Conclusion

This study has enquired into two major changes in the Indian political system that took place over the last decade. One, the formation of coalition governments at the national level and two, the transformation of India's federal system. The study argued that the formation of federal coalitions was one of the prime movers in the emergence of new federalism. It then focussed on the political dimension of new federalism, which was characterised by both assertiveness and increased opportunities for participation by the component units in national decision-making.

The study opened with a survey of literature, - in the relatively young, but highly developed field- of coalition politics. Coalition governments being a frequently encountered form of government on the European Continent, combined with the relative ease with which it lends itself to game theoretical and statistical analysis, are reasons why it has received widespread attention. Advances both in the theoretical and empirical domains have gone a long way in exploding many misconceptions, especially the assumption coalition governments tend to be anomalies and anti democratic. Our review of coalition literature revealed certain gaps. Notably, many of the assumptions and conceptions taken for granted are not necessarily universal and generalisable and hence could not be readily applied to the case of India.

First, the assumption of a single left-right division of political cleavages is unhelpful in the face of multiple and cross cutting dimensions of cleavages seen in India. Second, the assumption of stable party systems is turned on its head when we note that the party politics and party systems are in a state of continuous flux and change in democracies that are in the process of consolidating and stabilising the institutional structures of democracy. Third, the programmatic and policy base identification of political parties is again not a universal characteristic, and is actually only one of the numerous ways of political mobilisation. In systems where charismatic and clientelist forms of mobilisation play a larger role, ‘policy’ based coalition theories, - today’s ruling orthodoxy in coalition literature- does not hold take us very far.

Finally, it became apparent that there was a clear euro-centric bias in the sample of countries most frequently studied in coalition literature. Besides, the list was loaded with systems using the proportional system of electoral laws and countries predominantly unitary in structure. New institutional studies tell us that "institutions
matter" and make a difference to political outcomes. It follows therefore that many of the assumptions made and outcomes postulated are products of particular institutional structures. Coalition literature has ignored the impact of federalism as a structuring agent, not only of governments but also of political parties. Electoral coalitions, the principal characteristic of coalition building in India have also largely evaded the attention of coalition theorists who have assumed that coalition building is primarily a post-electoral phenomenon.

Most theories and explanations could therefore be used only by factoring in an ethnocentric bias. However at the same time, the review also noted that India has been treated as an untouchable in most comparative studies, considering that it has been excluded on some pretext or the other. An institutional approach to the study of the coalition experience in India has three primary uses. First, it helps narrow the gap between the Indian experience and experiences elsewhere. Second, it highlights the effects of certain unexplored institutional constraints and enabling factors. Finally it draws attention to formal institutional structures, which have been neglected in explanations on Indian politics.

Our institutional approach moves away from the behavioural explanation, which had reduced institutions to a secondary role or a consequent factor in relation to other variables. It brings back institutions as a dominant explanatory variable, highlighting its key intervening role without denying the importance of either the socio-economic context or the motives of the actors. The analytical framework that was mapped out in this study intended to show the distinct effects of three key institutional structures in the Indian political system, namely the federal system, the parliamentary system and the electoral system. The framework brought out the incentives and constraints that each of these structures offered, both separately and jointly, and the likely impact on the moves of the political parties.

From institutional studies we learnt that institutions are not neutral and impartial arbiters. In the process of providing solutions to some issues they automatically privilege a particular side or a course of action. Consequently, a particular framework may not necessarily provide the same level of satisfaction to all the participants. This fact came out clearly from the views of political parties. Instead of using the interview method, the study used the Sarkaria Commission report to comprehend the perceptions of the main actors on the nature and functioning of the political system. This report had recorded vividly the views of regional parties on the
**strong centre bias** within the Indian federal system. The Congress, on the other hand found nothing wrong with the system, considering that it was still in command over dominant institutions. Though federalism as an organising structure gave political parties the incentive to limit themselves territorially to a particular region without hurting themselves politically, the strong centre bias made it necessary for the regional parties to also seek to have a say at the national level. The submissions of the regional parties to the Commission were dominated by the plea to have greater control over many areas that were not in their hands or where the centre had an upper hand, and for reduced central intervention in the functioning of state governments. In other words, they wanted a clear protection of the “self-rule” component of the federal system.

The **executive-dominated parliamentary set up** in India had reduced the opposition to an ineffective position, one where it could make a lot of noise and attract attention but do nothing more than that so long as the government of the day had a majority in parliament. This was in stark contrast to systems where there was a more balanced relationship between the executive and the legislature, and where the opposition has greater powers qua opposition and opportunities to influence policy making through the committee system. The executive-dominated system on the other hand heightens the incentive to be in government.

