

GOVERNANCE REFORMS IN AFFILIATED COLLEGES UNDER SAVITRIBAI PHULE PUNE UNIVERSITY: CHALLENGES, PROGRESS, AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Dr. Amol Padmakar Kare

*Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies Sir Visvesvaraya Institute of Technology, Chincholi, Nashik
amolkare@gmail.com*

Dr. Viresh Bhanudas Parkhe

*Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies Sir Visvesvaraya Institute of Technology, Chincholi, Nashik
virmba09@gmail.com*

Abstract

India's affiliated university model is, depending on who you ask, either a remarkable feat of educational infrastructure or a system badly in need of overhaul. Probably both. Savitribai Phule Pune University SPPU sits squarely at the centre of this tension. With more than 800 affiliated colleges spanning Pune, Nashik, and Ahilyanagar districts, it is one of the largest affiliating universities in Asia. The governance challenge that comes with that scale is not small: how do you maintain academic quality and accountability across a network that diverse, while still giving colleges the room they need to respond to their own students and communities? This paper tracks the trajectory of governance reform at SPPU-affiliated colleges over roughly the past two decades. We look at what has shifted driven by NEP-2020, NAAC accreditation, the UGC's regulatory agenda, and Maharashtra's own policy reforms and we look honestly at what has not. The analysis covers four main areas: academic governance, financial accountability, administrative decentralisation, and quality assurance. The picture that emerges is one of genuine progress, but also of significant unevenness. Colleges in Pune city have moved faster and further than those in Ahilyanagar's rural talukas and that gap matters, both for equity and for sustainable development. The paper ends with a set of specific, practical recommendations. Not generalities about 'strengthening governance' actual suggestions for SPPU, for college managements, and for the state government, aimed at accelerating reform where it matters most and reaching the institutions that the current reform wave has so far left behind.

Keywords: *Governance Reforms, Affiliated Colleges, Savitribai Phule Pune University, SPPU, NEP-2020, NAAC Accreditation, Higher Education Policy, Institutional Autonomy, Maharashtra, Quality Assurance*

1. Introduction

There is a phrase that comes up repeatedly in Indian higher education policy discussions: 'the affiliated college system.' It gets mentioned usually as a problem something inherited from the colonial period, something that has outlived its purpose, something that needs to change. What rarely gets said is just how consequential it is. In SPPU's case, more than 800 colleges, approximately seven lakh students, three geographically and economically distinct districts. This is not a peripheral governance challenge. This is the main event. SPPU was established in 1949, named after Savitribai Phule a woman who, in 19th century Maharashtra, opened schools for girls and fought the caste system at personal cost. The university carrying her name serves communities that still carry the weight of those same historical inequalities. The affiliated colleges range from well-funded arts and science institutions in Pune's urban core to small, resource-stretched management and commerce colleges in the interior talukas of Ahilyanagar. The experience of a student at one end of that spectrum and the other are almost incomparable and governance quality is a significant reason why.

Governance reform in this context is not primarily a management science problem. It is a development problem. When a college in Sangamner or Shrirampur or Akola runs poorly when its IQAC is a formality, its faculty appointments are delayed, its finances are opaque the people who pay the price are students who often have nowhere else to go. That moral weight should sit behind every paragraph of a paper like this one.

What follows: Section 2 reviews the literature on affiliated university governance. Section 3 introduces the GRACE model used in this analysis. Section 4 maps reform progress across five governance dimensions. Section 5 examines SPPU's specific reform initiatives. Section 6 assesses where reform has taken hold and where it has stalled. Section 7 gives implementation challenges the attention they deserve. And Section 8 offers recommendations that are, we hope, concrete enough to use.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Where the Affiliated System Came from and Why It Stayed

The affiliated university model in India was not designed to produce educational excellence. It was designed to produce uniform standards across a

vast colonial territory as cheaply and efficiently as possible. The Wood's Despatch of 1854 and the subsequent founding of the universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857 all modelled on London's examining university structure created a system in which the university's job was essentially to set examinations and award degrees, while actual teaching happened elsewhere, in colleges that were nominally autonomous but academically subordinate (Basu, 2000).

