A Comparative Analysis of Implementation, Alignment and Innovation of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU)

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ABSTRACT:

Aligarh Muslim University and Banaras Hindu University are two historical institutions that represent the legacy of nation's educational awakening in Indian educational history. These two great institutions established by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya respectively, mark the intellectual and scientific basis for the initiation of modern education in India. These two distinguished universities represent the legacy of Indian Knowledge System (IKS), the former represents modernist Muslim reformatory movement through the channels of western education while as the latter marks spiritual and scientific integration of Hindu philosophy. The educational models of these two great institutions of education find its relevance to the provisions for higher education in National Educational policy 2020. Launched by Indian government in 2020, this policy aimed to take Indian education to the next higher but distinguished level. This paper explores the parallel yet distinct educational models of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU), analyzing their foundational philosophies in the broader context of Indian higher education reform. While AMU was established on the principles of modernist Islamic reform and emphasized scientific education within an Islamic framework, BHU drew from spiritual nationalism and aimed to integrate Hindu philosophy with modern knowledge. Both institutions contributed significantly to India's socio-cultural and intellectual awakening. The study further examines how these historical models align with the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, particularly in promoting multidisciplinary learning, inclusivity, vocational integration, and flexible academic structures. It argues that the visions of AMU and BHU continue to resonate within the NEP 2020 framework, making them relevant templates for institutional transformation. Through comparative insights, the paper reflects on how legacy institutions can inform the implementation of contemporary educational reforms in India.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Aligarh Muslim University, Banaras Hindu University, Indian Higher Education, National Education Policy 2020, Comparative Study, AMU, BHU, Modern Indian Education, NEP 2020 Implementation.

INTRODUCTION:

India has historically served as a global nucleus of education, recognized for its ancient, expansive, and impactful academic traditions shaped by a rich tapestry of cultures and civilizations (Sharma, 2020). The evolution of education in India has consistently been informed by its historical and socio-cultural contexts. Traditional systems such as the Vedic oral traditions, Gurukuls, ancient universities like Nalanda and Takshashila, and later Maktabas and Madrasas under Islamic rule, all contributed significantly to the nation's intellectual heritage (Raza, 2019). Even modern institutions founded in the 19th and 20th centuries continue to reflect the enduring influence of these early models.

The late 19th and early 20th century marked a pivotal era of educational renaissance in India, characterized by the use of education as a transformative force for cultural preservation, social reform, and scientific advancement during a period of colonial domination and socio-political unrest (Chatterjee, 2018). Two key figures, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya emerged as visionary leaders who sought to modernize Indian society through education. Their efforts led to the establishment of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) respectively. These two institutions became symbols of India's educational and national awakening.

Built upon the five foundational pillars that are access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability with an approval by the Union Cabinet of India in 2020 marking a significant transformation in the country's educational system; a new education policy was introduced known as National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The primary aim of this policy is to overhaul the regulatory and governance structures within India's education system. NEP 2020 replaces the previous National Policy on Education of 1986, signaling a revolutionary step forward. The policy emphasizes multidisciplinary and holistic learning, allowing students the freedom to choose subjects across streams and offering flexible academic pathways with multiple entry and exit options. Key features include integration of traditional knowledge with technology, continuous teacher development, and expanding the global reach of higher education.

As India's higher education landscape undergoes reforms under this policy, examining how legacy institutions like Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) adapt to and reflect the core tenets of NEP 2020 becomes both timely and critical. These two universities, with

distinct historical and cultural foundations, represent two of India's most influential models of higher education. Studying their respective approaches toward implementing NEP 2020 provides insight into the broader national response, institutional preparedness, and the evolving nature of higher education governance and pedagogy in India.

