INTRODUCTION
The socialist federal structure as adopted in Soviet Union was basically related to the nationalities question and its solution through the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In other words, the Soviet concept of federalism was based on the 'National - territorial principles,' which furnished the people with the opportunity on the one hand to exercise their right to self-determination, and on the other hand to make use of the advantages, stemming from the unification of their forces and joint development along a socialist path.

The Soviet federal structure shared the formal legalistic dimensions of the Western concepts like division of powers between the centre and the units, and the written constitution. However, the federal structure there was not based on the regional - administrative basis as conceived in the West. Unlike the Western democracies, the federal structure in the Soviet Union was based on a class-approach and democratic centralism. The Soviet concept of State and federalism as an instrument of class-rule, liable to wither away with the withering of the state and elimination of the classes, was diametrically opposed to the Western notion of state as an eternal institution and federalism as something essentially permanent. The principle of democratic-centralism claimed to give free play to local initiative in the economic and social development of the country besides strengthening the all-union state through centralised political leadership and planning. Theoretically argued, it did not negate the principle of national sovereignty or autonomy of national regions and areas.

Until the late 1980s, the Soviet federation seemed to function as a perfect system of ethno-regional control. This was supplemented throughout the Brezhnev years (1964-82) with a series of policies that were largely conciliatory in tone towards the ethnic regions and which, in essence, prioritised considerations of social stability over economic or political reform. The Brezhnev regime, in effect, presided over a federal polity in which the centre preferred the pragmatic preservation of the status quo to any more radical programme for social and economic transformation. And
yet the stresses and strains of this federal compromise were evident even before the late 1980's, when reform communism gained ground.

Throughout the middle to the late Brezhnev years relations between Moscow and the non-Russian union republics leadership had never been so good. Moscow required of its ethno regional leaders political loyalty and only a moderate overall commitment to realistic economic growth targets. A policy of putting a greater trust in native and local cadres had made political life in the republics less volatile and more comfortable. In return, the native political leadership could be relied upon to ensure social stability within their union republics. Yet this centre's "trust in cadres", combined with its increasing benign neglect of the day to day running of the life in the republics, had furnished the native leadership with a degree of power and patronage over their territories probably a more rather at any time in Soviet history. This illustrated that Moscow had in effect, control over vital spheres of social and political life within some of its borderland union republics.

A purposeful centrally - formulated regional policy had set itself the goals of ensuring not only that a considerable redistribution of resources took place through the federal budget to the less developed republics but that employment continued to be created for people within their ethno-regions, even when there was an overabundance and over-concentration of a particular skills or types of labour. Yet it was becoming clear, as the Brezhnev years unfolded, that with the Centre's unwillingness to take on broad structural economic reforms, as stagnating economy could no longer afford to meet the growing material and employment expectations of the republics.

During Brezhnev years, a national intelligentsia was able to flourish which reflected Soviet society's urban revolution of the Brezhnev years, a process characterised by the growing strength in all spheres of public life of a new urban intelligentsia of diploma holders who increasingly came to displace and challenge hegemony of the previous social formation. For this stratum the privileges of federation were in a
The accession of Gorbachev to the Soviet leadership and the inauguration of an increasingly far-reaching programmes of reforms, precipitated the emergence of mass nationalism as a major political force. It unleashed an unprecedented tide of protests and demonstrations across the entire territory of the USSR in which national grievances, fuelled by economic unrest occupied a central place. It launched a process of political movements, in which common nationality formed a crucial bond. It precipitate violent clashes between local populations and local authorities and the use of military forces to reestablish control. And it decisively transformed the very nature of the "national question" in the Soviet political life, not only to bring to the top of the political agenda but altering the vary premises of discussion and deliberations. The "national question" was replaced by a major political struggle over the nature and future of the Soviet federal structure in which sharp cleavages extending to the very top of the Soviet leadership became enlivened with the broader issue of the reform.

This struggle increasingly engaged republican elite as major political protagonists. The struggle for national rights was progressively transformed into a struggle for state's rights, as republics, one after the other, proclaimed their sovereignty, and over the time, their full independence, and fought to expand their control over political and economic life within their boundaries as well as their relations with other states.

