

## WE THE PEOPLE OF BHARAT: CONSTITUTIONAL DUALITY AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

**Sumit Mondal**

*Assistant Professor of Political Science  
Department of Law,  
Durgapur Institute of Legal Studies  
Durgapur W.B., India  
Email: [sumitmondal0369@gmail.com](mailto:sumitmondal0369@gmail.com)*

### **Abstract**

*The Indian Constitution presents a profound duality in the naming of a nation. The Preamble opens with, 'We the People of India' while Article 1 declares, 'India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States'. This paper explores the historical, cultural and political significance of this duality, situating it within the debates of Constituent Assembly and the larger discourse on national identity. 'India' reflects the modern, internationally recognized polity shaped by colonial legacies whereas 'Bharat' embodies civilizational heritage and indigenous consciousness deeply rooted in ancient traditions. This paper argues that the duality of the names is not merely symbolic but represents the synthesis of India's plural identities. It also enriches the democratic ethos of the Constitution, allowing the nation to balance continuity with change, tradition with modernity and diversity with unity.*

### **Keywords**

*India, Bharat, constitution, plural identities, nation.*

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**Sumit Mondal**

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## **1. Introduction**

The G20 Summit, held in India in 2023, does not mention Bharat as India. It sparked controversy when the President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu sent a dinner invitation for the G20 summit with the title ‘President of Bharat’ instead of the usual ‘President of India’. This move was seen as a deliberate attempt by the government to emphasise India’s name as ‘Bharat’. It makes us think whether India and Bharat represent the same entity as a nation or whether they denote the same concept.

One of the most distinctive aspects of the Indian Constitution is found in its opening words of Article 1, which declares: ‘India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States’ (Constitution of India, 1950, Art. 1). This phrase, introducing a dual nomenclature—India and Bharat—encapsulates a unique constitutional synthesis that distinguishes India from other modern democracies such as the United States, France, or Japan, whose constitutions bear single national identities.

The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America (1787) begins with, ‘We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union...’ (p. 1). The emphasis here is on a political union forged among the thirteen original colonies, unified under a common identity without any reference to multiple cultural or civilizational roots. Similarly, the Japanese Constitution (1947) opens with the statement, ‘We, the Japanese people... do proclaim that sovereign power resides with the people,’ reflecting a homogeneous national self-perception shaped in the aftermath of World War II. Likewise, the Constitution of the French Republic (1958) declares in Article 1 that ‘France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic, and social Republic.’ None of these constitutional preambles includes a dual reference to the nation; each articulates a single, cohesive national identity.

In contrast, the framers of the Indian Constitution deliberately chose to retain two names—India and Bharat—within the same constitutional clause. This decision was neither ornamental nor linguistic; it was a philosophical and political act of reconciliation. Bharat evokes the civilizational and cultural continuity of the subcontinent, rooted in ancient Sanskrit texts such as the Mahabharata and the Puranas, while India represents the modern, postcolonial state, internationally recognised and engaged in the global order (Khilnani, 1997, p. 18).

On the other hand, Granville Austin (1966, p. 19) observed that the Indian Constitution sought to create a ‘composite nationalism,’ harmonizing India’s diverse linguistic, religious, and regional identities within one constitutional framework. This duality of names thus symbolises the dialogue between tradition and modernity, between civilizational heritage and democratic aspiration. It reflects an understanding

that Indian nationhood is not monolithic but plural and layered, encompassing both its ancient civilizational ethos (Bharat) and its contemporary political identity (India).

By comparison, nations such as the United States, France, and Japan did not face such deep cultural multiplicity during their constitutional formations. Their constitutional identities could thus be expressed through a single linguistic and historical construct—a reflection of their relatively homogeneous social foundations. India’s Article 1, on the other hand, is a living example of unity in diversity, purposefully incorporating civilizational pluralism into the framework of constitutional modernity. The Constitution’s founders understood that India’s identity could not be reduced to a single culture, language, or religion but rather was the result of centuries of interaction and evolution amongst several civilisations. Article 1 advocates India’s civilizational legacy while placing it within the democratic, secular, and egalitarian values of a contemporary constitutional order by formally recognising both ‘India’ and ‘Bharat.’

