
Patent and technology commercialisation

Bridging the gap between academia, government and industry

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Abstract

Universities and research institutes are increasingly recognising intellectual property (IP) as a strategic asset for economic growth. In India, bridging the gap between academia and industry through effective IP commercialisation has gained momentum in recent years. This article examines how Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) are leveraging IP for technology commercialisation and diffusion, drawing on policy research and on-ground incubation experiences. We provide an overview of India's IP and technology transfer landscape, highlight key challenges in moving innovations from lab to market, and showcase successful commercialisation models at select Indian HEIs. The article concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen IP commercialisation in Indian academia, emphasising supportive policies, capacity-building, and inclusive strategies to accelerate technology diffusion for national development.

Introduction

The effective commercialisation of intellectual property (IP) – particularly patents and innovations arising from academic research – is vital for fostering innovation, enhancing business growth, providing competitive advantages, and driving economic development. Across the Asia-Pacific region, universities are being called upon to play a more entrepreneurial role, translating research outcomes into marketable products and startups. In India, this call has grown louder in the past decade, as the country seeks to leverage its strong scientific output for societal and economic impact. Bridging the gap between academia and industry is at the heart of

this effort, requiring robust models of IP management, technology transfer, and collaboration.

This article focuses on the role of government support and intermediaries, examining how initiatives and policies have begun to strengthen academia-industry linkages. We also discuss the regional impact of such efforts and consider gender dimensions, noting the importance of inclusive innovation ecosystems. Finally, we offer policy recommendations to further empower Indian academia in leveraging IP for commercialisation, with an eye on sustaining the momentum and ensuring broad-based benefits. By examining both the policy framework and on-ground examples,

this paper provides a comprehensive look at bridging the academia-industry gap in India through IP commercialisation. The findings and recommendations should interest policymakers, university administrators, researchers, and industry partners seeking to enhance technology commercialisation and diffusion in the Asia-Pacific context.

Evolution of IP policy and academic technology transfer

India's journey with intellectual property in the academic context has evolved significantly over the past few decades. Historically, Indian universities have focused more on fundamental research and publications than on patenting or commercialising research results. In the absence of a Bayh-Dole style framework (The Council on Governmental Relations, 2021) that allowed universities to own and license inventions from federally funded research, Indian academia lacked a uniform mandate for owning and exploiting IP. Nonetheless, individual institutions and government bodies took steps to promote innovation, protection, and tech transfer. The Indian Patents Act of 1970 (Office of the Controller General of Patents, 1970) laid the legal foundation, but it was only by the 1990s and 2000s that universities began establishing IP policies and dedicated cells for patent filing and industry linkages.

A notable early initiative was the Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer (FITT) at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi in 1992, one of India's first Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs). Around the same period, other leading institutes like the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and IITs started exploring commercialisation via limited patent licensing and the incubation of startups by entrepreneurial faculty or alumni. However, widespread

adoption of formal tech transfer mechanisms remained slow. A proposed “Indian Bayh-Dole” – the Protection and Utilisation of Public Funded IP (PUP-FIP) bill – was introduced in the late 2000s to grant universities automatic ownership of inventions from government-funded research, but it did not become law. In its absence, IP ownership and commercialisation practices varied by institution, with many public research organisations assigning IP to the government or not actively managing it at all.

By the 2010s, policy shifts signalled a more concerted push for academic innovation utilisation. The National IPR Policy 2016 (Trade, 2016) explicitly highlighted commercialisation and technology transfer as key outcomes of the IP system. Moreover, national missions like Start-up India ((DPIIT), n.d.) (2016) and Make in India (India, n.d.) underscored the role of research institutions in entrepreneurship. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) and other agencies launched programs to build innovation capacity within academia, for example, (DST, n.d.) under DST and Atal Incubation Centres (Aayog, n.d.) under NITI Aayog’s Atal Innovation Mission, placed at universities across states. Similarly, the Ministry of Education (formerly the Ministry of Human Resource Development - MHRD) rolled out a National Innovation and Startup Policy (NISP) for students and faculty, providing guidelines for IP ownership, start-up participation, and equity sharing to encourage commercialisation in HEIs.

Key challenges in commercialisation of academic IP

Transforming an academic invention into a commercial product or venture is a complex process, and Indian HEIs face several well-documented challenges in this journey. Some of the key barriers include:

Institutional and cultural barriers: Academia traditionally values publi-

cations and fundamental research, whereas commercialisation demands a market-oriented approach. Faculty and students may lack awareness or training on IP rights and entrepreneurship. Until recently, university reward systems did not sufficiently incentivise patenting or startup activities (e.g., promotions rarely accounted for patents or licences). This academic culture is gradually changing with new policies, but inertia remains a challenge.

