

# Candid tales of a diplomat's life, world

**SANDEEP SINHA**

**T**HE life of a diplomat appears exotic, but the nitty-gritty of developing a relationship between countries can be a lot of hard work, belying the impression. The book is an interesting memoir of a member of the Indian Foreign Service, detailing the trials and tribulations, achievements and ordeals while serving in foreign capitals. Author Madhu Bhaduri, born in Lahore, recounts how her great-grandfather and grandfather refused to leave Lahore during the Partition times, hoping the situation would blow over. It took no less than Liaquat Ali Khan, a friend of her grandfather, to convince him to leave Pakistan. Khan also arranged a safe passage for the family on a private plane.

There are interesting descriptions of her tenure in various capitals of the world and the contrast that they offer in comparison to India. An assignment to Portugal meant exemption from paying taxes, which prompted many to settle there. The Lisbon posting also saw the extradition of Abu Salem after protracted negotiations with the Portuguese authorities and how initially the then Home Minister LK Advani's request was turned down by Portugal's foreign ministry. There was also a furore in the IFS over women members of the service

asking for favourable postings because of their family commitments, before the Supreme Court denounced gender discrimination in the service.

The book has all the tit-bits that can be expected from a career diplomat. She tells of her time in Vienna which had no public signs for not parking a car. During her India posting, the visit of the princess of Iran tested the nerves of those attending on her. It was an important event and India hoped to derive enough goodwill to be able to export iron ore from Kudremukh. Later, the Shah of Iran, the princess' father, was overthrown during the revolution.

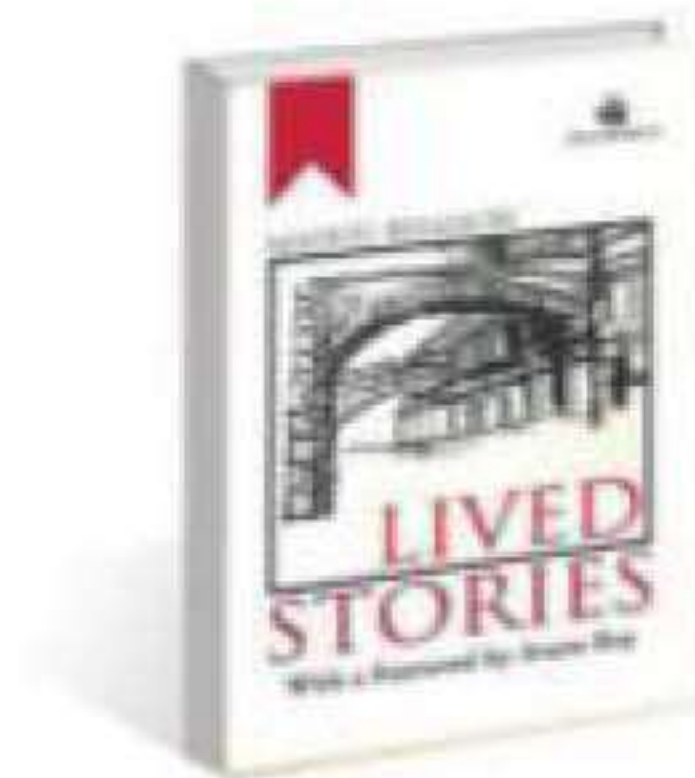
The author recounts how 40 years after she was posted in Vietnam, she found the country had sprung to life, with craters formed by bombs replaced with massive greenery. She writes how the forgotten and neglected grave of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, in Burma raises questions over whether the Indian government also believes the British historians' contention that the 1857 uprising was a mutiny and not the First War of Independence.

The book has some candid admissions about the role of the UN. The author says that in the Middle-East, the UN has become a pliable tool of whoever is the most dominant military power. The UN team

led by Hans Blix, former chief of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), clearly said that there was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Still, a war was waged on Iraq. Ironically, Saddam Hussain had fought the long war with Iran with US support. The attack on Libya took place because NATO powers wanted to remove Gaddafi and the UN was sidelined. The same pattern followed in Syria; the war continued.

All this destruction led to the uprooting of people and their seeking shelter gave rise to anti-immigration sentiments in European politics. The army of uprooted young men trying to restore Islamic supremacy in the region led to the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), adding to the chaos.

The author has also been a founder member of the Aam Aadmi Party and an RTI activist, and, not surprisingly, the book has a foreword by Magsaysay awardee Aruna Roy, who lauds Bhaduri for her nostalgia for principles now lost in politics. The book makes for enchanting reading about the efforts it takes for a diplomat to live up to her professional commitment.



**LIVED STORIES**  
by Madhu Bhaduri.  
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