



## REVIEW ARTICLE

## ECHOES FROM THE ASSEMBLY FORGOTTEN MINDS BEHIND THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

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## ABSTRACT

The Indian Constitution is often celebrated as a visionary document shaped by eminent leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Patel. However, this singular focus overshadows the critical yet underrecognized contributions of several other members of the Constituent Assembly. This paper aims to bring to light the "forgotten minds"—individuals whose intellectual, ideological, and emotional labor was instrumental in framing the Constitution but remain absent from mainstream historical discourse. Through a qualitative analysis of Constituent Assembly Debates, archival material, and scholarly literature, this study profiles figures such as Dakshayani Velayudhan, Hansa Mehta, Jaipal Singh Munda, K.T. Shah, and others. Their roles in advocating for social justice, gender equality, tribal rights, and economic equity underscore the plurality of ideas that shaped India's democratic foundation. The paper further explores the sociopolitical reasons behind their historical marginalization and argues for a more inclusive understanding of constitution-making. Recognizing these voices is not merely an act of remembrance, but a step towards reclaiming a fuller, more democratic historical narrative.

## KEYWORDS

Constitution, Constituent Assembly, India, Unsung Heroes, Forgotten Framers, Nation-building

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of India, adopted on 26 January 1950, is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant and elaborate democratic charters in the modern world. It is not merely a legal document but a transformative manifesto that seeks to ensure justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity to over a billion citizens of a post-colonial, pluralistic society (Austin, 1966). The Constitution laid the groundwork for India's political architecture and was envisioned as a living document capable of evolving with changing times, while safeguarding the democratic ethos and cultural heterogeneity of the nation.

The process of Constitution-making in India was unique in its scope and character. The Constituent Assembly of India, which first met on 9 December 1946, was tasked with the monumental responsibility of crafting a Constitution for a diverse country emerging from centuries of colonial rule, partition, socio-economic inequality, caste discrimination, and regional fragmentation. Over the course of eleven sessions spanning 165 days, 299 members debated and drafted the Constitution with a deep sense of responsibility and urgency, often drawing from global democratic experiences while remaining rooted in indigenous values and aspirations (Basu, 2012; Noorani, 2000).

In mainstream discourse, the Constitution's creation is often associated with a few towering personalities—most notably Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Dr. Ambedkar, as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, is celebrated as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. His incisive understanding of law, social justice, and democratic governance continues to influence generations of scholars and citizens (Jaffrelot, 2005). Pandit Nehru, through his visionary Objectives Resolution, laid the philosophical foundations for the Constitution, while Dr. Rajendra Prasad, as the President of the Assembly, skillfully presided over the debates, ensuring

procedural order and inclusive dialogue (Basu, 2012).

However, the glorification of these central figures, though deserved, often results in a flattened historical narrative, where the contributions of numerous other critical participants in the constitutional process are overlooked or reduced to footnotes. This selective memorialization undermines the plurality of voices and ideological diversity that actually characterized the framing of the Constitution. The constituent debates reflect that many underrepresented individuals—including women, Dalits, tribal leaders, regional voices, socialists, and linguistic minorities—made compelling and enduring contributions to the Constitution's spirit and substance (De, 2018).

For instance, Dakshayani Velayudhan, the only Dalit woman in the Assembly, spoke courageously on the abolition of untouchability and caste-based discrimination, bringing lived experience into constitutional debate (Rai, 2020). Hansa Mehta, a noted reformer and feminist, was instrumental in shaping the language of gender equality, challenging deeply rooted patriarchal structures. Her advocacy led to the replacement of the phrase "men are born free and equal" with "all human beings are born free and equal" in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which she ensured resonated within the Indian context as well (Forbes, 2005). K.T. Shah, a radical economist and legal thinker, persistently argued for the inclusion of terms like "Secular" and "Socialist" in the Preamble, years before they were officially inserted by the 42nd Amendment (Austin, 1966). Jaipal Singh Munda, representing the Adivasi communities, gave voice to tribal concerns, autonomy, and the importance of cultural preservation (Xaxa, 2005).

These individuals and many others engaged in deeply informed, courageous, and progressive interventions during the debates, yet their contributions remain largely absent in public memory, school curricula, and even scholarly texts. The reasons for their marginalization are

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manifold—ranging from post-independence political dynamics, lack of institutional documentation, caste and gender biases, and the elevation of dominant national narratives over subaltern perspectives (Chatterjee, 1997).

This paper seeks to critically revisit and recover the voices of these "forgotten minds" who helped shape India's constitutional democracy. Through a detailed examination of Constituent Assembly Debates, archival records, and contemporary academic scholarship, this research highlights their intellectual, political, and moral contributions. It also interrogates the mechanisms of historical erasure and proposes pathways toward a more inclusive and democratic historiography. Recognizing these contributors is not just about restoring individual legacies—it is about reimagining the democratic roots of the Republic of India in a more participatory, representative, and pluralistic light.

While the Constitution of India is widely admired for its progressive values and structural ingenuity, much of the national memory around its making has centered on a few iconic figures. This emphasis, although understandable given the monumental roles of personalities like B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, and Rajendra Prasad, has inadvertently led to the neglect of numerous other individuals whose participation and intellectual labor were no less significant. The popular and academic portrayal of the Constitution as the creation of a handful of great leaders has resulted in a historical flattening, wherein the complex plurality of voices and the collective nature of constitution-making have been diminished.

This marginalization is not accidental. It reflects deeper social and political dynamics, including the dominance of certain caste, gender, and ideological narratives in post-independence India. Many of the lesser-known members of the Constituent Assembly came from marginalized or underrepresented sections of society—Dalits, women, Adivasis, and regional leaders—whose social location often limited their visibility in elite-driven historical accounts. These contributors were not merely symbolic members; they were active participants who raised fundamental issues such as untouchability, tribal autonomy, gender rights, linguistic identity, and socio-economic justice. However, their contributions were rarely commemorated in official histories, memorials, or educational curricula.

The need to recover these forgotten voices is both a moral imperative and a scholarly necessity. Doing so helps us reframe the history of the Constitution as a truly participatory and representative project, and not simply the legacy of a few towering figures. It restores historical justice to individuals who challenged dominant norms within the Constituent Assembly and introduced transformative ideas that often anticipated the concerns of future generations. For example, Dakshayani Velayudhan, the only Dalit woman in the Assembly, courageously argued for the annihilation of caste and the protection of women's rights. Similarly, Hansa Mehta forcefully advocated for gender-inclusive language and policies, while K.T. Shah attempted to introduce terms such as "secular" and "socialist" into the Preamble well before they were formally adopted. Jaipal Singh Munda consistently spoke out for the rights of tribal communities, demanding recognition of their unique identity and historical suffering.

This paper seeks to critically explore and elevate such underrecognized contributions, examining their impact on the Indian Constitution and the reasons behind their marginalization in the historical record. By engaging with archival materials, including Constituent Assembly Debates (CADs), personal letters, and existing scholarly interpretations, the study aims to provide a more inclusive account of constitution-making in India. Rather than treating these individuals as peripheral figures, this paper situates them at the core of constitutional deliberation, emphasizing how their interventions shaped not only specific clauses but also the broader moral vision of the Indian Republic.

This inquiry is guided by an effort to understand the processes of historical erasure. It asks why certain names dominate our national memory while others, equally deserving, have faded into obscurity. It probes whether these exclusions were the result of post-independence political developments, elite historiography, or the larger social prejudices that continue to influence who gets remembered and who does not. In doing so, the paper contributes to ongoing debates about representation, recognition, and historical justice in democratic societies.

