



Editorial

Universities in the Twenty-First Century: Renewal, Reforms, and Roadmaps

Universities across the world are going through an uneasy moment. Old assurances about steady public funds, institutional autonomy and gradual reform have grown thin, while new pressures crowd the stage. Economic demands press upon campuses through rankings, performance indicators and labour markets that rarely pause for thought. Political attention grows sharper and often less patient, while citizens look to higher education for moral imagination, practical wisdom and courage in the face of crisis. Artificial intelligence, data platforms and algorithmic decision systems have entered lecture halls, libraries and admission offices. They speed up some tasks and unsettle others. Amid these swirling forces, the very idea of the university still carries luminous promise—a place where slow enquiry, principled disagreement and creative experiment can flourish. That promise now meets hurried timelines, intricate regulations, and expectations of constant visibility. Questions about who gains access, who speaks, who benefits, and who bears the cost have become more urgent. The theme of this issue of the *Telangana Journal of Higher Education*—“Universities in the Twenty-First Century: Renewal, Reforms, and Roadmaps”—emerges from this tension between aspiration and strain. It merits an entire issue because the future of higher education will not be settled by one policy or one technology. It will turn on how institutions rethink governance, pedagogy, research, access and public responsibility together, without losing the human core of learning.

The articles in this issue approach that task from many directions, yet they speak to one another with striking coherence. The opening essays by V. Balakista Reddy and Aditi Nidhi, and by U. Anitha Devi with B. Srinivasa Goud and G. Odelu, sketch wide panoramas of change in which digital shifts, demographic pressures, new funding patterns and market style metrics reshape universities across the globe. A third contribution by Ravinder Rena and Nageswara Rao Aderla turns this broad cartography into a close enquiry into labour conditions and precarity among academic staff. The focus then moves firmly to India, where K. Bhaskar traces reform journeys through central, state and deemed universities, and C. R. Annapurna probes the constitutional responsibilities that rest upon higher education. The middle of the issue brings equity questions sharply into view through K. Vidyasagar Reddy’s analysis of marginalised students and Mallikarjuna Naik Vadihe’s exploration of digital inclusion, before H. Kalpana Rao peers into research culture and the places where curiosity falls silent. The discussion then narrows to specific sectors and regions—management education across India, university–industry relations in Assam, digital inequalities in West Bengal and, finally, a bold institutional experiment in Telangana at Young India Skills University. Read together, these contributions trace not only the pressures that buffet twenty-first century universities, but also the emerging roadmaps that seek to hold together excellence, fairness and public duty. The sequence begins with global and conceptual terrain, moves through national systems and normative commitments, and settles, by the closing study, into the concrete grain of institutional practice.

The opening essay, “Universities in the Twenty-First Century: Reform Agendas and Emerging Roadmaps” by V. Balakista Reddy and Aditi Nidhi, lays out a panoramic survey of the forces that unsettle contemporary higher education. They draw attention to digitalisation, global competition, demographic strain and shrinking public budgets, and they describe how rankings, performance indicators and market logics flatten richer understandings of scholarship and truth



seeking. Their discussion of legitimacy crises and New Public Management style governance captures the sharpening tussle between autonomy, public obligation and commercial interest. Equally striking is the discussion of shifting curricula, inclusion agendas and the swift arrival of artificial intelligence and data-driven decision systems that reshape teaching, assessment and research. Out of this turbulent picture, they articulate the Dynamic Reform Framework—a notion that weaves together mission, leadership, capability building and external engagement into a pattern of continuous institutional self-renewal. This conceptual scaffolding gives the entire issue its opening horizon. It sketches forces that surge through universities everywhere, while hinting that any credible roadmap must bring technology, governance, equity and purpose into a common conversation, a theme that gains more concrete shape in the next contribution.

If the first essay draws a wide map of pressures and possibilities, U. Anitha Devi, with B. Srinivasa Goud and G. Odelu, in “Advancing Universities for the Future: Renewal of Academic Structures, Policy Reforms, and Strategic Roadmaps for Knowledge-Based Societies” walk closer to the ground of institutional design. Their essay threads together artificial intelligence-based pedagogy, digital-first teaching, smart campuses, interdisciplinary degrees, research hubs, industry collaboration and international partnerships. These elements are not treated as fashionable accessories. They appear as demanding components of a redesign of mission and everyday practice. At each turn, the authors remind readers that fairness, inclusion and commitment to the public good must hold firm. Agile systems and inventive technology must widen opportunity and nourish curiosity, not crush them under incessant pressure for measurable outputs. Their diagnosis of funding constraints, faculty readiness, access gaps and environmental sustainability roots the ambitious roadmap in daily difficulty. The piece stands near the centre of this issue’s theme. It argues that renewal will require daring experiments with tools and models, and at the same time an adamant refusal to let democratic responsibility slip from view. Once technology and grand strategy have entered the scene in this fashion, the question of who actually carries the burden within universities becomes impossible to ignore, which turns attention to labour and precarity.