This formulation—‘India, that is Bharat’ (Constitution of India, 1950, Art. 1)—therefore carries a meaning far beyond nomenclature. It asserts that the ancient civilization (Bharat) and the modern Republic (India) coexist within the same sovereign framework, bound by shared constitutional ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. The dual naming stands as a metaphor for India’s constitutional journey to reconcile its spiritual past with its democratic present, thereby creating a state that embodies both historical continuity and political modernity (Bhargava, 1998, p. 47).

Tracing its historical trajectory, we can say that the concept of ‘India’ has been mentioned in numerous ancient texts, supporting the idea that it existed under various names and forms. For example, in the Rigveda (2000 BCE), Megasthenes’s *Indica* (300 BCE), Abu’l-Fazl’s *Ain-i-Akbari* (1590 CE), and Bowen et al.’s *Britain’s Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, C.1550–1850* (2012), ‘Hindusthan’ in Abu’l-Fazl’s *Ain-i-Akbari* (1590 CE), or as *Bharata Shakti* in Sri Aurobindo’s *The Renaissance in India and other essays on Indian culture* (1997). In the process of building and rebuilding a nation, the name plays a significant role. This raises questions about whether a nation’s name—whether it is India or Bharat—makes a difference and how it relates to the search for identity. We therefore saw that the search for an indigenous identity was necessary during the colonial era. India’s journey of reclaiming Bharat during the nationalist era was followed by a fresh push for the Renaissance. Similar initiatives taken by the country during the colonial phase of the freedom movement at the start of the 20th century, such as those of Sri Aurobindo, served as inspiration for that (Mondal, 2024).

Moreover, the G20 summit in this contemporary era was an intentional attempt to rename India as Bharat, as seen by President Murmu's dinner invitation, which read 'President of Bharat' rather than 'President of India.' In an effort to remove colonial legacies and re-establish a connection with India's cultural past, officials advocate the name Bharat.

## **2. Historical Significance of Bharat and India**

### **2.1. The Historical Significance of Bharat**

Bharat has a lengthy history of civilisation, going all the way back to the Vedic era. (Vishnu Purana, 2.3.2, as reported in Thapar, 2013). The Rig Veda (VII.33.13) mentions the Bharata tribe, and subsequent writings like the Mahabharata and the Puranas use Bharatavarsha to define the country north of the ocean and south of the Himalayas. Bharat represents a sacred geography, a cultural unity bound together by dharma and the continuation of civilisational ethos and principles. (Thapar, 2000; Sharma, 2011; Guha, 2019). Throughout the nationalist awakening, Bharat emerged as a symbol of cultural authenticity and resistance. By depicting the land as a mother-goddess and invoking Bharat Mata in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's Vande Mataram (1882), the concept of Bharat became a rallying cry for nationalism (Chatterjee, 1989). Bharat has always represented spiritual belonging, continuity, and indigenous pride.

### **2.2. The Historical Significance of India**

The river Sindhu (Indus) is the source of the name India. Greeks transcribed it as Indos, which led to the creation of "India," while Persians called the inhabitants on the other side of the river Hindus (Thapar, 2013). This external term was widely accepted in international discourse throughout the course of centuries. The word "India" became ingrained in the world's consciousness when European explorers and medieval visitors like Al-Biruni wrote about the traditions and cultures of "India" (Al-Biruni, as cited in Sachau, 1910). Moreover, the Government of India Act, 1935, formed the basis for India's governance structure and Constitutional framework. (Austin, 1966). Significantly, the name was adopted by Indian nationalists themselves, as seen in the 'Quit India Movement' (1942) and the Indian National Congress (1885).

### **2.3. Dual Significance of Bharat and India**

The dual historical significance of India and Bharat reflects two intertwined yet distinct narratives of the subcontinent's evolution—one shaped by the trajectory of modern political development, and the other grounded in ancient civilizational identity. The name 'Bharat' finds its earliest mention in ancient texts such as the Rig Veda and the Mahabharata, where it represented not merely a geographical territory but a sacred and cultural unity rooted in the principles of dharma and shared heritage

(Thapar, 2000). It symbolized an indigenous civilizational consciousness, encompassing a continuum of traditions and values that transcended regional and linguistic diversities (Sharma, 2011). In contrast, the term “India” emerged from external designations—derived from the Greek Indos and the Persian Hindustan, both ultimately originating from the Sanskrit Sindhu, referring to the Indus River.

