SUMMARY

In India, coalition politics has moved from its nascent stage towards maturity. Sixty five years and seven coalition governments are enough to accept coalitions as permanent feature of Indian politics. Factors such as the failure of the Congress to maintain its dominating political presence, rise of the BJP with a wider base in North India and significant presence though at the behest of regional allies in South India, emergence of regional parties as representatives of regional aspirations and demands, and the ever changing party system has resulted in the acceptance of coalition governments as more representative and appropriate form of governance. In this study an attempt has been made to present an analytical account of various coalition theories and a detailed examination of the NDA coalition politics at the Centre with a view to demonstrate the value of focusing upon coalition behavior in order to understand major political developments during the past four decades. The study has been conducted with the objectives like examining the conceptual and operational dimensions of coalition governments, evolution and development of coalition politics in India, structure and functioning of NDA, the problems which NDA faced, how it resolved them and the future prospects of coalition governments in India. In the study both primary and secondary sources have been used. The primary sources include first hand information in different forms like government reports, parliamentary debates and other related government documents. Secondary data has been collected from books, journals, articles and newspapers etc. The study has made use of a number of methods, such as the historical, comparative, descriptive and analytical.
The study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter deals with the importance and relevance of the study, review of literature, objectives of the study, research problem and methodology. The second chapter presents a detailed analysis of the various theories and approaches of coalition politics. The third chapter deals with the formation, maintenance and termination of coalitions at the Centre. It covers the National Front Coalition Government (November 1989 to March 1991), the United Front Coalition Government (June 1996 to April 1997), the United Front Coalition government (April 1997 to November 1998) and the National Democratic Alliance government (March 1998 to April 1999). The fourth chapter discusses the political scenario, sharing of seats between BJP and alliance partners, election, issues raised by the various political parties and electoral performance of NDA. The fifth chapter discusses socio-economic and political performance of the NDA. And the last chapter discusses the major findings of the study and the prospects of coalition politics in India. Various suggestions have also been made regarding favorable conditions in which coalition government can work.

It has been found that all the important theories are more concerned with the patterns of collaboration and opposition in voting bodies than with the distribution of payoffs to winners and losers or with the stability of coalitions once they have been formed. In Indian context, analysis of the last five coalition governments at the centre shows that each case lends qualified support to one or more of coalition theories. Since none of these theories presents a comprehensive multi-functional model, none accords a complete explanation of the cases examined. They only explore some relevant causal factors involved in a coalition situation and together draw attention to conditions that appear to be
necessary, but by no means explain stability measured by the longevity of the government, ideological compatibility, performance of the NDA coalition and the strategies adopted by them ensure their survival and continuance in power. Since many years we have seen dramatic changes on the Indian political canvas—the Congress no longer holds the status of a single dominant political party, multi-party system appears to be gaining grounds, the BJP has emerged as the largest political party though its spread is not uniform in all parts of the country; regional political parties have gained importance; five general elections and six prime ministers in a span of ten years (1989-1999); mergers, shifts and defections in almost all national as well as regional political parties; and the dawn of coalition era. Considering this backdrop and the response of the political parties to the ongoing coalition era, certain observations have been made which point out significant future trends in our polity. Though the available theories and approaches on coalition politics and their individual relevance in Indian scenario shows that it is applicable not only to India but to all coalition governments in the world but the power maximization and policy based theories are more relevant in Indian context.

The era of coalition politics starts with elections of 1989 in actual sense but the truth is that coalition politics is older than the Indian Constitution itself in one or another sense as Indian National Congress was also a coalitional party having people with different ideology. India experiences its first experiment with coalition in 1937 at institutional level when elections to the provincial legislature were held in 1937. The congress had a tacit electoral understanding with the Muslim League when it was not fully confident of a decisive majority in the United
Provinces’ Legislature. Besides this, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were broadly given representation in Interim government of 1946.

Congress enjoyed a hegemony in government from 1952-1967 at centre and state levels. It was turning point in Indian political history when non-congress governments were formed in eight states in 1967. This happening witnessed the decline of Congress at the state levels. The post -1967 period represents a decline in Congress strength nationally, and in state after state. In the post –emergency elections of 1977, the Congress faced a temporarily united opposition consisting of the Janata Party, formed just before the elections, and having a seat adjustment with Jagjivan Ram’s Congress for Democracy, and the CPI(M), thus consisting of virtually the entire opposition except for the CPI and DMK. But this typical coalition could not survive for a full term collapsed in 1979 due to the mismanagement and high ambitions of the leaders involved in this coalition.

