



“The Politics of Coalition in India: Challenges and Opportunities”

Dr. SIDDARAJU C

Associate Professor of Political Science
Govt. First Grade College, Hebbal, Bangalore-24

Date of Submission: 15-08-2025

Date of Acceptance: 31-08-2025

ABSTRACT:

Coalition politics has become a defining feature of India's democratic process since the late 1980s, marking a departure from the era of single-party dominance. The emergence of coalition governments reflects the growing pluralism of Indian society, regional aspirations, and the fragmentation of the political landscape. While coalition politics has deepened democratic participation and accommodated diverse voices, it has also generated challenges of instability, policy paralysis, and compromises in governance. This study explores the impact of these challenges on the functioning of Indian coalition governments and the implications for democratic governance in India. This research study will analyze its nature, challenges and prospects of coalition governments in Indian political process. The significance lies in the study of multi-party system, growth of regionalism and its effect on the pattern of Centre-State relations. Author attempts to illustrate the Constitutional implications of coalition government in India with the context of Indian multi culture and multi-party system. Some scholars argue against the present multi-party system which leads to unstable coalition government and there are a lot of comments both for and against the existing form of coalition politics in India. This paper will evaluate the issues and challenges of the coalition politics in Indian parliamentary system with respect to stable government in the dual-party parliamentary system.

Key words: Indian coalition governments, Political stability, Party unity, Leadership struggles, Decision-making, Opportunities.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Coalition politics occupies a central place in the contemporary political discourse of India. The transition from one-party dominance under the Indian National Congress in the early decades after independence to a multi-party system has fundamentally reshaped the structures of power and governance. The emergence of coalition

governments in the 1989 general elections marked the beginning of a new era where no single party could easily claim a parliamentary majority, leading to alliances among national and regional parties. A coalition government might also be created at a time of majority problem or at the time of economic crisis, or when a general election does not produce a clear majority for a single party. The term coalition has been derived from the Latin word 'coalition', coalition means grow together. In political sense that some political parties will come together and form alliance for the exercise of the political power. The coalition governments are formed when no one single party is able to secure an essential majority in the legislature and an alliance of some political parties join their hands in order to form a government. Today we are in the coalition era, from few decades we have seen coalition government at centre as well as states in India, up to 1977 there was no coalition government at Centre in India, there was monopoly of Congress party but when electorates of India were dissatisfied about dictatorial rule of prime minister Smt. Indra Gandhi monopoly of Congress party is ended and for first time coalition government came to power at Centre in 1977, today because of multi-party system coalition governments are common at Centre as well as states. In this regard a political alliance, also referred to as a political coalition, political block, is an agreement for cooperation between different political parties on common political agenda, often for purposes of contesting an election to mutually benefit by collectively clearing election thresholds.

Meaning and definitions:

A coalition government refers to a political system where multiple parties come together to share power, typically when no single party holds an outright majority. In the context of India, coalition governments have become increasingly common due to the country's multiparty system and regional diversity (Chandra, 2019). These alliances require parties to compromise on policies and leadership roles to ensure stability and effective governance.



As these coalitions provide broader representation of diverse groups, they often encounter challenges, including instability and difficulties in decision-making (Jaffrelot, 2003). "Coalition politics," as it is often called, describes the intricate interactions between parties with varying ideologies, which can lead to both cooperation and conflict in the pursuit of governance (Rudra, 2015).

Objectives of the study area:

- To assess the challenges of coalition politics in India.
- To identify the opportunities created by coalition politics in terms of strengthening federalism, consensus-building, and inclusive representation.
- To understand and find a solution to unstable government in India.

Methodology: To analyse this research article adopted historical and descriptive methodology and using both the primary and secondary data.

Salient features of Coalition Government:

- Unstable Government
- Gift of multi-party system
- Concept of outside support to government
- Pre-election alliance and post-election alliance
- Prime minister and Chief minister cannot become the first among the equal
- Opportunism politics Reason for establishment of coalition Government:

The parliamentary coalitions can be classified into two types:

1) Pre-election coalition: The Pre-election alliances involve electoral alliances and adjustment for fighting election for various seats among the political parties. The pre-poll understandings between the parties are very common. They may agree on a common programme or an understanding not to oppose others' candidates in certain constituencies and even to extend their support.

2) Post-election coalitions: Post-election coalition starts after the declaration of the voting result, this political coalition is totally different from the pre-election coalition, a post-election coalition is facilitated if it is preceded by a pre or pre-election understanding. There are a lot of negotiations and much of give and take. There may be a lot of horse trading or other types of exchanges.