Ultimately, the objective is not to displace or diminish the roles of the more celebrated constitution-makers, but to widen the lens through which we understand the making of modern India. By giving voice to those who were silenced or sidelined, this study hopes to reclaim the constitutional legacy as a shared heritage—one that belongs not just to a few, but to the many who imagined, debated, and shaped a new nation from the ground up.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The making of the Indian Constitution has been the subject of extensive academic inquiry, legal commentary, and political reflection. Scholars have approached it from diverse perspectives—legal, historical, sociological, and philosophical. Among the earliest and most authoritative accounts is Granville Austin's seminal work, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (1966), which portrays the Constitution as a carefully balanced document that sought to achieve a "revolutionary" transformation through "democratic means." Austin's narrative largely centers on the consensus-building efforts of national leaders like B.R. Ambedkar, Nehru, and Patel, emphasizing their centrality in navigating India's transition from colonial rule to democratic self-governance. His interpretation has been foundational to constitutional scholarship, but it has also inadvertently contributed to a leadership-centric reading of history.

Subsequent studies, such as those by D.D. Basu and Subhash Kashyap, have focused on the constitutional provisions themselves and the roles of key committees and debates, often reinforcing the emphasis on major political figures. These texts have formed the bedrock of constitutional education in India, particularly in universities and legal institutions. While valuable in their own right, they rarely delve into the nuanced roles of less-celebrated members of the Constituent Assembly. In contrast, more recent interdisciplinary works have attempted to broaden the scope of inquiry. Rohit De's *A People's Constitution* in 2018, for instance, moves away from elite-centric frameworks by exploring how ordinary citizens engaged with constitutional law in the early years of the republic. Although De's work primarily focuses on post-Constitution India, it underscores the need to examine how democratic ideas were shaped and contested by a wider set of actors.

A growing body of feminist and subaltern scholarship has also begun to challenge the mainstream narrative. Scholars like Geraldine Forbes and Usha Ramanathan have drawn attention to the marginalization of women in nationalist and constitutional discourses. It highlights how female members of the Assembly, such as Hansa Mehta and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, were pioneers in advocating for gender rights, even though their names remain largely unacknowledged in conventional histories (Forbes, 2005). Similarly, in his work *Radical Equality*, offers a philosophical reinterpretation of Ambedkar's contributions while calling for a broader understanding of dissenting voices in the Assembly (Aishwary Kumar, 2015). These critical works suggest that the Indian Constitution was not a monolithic or uncontested product, but the result of intense ideological negotiation among a heterogeneous group of individuals.

Despite these valuable interventions, there remains a significant gap in the historiography concerning the full diversity of contributors to the Constitution. The Constituent Assembly Debates (CADs), running over twelve volumes, offer a rich archive of speeches and interventions by members from various backgrounds, but scholarly engagement with these voices has been uneven. For instance, Jaipal Singh Munda's articulate defenses of tribal autonomy and Dakshayani Velayudhan's appeals against untouchability appear in the debates but are seldom cited in legal or political discourse. This absence points to a broader issue within Indian historiography—the privileging of elite, urban, male, and upper-caste perspectives at the expense of marginal voices.

Historians like Partha Chatterjee have argued that nationalist and post-independence historiography has often reproduced the colonial habit of focusing on "great men," thereby excluding vernacular, minority, and gendered narratives from the mainstream story of the nation. The Constituent Assembly, despite being hailed as a representative body, is frequently remembered only through the lens of a few key figures. This selective remembrance not only distorts the collective nature of Constitution-making but also prevents a full appreciation of the democratic imagination that existed in the Assembly. While some recent efforts—such as curated online archives, academic conferences, and educational initiatives—have attempted to diversify the historical narrative, these remain fragmented and underdeveloped.

The existing literature on the making of the Indian Constitution is rich but uneven. It has succeeded in establishing the importance of constitutional democracy in India and celebrating a few architects of that vision, but it has fallen short of capturing the multiplicity of actors involved. A more inclusive historiography would acknowledge not only those who led but also those who questioned, resisted, contributed silently, or operated from the margins. This study positions itself within that critical gap, aiming to reconstruct a more comprehensive and democratic history of Constitution-making by drawing attention to the forgotten yet foundational voices of the Constituent Assembly.

Despite the abundance of scholarship on the Indian Constitution, a significant gap persists in the recognition and analysis of lesser-known

figures who were part of the Constituent Assembly. The dominant historiographical trend, as discussed earlier, has privileged narratives centered on a few towering personalities—primarily B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. While their contributions are undeniably monumental, this concentration of historical memory has marginalized the equally crucial roles played by other members of the Assembly—especially women, Dalits, Adivasis, and regional leaders—who engaged with the process with clarity, courage, and conviction. The neglect is particularly evident in the realm of public education and popular media, where school textbooks, documentaries, and national commemorations rarely mention figures like Hansa Mehta, Dakshayani Velayudhan, K.T. Shah, or Jaipal Singh Munda. Their absence from mainstream historical narratives is symptomatic of a broader exclusionary pattern in the construction of post-independence national identity.

This historical amnesia is not merely an academic oversight—it has real implications for how democracy is understood and practiced in India. When only a select few are remembered and celebrated, it distorts the collective nature of Constitution-making and denies citizens the opportunity to see themselves reflected in its origin story. Moreover, it reinforces structural hierarchies that historically marginalized groups have long struggled to dismantle. By failing to recognize the intellectual and political labor of these underrepresented contributors, we risk perpetuating the same silences that the Constitution itself sought to overcome.

The justification for focusing on the "forgotten minds" of the Indian Constitution stems from both normative and scholarly imperatives. First, from a normative standpoint, it is an act of historical justice—a necessary step in acknowledging the contributions of individuals who defied social constraints and institutional barriers to help build a democratic republic. Many of these figures—such as Dakshayani Velayudhan, the only Dalit woman in the Assembly, or Jaipal Singh Munda, who spoke eloquently for tribal dignity—brought perspectives rooted in lived experience, which enriched the debates far beyond abstract legalism. Their voices often represented the conscience of the nation at a critical historical juncture.

Second, from a scholarly standpoint, there is an urgent need to expand the analytical lens through which the Constitution is studied. By bringing these overlooked figures into focus, researchers can uncover alternative discourses on rights, justice, equality, and identity that were present at the founding moment but have since been lost to dominant narratives. Their speeches, proposals, and dissenting opinions—available in the Constituent Assembly Debates—offer a rich reservoir of constitutional imagination that challenges the binary of mainstream versus fringe. In doing so, they open up possibilities for reinterpreting constitutional principles in more inclusive, pluralistic terms.

Furthermore, exploring the contributions of these lesser-known figures enables a more intersectional analysis of the Assembly's work. It allows us to examine how gender, caste, region, language, and ideology intersected in the process of constitution-making. It also highlights the tensions and negotiations between competing visions of India—socialist versus capitalist, unitary versus federal, traditional versus modern, liberal versus communitarian. These complexities are often flattened in linear, hagiographic accounts of the Constitution.

In light of these considerations, this paper positions itself as an intervention in both historiography and democratic discourse. By recovering the voices of the "forgotten minds" of the Constituent Assembly, it seeks to contribute to a more inclusive, representative, and truthful understanding of how India's foundational document came into being. It argues that only by embracing the full diversity of contributors—both remembered and forgotten—can we truly appreciate the democratic spirit and pluralist vision embedded in the Indian Constitution.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative historical analysis as its primary methodological approach, aiming to reconstruct a more inclusive narrative of the Indian Constitution-making process by highlighting the roles of lesser-known contributors within the Constituent Assembly. Unlike quantitative methods that rely on statistical patterns or large datasets, qualitative historical analysis prioritizes contextual interpretation, textual examination, and narrative reconstruction, which are better suited to exploring under-documented, marginalized voices in political and constitutional history.

At the core of this methodology is a close reading of primary sources, most notably the Constituent Assembly Debates (CADs), which span twelve volumes and contain verbatim records of speeches, interventions, amendments, and dissenting opinions articulated by the Assembly's 299

members. These debates offer invaluable insight into the ideas, concerns, and ideological positions of various members—both prominent and obscure—on critical constitutional issues such as fundamental rights, minority protection, language policy, secularism, gender equality, and federalism. The CADs serve not only as a documentary record but also as a space of political imagination, where the vision of a newly independent India was actively constructed, challenged, and redefined.

