Preface

The Soviet system was established in the belief that it represented the shape of the future. In the event, it lasted for 74 years (1917-91). During that period, however, it shaped the twentieth century in two main ways. As an ideological challenge to capitalist societies, it reflected the belief that socialism was a superior form of social organisation; and as a state, it came to represent a geopolitical challenge to Western dominance of the international system, a challenge that after the Second World War was formalised in the conventions of the Cold War. For good or ill, the character of the twentieth century was stamped by the Soviet challenge; its existence largely coincided with what has been called 'the short twentieth century' from 1914-1991. Having played a major part in the defeat of Nazi Germany and raising the Soviet flag over Berlin in May 1945, in the post-war years the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics became first a regional power, establishing its dominance in Eastern Europe, and then became one of the two global superpowers. Like the United States of America, it was able to project its power worldwide; and also like the USA, it sought to do this in the name of a universal ideology.

Unlike the USA, however, it appeared that neither the ideology of revolutionary socialism nor the Soviet system that supported it was viable. It became increasingly clear that the USSR was an 'incomplete superpower', with an over-extended military-industrial edifice but with an underdeveloped civilian economy and a stunted society. In four key areas the Soviet system was found to be wanting in the international arena. It lacked all-round competitiveness, the economy remained locked in an outmoded model, relations between the various nationalities and the state proved unviable; and the political order lacked the flexibility to adapt to new circumstances. In addition to these structural problems a number of specific conjectural elements played their part in the fall once Mikhail Gorbachev launched his restructuring (perestroika) reforms from 1985. These above all focus on the elite interactions at the
centre and in the republics, the decline in coercion and a misplaced optimism about the reformability of the system.

In short, this apparently enormously powerful system proved to have a design flaw. The degree to which Soviet-type socialism was the architect of its own downfall is striking: the system fell largely under the weight of its own contradictions rather than through foreign intervention or defeat in war.

Against this backdrop, the proposed study, as its title suggests has covered particularly the post-Soviet political developments in the Russian federation. It seeks to explore how regional political conditions play an important role in the federal set up. The break up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the establishment of the Russian federation witnessed the complete metamorphosis of the Russian political system. The notion of federalism in the Russian context dates back to discussions and debates that took place in the Parliament and finally culminated in the Federal Treaty of 1992. This treaty could be considered as the edifice of federalism. However, when we look into the treaty then reveals a number of land and natural resources by the republics, relative taxes and other issues, which the treaty has not been able to resolve.

Another controversy regarding the federal treaty was around the debate of political versus economic federalism. Apart from this, at the point of signing of the treaty, two republics namely Chechnya and Tatarastan declined to sign the treaty over the issue of the demand for autonomy. Therefore, this treaty right from its inception generated debate and became controversial. In addition, the constitution of 1993, which President Boris Yeltsin has introduced also showed its presidential bias. Like the earlier presidential drafts, it reflected the shifting political situation, without considering the future of the federalism in Russia during the period.

Thus, the two key documents- the federal treaty of 1992 and the constitution of 1993 established the composition of the Russian federation. It is true that the present structure of the Russian federation is not simply an inherited institutional form. It is
also the result of an evolutionary debate and argument in Moscow and in the republics and regions. The debates that led to the 1992 Federal Treaty were perhaps the most dynamic product of those discussions. Evaluating the true nature of the federal treaty and the new constitution reveals that President Yeltsin’s method of playing off one group against another aggravated the conflicts within the federation.

For the smooth functioning of any federal system, the cooperation among its units is duly required. However, the newly emerging Russian federalism has been threatened by its own components, because of Moscow’s individual negotiations and different policies pursued from time to time. The narrowing institutional and political space for real federalism is giving rise to regional and nationality movements. Certain studies showed that these kinds of movements have been increasing with every passing year. Moreover, the constitution proposed by the President was greatly truncated by the Federal treaty. This effectively establishes inequality among the members of the Russian federation. The dissatisfaction and opposition will continue to grow posing a threat to the integrity of the Russian state.

Post-communist Russian politics is characterised by the tension between questions of ‘polity’—the nature of the state and ‘policy’, especially problem of public policy. While policy or ‘normal’ politics was strengthened after December 1993, the struggle over the nature of the constitutional order is by no means over. Indeed, much of the normal politics in Russia has consisted of the appeal to constitutional and ethical absolutes, while constitutional debates have often served immediate political interests. Once again, Russian exceptionalism has taken the form of appealing utopian abstractions.