The impact of the **electoral system** in conjunction with federal structures took place over a period of time. The incongruent nature of the federal system gave rise to numerous and diverse parties within the federation. Based on the territorial dimension it was possible to make a distinction polity-wide and regional parties and a further distinction into coalition makers and coalitionable parties. The key characteristics of the changing party system were the increased levels of competition and regionalisation. Using three indicators of competition, our study shows that over the years both the intensity and spread of competition within the polity has increased manifold. We also saw that Duverger’s Law worked clearly at the constituency level and two candidates were able to capture a majority of the votes. Besides this, the study also showed that there was an emergence of a strong third party in some of the states by the end of the '90s.

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1 The meaning of the term incongruent and the manner it has been used in this study has been explained in chapter two of this study.
Our study expanded the meaning of regionalisation of the party system. We saw that regionalisation went beyond the emergence of regional parties as even polity-wide parties are also territorialized in terms of areas of strength and weaknesses. It was seen that the two polity-wide parties the Congress and the BJP not only had their own distinct areas of dominance but also their own Achilles heel. No single party has been able to spread itself uniformly and command support across the country. This territorialization has made it increasingly difficult for polity-wide parties to garner a majority on their own in the near future, despite the proclivity of both of them to form single party governments.

The chapter on the party system also looked at the salient features of mobilisation pattern. It was noted that the dominant trend was towards a clientelist and patronage based system and access to the State was the main basis on which parties competed against one and another. The plurality system of electoral law also ensured that MPs had to maintain a close, continuous and almost personal contact with the constituency, diluting all other tasks and roles that MPs had to perform. Secondly, it was also seen that politics at the grassroots level was far removed from the politics of ideology and larger policy issues. Strategic and pragmatic considerations guided the usage of various identities; group and collective identities are primarily used to achieve material benefits. This mobilisation pattern and the relationship between the voter and the elected representative makes it easier for parties to switch or form alliances and coalitions with others who may outwardly profess a different ideology or viewpoint, without much fear of retribution. In sum, a combination of three factors, the mobilisation pattern, the executive biased parliamentary system and the electoral system that encourages the development of a personal connection between the voter and the candidate has encouraged office-seeking behaviour.

Once the background and the framework within which politics in the country took place was mapped out the study moved on to the core project, which is to understand the formation of coalition governments at the national level and assess its impact on the nature of federalism in India. Following the script mapped out in institutional literature, subsequent moves by actors showed clearly an intelligent reading of the political conditions and circumstances they were placed in. The longevity of the institutional framework, considering that there had been no major constitutional amendment barring the anti-defection law that had an impact on
government formation or electoral competition, and consequently the repetitiveness and regularity of the behaviour, induced a learning process among participant organisations in the political system.

Regional parties first attempted to bypass the existing constraining framework of centre state relations through “conclave politics”, as it came to be known. However, this forceful move to change existing structures was not successful. The second method, of “if you can't beat them, join them” proved far more useful, inaugurating the era of coalitions at the national level. The formation of coalitions and alliances arose as a result of the convergence of the needs of both regional and polity-wide parties. The keenness on the part of the regional parties to play a role at the national level made them coalitionable parties, and this dovetailed with the plans of the main challenger to the Congress, the other polity wide party, first the Janata Dal and later the BJP.

The winning criteria under the plurality system, has been instrumental in pushing parties into electoral coalitions. The skilful use of strategic coordination to fulfill the needs of both the coalition makers and the coalitionable parties, to overcome the limitations of territory and the need to have a say at the national level respectively led to pooling of votes among parties. This coordination was also greatly influenced by the increasing intensity of competition within the polity. It was seen that the margin of victory at the constituency level had been coming down over the years. What added to the intensity of competition was that this also coincided with the emergence of a third party, that was increasingly making a difference in matters of winning and losing at the constituency level. The predominance of electoral coalitions and seat adjustments in India is clearly linked to the incentives offered by the plurality system and the emergence of the strong third party.

The electoral alliance system itself was a step further from the Janata coalition experiment, which was predominantly the result of a merger of numerous parties. Federal coalitions that formed in the ‘90s clearly avoided the merger experiment and parties sought to maintain their distinctive identities within the coalition. It was noted that federal coalitions recognise, respect and celebrate diversity, difference and plurality. The concept of federal coalition goes beyond the majoritarian versions of democracy propounded by the two polity-wide parties. Federal coalitions brought in and accommodated the region at the national level without jettisoning or diluting the
national project. This was in sharp contrast to the '80s, when talk of the region and regionalism, was considered anti-national.

