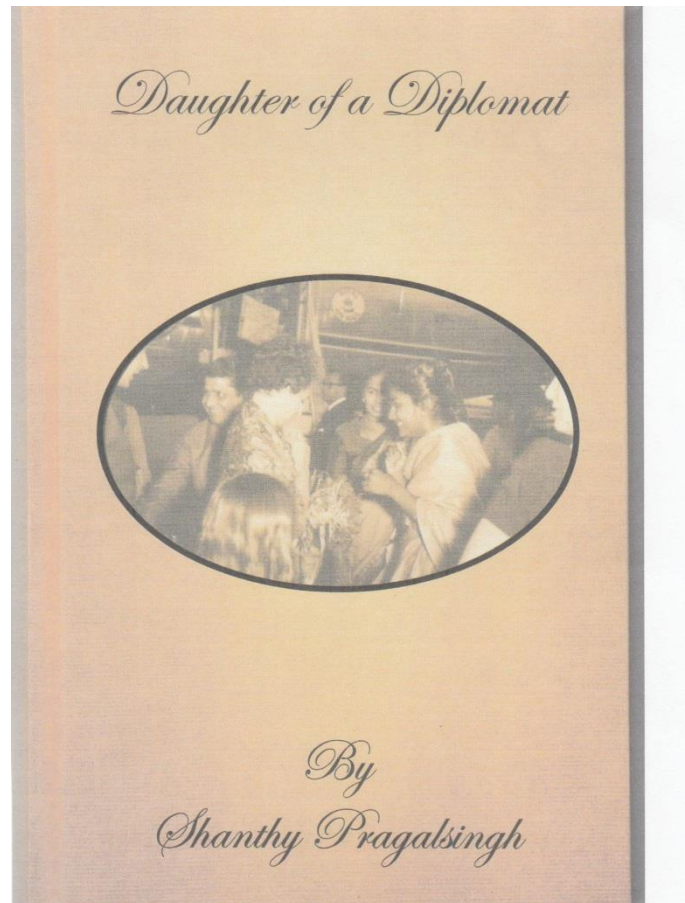


Daughter of a Diplomat
by Shanthy Pragalsingh

A Review by
M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.



This is a fascinating book, well written with passion and knowledge and understanding. Shanthy Pragalsingh writes about her personal life and experience as the daughter of a diplomat. The book gives us interesting and useful insights about Indian history and values, through the eyes of a young girl/woman who had many opportunities to speak to and listen to and observe many leading historical figures of modern Indian history after independence.

The role of a diplomat is hard and ambivalent even as it is exciting because a diplomat is in part a carrier of historical events. He or she initiates as well as participates in creating history. Sometimes diplomats succeed in achieving the goals set before them, but often, especially in

Indian circumstances of non-aligned status and movement, their role is to explain and convince other nations about the position taken by India for the good of India as well as the world. Overseas Indian issues always formed part of their concerns and assigned duties. Shanthy's father had been in the thick of conflicts all over the world. Shanthy had been with her family and had opportunities to see the world and its leaders.

Shanthy's statement given below is fully implemented in the book and we get an opportunity to travel back into the past and recollect (if you are a senior citizen like me) what went on during our younger days. If you are a high school or college student or a young scholar or teacher of international relations, you will get interesting information about the tension faced, and about the life of individuals and leaders who faced critical days with great composure, always holding the interests of India dear to their heart.

Shanthy writes,

This little book in your hand is a compilation of such memories, of a young girl. But you will find it to be rare and unique, because it is written by the Daughter of a Diplomat. She will take to different countries in the Continents of Asia, Europe, Africa and America. Her experiences are special, also because they start from Delhi in the early days of Independent India, moving on to strife-torn Nepal and onwards to Pondicherry and Ceylon. Then it is over to the post-World War II Europe, before moving to Africa in the apartheid days (p. v).

This book is a personal record of the history of happenings in newly independent India seen by the eyes of an Indian young citizen growing to be an adult. It also records the dynamic initiatives, achievements and failures of the newly emerging Indian nation in its external affairs.

Here below are given some of the incidents that would engage all our attention for a better India still in the making:

“My father was posted in Delhi in 1947. We lived there during the initial stages of the Hindu-Muslim riots and my mother would be worried till my father returned home safely from work. She would pray fervently and request us to pray for him as well. On one occasion, I remember looking over the parapet of our house and seeing a pregnant woman being stabbed in the riots that had erupted. I don't remember who was Hindu or who was Muslim, but I witnessed fires of hatred and resentment, with emotions running high and a complete absence of rationalism” (p.2)

(1949-1952) “My father had to travel to distant places within Nepal often, and many times had to face the wrath of the Ranas. God was his protector. Once the car in which my father used to travel normally was very badly stoned by agitators.

However, the Indian Intelligence had tipped the concerned people who had wisely put him in another car with heavy protection and brought him home safely. (p. 11)

“Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, along with Khrushchev, President of Russia was visiting Madras. Along with some other girls from school, I participated in a dance program organized in their honor. Nehruji came over and congratulated our performance. Needless to say we were thrilled. On that day when the band played the National Anthem, they started on a wrong note. Nehruji was so upset that he just shouted on top of his voice, “Stop it”. There was pin drop silence for a while before they started again. That day I realized the importance of the National Anthem. I felt a deep sense of patriotism.” (p.20)

The book is full of interesting narratives of historical events seen and experienced by the author Shanthi as a young girl and a young woman. The book also takes us to her later life as a teacher and Dean of a well-known school in Chennai (then called Madras).

The following contents list clearly reveals the scope of this very interesting book. School and college students will find the book a great introduction to the real and recent past of India as seen by an ordinary citizen, blessed with the opportunity to be present when historic events took place.

Chapter 1 My Family

Chapter 2 Nepal: Father’s First Diplomatic Posting

Chapter 3 Nepal to Madras, for Education

Chapter 4 Stay with Grandmother in Vellore

Chapter 5 Schooling in Madras

Chapter 6 Merger of Pondicherry with Indian Union

Chapter 7 My First Sea Voyage (1956)

Chapter 8 My Splendorous Life in Germany

Chapter 9 Across Europe by Tin, Ceylon bound by Sea

Chapter 10 Ceylon, the Emerald Island

Chapter 11 Over to Africa

Chapter 12 Goodbye to My Diplomatic Passport

Chapter 13 My Father’s Retirement and a Terrible Tragedy

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Chapter 14 Rare Memories of a Diplomat's Daughter

Chapter titles do not adequately reveal the contents of the chapters. Every chapter has interesting episodes from a variety of nations. Shanthy's experience in Africa is very significant and also her observations of life in Europe and political happenings in all these nations are significant.

I'd highly commend the book to be included in the reading lists of both English Literature and Political Science classes. Language used is simple and elegant. Short sentences written with passion and devotion to the cause of India and her potential to contribute to the welfare of humanity in the present and the future.

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