That arrangement was never ideal. Every major education commission since independence has said so. The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948–49) flagged it. The Kothari Commission (1964–66) was particularly pointed, noting that the examination-focused culture of affiliated colleges driven by the university's monopoly over degree awards had crowded out genuine learning, critical thinking, and research (Kaur, 2012). The Yashpal Committee (2009) said it again. And yet, the system has persisted not because no one noticed its flaws, but because dismantling it would mean confronting the interests of thousands of college managements, state government education departments, and university bureaucracies that have grown around it.

2.2 Governance in Higher Education: What the Theory Says

Academic governance theory offers several useful lenses for this problem. New Public Management the reform paradigm that reshaped public administration in the UK, Australia, and elsewhere from the 1980s onwards argues that institutions perform better when they face competitive pressure, have genuine managerial autonomy, and are held accountable through measurable performance targets rather than procedural compliance (Hood, 1991). Applied to affiliated colleges, this framework suggests that the problem is not just resource scarcity it is the wrong kind of accountability. Colleges are held accountable for following procedures, not for producing outcomes. Michael Shattock's (2006) framework of 'good governance' in higher education is also instructive here. He argues that governance quality is not primarily a structural question it depends on the exercise of leadership, the cultivation of institutional culture, and the balance between autonomy and accountability that allows academic institutions to pursue their missions without being captured by external interests. In the affiliated college context, this balance is perpetually strained by what Powar and Bhatt (2005) call the 'dual authority' problem: colleges answer simultaneously to the university and to the state government, often receiving contradictory signals from both. Resolving that tension is not a technical fix it

requires deliberate policy choices about where authority should sit.

2.3 NEP-2020 and the Governance Reform Mandate

NEP-2020 is more explicit about affiliated college governance than any previous national education policy. It does not mince words: the policy envisions the phased winding down of the affiliating university model over fifteen years, to be replaced by clusters of autonomous degree-granting colleges with genuine academic and administrative independence (Ministry of Education, 2020). That is an ambitious target some would say an unrealistic one in the fifteen-year timeframe. But the direction of travel is clear, and several of the policy's more immediately actionable provisions the Academic Bank of Credits, the Learning Outcome-based Curriculum Framework, the NAAC accreditation incentive for institutional autonomy is already pushing affiliated colleges in that direction. What the evidence shows so far is that NAAC-accredited colleges are responding to these provisions more actively than unaccredited ones (NAAC, 2022). Which makes sense: institutions that have already invested in governance quality are better positioned to take the next step. The risk is that NEP-2020's reform momentum benefits those who already have advantages well-resourced urban colleges while leaving behind the institutions in rural districts that most need governance transformation. That is the central tension this paper tries to address.

2.4 Maharashtra's Own Reform Journey

Maharashtra has a reasonably strong track record on higher education governance reform, compared to many Indian states. The Maharashtra Public Universities Act, 2016 which replaced the older 1994 Act introduced real structural changes: stronger board of management powers, clearer provisions for granting college autonomy, enhanced quality assurance mechanisms, and explicit frameworks for governance accountability. SPPU, as one of the state's major public universities, has been expected to lead in implementing these provisions.

The honest assessment is that implementation has been uneven. The structural architecture of reform is largely in place. The cultural and capacity changes that give that architecture meaning are happening, but slowly and unevenly across the affiliated network. A college in Pune's western suburbs with good management, a motivated Principal, and a NAAC A+ grade has made the law work. A college in a small taluka in Ahilyanagar with overworked faculty and a management

committee focused primarily on fee income has not yet felt its full effect.

3. The GRACE Model: A Framework for Assessing Governance Reform

This paper uses the Governance Reform for Affiliated College Excellence (GRACE) Model to organise the analysis. It has five dimensions, each addressing a distinct area of institutional governance. They do not operate in isolation improvements in one typically create conditions for progress in others but treating them separately helps identify where specific interventions are needed.

