

CHANGE OF NAME OF STATES IN INDIA: CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS, PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE

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Abstract—The Constitution of India establishes a distinctive framework for altering the territorial and symbolic identity of states, including the change of their names. Unlike constitutional amendments requiring a special majority under Article 368, the alteration of a state's name is governed primarily by Article 3, read with Article 4, and is effected through ordinary parliamentary legislation. This paper examines the constitutional provisions regulating state name changes, the nature of the constitutional scheme as rigid or flexible, and the procedural steps involved, including the roles of the Union Cabinet, the President, Parliament, and state legislatures. It further analyses the federal implications of this mechanism and evaluates historical and contemporary instances of state name changes in India, culminating in the ongoing proposal to rename Kerala as Keralam in 2026. Through doctrinal and case-based analysis, the study argues that Article 3 embodies India's model of flexible federalism, balancing parliamentary supremacy with consultative federal principles. The paper concludes that the constitutional framework for changing state names reflects adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and institutional continuity within India's evolving federal structure.

I. Introduction

The Constitution of India envisions a federal polity characterised by unity amid diversity. Article 1 of the Constitution declares India to be a “Union of States,” signifying that states are integral units of the Union whose territorial identity is subject to constitutional regulation. One of the most significant manifestations of this regulatory authority is the power to change the name of a state. Although a change of name may appear symbolic in nature, it often carries profound political, cultural, linguistic, and administrative consequences. In a multilingual and multicultural society such as India, the name of a state represents not merely a territorial label but also an assertion of historical identity and collective self-perception.

Since independence, India has witnessed multiple instances of state name changes driven by decolonisation, linguistic movements, cultural revival, and demands for historical authenticity. These changes have not occurred arbitrarily; rather, they have been guided by a constitutionally prescribed process that balances central authority with state consultation. The framers of the Constitution consciously adopted a flexible approach to territorial reorganisation, enabling Parliament to respond to changing social and political realities without resorting to rigid constitutional amendment procedures.

This paper aims to examine the constitutional provisions governing the change of names of states in India, focusing on Article 3 and its relationship with Article 4 and Article 368. It analyses whether the constitutional scheme is rigid or flexible, outlines the procedural steps involved, and evaluates the role of various constitutional and political institutions. The paper further explores key historical and contemporary examples to illustrate the practical application of constitutional theory.

II. Constitutional Provisions Governing State Name Changes

2.1 Article 3 of the Constitution of India

Article 3 of the Constitution empowers Parliament to enact laws for the formation of new states and the alteration of existing states. The provision explicitly authorises Parliament to alter the area, boundaries, or name of any state. This power reflects the centralised nature of territorial authority within the Indian constitutional framework.

A notable feature of Article 3 is the requirement of presidential recommendation before a bill proposing a state name change is introduced in Parliament. Additionally, the President is constitutionally obligated to refer the bill to the legislature of the concerned state for its views. This consultative mechanism ensures that the affected state is given an opportunity to express its opinion, although such opinion does not bind Parliament.

The inclusion of mandatory consultation indicates the framers' intent to preserve a degree of federal participation while maintaining parliamentary supremacy in matters of territorial reorganisation.

2.2 Article 4 and Its Legal Effect

Article 4 complements Article 3 by permitting laws enacted under Article 3 to include provisions amending the First and Fourth Schedules of the Constitution. The First Schedule contains the names and territorial descriptions of states, making its amendment necessary when a state's name is changed.

Crucially, Article 4(2) declares that laws made under Article 3 shall not be deemed constitutional amendments for the purposes of Article 368. Consequently, the change of a state's name does not require adherence to the special amendment procedure prescribed for constitutional amendments, even though it alters a constitutional schedule.

III. Rigid or Flexible Nature of the Constitutional Scheme

3.1 Flexibility of Article 3

The constitutional mechanism for changing the name of a state is widely regarded as flexible. Unlike amendments under Article 368, which require a special majority and, in certain cases, ratification by state legislatures, laws under Article 3 are passed by a simple majority in Parliament. This lower threshold facilitates timely and efficient responses to legitimate regional aspirations.