In addition to the debates, the research draws upon government archives, committee reports, and official communications preserved in the Parliamentary Library, the National Archives of India, and digital repositories such as the Constitution of India Archive hosted by institutions like the Centre for Law and Policy Research (CLPR). These sources provide context to the drafting process, illuminate intra-committee deliberations, and shed light on the political affiliations, backgrounds, and motivations of the members involved.

The study also engages with a wide array of secondary literature, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and biographies that discuss the making of the Constitution. Works by Granville Austin, Rohit De, Usha Ramanathan, and others offer essential frameworks for understanding the legal and ideological dimensions of the Constitution, while feminist and Dalit scholarship helps identify those contributors whose voices have been systemically silenced in mainstream narratives. Where available, the research also utilizes personal letters, memoirs, and autobiographical accounts of the Constituent Assembly members to better understand their personal philosophies, social commitments, and the historical conditions under which they operated.

A critical component of the methodology is the selection criteria for identifying "forgotten contributors". This identification is based on a triangulated evaluation of frequency of reference in existing literature and textbooks, the substantive impact of their contributions in the debates or drafting process, and their post-independence recognition in academic, public, and governmental forums. For instance, contributors like Dakshayani Velayudhan, Hansa Mehta, K.T. Shah, and Jaipal Singh Munda were all vocal in the Assembly and made ideologically significant interventions—yet their names are scarcely mentioned in standard histories or public commemorations. This gap between contribution and recognition serves as the primary criterion for inclusion in the study.

The study adopts a context-sensitive lens, recognizing that marginalization in historical narratives is often shaped by structural inequalities relating to caste, gender, region, and class. Therefore, the analysis is not limited to formal interventions in the Assembly but also considers the symbolic significance of certain members' presence and the representational role they played for their communities. This interpretative flexibility allows the research to foreground both textual and contextual contributions to the Constitution.

In essence, this methodology seeks not only to recover lost voices but also to interrogate the processes of historical exclusion that have shaped our collective memory. Through archival engagement, textual interpretation, and critical historiographical inquiry, the research aspires to construct a more representative and democratized account of the making of the Indian Constitution.

#### 3.1 The Constituent Assembly: An Overview

The Constituent Assembly of India, which convened for the first time on 9 December 1946, played a foundational role in giving independent India its constitutional identity. Functioning over a period of nearly three years until 26 November 1949, it met for 11 sessions spread across 165 days, culminating in the adoption of one of the world's lengthiest and most detailed constitutions (Austin, 1966). The Assembly functioned not merely as a law-drafting body but as a space of intense ideological negotiation, where competing visions of nationhood, democracy, social justice, and federalism were debated and reconciled.

The original composition of the Assembly was shaped by the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, which proposed an indirectly elected body of 389 members, selected by provincial legislative assemblies. After Partition, which saw the withdrawal of many Muslim League representatives who chose to join Pakistan, the number of members was reduced to 299 (Basu, 2012). While the Congress party held a dominant position—occupying approximately 82% of the seats—the Assembly also included a variety of voices across ideological, regional, social, and religious spectra (Noorani, 2000). Members were largely educated elites—lawyers, professors, administrators, and activists—with deep roots in the Indian nationalist movement. However, despite the elite nature of its composition, the Assembly achieved a degree of diversity that was notable for its time.

The Assembly was organized into committees and sub-committees, each assigned specific tasks relating to constitutional structure, minority rights,

language, and governance. The most prominent among these was the Drafting Committee, chaired by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, which was constituted on 29 August 1947. Other important committees included the Union Constitution Committee (chaired by Jawaharlal Nehru), the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights and Minorities (chaired by Sardar Patel), and the States Committee (Basu, 2012). These committees submitted reports that formed the backbone of the constitutional text. The Assembly, despite political and communal tensions in the background, managed to deliberate with remarkable civility and purpose.

One of the most compelling aspects of the Assembly was its attempt—however limited—to include representation from India's vast and diverse society, particularly groups that had been historically excluded from political processes. Women, for example, were few in number—only 15 members out of 299—but their presence was symbolically and substantively significant. Among them were Hansa Mehta, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Durgabai Deshmukh, Renuka Ray, and Dakshayani Velayudhan. These women participated actively in debates on education, minority rights, health, and gender equality. Hansa Mehta, a reformist and a member of the Fundamental Rights Sub-Committee, was a strong advocate for gender-neutral language and was instrumental in shaping the early vision of equality in the Indian context (Forbes, 2005). Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, who later became the first Health Minister of India, passionately advocated for women's empowerment and public health reforms (Forbes, 2005).

Dalit representation, while still limited, was strengthened by the inclusion of prominent figures like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Dakshayani Velayudhan, the latter being the only Dalit woman in the Assembly. Velayudhan brought an important perspective to the debates on caste, particularly untouchability and social justice, drawing from her lived experience and community engagement (Rai, 2020). Ambedkar's role, as the principal architect of the Constitution, is well documented, but Velayudhan's contributions have been largely overlooked despite her thoughtful interventions on caste abolition and her calls for a just and humane society.

The representation of tribal communities, though minimal in number, was marked by the powerful presence of Jaipal Singh Munda, a tribal leader from the Chotanagpur region and a former Oxford-educated hockey captain. Munda brought the voice of the Adivasi people to the Assembly floor, repeatedly asserting their right to cultural autonomy, protection of land, and equitable development. In a powerful speech on 19 December 1946, Munda stated, "As a jungli, as an Adivasi, I am not expected to understand the legal intricacies of the Resolution. But my people... want to be treated as the equals of all other Indians" (CAD, Vol. I). His interventions emphasized that tribal communities were not relics of the past but vital constituents of the Indian democratic future (Xaxa, 2005).

Religious and linguistic minorities were also represented, though the trauma of Partition inevitably affected the quality and scope of their participation. Frank Anthony, representing the Anglo-Indian community, was a vocal proponent of minority rights, education, and secularism. Z.H. Lari, a Muslim member from Uttar Pradesh, continued to participate even after the League's withdrawal, advocating for communal harmony and religious freedoms. Their voices played a crucial role in shaping Articles 25 to 30, which deal with the rights of minorities to freely profess religion and manage cultural institutions (Noorani, 2000).

Regional diversity within the Assembly was another notable aspect. The presence of representatives from southern states like Madras, Travancore, and Hyderabad, as well as from the Northeast, Punjab, and Bengal, brought local concerns to the national stage. This was especially important in debates on language, state reorganization, and federalism. For instance, members from Madras Presidency expressed strong views on the language question, resisting the imposition of Hindi and advocating for linguistic equality (Ramaswamy, 1997).

While the Assembly was not elected through universal adult suffrage and was composed mostly of elite, English-speaking men, it still managed to include voices that challenged the dominant narrative. These subaltern and marginal voices, though numerically few, brought fresh perspectives, grounded in lived experience, to debates that were otherwise shaped by legal and philosophical abstraction. The fact that many of these contributions are now forgotten or obscured in public memory reflects more on the failings of post-independence historiography than on their actual significance.

The Constituent Assembly was a remarkable institution that, despite its limitations, created a space for diverse ideological and social inputs. Its structure allowed for a degree of pluralism, and its composition—though imperfect—reflected the aspiration to include all Indians in the process of nation-building. The current project seeks to re-examine that plurality, to

uncover those contributions that have been overshadowed, and to argue that the Indian Constitution was not the product of a few hands, but of a chorus of voices, many of whom still await proper recognition in the annals of Indian history.