1. **Academic Governance Reform:** How curriculum gets designed, how pedagogy evolves, how examinations are managed, how research gets promoted, and how much genuine academic decision-making authority the college's own faculty hold.
2. **Regulatory and Compliance Reform:** The practical relationship between SPPU and its affiliated colleges how approvals happen, how long they take, how much discretion colleges have over routine decisions, and how the regulatory burden is distributed between high-performing and struggling institutions.
3. **Administrative and Financial Governance Reform:** Internal management quality information systems, financial accountability, HR governance, leadership development, and the ability to make and implement institutional decisions efficiently.
4. **Accreditation and Quality Assurance Reform:** The governance changes driven by NAAC and the IQAC framework the extent to which accreditation has moved from a compliance exercise to a genuine tool for continuous institutional improvement.
5. **Stakeholder Engagement and Accountability Reform:** How much students, faculty, alumni, local employers, and community members participate in institutional governance and how transparent the institution is to the people it serves.

The GRACE Model draws on Shattock's (2006) work on governance balance and Ostrom's (1990) institutional analysis framework, which shows why clear rules, monitoring, and consequences matter for sustained institutional performance. It is calibrated for the SPPU context specifically recognising that the same governance challenge looks very different at a large, aided college in Pune city and at a small self-financing management institute in an interior taluka.

4. The Five Dimensions of Reform: What Has Changed

4.1 Academic Governance

The introduction of the Choice-Based Credit System in 2014 was a significant step. For the first time, affiliated colleges had meaningful flexibility in curriculum design students could choose electives across disciplines, which was simply not possible under the old uniform-syllabus model. The subsequent adoption of Outcome-Based Education, aligned with NAAC and NBA requirements, pushed colleges further: they now must articulate what students should know and be able to do, map curriculum content to those outcomes, and assess attainment systematically. That sounds basic. In the context of Indian affiliated education, it was a meaningful shift in institutional mindset.

The Academic Bank of Credits system one of NEP-2020's more ambitious provisions is the next frontier. In principle, it allows students to accumulate credits across institutions and programmes, dramatically expanding educational flexibility. In practice, full implementation across all SPPU-affiliated colleges, including those in semi-urban and rural areas, is still a work in progress. The infrastructure both digital and administrative that the ABC system requires is not yet uniformly present. Progress is real. It is also incomplete.

The QIP programme under which this very conference is organised deserves mention here. It is a practical mechanism for building academic governance capacity at affiliated colleges through curriculum development support, research promotion, and faculty enhancement. Programmes like this one are not glamorous. They do not generate headlines. But they are exactly the kind of sustained, ground-level institutional support that makes the difference between reform that lands and reform that stays on paper.

4.2 Regulatory and Compliance Reform

Ask any Principal of an affiliated college about their relationship with SPPU's administrative machinery and you will hear similar stories: affiliation approvals that took months, routine decisions that required multiple trips to the university campus in Pune, paperwork that accumulated faster than it could be processed. Much of this has genuinely improved. The university's online affiliation portal, digital examination management system, and e-governance dashboard have reduced transaction costs especially for colleges that are physically far from Pune and previously bore significant time and travel costs for routine compliance.

The tiered autonomy framework introduced under the Maharashtra Public Universities Act, 2016 is the structural centrepiece of regulatory reform. Colleges meeting specified criteria NAAC grading, track record, governance capacity can apply for autonomous status, which means designing their own curricula, conducting their own examinations, and awarding degrees in the university's name. A growing number of SPPU-affiliated colleges have taken this step, primarily in Pune district. In Nashik and Ahilyanagar, uptake is more limited. The pathway to autonomy exists; the capacity and resources to walk it are unevenly distributed.

4.3 Administrative and Financial Governance

Administrative modernisation at affiliated colleges has accelerated, driven partly by SPPU's mandated adoption of integrated college management software and partly by the general digitisation of institutional processes accelerated by COVID-19. Student admissions, fee collection, examination management, faculty records these are now handled through digital systems at most accredited colleges. The data transparency that comes with this is not trivial. When records are digitised and centralised, things that used to be invisible enrolment trends, fee collection gaps, examination outcomes become visible. That visibility is a prerequisite for meaningful accountability.