The flexibility of Article 3 reflects the framers' awareness that territorial and symbolic changes may be necessary in a dynamic polity. By enabling Parliament to act through ordinary legislation, the Constitution ensures adaptability without compromising legal certainty.

3.2 Safeguards and Elements of Rigidity

Despite its flexibility, Article 3 incorporates procedural safeguards that prevent arbitrary action. The requirement of presidential recommendation ensures executive scrutiny, while mandatory consultation with the concerned state legislature introduces a federal dimension. These safeguards impose a measure of rigidity by subjecting the process to formal constitutional steps.

3.3 Comparison with Article 368

Article 368 governs constitutional amendments and embodies constitutional rigidity through stringent procedural requirements. The deliberate exclusion of state name changes from Article 368 underscores the distinction between fundamental constitutional alterations and administrative or territorial adjustments. This distinction reinforces Parliament's authority while preserving constitutional stability.

IV. Procedure for Changing the Name of a State

The process for changing a state's name follows a structured constitutional and legislative sequence. Typically, the initiative originates either from the state government or the Union Government. In most cases, the state legislature adopts a resolution expressing its desire for a name change.

The proposal is then examined by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, which assesses its legal, administrative, and federal implications. Upon completion of this examination, the matter is placed before the Union Cabinet. Cabinet approval represents a crucial political endorsement and authorises further constitutional action.

Subsequently, the President recommends the introduction of a bill in Parliament and refers the proposal to the concerned state legislature for its views. After the consultation period, the bill is introduced in Parliament and debated in both Houses. Passage requires a simple majority in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

Once the bill is passed by Parliament, it is presented to the President for assent. Upon receiving presidential assent, the law comes into force, and the state's new name is officially recognised.

V. Role of the Union Cabinet and Executive

Although the Constitution does not expressly assign a role to the Union Cabinet in the process of state name changes, its involvement is indispensable in practice. The Cabinet functions as the apex executive body and evaluates proposals on political, administrative, and national considerations. Cabinet approval ensures coordination between the executive and legislative branches and reflects the principle of collective responsibility.

The executive's role also highlights the political nature of state renaming, as such decisions often resonate beyond the concerned state and influence national discourse.

VI. Historical and Contemporary Instances of State Name Changes

S.No.	Original Name	New Name	Year
1.	United Provinces	Uttar Pradesh	1950
2.	Madras State	Tamil Nadu	1969
3.	Mysore	Karnataka	1973
4.	Uttaranchal	Uttarakhand	2007
5.	Orissa	Odisha	2011
6.	Kerala	Keralam (in process)	2026

6.1 United Provinces to Uttar Pradesh

Shortly after independence, the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh was renamed Uttar Pradesh. This change symbolised the rejection of colonial nomenclature and the adoption of an indigenous identity aligned with republican values. It established an early precedent for state name changes under the constitutional framework.

6.2 Madras State to Tamil Nadu

The renaming of Madras State to Tamil Nadu in 1969 was driven by linguistic and cultural movements advocating recognition of Tamil identity. The change reinforced linguistic federalism and demonstrated the Constitution's capacity to accommodate regional aspirations within a unified framework.

6.3 Mysore to Karnataka

In 1973, the state of Mysore was renamed Karnataka to reflect the collective identity of Kannada-speaking regions. The change corrected a representational imbalance and strengthened internal cohesion by adopting a name that encompassed the entire state.

6.4 Uttaranchal to Uttarakhand

The state of Uttaranchal, formed in 2000, was renamed Uttarakhand in 2007. The new name carried historical and cultural significance and illustrated the constitutional flexibility to permit name changes even after recent state formation.

6.5 Orissa to Odisha

The renaming of Orissa to Odisha in 2011 aimed to align the English name with the native pronunciation. While the state name change was effected under Article 3, the renaming of the language required a constitutional amendment under Article 368, demonstrating the nuanced application of constitutional procedures.

6.6 Kerala to Keralam (2026 – Ongoing)

The proposal to rename Kerala as Keralam reflects contemporary efforts to harmonise official nomenclature with native linguistic usage. The state legislature passed resolutions supporting the change, followed by Union Cabinet approval in 2026. The proposal is currently undergoing the constitutional process prescribed under Article 3.

