



Research Article

Evolution of Artificial Intelligence in Indian Policy: From AI For All

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most influential technologies shaping contemporary governance, economic development and public policy. In India, the growing significance of AI has transformed the relationship between technology and public policy. The evolution of Artificial Intelligence in Indian policy can be understood through the gradual movement from technological adoption and developmental applications towards a broader policy framework concerned with innovation, inclusion, skills, infrastructure, responsible use and governance. A major milestone in this evolution was the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence released by NITI Aayog in 2018 under the vision of “AI for All”. The strategy identified healthcare, agriculture, education, smart cities and mobility as priority sectors for AI applications. Since then, India's approach to AI has expanded considerably. The emphasis on AI for social and economic development has increasingly been accompanied by attention to responsible AI, data, privacy, transparency, accountability and technological capacity. The IndiaAI Mission represents another important stage in this policy evolution. This paper examines the evolution of Artificial Intelligence in Indian policy from the initial “AI for All” approach and analyses how AI has increasingly become connected with public administration, economic policy, social development, digital governance and India's technological priorities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has witnessed rapid technological transformation. Among emerging technologies, Artificial Intelligence has acquired particular importance because of its capacity to process large amounts of information, identify patterns, support decision-making and perform tasks traditionally associated with human intelligence. AI is increasingly influencing governments, markets and societies. Governments are using AI in areas such as public service delivery, healthcare, agriculture, education, transportation, taxation, security and administrative decision-making. Consequently, AI is no longer merely a technological issue. It has become a significant issue of public policy and governance. For India, the emergence of AI presents both opportunities and challenges. India has a large population, a rapidly expanding digital economy, significant technological expertise and extensive digital public infrastructure. At the same time, the country faces challenges relating to inequality, employment, healthcare, education, agricultural productivity and access to public services. AI can potentially contribute to addressing these challenges.

The Government of India recognized the growing importance of AI in the Union Budget 2018–19, following which NITI Aayog was mandated to establish a national programme on AI. This process resulted in the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in 2018. The strategy adopted the vision of “AI for All”, linking technological development with inclusive growth. The concept of “AI for All” is therefore an important starting point for understanding India's AI policy evolution.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the evolution of Artificial Intelligence in Indian policy.
2. To analyse the significance of the “AI for All” approach in India's AI development.
3. To examine the changing role of AI in Indian public policy and governance.
4. To analyse major government initiatives related to Artificial Intelligence.
5. To identify the opportunities and challenges created by AI for Indian policymaking.
6. To examine the emerging direction of AI policy in India.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is primarily qualitative and analytical in nature. It is based on secondary sources of information. The study uses government reports, policy documents, official publications, research literature and institutional documents relating to Artificial Intelligence in India. Particular attention has been given to the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence prepared by NITI Aayog and subsequent developments associated with responsible AI and the IndiaAI Mission. The study follows a descriptive and analytical approach to understand the transformation of AI from an emerging technological issue into an important component of Indian public policy.

Artificial Intelligence and Public Policy

Artificial Intelligence has a significant relationship with public policy because technological developments can influence the problems governments identify, the solutions they adopt and the methods through which policies are implemented. AI can influence public policy in at least three ways. First, AI can become an object of policy.

Governments need policies concerning AI research, data, privacy, ethics, employment and regulation.

Second, AI can become a tool of policymaking. Governments can use AI and data analytics to understand social and economic conditions, predict trends and improve administrative decisions.

Third, AI can become an instrument of policy implementation. AI-based systems can support the delivery of public services and improve administrative efficiency. Therefore, the evolution of AI in India is not limited to the creation of AI-specific policies. It also involves the increasing incorporation of AI into existing policy areas.

Beginning of the “AI for All” Approach

The National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence released by NITI Aayog in June 2018 was a major milestone in India's AI policy development. Its central vision was “#AIForAll: Technology Leadership for Inclusive Growth”.

The strategy recognized that AI could contribute to economic growth as well as social development. Rather than limiting AI to high-technology industries, the strategy emphasized its potential applications in areas with substantial social impact. The major priority sectors included healthcare, agriculture, education, smart cities and infrastructure, and mobility and transportation. The strategy also emphasized research, skills development, adoption of AI solutions and responsible AI.

Thus, “AI for All” represented an important policy idea: AI should contribute to development and should not remain limited to technologically advanced sections of society.

AI and Inclusive Development in India

India's developmental challenges make inclusive AI particularly important. The country's large and diverse population creates a need for technologies capable of operating at significant scale.