Limited technology transfer capacity: As noted, many Indian universities do not yet have fully resourced Technology Transfer Offices or experienced personnel to scout inventions, manage patent portfolios, and negotiate licences. Where TTOs exist, they might be understaffed or the staff may lack specialised legal and business skills required for complex IP transactions. The Department of Science & Technology (DST) – Centre for Policy Research (CPR)¹ study highlighted bottlenecks such as cumbersome administrative processes and the need for capacity building in TTOs⁸. Without professional commercialisation support, many inventions stagnate at the prototype stage.

Funding gap (“Valley of Death”): Early-stage technologies from academia often require further development (proof-of-concept, prototyping, trials) to become attractive for industry or investors. However, research grants typically end at proof-of-concept, and venture capital or industry funding is wary of unproven academic ideas. This creates a “valley of death” where promising innovations may languish due to a lack of translational funding. While government seed grant programs (such as DST NIDHI PRAYAS (DST, n.d.) or Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council, BIRAC’s, Biotechnology Ignition Grant) ((BIRAC), n.d.) exist, demand outstrips supply.

IP management and ownership issues: Clear IP ownership frameworks are essential to avoid disputes and

delays. In India, ownership of IP from publicly funded research can involve multiple stakeholders – the inventor, the institution, and sometimes the funding agency. Around 84% of TTOs reported that their host institution retains ownership of patents generated, with certain cases granting a share to funding agencies (Deployment, 2023). Negotiating these rights can be complex. Moreover, many institutes historically didn’t have comprehensive IP policies, though this is improving with virtually all major HEIs now adopting IP policies and revenue-sharing models. The Patents (Amendment) Rules 2021 (CGPDTM, 2021) extending 80% fee reduction to educational institutions has helped academic patentees, but high costs and procedural burdens can still deter patent filing and maintenance for cash-strapped institutions.

Industry engagement and trust: From the industry perspective, companies at times perceive academic research as too theoretical or not aligned with market needs, while academics may be unfamiliar with industry requirements. Bridging this perception gap takes deliberate effort. Companies have also cited concerns about negotiating with public institutions (e.g., lengthy approval times, rigid terms). The government is trying to simplify these processes, but streamlined contract and IP licensing practices are still evolving at many HEIs.

Regulatory and legal hurdles: Depending on the sector (biotech, pharmaceuticals, aerospace, etc.), moving a lab innovation to market might involve navigating complex regulatory approvals, which academics are not equipped for alone. Legal issues like ensuring Freedom-to-Operate (FTO) or managing IP infringement risk require expert guidance. In some cases, outdated rules (for instance, restrictions on faculty equity in startups in older statutes) created hurdles, though the NISP 2019 guidelines (MoE, 2019) now encourage flexibility, such as permitting faculty up

1 DST-Centre for Policy Research (CPR) at Panjab University (PU) is a premier institution dedicated to advancing research and policy development in Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI). The centre is supported by the Department of Science and Technology. (<https://cpr.puchd.ac.in/>).

to 20% time for startups or holding equity with permission.

Scale and diffusion challenges: Even when a technology is licensed or a startup is formed, scaling up production and achieving market diffusion is a further challenge. Many university spin-offs struggle to scale due to limited business experience and networks. They need connections to larger industry players for manufacturing, distribution, or integration into value chains. Without those linkages, the impact of academic IP may remain localised or delayed.

Resource constraints and sustainability: For technology commercialisation efforts to sustain, financial and infrastructural support is crucial. Few Indian universities have large endowments or innovation funds of their own. Hence, most rely on government grants (which can be project-based and time-limited) or occasional industry Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) support. Building a sustainable model where licensing royalties or equity returns feed back into funding new research is still an aspirational goal for most HEIs – currently, less than 1% of Indian TTOs reported being self-sustaining from their commercialisation income (Deployment, 2023).

Inclusive participation: There are also challenges related to inclusion, ensuring that researchers across regions and demographic groups (including women) participate in and benefit from commercialisation. We observe disparities: a handful of top metropolitan institutions account for a large share of patents and spin-offs, while many universities, especially in lesser-developed regions, have minimal IP activity. Similarly, women are underrepresented in India's patent and startup landscape – women inventors accounted for only about 18% of all patent applications in 2023 (Chatterjee & Ramu, 2018). This gender gap indicates untapped talent and the need for targeted interventions to support women innovators. Identifying these challenges is the first step; the next sections explore how some institutions have tackled these hurdles and what models are emerging to bridge the academia-industry divide effectively.