### 3.2 Profiles of Forgotten Contributors

- **Dakshayani Velayudhan:** Dakshayani Velayudhan, the only Dalit woman in the Constituent Assembly, was born into a Pulayar family in Cochin, Kerala, and was one of the first Dalit women to be educated in British India. She held a B.A. in science and was trained as a teacher. A Gandhian in ideology, she was nominated to the Assembly to represent Scheduled Castes. Her interventions in the debates were bold and progressive, especially given the social constraints of her identity. She made passionate appeals for the abolition of untouchability, advocating for a Constitution that would uphold the dignity of all individuals, irrespective of caste. She supported Article 17, which abolished untouchability, and argued that merely legal abolition was insufficient without societal reform. Despite being the voice of an intersectionally marginalized community (Dalit and woman), her contributions have rarely been acknowledged in textbooks or national commemorations. Her quiet yet powerful presence was overshadowed by more prominent male Dalit leaders, such as B.R. Ambedkar, and a general neglect of women's roles in public discourse.
- **Hansa Mehta:** Hansa Mehta, a social reformer and educationist from Gujarat, was a leading advocate of women's rights. A follower of Gandhi and a former Vice-Chancellor of SNDT Women's University, she was also part of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. In the Constituent Assembly, she forcefully challenged patriarchal language in legal documents. She is particularly remembered for replacing the phrase "all men are born free and equal" with "all human beings," thereby ensuring gender neutrality in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In India, she advocated for a uniform civil code and equal rights for women in marriage, inheritance, and employment. Despite her international stature and pivotal role in pushing gender-sensitive language and policies, Hansa Mehta remains underrepresented in national narratives, overshadowed by her male contemporaries and by the lack of emphasis on feminist contributions to Constitution-making.
- **K.T. Shah:** K.T. Shah was an economist, professor, and a strong advocate of socialist principles. Educated in the London School of Economics, he was known for his radical views and consistent push for constitutional clarity on ideology. In the Constituent Assembly, Shah repeatedly proposed amendments to include the terms "secular," "socialist," and "federal" in the Preamble of the Constitution. Though these terms were not accepted then, many were later incorporated through the 42nd Amendment (1976). Shah also made significant contributions to the debates on fundamental rights and economic justice. His uncompromising stance and frequent dissent led to his marginalization. His vision was deemed too radical for the consensus-driven Assembly, and his legacy suffered due to his lack of political alignment with dominant parties.
- **T.T. Krishnamachari:** T.T. Krishnamachari, a businessman and Congress leader from Madras, brought a strong economic perspective to the Assembly's deliberations. He was not initially a member of the Assembly but was later nominated to assist the Drafting Committee after some members became inactive. Krishnamachari played a significant role in finalizing the financial provisions of the Constitution. He defended the Planning Commission model and laid the groundwork for fiscal federalism. He later served as India's Finance Minister and shaped economic policies in the Nehruvian era. Despite his administrative importance and economic foresight, his role during the Constitution-making process is often footnoted rather than foregrounded, possibly due to his association with post-constitutional economic governance rather than the foundational debates.
- **Jaipal Singh Munda:** Jaipal Singh Munda, born in a Munda tribal family in Jharkhand, was a scholar from Oxford and the captain of India's first Olympic gold-winning hockey team. He was the chief spokesperson for tribal interests in the Constituent Assembly. In his speeches, he eloquently articulated the historical injustices faced by Adivasis and demanded safeguards for tribal autonomy and culture. He was instrumental in the formulation of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, which deal with tribal areas and governance. Jaipal Singh's articulate representation of tribal rights remains a high point in the Assembly's history. Yet, his memory has been confined to tribal history rather than national constitutional history, reflecting a broader

marginalization of Adivasi voices.

- Rohini Kumar Chaudhury: A leader from Assam, Rohini Kumar Chaudhury represented the North-East, a region often overlooked in national narratives. A lawyer by training and a seasoned legislator, he was an advocate for educational reforms and minority rights. In the Assembly, he emphasized the need for equitable development in the North-Eastern frontier, raising concerns about underrepresentation, infrastructure, and cultural preservation. He spoke against the imposition of Hindi and was a strong voice for linguistic pluralism. Despite his forward-thinking approach to regional inclusion, Chaudhury's contributions have largely remained unrecognized outside academic and regional circles.
- Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a princess-turned-reformer from Kapurthala, was an ardent Gandhian and India's first Health Minister. A founding member of the All India Women's Conference, she was deeply involved in advocating for women's education and healthcare. In the Assembly, she consistently spoke on issues of health, sanitation, and women's rights. Her advocacy was central to the inclusion of health as a Directive Principle of State Policy (Article 47). She also championed the cause of eradicating child marriage and improving maternal care. Although her post-independence role is occasionally highlighted, her pivotal work in the constitutional phase remains under-emphasized in most standard historical texts.
- Govind Ballabh Pant: G.B. Pant, a senior Congress leader and Chief Minister of United Provinces, was a key figure in shaping the federal structure and language policy of the Constitution. As a member of several important committees, he worked behind the scenes to mediate between centralists and federalists. He was instrumental in laying the foundations of linguistic reorganization and played a critical

role in managing Hindi-English language tensions during the drafting process. His moderate and consensus-building approach helped steer complex issues to resolution. Pant's contributions were vital but understated, perhaps due to his preference for backroom negotiations over floor speeches. As a result, he is often remembered more for his administrative roles after independence than for his behind-the-scenes influence on the Constitution.

- Minoo Masani: Minoo Masani was a liberal economist, lawyer, and politician who later co-founded the Swatantra Party. In the Constituent Assembly, he served as a staunch advocate for individual liberty, parliamentary democracy, and economic freedom. Masani's contributions to debates on fundamental rights and freedom of expression were particularly noteworthy. He pushed for limitations on preventive detention and cautioned against excessive centralization of power. His libertarian vision often clashed with the socialist inclinations of the majority but added ideological depth to the debates. Despite his articulate voice and legal acumen, Masani's legacy was eclipsed by the dominant socialist and statist narrative that shaped early post-independence India.
- Naziruddin Ahmad: Naziruddin Ahmad was a barrister and legal expert from Bengal, known for his meticulous scrutiny of constitutional language. He participated extensively in the line-by-line reading of the draft Constitution, often proposing precise amendments to clarify legal ambiguities. While not a political heavyweight, Ahmad's role as a grammarian and legal perfectionist contributed significantly to the linguistic and structural coherence of the Constitution. His work was highly technical and often passed over in broader historical accounts. Ahmad's contributions remain uncelebrated largely because they lacked ideological drama, focusing instead on technical precision.

**Table 1: Key Contributors to the Indian Constitution**

Name	Background	Key Interventions	Clauses/Ideas Influenced	Reasons for Being Forgotten
Dakshayani Velayudhan	Dalit woman; teacher; Gandhian; Kerala	Abolition of untouchability	Article 17 – Abolition of Untouchability	Overshadowed by Ambedkar; caste and gender marginalization
Hansa Mehta	Social reformer; educationist; UN delegate	Gender equality; human rights advocacy	Gender-neutral phrasing; civil rights	Feminist legacy sidelined; overshadowed by male leaders
K.T. Shah	Economist; professor; LSE; socialist	Inclusion of "secular", "socialist" terms; economic rights	Preamble (later 42nd Amendment)	Radical views; dissent from consensus positions
T.T. Krishnamachari	Businessman; Finance Minister; Congress	Economic policy; Planning Commission; fiscal federalism	Financial provisions; economic planning	Known more for post-constitutional career
Jaipal Singh Munda	Tribal leader; Oxford scholar; sportsman	Tribal rights; autonomy; cultural protections	Fifth and Sixth Schedules	Confined to tribal discourse; Adivasi marginalization
Rohini Kumar Chaudhury	Lawyer; North-East legislator	Regional inclusion; education; language diversity	Minority protection clauses	Northeast neglect in mainstream history
Rajkumari Amrit Kaur	Princess; Gandhian; women's and health activist	Public health; women's rights	Article 47 – Health; Directive Principles	Overshadowed by ministerial career post-1950
G.B. Pant	Congress leader; CM, United Provinces	Federalism; language policy	Language compromise; federal balance	Behind-the-scenes role; remembered more for administrative work
Minoo Masani	Liberal lawyer; Swatantra Party co-founder	Fundamental rights; civil liberties	Freedom of expression; anti-preventive detention	Libertarian stance in socialist era
Naziruddin Ahmad	Barrister; legal editor	Precise legal drafting; amendment clarity	Technical refinement of constitutional language	Non-ideological contributions; less public recognition

In addition to the above, several other members of the 299-person Constituent Assembly deserve recognition. Begum Aizaz Rasul, the only Muslim woman in the Assembly, argued powerfully against separate electorates and promoted national integration. Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer, a distinguished lawyer from Madras, was a key member of the drafting committee and provided expert legal grounding to several constitutional provisions. Kanaiyalal Munshi, another member of the drafting committee, was central in shaping provisions related to culture and fundamental duties, though his contributions are rarely acknowledged. B. Pattabhi

Sitaramayya, T. Prakasam, and Hirday Nath Kunzru were among those who voiced strong opinions on religious freedom, the structure of federalism, and education, respectively.

