

# INCLUSION OF THE WORD FRATERNITY IN PREAMBLE IS OF HISTORIC IMPORTANCE AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Indian Constitution - Features & Significant Provisions related to The Preamble, Union & its Territories and The Citizenship

Two months ago, Harsh Mander wrote in The India Forum of the significance of the word “fraternity” in our Constitution’s [Preamble](#). Reading the article nudged me to explore the story behind that word’s inclusion.

Scholars have long noted a few milestones in the history of India’s constitution-making. A major one was the 1931 “Fundamental Rights” resolution of the [Indian National Congress](#). Meeting in Karachi under the presidentship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Congress resolved that “any [future] constitution should include fundamental rights of the people such as freedom of association and combination, freedom of speech and press, freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion”.

Furthermore, the resolution added, such a constitution should prohibit discrimination against persons of any “religion, caste or creed in regard to public employment, office of power, and the exercise of any trade or calling” and should rule out any “civic bar on account of sex”.

It should assure “equal rights to all citizens of access to and use of public roads, public wells and all other places of public resort”. Also, the state was required, under the proposed constitution, to observe “religious neutrality”.

There is evidence that close collaboration between Gandhi and [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) produced the text of this consequential resolution, which Gandhi moved in Karachi in 1931. But it had the approval also of Patel and of everyone else who counted.

Subhas Chandra Bose, for example, played an active part at the Karachi session. Also present was Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and, we must assume, Abul Kalam Azad. Definitely present, too, in Karachi were the passionate spirits of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru, who had been hanged a few days earlier in Lahore.

The “constitution” resolution, as this Karachi resolution may also be called, was thus adopted during a landmark moment in our journey towards independence.

Another milestone on the journey to the Constitution was Ambedkar’s powerful 1936 text, Annihilation of Caste, where he wrote: “What is your ideal society if you do not want caste, is a question that is bound to be asked of you. If you ask me, my ideal would be a society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. And why not?”

In history’s light, it is thus Ambedkar who injects “fraternity” into India’s constitutional conversation.

Seven months before Independence, in January 1947, the Constituent Assembly passed its “Objectives Resolution”, which had been discussed from November 1946. This resolution declared: “All people of India shall be guaranteed and secured social, economic and political justice; equality of status and opportunities and equality before law; and fundamental freedoms — of speech, expression, belief, faith, worship, vocation, association and action...”

While these words bear a clear resemblance to the Preamble to come, they do not include the word “fraternity”.

Two weeks after Independence, on August 29, 1947, the Constituent Assembly appointed a Drafting Committee, with Ambedkar, the Law Minister in free India’s first cabinet, as chairman. A Draft Constitution prepared by this Drafting Committee was the basis for the Constituent Assembly’s deliberations on the Constitution.

The volumes entitled The Framing of India’s Constitution: Select Documents, edited by B Shiva Rao and available online, contain much information about the Drafting Committee’s work. Page 484 of Volume III of this series shows the word “fraternity” in the draft preamble for the first time, while providing minutes of the Drafting Committee’s meeting of February 6, 1948.

This date suggests that the inclusion of “fraternity” may have been connected to the assassination of [Mahatma Gandhi](#), which had occurred a week earlier.

Such a conclusion is strengthened by a letter that Ambedkar, writing as the Drafting Committee’s chairman, addressed on February 21, 1948, to Babu [Rajendra Prasad](#), president of the Constituent Assembly. In this letter, Ambedkar said:

“The [Drafting] Committee has added a clause about fraternity in the preamble, although it does not occur in the Objectives Resolution. The committee felt that the need for fraternal concord and goodwill in India was never greater than now and that this particular aim of the new Constitution should be emphasised by special mention in the preamble.” (p. 510 of The Framing Of India’s Constitution: Select Documents, Vol. III, edited by B. Shiva Rao (Digital Library of India Item 2015.278539).

If available, any record of discussions within the Drafting Committee that led to the inclusion of “fraternity” in the eventual Preamble might throw additional light on the inference that Gandhi may have contributed posthumously to it.

Nearly two years later, in his famous speech of November 25, 1949, to the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar would say: “Without fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint.”

As Mander has pointed out, the Hindi for fraternity, bandhuta, sounds more inclusive than male-centred “fraternity”. In any case, what the world’s present condition needs, namely bonding between humans, may be more important than the alphabet letters that make up “fraternity”.

***This article first appeared in the print edition on October 22, 2020 under the title “The answer is fraternity”. The writer teaches at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign***

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