Government policy incentives and schemes

Policy measures by the Government of India have directly tried to encourage IP commercialisation in a few ways.

IPR fee and process reforms: The Patents Rules amendments in 2016 and 2021 were geared to make IP filing more academic-friendly. As mentioned, since 2021, educational institutions have enjoyed an 80% reduction in patent filing and prosecution fees, similar to startups. Moreover, the patent examination system introduced expedited examination for certain categories – initially startups, and later extended to applications from institutions, and even to female applicants and SMEs. This means a university patent can be granted faster (sometimes within a year of request), which is crucial when trying to attract licensees or investors who prefer granted patents. Faster and cheaper patenting lowers one hurdle on the path to commercialisation.

Proof of Concept and Scaling Grants: Recognising the 'valley of death' funding gap, agencies like DST, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), and Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) provide grants specifically to take academic innovations closer to market. For example, DST's Technology Development Program and Promoting Innovations in Individuals, Startups and MSMEs (PRISM) scheme, and BIRAC's later-stage product development awards have helped certain lab technologies reach pilot plant or field trial stages. Similarly, Innovate UK-India partnerships and the Global Innovation & Technology Alliance (GITA) provide industry-matched grants to encourage companies to co-develop academic tech – an approach tying funding to eventual commercial uptake.

Commercialisation awards and competitions: To motivate researchers, the government and professional bodies have instituted awards for commercialisation success (e.g., NRDC's annual awards for successful technology transfers, or Indian Patent Office, IPO's, National IP Awards, which often recognise top academic patentees and licensees) Hackathons and innovation challenges (Smart India Hackathon,

etc.) also spur industry-defined problem solving by students, sometimes leading to IP that companies adopt.

Facilitation services: The Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has been active in spreading IP awareness in universities. It runs workshops, publishes guides, and has also facilitated setting up Technology and Innovation Support Centres (TISCs) in collaboration with World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) across India to assist with patent searches and drafting. Additionally, the Startups Intellectual Property Protection (SIPP) (Office of the Controller General of Patents, 1970) scheme offers startups (including those from academia) free or subsidised professional IP filing support. Some state governments have similar programs where they reimburse patent filing costs for universities in their state.

Startup/Innovation rankings and funding allocation: The government launched a University Innovation Ranking (ARIIA – Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements), which ranks institutions on parameters including commercialisation and entrepreneurship. Such rankings put healthy pressure on HEIs to improve their ecosystems. In parallel, the Ministry of Education ties some funding in its HEI grants to innovation outcomes, nudging institutions to prioritise this area. Collectively, these supports form an enabling environment, but effective utilisation varies. Some institutions leverage these schemes fully and have dedicated teams tapping into them, while others are still catching up. A positive development is that state governments are also stepping up – many states now have their own startup policies that encourage academia-industry collaboration (e.g., Invest Punjab, Chandigarh UT, Karnataka's Elevate program, Kerala's Startup Mission linking colleges, etc.).

Linking IP management, startup incubation, and commercialisation outcomes: A recurring theme in this discussion is the interplay between managing IP, incubating startups, and achieving real-world commercialisation. These elements cannot operate in silos – their integration is key to bridg-

ing the academia-industry gap. Indian HEIs are learning to create virtuous cycles that connect these steps.

From IP to startup: Many innovations, especially in cutting-edge fields or where a new product category is being created, are best commercialised via startups founded by the inventors. This is because established companies may be risk-averse or not have the expertise for very novel technologies. For such cases, the inventor (faculty or student) needs to take the lead in forming a company. Here, the role of the incubator is crucial to provide entrepreneurial training and business support, while the TTO handles IP protection. For example, at IIT Madras, the fact that over 50% of the 104 startups in 2024-25 were founded by institute members shows a healthy pipeline where university IP is directly seeding new companies. (Cell, n.d.) Those startups, in turn, often license the IP from the institute (with royalty or equity arrangements). Thus, the IP is managed in a way to facilitate the startup, often offering the startup an exclusive licence, which helps the startup secure funding on the strength of proprietary technology.