During the colonial era, ‘India’ evolved into a political construct under British administration, serving as the basis for centralized governance, law, and cartographic identity (Bayly, 1996). However, this colonial framework also became a platform for modern nationalism, as leaders of the independence movement redefined ‘India’ as a symbol of sovereignty and democratic statehood (Nehru, 1946; Guha, 2007). When the framers of the Constitution declared in Article 1 that ‘India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States,’ they deliberately united these dual lineages—the civilizational continuity of Bharat with the modern constitutionalism of India (Austin, 1966). Historically, therefore, “Bharat” represents the nation’s spiritual and cultural roots, while “India” embodies its modern, international, and constitutional identity. Their coexistence signifies an enduring effort to reconcile civilizational depth with political modernity, a synthesis that continues to define the Republic’s historical consciousness and identity.

The names India and Bharat together represent distinct historical paths. India symbolises political legitimacy and international acknowledgement, while Bharat conjures up sentiments of indigenous authenticity and the depth of civilisation. In Article 1, ‘India, that is Bharat,’ the Constitution’s writers purposefully used the two titles to represent this complex historical legacy. (Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX, 1949).

### **3. Cultural Significance of Bharat and India**

#### **3.1. The Cultural Significance of Bharat**

The cultural importance of Bharat lies in its depiction of a common civilisational identity that has endured throughout generations. According to classical Sanskrit writings, Bharatavarsha was a sacred cultural world where various customs, beliefs, and practices coexisted under the concept of dharma rather than just a geographical area (Thapar, 2000). Epics such as the Mahabharata and the devotional tradition of the Bhakti movement, which frequently referred to Bharat as the everlasting realm of moral and spiritual order, helped to preserve this cultural geography. The image of Bharat Mata, who represented the land and its inhabitants, was used to reinvent this cultural identity throughout the nationalist struggle. The cultural symbolism was crystallised by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s Anandamath (1882) and its song, Vande Mataram, which depicted Bharat as the

mother-goddess who personified devotion, sacrifice, and togetherness (Chatterjee, 1989). Thus, Bharat became a symbol of cultural resistance against colonial oppression as well as a marker of the continuation of civilisation.

### **3.2. The Cultural Significance of India**

India's cultural resonance evolved over centuries of internal reinterpretations and exterior encounters. 'India' was characterised by foreign explorers like Megasthenes, Marco Polo, and Al-Biruni as a land of great religious plurality, cultural diversity, and knowledge systems (Sachau, 1910; Thapar, 2013). These narratives contributed to India's international reputation as a patchwork of civilisations. By the colonial era, India had solidified its position as a pluralistic area in international discourse; its languages, faiths, and cultural customs were key components of the worldwide perception of the subcontinent (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2006). Using this cultural perspective, 'India' was hailed by Indian leaders themselves, like Jawaharlal Nehru in *The Discovery of India* (1946), where he projected India as a civilisation that flourished on synthesis, diversity, and tolerance. Moreover, India's pluralist nature also became essential to the modern nation's cultural identity.

### **3.3. Dual Cultural Identity of Bharat and India**

India and Bharat represent two complementary facets of cultural identity when combined together. India is a symbol of plurality, cosmopolitanism, and international recognition, whereas Bharat promotes continuity with an ancient civilisational legacy and cultural rootedness. A country which is both firmly rooted in its history and focused on modernisation and openness is reflected to choose both names in the Constitution (Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX, 1949).

## **4. Political Significance of Bharat and India**

### **4.1. The Political Significance of India**

In both internal governance and foreign affairs, India has simultaneously gained crucial political legitimacy. Through the Government of India Act (1935), which established the legal basis for British power, the term 'India' was included into the administrative structure throughout colonial control (Austin, 1966). Furthermore, the nationalist movement itself frequently used India as its political identity, as demonstrated by the Indian National Congress's 1885 founding name and catchphrases like the 'Quit India Movement' of 1942. Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders highlighted India as an example of a contemporary democratic country that could interact with the world on an equal basis (Nehru, 1946). The framers made sure that diplomatic recognition, legal order, and international law would strengthen India's credibility in the international arena.

#### **4.2. The Political Significance of Bharat**

The term ‘Bharat’ holds profound political significance within India’s constitutional and civilizational framework. It symbolises the effort to blend indigenous cultural identity with modern democratic governance. The inclusion of both ‘India’ and ‘Bharat’ in Article 1 of the Constitution — ‘India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States’ — reflects this dual vision of the nation.

