MEANING OF COALITIONS:

- The term coalition derived from the Latin word “coalition” means to grow together.
- Etymologically coalition means a combination of bodies or parts into one body.
- In political system it means that some political parties or groups will come together and form alliance in order to exercise control over political power.
- According to prof. Ogg “coalition is cooperative arrangement under which distinct political parties or at all events members of such parties unite to form a government or ministry.”
- Thus, coalition is an activity of growing together on the principle of cooperation &coordination.
- It is an alliance on a temporary basis for a joint action.
- Coalition politics centers around political parties to play the game of politics to capture power which results in the formation of a coalition government.
Today, in India coalition system has become an essential feature of our polity.

In a parliamentary government which is based on majority principle & the party or parties that secure majority forms the government.

A coalition government is formed when no single party is able to reach a position of majority to form a government.

Coalitions or party alliances may be formed before or after the general elections.
From the past two decades India is experiencing with various coalition governments at the national & state levels.

The first coalition experiment at the central level began with the congress under Indira Gandhi (1967-71) with the support of the communists.

The second experiment at the central level was under Morarji Desai in 1977.

All other governments formed at the central level after 1989 were coalition governments except that of PVN’s govt. (1991-96).

In A.P. one such govt formed in 1955, in Orissa1957, in W. Bengal in 1967 & also in Kerala.

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1. Failure to obtain Majority:

When no single party wins majority.

Then in order to form a government combination of some political parties are essential.

But these parties do not lose their identity.

They agree to a common minimum programmes.

When differences arises any group or party is free to withdraw its support.
2. PLURALISM:

- India is a subcontinent with multi-cultural & multi-national state.
- India is known for its diversity of language, religion, culture, etc.
- So coalition system is a natural corollary of a pluralist society.
- Multiplicity of PPs along with pluralistic society & individualistic bent of mind of our leaders led to a coalition system.
3. DOMINANCE OF THE CONGRESS PARTY:

- The dominant role played by the congress party.
- The dictatorial style of functioning of the congress, the rebellious attitude against it by the regional units or leaders within it.
- These regional parties have facilitated the emergence of coalition system in India.
- The coalition system is best suited to accommodate the regional aspirations of the regional parties.
The electoral system in India encourages small political parties to contest elections and get represented in the legislatures & ministries.

Minority communities are also able to get represented through a coalition system.

For the time being the coalition system is the only viable political system for India.
Coalition has become a common feature of Indian politics.

Coalition Governments are minority governments which have been unstable due to opportunistic politics.

Most of them suffered from internal contradictions due to the pressure of coalition politics.

Coalition system has had a great impact on Indian politics in a number of ways.
1. Instability:

- Coalition governments will not last long for the full term.
- If any of the coalition partners withdraw support, the government will collapse.
- The average life of the coalition governments in India is 20 months (Shridharan, 1999).
- Coalition government failed to provide a stable government.
To secure a consensus within the parties is a very difficult task.

Each coalition partner tends to suspect the other.

If the government is efficient, the coalition partner is worried that the other will get credit for it.

Thus, the coalition has had the impact of creating a weak & ineffective governments.
In Indian context there is a single party which is dominant in a coalition of several parties.

The identity, agenda & the ideology of that party has to be merged with the remaining small partners.

For example, BJP has to subdue its distinct identity & ideology for the sake of maintaining the coalition.

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4. Narrow Outlook of Parties:

- The political parties have the desire to maintain its political power at any cost.
- Coalition partners like regional parties do not give up their narrow minded approach.
- They have their stronger state agendas and the national agendas are totally neglected.
- As a result, the states tends to become strong & center becomes weak.

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In a coalition government the PM cannot take a strong decision.

Even the smallest partner in the coalition can hold the PM to ransom.

The pm cannot choose his own cabinet, he has to consider the demands of so many parties.

He has no free hand in the distribution of portfolios.

He has to depend frequently on the consent of the constituent parties to carry on the business of the govt, which makes his position weak & pitiable.

This has an impact on Indian politics as the national & foreign policy tends to be weak.
In a coalition, we see power has shifted from the cabinet to that of an extra-constitutional authority like the coordination committee. A coordination/steering committee is formed in order to arrive at a consensus among the coalition partners with different ideologies & with different agendas. Sometimes, the PM finds it very difficult to carry the entire cabinet as one body due to these differences. Sometimes the PM has to give important positions to the fence sitters even though they are insignificant.
7. REGIONAL PARTIES DECIDING THE FATE OF NATIONAL PARTIES:

- Regional parties are increasingly playing an important role in deciding the national players.
- The smaller parties tend to exercise more power, authority in deciding the fate of national parties- hence, critics regard coalition system as undemocratic.
Centralisation of authority & misuse of Article 356 are today rarely takes place. Due to coalition system federal system has been made more federal & real. Our federalism today has become truly a cooperative and bargaining federalism. Governance through consensual approach is also adopted. Today the center-state relations has become quite harmonious due to coalition system.
Thus, coalition in India has both positive and negative impact on Indian Politics.

Even though there is the common minimum programmes which binds its constituents there is often fighting regarding its implementation.

In fact, coalitions has provided a feasible and a reliable alternative in parliamentary democracy against the collapse of the democratic set up.

It makes democracy more participative as every small faction gets represented and heard in the legislature.

It also ends one party dominance and gives chance to regional parties to participate in national politics.

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