In healthcare, AI can support diagnosis, medical research and healthcare management. In agriculture, AI can assist farmers through weather prediction, crop monitoring, soil analysis and agricultural advisory services. In education, AI can support personalized learning, digital education and educational content development. In governance, AI can help government institutions process information, identify patterns and improve public service delivery.

The significance of “AI for All” therefore lies in connecting technological development with the broader objectives of social and economic development. However, technological inclusion requires access to digital infrastructure, affordable connectivity, quality datasets and digital skills. Without these conditions, AI could potentially increase existing inequalities rather than reduce them.

From AI Adoption to Responsible AI

As AI technologies became more widely adopted, policymakers increasingly recognized that AI could create risks as well as opportunities. Questions concerning privacy, discrimination, transparency, accountability, bias, security and employment became increasingly important.

NITI Aayog subsequently developed its work on Responsible AI for All. Its responsible-AI framework identified principles including safety and reliability, inclusivity and non-discrimination, equality, privacy and security, transparency, accountability and the protection of positive human values.

This development is significant for understanding the evolution of Indian AI policy. The initial question was: How can India use AI for development? The policy discussion increasingly became: How can India use AI for development while ensuring that AI remains safe, fair, transparent and accountable? This represents an important evolution in India's policy thinking.

AI and Digital Governance

India's digital transformation has created an important foundation for the expansion of AI. Digital public infrastructure has enabled the government and other institutions to operate at a large scale using digital systems and data. AI can potentially complement this infrastructure by improving data analysis, service delivery and decision-support mechanisms.

The relationship between AI and governance can be observed in public service delivery, digital administration, healthcare systems, education, agriculture, financial services, urban governance, disaster management and public grievance systems. AI therefore increasingly functions not only as an independent technology but also as an additional layer of digital governance.

IndiaAI Mission: A New Stage of Policy Evolution

The approval of the IndiaAI Mission on 7 March 2024 marked a major development in India's AI policy. The Union Cabinet approved an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore over five years to build a comprehensive and inclusive AI ecosystem in India.

The mission includes seven major pillars: IndiaAI Compute; IndiaAI Innovation Centre; IndiaAI Datasets Platform; IndiaAI Application Development Initiative; IndiaAI FutureSkills; IndiaAI Startup Financing; and Safe & Trusted AI.

These pillars demonstrate that India's AI policy has expanded beyond the initial developmental vision. The focus now includes AI computing infrastructure, indigenous AI models, data availability, AI research and innovation, skill development, startup development, responsible AI and AI applications for public and social challenges. The IndiaAI Mission therefore represents a more comprehensive approach to AI development and policy in India.

A. AI and Economic Policy

Artificial Intelligence is increasingly relevant to India's economic policy. AI can improve productivity, create new industries and contribute to innovation. At the same time, automation may change existing employment patterns and create demand for new skills.

Consequently, AI policy must be connected with employment and skill-development policy. The IndiaAI Mission's FutureSkills and startup-related components demonstrate recognition of the need to develop human capabilities alongside technological infrastructure. India's policy challenge is therefore to ensure that AI-driven economic growth creates opportunities for workers while reducing the negative consequences of technological displacement.

B. AI and Social Policy

The influence of AI extends beyond economic policy. In healthcare, AI may improve diagnosis and healthcare planning. In education, it can support individualized learning and educational administration. In agriculture, AI can provide farmers with information relating to crops, weather and markets. In social welfare, AI can potentially assist in identifying beneficiaries and improving delivery mechanisms. However, these applications require careful policy design. Automated systems should not replace human accountability, particularly when government decisions can significantly affect citizens' rights and welfare.

C. AI, Privacy and Data Governance

Data is one of the most important resources for AI systems. AI models require large quantities of data for training, testing and deployment. This creates important policy questions regarding privacy, data ownership, data protection, consent, data security, access to public datasets and cross-border data flows.

India's AI policy therefore cannot be separated from broader data governance. A strong AI ecosystem requires access to high-quality data while protecting individual rights and ensuring responsible use of information.

D. AI and Employment

Employment is one of the most debated issues associated with Artificial Intelligence. AI can automate repetitive tasks and potentially reduce demand for certain forms of labour. However, it can also create new occupations, industries and opportunities.

The policy challenge is therefore not simply to prevent automation but to prepare society for technological change. India needs stronger emphasis on reskilling, upskilling, digital literacy, AI education, research and technical training, and lifelong learning. The development of AI skills is therefore an important part of India's broader AI policy framework.