Congress restored its position in 1980 again with near two third majority following the disintegration of the Janata Party. But 1989 elections marked another turning point with the Congress crashing to 39.5 per cent and 197 seats against an opposition of electoral alliance consisting of seat adjustment, of the National Front coalition of the Janata Dal, regional and minor parties supported by the BJP and the Left parties. This was the time when the coalition politics emerged in India in true sense. The National Front government also met the same fate as it was in case of Janata Party. Diverse issues played role in the decline of National Front government. Mismanagement along with the issues of Ram Mandir and Mandal Commission were mainly responsible for defections in the National Front support. Economic crises further worsened the situation during the Prime Ministership of
Consequently, the National Front collapsed when Congress withdrew its support. Congress again formed the government in 1991 under the leadership of P.V. Narsimha Rao which managed the majority and successfully completed its five year term.

The election of 1996 witnessed the rise of BJP having 162 seats, which made it the largest party in the Lok Sabha. As a result, it formed the government only for 13 days. Then United Front was formed by Left Front and National Front. They formed the government under the Prime Ministership of H.D. Deve Gowda which was supported by Congress from outside. The Congress withdrew the support from Deve Gowda government in April 1997, but continued the support to the United Front government after his replacement as Prime Minister by I.K. Gujral. But Congress again withdrew the support from I.K. Gujral government on the issue of Jain Commission report in November 1997 which led to the collapse of government.

NDA was formed during the mid-term elections of 1998. Large scale defections in Janata Dal, National agenda for governance, Coordination Committee headed by George Fernandes, and Charismatic leadership of A.B. Vajpayee were the main factors which helped in formation of NDA. Both pre-poll and post-poll alliances were forged with other regional parties. But in April 1999 AIADMK chief Jayalalitha withdrew her support from NDA on the issue of Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat. NDA managed other regional parties named INLD of OP Chautala from Haryana and DMK of M. Karunanidhi from Tamil Nadu but it could not help it in saving the government. Moreover, BSP promised to abstain from the voting in the house but ultimately it participated in the voting and went against the NDA. Consequently, NDA collapsed by the margin of one vote after the period of 13 months.
During the no confidence motion against Vajpayee government in April 1999 the parties like Congress, Left parties and Loktantrik Morcha were in favour of forming an alternative government in the situation Vajpayee government collapses. Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Supremo of Samwajwadi Party, announced that the successor to Vajpayee will be found with in hours of his disposition. But that did not happen because the opposition was more agreed on the removal of the government than supporting a successor. Recycling the national agenda for governance, formation of only pre- poll alliances and denying the post- poll alliances, sympathy with Vajpayee and observation of coalition dharma were other issues which inspired the alliance to form and strengthen the NDA.

The issue of foreign origin of Sonia Gandhi caused the spilt in Congress on May 15,1999. Three senior members of CWC- Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangama and Tariq Anwer, suggested to Sonia Gandhi that the party should include in its election manifesto a promise to amend the Constitution to ensure that only a nation born Indian Citizen should be eligible for the post of President, Vice President and Prime Minister. The spilt in Congress tilted the situation in favour of NDA.

After its formation, the NDA successfully completed the seat sharing. BJP, as a leading party in the NDA, managed this seat sharing with the host of regional political parties across different states. In many of the arrangements the party played the junior partner with the regional parties having the upper hand. This enabled the party to open its account in states and regions where it was finding it difficult to gain a freehold.

NDA fought elections on the issues like Kargil War, Pokhran-11, sympathy with Vajpayee, National Agenda for Governance and Foreign
origin of Sonia Gandhi. The nuclear explosion at Pokharan in May 1998 paved the way in India to enter into an elite nuclear club. Similarly the Kargil War also created nationalist fervor in the face of blatant aggression. Almost all parts of the country mourned the deaths of officers and jawans on the front. There was unprecedented diplomatic support from international community. Finally, India succeeded in its limited military objective of repelling the intruders from LOC. The impact of these events appeared to be a sort of boost to Indian nationalism which NDA tried its level best to exploit. NDA also tried to win the votes through a sympathy wave. Its election campaign broadly reflected this wave when it displayed pamphlet about Vajpayee that what wrong did this man do? Kya Kasoor tha iss Aadmin Ka. Why the government of Vajpayee collapsed in thirteen months? The issue of foreign origin of Sonia Gandhi was also highlighted by the party to gain votes. The elections were, particularly, marked by a hot controversy regarding Sonia Gandhi as a Primeministerial candidate both from within the party and outside.