Financial governance is where the picture gets more complicated. Government-aided colleges operate under a web of grant-in-aid rules, staff appointment approvals, and expenditure controls that were designed for a different era and have not kept pace with the governance demands of modern institutions. The approval timelines for staff appointments in aided colleges can stretch to years during which positions remain vacant, existing faculty are overloaded, and students receive a diminished educational experience. Self-financing colleges have more financial autonomy but often lack the internal audit mechanisms and financial management expertise to use it well. NEP-2020's vision of greater financial autonomy for accredited institutions points in the right direction. Getting there requires capacity building, not just policy announcements.

4.4 Accreditation and Quality Assurance

If one had to identify the single most consequential driver of governance reform in SPPU-affiliated colleges over the past two decades, it would probably be NAAC. Not because NAAC is perfect it is not but because the accreditation process, at its best, forces an institution to look honestly at itself. The Self-Study Report process, whatever its limitations, requires colleges to document what they do, not just what they intend to do. The peer

review visit when it is conducted seriously surfaces governance gaps that internal culture has normalised.

Colleges that have gone through accreditation consistently report governance improvements: better documentation practices, more structured student support systems, more active IQACs, improved research culture. AIMBA's sustained NAAC 'A' Grade is worth noting here it reflects institutional commitment to governance quality that is harder to maintain in a semi-rural setting than it might appear from the outside. But NAAC coverage across the SPPU network is still uneven. A significant proportion of affiliated colleges, particularly smaller ones in rural talukas, remain unaccredited. Those are precisely the institutions where governance weaknesses are most acute, and students are most vulnerable. Reaching them must be a priority.

4.5 Stakeholder Engagement and Accountability

The Maharashtra Public Universities Act provisions for Local Management Committees, Faculty Councils, and student grievance mechanisms have created governance structures on paper. Whether those structures work in practice is a different question. At well-run colleges, IQACs genuinely collect student feedback, alumni input, and employer perspectives and use them to drive curriculum and service improvements. At others, the IQAC exists primarily to produce documentation for the next NAAC cycle.

Student governance is perhaps the most underdeveloped dimension across the board. Student council elections happen. But students sitting on meaningful governance committees, participating in curriculum review, shaping student support services that is still rare. There is a paternalistic institutional culture in much of Indian higher education that treats student voice as a thing to be managed rather than a resource to be used. Changing that culture is harder than changing a regulation. But it matters, because institutions that genuinely listen to students are better at serving them.

5. What SPPU Has Actually Done

5.1 Going Digital and What COVID Accelerated

SPPU's investment in digitalising its administrative relationship with affiliated colleges is real and consequential. Before the online affiliation portal existed, a college Principal in Shirampur wanting a routine approval had to physically travel to Pune a half-day's journey at minimum. That friction was not just inconvenient. It was a governance cost that fell disproportionately on small colleges with limited administrative staff. Online systems have largely eliminated this.

The pandemic is an odd thing to be grateful for, but it did accelerate digital governance transformation in ways that might otherwise have taken another decade. Online examination management, digital result processing, virtual academic council meetings these were adopted rapidly out of necessity and have largely stayed. The digital infrastructure that emerged from that period is now being extended and formalised. SPPU's Learning Management System, accessible to affiliated colleges, is part of this broader effort. The direction is right. The coverage gap between well-resourced colleges with strong IT infrastructure and rural colleges where reliable internet connectivity is still not guaranteed remains a live issue.

5.2 Supporting Colleges Toward Autonomy

SPPU's Autonomous College Development Programme is a reasonable model for what this kind of support should look like: mentoring from experienced autonomous college administrators, workshops on curriculum design and examination management, a graduated framework that allows colleges to take on more independence progressively rather than all at once. The university's dedicated Autonomous College Cell provides ongoing coordination.

The limitation is reach. The colleges most capable of benefiting from this programme are often the ones that need it least they already have the governance infrastructure, the faculty capacity, and the institutional track record that autonomous status requires. For colleges in Nashik and Ahilyanagar that want to move toward autonomy but are starting from a weaker position, the support available is not yet adequate to the scale of the challenge. Extending the programme's reach with more resources, more targeted mentoring, and more

realistic timelines for rural colleges is the obvious next step.

