

## Transforming Higher Education for Viksit Bharat 2047: Academia's Strategic Role Under NEP 2020

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### ABSTRACT

India's journey toward becoming a developed nation under the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 depends greatly on the transformation of its higher education system. In this context, the National Education Policy 2020 emerges as a significant framework aimed at reshaping the structure, purpose, and functioning of higher education in India. This paper examines how academic institutions can contribute meaningfully to the realization of this long-term national vision through the reforms introduced by NEP 2020. It explores key dimensions such as multidisciplinary education, institutional reforms, digital learning, research and innovation, skill development, and inclusive access to education. The study argues that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are not merely centres of teaching, but also spaces for knowledge creation, critical thinking, innovation, and social transformation. In an era shaped by technological advancement, global competition, and changing employment patterns, universities and colleges play a decisive role in preparing a skilled and responsible generation capable of driving national progress. Drawing upon policy documents, government reports, and existing academic literature, the paper highlights how NEP 2020 seeks to connect educational reforms with India's demographic potential and aspirations for sustainable and inclusive development. By emphasizing innovation, flexibility, and quality in higher education, NEP 2020 has the potential to position India as a leading knowledge-based society in the coming decades.

**Keywords:** Academia, Viksit Bharat 2047, NEP 2020, Higher Education, Transformation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

India's dream of becoming a developed nation, or Vikasit Bharat, by 2047 hinges on completely revamping its higher education system. This shift is vital for sparking economic growth, fresh ideas, and a strong place on the world stage, especially with India's huge pool of young people ready to work. (Agarwal, 2021; Kapur & Mehta, 2021). For India, this imperative is even stronger given its demographic dividend, rapidly evolving labour markets, technological disruptions, and aspirations for global leadership. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 the first comprehensive reform in over three decades lays the foundation for this

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transformation. It envisions a holistic, multidisciplinary, flexible, and research-driven higher education system capable of positioning India among the world's leading knowledge societies (Government of India, 2020). India's working-age population will hit nearly 69% by 2030, giving the country a rare chance to lead in global jobs and innovation if we train them right. Right now, about 40 million young Indians are in higher education, but that's still below the world average, and we lag behind China where over 70% of youth enroll. (Sharma, 2021; Chattopadhyay, 2021). The role of academia under NEP 2020 becomes strategic in shaping the nation's trajectory toward 2047. Universities, colleges, and research institutions act as knowledge producers, innovation incubators, and human capital developers central pillars of national development (Tilak, 2020; NITI Aayog, 2021). In particular, the transition toward Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs), expansion of the National Research Foundation (NRF), and promotion of technology-enabled learning underscore the policy's ambition to transform India into a high-value innovation economy (Varghese, 2021; Prasad, 2022). These reforms directly contribute to preparing a future-ready workforce equipped with competencies in artificial intelligence, climate studies, biotechnology, data analytics, digital governance, and other emerging sectors essential for a developed India (World Bank, 2022).

## **2. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

The evolution of India's higher education system reflects the country's socio-political transformations from colonial rule to modern nation-building. Each historical phase contributed structural reforms and ideological frameworks that ultimately shaped the emergence of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

### **2.1 Ancient and Pre-Colonial Traditions**

India's higher learning traditions date back to ancient universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, and Vallabhi, which were global centres of multidisciplinary scholarship (Sharma, 2018; Thapar, 2019). These institutions promoted holistic education, philosophy, sciences, and international academic exchange values echoed in NEP 2020's emphasis on multidisciplinary learning and Indian Knowledge Systems (Government of India, 2020).

### **2.2 Colonial Era and Macaulay's Influence (19th–20th Century)**

British colonial policies drastically altered India's educational landscape. Macaulay's Minute (1835) introduced Western-style education, prioritizing English, administrative training, and hierarchical institutions (Basu, 2017). Universities established in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857 marked the beginning of India's modern university system but focused heavily on examinations and clerical skills (Krishnan, 2019). The Wood's Despatch (1854) and subsequent commissions reinforced centralization and restricted research culture structural limitations that NEP 2020 seeks to overcome through autonomy, innovation, and flexible curricula.

### **2.3 Post-Independence Expansion (1950–1985)**

After 1947, higher education became central to nation-building. The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948–49) recommended modernizing universities, promoting research, and expanding scientific education (Radhakrishnan, 1950). The Kothari Commission (1964–66) provided the first integrated vision for national education advocating access, equity, and quality (Government of India, 1966). This period saw the establishment of IITs, IIMs, CSIR laboratories, and agricultural universities, strengthening India's scientific foundations (Varghese, 2021).

