REVIEW OF THE EXPANSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: CARDINAL CONCERNS IN THE TRAVERSE

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Abstract

The origin, evolution, and growth of the Indian education sector have been phenomenal. The Indian higher education system presently faces multiple challenges for its growth and expansion in the direction of meeting the demands of the country. The competition among higher education institutions has been a global challenge in terms of equity, access, quality, relevance, globalization, and privatization. The aim of this review paper is to critically examine the potentiality of expansion of higher education in India and the ability to overcome its challenges to emerge as the best destination for the world-wide scholars to pursue their higher education and build a robust career in research in India.

Keywords: higher education in India; higher education institutions; gross enrolment ratio; university; rankings.

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Education plays an important role in the growth and development of any nation in general and society in particular. 'Education' appears in the Concurrent List of the Constitution of India. Both the Government of India and the State Governments have equal role and importance to set up schools, colleges, and universities for imparting education. Since independence both these governments have been focusing on school education considering the higher rate of illiteracy in the contemporary India. Nevertheless, the economic conditions have affected the growth of institutions of higher education. The overall Indian education system has faced several challenges, like equity, relevance, access, and quality of education in the society in general and in the disadvantaged groups per se across the time continuum. Moreover, even though the growth and expansion of higher education institutions have been shaped slowly through five-year plans, the progress is not enough to cater the growing need and demand of the society [1].

A decade ago, the Right to Education Act came into effect on 1 April 2010 in India. The Right to Education has been inserted by the 86th Amendment of the Constitution of India under Article 21A in December 2002 and passed by the Parliament in July, 2009. The Article 21A says, "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine" [2]. It is stated by the Government of India that 'Free education' means that no child, other than a child who has been admitted by his or her parents to a school which is not supported by the appropriate Government, shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education. 'Compulsory education' casts an obligation on the appropriate Government and local authorities to provide and ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in the 6-14 age group [3].

To realise the spirit of the Right to Education, Government of India has subsequently launched a flagship program—Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan—for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UAE) in a time bound manner [4].

This review paper has two key aims. Firstly, it aims to critically evaluate the growth and expansion of higher education system in India and its structural reforms for sustainable development highlighting the major focus areas. Secondly, the review aims to assess the present performance of higher education institutions in India and their positions in the global ranking vis-à-vis national ranking. Due to sparse research evidence, this review paper primarily depends on the information and evidence available in Government of India sources. In addition to this, latest important orders and circulars of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and University Grants Commission (UGC) have also been referred.

THE TREND OF GROWTH: THE ORIGIN AND EXPANSION OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The glimpses of the history of ancient India portray the significance of Indian Universities, like Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramasila—the captivating colossus of higher education system in the then society—that attracted many foreign scholars [5]. During the colonial era, deliberately education was not used for sustainable development. The British colonial regime laid the foundation of modern higher education in India in the mid-19th century [6]. The colonial government preferred an 'anglicist' orientation of higher education. It was led by Lord Macaulay in 1835 followed by Charles Wood’s Dispatch of 1854. The first effort to devise a national education system in India came into existence in 1944 with the Sargent Report of the Central Advisory Board on Education on Post-War Educational Development in India. In 1857, the first three universities—Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras—were set up in the presidency towns. After three decades, the fourth university, i.e., Allahabad University was established in 1887. Again, after three decades, the fifth and sixth universities came up at Mysore and Benaras in 1916. These universities, established in the model of University of London, were affiliating, examining, and regulating bodies of higher education in India. During that period, only colleges used to offer the degree courses. Later, the research departments were incorporated in 1920s.

Soon after India gained independence, the Government of India established 'University Education Commission' in 1948 based on the recommendation of the National Education Policy chaired by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Later it was changed to 'University Grants Commission' (UGC). Nevertheless, the UGC was formally established as a Central Autonomous Body under the Government of India in November 1956 through an Act of Parliament [5].
According to the Act, the UGC has been assigned the primary role of providing funds, coordination, determination, and maintenance of standards in institutions of higher education in India. Besides, an important task for the UGC is to notify and keep updating the list of fake universities in India as the commercialization of education has also led to the menace of the popping up of fake universities. The UGC has constituted a National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) for accreditation of all colleges and universities in terms of quality and impact of imparting education in India [7].

In addition to the presence of UGC, other professional bodies are established for the recognition or accreditation of various courses of study—All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to be superseded by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) for technical and management colleges for all technology- and management-related courses, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) for all agriculture, veterinary, and allied courses, Bar Council of India (BCI) for law-related courses, National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) for education-related courses, National Medical Commission (NMC) for medical-related courses, Pharmacy Council of India (PCI) for pharmacy-related courses, Indian Nursing Council (INC) for nursing-related courses, Dental Council of India (DCI) for dental science-related courses, Central Council of Homeopathy (CCH) for homeopathy-related courses, and Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) for the courses related to rehabilitation and special education.

