Contours of a Discipline: Rethinking Political Science in Indian Classrooms

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	The landscape of higher education in political science is rapidly evolving, driven by dynamic shifts in pedagogy, technology, and societal expectations. This paper explores the emerging trends shaping the field of political science, highlighting how these developments respond to the growing complexities of governance, globalization, and civic engagement in the 21st century. Key trends analysed include the integration of digital and blended learning environments, the increasing emphasis on experiential and interdisciplinary learning, and the adoption of global and decolonial perspectives within curricula. The study also examines the challenges and opportunities posed by these changes, such as ensuring equitable access, fostering critical thinking, and balancing traditional foundations with innovative practices. Through a synthesis of contemporary literature and case studies, this paper offers insights into how political science higher education is adapting to prepare students for the multifaceted political challenges of the future. Ultimately, it has been found that increased interdisciplinarity, digital integration and a shift towards empirical research is evident in recent times. However, disparities in access and infrastructure persist, highlighting the need for inclusive reforms, faculty training, and skill-based learning approaches

Introduction

Higher education in India has long been central to shaping critical thinking, nurturing democratic ideals, and preparing engaged citizens. Among the disciplines offered within its expansive academic landscape, Political Science holds a special significance. Its role goes far beyond the boundaries of the classroom, influencing nation-building, policymaking, and civil society. In recent times, the discipline has experienced profound changes that have reshaped its approach, aligning it more closely with the dynamics of an increasingly complex global and national context. New ideas, methods, and technologies have emerged, prompting scholars, institutions, and students to rethink the teaching and learning of Political Science across the country.

Traditionally, Political Science education in India concentrated mainly on theoretical analyses of politics, governmental institutions, and constitutional frameworks. The curriculum was rooted largely in normative approaches shaped by British institutional traditions, supplemented by the study of Indian politics and its constitutional structure. However, in the era of globalization, advances in digital technologies, and the growing trend towards interdisciplinary understanding, Political Science has evolved beyond its traditional boundaries. Today, it embraces a more comprehensive and practice-oriented approach, incorporating fields such as public policy, international relations, gender studies, environmental politics, digital governance, and data analytics. This shift has made Political Science more relevant and attractive to younger generations looking for a discipline that speaks to contemporary realities.

The launch of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has acted as a catalyst for reshaping higher education across disciplines, including Political Science. The NEP promotes multidisciplinary and holistic learning, allowing students to pursue a range of interests while gaining in-depth expertise. As a result, Political Science is increasingly defined by its responsiveness to new ideas and its ability to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical applications. Innovative pedagogies such as online courses, flipped classrooms, simulations, and field-based learning have become more common, making the discipline more accessible and impactful.

At the same time, these changes have brought forth a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Resource constraints within state and central universities, the difficulty of aligning curricula with global standards, and resistance to adopting new teaching methods have posed significant hurdles. Yet advances in digital learning platforms, growing collaborations between academic institutions and policymaking

bodies, and the rising interest of students in Political Science as a career path present promising avenues for growth and renewal.

This paper aims to examine and assess these recent developments within Political Science higher education in India. It explores how the discipline has evolved to accommodate new theoretical and empirical methods, how technology has reshaped teaching and research, and how policies like NEP 2020 have influenced its direction. In doing so, this study aspires to provide a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary landscape of Political Science education in India, highlighting its challenges, opportunities, and future trajectory. Ultimately, it aims to contribute to ongoing conversations about making Political Science more relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the demands of an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

The Evolution of Higher Education in Political Science

The evolution of higher education in Political Science in India is deeply rooted in the country's long and rich intellectual heritage. The study of politics and statecraft in the subcontinent can be traced back to ancient times when texts like the Arthashastra, Dharmashastra, and epics such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana offered profound insights into kingship, ethics, administration, and state governance. These ancient works reflect an enduring concern with the nature of authority, the dynamics of power, and the responsibilities of rulers and citizens. However, it was only during the British colonial period that Political Science emerged as a formal academic discipline in its modern sense.

