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# Kerala to Keralam — How India Renames a State

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# Kerala to Keralam — How India Renames a State

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## WHY IN NEWS

The Union Cabinet approved renaming the state of Kerala as “Keralam”, initiating the constitutional process to amend the First Schedule of the Constitution. The change reflects the traditional Malayalam name and follows a 2023 resolution by the Kerala Legislative Assembly.

## THE CONSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM FOR RENAMING A STATE

India’s Constitution places the power to alter a state’s name squarely with **Parliament**, not the state concerned. This may seem counterintuitive — surely a state should name itself — but reflects the framers’ design of a union where Parliament acts as the ultimate arbiter of the federal map.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

*Parliament may by law— (a) form a new State by separation of territory from any State or by uniting two or more States or parts of States or by uniting any territory to a part of any State; (b) increase the area of any State; (c) diminish the area of any State; (d) alter the boundaries of any State; (e) **alter the name of any State.***

The critical procedural aspect is the **proviso to Article 3**: before Parliament passes such a bill, the **President must refer the bill** to the legislature of the affected state for its opinion. Parliament is **not bound** by that opinion — it may or may not accept the state’s view — but the reference is mandatory.

## WHAT REQUIRES AMENDMENT UNDER ARTICLE 368?

The **First Schedule** to the Constitution lists the names of all States and Union Territories. Since renaming a state requires updating this schedule, a **constitutional amendment** is technically needed.

However, renaming via Article 3 is treated as a **simple-majority bill** (ordinary legislation), not a **special majority bill** under Article 368. The Supreme Court has interpreted that the First Schedule amendment consequent to an Article 3 action follows the procedural requirements of Article 3 (simple majority + Presidential reference to state), not the rigorous Article 368 route (two-thirds majority + ratification by half the state legislatures).

This distinction matters: a constitutional amendment under Article 368(2) requires:

**Two-thirds majority** of members present and voting in each House

**Absolute majority** (majority of total membership) of each House

**Ratification by legislatures of not less than one-half of the States** (for specified provisions)

For a simple Article 3 renaming, none of these stricter conditions apply.

## “KERALA” VS. “KERALAM” — THE LINGUISTIC ARGUMENT

The name discrepancy between how Malayalees pronounce their state’s name and how it is officially written in English (and Hindi) traces to the era of post-independence state reorganisation.

In **Malayalam**, the state is called “**Keralam**” (കേരളം) — the terminal “m” (*anusvara/visarga* equivalent) is an inherent part of the word’s morphological structure

The **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**, which created Kerala from the former Travancore-Cochin state and the Malabar district of Madras, adopted the Anglicised form “**Kerala**” — dropping the terminal nasal

Similar drops occurred for other states: “Tamilnadu” vs. “Tamil Nadu”, “Panjab” vs. “Punjab” — though the latter’s official spelling is Punjab

The Kerala government’s position: the Anglicised form creates a mismatch between the state’s name in its own official language and its name in constitutional law

The change to “Keralam” would bring the English constitutional name in alignment with the Malayalam official name.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND — HOW KERALA WAS FORMED

**Kerala** as a state came into existence on **November 1, 1956**, under the **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**, based on the recommendations of the **States Reorganisation Commission (SRC)** led by **Fazl Ali, H.N. Kunzru, and K.M. Panikkar**. It merged:

**Travancore-Cochin** (already a state since 1949, combining the former princely states of Travancore and Cochin)

**Malabar district** of the Madras State (which had been under British administration)

**Kasaragod taluk** of South Kanara district

The reorganisation was primarily on linguistic lines — **Malayalam-speaking** areas — making Kerala one of India’s most linguistically homogeneous states (with ~97% of the population speaking Malayalam as their first language).

**November 1** is celebrated annually as **Kerala Piravi** (Birth of Kerala) — the state’s formation day.

## PREVIOUS RENAMING PRECEDENTS IN INDIA

Several states and union territories have been renamed through the Article 3 process:

Previous Name	New Name	Year
Madras	Tamil Nadu	1969
Mysore	Karnataka	1973
Uttaranchal	Uttarakhand	2007
Orissa	Odisha	2011
Pondicherry	Puducherry	2006

In all these cases, the process involved a state legislative resolution, Presidential reference, and parliamentary legislation — the same route Kerala/Keralam now follows.

**Bombay** → **Maharashtra** (1960) and **Madras city** → **Chennai** (1996) represent different processes — the former was state formation (not renaming), and the latter was a city rename (not a constitutional state rename).

## UPSC RELEVANCE

*Article 3 (alter state name), First Schedule, Article 368, States Reorganisation Act 1956, States Reorganisation Commission (Fazl Ali Commission), Kerala Piravi (November 1), Constitutional amendment procedure. **Mains GS-2:** Centre-State relations; federalism and parliamentary power over state territories; linguistic reorganisation of states. **Interview:** “Does India’s federal structure give states adequate autonomy over their own identity? What does the Article 3 procedure reveal about Indian federalism?”*

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

### KERALA → KERALAM RENAMING:

Constitutional authority: **Article 3** (Parliament may alter a state's name)

Schedule affected: **First Schedule** of the Constitution

Amendment type: Simple majority (NOT Article 368 special majority)

Mandatory step: President must refer bill to **state legislature for opinion** (but Parliament not bound by it)

Kerala Assembly renaming resolution: **2023**

Linguistic basis: Malayalam name “Keralam” (കേരളം) — terminal “m” is morphologically correct

### ARTICLE 3 — COMPLETE POWERS:

Form new State (separation/union of territories)

Increase or diminish area of any State

Alter boundaries of any State

**Alter the name of any State**

Bill introduced only on Presidential recommendation

### ARTICLE 368 — SPECIAL MAJORITY REQUIREMENTS (NOT NEEDED FOR ART. 3):

2/3 majority of members present and voting in each House

AND absolute majority of total House membership

AND ratification by ≥ half the state legislatures (for federal provisions)

### KERALA'S FORMATION:

Date: **November 1, 1956** (Kerala Piravi)

Act: **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**

Commission: **Fazl Ali Commission** (States Reorganisation Commission)

Components: Travancore-Cochin + Malabar (from Madras) + Kasaragod taluk

Language basis: **Malayalam**-speaking areas

### STATE RENAMING PRECEDENTS:

Madras → **Tamil Nadu** (1969)

Mysore → **Karnataka** (1973)

Uttaranchal → **Uttarakhand** (2007)

Orissa → **Odisha** (2011)

Pondicherry → **Puducherry** (2006)

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

States Reorganisation Commission members: **Fazl Ali** (Chairman), **H.N. Kunzru**, **K.M. Panikkar**

Language basis for state reorganisation: **Dhar Commission** (1948) first examined; **JVP Committee** (Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, 1949) initially opposed; finally accepted after **Andhra agitation** (Potti Sriramulu's fast unto death, 1952) and creation of Andhra State (1953)

India currently has: **28 States + 8 Union Territories**

Hindi version of “Kerala” in Constitution was already spelled “Keral” (without terminal “a”) — closer to the Malayalam form

Sources: The Hindu, PIB

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