Since independence, there is an exponential growth of the colleges and universities in India. According to the report of All India Survey of Higher Education 2018-2019 [8] conducted by the Ministry of Human Resource & Development (MHRD), Government of India, the number of colleges has grown from 578 to 39,931 while the number of universities has increased from 28 to 993 from 1950-51 to 2018-19. The quantitative growth of universities and colleges in India is mentioned in Table 1 [8]. The trend of such growth is depicted in Figure 1. As per the AISHE Report 2018-29 [8], during 1950-51, the number of teachers and students were 24,000 and 1.74 lakh whereas the numbers increased to 14.16 lakh and 3.74 crore during 2018-2019.

### Table 1 The number of universities and colleges in India as per AISHE Report 2018-19

| Period   | Universities | Colleges |
|----------|--------------|----------|
| 1950-51  | 28           | 578      |
| 1960-61  | 45           | 1,819    |
| 1970-71  | 93           | 3,227    |
| 1980-81  | 123          | 4,738    |
| 1990-91  | 184          | 5,748    |
| 2000-01  | 266          | 11,146   |
| 2018-19  | 993          | 39,931   |

### Figure 1. The trend of the growth of colleges and universities in India from 1950 to 2019.

As seen in Table 2, there are primarily four types of universities established by the State and Central Governments—State Universities, Central Universities, Private Universities, and Deemed-to-be Universities that include the Institutions of National Importance [8]. Depending on the nature of programmes offered, there is a variation observed in these four types of universities [8]. These variations are mentioned in Table 3. Their percentages are presented in Figure 2. It is observed that the percentage of general universities is substantially higher than that of other type of universities. The numbers of technical, agricultural and allied, and medical universities are proportionately very meagre.

### Table 2 Types of universities in India as per the AISHE Report 2018-19

| Type                  | Number   | Type                  | Number   |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
| 1. State Universities | 435 (43.83) | 1. General             | 548 (55.19) |
| 2. Private Universities | 385 (38.77) | 2. Technical           | 142 (14.50) |
| 3. Central Universities | 46 (4.63)   | 3. Agricultural & Allied | 63 (6.34)    |
| 4. Deemed-to-be Universities | 127 (12.79) | 4. Medical             | 58 (5.84)  |
| IIT                   | 23       | 5. Law                | 23 (2.32)  |
| IIM                   | 19       | 6. Sanskrit           | 13 (1.31)  |
| NIT                   | 31       | 7. Languages          | 9 (0.91)   |
| IIIT                  | 18       | 8. Others             | 106 (10.67) |
| IISER                 | 5        | Total                 | 993       |
| Total                 | 993      | Total                 | 993       |
According to the AISHE Report 2018-19 [8], there are 16 universities exclusively for women. The number of universities offer distance education is 110, some of which have dual mode—regular and distance modes. The present gross enrolment ratio (GER) is approximately 26% in respect of students pursuing higher education in India. Among the states in India, Rajasthan occupies the first position in India's 85 Universities, followed by Uttar Pradesh with 79 Universities, and Gujarat having 72 Universities. Bangalore district of Karnataka state has 880 colleges—the highest number of colleges in a district. Among these colleges, 78% are private, 21.50% are owned by the State Government, and 0.5% are owned by the Central Government. Moreover, distance education enrolment in higher education is 10.62%. The number of affiliating universities in India is 298; Sri Chatrapati Sahuji Maharaj University situated in Kanpur of Uttar Pradesh is the biggest affiliating university with 922 colleges.

Out of the total 3.74 crore students pursuing higher education in India, 48.6% are women, enrolled in 39931 colleges and 993 universities [8]. This includes 47,427 foreign students from 164 countries. Among these female students, 79.80% of students are enrolled in undergraduate programmes, 10.81% in master’s programmes, and less than 0.50% in Ph.D. programmes. In 2018, students enrolled in Ph.D. programmes were 1,69,170 and the number of students awarded the Ph.D. degree was 40,813. Further, there are 14.16 lakh teachers and 12.14 lakh non-teaching staff in the field of higher education. It is commendable that the country has progressed to this extent since independence. We have come a long way in managing a huge set up of higher education system which is appreciable. However, still much more needs to be done as we have achieved only 25.8% of enrolment in higher education [9] and the country needs to expand the opportunity to all.