With the establishment of the first modern universities in India — the University of Calcutta (1857), the University of Madras (1857), and the University of Bombay (1857) — Political Science began to be introduced within their curriculum. Its early focus was largely shaped by British institutional traditions, legalistic approaches, and constitutional studies. The discipline was taught primarily as an extension of British administrative practices, making its scope narrowly focused on formal institutions, legal frameworks, and the British political order. Political Science in its formative years was highly normative and tended to emphasize institutional and constitutional analyses rooted in British political thought.

The attainment of independence in 1947 acted as a significant turning point for Political Science in India. In the post-independence era, the discipline gained a distinct identity as it aligned itself more closely with the nation-building agenda. The focus of teaching and research expanded from British institutional and legal frameworks towards an understanding of Indian politics, state institutions, democratic structures,

and constitutionalism. Political Science departments across the country introduced courses that examined topics such as federalism, electoral behavior, party politics, coalition dynamics, caste and class relations, and the role of pressure groups and civil society. In doing so, the discipline became a vital tool for interpreting the socio-political transformations and democratic aspirations of a newly independent nation.

The establishment of prestigious institutions such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in 1969 and the growth of departments in universities across India further strengthened Political Science as an academic discipline. By the 1970s and 1980s, Political Science evolved into a more multidisciplinary subject, drawing upon insights from Sociology, History, Economics, and Area Studies. The intellectual climate of the era was shaped by Marxist theory, Dependency theory, and Subaltern studies, which influenced the teaching and research of Political Science departments across the country. The focus of inquiry widened to rural politics, social movements, caste dynamics, gender relations, and the interplay between state and society. This shift facilitated a more nuanced understanding of Indian politics and made the discipline more relevant to the lived realities of its people.

The economic liberalization and globalization of the early 1990s introduced another critical shift in Political Science education in India. The discipline responded by expanding its focus to incorporate international relations, global governance, environmental politics, human rights, gender studies, and comparative politics. The growing role of multinational institutions, advances in information and communication technology, and the emergence of new global economic and political orders required Political Science departments to rethink their curricula. The subject came to be increasingly defined by its global connections and its ability to critically assess contemporary national and international developments.

In summary, the evolution of higher education in Political Science in India reflects a long and intricate journey. From its roots in ancient thought and its formal introduction under British colonial rule, the discipline has evolved into a dynamic, expansive, and interdisciplinary field. Its progression mirrors the socio-political transformations of the country itself — adapting to its needs, responding to its aspirations, and aligning itself with global developments. Today, Political Science is not merely an academic subject; it is a lens through which students can understand, analyze, and actively participate in shaping the complex, challenging, and ever-changing world that they inherit.

Changes Introduced by the New Education Policy, 2020

The New Education Policy (NEP), 2020 has brought about a sweeping transformation in the structure and outlook of higher education in India. Designed to build an inclusive, multidisciplinary, and flexible learning environment, this policy aims to create an education system that is better suited to the needs of the 21st century. Its changes have a profound impact across disciplines, including Political Science, reshaping how this subject is taught, learned, and applied. By focusing on critical thinking, interdisciplinarity, and practical experience, NEP 2020 positions Political Science to evolve as an increasingly relevant and dynamic field.

One of the central priorities of NEP 2020 is its shift towards multidisciplinary education. Under this new approach, students can now pursue Political Science in tandem with disciplines such as Sociology, Economics, Environmental Studies, History, and Computer Science. This allows students to understand politics within a larger framework — highlighting its connections with society, policy, and technological advances. By breaking down traditional boundaries between disciplines, NEP encourages a more holistic understanding of Political Science, making it more relevant to contemporary global and national realities.

Another significant feature introduced by NEP 2020 is the flexibility of curricula and entry-exit options. The policy allows students to pursue Political Science courses with varying timeframes and outcomes, providing exit points after one, two, three, or four years. Each level grants a qualification — a certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree, or a bachelor's degree with research. This approach empowers students to shape their own academic pathways based on interests, career aspirations, or personal constraints, making higher education more accessible, personalized, and inclusive.