On one hand, it asserted indigenous identity as ‘Bharat’ draws its origin from ancient civilizational traditions, mentioned in classical texts such as the Mahabharata and Puranas, where the land was described as ‘Bharata Varsha’ — a unified cultural and geographical entity. By adopting this term, the Constitution affirms that the Indian state is not merely a postcolonial creation but a continuation of a long historical civilization. As historian Romila Thapar (2000) observes, Bharat represents a ‘sacred geography and cultural unity bound together by dharma and civilization,’ rather than a purely political boundary. This cultural understanding informs the political identity of the modern state, situating it within indigenous traditions rather than colonial constructs. On the other hand, the inclusion of Bharat in the Constitution signifies a process of decolonisation and self-naming. The term India was largely a colonial imposition derived from the Greek Indos and Persian Hindustan. (Thapar,2000;Metcalf, B.D; and Metcalf,2006;Guha,2019))Some members of the Constituent Assembly, such as S.N. Singh and Seth Govind Das, argued passionately that Bharat should be the primary name of the Republic because it reflected the “soul of the nation” and its precolonial identity (Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX, 1949).

This debate highlights how the adoption of Bharat was a political act of reclaiming indigenous identity and asserting sovereignty free from colonial influence (Austin, 1966). Moreover, Bharat represents unity amid diversity. While “India” symbolises the administrative and constitutional unity of a modern republic, Bharat invokes emotional, cultural, and spiritual unity across regions, languages, and communities.

According to Ramachandra Guha (2019), the dual naming of the nation reflects “an inclusive vision where modern constitutionalism coexists with ancient civilizational consciousness.” Thus, Bharat becomes a political metaphor for integrating pluralism into the nation’s identity.

In contemporary India, Bharat continues to be invoked in political discourse to emphasise cultural nationalism, self-reliance (Atmanirbharta), and indigenous pride. However, scholars caution that its political use should preserve the inclusive and plural spirit envisioned in the Constitution.

The political significance of Bharat thus lies in its power to connect civilization with statehood, tradition with democracy, and identity with sovereignty. It is not merely a name, but a political philosophy that embodies India's aspiration to be both ancient and modern — a republic grounded in its civilizational ethos while committed to constitutional ideals.

### **4.3. The Dual Political Identity: Bharat and India**

A political compromise between pragmatic statecraft and cultural authenticity was expressed in the Constitution's adoption of the term 'India, that is Bharat' in Article 1. Granville Austin (1966) points out that the Indian Constitution was distinguished by a "seamless web of compromise," which balanced conflicting ideas about identity and government. India maintained legal continuity and international recognition, whereas Bharat offered symbolic and cultural roots. The two names collectively convey the Republic's dual political identity: an old civilisation regaining its independence while adopting the framework of a contemporary democratic state (Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX, 1949; Rao, 1967).

## **5. Debates in Constituent Assembly**

### **5.1. Debates in the Constituent Assembly Regarding 'India' and 'Bharat'**

The debate over the naming of the Indian Republic in the Constituent Assembly was not a superficial linguistic issue, but a profound discussion about national identity, cultural authenticity, and political modernity. It unfolded primarily on 17–18 September 1949, during the final stages of drafting the Constitution. The key question before the Assembly was whether the country should be called India, Bharat, or both.

The draft constitution prepared by the drafting committee under Dr. B.R. Ambedkar originally stated: "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States." (Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX, 17 September 1949). Several members proposed certain amendments, seeking either to reverse the order or replace "India" entirely with "Bharat." Among these were H.V. Kamath, Seth Govind Das, and Hargovind Pant. Kamath suggested the article should read: 'Bharat, or in the English language, India, shall be a Union of States.' (Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX, 18 September 1949). Other members like K.V. Rao and Kamalapati Tripathi supported this amendment, emphasising Bharat as the nation's authentic name rooted in its cultural and historical heritage.

### **5.2. Arguments in Favour of 'Bharat'**

Proponents of Bharat framed their argument around cultural and decolonial principles. Seth Govind Das declared, 'In the world, our country is known by the

name India, but to us she has always been Bharat. This word is a symbol of our culture. It is essential that we give our ancient name its due place in our Constitution.’(Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX, p. 1625).

Hargovind Pant asserted that the term ‘India’ is a foreign name that was imposed by outsiders.. Slavery is being perpetuated by referring to our nation as India when it has been known as Bharat for millennia.(Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX, 18 September 1949) These arguments drew on the nationalist imagination that saw Bharat as an indigenous term embodying the civilisational unity of the subcontinent. According to them, choosing Bharat was not only a linguistic choice but a political statement, a declaration of independence in cultural terms.