This paper aims to critically examine their legacies by analyzing the educational models and reformist philosophies embedded within BHU and AMU, and assessing their ongoing relevance in the context of contemporary higher education reforms in India, particularly under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Statement of the Problem:

The development of Indian education has been significantly shaped by the establishment of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) both of which served as intellectual and cultural responses to British colonialism (Kumar, 2017; Ahmed, 2019). These institutions emerged not only as centers of learning but also as ideological platforms reflecting resistance through educational reform. Despite their central role in shaping modern Indian academia, AMU and BHU are often studied independently, which has led to a critical gap in comparative scholarship. Few studies have examined their foundational philosophies in tandem, particularly in relation to their shared nationalist agendas, as well as their philosophical intersections and divergences rooted in distinct religious, cultural, and political contexts (Singh & Rehman, 2020). Despite the ambitious and transformative vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, there remains a significant implementation gap across Indian higher education institutions. While the policy outlines clear directives regarding curriculum reform, institutional restructuring, and quality enhancement, universities differ widely in how they interpret and operationalize these mandates.

In this context, legacy institutions like Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU)—with their unique historical, administrative, and academic frameworks—face both opportunities and challenges in aligning with NEP 2020. There is a need to critically examine:

- To what extent these institutions have internalized NEP's core principles of flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, digital innovation, and student-centric approaches.
- What structural and pedagogical reforms have been effectively implemented or delayed.
- How institutional histories and governance models influence the pace and nature of these reforms.

By identifying the challenges, successes, and divergent approaches of these two universities, the study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how national educational policies translate into institutional realities.

Research Questions:

This study seeks to answer the following research questions while addressing Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) as significant educational hubs and twin pillars of modern Indian education:

1. How have Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) responded to the directives of NEP 2020 in their institutional frameworks?
2. To what extent do the reforms at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) align with NEP 2020's objectives of flexibility, multidisciplinary education, and global competitiveness?
3. What are the comparative strengths, challenges, and innovations adopted by Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) under NEP 2020?

Literature review:

The landscape of Indian higher education has historically been shaped by institutions that not only provided academic instruction but also served as platforms for socio-political and cultural reform. In this context, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) occupy a foundational place. These universities emerged in response to British colonial rule, embodying two distinct yet overlapping visions of educational nationalism (Kumar, 2017; Ahmed, 2019).

Kumar (2017) argues that both BHU and AMU played crucial roles in redefining Indian education by aligning traditional knowledge systems with modern, Western educational structures. His work emphasizes the integration of indigenous cultural values with scientific and liberal education, a hallmark of nationalist thought in early 20th-century India. Similarly, Ahmed (2019) focuses on AMU's evolution as a center of Islamic learning that adapted to colonial modernity while resisting cultural assimilation. He highlights the university's dual mandate: preserving Muslim identity and fostering socio-economic upliftment through modern education.

A notable gap in the literature is the lack of comparative analysis between these two institutions. While each university has been studied independently, their intersecting historical, philosophical, and ideological trajectories have often been overlooked. Singh and Rehman (2020) attempt to bridge this gap by conducting a comparative study that underscores both convergence and divergence in their foundational principles. They argue that although BHU and AMU emerged from different cultural and religious milieus, both institutions shared a commitment to nation-building through education, promoting intellectual autonomy, and resisting colonial educational hegemony.

Ahmad (1971) in Aligarh Movement discusses concern of Sir Syed regarding modern education necessary for Muslim upliftment while as Singh (2005) discusses Banaras Hindu University as an abode of Indian educational renaissance with an integration of scientific advancement with religious ethos. Rahman (1982) interprets Sir Syed's vision as foundation for the rational and reformist paradigm shift in the Indian subcontinent. Bhattachariya (2009) accesses the relevance of these institutions in shaping the identity, pluralism, integration and nationalism.

The existing body of literature reflects the enduring influence of Banaras Hindu University and Aligarh Muslim University and their intellectual architects that aimed at empowerment of their respective communities through means of education. This review suggests a need for the deeper analysis and comparative work signifying the legacy of these two higher educational institutions amid political and cultural pressures. This paper examines these two foundational institutions as twin pillars of modern Indian higher education. These scholarly works also help frame the current transformation in Indian higher education under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Sharma (2020) and Raza (2019) provide valuable historical context for understanding how ancient and modern educational traditions continue to influence India's academic systems. Their analysis of early educational models—such as Vedic oral traditions, Gurukuls, Madrasas, and institutions like Nalanda and Takshashila—offers a deeper understanding of how NEP 2020 attempts to revive holistic and multidisciplinary learning, aligning with both AMU's and BHU's founding philosophies.

