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Prabhav Anand

Prof. Poonam Tandon

Vice-Chancellor

Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur

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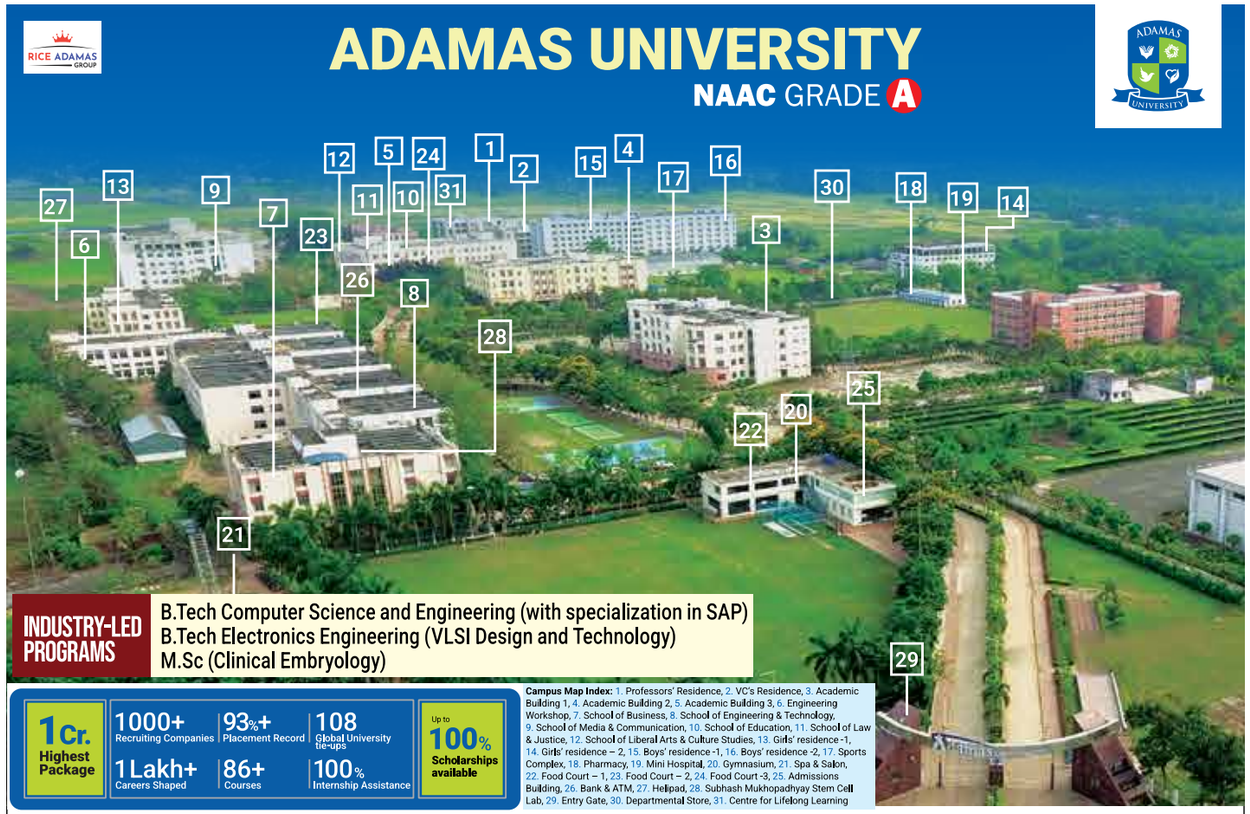
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MEDICINE WITHOUT MERIT DANGER

Ten years from now, you're sitting in a hospital waiting room. Your name is called. You walk in, describe what's wrong, and hand over your trust to the person across the table. You don't ask how they got their seat in medical college. You assume they earned it, because they were good enough.

That assumption is doing more work than we realize. And it's exactly what a leaked exam paper puts at risk.

Every time a medical entrance exam is compromised, the coverage follows a familiar script: investigations, arrests, a canceled exam, a few thousand students left staring at their phones. Those stories are real and they matter. But underneath them sits a bigger, quieter story that rarely makes the front page. What happens to trust once it's been shaken more than once.

Medical education runs on a simple premise: a seat is earned, not bought, not manipulated, not stolen. It has to. This is the one profession where a mistake isn't measured in marks or money. It's measured in a life.

Most students, of course, do it the hard way. Years of studying. Missed weekends, missed weddings, missed sleep, all chasing a single goal. They earn what they get, and they deserve it without qualification.

That's what makes a paper leak such a strange kind of damage. It doesn't only help the people who cheated. It quietly implicates everyone who didn't.

Because once a scandal like this repeats, not once, but again and again, a question starts forming in people's heads that has nothing to do with any individual doctor: did everyone who got in actually deserve to be there?