In this study, efforts have been made to assess how regional political conditions influence the federal set up. In the course of this study, an important component has been to understand how Russia a large multicultural state been able to cope with an increasing demand of autonomy and how regions respond in the process of maintaining unity and integrity of the state. More specifically, does Russia offer a
unique case of examining the relationships between these factors or does it conform to the prevailing views on the correlation between regional politics and federal creations. Furthermore, another important concern was to examine the political conditions in post-communist Russia and how these political maneuverings have contributed in the establishment of asymmetrical model of federalism. Against this formulation, it has tried to evaluate whether the Centre has been taking measures to settle the demands of autonomy and resolve the emerging separatist movements in different regions of the Russian federation or has not been able to achieve the same. Further the study also explores the possibility of a unique exceptionalism in Russian regional politics. Does such a model also reveal general principles of federalism at works in a specific setting? Ultimately, this study seeks to appreciate the obstacles inherent in any attempt at evolving genuine federal institutions and developing a corresponding culture of representation and direct accountability. The manner in which the Russian federal question is resolved will determine to a large extent the nature of political processes required to affect change. This may hold important lessons of obstacles to be overcome for any attempt at genuine federalisation in other parts of the international system.

In the course of study, the following hypotheses were tested, such as, firstly, the introduction of a democratic form of government in Russia, and the manner in which different treaties and agreements have created new dynamics and corresponding challenges for the future of regional politics in the Russian federation. Secondly, the multi-ethnic make-up of the Russian federation inevitably demands flexibility in policy and posture. Integral to the federal process is the requisite skill for political negotiations and accommodation of competing claims to political representation. Thirdly, even in the context of a centralised formal constitution, it is important to note that the levers of power do not reside solely in the President’s office but also circulate through the regions and republics of the Russian federation. Fourthly, the source of republican/regional authority emerges from the control over economic and natural resources. However, local elites play a crucial role in mobilising support/opposition. And finally, in Russia, unity could be more effectively assured through devolution
within the framework of a genuinely federal separation of powers, and the principle of checks and balances.

Chapter one, "Soviet Federal System: An Overview", primarily deals with both the theoretical formulation on federalism and traces its roots first in the former Soviet Union and then in the post-Soviet state, i.e. in the Russian federation. This has been traced through different constitutions, which was subsequently adopted in the Soviet Union and then in the modern Russia, and its first constitution of 1993. It reveals that the notion of federalism has been changing with each constitution in the Soviet Union and in the post 1991 period; Russia adopted a more Presidential based constitution where political arrangement was done in a federal framework. It becomes even more interesting to study, particularly when on the one hand, the constitution itself favours strong presidency and in such a situation how a new federal system operates in the given situation.

Chapter two, "Evolving Political Institutions and Process in the Russian Political System" has analysed how new-formed institutions and the governing processes shape up the political system. Prior to this, it also deals with the conditions and factors that led the way for the disintegration of the Soviet Union and what lessons it left for the rest of the union. This has started with the federal treaty and its role behind the 1993 constitution and its different provisions for the Russian federation. Going beyond the central institutions, it has gone into the analysis of the regional governors in the state, DUMA and their influence in the federal polity. Towards the end of the chapter, the impact of privatisation in Russia has been described. It also involves an understanding of how a politically fragile and economically trashed country adopted privatisation programme to strengthen its economic position in the world polity. The treaties, which were collectively known as Federal treaty and the 1993 constitution, which created several divisions within the units of the federation has given rise to secessionist movements in the Russian federation. The most difficult task for federal Russia has been to settle the issue of Chechnya and this has been dealt in great detail. In addition, some of the other republics has also been revisited in this chapter.
The rising political conditions under a nascent democratic set-up, the current and contemporary political patterns have been discussed in the chapter three, "Contemporary Patterns of Regional Politics in Russia". Apart from many other things, this chapter focuses on the national and state elections and its role towards the national polity vis-à-vis strengthening of a new federal system. In this process, other related issues like role of governors in the national political system, role of different political parties, patterns of governance, economic conditions of the state etc have been discussed at great length.

The chapter four, "Movements for Autonomy in the Russian Federation" deals with the separatists tendency and movements for autonomy in the Russian Federation (RF). How and why such issues emerged in the Russian Federation. What factors led to autonomous movements in the RF? Were the state policies responsible for such tendency. In this process few cases like Chechnya, Dagestan etc. have been taken up. In case of Chechnya, the problem has been traced out right from the Stalin era, which in fact, continued after the formation of the Soviet Union and in modern Russia, when two wars have already occurred to save the map of the RF. Such a tendency poses greatest risk to the federal set-up. The local political conditions have also been discussed in the chapter. The important tasks, which has been done in the chapter is that it has tried to examine whether state policies are primarily responsible for such ethnic strife/ civil war or the republic’s secessionist tendency itself holds the responsibility.

The concluding chapter has discussed the broader research questions and also focussed on the new regime, which came into place in 2000 as well as subsequent changes.