NEP 2020 also emphasizes the importance of skill-based and experiential learning. In Political Science, this means going beyond traditional theoretical teaching and focusing more on application and practice. New methods such as internships, role-playing exercises, simulations, debates, case studies, and fieldwork have become vital elements of the curriculum. Departments are encouraged to collaborate with NGOs, think tanks, civil society organizations, and governmental institutions, allowing students to apply their knowledge to real-world problems. This approach strengthens their understanding of governance, policymaking, diplomacy, and international relations, making Political Science more practical and impactful.

The role of technology-enabled learning is another core tenet of NEP 2020. The policy promotes the use of online platforms, digital libraries, open educational resources, and virtual labs across disciplines. In Political Science, this has opened access to global academic resources, online seminars, collaborative research projects, and digital courses — making the discipline more interactive and inclusive.

Finally, NEP 2020 encourages a research-oriented approach, allowing students to cultivate critical thinking, data literacy, and analytical abilities. The establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF) aims to foster a strong research culture across disciplines. This initiative can enable Political Science departments to explore new areas such as climate politics, gender studies, digital governance, and global security, making the subject more forward-looking and relevant.

In conclusion, NEP 2020 has revitalized Political Science education in India. By introducing multidisciplinary learning, flexible entry and exit points, digital access, and skill-based teaching methods, the policy has positioned the discipline to adapt to an increasingly complex, globalized world — making it more inclusive, impactful, and aligned with the needs of future generations.

Recent Trends in the Political Science as a Discipline

Over the past few years, Political Science education in India has witnessed profound changes as it strives to adapt to an increasingly complex and globalized world. What was once a discipline focused mainly on constitutional studies and traditional institutional analyses has now evolved into a dynamic and multidisciplinary area of academic inquiry. Today, Political Science embraces new teaching methods, expands its areas of focus, and increasingly utilizes digital platforms and experiential learning techniques to make the subject more relevant, inclusive, and impactful for students across the country.

- Incorporation of Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary Courses

One of the biggest shifts in recent times has been the growing emphasis on making Political Science a multidisciplinary endeavor. Political phenomena are no longer viewed in isolation. Instead, they are examined through the lens of other disciplines such as Economics, History, Sociology, Environmental Studies, Psychology, and even Computer Science. This shift allows students to understand how politics operates within wider social, economic, and environmental contexts. New courses like Political Economy, Social Policy, Environmental Politics, and Political Psychology have been introduced across universities, providing learners with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of politics. Such a

multidisciplinary approach encourages critical thinking, making students more adept at analyzing complex social and political questions.

- New Areas of Focus

The scope of Political Science has also broadened to incorporate areas that reflect the pressing issues of the 21st century. Topics such as Public Policy, International Relations, Gender Studies, Human Rights, Climate Politics, and Peace and Conflict Studies have gained prominence within Political Science departments. The growing focus on gender studies has encouraged critical examination of gender relations and their impact on state policies and institutions. Similarly, courses on human rights and climate politics have made students more conscious of global challenges and responsibilities. By introducing such areas, Political Science has evolved from being a traditional discipline to one that engages with global and national debates, making its curriculum more relevant for students seeking careers in civil services, NGOs, policymaking, diplomacy, and international organizations.

- Role of Technology and Digital Platforms

Another significant trend reshaping Political Science education is the increasing role of technology. The widespread availability of digital platforms has revolutionized both teaching and research in the discipline. Political Science departments now utilize learning management systems (LMS), online databases, digital archives, and open educational resources (OER), making high-quality academic material more accessible than ever before. This shift has bridged the gap between rural and urban institutions, allowing students from remote areas to access lectures, seminars, and webinars conducted by leading scholars across the globe. The use of digital platforms has also facilitated collaborative research projects and enabled students to gain exposure to international academic environments, making Political Science more inclusive, interactive, and globally connected.