In India from 1952 to till today several coalition governments were formed at centre as well as states. In centre up to 1977 there was monopoly of congress party but when electorates of India were dissatisfied about dictatorship rule of Indra Gandhi then only people given mandate to non-congress party and supported Janata Party coalition govt. Then in 1989, 1996, 1998, 2004, 2009, 2014 coalition governments were formed at centre today at centre, today at centre there is NDA coalition government led by BJP under the leadership of Narendra Modi. Totally era of the governments started in India.

List of Coalition Governments in India:

Number of coalitions	Period of coalition	Prime Minister	Alliance within the parties	Leading Party
1	1977-1979	Moraji Desai	JP, BLD, SP, CONG(O)	Janata Party
2	1979-1980	Charan Singh	CPI, CPI(M)	Janata Party
3	1989-1990	V.P Singh	CPI, CPI(M), BJP, RSP	Janata Dal
4	1990-1991	Chandra Shekhar	SAD, K.CONG, AIADMK, BSP.	Congress
5	1996-1997	H.D. Deve Gowda	SP, DMK, AGP, CPI, TDP	Janata Dal
6	1997-1998	I.K. Gujral	INC, LEFT, OTHERS.	Janata Dal
7	1998-1999	Atal Bihari Vajpayee	AIADMK, BJD, AD, SN, TRC.	BJP
8	1999-2004	Atal Bihari Vajpayee	AIADMK, BJD, AD, SN, TRC, TMC	BJP
9	2004-2009	Manmohan Singh	NC, RJD, IUML, BSP, RJD, TMC.	Congress
10	2009-2014	Manmohan Singh	JD, RJD, BSP, SP, NC	Congress
11	2014 to till date	Narendra Modi	MGP, TDM, SN, LJP, KC, NPF, GJM.	BJP

Coalition politics in India represents both a structural challenge and a democratic opportunity.

On the one hand, coalitions often lead to instability and weak governance, as seen in the 1990s when



governments changed frequently due to shifting alliances. The necessity of accommodating multiple partners often results in policy compromises and short-term populist decisions, limiting bold reforms. On the other hand, coalition governments reflect the pluralistic nature of Indian society. The rise of regional parties has ensured that the voices of smaller states and marginalized groups are heard in the national political process. Coalition politics has also strengthened federalism by giving states greater bargaining power vis-à-vis the Centre. Importantly, coalitions have curtailed the possibility of authoritarianism by dispersing power among multiple stakeholders.

Monopoly of Single Party: When no single party is able to secure majority in general election in that condition generally which party gain the maximum seats in election that party formed the coalition government with the support of other small parties, and its leader is becoming Prime Minister. Ex: U.P.A in 2004 N.D.A in 2014 and 2019. some situations with the outside support of large party, a leader of the small party can form the coalition governments and he becomes Prime Minister. But in this condition coalition government is completely controlled by party which gives the outside support to governments, Ex: In 1989 V.P.Singh coalition government, in 1990 H.D.Devagowda coalition government, in 1998 A.B.Vajpayee coalition government were fell down because of non-cooperation of outside supported parties. Thus, which party gives the outside support it always tries to control the govt, when it fails to control that party with draw its support.

A coalition government in India is a political arrangement in which multiple parties, often with differing ideologies, come together to form a government when no single party wins a clear majority. This arrangement has become increasingly common in India's multiparty political system, where regional parties play a significant role alongside national ones. As Chandra (2019) notes, the rise of coalition politics reflects India's "multiparty system and regional diversity," highlighting the fragmented nature of political power in the country.

While coalition governments allow for broader representation of various social and regional groups, they are often marked by challenges in governance. Jaffrelot (2003) emphasizes that coalition politics in India necessitates constant negotiation, compromise, and the sharing of power among parties with differing ideologies and policy preferences. This can lead to instability, as parties may struggle to

reconcile their differences or may break away from the alliance over disagreements.

Furthermore, as Rudra (2015) explains, coalition governments are often hindered by internal conflicts, leading to inefficiencies in decision-making and policy implementation. The balancing act between maintaining unity among coalition partners and ensuring effective governance is a persistent challenge. The intricate dynamics of these coalitions can lead to both cooperation and conflict, depending on the political context