STRUCTURAL REFORMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Government of India established the Ministry of Education after the independence; later on, it is renamed as the MHRD on 26 September 1985 [10]. Its higher education department is responsible for what is one of the world’s 3rd largest higher education system just after the U.S. and China. The new National Education Policy has proposed that it be renamed the Ministry of Education [9]. The MHRD, Government of India has initiated many significant reforms in higher education, like common entrance examination and curriculum, faculty mobility, student mobility, national credit transfer system, national ranking system for the universities, global initiatives of academic networks (GIAN), and initiatives for online admissions from 2017-18 [10]. Several other academic reforms have been introduced by both MHRD and UGC like semester system, choice-based credit system (CBCS), the direct online transfer of scholarships, and standardization of examinations. Recently, the government started an initiative encouraging the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC’s), National Academic Depository (NAD) for digitization of certificates, and Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) for capital grants in form of loans, and promotes Innovation Cells and entrepreneurship under Startup India’ and ‘Skill India’ and ‘Skill Development’ for India’, ‘Make in India’, and ‘Skill Development’ for

PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES VS. PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA

Indian higher education consists of several categories of public institutions. The most significant among them are Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Central Universities, Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISER), and All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). These are considered to be the best places in India known for producing world-class professionals. The major objective of the public universities in India was to curtail the course fees, thereby increase the student’s enrolment as per the Government’s policies on education. Higher education has remained in the social sector for a very long time. It is observed that the course fees and fees toward the hostel accommodation and mess expenditure are highly subsidized to encourage more students for the expansion of higher education in India. However, now the Government has started encouraging competition among public and private universities and has asked the public universities to move towards becoming self-sustainable and reduce the dependence on Government grants. Besides, it is also observed that the Government encourages the universities and colleges to (i) increase tuition and other fees, (ii) raise of resources by the institutions through consultancy and sale of other services, and (iii) introduce self-financing courses.

In India, the private universities have been started with an aim of profitability and on the concept of ‘return on investment’. This triggers the move of commercialization of education. After
reaching a stage of optimum level of commercialization, now their focus is getting shifted to the quality of education. Until the 1990s, the private colleges were being set up across India. Between the years 2000 and 2005, the Deemed-to-be-university status has been granted to 26 private institutions by the UGC [11]. Though these universities had no affiliating forces, they had multiple campuses at various locations in the country. Later, the trend has changed when the private educational institutions start becoming autonomous colleges or private deemed-to-be-university and start offering several self-financing courses and distance education courses. Along with public institutions, now-a-days the contribution of private institutions is going to be immense in terms of student’s enrolment, research, and development.

FOCUS AREAS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA AND CARDINAL CONCERNS

The focus of higher education is on three facets—teaching, research, and inculcation of professionalism.

Teaching

For centuries, most of the formal education was taking place in Gurukulas, Viharas, and Madrassas across the nation. During pre-independence period, while the universities were set up in the pattern of western universities, the primary goal was confined to teaching in Universities and Colleges. In higher education, the teachers were mainly involved in teaching activity.

In today’s scenario, the teaching is also given primary importance in majority of higher education institutions in India. Despite this, according to the National Education Policy, 2019, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of India in higher education is only 25.6% which is quite low as compared to the developed and developing countries [9]. Besides, there is no equity in GER among different sects of Indian society. According to previous studies, there is a wider disparity in the GER in higher education in India across men and women. There are regional variations too; some states have high GER while some are quite behind the national GER reflecting a significant imbalance within the higher education system.

Further, it is observed that there are many regulating authorities, like MHRD, UGC, NAAC, and other professional bodies as discussed. It may be assumed that the public higher education institutions lag behind due to the problem of complexities arising out of the existence of too many regulating authorities and professional bodies. In case a University offers few programmes like MBA, MTech, BEd, and degrees in Agriculture, it needs approval for offering the programmes from AICTE, AICTE, NCTE, and ICAR respectively. Similarly, if a University offers MBBS, BDS, and BSc in Nursing needs approval for offering the programmes from the National Medical Commission, Dental Council of India, and Indian Nursing Council respectively. Because of the heterogeneity of these bodies, there are different parameters and rules to be followed for different courses being regulated by these bodies. Despite sanctioning autonomy, the Government controls the higher education institutions through these formal heterogeneous bodies. Recently, the Government of India has implemented 10% reservation of seats for the students belonging to the category of Economically Weaker Section (EWS) and instructed all public higher education institutions to increase their intake by 25% as compared to intake of 2018-19 [12]. The scheme of 10% reservation for EWS is already implemented from 2019-20. Such decisions have put additional pressure on public higher education institutions as they do not have scope for increasing the infrastructure and manpower in such a short notice.