In “Responses to Casualisation and Precarity among Academic Staff in Contemporary University Reforms: A Global Systematic Synthesis and New Multi-Level Integrative Framework,” Ravinder Rena and Nageswara Rao Aderla direct the gaze towards the fragile lives that sustain higher education. Their wide reading of international research on temporary contracts, uncertainty and exhaustion shows how market-driven reform agendas can hollow out collegial cultures and weaken the conscience of universities. Yet the essay does not rest with a description of harm. It tracks responses that range from solitary coping strategies and informal peer support to union action, student alliances, digital organising and policy change. From this rich catalogue, the authors build a multi-level model that links personal resilience with institutional responsibility and cross-border solidarity. Any ethical institution in the ongoing century, they argue, must treat casualisation as a core issue of governance, fairness and the future of knowledge itself. Labour conditions are not a side story. They are woven into the very possibility of honest teaching and research. Once this claim is accepted, attention naturally moves to the ways in which one national system, India, tries to reshape its universities under the double pull of history and reform rhetoric.

K. Bhaskar takes up this challenge in “Between Path Dependency and Policy Disruption: Reforming Indian Universities in the Twenty-First Century.” The article insists that Indian



higher education does not operate in an empty field. It is layered with colonial designs, post-Independence planning, fiscal federal arrangements and a dense web of regulatory bodies. The National Education Policy 2020 speaks the language of autonomy, accountability, accreditation and global outreach. Bhaskar shows that this vocabulary travels very differently through central universities, state institutions and deemed entities. Central universities rest on somewhat steadier grants and more coherent rules. State universities wrestle with unpredictable finances, political intrusion and procedural delay. Deemed universities move between public purpose and market prestige. Reform in this context cannot rely on slogans or ranking tables. It requires bargaining across federal levels, thoughtful redesign of governance and respect for institutional plurality. The roadmap that emerges is hopeful yet sober. It accepts the hold of history while pressing for a fresh balance of power and duty. Once such a systemic reading is in place, a further question arises with more force—what do these reformed institutions owe to the constitutional vision of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity?

That question stands at the forefront of C. R. Annapurna's "Onus on the Universities in Realising the Objectives of the Indian Constitution: A Theoretical Analysis." This piece brings moral and constitutional stakes into sharp focus. It presents universities in contemporary India as bearers of a constitutional charge. They must turn the values inscribed in the Preamble into daily practice on campus. Ancient centres like Nalanda and Takshashila appear alongside NEP 2020, human rights charters and the Sustainable Development Goals. The juxtaposition is not nostalgic. It seeks to recall a tradition of learning that joined intellectual rigour with public duty. Holistic development, academic freedom, community outreach, academic social responsibility, inclusive admissions and engagement that crosses the boundary between campus and neighbourhood are treated as concrete tasks. They do not remain on ceremonial walls. The essay ties the theme of this issue directly to democracy and human dignity. Any roadmap for twenty-first century universities, it argues, must recognise that these institutions guard the health of public life. Once this normative ground is laid, the discussion naturally shifts towards those who remain at the edges of this democratic promise, especially students from communities that histories of exclusion have hurt most deeply.

This movement guides K. Vidyasagar Reddy's "University Education in 21st-Century India: Marginalised Students and Critical Challenges." The author turns high-level talk of reform into a piercing enquiry into who actually crosses the university gate and who remains outside, or enters only to feel out of place. Privatisation, the language of markets and pressures from global competition squeeze public institutions, push fees upward and weaken security for teachers. Policy documents and UGC restructuring announce renewal, yet they risk entrenching exclusion when equity stays rhetorical. Online and hybrid models arrive with flair, yet for rural, Dalit, Adivasi and poor urban students they often translate into unstable signals, shared devices and a different form of humiliation. The article insists that access, quality and democratic purpose must move together or the very idea of a public university begins to fray. The roadmap that appears is practical and justice-oriented. It calls for scholarships that genuinely reach the needy, supportive academic environments, and admission and assessment practices that recognise structural disadvantage. Once marginalisation takes centre stage in this fashion, technology cannot be treated as a neutral instrument. The next contribution stays within the Indian system yet directs attention to digital transformation and inclusive access.