It's not a fair question to ask of the thousands who did it right. But fairness has nothing to do with how doubt spreads. Once public confidence cracks, it doesn't stay confined to the guilty.

India needs more doctors, and it's building toward that: new medical colleges opening every year, more students than ever hoping to put on the white coat. That's the right direction for a country this size. But there's a difference between producing more doctors and producing more seats. Numbers can grow. Credibility can't be manufactured at the same pace.

A medical entrance exam isn't just testing what a student knows. It's a promise, to patients, to the profession, to the public, that whoever walks through that door earned it fairly. Break that promise enough times, and the damage outlasts the scandal. Catching the people behind a leak is hard. Rebuilding faith after one is harder.

So the fix can't just be tougher laws and harsher sentences handed out after the fact. Those matter, but they're cleanup, not prevention. The real work is upstream –secure exam infrastructure, better technology, tighter oversight, investigations that move fast instead of dragging for years. And underneath all of that, one basic requirement. Every student preparing for this exam needs to believe that honesty is still the smartest strategy in the room.

Because the entire system runs on a kind of hope. Students study because they believe the effort gets rewarded. Parents sacrifice because they believe the process is straight. Patients trust doctors because they believe competence got them there, not connections, not money, not a leaked paper two years earlier.

Weaken that belief, and it doesn't just cost the people who cheated. It costs everyone standing next to them.

The real danger of a leak was never that a few undeserving names might slip through. It's that millions of honest, exhausted, hopeful students start to wonder if merit was ever really enough.

And once that doubt takes hold in medical education, the bill doesn't stay inside the examination hall. It follows every one of those students into every hospital room they'll ever walk into.

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COVER **INTERVIEW**

ACCESS WITHOUT QUALITY IS A BETRAYAL; QUALITY WITHOUT ACCESS IS AN INJUSTICE

Prof. Poonam Tandon
Vice-Chancellor
Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University, Uttar Pradesh

Higher education in India is at an important inflection point – one where access, academic excellence, research, technology and inclusion must move forward together. In this cover interview with Education Post's ***Prabhav Anand, Prof. Poonam Tandon,*** *Vice-Chancellor of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University (DDUGU), reflects on how Indian universities have evolved over the past three decades and what must change to prepare them for the future.*

Drawing from her journey as a physicist, researcher, academic administrator and the founding Director General of the Uttar Pradesh Centre for Ranking, Accreditation and Mentoring (UPCRAM), Prof. Tandon offers a grounded perspective on the challenges facing state universities. She discusses the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the growing influence of artificial intelligence, the gap between academic research and real-world innovation, and the need to make digital transformation genuinely inclusive.

The conversation also explores DDUGU's efforts in research, internationalisation, industry collaboration, skill development and student welfare, while addressing the larger question of what an Indian university should look like by 2047. For Prof. Tandon, the future rests on three principles: universal access with quality, research rooted in Indian challenges, and an institutional culture built around dignity. Her vision is ultimately one of a university that is globally engaged without losing sight of the students and society it exists to serve.

Having served as a researcher, Head of the Department of Physics, Dean, Director General of UPCRAM, and now Vice-Chancellor, you have experienced higher education from multiple vantage points. Looking back over more than three decades, what do you believe is the single biggest structural shift Indian universities have undergone, and where do you think they still remain resistant to change?

When I look back over the last three decades, the most significant structural shift, in my view, has been the quiet democratisation of the Indian university. When I began teaching, higher education was still the reserve of a fairly narrow section of society. Today, if I walk through



our own campus at Gorakhpur, I meet young women who are the first in their families to enter a university, students who came on a bicycle from a village fifty kilometres away, and doctoral scholars whose parents have never held a formal degree. That is a profound change, and it deserves to be acknowledged. In DDUGU, more than 50% of the students are girls. This expansion has made the university more representative and inclusive than ever before.

The second shift, less visible but equally important, is that universities are no longer expected to teach only. We are expected to research, innovate, place students, engage with industry, and serve society. That expansion of role has stretched the system, but it has also matured it.

We remain resistant in three specific areas. First, we hold on to departmental boundaries far too tightly. A physics student who wants to explore philosophy still faces friction within the system, even though the policy allows it. Second, we spend too much time on procedural compliance and too little on academic substance. Third, we are slow to trust our own faculty with genuine autonomy in curriculum design. These are cultural rather than structural problems, and cultures take longer to change than rules.

India's universities are under increasing pressure to improve not only enrolment but also measurable outcomes such as employability, innovation, patents and global rankings. In your opinion, has higher education begun measuring success through the right indicators, or are institutions chasing rankings at the cost of academic depth and societal impact?