Nevertheless, the MHRD has been encouraging the distance education and MOOCs programme through the SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) platform for the rapid expansion of higher education [9]. SWAYAM is one of the flagships programmes of the MHRD to enable the faculties of centrally funded institutions, like IITs, IIMs, and Central Universities to offer online courses to citizens of India. This is an initiative for increasing the GER rapidly in the country using technology and ICT. These are flexible ways of promoting the higher education in India.

Research

The focus of higher education in India gradually shifted to research. Many fellowships are instituted by the UGC and MHRD for pursuing research, e.g. Emeritus Fellowship, Maulana Azad National Fellowship for Research Fellowship in Sciences for meritorious students, Dr. D. S. Kothari Post-Doctoral Fellowships in Sciences, Medical Sciences, and Engineering Sciences, Radhakrishnan Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Humanities and Social Sciences, Post-Doctoral Fellowship to Women Candidates, Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) and Research Associateship (RA) for Foreign Nationals, JRF in Sciences, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Engineering and Technology, Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship for SC/ST Candidates, and UGC National Fellowship for OBC candidates [5, 10]. Nevertheless, the Maulana Azad National Fellowship, formulated and funded by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, is awarded to the minority students through the UGC [5, 13]. In addition to these, the UGC has launched a new scheme for providing a special honorarium to teachers who are Fellows of at least two of the four Science Academies identified by the UGC [5].

Moreover, there are several funding agencies under the Government of India for research, like Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO), Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Department of Science and Technology (DST), Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeITY), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), Indian National Science Academy (INSA), Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), National Board for Higher Mathematics (NBHM), Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA), and Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB).

As the quality in teaching and research is highly subjective, dynamic, multilevel, and multi-dimensional in the real sense and is often debated in academic arena, ensuring high quality in higher education is a major challenge in India today. The focus on high quality research in higher education institutions in India is not uniform. There are insufficient resources, inadequate facilities, and limited numbers of quality faculty in majority of the Indian higher education institutions. Moreover, Indian higher education institutions are poorly connected to high quality research centers and industries across the globe bringing a limitation to the state-of-the-art infrastructure and technology. However, the UGC has directed all the academic institutions to have an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) for maintaining the quality parameters not only for the recruitment of faculty but also for publication and identification of journals [5]. It is also a matter of concern that the UGC has not made the NAAC accreditation mandatory for all institutions in India. This provides an opportunity for the substandard institution to escape from the ambit of maintaining the minimum requirement for providing quality education.

Professionalism

Due to the rapid transformation of technology and expansion of internet, the accessibility of information and knowledge have been increased manifold way. The mushrooming of public and private higher education institutions in India are leading to stiff competition in teaching and research to attract bright students, research scholars, faculty, and non-teaching staff. There are institutions like IITs, IIMs and NALSAR offering single disciplines; in the National Education Policy 2019, it is recommended to convert these institutions to multidisciplinary institutions [9]. Moreover, because of the realization of having multidisciplinary approach that helps the growth and development of personality, the UGC and MHRD have
Cardinal concerns

From the review, it is observed that the major concern of present higher education in India is centered around three primary areas—lack of state-of-the-art infrastructure, deficit of funds, and inadequate human resource. Majority of the higher education institutions in India do not have adequate state-of-the-art infrastructure and equipment to conduct high quality research. Many quality decisions depend upon the UGC, MHRD, and various external funding agencies to establish their infrastructure like buildings, classroom and laboratories. Even the higher education institutions do not have adequate infrastructure for teaching. In these circumstances the public higher education institutions have suffered immensely and now the UGC and MHRD are not in a position to support them financially. This leads to a vicious cycle of financial crisis. Now, the way ahead is to take loans from the HEFA or any other external funding agency and plan for the expansion in such a way that they can also repay the loan taken by them.

The financial crunch is also another major concern. The Government of India has decided not to provide any financial support in the form of capital grants or plan funds to higher education institutions. Instead the Government has proposed that the higher education institutions may take loans from the HEFA for their expansion. Further, the public higher education institutions are advised to become self-sustainable and generate at least 30% of its revenue for their salaries and recurring expenses.