Our study highlighted the fact that coalitions in India have evolved continually. Coalition experiments are therefore not one of a kind experience, as is usually assumed in coalition literature, but each had a history and background that needs to be accounted for. We saw there was a constant learning process, with each phase learning not only from its own experiences but also from those of the past. Each coalition experiment, gaining from experience, improved upon the institutional mechanisms of coalition maintenance used by its predecessor. The United Front bettered the record of the National Front and the National Democratic Alliance went a step ahead of the United Front. Here it does not merely mean longer lasting governments. The most visible outcome of the process has in fact been the development of complex and sophisticated coalition management techniques and mechanisms. Beginning with ad hoc meetings between allies, today there are robust institutionalised mechanisms in place at multiple levels both within the government and outside. These mechanisms have been successful to a large extent in acting as pressure valves, managing the diverse concerns of the numerous allies and also ensuring that the alliance has stuck to the agenda it had outlined for itself.

It may also be said that while the federal coalition phase has enabled the BJP to extend itself territorially into the East and South, where it has been traditionally weak. The alliance to a certain extent has also managed to keep in check the majoritarian and unitarian instincts of the party. The party was forced to adopt a moderate path and tone or play down the most controversial aspects that had made it a pariah in the first half of the last decade of the twentieth century. "Coalition compulsions" as they are popularly known have made the party accept the federal logic of "shared rule and self rule" a point it had once reviled as a danger to national unity and strength. However, we may add a rider to this proposition. The party followed its own agenda when the tight constraints of the coalition did not exist. In states where it has been solely in power it has consistently held that the logic of coalition dharma was not applicable.

Federal coalitions, it was seen, did not serve the narrow purpose of governmental formation alone. In a diverse and plural country like India, it is also an important consociational device that brings together numerous and different interests together. Considering that the period prior to the formation of federal coalitions was
marked by great hostility, tensions and even threats of secession, federal coalitions characterised by greater inclusiveness have in a way assuaged the concerns of the hitherto excluded. While critics have cynically focussed on the increasing number of partners and players in the coalition game, this study is of the view that these numbers have greatly added to the diversity of views and consequently increased its inclusiveness, representativeness and allowed for greater participation. This participatory role in federal coalitions has gone a long way towards dousing the flaming embers of the '80s. The success of the NDA federal coalition has in a way also forced more recently the other polity wide party the Congress to alter its stand, becoming more amenable to alliance and coalition building.

No single cause could be identified for the breakdown of coalition arrangements. However in the NF, UF and the NDA federal coalitions competition at the state level with parties outside the alliance, supporting the alliance or even within the alliance has been the predominant reason for instability and tensions. This is a rather complex situation that arises in federal systems. If competition at the state level provided the glue for the alliance it was also responsible for rocking it when it was least unexpected. Many a time the reasons for instability in the federal coalition were often unconnected with national affairs. Another reason for instability and breakdown lay with the nature of the party organisation of the component parties in the alliance. It was noted that most parties had no real internal democracy and were run as personal fiefdoms of the leaders. This has in turn made coalitions vulnerable, as parties are prone to splits and divisions as differences of opinion are often taken to be challenges to the ruling group in the party.

Federal coalitions have however played an important role in the movement of Indian federalism from a centralised one to a less centralised one and enabled the emergence of new federalism. New federalism also called cooperative federalism is primarily distinguished by the changed relationship between the centre and the states. The centre no longer dominates and the states have increasingly acquired a voice at the national level. Federal coalitions brought in a state level perspective to national decision-making, in the process fulfilling a long-standing demand and consequently institutionalising one of the essential features of a federation. New federalism has both a political and an economic dimension. The study focussed on the three political dimensions of new federalism, first, a greater say for the states in national level decision making, second, a renewed interaction and cooperation between the states
and the centre, and third, reduced central intervention. The different mechanisms through which new federalism worked along with concrete examples of the new phase of relationship were highlighted. This new phase was distinctly different from the earlier phase in numerous ways and was brought about by the learning experiences and the play of political forces rather than by any major structural changes.