From IP to industry licence: Not all technologies require a new startup; some can be transferred to existing companies for scaling. For instance, Panjab University's nanomicelle platform was licensed to an industrial partner in the cosmetics sector, since the company already had manufacturing and market channels to exploit it. In such cases, the TTO's capability to market the invention and negotiate a fair deal is vital. The measure of outcome here would be licensing revenue or the successful introduction of a product to the market by the licensee. Indian TTOs are gradually racking up such successes, although data on licence counts and revenues are not uniformly reported. It is known, however, that institutions like the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) (a network of national research labs), through its tech transfer units and National Research Development Corpora-

tion (NRDC), have collectively licensed hundreds of technologies (many being smaller process improvements or know-how licences). Universities are catching up – for example, IIT Bombay has licensed technologies ranging from advanced materials to telecom software to both Multi-National Companies (MNCs) and Indian startups via its Industrial Research and Consultancy Centre (IRCC) and Society for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (SINE) incubator interactions.

Feedback loop: When a startup succeeds or a licence yields impact, it often feeds back into academia positively. Successful alumni entrepreneurs might donate to their university's innovation fund or mentor the next generation. Licence royalties coming to institutions can be reinvested in research or infrastructure (though currently the scale of royalties is modest, the principle is important). Moreover, seeing peers succeed encourages other faculty and students to engage in IP creation and commercialisation, gradually changing the institutional culture. We see this at play in places like IIT Madras and IIT Delhi, where each big success story (be it a unicorn startup or a high-profile licence) has spurred more interest in entrepreneurship on campus.

Policy alignment: The linkage of IP and startups has been acknowledged in policy through mechanisms like the NISP 2019. Many Indian HEIs have now adopted guidelines that, for example, allow a faculty startup to use university labs and equipment at nominal cost, or let students take a semester off for a startup. IP policies increasingly clarify how IP ownership or revenue sharing will work when a startup is involved (e.g., many institutes take small equity instead of licensing fees to startups founded by their people, to reduce the upfront burden on the startup). This alignment ensures that procedures support rather than hinder the flow from IP to commercialisation.

Metrics and outcomes: How do we measure success in this linkage? Traditional metrics like the number of

patents or the number of startups are one-dimensional. Progressive institutions and government reports are starting to track metrics like “technologies commercialised”, which could mean patents licensed or products launched, and “startups still active after 2-3 years” as a measure of sustainability. For instance, in the DST-CPR study (Bhardwaj, 2021), they attempted to gather data on *technologies generated vs. commercialised vs. patents filed*, but found inconsistencies in reporting. They pointed out that some counted each patent as a technology, and equated a patent licensed with technology commercialised, which is not always accurate. There is a need for standardised reporting so that outcomes can be better measured and correlated with inputs (like how many full-time staff or how much budget a TTO has). Early evidence indicates that institutions with higher patent filings and strong incubation support do show better commercialisation outcomes – IIT Madras being a prime example where high patenting coincides with high startup output and some significant economic value creation

Societal impact: Ultimately, IP commercialisation outcomes should be seen not only in financial terms but also in societal benefits – new solutions to problems, improved services, local employment, etc. Many of the startups from academia in India are working in areas of societal importance: affordable healthcare devices, clean energy, educational technologies, agriculture improvements, etc. The diffusion of these technology solutions addresses developmental needs while also creating economic opportunities. For example, a startup from an Indian university that develops a low-cost water purification system may license it for mass production, thereby providing clean water access (social impact) and generating business (economic impact). When scaled across many such innovations, the impact can be transformative for society. Therefore, bridging the academia-industry gap is also about moving closer to self-reliance in technology (Aatmanirbhar Bharat)² and achieving

2 **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, or Self-Reliant India, is a visionary initiative launched by the Government of India to strengthen the nation's economy by fostering domestic production, innovation, and resilience across sectors. It emphasises reducing dependency on imports, promoting indigenous technologies, and empowering startups, MSMEs, and rural enterprises.

sustainable development goals through indigenous innovation. In summary, integrating strong IP management with active startup incubation and industry linkage leads to a multiplier effect on outcomes. Indian HEIs that recognise and implement this integration are showing promising results, as detailed above. The challenge ahead is to broaden this model to more institutions and ensure it is inclusive and sustainable.

Policy recommendations

Building on the analysis and case insights, here are key policy and strategic recommendations to further leverage IP for technology commercialisation and diffusion in India's academic sector. These recommendations are aimed at policymakers (government bodies like DST, MeitY, DPIIT, and MoE), academic institution leaders, and supporting agencies.