- Rise of Online Learning and Digital Resources

The rise of online platforms and digital resources has further transformed Political Science education. The growing popularity of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), mobile applications, and digital libraries has enhanced access to quality education beyond traditional campus boundaries. Students can now pursue courses offered by top universities across the world, access lectures by eminent scholars, and utilize digital repositories of research papers and data. This trend has opened new opportunities for

lifelong learning and made Political Science education more flexible and accessible to learners from varied socio-economic and geographic backgrounds.

- Growth of Experiential Learning

Perhaps one of the most significant shifts in recent times has been the increasing focus on experiential learning within Political Science. The traditional model, which was largely theory-centric, has now embraced methods such as internships, fieldwork, case studies, role-playing exercises, and simulations of legislative or policymaking proceedings. By participating in internships with NGOs, media organizations, or governmental institutions, students gain hands-on experience that allows them to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios. Fieldwork and case studies enable students to investigate pressing social and political issues within communities, gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities of governance and policymaking. These experiential learning methods cultivate critical thinking, analytical capabilities, and practical problem-solving skills that are highly valued in both academic and professional settings.

Therefore, the recent trends in Political Science education in India reflect a shift towards making the discipline more multidisciplinary, inclusive, and practice-oriented. The incorporation of new areas of focus, combined with advances in technology, has reshaped the discipline into one that is more aligned with the evolving needs of society. Meanwhile, the rise of online platforms has made quality education more accessible across the country, creating opportunities for a diverse range of learners. The growing emphasis on experiential learning further ensures that Political Science is no longer confined to theoretical debates but is deeply connected to the real-world dynamics of politics and governance. Together, these trends have positioned Political Science as a forward-looking discipline, nurturing informed, critical, and engaged citizens who can navigate and contribute to the complex and interdependent global order of the 21st century.

The Impact of Policies Introduced by the Government

Government policies have long been central to shaping the landscape of higher education in India, and their influence is especially significant within disciplines like Political Science. These policies have defined institutional priorities, reshaped teaching and learning methods, and impacted both the academic environment and research culture across universities and colleges. In recent years, landmark reforms — such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and other initiatives introduced by the University

Grants Commission (UGC) and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) — have brought about profound changes that have strengthened Political Science as a vital discipline within higher education.

The NEP 2020 has acted as a catalyst for making Political Science more holistic, interdisciplinary, and practice-oriented. The policy promotes a shift from traditional methods of instruction towards more flexible and broad-based learning, allowing students to pursue Political Science alongside disciplines like Sociology, History, Economics, Environmental Studies, and Gender Studies. This approach encourages a deeper and more nuanced understanding of politics and governance within the wider context of society. The NEP also emphasizes experiential learning — through internships, fieldwork, simulations, role-playing exercises, and collaborative projects — making Political Science more applicable to contemporary issues and the demands of the global workforce.

Another significant provision of the NEP is its focus on multiple entry and exit points within higher education. This allows students to pursue Political Science at their own pace and convenience, making the discipline more accessible to learners from different social, economic, and geographical backgrounds. The policy's emphasis on online platforms, digital libraries, and open educational resources has further strengthened access, making Political Science education more inclusive and affordable for students across rural and urban areas alike.

Moreover, reforms introduced by the UGC, such as the Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS), have created a more flexible and student-centric academic structure. These changes enable students to design personalized learning paths by selecting courses that align with their interests and career aspirations. The establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF), as envisioned by the NEP, aims to foster a culture of inquiry and innovation across disciplines. In Political Science, this initiative is expected to stimulate research in critical areas such as climate politics, gender studies, digital governance, and international relations, making the subject more relevant for addressing national and global challenges.

The ICSSR has also contributed significantly to the enrichment of Political Science education. Its grants and fellowships have promoted interdisciplinary and applied research, facilitating connections between Political Science departments, NGOs, civil society groups, and governmental institutions. These collaborations have strengthened the role of Political Science in shaping policymaking, reinforcing its position as an indispensable discipline in understanding and addressing the complexities of state and society.