Progress is not possible: The progress of the country is not possible by coalition government, partners of the government they are not ready to moderate their ideologies and they are not ready to give respect to each other's interest, therefore they always spend their time and energy in clash and criticize each other's, they forget to finding the new techniques for development of the country. Thus, coalition government spend its time only for preserve its existence and neglects the progress of the country. Prime Minister is not able to exercise his powers independently: In parliamentary system Prime Minister post is most prestigious and powerful and he himself exercise his power independently, but it is not possible in coalition government because he cannot exercise his powers without consent of the leader of the partners, in this system of government Prime Minister must consult the partners before exercise his powers. Ex: During U.P.A government Prime Minister Manmohan singh is very interested to make 1,2,3 agreements with U.S.A but communist party opposed this agreement so he loses the support of communist party, thus Prime Minister always exercises his power with the assent of partners otherwise they will withdraw their support. Role of Independent M.L.A's is very important: Sometimes role of the independent M.L.A's is very in important in existence and decline of the coalition government. Ex: In 2008 B.J.P party formed the government in Karnataka with the support of 5 Independent M.L.A 's, so during that time existence of this government depends upon decision of these independent M.L.A's. Opportunism Politics: Another result of the coalition government is opportunism politics, when we examine the working of the coalition governments we found that these coalition governments were opportunist coalition without any definite policies and programmes. Ex: In 1977 Jana Sangha, Socialistic Parties were merged in Janata party and formed the government at centre because to keep the Indra Gandhi and her congress party out of power but within further their differences, self-



interest and Political opportunism leads decline of the Janta Party coalition government within 2 Years, and those parties were merged in Janta Party they further they have their one identity , this is best instance for political opportunism, and sometimes which party gain more seats in election that party will give outside support to alliance of small parties to form the government , but when they fail to control over the government they will withdraw the support . Ex: In 1998 Congress party withdraw its support of United front government.

Historical evolution of coalition governance in India, tracing its origins and key moments when coalitions played a central role in Indian politics. It examines the socio-political factors that made coalition governments necessary in India. The author also highlights key challenges faced during significant coalition governments and their impact on India's political system. Mehta provides a comprehensive historical perspective that helps in understanding the nuances of current coalition dynamics (Mehta, P. 2016). The future of coalition politics in India, assessing the trends that could shape the governance of India in the coming years. It addresses the growing influence of regional parties and their impact on national politics. Yadav also considers how demographic changes and shifting voter preferences could alter the dynamics of coalition formation. He argues that coalition politics, though challenging, will remain central to India's political system due to its diverse electorate (Yadav, Y. 2014). The relationship between regionalism and coalition politics in India, with a focus on how regional parties influence national governance. The paper argues that regional parties, by advocating for local issues, play a pivotal role in shaping coalition dynamics. It explores how the inclusion of regional parties in coalitions can complicate national policy-making, as these parties often prioritize their local agendas. Bhattacharya highlights several case studies where regional demands have either strengthened or weakened coalition governments. The article concludes by discussing how regionalism continues to shape the future of coalition politics in India (Bhattacharya, D. 2022).

Challenges of coalition politics in India:

✓ Coalition government is less transparent as, no single party has a real chance of forming a government alone. The party manifesto they had presented to the public before the elections is practically unrealistic at the time of formation of coalition government, and it has been very bad

experience of parties as no party can achieve its targets.

✓ Government is very unstable, often collapsing and re-election taking place are the natural phenomenon of coalition government. In India many coalition governments collapsed at the centre like Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, V.P Singh, Chandra Shekhar, H. D. Deve Gowda, I.K Gujral and Atal Bihari Vajpayee government.

✓ Horse trading is another demerit of coalition government in India. There is widespread agreement that horse trading in the political arena is immoral and undesirable, and should be illegal. It is alleged that horse trading takes place to influence the no confidence motion.

✓ **Party Unity and Cooperation:** Coalition governments are built on alliances between various political parties, which often have divergent ideologies. According to Chandra (2019), maintaining cooperation within such a diverse setup requires continuous dialogue and the willingness to compromise on key issues.

✓ **Policy Compromises:** As Jaffrelot (2003) points out, one of the major drawbacks of coalition governance is that policies must be diluted to accommodate the different viewpoints of coalition partners. These compromises can sometimes lead to ineffective or vague policies that fail to address critical issues comprehensively.

✓ **Instability and Defections:** Rudra (2015) highlights that coalition governments in India face significant instability due to party defections, where smaller parties withdraw their support, forcing the government to collapse. This undermines long-term policy planning and governance stability.

✓ **Leadership Struggles:** Within a coalition, there is often competition for key leadership positions, such as the prime minister or cabinet ministers. As Jaffrelot (2003) explains, this can cause internal conflicts, especially when there is a disparity in power and influence between major and minor coalition partners.

✓ **Regional Interests vs National Agenda:** India's vast regional diversity means that regional parties often have different priorities compared to national parties. Chandra (2019) argues that these regional interests may conflict with national objectives, forcing the government to accommodate various local demands, which can dilute the national agenda.