One of the crucial factors in the construction of the Soviet federalism, was the position of the Communist Party. It would not be overstating the case to say that
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there was the development within the CPSU of republican groupings and particularly the formation of a Russian Communist Party, that predicated the movement to regional autonomy. The virtual fragmentation of the previously monolithic party, and loss of its monopoly as a political party with the reform of Article 6' of the Constitution in March 1990, created the potential for real political and legal restructuring. Unfortunately, it also created a vacuum in the allocation of the power. Whilst a reformed federal structure was the part of the solution as to how that vacuum be best filled, remained only one part. There was a great deal of political, social and legal restructuring, that had to set in motion to achieve a renewed, stable and law abiding state.

Although, the state of the federation was viewed as part of the problem facing the Soviet Union, its renewal was also considered part of the solution. The task of resolving ethnic and political conflicts within the USSR was inseparable from building a completely new federation constructing a common home for all Soviet peoples. Political debates, legislative hearings, scholarly writings, newspaper articles and interviews in the mass-media raged over the Union’s specific approaches to receiving the Soviet Union and staving off its collapse.

The problem, thus, identified, Gorbachev was attempting to design his nationalities policy in the broader context of constitutional reforms, democratisation and decentralisation of political and economic powers, to the republic and local levels. It was difficult to differentiate between general measures of reform and specific steps towards federalisation. Gorbachev, through his agenda for federal reforms, intended to replace the highly integrated and centralised state structure dominated by Moscow with a loose federation that would put the republics on an equal basis with the centre and give them greater self-determination.

The 19th CPSU Conference in 1988 was the first forum where the need for radical transformation in the Soviet federation was discussed. It was concluded that transformation could be accomplished only along the lines of democratisation of
Soviet society and the establishment of the socialist self-government. The conference, while realising the enormous potentials of the Soviet federation, set for itself the task of redefining the jurisdiction and mutual obligations of the Union and the republics in the light of the recognised formula: "without a strong Union, there could be no strong republics and vice-versa. There were vague hints also for the creation of a new Union Treaty on the formation of the USSR.

The major positive political step towards the perceived transformation of the Soviet federalism was manifested in the first competitive, multi-candidate election in the USSR on 25th March 1989. It elected 2,250 deputies to a newly formed congress of People’s Deputies. A total of 750 members were elected from the single member districts, 750 were elected from the nationality areas and 750 were elected by various social organisations. (e.g. the CPSU, the Komsomol, the trade unions, the Academies of Sciences, etc.) The decentralisation process which started in 1989, by the end of the year began to take the shape of devolution in federal structure. (Split in Lithuanian Communist Party in December 1989 was a key event in this transition symbolising the end of CPSU hegemony).

The fourth Congress of People’s Deputies in 1990 envisaged various stages of the constitutional reforms. The basic contents of the first stage of reform was updating the structures of the Soviets, the procedure for the formation and activity of the Supreme bodies of power, and the electoral system.

The next major step of political transformation was linked to the harmonisation of the relationship of the Union and the constituent republics. Questions of the status of the union republics, of expanding their rights and possibilities in political socioeconomic and cultural life and of consolidating the federal socialist state on this basis were to be examined.

The final stage of the reform had to be the reorganisation of power at the local level. It was necessary to see to it that material and legal preconditions were created for
the Soviets and to revive them as fully unpowered bodies of the people's self-govern-
ment.

Three kinds of conflicts in the Soviet federal structure could be witnessed during
1990: between the Centre and Republics; among the Republics; and within the
individual Republics. The *centre-priphery problem* affected all those republics
which had declared their independence, e.g., Estonia, Lithuania as well as those
which were going to declare their independence. *Inter-republic strife* affected
Armenia and Azerbaijan most severely. As for the third kind of *nationality conflict,
within a republic*, it seemed to bound to continue in Azerbaijan, but also in the central
Asian Republics, where embattled refugees and emigre populations e.g., Armenians
in Azerbaijan (Nogorno Karabakh conflict) Meshkhetian - Turkish population in
Uzbekistan (the Ferghane riots), the non-Moldavians in the Moldavian territory and
many others were involved.