I have a nuanced view on this. Rankings, in themselves, are not the villain some make them out to be. They have forced Indian universities to document their work, to think seriously about outcomes, and to compare themselves with peers. That is a healthy discipline.

But indicators are only useful if we ask the right questions of them. If a university begins to optimise purely for a NIRF score, and forgets whether its students are actually learning, or whether its faculty are actually thinking, then we have mistaken the thermometer for the health of the patient.

At DDU Gorakhpur University, we take rankings seriously. We now feature in twelve major national and international ranking systems, including NIRF 2025, where we are placed in the 151–200 band, QS Asia in the 1001 to 1100 band, the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 1001-1500 band, and Nature Index, where we stand 64th among Indian universities. Our NAAC A++ grade with a CGPA of 3.78 is something we are proud of. But we treat these as signals of institutional health, not as the institution's purpose.

The real measures, in my view, remain the older ones. Does a first-generation learner graduate with confidence? Does a faculty member feel their work matters? Does a doctoral scholar produce work that stands on its own? If those answers are yes, the rankings tend to follow.

Before assuming leadership at DDU Gorakhpur University, you played a pioneering role as the first Director General of the Uttar Pradesh Centre for Ranking, Accreditation and Mentoring (UPCRAM), helping universities improve quality standards and accreditation outcomes. Based on that experience, what are the most common institutional weaknesses that continue to prevent many state universities from competing with India's best institutions?

My time as the founding Director General of UPCRAM gave me a rather unfiltered view of this question because I worked directly with several state universities across Uttar Pradesh, gaining an inside view of their real constraints.

The deficits I saw were rarely about talent. Our faculty are capable, and our students are hungry to learn. The problems were mostly structural. Documentation and evidence-keeping were weak, so even good work went unrecognised during accreditation cycles. Administrative bandwidth was thin, so a single dean or department head often handled what four or five people would at a premier institution.



Recruitment cycles were slow, which created generational gaps in mentorship. And perhaps most importantly, there was a self-image problem. Many state universities had begun to think of themselves as regional service providers rather than as places capable of setting national standards.

This can be corrected, and my own institution is one example. Since we established the Ranking Cell and began taking documentation seriously, our position in national and international rankings has significantly improved over the last three years. What state universities need now is not more directives, but sustained handholding and a change in self-perception.

As a scientist with extensive research in spectroscopy and interdisciplinary collaborations, you have consistently advocated research-driven education. Yet a significant proportion of research produced in Indian universities struggles to translate into patents, startups or industry applications.

What fundamental changes are needed to bridge the long-standing gap between academic research and real-world innovation?

I have spent my working life in laboratories in India and in Germany, France, Japan, and Brazil, so this is a question I care about deeply. The gap between our research and its real-world application is not primarily a gap in scientific ability. Indian researchers publish extensively and are cited internationally. The gap lies in the ecosystem around research.

Three things need to change fundamentally. First, we have to reverse the direction in which research problems are chosen. Too many of us pick problems that are publishable rather than problems that matter to a farmer, a small manufacturer, or a district hospital. Second, we need patient funding. Translational research rarely fits within a 12-month project timeline, and yet that is the standard rhythm of our funding agencies. Third, our internal incentive structures still reward journal papers more than patents or products, and that quietly shapes what young researchers choose to work on.

At Gorakhpur, we have tried to act on this in a modest but concrete way. We have filed 102 patent applications so far, of which 63 are published, and 150 copyright applications, of which 56 are registered. Our Scopus-indexed publications have grown from 98 in 2020 to 312 in 2024. We have signed over a hundred national MoUs with organisations such as ICMR-RMRC, ISRO through the Namaskar Foundation, and TCS, which is training 3,500 of our students. These are small beginnings, but they represent the ecosystem thinking Indian research needs.

The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has entered a crucial phase where institutions are expected to move beyond policy announcements towards measurable transformation. Which components of the policy do you believe have genuinely changed university education, and which reforms still require stronger policy support or institutional readiness?

The National Education Policy has produced some real transformations, not just paper reforms. Let me speak from what we have actually implemented.

The four-year undergraduate programme with multiple entry and exit points has restored dignity to students who cannot always complete a degree in a straight line. For a region like eastern Uttar Pradesh, where family responsibilities and financial pressures sometimes interrupt studies, this is not a cosmetic reform. It is a lifeline. The Academic Bank of Credits gives structure to what would otherwise feel like a failed attempt.



The multidisciplinary provisions have opened doors. At our university, we have introduced mandatory three-credit SWAYAM skill courses, and over one lakh students have already enrolled in them. We have also launched new programmes that would not have existed under the old rigid structure, such as the B.Tech in AI and Data Science, the M.Sc. in Forensic Science, the B.Sc. in Natural Farming, and the B.Pharma. Fresh institutes for Pharmacy, Media, Film and Communication, Library and Information Science, and Forensic Science have been established.