Strengthen and network TTOs nationwide: Establish or reinforce Technology Transfer Offices in all major research institutions and universities. The government should consider a dedicated program to fund TTO personnel positions and training. Creating a national network or forum of TTOs under APCTT or a similar body could facilitate sharing best practices. As recommended in the DST-CPR study, a stronger governance and capacity-building framework for TTOs will help standardise processes and raise performance. Metrics-driven funding (rewarding TTOs for licences executed or startups formed) can incentivise results. Smaller or resource-constrained institutions can be served via regional TTO hubs – for example, one TTO office could cater to a cluster of colleges in a region, especially for IP filing and initial industry outreach.

Enhance incentives for researchers to commercialise: Academic promotion and reward systems should formally acknowledge patents, licences, and startup initiatives. Already, some institutes include patents as a criterion for faculty promotion or offer faculty a share in royalties (often 30-70%). This needs to be uniformly adopted across HEIs. Additionally, awarding sabbatical leave or reduced teaching loads for faculty engaging in commercialisation projects would encourage more par-

ticipation. On the student side, universities should allow flexible academic credit for startup projects (in line with NISP guidelines) so that students can take entrepreneurial risks without derailing their academic progress.

Increase proof-of-concept funding and incubation support: The government and private sector should boost funds available for transitioning prototypes to products. Expanding grants like PRAYAS, BIG, or introducing a "Research to Market" challenge fund for universities could fill the critical early-stage funding gap. In parallel, incubators should receive sustained operational funding – many currently depend on 3–5-year grants. A national incubation sustainability fund could match contributions raised by incubators from alumni or industries, to help them become long-term fixtures. Moreover, encouraging CSR investments into academic incubators (with possibly tax incentives) could be explored.

Promote industry collaboration through policy and platforms: Policies should make it easier for industries to engage with academia. Simplifying IP clauses in government-sponsored research (e.g., allowing industry partners certain licensing rights) can attract more industry-funded projects. The government can facilitate industry-academia matchmaking platforms – perhaps an annual "Innovation Marketplace" where academia showcases licensable technologies to industry in a sector-focused manner (some sectors like biotech already have forums, but others could benefit.) Revival or strengthening of organisations like NRDC (National Research Development Corporation) to actively broker deals between academic inventors and companies, especially micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), would also help – essentially acting as a tech transfer intermediary for those who don't have their own.

Implement National IP-Startup Consortia: Taking inspiration from successful models abroad (such as some countries that have joint patent pools or university startup consortia), India could establish consortia in key domains. For instance, a Pharma Innovation Consortium where multiple univer-

sity pharmacology departments pool their patents and work with a group of pharmaceutical companies to license or co-develop them reduces transaction costs (companies get a one-stop view of innovations) and improves bargaining power for academia through collective action. Similar consortia could be envisaged for clean energy technologies or Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics, aligning with national missions.

Regional innovation cluster development: Continue and expand the Science & Technology Cluster initiative to more cities, fostering local innovation ecosystems. State governments should be encouraged (via central incentives or matching grants) to set up Innovation Zones around leading state universities or technical institutes, where incubators, common fabrication labs, and co-working spaces for industry research and development (R&D) can co-exist. These zones would drive regional tech entrepreneurship and help retain local talent. For example, building on the model of IIT Madras Research Park in the south, similar parks or innovation hubs in the north, north-east, central India, etc., can balance regional development.

Encourage Bayh-Dole-like institutional policies: Rather than a single law, the government can push via funding requirements that any institution receiving research grants above a threshold must have an IP policy aligning with certain principles (institutional ownership with inventor incentives, obligation to commercialise or else allow government "march-in", etc.). Many top institutions have such policies, but ensuring all research-active HEIs adopt them will create uniform expectations. This also reassures the industry that when they deal with a university, the IP terms will be straightforward. Where appropriate, consider revisiting national legislation for publicly funded research IP utilisation, learning from earlier attempts and current ecosystem maturity.

Sustain momentum through recognition and success showcases: Continue to celebrate and publicise success stories of IP commercialisation from academia. Government and media can

highlight case studies (like those in this article) to a wider audience, which helps change mindsets and encourages other institutions and companies to collaborate. Recognition programs at regional and national levels (for the best TTO, best incubator, most innovative university, etc.) could motivate lagging institutions to improve. Furthermore, fostering an innovation narrative where academia-industry linkages are seen as key to India's development will help sustain political and public support for these initiatives. Implementing these recommendations requires coordinated effort among multiple stakeholders – ministries, educational regulators, universities, industry bodies, and international partners (like WIPO, which can provide training, or foreign universities open to sharing models). The good news is that the trajectory in India is already positive; with each policy refinement and success story, the ecosystem becomes more robust.

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