

Constituent Assembly of India, Members, Timeline, Chairman

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Constituent Assembly of India was a special body formed in November 1946 under the Cabinet Mission Plan to draft the Constitution of India. It held its first meeting on December 9, 1946, and completed its historic work in two years, eleven months, and seventeen days.

Constituent Assembly of India played a crucial role in drafting the **Indian Constitution**, ensuring it reflected the nation's diverse cultural, social, and political fabric. Led by prominent figures like Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Assembly engaged in comprehensive debates on federalism, fundamental rights, and governance, shaping the document's core principles.

Constituent Assembly About

The Constituent Assembly of India is an institution specifically conceived to design or amend a Constitution, with the authority to establish the norms that govern the political and social framework of a territory. In India, the Constituent Assembly was formed in November 1946 under the Cabinet Mission Plan (1946) as a partly elected and partly nominated body.

- **First Meeting:** It convened for the first time on December 9, 1946, to draft and formulate the Constitution of India, seen as essential for implementing self-determination.
- **Provisional Parliament:** After its final session on January 24, 1950, the Constituent Assembly served as the **provisional Parliament** from January 26, 1950, until the first general elections in 1951-52 established the new Parliament.

Constituent Assembly of India Background

The Constituent Assembly of India was born out of the national demand for self-determination and **freedom from British rule in India**. Colonial frameworks, such as the **Government of India Act of 1919** and the **Government of India Act of 1935**, offered limited self-governance while keeping key powers, like defense, finance, and foreign affairs, under British control.

Widespread dissatisfaction with these restrictive laws strengthened the call for full sovereignty. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar emphasised that only a Constitution drafted by Indians could truly reflect the nation's diverse social, cultural, and political reality.

Constituent Assembly Timeline

This timeline traces the evolution of the Constituent Assembly, showing how the demand for self-determination culminated in the framing of India's Constitution and the dawn of complete independence.

1934	The idea of a Constituent Assembly for India was put forward for the first time by M.N.Roy , a pioneer of the communist movement in India.
1935	Indian National Congress first demanded a Constituent Assembly to frame the Constitution of India.
1938	J.L. Nehru declared that the Constitution of free India must be framed, without outside interference, by a Constituent Assembly elected based on Adult Franchise .
1940	First time in principle, the demand for a Constituent Assembly was accepted by the British in the August offer 1940 .
1942	Cripps Mission , headed by Sir Stafford Cripps , came to India with a draft proposal to frame an independent Constitution, which was rejected by the Muslim League.
1946	Cabinet Mission was sent to India, which rejected the idea of two Constituent Assemblies. Hence, Elections were held as per the Cabinet Mission plan of 1946 to establish the Constituent Assembly.

Constituent Assembly Members and Composition

The Constituent Assembly of India was formed in November 1946 under the Cabinet Mission Plan to draft a Constitution for independent India, though post-partition its strength dropped to 299 members (229 provinces, 70 princely states) after Pakistan's separation.

- **Initial Strength:** The Assembly initially comprised **389 members**, including 296 representatives from British India and 93 from the Princely States.
- **Seat Ratio:** Seats were allotted in proportion to the population, roughly representing one seat for every million people.
- **Community Quotas:** Seats assigned to British Indian provinces were divided among three major categories: Muslims, Sikhs, and General.
- **Provinces (296):** Members from the provinces were indirectly elected by provincial legislative assemblies using the single transferable vote system.
- **Princely States (93):** Representatives from the Princely States were directly nominated by the heads or rulers of those respective states.

Chairman of Constituent Assembly of india

The Chairman of the Constituent Assembly of India (president or constituent assembly) was Dr Rajendra Prasad. He was elected as the permanent Chairman (President) of the Constituent Assembly on 11 December 1946. Under his leadership, the Assembly conducted debates and discussions for drafting the Constitution. Notably, Dr Sachchidananda Sinha served as the temporary chairman for the first meeting on December 9, 1946, and Dr B.R. Ambedkar chaired the separate Drafting Committee.