This new federalism characterised by increasing assertiveness on the part of the states has therefore come about due to the clout that regional and state based political parties have obtained within federal coalitions. These coalitionable parties have however not used their strength at the national level to institutionalise the changed relationship between the centre and the states. This has delayed the consolidation of the foundations of new federalism. This paradox of federal coalitions, whereby states have a say in national decision making today but may not have it tomorrow, is something that will have to be delved into.

The paradox primarily arises from the very nature of the formation of these coalitions. We had seen that strategic and consociational reasons have been at the forefront. Most of these coalitionable parties have their primary interests at the state level and they seek to play a role at the national level because of the very structure of the federal system in which the central government dominates. Coalition makers on the other hand, have been forced to keep in mind the demands of these parties because of their own limitations in terms of territorial asymmetries or societal asymmetries and for reasons of consociational alliance building. This type of alliance building has worked to the advantage of both the coalition makers and the coalitionable parties in the system.

Coalition makers have through this arrangement been able to preserve, nourish and sustain their areas of influence but also to increase their outreach. The regional and state based parties, who form the bulk of the category of coalitionable parties, have learnt that power lies at the central level and have consequently manoeuvred themselves to capture the centre, but they appear to have acted primarily from a short term perspective rather than a long term one. Their focus has been on the limited goals of obtaining increased resources for their regions and for their electoral support bases. They have not sought to ensure a situation whereby states will continue to play a role at the national level, even after the present political circumstances change. Similarly, coalition makers have also been short sighted. By not facilitating the changes in terms of relations between the centre and the states, which would make
If new federalism is to be sustained, regional and state-based parties should use their position at the national level to negotiate structural changes in the framework and not be content merely with tip of the nose demands. Some of the changes in this direction could aim to:

- Ensure that the ISC meets regularly. The ISC should be used as a sounding body for consultation and cooperation between the centre and the states.
- Institutionalise the Chief Minister’s Conference and ensure that it meets regularly.
- Enact legislation to ensure that the consensus reached at the ISC on the position of Governor, Concurrent legislation and so on are adhered to.
- Devise written or unwritten consociational and numerical limit agreements with regard to cabinet composition.
- Lay down clear-cut specifications as to the use of Art. 356 must be laid down as quickly as possible.
- Make the committee system more powerful and more meaningful so that the executive is obligated to follow its recommendations.
- Reform the Rajya Sabha to give states better representation.

Coalition politics in India has often been harshly judged. Many of the “characteristics” of coalitions like instability, hankering for office, “opportunistic” and so on are primarily a result of the incentives and opportunities offered by the institutional framework rather than a particular culture. My study showed that the three institutional factors, the federal system, the parliamentary system and the nature of electoral laws have played a defining role in the formation, maintenance and breakdown of coalition arrangements in India.

This study, as noted in the introduction, did not seek to evaluate the performance of coalitions. However, at some time in the future this will also have to be done. In this direction it would be ideal to focus on particular issues or areas rather than attempting large-scale evaluations, as there seems to be no consensus on suitable
measurement indicators. Numerous micro studies could be a starting point for the evaluation of coalition experiences.

Coalition studies have been one of the most dynamic sub fields in political science and if it has to maintain the same and vitality in the future it is imperative that it takes into account the fact that coalition formation is not simply a post-electoral phenomenon, but could also take place in the electoral arena. Besides this it should also consider the experiences of systems where the dominant mode of mobilisation is not policy based but clientelist or even charismatic based. However what is more urgent is to account for the impact of federal structures of governance. Multiple jurisdictions or levels of government are likely to acquire greater significance in the coming years irrespective of the nature of the political system. It will not matter whether it is overtly federal or not. The establishment of the World Trade Organisation and the framing of international rules of trade and commerce have resulted in the globe becoming one big market. Besides this, nations themselves have reached agreements on economy, trade, and other areas resulting in the setting up of free trade zones, economic and monetary unions, and so on. All this has led to a greater global economic integration. Parallel to this, is the revolutionary technological change that has taken place in many fields, including communications, transport, and military.

The upshot of all this has been the negation of space, time and the once sacrosanct national boundaries. Citizens in the modern nation state are therefore no longer affected only by decisions taken by their sovereign governments but are increasingly impinged upon by extraterritorial bodies and organisations. In the future we are likely to witness further movement towards global integration. The European Union is one such emerging example of how citizens are going to live under multiple jurisdictions. Coalition studies have yet to take note of these transformations and the impact of multiple levels of governance and decision-making. The experiences from federal parliamentary democracies like India could therefore be illustrative of the likely impact of multiple governance institutions.