Many of these individuals were marginalized in the collective memory due to a variety of reasons—ideological divergence from dominant political forces (particularly the Congress consensus), limited post-constitutional political careers, regional and caste-based biases, or the invisibility of technical contributions that lacked public appeal. The historiography of

the Indian Constitution, thus, reflects not only what was recorded but also what was forgotten or ignored.

The making of the Indian Constitution was not a solitary achievement of a few iconic leaders, but a collective intellectual labor of 299 individuals from diverse walks of life. Recognizing these "forgotten minds" helps us construct a more democratic and inclusive understanding of constitution-making. Their contributions—whether in gender justice, tribal autonomy, economic equity, legal precision, or federal balance—echo the pluralism that lies at the heart of Indian democracy. To remember them is not only a matter of historical justice but also a necessary step in preserving the integrity and spirit of the constitutional vision.

### 3.3 Analysis: Why Were They Forgotten?

The Indian Constitution, often described as a "living document," emerged from intense deliberation, negotiation, and intellectual labor by 299 members of the Constituent Assembly. While a few prominent names—Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel—have been consistently celebrated in political and academic circles, many others who made pivotal contributions have been largely forgotten. This amnesia is not merely an oversight but a result of systemic power dynamics, patriarchal bias, caste-based exclusion, and regional marginalization that continue to shape historical memory. Understanding why these contributors were forgotten allows us to interrogate the politics of historical remembrance and reclaim a more inclusive narrative of India's constitutional legacy.

#### 3.3.1 Power Politics and the Centralization of Fame

A key reason for the historical neglect of many contributors lies in the post-independence political centralization of fame and authority around a handful of figures. The consolidation of political capital by the Indian National Congress, and within it by charismatic national leaders like Nehru and Patel, meant that contributions of others were either subordinated to party leadership or assimilated without individual acknowledgment.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, by virtue of his leadership of the Drafting Committee and his identity as a Dalit intellectual, deservedly occupies a central place in the Constitution's narrative. However, others like K.T. Shah, Minoo Masani, and Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer—who had equally strong intellectual roles—were often ignored because they either dissented from the mainstream or lacked political mass appeal. Shah, for example, proposed the inclusion of the words "secular" and "socialist" in the Preamble as early as 1947. His suggestions, though rejected at the time, were eventually included through the 42nd Amendment in 1976. Yet, Shah is rarely credited in popular or academic retellings of this shift (Austin, 1999).

The structure of post-independence political narratives, especially under the Congress-dominated government, led to the creation of a selective memory that lionized certain leaders while rendering others invisible. This process mirrors what historian Ramachandra Guha (2007) describes as the "canonization of a few and forgetting of the many"—a tendency that simplifies history by personalizing collective achievements.

Furthermore, political capital after independence was accrued by those who remained visible in government. Figures like G.B. Pant and T.T. Krishnamachari, though they contributed intellectually to debates on federalism and economic planning, are remembered more for their ministerial roles than their foundational constitutional work. Those who exited public office, like Naziruddin Ahmad, faded from public consciousness despite offering rigorous legal clarity in the Assembly.

#### 3.3.2 Gender Bias in Historiography and Public Memory

Gender-based marginalization has played a significant role in erasing the constitutional contributions of women members of the Constituent Assembly. Though only 15 out of 299 members were women, their voices were strong, principled, and often far ahead of their time. Yet, mainstream historical narratives largely overlook their interventions, reflecting the deep-rooted patriarchal biases in both politics and historiography.

Hansa Mehta, a prominent feminist, educationist, and member of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, consistently advocated for gender equality and gender-neutral language in the Constitution. Her interventions contributed to the progressive phrasing of rights and citizenship, yet she remains largely forgotten in textbook accounts. Ironically, her global recognition—for replacing the phrase "All men are born free" with "All human beings are born free" in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—is more celebrated than her work in India's own constitutional framework (UN Women, 2014).

Similarly, Dakshayani Velayudhan, the only Dalit woman in the Assembly, addressed both caste and gender issues. In her speeches, she spoke

powerfully about untouchability and dignity, and supported the adoption of Article 17, which abolished untouchability. Despite these contributions, she is rarely acknowledged in studies of caste or gender in the Constitution. Historian Vina Mazumdar (1994) notes that women's participation in constitution-making is "often rendered as anecdotal rather than substantive," which reveals how women's roles are historically minimized, even when they speak from the very floor of the Assembly.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a royal-turned-Gandhian and staunch advocate for women's health and welfare, contributed to Directive Principles of State Policy, particularly Article 47, which urges the state to improve nutrition and public health. However, she is often remembered more as an administrator than a framer of constitutional principles. The framing of women's contributions as "supportive" rather than "strategic" is a reflection of how gendered lenses shape historical memory.

#### 3.3.3 Caste-Based and Tribal Marginalization

The historical marginalization of Dalit and Adivasi voices in constitutional historiography is part of a broader pattern of caste and ethnic exclusion in Indian society. Although Dr. Ambedkar's role is widely recognized, the broader collective labor of Dalit and tribal members of the Assembly is underrepresented.

Dakshayani Velayudhan, again, provides a crucial case. As a Dalit woman, her perspectives uniquely bridged two axes of marginalization. Yet, her legacy has been overshadowed by the dominant Ambedkarite narrative, which inadvertently leaves little space for other Dalit voices.

Jaipal Singh Munda, an Oxford-educated Adivasi leader and former Indian hockey captain, played a pivotal role in defending tribal autonomy and identity. He argued eloquently for cultural protection, self-governance, and land rights for tribal communities, which later found constitutional form in the Fifth and Sixth Schedules. In his famous speech on December 19, 1946, Singh said, "As a jungli, as an Adivasi, I am not expected to understand the legal intricacies of this Resolution, but my common sense tells me that every one of us should march in that common cause." (CAD, Vol. I, 1946). Yet, he remains absent in most school textbooks and even academic compilations on constitutional history.

Scholar Virginius Xaxa (2008) points out that tribal political figures are often seen only in relation to tribal identity, and not as national political actors. Their "compartmentalized visibility" means their contributions are deemed relevant only within the confines of 'tribal issues,' excluding them from the broader constitutional discourse.

#### 3.3.4 Regional Bias in Recognition and Documentation

Another reason many contributors were forgotten is regional marginalization, particularly those from the North-East, South India, and princely states. The postcolonial Indian narrative has long been Delhi-centric, giving prominence to voices from the Hindi-speaking heartland while marginalizing contributions from other linguistic and geographic regions.

Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, a lawyer and legislator from Assam, made crucial interventions regarding minority protections, educational rights, and language diversity. He vocally advocated for equitable representation of the North-East and minorities within the constitutional framework. However, his contributions are rarely cited outside specialist studies. As Sanjib Baruah (2003) notes, the Indian nation-building process treated the North-East as a "peripheral frontier," both geographically and ideologically. This peripherality extended into the national memory, erasing regional voices from the constitution-making saga.