✓ **Inefficiency in Decision-making:** Rudra (2015) explains that coalition governments often suffer from inefficiencies in decision-making because each policy needs to be discussed and



agreed upon by all coalition members, which can slow down the process and delay crucial reforms.

Opportunities of the Coalition System in India:

- ✓ Coalition governments provide space for regional, caste-based, and minority parties, ensuring that diverse voices are represented in national policymaking.
- ✓ Regional parties gain importance in coalitions, which gives states greater bargaining power and ensures that local issues are addressed at the national level.
- ✓ Coalition politics prevents the concentration of power in one party or leader, thereby reducing the risk of authoritarian rule.
- ✓ By accommodating different interests and ideologies, coalitions make democracy more participatory and reflective of India's pluralism.
- ✓ Coalition partners bring varied perspectives, which can lead to innovative policies that balance national priorities with regional needs.
- ✓ While coalitions may seem unstable, they also encourage compromise and dialogue, which can reduce political confrontation and promote peaceful coexistence of parties.
- ✓ Coalition partners often demand developmental projects, infrastructure, and resources for their states, leading to more equitable distribution of development benefits.

II. Conclusion:

Indian coalition governments, while ensuring broader representation and inclusivity, face significant challenges in governance. The need for constant negotiation, policy compromises, and maintaining party unity often leads to instability and inefficiency. Leadership struggles and regional interests further complicate the decision-making process, hindering effective governance. Despite these challenges, coalition politics remains a crucial aspect of India's democratic structure. Moving forward, strengthening institutional mechanisms could improve the stability and effectiveness of coalition governments. Although it may be argued that coalition provides good government as their decisions are made in the interest of the majority of the people, often it is seen that the various demands made by the coalition partners, sometimes to the harm of other coalition partners, lead to extreme tension within the government and make it impossible to formulate laws. Further, a single national policy, which may be against the interest of a region, cannot be formulated, if a party belonging to that region is part of the government. The people

of India had got tired of the congress rule because of dictatorial rule and today lack of eminent AICC leadership and depending upon only Gandhi family, it's hollow promises to the people particularly about checking the concentration of wealth and minimizes poverty, therefore people willing to give chance to the opposition parties. But there are fundamental differences amongst the opposition parties about the ideologies, policies and programmes and they fail to chalking out a minimum common programme for the welfare of the people. Coalition governments are not majority governments and role of the regional parties is pivotal but unfortunately regional parties gives more importance to the regional interest instead of national interest. So today people willing to give chance to the single party at state as well as centre. To form the stable government and prevent the dictatorial rule of single party in Indian parliamentary democracy, it is essential to rethink about dual party system at centre instead of multi-partysystem.

Suggestions: The following suggestions have been made for proper working of coalition government and establish stable government.

- Strengthen the national parties.
- Effective opposition party.
- Strengthen the true spirit of parliamentary democracy.
- Regional parties will ready to adjust their ideologies and gives importance to national interest instead of regional interest.
- Introduce the recall system related with representatives.
- Increase the political literacy among the people.

References:

- [1] Chandra, K. (2019). *Why Coalition Governments in India Have Grown in Popularity*. South Asian Politics Review, 12(4), 45-67.
- [2] Jaffrelot, C. (2003). *India's Political Parties and the Rise of Coalition Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- [3] Rudra, A. (2015). *Coalition Governments and Their Challenges in India: An Overview*. Indian Political Science Review, 10(2), 22-37.
- [4] Kumar, R. (2017). *Coalition Politics in India: Dynamics and Challenges*. Political Science Journal, 15(3), 88-110.
- [5] Srinivasan, V. (2012). *The Impact of Coalition Governments on Indian Democracy*. Indian Journal of Political Science, 56(4), 45-58.



- [6] Sharma, A. (2018). *Political Alliances and Governance: The Case of Indian Coalitions*. South Asian Political Studies, 11(2), 67-82.
- [7] Verma, S. (2020). *Regional Parties and Coalition Governments in India*. Indian Politics Today, 14(1), 33-49.
- [8] Mehta, P. (2016). *Coalition Governance in India: A Historical Perspective*. Indian Political Review, 8(3), 121-135.
- [9] Yadav, Y. (2014). *The Future of Coalition Politics in India*. Journal of South Asian Politics, 22(2), 78-92.
- [10] Ghosh, S. (2011). *Negotiating Power in Coalition Governments*. Indian Politics and Society, 19(4), 101-115.
- [11] Patel, R. (2019). *The Stability of Coalition Governments in India*. Journal of Political Science, 34(1), 59-73.
- [12] Bhattacharya, D. (2022). *Regionalism and Coalition Politics: A Complex Relationship*. Political Science Quarterly, 43(2), 200-214.