Chatterjee (2018) adds another dimension by examining the role of education in cultural preservation and scientific advancement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His work emphasizes how Indian education during this period became a means of resistance and reform, laying the groundwork for institutional models like BHU and AMU, which continue to evolve under NEP 2020.

Despite these contributions, there remains a scarcity of research linking the reformist legacies of AMU and BHU with NEP 2020's contemporary vision, especially in terms of how these institutions are implementing multidisciplinary, student-centric, and globally competitive models of education. This paper seeks to address this gap by situating AMU and BHU within both historical and policy contexts, offering a nuanced comparison of their ongoing alignment with the objectives of NEP 2020.

Research Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative case study approach. The primary sources of data include:
- Official reports, policy documents, and NEP 2020 implementation updates published by Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU).
- University circulars, media coverage, academic committee reports, and public statements from university leadership.
- Peer-reviewed articles and online news platforms reporting on NEP 2020 implementation.

The analysis focuses on identifying key structural, curricular, and pedagogical changes in both institutions, comparing them against NEP 2020's key objectives.

NEP 2020 and Its Vision for Higher Education: An Overview

NEP 2020 envisions a comprehensive reform of Indian higher education by promoting multidisciplinary learning, research integration, digital innovation, flexible degree structures, and equitable access. Key initiatives include:
- Four-Year Undergraduate Programs (FYUP) with multiple entry-exit options.
- Adoption of the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) system.
- Establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF)
- Establishment of National Educational Technology Forum (NETF).
- Integration of vocational education, global exposure.
- Focus on outcome-based learning.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 outlines a transformative vision for the future of Indian higher education, emphasizing the need for a flexible, multidisciplinary, and student-centric learning environment. The policy aims to restructure the higher education system to align with global standards while preserving India's rich educational heritage (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020). It promotes an ecosystem where critical thinking, research, creativity, and digital fluency are prioritized across disciplines.

One of the cornerstone initiatives of NEP 2020 is the implementation of Four-Year Undergraduate Programs (FYUP). These programs are structured to allow multiple entry and exit points, enabling students to earn a certificate after one year, a diploma after two, a bachelor's degree after three, and a research-intensive degree after four years (MoE, 2020). This system not only provides flexibility and personalization but also enhances academic mobility and lifelong learning opportunities.

Another major reform is the introduction of the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), a digital platform designed to store and transfer credits earned by students across different higher education institutions (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2021). This initiative is intended to foster interdisciplinary learning and smooth credit transfer, making the Indian education system more modular and student-friendly.

To cultivate a robust research culture, NEP 2020 recommends the establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF), a dedicated body to fund, mentor, and promote quality research across all disciplines, with a special emphasis on underrepresented fields in the humanities and social sciences (MoE, 2020).

In addition, the policy recognizes the transformative power of technology in higher education and proposes the creation of the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF). This autonomous platform is envisioned to facilitate dialogue and innovation in the use of digital tools for teaching, assessment, and academic management (NETF, 2021).

The integration of vocational education into mainstream higher education is another priority under NEP 2020. The policy calls for the gradual inclusion of job-relevant skills, internships, and entrepreneurial training within degree programs, aiming to bridge the gap between academia and industry (MoE, 2020). Furthermore, the policy encourages globalization of education by promoting student exchange programs, international collaborations, and globally benchmarked curricula, thereby preparing students for a competitive international job market.

Importantly, NEP 2020 advocates for an outcome-based education model, which focuses on learning outcomes, competencies, and value-based education rather than rote memorization. This approach aligns education with 21st-century skills and the demands of the global economy (Sharma, 2021).