Thus, the policies introduced by the government have reshaped Political Science education in India, making it more responsive to the needs of a globalized, democratic, and digital era. By promoting interdisciplinary learning, flexible entry and exit points, digital accessibility, and research-driven inquiry, these reforms have laid the foundation for a more inclusive, impactful, and future-oriented discipline. Political Science has emerged as a vital force for nurturing critical, informed, and engaged citizens, making its role in higher education more significant than ever before.

Challenges and Opportunities

The rapid changes reshaping higher education in Political Science in India have created both significant challenges and promising opportunities. As the discipline strives to stay relevant in an era defined by global connectivity, technological advancement, and shifting socio-political dynamics, it must grapple with a range of constraints while exploring new pathways for growth and improvement.

One of the primary challenges is the persistent issue of resource constraints within state and central universities. Despite efforts to expand and modernize higher education, many institutions continue to operate with limited budgets, aging infrastructure, and shortages of qualified faculty. These constraints affect the quality of teaching, research, and overall academic experience available to students of Political Science. In many state-funded universities, especially in rural and underserved areas, the lack of access to digital platforms, research databases, and updated academic material makes it challenging for students and faculty to remain competitive and engaged in global academic debates.

Another pressing challenge is the difficulty of aligning curricula with global standards and making them relevant to both national and international contexts. The traditional focus of Political Science departments in many institutions still leans towards theoretical and normative approaches, making it harder to integrate multidisciplinary and empirical methods that have become increasingly vital in understanding contemporary politics. The slow pace of curriculum reforms and limited access to modern pedagogical tools hamper efforts to bridge the gap between traditional teaching methods and the global standards required for a truly world-class Political Science education.

Resistance to pedagogical changes within institutions presents yet another challenge. In many cases, academic departments continue to adhere to long-standing teaching methods, making it difficult to adopt more interactive, experiential, and technology-driven approaches that can invigorate the learning process. The reluctance to move away from traditional lecture-based instruction and limited faculty training in

digital tools often impede efforts to incorporate case studies, simulations, role-playing exercises, and fieldwork that are essential for making Political Science more relevant and practice-oriented.

While these constraints are significant, recent trends and policies have also opened up a host of opportunities for Political Science departments across the country. The growing availability of online platforms has emerged as a powerful tool for expanding access to quality education. Through online courses, digital libraries, open educational resources, and virtual seminars, Political Science departments can overcome traditional geographical and infrastructural limitations, making the subject available to a wider range of students across rural and urban areas. These platforms also foster global collaboration and enable students and researchers to learn from leading scholars and institutions worldwide.

Another promising trend is the rising emphasis on skill-oriented and applied Political Science courses. The increasing demand for graduates who can critically analyze public policies, understand global governance, and navigate complex socio-political landscapes has motivated departments to introduce courses that combine theoretical knowledge with practical application. New areas such as data analytics, digital governance, human rights, gender studies, climate politics, and global security have become integral parts of the curriculum, making Political Science more relevant to future career prospects.

Finally, growing collaborations between academia, NGOs, civil society, and policymaking institutions present unprecedented opportunities for Political Science departments. These partnerships enable students to gain hands-on experience and connect theoretical knowledge with real-world practice. Fieldwork, internships, and joint research projects foster closer connections between Political Science departments and external stakeholders, making the discipline more engaged, impactful, and solution-oriented.

Suggestive Measures

To make Political Science education in India more relevant and robust in the context of a globalized, digital, and multidisciplinary era, a range of concrete steps can be introduced. These measures can help departments, institutions, and policymakers overcome existing limitations, build on new opportunities, and ensure that the subject remains dynamic, inclusive, and impactful.

1. **Updating and Expanding the Curriculum**

A crucial first step is to periodically review and revise the Political Science curriculum to align it with contemporary academic and global trends. New areas of focus — such as digital governance, climate politics, gender studies, human rights, and global security — should be added to the existing curriculum. At the same time, traditional areas of study like institutional politics, constitutional theory, and state structures can be taught alongside these emerging topics. By combining foundational knowledge with recent advances, students can gain a well-rounded understanding of politics and its evolving role in society. Additionally, departments should adopt interactive teaching methods — including debates, role-play exercises, case studies, and simulations — making learning more participatory, experiential, and relevant.