An organization is known by the human resource it possesses. In higher educational institutions, the human resource comprises faculty, non-teaching staff, and students. Human resource management is one of the challenging issues in the present-day higher education system. Scant attention has been given to this pivotal aspect upon which the edifice of the whole organization is erected. The recruitment, training and development, pay package compensation, performance appraisal, employee relation, retention of employees, motivation and job satisfaction are important functions of human resources management. This leads to working of members as a team. The private Institutions give lot of emphasis on human resource and the human resource management. They have a separate department dedicated to performing and monitoring this function. Centre and State-funded universities need to restructure themselves to create a department so that specialized people can be employed full-time to undertake crucial functions of human resource management. As per the data of AISHE on enrolment, it is evident that in this competitive world the private institutions are doing better than public institutions as they have realized the advantages and importance of human resource management and are implementing it strategically. An effective human resource management ensures employees are motivated and satisfied with their role and this leads to less attrition and better performance. In public institutions, because of rigidity, the talents (faculty and non-teaching staff) prefer to switch over to private institutions or other Public Institutions with better human resource management. Time has come for human resources to change from an administrative functional model to a strategic one so that educational institutions continue to attract quality human capital and gain competitive advantage.

The significant stakeholder of human resource in higher education institutions is their students. Students are the brand ambassadors of such institutions. The present students and the alumni play an important role in the growth and publicity of the institutions among the prospective students. The alumni extend help in placements and help generating funds through donations from corporates and trusts under corporate social responsibility. The IITs in India particularly the older ones have a very strong alumni base and get enormous funds, and offer placements and career guidance to the students of their alma mater. Such models is to be adopted by other institutions for better development.

In terms of availability of qualified teachers, according to MHRD there is a shortage of faculty to an extent of 25-30% in public higher education institutions. According to UGC, there is also a shortage of non-teaching, technical, and support staff due to restriction in their number in the ratio of faculty: non-teaching staff, i.e., 1:1.1. There have been many questions raised on transparency and delay in faculty appointments. The condition further gets complicated due to legal issues. The use of IT- and ICT-enabled services are optimally used in private institutions for offering efficient and effective services with minimum human resource. Compared to private institutions, the public higher education institutions are lagging behind the optimum utilization of IT- and ICT-enabled services. In many public higher education institutions dual system—manual writing and use of technology—is in vogue, putting an additional burden on existing manpower with poor outcome.

**PERFORMANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: WHERE DO INDIAN UNIVERSITIES STAND IN RANKINGS?**

In spite of a rapid and massive post-independence growth of higher education institutions, none of the Indian university figures in the list of top 200 world universities in Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings (QS-Ranking) or Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE-Ranking) [14, 15]. This is a matter of concern for India in terms of the quality of education being imparted in higher education institutions across the country. The Government of India is very particular about the quality and outcomes of the institutions of higher education. To develop a national ranking system, the Government of India has recently introduced the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) for the annual ranking of institutions in various categories. Now, the Government of India has taken a proactive initiative to recognize 20 world-class Institutions of Eminence (10 public and 10 private institutions) and framed the UGC (World Class Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations, 2016 [5].

The institutions to be recognized as the Institutions of Eminence should preferably be multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary in nature and have both teaching and research focus of exceptionally high quality. Such institutions should achieve a student enrolment of at least 20,000 over 15 years. They should be considered figured in the top 500 universities in any of the world-renowned ranking frameworks within the first 10 years and be in the top 100 eventually over time.

**CONCLUSION**

Education is a process of not only shaping and improving the body, mind, and character of an individual for all-round development, but also transforming a society. There are opportunities for strategic engagement and capacity building in higher education leadership and management at both the state and national levels. Moreover, collaboration in the national and international levels on areas of systemic reform, such as quality assurance, international credit recognition, and unified national qualifications framework is the need of the hour. At present, equity of educational opportunity in higher education is considered essential because higher education is a powerful process for alleviating economic disparities in the society.

The history of modern India shows that there is indeed no clear term policy perspective on higher education in India by the previous governments. It is also observed that there is a growing public apathy for higher education, followed by a meagre budgetary allocation for public higher education sector. Along with these, the absence of any robust higher education development policy is instrumental in helping the exponential growth of the private higher education system.

Nevertheless, the recent success of our country in the global knowledge economy is an object of envy not only from the developing countries but also from the developed countries [16]. A fair amount of credit is being given and rightly so, to the

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large pool of skilled manpower in the country. As it is evident, there is massive brain drain and loss of scarce resources—financial and human—as our IIT engineers, IIM managers, and AIIMS doctors are found to be placed in high position across the globe. From a global perspective, India is one of the leading countries in providing the world market with highly skilled scientific and technical professionals at relatively low cost. Despite myriad challenges, the Indian higher education system has experienced rapid growth and expansion in its traverse. The present government focuses more on 'Digital India' in all its components. Therefore, with the help of the state-of-the-art new-age learning tools and technology, India would be able to overcome the challenges in its traverse of high-quality research and teaching in higher education system. The present government's new and proactive initiatives to bring reform in higher education system with adequate budgetary allocation would gradually attract world-wide scholars to pursue their careers in higher education in India.

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