Mallikarjuna Naik Vadithe rises to this task in "Digital Transformation and Inclusive Access in Indian Universities: Challenges, Reforms, and Future Pathways." The essay treats education



technology not as a miracle cure, but as a revealing mirror. Enrolment figures may look impressive, yet the author's reading of AISHE, NFHS-5 and telecom data shows that bandwidth, devices and digital skills still follow old gradients of caste, class, gender and geography. Rural campuses lag behind better-connected hubs. Many young women in rural settings share phones or do not control them. Universities and colleges stand on very uneven digital ground. The article speaks directly to this issue's concern with artificial intelligence, online and blended teaching, and the ethical meaning of access. It argues that connectivity, accessible digital platforms, campus computer spaces and teacher preparation must count as core academic infrastructure. They cannot remain afterthoughts. The trajectory he sketches begins from the margins and measures success by who finally enters the learning circle. Once technology and equity have been brought together in this unsparing manner, attention turns inward again, this time to the culture of inquiry within universities and the conditions for research that is both bold and honest.

H. Kalpana Rao addresses this inner terrain in "Where Ideas Go Silent: Reflections on Research Culture in Indian Universities." The essay takes policy talk about excellence and research output and sets it against a meticulous portrait of everyday academic life. A distinction runs through the piece between inquiry that springs from curiosity and intellectual hunger and work that emerges mainly from promotion requirements, ranking demands and audit trails. Colonial legacies, overloaded teaching duties, fragile doctoral training, questionable publishing outlets and hollow conferences all appear as forces that sap energy from thoughtful scholarship. The issue theme speaks here with particular sharpness. Metric-driven agendas, tight control and fear of failure can smother slow thinking, interdisciplinary conversation and ethical practice. Yet the essay does not end with despair. It calls for a properly empowered University Research Centre, shared across disciplines, that supports methodology, writing and mental wellbeing, and that enforces firm standards on ethics and authorship. Renewal, in this view, begins when universities reclaim research as a collective search for understanding rather than a bureaucratic chore. Once this plea has been voiced, attention moves towards one important sector where questions of curriculum, employability, technology and national ambition converge with unusual intensity.

"Reimagining Management Education in India: Evolution, Challenges, and a Future-Ready MBA Model for Viksit Bharat 2047" by Vasishta Reddy Aileni and A. Vidyadhar Reddy takes the MBA classroom as a testing ground for broader reform debates. The essay traces four eras of management education in India and then turns to the present moment, where artificial intelligence, digital platforms and global rankings steer institutions towards quick adjustments while long-set curricular habits remain unaffected. The authors argue that marginal tinkering cannot meet the aspirations of Viksit Bharat 2047 or the demands of an algorithmically driven economy. Their MBA 2047 Integrated Adaptive Learning Model presses for flexible credit structures, close collaboration with industry, technology-rich learning spaces and lifelong opportunities for alumni to re-enter the university. Abstract concerns about governance, employability and digital disruption suddenly take concrete form. Programmes in business schools become laboratories in which roadmaps for the wider university system can be attempted. This focus on collaboration with industry and practical routes into work prepares the ground for a closer look at how teachers in a particular region perceive university–industry relations, and how digital inequalities shape learning opportunities in another state.



Sasiprava Machahary and Amar Upadhyaya, in “Teachers’ Perceptions of University–Industry Relations: A Study of Universities in Assam,” listen with rare attentiveness to faculty voices. Their enquiry spans central, state and private universities in Assam and asks how teachers read the growing policy emphasis on collaboration with industry. A broadly favourable mood emerges across gender and institutional type. Many teachers see ties with firms as avenues towards richer curricula, more grounded research and more credible prospects for students as they step into work. At the same time, the authors insist that goodwill cannot sustain partnerships indefinitely. Universities need stable policies, dedicated liaison offices and norms that protect academic freedom while engaging markets with open eyes. The essay brings the theme of renewal down to a state level and anchors it in the perceptions of those who teach. It appears alongside the quantitative study by Shashi Bhusan Mishra and Md Soaib Raja, “The Digital Paradox in West Bengal’s Higher Education: A Quantitative Analysis of Socioeconomic Determinants of Digital Exclusion and Capability.” Their capability-based analysis in West Bengal turns the bright promise of online expansion into an urgent question about justice. Family income, caste, religion and rural residence twist digital resources into deeply unequal freedoms. Students from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Muslim communities often face a triple bind of weak connectivity, anxiety and lower academic returns from the same tools. The article insists that tablets, software and bandwidth cannot be treated as neutral infrastructure. Digital skills, reliable networks and supportive environments form matters of redistribution and dignity. These regional studies remind readers that reform agendas and technological shifts always take specific shape in particular places. They prepare the ground for the closing piece, which offers a focused institutional example of how skill integration and public purpose can come together.