The debate over the *'reconstruction' of federal structure through 'deconstruction'
of Union* (consensual dismantling of union structures, where Moscow would allow
the graceful departure of all the republics and then create a new entity with the
sovereign states), than *'disintegration'* (where Moscow resisted the exit of the
reluctant republics to the bitter end, with potentially disastrous consequences for
further cooperation), was the distinguished feature of 1990. Those who advocated
the *reconstruction of federalism through deconstruction* argued that the federation,
though renovated to some extent, provided scope and space for further improvement
through a new treaty of union if the republics showed due forbearance. On the
contrary, those who allegedly supported for *disintegration* held that country’s
self-renewal would not in practice survive the attempt to sustain the union, whether
renovated or not. The consequential outcome of these debates and deliberations was
a political, ideological and economic struggle, and coalition building processes
between the dissident republics and Moscow.
In order to find a political compromise which would break the deadlock between the centre and republics, and save the union, Gorbachev was forced to meet the leaders of the nine union republics at Novoogarevo on 23 April 1991, and negotiated a coalition based on confederal arrangement (9+1 agreement). But, the treaty concluded could not be signed on 20 August 1991 due to the coup on 19 August 1991. The defeat of this attempted coup by an opposition, rallied by Yeltsin, discredited and undermined the remaining institutions of central power. This accelerated the shift of power from Gorbachev to Yeltsin, and from Centre to republics.

By the mid-September, new structures of governance, e.g., State Council and Inter-Republican Economic Council were created accommodating a role for the republican leaders in the running of the union government. There was an attempt to revive the Novoogarevo treaty. In the meeting at Novoogarvo on 14 October 1991, Yeltsin staged a volte-face and declared his inability to ratify the concept of a unified federal state, as propagated by Gorbachev against the economic community at that juncture. A formula of the Union as a "confederation of democratic state" was more acceptable to him.

Following a referendum on 1 December 1991, though an alibi, Ukraine declared the independence with ninety percent of affirmative vote which came as final blow. Consecutively, in hasty turn of events, Yeltsin reached a dramatic agreement, with Ukranine and Belarus on 8 December 1991, at Minsk on the creation of CIS to replace the former Soviet Union. At a summit meeting in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan on 21 December 1991, along with leaders of ten former republics of the USSR (Baltics did not participate and Georgia sent an observer) signed the Commonwealth agreement which guaranteed their sovereignties. On 30 December 1991, a Council of Heads of States was created in order to resolve questions related to the coordination of the activities of the states. It proclaimed the end of the Soviet Union and Russia was declared to be its legal successor. The proposals for limited federal reforms vied with the concepts of "refederalisation", "Confederalisation" and
"defederalisation", and resulted in replacement by the CIS signifying the end of an epoch of world history.

The case of the Soviet Union was handicapped by the absence of well-established and legitimate potential identities and boundaries in advance of the initiation of democratisation, a condition that was essential for its success. In view of the fact that there was no democratic way to settle such issues could not but complicate already intense struggles for power and resources. Thus, the major consequences of the process of liberalisation were growing challenge to what were reviewed as the imperial features of the old system and the concomitant emergence of centrifugal forces, which resulted in the dissolution of the union.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the appearance of Newly Independent States as well as of several loose frameworks of other cooperation, and of the Commonwealth of Independent States in particular had triggered discussions both in the Former Soviet Union, and in the international community on the prospects of cooperation in the post-Soviet space. The controversy over what trend would finally prevail - that of further disintegration or of a subsequent integration - became one of the focal points of discussion.

The researcher, in this project, has undertaken to analyse and examine certain potent and pertinent questions relating to the federalising process going on in the erstwhile USSR. It seeks to study issues on the basis of empirical evidences available, but by no means does it purport to be the final answer to the important questions relating to the nature of the specific features of the "socialist federalism" and its distinguishing characteristics when compared to the Western concept of federalism, the influence of the Marxist - Leninist ideology on the framework of the Soviet federal theory: the methods of quantifying the elaborate mechanism of constitutions in the USSR in terms of either federal or unitary.
The present study examines the questions of the 'constitutional measures and provisions' of federalism which satisfy the needs and demands of the multinational state in the then present constitutional framework. Besides it has scrutinized the problems in the Union-Republics relations against the background of resurgent nationalism during the changes at the theoretical plane consequent to the emergence of these problems.

