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Book review

**K Natwar Singh, 'Is One Life Enough for 'Profession',
but not for 'Politics'?**

**One Life is Not Enough: An Autobiography, New Delhi:
Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 2014; pp 410 + xiii**

S Swaroop Sirapangi

Political Background to the Autobiography

K Natwar Singh was India's former External Affairs Minister during 2004-05 under the Indian National Congress (INC) headed coalition United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government headed by Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister. He was forced to leave this position on account of allegations over 'Oil for Food Scam' in the Iraq during the tenure of former President Saddam Hussein, as revealed by Paul Volcker, who investigated this scam, which was appointed by the United Nations Organisation (UNO) the then General Secretary Kofi Annan. Paul Volcker included many persons across the globe in his report over this scam and Natwar Singh was one among them. The report created lot of political sensation in India. His political party INC and its leadership headed by Sonia Gandhi did not back him and asserted that Natwar Singh alone was responsible to clear his innocence in this scam. This made Natwar furious and in the subsequent events he was forced to leave his Cabinet position and had to face investigations by different agencies and at last he even left the INC, with which he had a long association.

Since his disassociation from the INC over this scam; he faced many hurdles from various investigating agencies and remained silent till 2014 general elections. When it became clear that neither INC nor INC headed UPA will not be able to capture political power anymore at the national level, but Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or its alliance National Democratic Alliance (NDA) headed by Narendra Modi would be able to win over the election, Natwar became vocal and revealed that he was authoring an autobiography. Thus, the timing chosen for this autobiography is politically significant.

When it was revealed, the INC President Sonia Gandhi became alert along with her daughter Priyanka Gandhi and requested him not to mention about her intention to become the Prime Minister immediately after the 2004 general election. Because, Sonia Gandhi was praised for declining the post of

Prime Minister due to her Italy birth, but for choosing Manmohan Singh to lead the UPA government headed by INC. Natwar was an 'insider' testimony to various developments at various points of time either in the INC or governments headed by the INC etc. In the same way Natwar was an insider who knew very clearly in 2004 that Sonia Gandhi was much interested to become the Prime Minister of India, but on what grounds she gave up such a wish!! Revealing of this 'inside' would diminish the stature of Sonia Gandhi considerably, as she was praised and exalted for not becoming the Prime Minister of the country. So, Sonia Gandhi along with her daughter Priyanka Gandhi requested Natwar not to disclose this 'inside' story. But, Natwar asserted that he would not hide the 'truth'. Thus, the authoring of this autobiography by Natwar made Sonia Gandhi and some others highly uncomfortable.

The other significant unfolding in the last chapters and pages of this volume is Natwar's assertion how he was innocent, but, how he was made a scapegoat in the 'Oil for Food Scam' and went-on to attack the INC and its leadership primarily headed by Sonia Gandhi and the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Thus, he attempted to prove his clean image through this autobiography, which he chose to author and release after the INC's drastic decline at the time of 2014 general election to the Lok Sabha and when the position became clear that INC will not be able to form government at the national level. Thus, the timing of this autobiography's release is politically significant.

Natwar was inclined towards the INC prior to India's declaration of independence. Since then he had close association either professionally or personally in various capacities with various top leaders of Nehru - Gandhi family, like: Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, etc. Both his professional and political life revolved considerably with these personalities and more. But, since the end of 2005 his fate changed drastically and he became aloof from the INC and the Nehru - Gandhi family members too. At the end of the book Natwar denounces Sonia Gandhi and held her responsible for the poor performance of the INC which could not bag even fifty seats in the Lok Sabha and showed his 'silent inclination' towards BJP headed government by Narendra Modi!! But, Natwar fails to justify on what 'political ideological terms' he shifted his political alliance from INC to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who belongs to the right wing BJP. Thus, this book, in one way attempts to expose his 'undisclosed silent shallow ideological shift from INC to BJP, i.e. from Centrist to the Rightist'. In-fact, his son Jagat who also started his political career in the INC shifted his alliance to the BJP after 2005 Volcker report and the subsequent hurdles that he faced from the INC.

Two Innings in Natwar's Life: Professional and Political

Natwar was an Indian diplomat by profession. In his professional diplomatic career he had a satisfactory innings. But, he gave up his Indian Foreign Service in 1984 in-order to enter politics, which he considered as one of his most interested field to serve and prove. With the blessed approval of Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India, and a towering personality of INC, he entered politics. But, his second life innings in politics was not that satisfactory, when compared to his first innings as a diplomat.

Though the author calls this volume as his autobiography; I consider this as partial. More than autobiography, at first this work is an attempt of an insider's narration of certain significant international political events to which he was a witness during his diplomatic professional career, primarily. Thus, this volume would be certainly interesting and insightful to various persons involved in the diplomatic career, seriously.

Secondly, the second innings (since 1984 to 2005, i.e. up to his ouster from the INC) of Natwar Singh as a politician is a turbulent one. During this duration he was a close associate of the Nehru – Gandhi family and he relied much on this family to succeed politically. This second innings of him coincided with the drastic decline of INC over the years on the one side and the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on the Indian political scene on a drastic scale, on the other side. The readers can certainly benefit from his narration of the role of certain key politicians while dealing with various national and international issues and shades of various political personalities at varying points of time.

This book has a total of twenty two chapters and most of them are devoted on international affairs in which Natwar took part or which occurred during his diplomatic and/or political career. So, the book is mostly about an insider's account of various international and national incidents, to which mostly Natwar was a close witness or he was one among the key players in certain formal and informal decision making process and deliberations. Thus, the work informs us about various political decisions which were taken or deliberated upon, on behalf of India or the INC or government/s at various points of time.

Concluding Observations

Natwar failed to convey us why he felt 'One Life is Not Enough', which is the title of this autobiography. However, I feel his first life innings as an Indian diplomat was a successful one, when compared to the second innings as a 'politician'. In-fact, Natwar too somehow acknowledged great satisfaction over his life's first innings. His utmost satisfaction in first innings made him to move-on to next cherished ambition of proving in politics, which can be considered as a second innings.

In order to turn this volume as a full-fledged autobiography the author should have attempted to focus much more on two primary issues in detail, like; first, on the formation and shaping of his political ideology at various points of time, along with his family members too. And, secondly, turbulent issues in the family which made him to face and realize various shades of life, etc. A clear focus on these two issues are missing, I would regard this as 'partial political autobiography'!! The autobiography however is very interesting.

Book 1

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