysore to becoming an associate professor in economics at Harvard has been a steady but remarkable climb. Can you share with us how things shaped for you?

I always wanted to be an academic. I am happy where I have reached now. I have an opportunity to train the brightest minds in the world and I do a lot of research, which is also my second source of joy. But initially when I left Mysore to join the Lady Shriram's College in Delhi for my undergraduate course, it was with the idea of wanting to be an IAS officer. As economics is a good subject to crack the civil service, I took up the subject. However, I started liking academics. I love the process of learning and that's why I changed the focus in college.

Economics, like statistics or even rocket science is a subject few understand. Is this subject something that you can put across to a common man?

Absolutely. Unlike pure science, this is a social science which involves understanding how human beings make decisions. It's very necessary to communicate what we have understood and learnt. For instance, every economist understands that more money causes inflation. Hence just printing more money leads to inflation. A country like Zimbabwe has a super high inflation.

Studying in Delhi School of Economics and teaching at Harvard, what's the difference like?

Education system in India is very different compared to the US. Here it is all very formal. There is a distance between the students and the professor in DSE, which is always maintained.

At Harvard it is not like that at all. In DSE showing up in class is a given. Even if the classes are not interesting you should attend. In India you are just a consumer of knowledge. You don't question. At Harvard if the classes are not interesting you don't attend. This would force you as a teacher to sharpen your skills and it is very enjoyable. Students ask questions and there is no dictation of notes. Both the students and the teacher are trying to make progress. I learn a lot from my students. I teach PhD students. It helps me keep up with what is the latest in the field and it helps me stay on top.

You have worked with the likes of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen...

There are only two professors of economics in Harvard and one of them is Amartya Sen. He travels most of the time and I hardly get to see him. When I was in DSE I heard his lecture for the first time and he is truly inspiring. I want to be like him.

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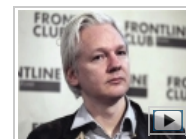
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Farmer Bachiben Kolipatle, 63, selects gold earrings inside a jewellery shop at Vadnagar

You have also been working as an associate editor of the 'American Economic Review' and a few others. How influential are these journals?

For the field of economics it is incredibly important. This is where the top economists publish their works. Getting published in these journals is important because it helps you for promotion in your career. The papers that are published here get translated into policy many a times. The chairman of Federal Reserve Ben Bernanke had formulated a policy at Princeton. Now he is implementing his own research as America is facing a financial crisis. My thesis professor Ken Rogoff did a lot of research when he was at the IMF, which he had to implement later.

You have done a study on 'India-China, a growth comparison'. Where do we stand vis-à-vis China in economic growth context?

At this point in time, in terms of pure growth, China is far ahead. The biggest challenge for India is building infrastructure. The second challenge for both countries is education. We are not producing enough high quality work-force. China is doing something about this. In India everything moves a lot more slowly. However, in the long run India will stand to gain because it is a democracy. Even though the development is slow it is more concrete. If there is a political upheaval in China then there could be a collapse.

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