### **2.4 Liberalization and Massification of Higher Education (1991–2010)**

Economic liberalization in 1991 increased the demand for skilled human capital, leading to rapid expansion of private institutions (Agarwal, 2009). While access improved significantly, concerns emerged regarding quality, employability, and uneven standards (Tilak, 2020). The Yashpal Committee (2009) highlighted fragmentation and the lack of multidisciplinary learning problems NEP 2020 resolves through institutional restructuring, holistic education, and academic flexibility.

### **2.5 Emergence of Reform Needs (2010–2019)**

The exponential growth of colleges and universities created one of the world's largest higher education systems, yet global rankings, research output, and innovation remained comparatively low (NITI Aayog, 2021). Reports from the National Knowledge Commission (2005–09) and the TSR Subramanian Committee (2016) called for sweeping reforms to improve autonomy, innovation, teaching quality, and governance. These reports provided the intellectual foundation for NEP 2020, emphasizing: Multidisciplinary universities, Stronger research infrastructure, Internationalization, Digital learning, Equity and inclusion.

### **2.6 NEP 2020: A New Paradigm in Historical Context**

Against this historical trajectory, NEP 2020 represents the most comprehensive and transformative reform since independence (Government of India, 2020). It synthesizes lessons from ancient India's holistic learning, colonial-era structural limitations, post-independence nation-building priorities, and modern global demands. Key historical continuities addressed by NEP 2020 include: Overcoming fragmentation by creating Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs), Revitalizing research through the National Research Foundation (NRF), Reducing overburdened affiliation systems, Enhancing academic autonomy and flexibility, Strengthening digital and hybrid learning models, Thus, NEP 2020 stands as both a historical corrective and a futuristic blueprint designed to transform Indian higher education into a globally competitive, innovation-driven ecosystem essential for achieving Viksit Bharat 2047.

## **3. STRUCTURAL REFORMS: ACADEMIC RESTRUCTURING FOR 2047**

India's higher education is getting a major shake-up under NEP 2020 to gear up for the Viksit Bharat goal by 2047, stressing flexible setups, better quality, mixed subjects, and world-class edge.

### **3.1. Merging and Streamlining Institutions**

NEP 2020 wants to fix the messy patchwork of colleges and unis by building big, all-subject schools strong in both teaching and research. A single overseer, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) slated for a 2025 bill will handle rules, checks, funds, and standards to cut red tape and boost freedom (The Print India, 2025). Picture aiming for 3,000 top-notch multidisciplinary spots by 2040, while ditching old college tie-ups to affiliated unis within 15 years for sharper governance and less repeat work (Association of Indian Universities, 2021).

### **3.2. Multidisciplinary Education and Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP)**

NEP introduces holistic and flexible curricula through the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme, Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), and multiple entry–exit options (Menon, 2022). FYUP aligns India with global education models practiced in the US, UK, and East Asia (Altbach, 2020). Multidisciplinary learning is promoted as essential for innovation and employability in the knowledge economy (World Bank, 2022). By 2047, multidisciplinary universities are expected to become the norm, producing broad-skilled, research-ready graduates.

### **3.3. The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and Flexible Curricula**

Another major restructuring initiative is the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), which allows students to accumulate, store, and transfer credits across universities (UGC, 2021). This reform promotes mobility, flexibility, and lifelong learning key features of modern education ecosystems (World Bank, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). The ABC system also supports: Multiple entry–exit options, enabling personalized learning pathways, Interdisciplinary course combinations aligned with student interests and labour market needs, Continuous upskilling and reskilling required for Industry 4.0 technologies (NASSCOM, 2021).

### **3.4. Strengthening Research and Innovation Ecosystems**

A major reform is the establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF), intended to build India’s research capacity by funding competitive, peer-reviewed research projects (NITI Aayog, 2021). It fuels uni projects and global ties to crank up papers and breakthroughs (Drishti IAS, 2023). India currently spends less than 0.7% of GDP on R & D, lower than China (2.4%) and South Korea (4.8%) (World Bank, 2022). NRF seeks to dramatically strengthen university research output and international collaborations (Kapur & Mehta, 2021).

### **3.5. Digital and Technology-Integrated Learning**

NEP promotes digital transformation through National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR), National Educational Technology Forum (NETF), and large-scale online learning initiatives. Online education is projected to grow at over 20% annually in India (FICCI–EY, 2022). Digital platforms reduce regional disparities and support lifelong learning models (UNESCO, 2023). Technology-enabled education is essential for achieving widespread access and equity by 2047.