Working of Constituent Assembly of India

The Constituent Assembly drafted the Constitution of India. Formed under the provisions of the Cabinet Mission of May 1946, it took 2 years, 11 months, and 18 days to complete the **Indian Constitution**.

- **9 December 1946:** The Constituent Assembly sat for the first time.
- **11 December 1946:** Rajendra Prasad as President, Harendra Coomar Mookerjee and V.T. Krishnamachari as the Vice Presidents were elected, and B. N. Rau as Constitutional legal advisor was appointed.
- **13 December 1946:** **Jawaharlal** Nehru introduced the famous "Objective Resolution" in the Assembly, which laid down the philosophy of the Constitution of India.
 - It is geared toward fostering economic and political security in India through a written Constitution and declaring India a Sovereign, Democratic Republic.
 - It fostered the formulation of a federal system with the even-handed distribution of powers between the Centre and the states.
 - It strives to secure equality, justice, and freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, association, and associated action for each subject of the country.
 - It is geared toward providing necessary protection to the minority and backward sections of society.
 - It strives to secure the integrity of the territory of the Indian Republic and follow the law of any civilised nation to secure rights on land, sea, and air.
- **22 January 1947:** The Resolution was unanimously adopted by the Assembly.

- **July 1947- Indian Independence Act, 1947:**

- The Assembly was given **complete autonomy** and the power to draft any Constitution it chose.
- The Act gave the Assembly the authority to annul or amend any law passed by the British Parliament regarding India.
- The Assembly was also given legislative authority. As a result, the Assembly was elected as India's first free Parliament (Dominion Legislature). **Dr. Rajendra Prasad** presided over meetings of the Assembly as the Constituent body, and **G.V. Mavlankar** presided over those of the Assembly as the Legislative body.

- **July - October 1947:** Preparation of the **first draft by the Constitutional Advisor**. The Constitutional Advisor started putting together the first draft of the Constitution by aligning the reports already discussed and adopted.
- **22 July 1947:** The Constituent Assembly adopted the National flag.
- **October 1947- February 1948:** Deliberations in Drafting Committee and resultant draft Constitution. The Drafting Committee produced the **draft Constitution** by February 21, 1948, which contained 315 Articles and 8 Schedules.
- **4 November 1948 - 9 November 1948 (First reading):** The Drafting Committee published the draft Constitution of India in February 1948. The draft was introduced in the Assembly in November 1948.
- **15 November 1948 - 17 October 1949 (Second reading):** Clause-by-clause draft discussion was conducted in the Assembly.
- **May 1949:** The Constituent Assembly accepted and approved India's membership of the British **Commonwealth**.
- **14 November 1949 - 26 November 1949 (Third reading):** The Assembly finished the third reading.
- **26 November 1949:** The Constituent Assembly **passed and adopted** the Constitution of India.
- **24 January 1950:** The Constituent Assembly elected **Dr. Rajendra Prasad** as the first President of India and adopted the **National Anthem** and **National Song**.

Enforcement of the Constitution

As per the provisions in the Constitution, it formally commenced on January 1950, bringing it into force in its entirety. This date was chosen to commemorate the declaration of 'Poorna Swaraj' by J.L. Nehru at an annual session of the Congress in Lahore in 1929.

- Some of the Constitution's provisions, included in Articles 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 60, 324, 366, 367, 379, 380, 388, 391, 392, and 393, relating to **citizenship**, elections, a provisional parliament, temporary and transitional laws, and short titles, came into effect on **November 26, 1949**.
- The remaining provisions of the Constitution took effect on January 26, 1950, and the entire Constitution was enforced. This day is celebrated as Republic Day.

Constituent Assembly Committees

Committees of the Constituent Assembly were specialised bodies formed to draft, deliberate, and finalise different aspects of India's Constitution and to conduct preliminary research and deliberations within smaller groups.

Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly

The Drafting Committee was established on **August 29, 1947**, under the chairmanship of **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar** to frame the new Constitution. It served as the central body of the Constituent Assembly, responsible for drafting the Constitution of India by integrating reports and proposals from all other committees. Sitting for 141 days, it prepared the first draft by February 1948 and the second by October 1948, completing its task in under six months. The **seven members** of the Drafting Committee were:

- **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (Chairman)**
- N. Gopalaswamy Ayyangar
- Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar
- Dr. K.M. Munshi
- Syed Mohammad Saadullah
- N. Madhava Rau
- T.T. Krishnamachari
- Major Committees

The Constituent Assembly appointed 8 Major Committees to handle core constitutional frameworks. Key leaders chaired these bodies to address fundamental governance, federal structure, and rights:

Committee	Chairman	Description
Drafting Committee	Dr. B.R. Ambedkar	Scrutinized and prepared the official draft of the Constitution.
Union Power Committee	Jawaharlal Nehru	Defined powers and subjects under central jurisdiction.
Union Constitution Committee	Jawaharlal Nehru	Framed the structure and principles of the Central Government.
States Committee	Jawaharlal Nehru	Handled integration and negotiation with Princely States.
Provincial Constitution Committee	Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel	Designed the governance model for provinces.
Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas	Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel	Oversaw protection of citizen rights and tribal/minority safeguards.

Rules of Procedure Committee	Dr. Rajendra Prasad	Formulated rules governing Assembly debates and proceedings.
Steering Committee	Dr. Rajendra Prasad	Managed the day-to-day order of business and agenda.

Minor Committees

Constituent Assembly Minor Committees played crucial procedural, administrative, and specialised advisory roles to support the Major Committees in efficiently drafting and finalising India's Constitution.

- Key Operational & Finance Committees
 - **Finance and Staff Committee:** Dr. Rajendra Prasad
 - **House Committee:** B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya
 - **Business Order Committee:** Dr. K.M. Munshi
 - **Press Gallery Committee:** Usha Nath Sen
- Legal & Administrative Bodies
 - **Committee on the Functions of the Constituent Assembly:** G.V. Mavlankar (*handled legislative affairs when the Assembly met as a parliament*)
 - **Ad-hoc Committee on the National Flag:** Dr. Rajendra Prasad
 - **Special Committee to Examine the Draft Constitution:** Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar
 - **Credentials Committee:** Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar
- Judicial & Territorial Panels
 - **Ad-hoc Committee on the Supreme Court:** S. Varadachari (*non-member*)
 - **Committee on Chief Commissioners' Provinces:** B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya
 - **Expert Committee on Financial Provisions of the Union Constitution:** N.L. Sarkar (*non-member*).

Constituent Assembly of India Criticism

The Constituent Assembly has been criticised by several scholars and Constitutional experts on various grounds. These are as follows:

- **Not a Representative Body:** Its members were not directly elected based on the universal adult franchise.
- **Not a Sovereign Body:** It was created by the British proposals, and its sessions were held with the permission of the British Government.
- **Time-Consuming:** It took an unduly long time to frame the Constitution; on the other hand, the American Constitution was formed in 4 months.
- **Dominated by Congress:** **Granville Austin** commented that "The Constituent Assembly was a one-party body in an essentially one-party country. The Assembly was the Congress, and the Congress was India."

- **Lawyer-Politician Domination:** Scholars maintain that they dominated the Constituent Assembly and are not representative of other sections.
- **Dominated by Hindus: Winston Churchill** commented that the Constituent Assembly represents "Only one major community in India".

Constituent Assembly of India UPSC PYQs

Q1. What was the exact Constitutional status of India on 26th January 1950? **(UPSC Prelims 2020)**

- A Democratic Republic
- A Sovereign Democratic Republic
- A Sovereign Secular Democratic Republic
- A Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic

Ans: (b)

Q2. With reference to Indian National Movement, consider the following pairs: **(UPSC Prelims 2019)**

Person	Position Held
1. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru	President, All India Liberal Federation
2. K. C. Neogy	Member, The Constituent Assembly
3. P. C. Joshi	General Secretary, Communist Party of India

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- 1 only
- 1 and 2 only
- 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Q3. Who among the following was the chairman of the Union Constitution Committee of the Constituent Assembly? **(UPSC Prelims 2005)**

- B.R. Ambedkar
- J. B. Kripalani
- Jawaharlal Nehru
- Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar

Ans: (a)

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