

# Bharat or India: battle for national identity

By Gautam Pingle

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*"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." (Lewis Carroll, "Alice through the Looking Glass", Chapter 6)*

The "natural borders" of the country have always been the three oceans to the West, South and East, the mountains in the North-West – the Hindu Kush - and the Himalayas on the north running west-east till they run out of height in the Far East.

The Mahabharata and the Puranas used the name 'Bharata' to describe the country whose geographical borders were clearly known. The Greeks referred to the country as 'Indika'. After Alexander, the Mauryas regained much of what was Vedic India - the area which is now Afghanistan - and re-established the North West border of the country. They also ruled the entire country except the southern tip.

This would be about the last time the country was united and at peace. It is little wonder that the Ashoka's lion capital and the Chakra were chosen as the symbols of the Republic. The Arab chroniclers called it 'Al-Hind'. The later Muslim chroniclers transformed Al-Hind to 'Hindustan' and used it continuously as did the East India Company and the British Raj.

The Mughal emperors were titled Badshah-i-Hind. Victoria became Kaiser-i-Hind. In Pakistan, they still use the term Hindustan to refer to India as does much of Northern India. And so did Savarkar.

The debates in the Constituent Assembly on naming of the country were intense. On 18th of September 1949, H. V. Kamath tabled an amendment to Article 1 that it should read "(1) Bharat or, in the English language, India, shall be a Union of States." or, alternatively, (2) Hind, or, in the English language, India, shall be a Union of States."

## **Speaking on his Amendment he said:**

"The prominent suggestions have been Bharat, Hindustan, Hind and Bharatbhumi or Bharatvarsh and names of that kind. At this stage, it would be desirable and perhaps profitable also to go into the question as to what name is best suited to this occasion of the birth of the new baby - the Indian Republic. Historians and philologists have delved deep into this matter of the name of this country, especially the origin of this name Bharat.

All of them are not agreed as to the genesis of this name Bharat. Some ascribe it to the son of Dushyant and Shakuntala, who was also known as "Sarvadamana" or all-conqueror and who established his suzerainty and kingdom in this ancient land. After him, this land came to be

known as Bharat. Another school of research scholars holds that Bharat dates back to Vedic.....”

At this stage, he was interrupted by Ambedkar, who said: “Is it necessary to trace all this? I do not understand the purpose of it. It may well be interesting in some other place. My friend accepts the word "Bharat". The only thing is that he has got an alternative. I am very sorry but there ought to be some sense of proportion, in view of the limited time before the House....Why all this eloquence over it?”

Kallur Subba Rao was even more insistent.

He said: “I heartily support the name Bharat which is ancient. The name Bharat is in the Rig Veda (vide, Rig 3, 4, 23.4). It is said there, "Oh, Indra, all this progeny of Bharata..." Also in Vayu Purana the boundaries of Bharat are given (Vayupuran U45-75). It means that land that is to the south of the Himalayas and north of the Samundras (Southern ocean) is called Bharat. So the name Bharat is very ancient.

The name India has come from Sindhu (the Indus river), and we can now call Pakistan as Hindustan because the Indus river is there. Sind has become Hind, as 'sa' in Sanskrit is pronounced as 'Ha' in Prakrit. Greeks pronounced Hind as Ind. Hereafter; it is good and proper that we should refer to India as Bharat. I would request Seth Govind Das and other Hindi friends to name the language also as “Bharati”, I think for the name “Hindi” the name “Bharati” should be substituted, as the latter denotes the Goddess of Learning”.

Kamalapathi Tripathi (speaking in Hindi) also entered the debate. He said: “We are pleased to see that this word (Bharat) has been used and we congratulate Dr. Ambedkar on it. It would have been very proper, if he had accepted the amendment moved by Kamath, which states "Bharat as is known 'in English language 'India'". That would have preserved the prestige of this country. By the inclusion of the word 'Bharat' and by accepting it, we shall be able to give to this country a form and to give back to it its lost soul and we shall be able to protect it also.”

Seth Govind Das felt that: “I am glad to find that we are giving the most ancient name to our country but, Dr. Ambedkar will excuse me, we are not giving it in as beautiful a way as it was necessary.”India, that is, Bharat" is not beautiful words for the name of a country. We should have put the words "Bharat known as India also in foreign countries". That would have been much more appropriate than the former expression. We should, however, at least have the satisfaction that we are today giving to our country the name of Bharat”.

Clearly H V Kamath, Kamalapati Tripathi, Kallur Subba Rao and Govind Das were placing “Bharat” in the forefront and emphasizing that “India” was a late British Imperial usage. However, the vote on Amendment was lost by 13 votes - Ayes: 38, Noes: 51 Undeterred, Kamath returned to the fray on 14th November 1949, saying: “the Draft as passed by the House reads, ‘India, that is, Bharat’.

The revised draft presented to the House says, ‘India, that is Bharat,’ that I do not think it is what the House intended when we accepted Article 1. What was meant was, “India, that is to say Bharat”. That is why two commas were inserted and the phrase was interposed. It does not mean, ‘India, that is Bharat.’ This is wrong English, so far as the meaning intended is concerned.

I think the original was perfectly correct and it was absolutely wrong on the part of the Drafting Committee to change the wording”. He then moved an amendment to the effect that “That in

clause (1) of Article 1, after the words 'that is' a comma be inserted and the comma after the word 'Bharat' be deleted.”

His earlier amendment for placing 'Bharat' first was rejected. This amendment would have had the effect of making 'Bharat' as the subject of the sentence even if it were not the first mentioned name.

Not only were all these amendments rejected and the Article 1 stands, as “India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States” but, moreover, the Preamble states: “WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India as a ....”

Maybe the Second Republic will decide whether we are 'India' or 'Bharat', for this battle does not seem to be over yet.

### **--OPINION**

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DR GAUTAM PINGLE  
DIRECTOR  
CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE  
ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF COLLEGE OF INDIA  
BELLA VISTA  
RAJ BHAVAN ROAD  
HYDERABAD 500082  
TEL:+91-40-6653 3000, 3081  
+91-40-2331 0907 (D)  
FAX:+91-40-66534356/ 2331 3882  
E-MAIL: [gpingle@asci.org.in](mailto:gpingle@asci.org.in)  
[gautam.pingle@gmail.com](mailto:gautam.pingle@gmail.com)