



Breaking Out: An Indian Woman's American Journey

Padma Desai

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Padma Desai grew up in the 1930s in the provincial world of Surat, India, where she had a sheltered and strict upbringing in a traditional Gujarati Anavil Brahmin family. Her academic brilliance won her a scholarship to Bombay University, where the first heady taste of freedom in the big city led to tragic consequences -- seduction by a fellow student whom she was then compelled to marry. In a failed attempt to end this disastrous first marriage, she converted to Christianity.

A scholarship to America in 1955 launched her on her long journey to liberation from the burdens and constraints of her life in India. With a growing self-awareness and transformation at many levels, she made a new life for herself, met and married the celebrated economist Jagdish Bhagwati, became a mother, and rose to academic eminence at Harvard and Columbia.

How did she navigate the tumultuous road to assimilation in American society and culture? And what did she retain of her Indian upbringing in the process? This brave and moving memoir -- written with a novelist's skill at evoking personalities, places, and atmosphere, and a scholar's insights into culture and society, community, and family -- tells a compelling and thought-provoking human story that will resonate with readers everywhere.

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