## **4. ROLE OF ACADEMIA IN NATION-BUILDING FOR VIKSIT BHARAT 2047**

The vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 places higher education at the centre of India's developmental transformation. In a rapidly changing global environment shaped by technology, globalization, and knowledge-based economies, universities are no longer limited to classroom teaching alone. The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes this changing role of academia and attempts to align higher education with India's long-term developmental aspirations (Government of India, 2020; Tilak, 2020). India possesses one of the world's largest youth populations, with more than 65% of its population below the age of 35. This demographic strength can become a major national asset only when educational institutions are able to provide quality education, practical skills, and opportunities for innovation. In this context, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) become important instruments for economic growth, social mobility, democratic development, and global competitiveness (Varghese, 2021; World Bank, 2022).

### **4.1 Producing a Skilled and Future-Ready Workforce**

One of the major responsibilities of academia in the twenty-first century is to prepare students for changing economic and technological realities. Traditional forms of rote learning are gradually becoming inadequate in a world driven by artificial intelligence, automation, data science, and digital technologies. NEP 2020 therefore emphasizes multidisciplinary education, skill-oriented learning, and flexibility in curriculum design (Government of India, 2020). According to various national reports, India faces a significant gap between academic qualifications and market-oriented skills. Academia can bridge this gap by strengthening industry-academia collaboration, internships, research training, and innovation-based learning (World Bank, 2022; NITI Aayog, 2021).

### **4.2 Fostering Innovation, Research, and Knowledge Production**

Research and innovation are widely recognized as essential drivers of national development. Countries that lead in science, technology, and research often dominate the global economy and policymaking structures. Recognizing this challenge, NEP 2020 gives considerable importance to research culture within universities and higher educational institutions (Altbach, 2020; Government of India, 2020). The proposed National Research Foundation (NRF) seeks to encourage quality research across disciplines by providing financial support, institutional collaboration, and interdisciplinary opportunities (NITI Aayog, 2021). In recent years, institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institute of Science have demonstrated how research-driven academia can contribute to innovation, entrepreneurship, and global academic recognition (Kapur & Mehta, 2021; Altbach, 2020).

### **4.3 Promoting Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusive Development**

The role of academia in nation-building is not limited to economic development alone; it is also closely connected with social justice and inclusive growth. Indian society continues to experience inequalities based on caste, class, gender, region, language, and access to resources. Educational institutions therefore have a moral and constitutional responsibility to promote equal opportunities and social inclusion (Rajput, 2022). NEP 2020 highlights the importance

of expanding educational access to marginalized communities, including SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities, women, and students from rural and economically weaker backgrounds. Policies related to scholarships, reservation, gender inclusion, digital accessibility, and regional-language education are important steps toward reducing educational inequality (Government of India, 2020; UNESCO, 2023). The promotion of mother-tongue and regional-language education under NEP 2020 is particularly significant for students from tribal and rural areas, who often face disadvantages in English-dominated educational systems (Mohanty, 2020; UNESCO, 2023).

#### **4.4 Strengthening Democratic Values and Citizenship Education**

Universities have historically played a major role in shaping democratic consciousness and political awareness. Beyond professional training, higher education also helps in developing ethical values, constitutional understanding, and civic responsibility among students. In a diverse democratic society like India, academia acts as an important space for dialogue, debate, and critical thinking (Pathak, 2021). Humanities and social science education encourage students to engage with issues such as equality, justice, secularism, human rights, and public accountability. Through classroom discussions, research activities, student participation, and public engagement, universities help in nurturing informed and responsible citizens (Nussbaum, 2016).

### **5. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING NEP 2020: FOR VIKSIT BHARAT 2047**

While NEP 2020 presents a transformative roadmap for India's education future, its effective implementation faces multiple structural, financial, technological, and governance-related challenges. These challenges must be addressed to achieve India's goal of Viksit Bharat 2047.

**5.1. Funding Constraints and Low Public Investment in Education:** One of the biggest hurdles is India's chronically low education expenditure. India spends only 2.9% of its GDP on education (Economic Survey of India, 2022–23), far below NEP's recommended 6%. Higher education alone requires an estimated ₹1.5–2 lakh crore additional investment annually to meet NEP targets (NITI Aayog, 2021). Insufficient funding delays infrastructure upgrades, research expansion, digital transformation, and faculty recruitment.

#### **5.2. Limited Research Capacity and Low R&D Investment**

India's research ecosystem remains weak compared to global standards. India spends just 0.7% of GDP on R&D, whereas China spends 2.4% and South Korea 4.8% (World Bank, 2022). India accounts for only 2.7% of global scientific publications (Scimago, 2023), far behind the US (24%) and China (22%). Only 2.5% of Indian higher education institutions contribute to significant research output (AISHE, 2021).