Similarly, figures like Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer, a legal expert from the Madras Presidency and a member of the Drafting Committee, made foundational legal contributions—yet they are rarely recognized in the same breath as Ambedkar or Nehru. His precise legal acumen helped draft several Articles, but as a technocrat rather than a political orator, his work remained in the background.

The erasure of many significant contributors to the Indian Constitution is not a coincidental gap but a product of structural biases in historiography, shaped by power politics, patriarchy, casteism, and regional exclusion. These dynamics ensured that fame, recognition, and memorialization were reserved for a select few, often aligned with dominant narratives or post-constitutional political power.

Reclaiming the stories of these forgotten minds is essential not just for academic completeness but for ethical responsibility. It reminds us that the Constitution was the outcome of a collective endeavor, involving individuals who brought diverse experiences, identities, and ideologies into the constitutional discourse. Their contributions—though buried in

the footnotes of history—are foundational to the spirit of pluralism, justice, and democracy that the Constitution aspires to uphold.

### 3.3.5 Limited Access to Publishing and Media Coverage

A significant reason many contributors to the Indian Constitution faded into historical obscurity is the limited access they had to platforms of documentation, publishing, and media visibility, especially during the early decades of independent India. The print media, academic publishing, and official history writing of the time were largely controlled by elite, urban, and often upper-caste networks centered in Delhi, Bombay (now Mumbai), and Calcutta (now Kolkata). Contributors from tribal areas, marginalized castes, princely states, or non-Hindi-speaking regions rarely had the institutional support or journalistic access to document their ideas or experiences for broader public consumption.

Language barriers also played a role in historical erasure. Much of the early documentation of the Constitution-making process occurred in English, a language not accessible to all members, particularly those from rural or non-metropolitan backgrounds. Many members who spoke eloquently in the Assembly in Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, or Assamese did not receive the same academic or media traction as those who spoke in English. As Ornit Shani (2018) points out in her study of electoral list-making, many civil servants and public contributors who operated in regional languages played indispensable roles, yet were systematically overlooked in official archives and scholarly writing because their work was not recorded or published in English.

Furthermore, the post-independence decades did not witness robust efforts to democratize historical publishing. Biographies and memoirs of major leaders were often state-sponsored or institutionally supported. In contrast, figures like Jaipal Singh Munda or Rohini Kumar Chaudhury had limited access to publishing houses, historians, or publicists. Their ideas, though recorded in the Constituent Assembly Debates, were not widely disseminated or analyzed outside niche academic circles. Women and Dalit contributors, too, rarely had the means or encouragement to publish their reflections or autobiographies—tools that often cement public legacy.

The absence of visual media documentation such as archival films, documentaries, and radio interviews for many of these individuals further exacerbated their invisibility. Unlike Nehru, Patel, and Ambedkar—whose speeches were broadcast and whose images were regularly circulated—many lesser-known members of the Assembly lacked media representation, resulting in what cultural theorists call “archival silence.” Without images, interviews, or published writings, their public memory was gradually eroded.

### 3.3.6 Post-Independence Political Trajectories

Another decisive factor in the historical forgetting of certain constitutional framers lies in their post-independence political trajectory—or lack thereof. India’s post-1950 political scene rapidly evolved into a centralized, party-dominated democracy, with the Indian National Congress holding near-total hegemony for the first two decades. Those who did not align themselves with the dominant party, or who withdrew from politics, quickly lost political visibility and, by extension, historical relevance in the public eye.

Some individuals, such as K.T. Shah and Minoo Masani, took ideological stances that increasingly alienated them from the Congress consensus. Shah’s strong socialist proposals were seen as too radical, and his exclusion from post-Assembly politics made it easier for official histories to bypass his vision. Masani, who later co-founded the Swatantra Party, became a vocal critic of Nehruvian socialism. His advocacy for classical liberal values—such as free markets, limited government, and individual liberty—was at odds with the ideological tone of early Indian socialism and was therefore underplayed in state-sponsored narratives (Austin, 1999).

Others, like Dakshayani Velayudhan, chose not to pursue a long political career after the Constitution was adopted. Although she served as a Member of Parliament for a brief period, her limited political visibility and her focus on grassroots social work meant that her voice did not remain prominent in the political arena. Similarly, Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, after participating actively in the constitutional process, returned to regional politics with limited national exposure, resulting in a loss of central recognition.

Conversely, those whose careers flourished after 1950 often found their constitutional roles blurred or rebranded. For example, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur’s work in public health as independent India’s first Health Minister overshadowed her significant contributions to the framing of Directive Principles. G.B. Pant, known widely for his administrative role as the Chief

Minister of Uttar Pradesh and later as Home Minister, is remembered more as a statesman than a constitution-maker. Thus, post-constitutional careers often rewrote or obscured the nature of their participation in the Assembly itself.

Moreover, contributors who passed away early or lived in political retirement were especially vulnerable to being forgotten. Without ongoing political roles, party affiliation, or public institutions to safeguard their legacies, there was no institutional mechanism to preserve or celebrate their contributions. Their stories remained locked in the Constituent Assembly Debates—archival documents seldom read by the general public or cited in school curricula.

The marginalization of key contributors to the Indian Constitution cannot be explained by historical accident or apolitical oversight. It is the outcome of deliberate and structural exclusions, reinforced by hierarchies of power, media access, publication resources, and political continuity. From language-based barriers to ideological non-conformity, from caste and gender marginalization to regional neglect, the historical forgetting of these framers represents the silencing of alternative imaginations that coexisted in the making of modern India.

To reinsert these voices into constitutional memory is not merely a symbolic act of remembrance. It is an epistemological correction—a way to reclaim the full plurality of India’s founding ideas. These forgotten framers—many of whom fought for justice, inclusion, and federal balance—embodied a vision that was often more progressive, more radical, and more grounded in lived experience than the dominant narrative allows. Their legacy belongs not just in footnotes but in the very heart of India’s democratic story.

## 4. IMPACT OF THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

While India’s Constitution is frequently hailed as a visionary document, this vision was never the product of a few towering individuals alone. Behind the iconic names that dominate public memory stood a diverse group of intellectuals, reformers, social workers, regional leaders, tribal spokespersons, and women’s rights advocates whose contributions were vital to the depth and democratic inclusiveness of the Constitution. Their interventions laid the groundwork for many of the rights, protections, and institutional values we consider fundamental today. However, because of systemic erasure, their legacies remain scattered, underexplored, and often reduced to footnotes. An expansive understanding of their contributions reveals not only the richness of India’s constitutional ethos but also underscores the missed opportunities that emerged from their underrepresentation in subsequent political and academic discourse.

### 4.1 Shaping Constitutional Values and Provisions

Several lesser-known members of the Constituent Assembly introduced and supported ideas that found direct expression in the Constitution’s articles, schedules, and preamble, particularly concerning social justice, civil liberties, gender equality, tribal rights, and legal coherence.