This work also seeks to explain as to why the Soviet federal structure, with its stress on the socialist content and democratic centralism, failed to provide ideal conditions for the economic and cultural development of the national and autonomous republics. Erstwhile Soviet Union has passed through the phase of federation building where the control and timing of these processes were two important determinants. The research has tried to evaluate, whether the federalization of the Soviet Union could be managed and stabilized at a certain level or whether the concurrent processes of democratisation and decentralisation had been reinforcing the centrifugal tendencies.

The process of creation of CIS characterising the transition from centralised-authoritarian command based system to market economy has been historically unprecedented. Equally, unprecedented is the combination of state breakdown, nation-building and formation of a new 'supra-national' community. The issue is what are the appropriate framework for comprehending the dynamics of the post-Soviet coalitions. There are nebulous trends of various arrangements of 'sovereign states' though still in nascent phase. On closer scrutiny of the nature of growing relationship between the groups of states and among individual groups, it becomes evident that any possibility of return to the Brezhnev order or even a renewed federation is ruled out. Since Commonwealth was perceived as a transitory and experimental phase, can the bonds between various states be termed as 'confederal'? This is another problem which has been studied at the theoretical plane.
Last, in what ways, the developments in the USSR, that have highlighted changes in the concept of federalism, going to contribute to the theory of federalism, is an important issue and has been investigated in the study.

In order to examine the problems and issues raised above, the thesis has been divided into five chapters. The first chapter entitled, Theoretical and Conceptual Framework, deals with the theoretical construct of the work. It compares the western and Soviet notions of federalism and covers the place of federalism in Marxist-Leninist theory. It also traces the emergence of federalism in concrete historical conditions of Russia in the imperial days and after the October Revolution.

Chapter Two discusses the "Perspectives on federalism in the RSFSR Constitution of 1918, USSR Constitutions of 1924, 1936 and 1977", which forms an important part of the thesis. It deals with the origin and development of the Soviet federal state, its emergence during the formation of RSFSR and the basic principle of the establishment of the USSR.

Chapter Three emphasizes the Growing realization for the need for change in the Soviet federation during the period 1977-85. This was the period when the attempts to decentralize the state machinery had begun, though, there was no follow up and all the attempts limited themselves to the theoretical plane. But as this chapter brings out, these debates and discussions had bearings on the future of the Soviet federal structure.

The advent of Gorbachev on the Soviet political scene was the beginning of a fresh phase of political life in the USSR, who tried to set the affairs of state in a proper order. Chapter Four, "The Emerging Contours of a new Concept of Soviet Federalism : From Perestroika to the August Coup", evaluates the measures of perestroika, glasnost and democratisation on the question of recasting the federal structure on a new basis, beginning with the political reforms in early 1987. It analyses the conceptual changes providing the motive forces behind the
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‘Novoogarevo Process’ leading to the unsigned Union Treaty aborted by the nationalists led coup d’état. It ends with the discussion of the unsuccessful attempts to convert the federation into a confederation.

The period between the "Collapse of the Federal Structure and transformation from ‘Attempted’ Confederation to the Commonwealth of Independent States" comprises the subject matter of the fifth chapter. Besides dealing with the events and causes of the coup, the nationality policy followed after it and the course of the final break of the republics from the centre, it examines and peruses the legal and constitutional sanctity of the structure of the USSR, its functioning in first few years, the successes and failures it has met with and the possibilities of revival of the argument of ‘reconstruction’ of ‘federal’ or ‘confederal’ relations through ‘deconstruction’.

The study ends with a Summary and Conclusion which gives an overall assessment of the Soviet federal structure, its problems, the changes which took place, the new structure which replaced the old one and the general problems faced by the new structure. It concludes with some general guidelines about the federal structure in the erstwhile Soviet Union and possibilities of emergence of a renewed federal or confederal relations among the group of states.

The proposed study is based on both the primary and the secondary sources. The books, articles, journals, newspapers and unpublished works etc., in both English and Russian languages has been referred to as secondary sources of information. However, the study is mainly based on the primary sources, mostly in Russian, comprising various government documents such as constitutional documents, decrees of the Soviets, reports and decisions, important state pronouncements and policy statements, parliamentary debates as well as speeches and writings of prominent statesmen.
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Since some of the research techniques generally used in India and in the West, such as interviews, questionnaires etc. could not be successfully implied in case of Russia, researcher therefore has largely relied upon indepth - analysis of the primary and secondary source materials for making various references.

In general, Historical-Descriptive-Analytical method has been followed for the thesis.