E. AI and National Governance

AI is increasingly connected with national governance and strategic capacity. Countries that possess strong AI infrastructure, research capabilities, skilled human resources and indigenous technologies may gain significant economic and strategic advantages.

For India, developing domestic AI capacity can reduce excessive dependence on foreign technologies and strengthen technological self-reliance. The IndiaAI Mission's emphasis on domestic computing infrastructure, innovation, foundation models and startups reflects this broader strategic dimension.

Emerging Governance Approach

The evolution of AI policy demonstrates a gradual shift from AI adoption towards AI governance. India's policy approach increasingly recognizes that AI must be developed and deployed within appropriate institutional and ethical frameworks.

The Safe & Trusted AI pillar of the IndiaAI Mission specifically seeks to support responsible AI through indigenous governance frameworks, standards, tools and evaluation mechanisms. This indicates that India's AI policy is developing in two parallel directions: promotion of AI innovation and management of AI-related risks. Maintaining a balance between these two objectives will be essential for India's future AI governance.

Major Challenges

1. **Digital Divide:** Unequal access to technology can prevent some groups from benefiting from AI.
2. **Skill Gap:** The rapid development of AI requires a workforce with new technical and interdisciplinary skills.
3. **Data Challenges:** AI requires high-quality, representative and reliable data.
4. **Privacy and Security:** The use of large datasets creates risks relating to privacy and cybersecurity.
5. **Algorithmic Bias:** AI systems may reproduce or amplify biases present in their training data.
6. **Employment Disruption:** Automation may transform existing occupations and create pressure for reskilling.
7. **Institutional Capacity:** Government institutions require adequate technical expertise to design, evaluate and regulate AI systems.
8. **Accountability:** Clear mechanisms are required to determine responsibility when AI-supported decisions cause harm.

Critical Analysis

The evolution of Artificial Intelligence in Indian policy demonstrates that India's approach has moved through several interconnected stages. The first stage focused on recognizing AI as a technology capable of supporting economic and social development. The second stage emphasized the implementation of the "AI for All" vision through priority sectors and institutional development. The third stage increasingly incorporated responsible AI principles, reflecting concerns about privacy, fairness, transparency and accountability. The fourth stage, represented significantly by the IndiaAI Mission, seeks to develop a comprehensive national AI ecosystem covering infrastructure, data, innovation, skills, startups and trusted AI.

This evolution demonstrates that AI has gradually moved from the margins of technology policy towards the centre of broader public policy. The key challenge for India is to ensure that technological advancement remains connected with democratic values, social justice and inclusive development.

Future Directions

The future of Artificial Intelligence in Indian policy is likely to involve greater integration of AI into government programmes

and public services. India needs policies that promote indigenous AI research and innovation; expand AI education and skill development; improve access to high-quality datasets; strengthen AI-related cybersecurity; protect privacy and individual rights; encourage transparent and accountable AI systems; promote AI applications for rural and disadvantaged communities; support responsible AI innovation; strengthen institutional capacity for AI governance; and balance technological development with social and ethical considerations.

India's policy future should therefore not be based simply on adopting the newest AI technologies. It should focus on developing an AI ecosystem suited to India's social, economic, linguistic and institutional diversity.

4. CONCLUSION

The evolution of Artificial Intelligence in Indian policy represents an important transformation in India's approach to emerging technology. The "AI for All" vision introduced through NITI Aayog's National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in 2018 established the foundation for viewing AI as an instrument of inclusive growth and social development.

Since then, India's AI policy has expanded significantly. The policy discussion has moved from identifying areas where AI can be used towards developing the infrastructure, skills, data ecosystem, innovation capacity and governance mechanisms necessary for large-scale AI adoption.

The IndiaAI Mission represents an important stage in this evolution. Its seven pillars demonstrate India's attempt to build a comprehensive AI ecosystem while simultaneously addressing responsible and trusted AI.

The evolution of AI in Indian policy should therefore be understood not merely as the history of government initiatives concerning artificial intelligence. It represents a broader transformation in the relationship between technology, state capacity, public policy and society.

The idea of "AI for All" remains significant because the ultimate success of India's AI journey will depend not only on technological capability but also on whether the benefits of AI are accessible, equitable and meaningful for the wider population.

India's future AI policy must consequently maintain a balance between innovation and regulation, economic growth and social justice, technological advancement and human values. Such a balance can enable Artificial Intelligence to become an important instrument of India's inclusive and sustainable development.

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