The final contribution, Gurrapu Damodar’s “Revolutionising Higher Education Through Skill Integration: A Case Study of Young India Skills University,” returns the discussion to Telangana and to one bold institutional experiment. Young India Skills University reworks familiar academic routines in striking fashion. Industry chairs the governing board. Curricula arise from actual job descriptions rather than abstract models. On the job learning counts for academic credit rather than appearing as a token internship. Fields such as artificial intelligence, logistics, healthcare and quick commerce enter the timetable not as marginal electives but as everyday training grounds. Firms co-design programmes and share responsibility for assessment and certification. The study addresses this issue’s concern with renewal and roadmaps with unusual clarity. It presents one route by which universities might embrace market pressure and public responsibility at the same time, rather than treat them as enemies. Statutory backing, deep corporate engagement and district-level centres come together to rethink access, quality and social mobility for learners in the current century. By ending with this case study, the issue moves from global surveys and national policies to one concrete experiment that invites readers to imagine what courageous reform might look like on an actual campus.

From an editorial standpoint, it is important to acknowledge the rigorous thought and careful craft that underpin this collection. The authors in this issue have worked through complex questions in order to bring into view the worlds that lie behind brief policy phrases like autonomy, equity, digital transformation or skill integration. They have read vast amounts of scholarship, gathered data where little existed, listened to students and teachers, and set their findings against demanding ethical standards. They have, each in their own idiom, resisted the temptation to reduce universities to factories for credentials or engines of immediate economic



gain. Instead, they have treated higher education as a living institution that holds together many aspirations at once. The journal owes them gratitude for their intellectual patience and moral seriousness. Without such work, phrases like renewal, reform and roadmap would soon grow hollow.

The readership of this journal is equally varied and demanding. Policymakers who open these pages may find in the essays by Reddy and Nidhi, by Bhaskar, by Annapurna and by Damodar material that can reshape strategies for funding, regulation and institutional support, not by offering ready recipes, but by exposing the knotty ties between autonomy, accountability and access. University leaders and practitioners may draw strength and caution from the accounts of labour conditions by Rena and Aderla, from the portraits of marginalised students and digital exclusion offered by Vidyasagar Reddy, Vadithe, Mishra and Raja, and from the studies of partnerships undertaken by Anitha Devi and colleagues, Machahary and Upadhyaya, and Aileni with Vidyadhar Reddy. Teachers and scholars concerned with research culture will recognise themselves in Kalpana Rao's essay and may find encouragement to build communal spaces where inquiry can flourish. Students who encounter these arguments will, we hope, see their own hopes and frustrations named with honesty, and may feel invited to claim their share in shaping the universities they inhabit.

What does this collection suggest about the future of universities in the twenty-first century, in India and in Telangana in particular? One insight concerns the broadening of the very idea of reform. The articles show that change cannot be confined to new gadgets, new rules or revised syllabi. It touches who walks through the campus gate, which histories are remembered, how labour is treated, and how knowledge travels between the classroom, workplace and public sphere. Another insight lies in the tension between aspiration and responsibility. Systems and institutions seek visibility on global tables and in international partnerships. Yet, as these studies repeatedly show, lasting strength grows where openness is regulated with fairness, excellence is tied to inclusion, and technology is shaped to serve human dignity. A third insight directs attention to daily life. Policies matter. So do human relationships—in partnerships, in classrooms, in alumni networks, in the quiet guidance that teachers and peers offer to those who feel lost in unfamiliar academic cultures. The outer frame of law and policy holds, but the living centre remains face-to-face connection and shared work.

Much remains to be understood. The theme of “Universities in the 21st Century: Renewal, Reforms, and Roadmaps” will not be exhausted by one journal issue. Comparative studies across Indian states and between India and other countries will advance our knowledge of what works and what falters. Longitudinal research that follows reforms over time will help distinguish passing fashions from lasting change. Future work on artificial intelligence in teaching and research, on mental health in academic settings, on climate action on campuses and on new forms of student and staff organising will all feed into this continuing enquiry. This issue of *TJHE* aims to contribute to that ongoing conversation by bringing together scholarship that is at once empirically grounded, historically aware and ethically alert.

If readers move from these pages to the articles themselves with curiosity and critical interest, the editorial endeavour will have served its purpose. If policy discussions, institutional decisions, teaching practices and student movements draw strength from the analyses gathered here, the journal will have played a modest part in shaping universities that are more just, more thoughtful and more courageous. The future of higher education in Telangana, across India and



around the world will be demanding. It will also be full of possibilities if renewal, reform and roadmaps are pursued with intellectual honesty and a sincere regard for human dignity.

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