

## IN MEMORIAM

Preetom S. Sunga

(1923-1991)

The recent passing of Preetom Sunga, just a few short years after his retirement from Statistics Canada, is a cause of deep sorrow. If Preetom taught one important lesson it was that all conventional wisdom should be challenged. It was only after a debate with Preetom and upon serious reflection that one began to realize how solidly structured his arguments were and the subtlety with which he made his main points. In the end, it could safely be said that Preetom was only interested in intellectual ardour and precision; one-upmanship was not his game.

Preetom was one of a generation of postwar economists who pioneered the development of Canada's system of national accounts. The immediate postwar period was an exciting time for a creative young mind such as that possessed by Preetom. The national accounts were in the process of being developed in Canada and other developed countries. Extensive work was also being undertaken internationally through the United Nations. The ground was thus fertile for any creative mind and Preetom cultivated it to the fullest.

Preetom made extensive contributions and most of his articles were published in the *Review of Income and Wealth*. The articles show the wide range of interests that Preetom had with respect to national accounts. The articles on interest and net rents bear testimony to his knowledge of this subject. Although Preetom's proposals for the treatment of interest have not been accepted as standard treatment in the system of national accounts and to this day reflect what must be taken as a minority view, the ideas proffered in these two articles nonetheless should be examined carefully in light not only of the originality of the approach formulated, but also to gain important insights on some of the conceptual controversies underlying the national accounts treatment of interest.

Further, while the principal focus of his thoughts was on the national accounts, Preetom did not restrict himself only to this, but sometimes strayed into other areas and not so surprisingly made a major contribution. The joint paper with Swinamer on the health accounts is proof on this account. It should also be mentioned that Preetom took a keen interest in the work of his colleagues. Preetom's footprints are on a vast amount of national accounts research ranging from estimates of the underground economy to the development of satellite accounts.

It is interesting that with the exception of Preetom's first interest article, and the joint paper with Goldberg *et al.*, all others were written in the latter part of his career. This can be explained both by the fact that Preetom had been away from Statistics Canada for several years and that when Preetom returned, he was assigned to a research position which gave him the time to consolidate and put

down on paper all the thoughts on national income which he had formulated over his long and intellectually productive career. Statistics Canada itself benefited for giving Preetom this opportunity and because of it the System of National Accounts, both in Canada and internationally, is that much stronger.

On a more personal level, and as a friend, Preetom was a good man, a gentle man and kind man. He displayed these characteristics in all his actions. He was thoughtful in his views of world affairs and human relationships, and was knowledgeable in a wide range of subjects from the very practical to the highly philosophical. Despite a serious approach to problems, his sense of humour prevented him from taking himself too seriously and provided him with a balanced perspective on life. We learned from our discussions with him and greatly benefited from the advice he gave to us.

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