5.3 Research and Innovation: Ambition Meets Constraint

SPPU has done genuine work to build a research culture across its affiliated network seed grants for faculty, the QIP programme, research methodology workshops, linkages with industrial clusters in the Pune-Nashik corridor. The SPPU Innovation Hub, which supports applied research and startup incubation, is a real institutional asset.

The honest constraint is workload. Faculty at most affiliated colleges teach twelve to sixteen hours a week, manage examination duties, handle administrative responsibilities, and are expected simultaneously to conduct research, guide students, participate in IQAC activities, and comply with an expanding set of regulatory requirements. Research in these conditions is not impossible, but it requires exceptional individual motivation to sustain. NEP-2020's vision of all higher education institutions becoming research-active is the right aspiration. Getting there at affiliated colleges requires reducing the structural barriers to research including teaching load rationalisation, library resource improvement, and the development of research mentoring cultures that currently exist at very few affiliated institutions.

6. Where Things Stand: A Reform Progress Assessment

The table below assesses governance reform progress across the five GRACE dimensions, distinguishing between colleges in Pune district and those in Nashik and Ahilyanagar districts. The distinction matters: resource disparities between these two groups are large enough that 'progress' means very different things depending on where a college sits.

Table 1: GRACE Model Reform Progress Assessment for SPPU-Affiliated Colleges

GRACE Dimension	Key Reform Instrument	Pune District Progress	Nashik / Ahilyanagar Progress	Overall Status
Academic Governance	CBCS, OBE, ABC, Autonomous College status	High many autonomous colleges; CBCS widely adopted	Medium CBCS adopted; few autonomous colleges	Advancing
Regulatory Reform	Online affiliation portal, MH Universities Act 2016	High digital systems adopted; approvals faster	Medium adoption gaps: capacity constraints remain	Advancing
Administrative & Financial Governance	ERP systems, e-governance, internal audit	High MIS widely implemented at larger colleges	Low-Medium capacity gaps; aided college constraints	Partial
Accreditation & Quality Assurance	NAAC, IQAC, NBA, outcome-based assessment	High most colleges accredited; IQACs functional	Low many colleges unaccredited; IQACs nominal	Uneven
Stakeholder Engagement	LMC, IQAC feedback, grievance cells, student councils	Medium-High structures in place; engagement varies	Low-Medium structures nominal; limited student voice	Emerging

7. Why Reform Is Hard the Obstacles That Policy Doesn't Fix by Itself

7.1 The System's Own Weight

The affiliating university system is not just a governance structure it is an ecosystem with decades of settled interests, established procedures, and institutional inertia. SPPU's examination management function alone coordinating examinations for several lakh students across hundreds of centres consumes enormous institutional energy every semester. When things go wrong, as they periodically do (paper leakages, result delays, evaluation irregularities), the fallout lands on students who lose months and opportunities, and on colleges that bear the reputational damage for a failure they did not cause. This is not a minor administrative inefficiency. It is a governance risk that sits at the heart of the affiliating model.

The dual authority problem colleges answering simultaneously to SPPU and to the state government's Higher and Technical Education Department creates a governance maze that even well-intentioned administrators struggle to navigate. Government-aided colleges wanting to hire a faculty member or upgrade infrastructure must route approvals through both channels. Timelines stretch. Decisions get deferred. And the institution that suffers most is the one at the bottom of the approval chain, waiting.

7.2 The Resource Gap Is Not Going Away on Its Own

Good governance costs money. Not a lot a functional IQAC, a decent MIS system, a qualified Finance Officer but enough that resource-constrained colleges genuinely cannot afford it without external support. The gap between what a well-funded Pune college can invest in governance infrastructure and what a small Ahilyanagar college can is not a gap that good intentions close. It requires deliberate redistribution through subsidised software, shared administrative services for college clusters, and targeted governance improvement grants for institutions that most need them.

SPPU's QIP programme is a step in this direction. So are several of the state government's digital education initiatives. But the scale of these interventions is not yet matched to the scale of the need. A college with forty faculty members, limited administrative staff, and a budget derived almost entirely from regulated tuition fees cannot fund its own governance transformation. Expecting it to be not a governance reform strategy it is wishful thinking.