2. **Improving Infrastructure and Faculty Development**

Adequate investment in physical and digital infrastructure is vital for making Political Science education more accessible and effective. Government and institutional support can help build well-equipped classrooms, seminar spaces, digital libraries, and online platforms that enable seamless access to learning resources. At the same time, faculty training needs to be strengthened. Regular workshops, seminars, and short-term courses can help teachers adopt innovative pedagogies and integrate digital methods into their teaching, ensuring that students benefit from the best available academic practices.

3. **Encouraging Interdisciplinary and Research-Led Approaches**

To deepen students' understanding of politics within its wider socio-economic and cultural contexts, Political Science departments must foster closer collaboration with disciplines such as Sociology, Economics, History, Environmental Studies, and Information Technology. Interdisciplinary courses can enable students to critically analyze contemporary global and national issues. At the same time, a robust research culture needs to be promoted. Grants and fellowships from institutions like the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the National Research Foundation (NRF) can play a pivotal role in facilitating quality research in critical areas such as international relations, climate politics, gender justice, digital governance, and sustainable development.

4. **Expanding Access Through Digital Education**

Developing online platforms, open educational resources, and digital libraries can bridge existing gaps in access to quality Political Science education, especially for students in rural or underserved areas.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), online seminars, and digital archives can enable learners to benefit from expert knowledge across disciplines and institutions, making Political Science education more inclusive and universally available.

5. Strengthening Links Between Academia and Practice

Finally, closer ties between Political Science departments, NGOs, civil society organizations, media institutions, and government bodies can create opportunities for internships, fieldwork, and collaborative research. These connections can enable students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations, making their education more impactful and directly relevant to society.

Through these measures, Political Science can evolve into a forward-looking, inclusive, and multidisciplinary discipline that prepares students to understand, navigate, and contribute meaningfully to the democratic, global, and technological challenges of the 21st century.

Conclusion

The evolution of higher education in Political Science in India is a story of continual growth, adaptation, and renewal. From its early beginnings rooted in ancient philosophical thought and statecraft, to its institutionalization during the British period, and its vital role in shaping democratic and constitutional practice in post-independence India, Political Science has remained a significant discipline for understanding politics, society, and governance. Today, it stands at a pivotal point as it strives to redefine itself for a world shaped by globalization, technological advances, and multidisciplinary inquiry.

Reforms introduced through policies such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have acted as a springboard for this transformation. By focusing on holistic, flexible, and inclusive approaches, NEP has inspired Political Science departments across the country to rethink traditional teaching methods and align themselves more closely with the demands of the 21st century. The growing focus on multidisciplinary courses, skill-based and experiential learning, digital platforms, and new areas of inquiry — such as gender studies, climate politics, digital governance, and global security — has brought fresh depth and energy to the subject. These changes have made Political Science more relevant and attractive for students seeking to understand and navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world.

At the same time, Political Science faces pressing challenges. Limited resources in many institutions, resistance to innovative teaching methods, and the need for aligning with global academic standards present hurdles that must be addressed. Yet, within these very constraints lies the potential for growth

and improvement. By leveraging advances in digital technology, fostering interdisciplinary connections, building closer links between academia and policymaking, and nurturing a strong research culture, Political Science can continue to evolve and remain deeply connected to the evolving needs of society.

In an era shaped by global and local complexities, Political Science has a vital role to play. It is more than an academic discipline — it is a lens for understanding, analyzing, and shaping the dynamics of politics, governance, and society. By nurturing critical inquiry, evidence-based research, and engaged citizenship, Political Science can educate a new generation of scholars, leaders, and changemakers.

Therefore, the future of Political Science in India rests upon its ability to adapt, innovate, and stay relevant in a rapidly shifting world. By embracing interdisciplinary learning, digital advances, and experiential approaches, it can remain a vital and transformative force in shaping the democratic and global landscapes of the 21st century.

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