#### **5.3. Shortage of Qualified Faculty and High Vacancies**

Indian universities face over 33% faculty vacancies on average (UGC Report, 2022). Technical institutions like IITs and NITs have a shortage of 6,000+ faculty positions (MoE, 2023). Student–teacher ratios remain high at 1:24, compared to the OECD average of 1:15 (OECD,

2022). Without adequate faculty strength, implementing multidisciplinary and research-based learning becomes difficult.

#### **5.4. Digital Divide and Unequal Access to Technology**

Digital infrastructure remains unequal, especially in rural and tribal regions. 47% of Indian households lack internet access (NSO, 2022). Only 33% of rural households have smartphones suitable for online education (NFHS-5, 2021). India ranks 46th in the Global Innovation Index in digital readiness (WIPO, 2023).

#### **5.5. Institutional Fragmentation and Slow Governance Reforms**

NEP calls for consolidation of institutions and autonomy reforms, but: India still has over 40,000 colleges, many with low-quality affiliation systems (AISHE, 2021). Governance reforms such as creating HECI and eliminating affiliation have progressed slowly at state-level due to political and administrative constraints (Kapur & Mehta, 2021).

### **6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

To make NEP 2020 actually work and push India toward that Viksit Bharat dream by 2047, we need smart fixes in money, tech, people, and rules here's a no-nonsense plan to get it done.

#### **6.1. Pump More Cash into Education**

Right now, India barely hits 3-4% of GDP on education overall way short of NEP's 6% goal. We should ring-fence an extra 1.5-2% just for colleges and unis to beef up labs, train teachers better, and roll out online tools everywhere. Without steady funding, all the talk of world-class schools stays just that: talk (NITI Aayog, 2021).

#### **6.2. Get NRF Running and Fire Up Research**

Hurry up and launch the National Research Foundation with clear rules for who gets the cash purely based on merit. Sweeten the deal for unis teaming up with companies: tax breaks, shared labs, and grants for real-world projects. This could triple research output in a decade.

#### **6.3. Fix the Teacher Crunch Fast**

Over a third of faculty spots sit empty in our unis and launch a nationwide hiring blitz like a "Faculty Mission" to fill them. Throw in bigger scholarships for PhDs, post-doc gigs abroad, and swap programs to pull in top talent and keep our profs sharp (UGC, 2022).

#### **6.4. Close the Rural Tech Gap**

Roll out super-fast internet to every village via BharatNet by 2027, no excuses. Set up community digital hubs in far-off spots for hybrid classes, think free laptops, Wi-Fi, and training so kids in Bihar or Odisha aren't left behind.

#### **6.5. Link Colleges Straight to Jobs**

Plant industry councils right inside unis, zeroed in on hot fields like AI, cyber defense, electric cars, and solar power. Make internships and hands-on training a must for every four-year

degree watch the "unemployable grad" problem vanish as companies snap up ready-to-work talent.

### **6.6. Push All-in-One Units and Flexible Degrees**

Dangle carrots for small colleges to merge into big multidisciplinary powerhouses by 2035—grants, land, whatever it takes. Blend arts, science, and tech in classes, lock in credit banks for easy switches, and skill tests that actually matter. This builds thinkers, not just test-takers.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

India's aspiration to emerge as a Viksit Bharat by 2047 is deeply connected with the transformation of its higher education system. In the contemporary global order, nations achieve sustainable growth not merely through economic expansion, but through the strength of their knowledge institutions, research capacity, technological innovation, and human capital. In this context, the National Education Policy 2020 represents a significant attempt to redefine the purpose and structure of Indian higher education in accordance with the needs of the twenty-first century. Several structural and institutional challenges continue to affect the higher education sector, including inadequate public funding, shortage of qualified faculty, unequal access to digital infrastructure, regional disparities, limited research culture, and gaps between academic learning and employability. These structural constraints highlight the need for sustained political will, coordinated federal–state action, and long-term financial commitment. Addressing these challenges is not merely an educational necessity, it is a national imperative. Despite these complexities, the potential of NEP 2020 remains enormous. With targeted reforms, strengthened governance, industry–academia collaboration, and equitable access for all sections of society, India can build a higher education system that is both globally respected and locally responsive. The policy's focus on innovation, employability, values, and multidisciplinary excellence aligns perfectly with the developmental aspirations of a rising India. The broader significance of NEP 2020 lies in its attempt to move Indian education beyond the limitations of rote learning and examination-oriented systems toward a more holistic, flexible, and learner-centred approach. The path toward Viksit Bharat 2047 will ultimately depend on how effectively academia, policymakers, and society collectively work to transform education into a powerful instrument of national development, human empowerment, and global progress.

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