

IN DIVERSE INDIA, NAME CHANGE DEMANDS CONSENSUS

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“The official name of the country is the Republic of India”. Photo: loc.gov

An official invitation sent out by Rashtrapati Bhavan in connection with the G-20 summit in New Delhi under India’s presidency which [carried the nomenclature of the President of India as ‘President of Bharat’](#) set off a controversy. The controversy is symptomatic of the present-day political atmosphere, characterised by an intense distrust of each other, extreme and inexplicable revengefulness and heightened revanchism on the part of the power wielders, and widespread anxiety about the future of the country.

Editorial | [India that is Bharat: On a name game](#)

There has been no explanation from official spokesmen of the government for this sudden change. The abrupt change in a very formal official communication from the head of the state caught the nation unawares. Apologists of the powers that be came out with the proposition that the name of the country is interchangeable as Bharat (as is described in Article 1 of the Constitution); therefore, Bharat can be used. In this context, someone was heard saying that all that is required to change to Bharat is a resolution to that effect in Parliament. In fact, it was even suggested that the [special session of Parliament](#) next week would do just that. It is a bit surprising that some senior advocates of the [Supreme Court of India too chimed in](#) with their considered opinion — of course, in favour of the proposition highlighted above.

Before the whole issue of changing the name of the country and the manner in which it is being handled are considered, it is necessary to make it clear that Parliament has the absolute power to change the name of the country at any time by amending the Constitution. [Article 368 of the Constitution](#) empowers Parliament to amend any provision of the Constitution which includes the name of the country, as mentioned in Article 1. But the public has been left aghast by the general cacophony which has left them none the wiser as far as the issue is concerned.

So, let us examine the whole issue of the change of name of the country from a purely constitutional point of view. First, the invite that went out from Rashtrapati Bhavan. This invite used the nomenclature, “President of Bharat”. In fact, at the moment, constitutionally speaking, there is no President of Bharat in the country. [Article 52 says that there shall be a President of India](#). This is the official nomenclature of the head of the state which cannot be changed into anything else unless Article 52 is amended suitably. Thus, it is quite obvious that the term

'President of Bharat' is not in conformity with Article 52 of the Constitution.

[Article 1](#) says, "[India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States](#)". These words by no means signify that the words 'India' and 'Bharat' are interchangeable and that 'Bharat' can be used in place of 'India' as the official name of the country. As a matter of fact, the word 'Bharat' is not used in any of the articles of the Constitution except in the Hindi version, which was published under [the authority of the President under Article 394A](#).

If the intention of the Constitution makers was to use the word 'Bharat' interchangeably, they would have used it in some parts of the Constitution which is the authentic [Constitution of India officially so described under Article 393](#). In this context, let us try to understand the true import of the words "India, that is Bharat...", used in Article 1. The words 'that is' are clarificatory whose function is to explain or further clarify the preceding word 'India'. Thus, it is interpreted that Article 1 would mean India that is known as Bharat shall be a Union of States. Article 1 in the Hindi translation of the Constitution says "Bharat means India", which shows that Bharat is treated as the translation of India.

In other words the word 'Bharat' does not stand as an independent word in the original Constitution. It is to be used only in the Hindi translation of the Constitution. Further [Article 394A\(2\)](#) says "the translation of this Constitution...shall be construed to have the same meaning as the original thereof..."; this clause reinforces the point that the word Bharat is a translation of the word 'India', as used in the original Constitution, and India is the authentic name of the country until it is legally changed.

The use of 'Bharat' interchangeably with 'India' in official communication can create a great deal of confusion. The official name of the country is the Republic of India. This is the name used in all official communication sent to foreign countries and international bodies. Agreements and treaties entered into with foreign countries are in the name of the Republic of India and not republic of Bharat. If Bharat is used interchangeably, the foreign governments will be thrown into utter confusion. In some agreements with foreign governments or international bodies India will be shown as Republic of India and in some other, as republic of Bharat. A country can have only one official name. It can be either India or Bharat, not both.

A perusal of the debates of the Constituent Assembly shows that Article 1 in the draft Constitution was worded "India shall be a union of states". The word Bharat was added later during the debate because of strong pressure from many Members to use Bharat instead of India. Many formulations were suggested by members such as H.V. Kamath, K.T. Shah, Seth Govind Das, and Shibban Lal Saxena. But B.R. Ambedkar added the words "that is Bharat" as a compromise. He never once said that 'Bharat' can be used interchangeably in the original Constitution.

The change of name of a country cannot be and should not be done as the agenda of a political party. In a diverse country like India there needs to be a consensus on this. People in every nook and corner of the country must be able to emotionally connect with the name. Otherwise it will create a sense of alienation among some section or the other. The weird idea of liberation from India's colonial past should lead us to demolish all symbols of colonialism such as Rashtrapati Bhavan, Parliament House, the Assembly building, and completely change the whole administrative structure that is prevalent as well as many other things. The entire railway system in India is also a symbol of the colonial past.

Does this newfound anti-colonial exuberance sit well with the idea of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', that was the motto of the G-20 under India's presidency?

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