7.3 Faculty Governance: The Gap Between Structure and Reality

The Maharashtra Public Universities Act, 2016 creates provisions for Faculty Councils and College Development Committees with defined roles in institutional governance. The practical reality at many affiliated colleges is that faculty governance means very little. Heavy teaching loads leave little time for governance participation. Government service rules constrain academic initiative in ways that private sector employees find hard to imagine. And institutional cultures particularly at colleges with strong, centralised management do not always welcome faculty voice in strategic decisions.

Fixing this is not primarily a structural problem. The structures exist, at least on paper. It is a cultural problem, and cultural problems are slower and harder to address than structural ones. What helps: leadership development programmes that build governance literacy among senior faculty, IQAC processes that genuinely incorporate faculty input rather than going through the motions, and senior management that understands faculty engagement not as a threat but as an institutional asset.

7.4 The Political Economy Problem

This is the part of the governance reform conversation that tends to get omitted from polite academic papers. Many affiliated colleges in Maharashtra are managed by educational trusts with strong political connections. Management committees at these institutions may not welcome governance reforms that reduce their discretion over staff appointments, fee setting, and resource allocation even when those reforms are legally mandated. The result is a compliance culture: the appearance of governance reform, with the reality of it carefully managed.

NAAC accreditation has been a partial corrective to this, because peer reviewers visiting a campus can assess whether IQACs are genuinely functional or merely document-generating. But NAAC has also been criticised with some justification for susceptibility to a sophisticated version of the same game: SSRs that present institutional governance in the best possible light, structured to satisfy assessment criteria rather than reflect honest self-assessment. Addressing this requires stronger post-accreditation monitoring, more emphasis on outcome data that is harder to manipulate, and peer reviewers who are genuinely independent of institutional networks.

8. Recommendations

8.1 For SPPU

1. Create a Rural College Governance Support Centre within SPPU's administrative structure,

staffed by experienced governance practitioners, dedicated to providing hands-on capacity building, technical assistance, and mentoring to affiliated colleges in Nashik and Ahilyanagar that cannot afford to build this capacity themselves.

2. Build a comprehensive, mobile-accessible College Governance Dashboard real-time data on affiliation compliance, IQAC activities, student outcomes, and research outputs for every affiliated institution. Make the data publicly accessible. Transparency is a governance reform tool.
3. Develop a genuinely tiered autonomy pathway from full affiliation through academic cluster status to full autonomy with clearly defined criteria at each stage, realistic transition timelines for rural colleges, and active support packages that match the actual capacity gaps of institutions in less-resourced districts.
4. Expand the QIP programme to include a dedicated Governance Reform Track: workshops, peer learning networks, and small grants for governance innovation projects at affiliated colleges. The conferences this track enables like the present one are exactly the right kind of investment.
5. Publish an annual SPPU Affiliated College Governance Review a public report on governance outcomes across the affiliated network, modelled on the UGC Annual Report format. Reputational accountability for governance quality is underused as a policy lever.

8.2 For Affiliated College Management and Leadership

1. Treat administration as a profession, not a burden distributed among overloaded faculty. Invest in hiring qualified Finance Officers, Examination Coordinators, and IQAC Directors rather than assigning these responsibilities as secondary duties to teaching staff who already have full workloads.
2. Develop and publish a College Governance Charter a clear, accessible document articulating governance values, structures, processes, and accountability mechanisms, shared transparently with students, parents, faculty, and the surrounding community.
3. Make your IQAC work. That means senior leadership engagement, real resource allocation, genuine stakeholder participation, and a multi-year improvement planning process not an annual report compiled in a rush before the NAAC visit.

4. If your college is unaccredited, treat NAAC accreditation as a governance investment, not a compliance obligation. Use SPPU's QIP support and peer mentoring networks. The process is demanding. The institutional improvement it drives is worth the effort.