The NDA government was the first national coalition government in India to complete a full five year term in office. It went a step ahead of UF government by using the institutional mechanism of coalition maintenance for effective working. It used the most extensive and elaborated mechanism to coordinate between parties within and outside the government. The NDA had a two dimensional coordination mechanism, which was not restricted mere in the political sphere; it formed the National Agenda for Governance (NAG) and the Coordination Committee (CC). Besides this, the alliance began to use extensively all-party meetings and Chief Minister’s conferences for consultation. At the governmental level, it used the device of Group of
Ministers (GoM) not only for administrative reasons and formulation of policy matters but also to settle the issues of political significance.

The National Agenda for Governance (NAG), like the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the UF, formed the first base on which the alliance revolved. The NAG reflected a commitment from the main alliance partner, the BJP to adhere to a moderate agenda and not confirming to religious programmes only. This commitment removed the untouchability tag that BJP carried, and enabled the allies to join hands with the party to form the alliance. Thus the NAG continued to be an important part of daily political discourse and crucial torchbearer for the alliance. At the second level, the NDA had a Coordination Committee (CC). Unlike the Steering Committee of the UF, the CC met more regularly and frequently. Considering the fact that the smaller parties held the key to the stability of the alliance, the CC played a key role in the maintenance of the alliance. The CC made it a point to meet before each parliamentary session to ensure floor coordination among the allies. The institution of all-party meetings brought together all political parties on a common platform. The all-party meeting route is used by government to elicit the opinion of, or make some clarifications to political parties on some legislation or proposed legislative measures, and to discuss matters of national and international importance among other things. The advantage of this mechanism was that it gave the government a sounding board and enabled discussion to take place in a relaxed and informal manner as compared to parliament or any other such formal forum. It enables parties to freely express their opinion and reach compromises, which were not possible in parliament, where winning and losing, are recorded and publicized.
The NDA coordination machinery was not limited to the political level alone but also took place at the governmental level. The NDA federal coalition began to make use of inter-ministerial groups, which like the all-party mechanism, served multiple purposes. The GoMs served the purpose of coordination within a coalition ministry; it helped to minimize differences of opinion and conflicts within the cabinet. It also helped in making important policy decisions and vetting other policy and programme recommendations. This mechanism was also used for the purpose of looking into matters of concern to different allies of the coalition. These groups popularly called Group of Ministers (GoM) usually composed of three to four members of the union cabinet. Thus coalitions have evolved newer and sturdier mechanisms of coordination.

Though there is no single cause that has led to the breakdown of federal coalitions, there were many factors responsible. Competition at the state level was the main reason for the breakdown of an alliance. Another reason for the breakdown of alliances could be traced to the absence of a proper institutionalized consultation mechanism within the coalition. The game of power sharing was also responsible for breakdown of coalition. In the Indian system, this process of power sharing is largely done by the allocation of portfolios such as that of Cabinet Ministers, Ministers of State, Deputy Ministers; arrangement of important positions of authority, Constitutional post of Governors, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Legislative posts such as headship and membership of parliamentary committees, consultative joint committees and others where nominations are made by the Prime Minister such as appointing the Chairman and members of Indian Council of Cultural Relations, Lalit Kala Akademi, Indian Council of Social Science
Research, etc. A weak organizational structure of the core party within the alliance was also responsible for the breakdown of coalition. But the NDA coped up efficiently with all these barriers responsible for breakdown of the coalition and provided a good performance during its tenure.

After all the pulls and pressures, the NDA performed well in the areas of controversial legislations and reforms. It passed many Acts and Bills like Insurance Regulatory Development Authority Bill and Securities Laws (Amendment) Bill. Several legislations in conformity with government’s policy of globalization and economic liberalization were also passed, for example, Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), Trade Marks Act, Copyright Amendment Act, etc. The government successfully introduced Information Technology Bill, 1999 to provide legal recognition for e-commerce. Many innovative schemes were also initiated by the government in areas like tourism, civil aviation, agriculture, law and justice, information and broadcasting, railways, power, surface transport and human resource development. The NDA has also some commendable achievements to its credit in fields of Production and Development, Welfare Service and Human Welfare. In the sphere of Production and Development number of achievements are recorded like in the sectors of agriculture, industry, petroleum and natural gas, power, science and technology, steel, and water resources. Various welfare schemes were also initiated. In the fields of social justice and employment, tribal affairs, urban development and poverty alleviation, the achievements are up to the mark during the tenure of NDA. The whole credit goes to the coordination mechanism adopted for efficient working of the coalition.
Thus the era of coalitions is far from over. Rather it has entered into a next and more mature stage of national plus regional alliances. The need of the hour is to arrive at a consensus rather than to involve in conflicts and contradictions. A far greater acceptability of coalition government and coalition politics by the political parties is the need of the day. It is all the more necessary to positively respond to coalition situations because the single party system is gradually losing its relevance in India.