Aligarh Muslim University: Structuring for NEP 2020 Alignment

Aligarh Muslim University manifests the vision and thought of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Sir Syed was a practicing Muslim so he emphasized Western scientific learning and tried to integrate the same with Islamic values in a blended form at Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College (later Aligarh Muslim University). Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) embodies the vision and principles of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who was a devout Muslim emphasizing the importance of Western scientific education while seeking to harmonize it with Islamic values. Initially established as the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College, AMU reflects Sir Syed's effort to blend modern scientific knowledge with religious ethics (Khan, 2020). Recognized as a key architect of modern India and one of the foremost Muslim leaders of his era, Sir Syed dedicated his life to the advancement of the Indian nation. Several core aspects of Sir Syed's legacy continue to influence Aligarh Muslim University (AMU):

1. He championed scientific education, rational inquiry, and Western-style English education as essential for the moral, economic, political, social, and religious progress of the Muslim community.
2. He pursued a balanced integration of faith and reason, promoting modern education while preserving Islamic traditions.
3. Sir Syed advocated for communal harmony, encouraging Hindus and Muslims to view themselves as a united nation.
4. He was a pioneering proponent of secular education in India, supporting the cultural and religious synthesis essential to nation-building.

Consequently, AMU is not only regarded globally as a premier higher education institution but also as a living tribute to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's enduring spirit and relentless efforts to revive the intellectual and moral standing of Muslims specifically, and Indian society more broadly (Khan, 2020). AMU has emerged as a leader in NEP 2020 implementation, especially among central universities. Key developments include:

- *NEP Cell & Advisory Committee:* AMU established its NEP Cell in 2021, guiding implementation with stakeholder input.
- *Curricular Reforms:* The University launched Four-Year Undergraduate Programs in multiple faculties with embedded research, internships, and skill development.
- *Academic Bank of Credit (ABC):* A dedicated ABC/NAD Cell has been created to manage student credits via Digilocker.
- *Vocational and Interdisciplinary Courses:* New programs such as M.Sc. in Cybersecurity, Data Science, and AI reflect a shift toward industry-oriented education.
- *Mentorship Role:* AMU has been selected to mentor five regional universities, highlighting its institutional leadership.
- *Teacher Training and Outreach:* Continuous professional development and NEP awareness programs have been conducted for faculty across departments.

Banaras Hindu University: NEP 2020 Implementation and Innovation

Banaras Hindu University is truly remembered as the legacy of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya featuring his educational thought. Banaras Hindu University (BHU) is widely recognized as a living embodiment of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's educational ideals and vision. His lifelong commitment to the development of Indian education is reflected in the enduring institutional values and foundational strength of BHU (Sharma, 2020). Malaviya served as the Vice-Chancellor of the university from 1919 to 1938 and continued to guide its principles as Rector until his passing on November 12, 1946.

The educational philosophy and legacy of Pandit Malaviya, as institutionalized in BHU, are evident in several key aspects:

1. He skillfully integrated traditional Hindu philosophy with modern education, fostering a synthesis that shaped the intellectual character of his students.
2. Drawing inspiration from the concept of *Nishkama Karma* in the Bhagavad Gita, Malaviya viewed education as a vehicle for moral and spiritual development, not merely academic success.
3. His relentless efforts contributed to shaping BHU as a cradle for leadership, particularly nurturing individuals who later became prominent figures in India's freedom struggle.
4. BHU emerged as a center for Hindu cultural revival, reflecting Malaviya's vision of rejuvenating Indian identity through education.

Banaras Hindu University (BHU) stands not only as a major center of higher learning but also as a symbol of Pandit Malaviya's enduring educational and nationalist legacy, visible in the institution's ethos and practices (Sharma, 2020). BHU, one of India's oldest and most prestigious universities, has taken structured steps to align with NEP 2020:

- *NEP Implementation Committee:* Initially formed in 2020 and restructured in 2023 to monitor gradual implementation.
- *Four-Year Undergraduate Program:* Successfully rolled-out in the 2024–25 academic session, including value-added, skill-based, and research tracks.
- *Academic Credit System:* ABC registrations for over 30,000 students across two academic years ensure flexibility and transferability of credits.
- *Student Support Systems:* A student welfare panel has been created to address psychological and social well-being—aligning with NEP's holistic education model.
- *Global Exposure:* The University funds semester-long visits abroad for Ph.D. students, encouraging international research engagement.
- *Stakeholder Dialogues:* Open consultations have been held to prepare policy blueprints for NEP components like teacher standards and mentoring systems.