### **5.3. Arguments in Favour of Retaining ‘India’**

The supporters who favoured India pointed out its practicality, legal and diplomatic importance. The term had acquired official status under the Government of India Act, 1935, and was globally recognised in treaties and international law. Dr B.R. Ambedkar, while not elaborating extensively on this point, defended the Drafting Committee’s formulation as a compromise ensuring both continuity and cultural respect (Austin, 1966). Several members, including Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar, emphasised that India had been used by the nationalist movement itself. The Indian National Congress, the ‘Quit India Movement,’ and the ‘Independent India’ slogan all made India synonymous with the freedom struggle (Nehru, 1946).

Thus, from a pragmatic and political standpoint, India was necessary for international recognition and legal continuity, while Bharat represented cultural rootedness.

### **6. Crisis of Identity or a Negotiation?**

The naming of India and Bharat represents neither a rejection of the past nor a blind acceptance of modernity, but a harmonious synthesis of both. It demonstrates how a nation born out of colonial subjugation chose to articulate its sovereignty through the coexistence of its civilizational soul and democratic spirit. On one hand ‘crisis of identity’ is most appropriately referred to in this situation as it is a process of self-definition that ensures India remains faithful to its plural origins while continuously adapting to the demands of modern governance. In that light, India, that is Bharat, becomes not just a constitutional clause, but a living expression of the Republic’s enduring effort to reconcile its historical depth with its political aspirations—a synthesis that turns diversity itself into the foundation of national unity.

On the other hand this dual identity between India and Bharat is better understood as an ongoing negotiation of national identity rather than a crisis of identity. While the term “crisis” implies a breakdown or loss of coherence, the

coexistence of India and Bharat reflects a creative dialogue between the nation's ancient civilizational consciousness and its modern constitutional framework. Bharat evokes the spiritual, cultural, and historical continuities of the subcontinent, whereas India symbolizes the democratic, secular, and legal order born from the independence movement and constitutional modernity. This duality does not signify confusion but rather the strength of a plural identity that accommodates both tradition and transformation, enabling the Republic to reconcile its cultural memory with its democratic aspirations.

## **7. Conclusion**

The dual identity of 'India' and 'Bharat,' as enshrined in Article 1 of the Indian Constitution, encapsulates the essence of India's complex and multifaceted nature. On one hand, 'Bharat' connects the country to its ancient civilizational roots, invoking a rich cultural, spiritual, and historical heritage that spans millennia. On the other hand, 'India' reflects the modern, democratic nation-state forged in the aftermath of colonialism, embodying the values of democracy, equality, and secularism.

By constitutionally affirming both, the framers envisioned a nation that would not be torn between past and present, but would instead integrate them into a coherent narrative of continuity. As Granville Austin (1966) notes, this resolution exemplified the Indian Constitution's essence as a "seamless web of compromises"—a deliberate harmonization of tradition and modernity, diversity and unity, continuity and change (p. 19).

This duality is not merely a linguistic or symbolic distinction but an embodiment of India's unique capacity to reconcile seemingly contradictory forces—tradition and modernity, continuity and change, unity and diversity. The decision to retain both names in the Constitution is a profound recognition of the fact that India's identity is a synthesis of its past and its future. It acknowledges the country's ancient traditions while embracing the democratic ideals of modern governance.

The legacy of this duality endures in contemporary India's ongoing debates over identity and nomenclature. Political and cultural discussions surrounding whether Bharat or India should predominate often resurface, reflecting divergent interpretations of nationalism. Yet, the wisdom of the framers lies precisely in having refused exclusivity. By acknowledging both names, they offered a vision of inclusive nationhood, capable of representing the multiplicity of India's past and the aspirations of its future.

The idea of a 'seamless web of compromises,' as noted by Granville Austin (Austin, 1966) reflects the constitutional vision of harmonising India's pluralism. By simultaneously respecting the country's historical identity and charting a course for its democratic future, the Constitution of India forms a bridge between

Bharat's past and India's future, ensuring that the country's rich heritage and modern aspirations can coexist and enrich each other. This dual identity, therefore, is not a contradiction but a testament to the resilience and diversity of India's socio-political fabric.

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