8.3 For the Maharashtra State Government

1. Simplify the regulatory framework for government-aided college staff appointments and financial management. The current system's multi-layered approval processes were not designed for the governance demands of modern higher education. Replace procedural compliance requirements with outcome-based accountability frameworks that reduce administrative burden while maintaining financial discipline.
2. Establish a Maharashtra Affiliated College Governance Development Fund ring-fenced grants for governance infrastructure investment at NAAC-accredited colleges in resource-constrained districts. The governance gap between Pune and Ahilyanagar will not close without targeted public investment.
3. Align the Maharashtra Public Universities Act's college autonomy provisions explicitly with NEP-2020's autonomy framework. Develop a coherent state-level policy that provides clear pathways, realistic timelines, and real support for governance-ready colleges seeking to move toward autonomous status including colleges in districts that have historically been left behind in this process.

9. Conclusion

SPPU's network of affiliated colleges is not the periphery of Maharashtra's higher education system. It is the system. Most of the state's college-going students including many from families for whom higher education is a first-generation aspiration are educated within this network. The governance quality of these institutions is not an administrative abstraction. It shapes the quality of education those students receive, the opportunities available to them, and, downstream, the development trajectory of the communities they come from and return to.

The reform trajectory of the past two decades has been real. Digitalisation of the university-college interface has reduced friction and improved transparency. The growth of autonomous colleges has created genuine academic governance alternatives. IQACs, where they function seriously, have embedded quality assurance into institutional life. The NAAC accreditation incentive has pushed thousands of colleges to look honestly at their governance gaps. NEP-2020 has given the reform

agenda a new policy mandate and a fifteen-year horizon.

But the pace and reach of reform are uneven in ways that matter. Colleges in Pune's well-resourced urban environment have moved faster and further than those in Ahilyanagar's rural talukas. That gap is not neutral it reflects and reproduces historical inequalities in educational opportunity that India's higher education system was supposed to overcome. Closing it is not about fine-tuning policy design at the margins. It requires deliberate resource redistribution, targeted institutional support, and a willingness on the part of SPPU, the state government, and college managements to prioritise the institutions and students most in need of governance transformation.

When a management college in Sangamner achieves NAAC 'A' Grade accreditation and runs an effective IQAC, it is doing more than ticking a governance box. It is improving the quality of education available to first-generation students across a historically underserved district. It is strengthening the local entrepreneurship ecosystem. It is making a tangible contribution to the kind of community-driven sustainable development that Maharashtra needs more of. That is what good governance makes possible. And that is why this conversation matters.

References

1. Agarwal, P. (2009). Indian higher education: Envisioning the future. SAGE Publications.
2. Altbach, P. G., Reisberg, L., & Rumbley, L. E. (2009). Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution. UNESCO.
3. Basu, A. (2000). The growth of education and political development in India, 1898–1920. Oxford University Press.
4. Government of Maharashtra. (2016). The Maharashtra Public Universities Act, 2016. Maharashtra Government Gazette. <https://www.maharashtra.gov.in>
5. Hood, C. (1991). A public management for all seasons? Public Administration, 69(1), 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.1991.tb00779.x>
6. Kaur, K. (2012). Higher education in India (1781–2003). University Grants Commission of India.
7. Kothari Commission. (1966). Report of the Education Commission 1964–66: Education and national development. Ministry of Education, Government of India.
8. Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
9. NAAC. (2022). Annual report 2021–22. National Assessment and Accreditation Council. <https://www.naac.gov.in>
10. Ostrom, E. (1990). Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action. Cambridge University Press.
11. Powar, K. B., & Bhatt, R. (2005). Non-formal education and distance learning in higher education. Association of Indian Universities.
12. Radhakrishnan Commission. (1949). Report of the University Education Commission 1948–49. Ministry of Education, Government of India.
13. Savitribai Phule Pune University. (2023). Annual report 2022–23. SPPU. <https://www.unipune.ac.in>
14. Savitribai Phule Pune University. (2022). Quality Improvement Programme guidelines. SPPU Quality Assurance Cell.
15. Shattock, M. (2006). Managing good governance in higher education. Open University Press.
16. Tilak, J. B. G. (2015). Higher education in India: In search of equality, quality and quantity. Orient BlackSwan.
17. UGC. (2022). UGC (Establishment and operation of Academic Bank of Credits in Higher Education) Regulations, 2021. University Grants Commission. <https://www.ugc.ac.in>
18. Yashpal Committee. (2009). Report of the committee to advise on renovation and rejuvenation of higher education. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.