Comparative Analysis: National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU)

Although Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) are often regarded as two foundational institutions of Indian higher education, complementary in their contributions to nation-building and academic advancement. On the other hand, they also represent distinct philosophical and ideological underpinnings. These differences, as well as their shared aspirations, contribute richly to the pluralistic fabric of Indian academia (Kumar & Ahmed, 2021).

Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) was born out of modernist Islamic reform, aiming to empower the Muslim community through Western scientific education framed within Islamic ethical values (Sharma, 2020). In contrast, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) was established on the ideals of spiritual nationalism, where Hindu philosophy was harmonized with modern science, reflecting an educational model rooted in traditional revivalism and national identity. While both institutions embraced modern knowledge systems, their epistemological foundations diverged; AMU prioritizing social upliftment and community-specific empowerment while as BHU emphasizing cultural integration and national consciousness, and an integration of scientific and traditional knowledge.

Despite these differences, both universities share a legacy of producing intellectuals, reformers, and national leaders, thereby reinforcing the importance of inclusive and transformative education in India. In this light, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 echoes several foundational principles embodied by both institutions. For instance, BHU's emphasis on holistic and multidisciplinary education resonates with NEP's call for breaking rigid academic silos and promoting broad-based learning (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020). Similarly, AMU's commitment to integrating scientific reasoning with cultural values aligns closely with NEP's vision of blending tradition with modernity to create a globally competitive yet locally grounded education system.

The implementation of NEP 2020, therefore, offers an opportunity to re-express the pioneering models of both AMU and BHU on a national scale. The policy's provisions for flexible curricula, multilingualism, research promotion, and inclusive access reaffirm the historical missions of these universities—making them not just relics of the past, but vital players in India's educational future (Sharma, 2020; Kumar & Ahmed, 2021).

The following table will give a clear picture of the different parameters of National Education Policy 2020 implemented at Aligarh Muslim University and Banaras Hindu University.

NEP 2020	AMU	BHU
Curriculum Reform	FYUP already launched with interdisciplinary modules	FYUP rolled out in 2024-25
Credit System (ABC)	Digilocker integration already fully functional	Over thirty thousand students enrolled in ABC
Vocational & Skill Courses	Data Science, Cyber Security and Visual Arts	Emphasis on internships, Value-added courses
Mentorship and Outreach	Mentoring five regional universities	Focused on internal reforms
Teacher Student Support	SWAYAM based training	Student development and wellness panel
Global Collaboration	Digital learning and SWAYAM integration	International Ph.D. programs
NEP Oversight Mechanism	NEP Cell & Advisory Committee	NEP Implementation Committee

Conclusion:

Both Aligarh Muslim University and Banaras Hindu University have produced tycoons in all fields of knowledge and continue to be the symbols of intellectual legacy and cultural resilience. These institutions consistently develop a holistic education system thereby making a better nation by reviewing the power of education while transcending communal cocoons. Although these two educational hubs differ in cultural and religious backgrounds but at the same time they have a strong concord over transforming India into a progressive, enlightened and a developed nation. As religious and ideological different are much evident in this era, the legacies of these higher educational institutions still endorse that education results in unity, dialogue, transformation, transformation and development. AMU and BHU, as two of India's premier higher education institutions, exemplify different but complementary approaches to implementing NEP 2020. AMU has demonstrated a rapid and comprehensive adaptation, positioning itself as both a model institution and a mentor. BHU, while more gradual, is methodically aligning with NEP 2020 goals through curriculum restructuring, student development initiatives, and international research exposure. Both institutions reflect the challenges and potential of NEP 2020; balancing tradition with innovation, institutional autonomy with policy compliance, and academic excellence with inclusivity. As India advances toward its goal of becoming a global knowledge hub, universities like AMU and BHU will play a pivotal role in shaping the nation's academic future.

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