- Dakshayani Velayudhan, the first and only Dalit woman in the Constituent Assembly, offered a moral and ideological counterpoint to caste hierarchies from within the system. Her insistence on dignity over tokenism helped reinforce Article 17, which abolished untouchability. Her speeches reflected not just legislative insight but lived experience. She argued: *“I do not want to be governed as a ‘harijan’. I want to be governed as an Indian.”* This powerful statement asserted her claim to equal citizenship—an assertion that resonated with Ambedkar’s call for constitutional morality.
- Hansa Mehta was a prominent voice for gender justice. As a member of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights and a global advocate of women’s rights, she was instrumental in pushing for gender-neutral language in constitutional text. Her efforts impacted the phrasing and interpretation of Articles 14–16, which deal with equality before the law, prohibition of discrimination, and equal opportunity. Without her influence, these articles may have been phrased through a male-default lens, undermining the spirit of inclusion.
- Jaipal Singh Munda, representing the tribal communities of central and eastern India, passionately advocated for indigenous rights, land security, and cultural autonomy. His inputs led to the creation of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, which institutionalized the autonomy of tribal regions through self-governance provisions. His argument that Adivasis needed “constitutional protection, not charity” continues to echo in modern debates over tribal displacement and environmental justice.
- K.T. Shah, a socialist economist, though frequently in the minority,

constantly challenged the Drafting Committee to make India's founding document more ideologically explicit. His early proposals to include the words "secular", "socialist", and "republic" in the Preamble—even though rejected then—formed the basis of later additions through the 42nd Amendment in 1976. Shah's warnings about the dangers of ambiguous phrasing foretold the ideological and judicial conflicts that would later test India's constitutional resilience.

- Minoos Masani contributed robustly to debates on civil liberties and economic freedom. He opposed preventive detention laws and emphasized the protection of individual rights, often drawing from global liberal traditions. In a climate increasingly oriented towards state-led socialism, his minority voice was critical in keeping the spirit of dissent alive within constitutional discourse.
- Naziruddin Ahmad's legal precision and focus on drafting clarity often went unnoticed in ideological battles, but his insistence on refined language ensured that many articles had semantic and legal consistency, reducing room for misinterpretation and judicial ambiguity. His contribution reflects the invisible yet invaluable work of technical framers in any constitutional enterprise.

#### 4.2 Long-Term Democratic Legacy

Even though these framers did not dominate public narratives, the principles they championed have become integral to India's democratic infrastructure. Over time, their ideas have influenced:

- **Judicial interpretation:** Many of their concerns and framings—particularly around equality, liberty, and non-discrimination—have shaped Supreme Court rulings. For instance, the Court's interpretation of Article 21 (Right to Life) to include privacy, dignity, and environmental protection reflects the expansive vision that many of these framers shared.
- **Policy formulation:** The Fifth and Sixth Schedules, advocated by Jaipal Singh Munda, became the basis for later protective legislations like the PESA Act (1996) and the Forest Rights Act (2006), which recognized the customary rights of Adivasi communities over forest lands.
- **Gender-sensitive governance:** Hansa Mehta and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur laid the moral foundation for gender-focused public policies, including maternal health, education for girls, and nutrition programs. Rajkumari's emphasis on Article 47 of the Directive Principles, which advocates raising nutrition and public health, is reflected in the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and National Health Mission.
- **Federal principles:** G.B. Pant and Rohini Kumar Chaudhury's work on language policy and minority protections supported a vision of India as a plural federal democracy, which is being increasingly referenced in debates over linguistic diversity, regional autonomy, and multilevel governance.
- **Rights-based movements:** Masani's critique of preventive detention and K.T. Shah's push for economic justice now resonate strongly with modern civil society movements challenging surveillance, sedition laws, and economic inequality. The liberal-conservative tension present in the Assembly is mirrored in present-day ideological contests.

#### 4.3 Missed Opportunities Due to Underrepresentation

While these contributions shaped many parts of the Constitution, systemic underrecognition of their voices led to several missed opportunities that continue to impact Indian democracy.

- **Adivasi marginalization:** Jaipal Singh's nuanced understanding of tribal identity went far beyond legal protections; he envisioned a bottom-up model of tribal self-rule. However, his vision was diluted over time, as top-down bureaucratic models took precedence. This has led to continued alienation, insurgency, and development-displacement conflicts in tribal areas—issues that a stronger implementation of his vision might have preempted.
- **Gender justice:** Hansa Mehta's push for uniform civil rights for women was undercut by political compromises in favor of personal law systems, which left gender justice fragmented and incomplete. As a result, battles over women's autonomy, marital rape, and inheritance rights are still being fought decades later.
- **Secularism and socialism as political tools:** K.T. Shah's insistence on defining India's ideological character early on was dismissed. When secularism and socialism were finally inserted into the Preamble during the Emergency—a period of curtailed freedoms—they were viewed with suspicion rather than democratic consensus, weakening

their normative legitimacy.

- **Liberal democratic balance:** Minoos Masani's warnings about state authoritarianism and preventive detention were not heeded. Laws such as the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) during the Emergency and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) today reflect how the absence of a strong liberal lobby within foundational politics created space for unchecked executive power.
- **Regional imbalance:** Figures like Rohini Kumar Chaudhury raised concerns about the integration and inclusion of Northeastern and linguistic minorities. The failure to act on these early warnings led to linguistic riots, alienation, and calls for secession—conflicts that could have been avoided had regional voices been meaningfully included in governance frameworks.

#### 4.4 Symbolic and Educational Erasure

Another significant impact of underrecognizing these figures is the symbolic erasure of diversity from the popular imagination of constitution-making. School textbooks, public commemorations, and national celebrations of Republic Day routinely focus on 3–5 figures, ignoring the rich gender, caste, regional, and ideological diversity that defined the Constituent Assembly.

This symbolic erasure limits civic education and creates a distorted understanding of democracy as the product of a few rather than the collective effort of many. If students only learn about Ambedkar, Nehru, and Patel—without hearing about Velayudhan, Mehta, Munda, Shah, Masani, or Ahmad—they inherit a centralized and homogenized image of India's democratic birth, contrary to its actual pluralistic foundations.

The forgotten contributors to the Indian Constitution were not peripheral figures; they were pioneers of ideas that remain central to India's constitutional and democratic framework. Their voices—rooted in lived realities and ideological clarity—challenged the elite consensus and broadened the Constitution's moral imagination. The long arc of Indian democracy continues to draw strength from their visions—even when their names are rarely recalled.

Recognizing their impact is not an act of nostalgia but of democratic recovery. In an era when democratic values are under stress, revisiting the plurality of India's constitutional moment can reinvigorate our collective understanding of justice, equality, and freedom. As educators, scholars, and citizens, we must re-inscribe these names into our syllabi, memorials, debates, and public consciousness. The strength of a democracy is not only measured by whom it remembers, but also by whom it chooses no longer to forget.

### 5. RELEVANCE TODAY

The Constitution of India is not merely a legal document—it is the moral and philosophical foundation upon which the Republic rests. However, its creation is often narrated through the contributions of a select few: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and a handful of others. While their roles were undoubtedly central, this narrow focus has overshadowed the equally vital inputs of other members of the Constituent Assembly, particularly those from marginalized caste groups, tribal communities, regional peripheries, and feminist backgrounds.

In today's context—marked by political polarization, caste tensions, gender-based violence, tribal alienation, and growing apathy toward constitutional values—the stories of these "forgotten minds" have renewed relevance. Recognizing and reintegrating their contributions is not simply a historical exercise; it is a democratic imperative. Their inclusion in our narratives, textbooks, and institutions can foster constitutional literacy, participatory citizenship, and equitable nation-building.

#### 5.1 Importance of Inclusive Historiography: Resisting Erasure, Recovering Plurality

Mainstream historiography in India has long privileged the elite—upper-caste, urban, male voices—while marginalizing the intellectual labor of those who did not conform to the dominant social order. This pattern of selective remembrance has created an incomplete picture of India's constitutional history, one that neglects the intellectual heterogeneity and regional diversity of the Assembly.

The need for inclusive historiography lies in its ability to:

- **Resist monolithic narratives:** By reclaiming voices like Dakshayani Velayudhan and Jaipal Singh Munda, we present a more democratic account of India's founding—one that recognizes the Constitution as a product of multiple traditions: tribal, Dalit, socialist, feminist, liberal,

and nationalist.

