



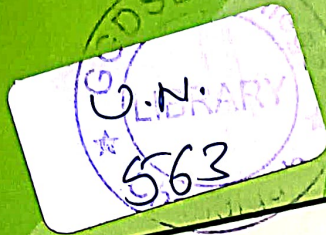
Rs. 30.00
ISSN-0566-2257

UNIVERSITY NEWS

A Weekly Journal of Higher Education

Association of Indian Universities

Vol. 63 • No. 10 • March 10-16, 2025



Manas Ranjan Panigrahi, Mukesh K Sharma, and Sandeep Chaurasia

Transforming Indian Higher Education: 21st Century Reforms and Future Trends

Mukta Mani and Siddharth Kumar

Socio-economic Inclusion of the Third Gender Community in Bihar: A
Sine-Qua-Non to Achieve the Goals of *Viksit Bharat 2047*

Suneel Kumar Bhat

Ink and Impression: A Journey through Printing History

Taherali Bakir Slatewala

The Pressure of Publish or Perish: A Critical Look at Academic Malpractices

Droupadi Murmu

Design as a Catalyst for Social Change

– **Convocation Address**

Manash Kumar

Exploring Gender Dynamics: Key Concepts and Historical Perspectives in
Gender Studies

– **Student Column**

P Prema

Specifications for Objective Assessment of Qualitative Criteria

– **Communication**

In This Issue

| ITEMS | PAGE |
|--|------|
| Articles | |
| Transforming Indian Higher Education: 21 st Century Reforms and Future Trends | 3 |
| Socio-economic Inclusion of the Third Gender Community in Bihar: A <i>Sine-Qua-Non</i> to Achieve the Goals of <i>Viksit Bharat 2047</i> | 7 |
| Ink and Impression: A Journey through Printing History | 18 |
| The Pressure of Publish or Perish: A Critical Look at Academic Malpractices | 22 |
| Convocation Address | |
| National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad | 24 |
| Campus News | 26 |
| Student Column | |
| Exploring Gender Dynamics: Key Concepts and Historical Perspectives in Gender Studies | 32 |
| Communication | |
| Specifications for Objective Assessment of Qualitative Criteria | 35 |
| Theses of the Month (Humanities) | 37 |
| Advertisement | 40 |

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Transforming Indian Higher Education: 21st Century Reforms and Future Trends

Manas Ranjan Panigrahi*, Mukesh K Sharma**, and Sandeep Chaurasia***

Education is the cornerstone for sustainable development. It is essential not only for individual growth but also for societal development. Higher education plays an important role in nation-building. Since independence, the country's literacy rate was a mere 18% in 1951, which increased to 72.98% in the year 2011 according to the Census of India (Census India, 2011). Indian higher education is the highest in the world, with over 1192 universities and 45,000 colleges (UGC Report, January 2025). Despite its scale, we are able to serve only 4.3 crore postgraduate students. If 25 crore students, who enroll for school education, have to go for higher education, therefore we need to double this educational network and infrastructure. At present, India's Gross Enrollment ratio is 26.3%. The government is planning to reach the goal of 50% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) by 2035 (NEP 2020). We need a large number of universities the system faces significant issues such as uneven quality, outdated curricula, insufficient research output, and limited employability of graduates. With the increasing importance of a knowledge-based economy, it is imperative to reform higher education to foster innovation, critical thinking, and inclusivity (World Bank Report, 2022).

Historical Evolution of Indian Higher Education

Pre-Independence Era

Before independence, British rule brought significant changes in Indian Higher by focusing on colonial-era institutions where emphasis was given to the English language and literature, science, and mathematics. In this era, the Guru Shiksha System was replaced by a Formal Degree Examination. Based on the British university system, the British founded universities such as the University of Bombay (1857), the University of Madras (1857), and the University of Calcutta (1857). These universities had little room for local studies and were largely devoted to Western expertise. Instead of encouraging general education for the public, the focus was on creating a small, educated elite (Miller, 1984).

Post-Independence Developments

After independence Government of India took an initiative to build the nation through education and emphasize quality education by establishing key institutions such as IITs (1950s), IIMs, AIIMS, and universities under the UGC-1956 to standardize and regulate education.

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