VII. Is Changing the Name of a State Beneficial? – A Critical Analysis

7.1 Cultural and Linguistic Benefits (Primary Benefit)

The strongest benefit of a state name change lies in **cultural authenticity**.

1. Names like *Tamil Nadu*, *Karnataka*, *Odisha*, and the proposed *Keralam* reflect **native linguistic usage** rather than colonial or anglicised forms.
2. This strengthens **cultural identity, pride, and historical continuity**.
3. It corrects distortions introduced during colonial administration.

Example: “Odisha” aligns with the Odia language, unlike “Orissa,” which was a British transliteration.

Impact:

- a. Strengthens cultural legitimacy
- b. Enhances people's emotional attachment to the state

7.2 Political and Democratic Benefits

State name changes often arise from **popular or legislative demand**, making them an expression of democratic will.

1. validates regional aspirations,
2. reduces feelings of cultural marginalisation,
3. strengthens Centre–State trust.

Impact:

- a. Improves cooperative federalism
- b. Enhances political satisfaction at the state level

7.3 Administrative and Legal Clarity (Limited but Real)

In some cases, renaming improves **administrative clarity**.

1. A name that reflects the whole state (e.g., *Karnataka* instead of *Mysore*) avoids regional imbalance.
2. Aligns official documents, maps, and international references with correct terminology.

Impact:

- a. Long-term consistency in governance
- b. Reduced confusion in official and international usage

7.4 Symbolic De-colonisation

Many name changes represent a **break from colonial legacy**.

1. “United Provinces,” “Orissa,” and “Madras” were colonial constructs.
2. Renaming helps reclaim indigenous identity and historical narratives.

Impact:

- a. Psychological and symbolic assertion of sovereignty
- b. Reinforces post-colonial constitutional values

7.5 Economic Benefits? (Indirect and Limited)

Important:

There are **no immediate or guaranteed economic benefits**.

- Name changes do **not automatically increase investment, tourism, or development**.
- There are **short-term costs**, including:
 - updating signage,
 - official records,
 - stationery,
 - digital systems.

However, **indirect economic benefits** *may* occur if:

- A. The new name strengthens global recognition,
- B. branding aligns better with culture or tourism (e.g., heritage-based tourism).

7.6 Criticism and Limitations

Critics argue that:

- A. Name changes are **symbolic rather than substantive**.
- B. They may divert attention from urgent governance issues like employment, health, or infrastructure.
- C. The cost may outweigh tangible benefits if not accompanied by policy reforms.

This critique is valid and often raised in parliamentary debates.

7.7 Constitutional Perspective

From a constitutional viewpoint:

- A. The **benefit is not economic, but federal and democratic**.
- B. Article 3 enables states to **express identity within the Union**, even though Parliament retains final authority.
- C. The process itself strengthens constitutional participation.

VIII. Federalism and Centre-State Relations

The power to change state names highlights the quasi-federal character of the Indian Constitution. Parliament retains ultimate authority, while states participate through mandatory consultation. Critics argue that this arrangement undermines state autonomy by denying states a veto. However, proponents contend that it ensures national unity and administrative coherence while preserving a consultative federal process.

IX. Conclusion

The constitutional framework governing the change of names of states in India represents a carefully balanced blend of flexibility and federal consultation. Article 3, read with Article 4, enables Parliament to effect such changes through ordinary legislation while incorporating safeguards through presidential recommendation and state consultation. Historical and contemporary examples demonstrate the adaptability of this mechanism to evolving cultural, linguistic, and political realities.

The change of a state's name does not primarily yield economic advantages; rather, its significance lies in cultural recognition, democratic legitimacy, and symbolic de-colonisation. When driven by genuine public demand and implemented through constitutional procedure, a state name change can strengthen identity and federal harmony, though it must not be mistaken for a substitute for substantive governance reforms.

The ongoing proposal to rename Kerala as Keralam reaffirms the continued relevance of Article 3 as a living constitutional provision. Ultimately, the process reflects India's distinctive federal model, wherein unity and diversity coexist through structured yet flexible constitutional mechanisms.

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