- Deconstruct ideological binaries: The inclusion of both socialist thinkers like K.T. Shah and liberal democrats like Minoo Masani challenges the simplistic binary of Nehruvian socialism vs. right-wing nationalism and reveals a richer ideological debate within the Assembly.
- Recognize silenced knowledge systems: Figures like Jaipal Singh Munda brought indigenous worldviews and oral political traditions into constitutional discourse—an aspect ignored by textual-centric histories. Inclusive historiography recognizes these alternate epistemologies.
- Acknowledge intersectional identities: Women like Hansa Mehta were not just feminists but also international diplomats, educators, and political thinkers. Overlooking their multifaceted identities does a disservice to the layered nature of their contributions.

Thus, inclusive historiography not only corrects historical injustice but also broadens our collective moral imagination by giving us a fuller understanding of the ethical and ideological debates that shaped the nation.

## 5.2 Implications for Civic Education, Textbooks, and National Memory

How we educate our children shapes how they see their nation—and themselves. Unfortunately, Indian school curricula often conflate constitutionalism with a handful of leaders, presenting the process of nation-building as the work of a few rather than the collective endeavor of 299 Assembly members from varied walks of life.

This has far-reaching consequences:

- **Narrow Civic Imagination:** When students repeatedly see only male, upper-caste, North Indian, or Anglophone leaders, they unconsciously absorb a message about who qualifies as a “nation builder.” This fosters civic alienation among students from tribal, Dalit, regional, and minority backgrounds.

For example:

- Jaipal Singh Munda is barely mentioned in NCERT textbooks, despite his role in shaping tribal autonomy.
- Dakshayani Velayudhan, a Dalit woman advocating for anti-discrimination laws, is absent from discussions on caste justice.
- Hansa Mehta, who influenced gender language in both the Indian Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is largely ignored in both global and Indian curricula.
- **Weak Constitutional Literacy:** When education simplifies constitution-making to a few biographical highlights, it robs learners of a deeper understanding of constitutional values such as secularism, justice, liberty, and federalism. Students don't learn that these were contested ideas, debated fiercely, and won through the intellectual labor of diverse contributors.
- **Incomplete National Memory:** Public memory is constructed not only through textbooks but also through media, national celebrations, statues, currency, and naming of institutions. The lack of representation of forgotten framers in these public symbols reinforces the perception that some identities matter more than others in the story of India.

## 5.3 Suggestions for Curricular and Institutional Reform: Toward Constitutional Pluralism

To address the above challenges, India needs a multi-layered reform across educational, institutional, and cultural platforms. The goal must be not only to remember these contributors but also to institutionalize their presence in national consciousness.

### 5.3.1 Education System and Curriculum Reforms

- NCERT and State Textbook Overhauls:
  - Include case studies and profiles of lesser-known framers.
  - Introduce debate-based exercises where students analyze different ideological positions from Constituent Assembly Debates.
  - Add comparative perspectives, such as the role of Hansa Mehta in both national and international constitutionalism.

- Constitution Clubs in Schools:
  - Establish Constitution Clubs that organize role-plays of Assembly debates.
  - Host annual “Forgotten Framers Day” events focusing on diverse framers by region, gender, and ideology.

- Higher Education Modules:
  - University courses on “Alternative Constitutional Histories” or “Marginalized Voices in Indian Nation-Building.”
  - Support thesis and dissertation work on lesser-known Assembly members through UGC and ICSSR grants.

### 5.3.2 Institutional and Policy-Level Reforms

- Civic Engagement through Government Bodies:
  - Encourage the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture to sponsor public exhibitions, digital archives, and museum spaces highlighting all 299 Assembly members.
  - Promote local governance bodies to name streets, institutions, and awards after regional framers.

- Digital Access and Public Broadcasting:
  - Create a dedicated YouTube channel and web archive titled *Voices of the Constitution*, featuring animated explainers, short documentaries, and translated excerpts from Constituent Assembly Debates.
  - Partner with Doordarshan and AIR to produce radio and TV segments on forgotten framers.

- Cultural Outreach:
  - Commission children's books, comics, and school plays on framers like Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Naziruddin Ahmad, and Rohini Kumar Chaudhury.
  - Use folk theatre and regional storytelling forms to narrate contributions of Assembly members from tribal and linguistic minority regions.

In a time when democratic institutions are under stress, constitutional values are contested, and identity politics dominate discourse, returning to the plural roots of the Indian Constitution can act as a unifying force. Remembering the forgotten framers is not about diminishing the contributions of Ambedkar or Nehru—it is about expanding the canvas to reflect the full diversity of India's democratic imagination.

A Constitution made by 299 minds deserves a memory that reflects 299 names—not just five. By reclaiming their voices, we do not merely honor the past—we shape a future that is more just, more inclusive, and more truly constitutional.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Indian Constitution stands as one of the most progressive legal documents in the world—a living testament to the country's commitment to justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. It is frequently celebrated as the crowning achievement of visionary leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, and Rajendra Prasad. While their contributions are undeniably significant, this singular focus has inadvertently narrowed the public's understanding of the collective and contested nature of constitution-making. This paper has sought to challenge this narrowed narrative by bringing into focus the “forgotten minds” of the Constituent Assembly—individuals whose ideological foresight, moral courage, and lived experiences added enormous depth to the constitutional project, but who have largely been marginalized by the power structures of history.

These voices—of Dakshayani Velayudhan, the only Dalit woman in the Assembly; Hansa Mehta, a global advocate for gender justice; Jaipal Singh Munda, a proud Adivasi who envisioned autonomy and dignity for tribal communities; K.T. Shah, the fierce critic of economic inequality; and Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, a representative of the Northeast—remind us that the Constitution was not merely written, but argued, debated, and co-authored across ideological, regional, caste, class, and gender lines. The democratic values enshrined in the document today—be it untouchability abolition (Article 17), tribal autonomy (Fifth and Sixth Schedules), gender equality (Articles 14–16), or secular ideals in the Preamble—bear the indelible imprint of their intellect and intervention.

Yet, the historical record has often been unkind. These figures were forgotten not due to the insignificance of their contributions, but because of structural inequalities—gender bias, caste hierarchies, regional marginalization, ideological sidelining, and limited media access. The centralization of fame around a few political figures was not just an outcome of historical circumstances but also a result of deliberate historiographic choices. As a consequence, entire generations of Indians have grown up with a partial and exclusionary version of the making of their democracy.

In the current climate—where debates over citizenship, dissent, minority rights, and the limits of state power are more intense than ever—rediscovering these voices offers critical insights and moral anchoring. The stories of these forgotten framers can serve as a compass in turbulent times, reminding us of the foundational debates on inclusion, autonomy, liberty, and justice. Their arguments were not confined to the moment of 1946–1950; they continue to echo in courtrooms, classrooms, parliaments, and protest sites across the country.

Reaffirming their place in constitutional memory is also an act of historical justice. Justice is not merely a principle to be applied to laws and policies—it is a principle that must also guide the writing and telling of history. Recognizing these framers means restoring them to their rightful place in the public consciousness, honoring their democratic labor, and ensuring that India's foundational history reflects the diversity of its people.

Moreover, this remembrance is a powerful tool of nation-building. Collective memory is not just an archive of facts; it is a moral landscape through which citizens understand their rights, duties, and sense of belonging. If our national memory remains exclusionary, our civic identity becomes shallow and hierarchical. By integrating the stories of these framers into our textbooks, cultural institutions, public discourse, and academic research, we can build a stronger and more inclusive civic consciousness—one that empowers all communities to see themselves as co-owners of the Indian Republic.

Reclaiming the forgotten minds behind the Constitution is not a backward-looking exercise—it is a forward-looking responsibility. It is about renewing our faith in the democratic experiment by remembering that it was born not from uniformity, but from dialogue, dissent, and diversity. These framers dreamed of a Republic where the voices from the margins would have as much weight as those from the center. In remembering them, we do not merely honor the past—we enrich the present and prepare the future.

Let this act of historical recovery be not just a tribute, but a call to action—for educators, policymakers, historians, students, and citizens alike—to reclaim, retell, and reinvigorate the full story of India's constitutional soul.

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