What still requires stronger support is implementation capacity. The policy assumes an operating environment that state universities are still building. Faculty strength, classroom infrastructure, digital backbones, and administrative support all need to expand together. Policy has done its part. Now the ecosystem has to catch up, and that requires sustained funding rather than one-time grants.

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly transforming teaching, learning and research. While AI offers enormous opportunities, concerns regarding academic integrity, misinformation and overdependence are equally significant. How should universities prepare students to work with AI without compromising critical thinking, originality and ethical responsibility?

I do not see AI as either a threat or a saviour. It is a powerful tool, and like all powerful tools, it magnifies the intent of the person using it. A student who has never learned to argue carefully will not suddenly learn it because a chatbot writes fluently. Confident-sounding fabrications will mislead a researcher who has not developed a sceptical eye.

So our first responsibility, as universities, is to strengthen the fundamentals. Close reading, patient writing, honest questioning of sources, respect for originality. If these habits are in place, AI becomes an amplifier of judgment. If they are absent, no policy can compensate.

In practical terms, we are working on this in several ways. Through our TCS partnership and the Samsung Innovation Campus, over 6,500 of our students have already received training in relevant digital skills. We have introduced B.Tech in AI and Data Science. We have also adopted the UGC 2018 plagiarism rules with a strict 10% limit, and we take anti-plagiarism checks for our doctoral work seriously.

At the same time, we are telling our students very plainly that AI is not a shortcut for thinking. It is a companion to it. That message has to come not just from policy documents but from teachers in the classroom, every day.

DDU Gorakhpur University serves a large student population from eastern Uttar Pradesh, a region where higher education often represents the first opportunity for social and economic mobility. How do you ensure that technology-led reforms and digital transformation remain inclusive rather than widening the gap between privileged and underserved learners?

This question keeps me awake, honestly. A large proportion of our students come from homes without a stable internet connection, from schools where English was not the medium of instruction, and from families for whom higher education is the first step toward economic mobility. If we digitise without thinking, we can very easily build a modern-looking system that quietly excludes them.

Our approach rests on a few plain principles. Digital access must be a public good on campus. Our libraries, computer facilities, and campus Wi Fi are treated as basic infrastructure, not as extras. We are establishing an Online Examination Centre worth ₹8.5 crore precisely so that no student is disadvantaged by poor connectivity at home. Bilingual and Hindi-medium teaching resources are deliberately developed because a student's dignity should not depend on their command of a language they encountered only in adolescence.

We have also protected the human dimension of learning. Technology can support a teacher, but in first-generation learner contexts, no algorithm can replace an encouraging mentor. Our 400 students receiving stipends of ₹32 lakh under the HURL NSDC programme and our 1300 students trained under the Samsung Innovation Campus continue to have direct faculty mentorship alongside their digital exposure.

Inclusion is not something to be added at the end



of a reform. It is the test of whether the reform was worth doing in the first place.

One of your stated priorities has been building a student-centric academic ecosystem through mentoring, counselling, scholarships and support systems. In your experience, what are the most overlooked challenges today's university students face beyond academics, and how should universities redefine student welfare in the coming decade?

I meet students almost every day, and beyond academics, three challenges come up more often than most people realise.

The first is mental health, and the loneliness that quietly accompanies it. Many of our students leave home for the first time, live in unfamiliar linguistic environments, and carry family expectations they never speak about openly. Anxiety, poor sleep, and self-doubt are far more common than students are willing to admit.

The second is career anxiety. A degree no longer guarantees a job, and students internalise this uncertainty as personal failure. That is why we have set up initiatives like the E2E Career Lounge, expanded placement mentoring, and built industry linkages that offer real training rather than just brochures.

The third, particularly for young women, is the quiet question of safety and self-agency. The confidence to travel, to speak up in a seminar, to lead a student society, to imagine oneself as a future researcher. When our female enrolment grew from 7,040 to 10,530, roughly a 50% rise, we knew this was not just an admissions statistic. It was a signal that we now have a responsibility to build a campus where these young women can genuinely flourish.

Student welfare in the coming decade cannot mean scholarships alone. It must mean counselling infrastructure, peer support networks, transparent financial aid, responsive grievance systems, and multi-year mentoring. We have begun this work through our Anti-Ragging structures and student support systems, but I call it a horizon rather than a checkbox.

Indian universities are increasingly expected to become engines of regional development rather than isolated academic institutions. How can universities like DDU Gorakhpur leverage local knowledge, agriculture, healthcare, entrepreneurship and traditional industries to contribute meaningfully to the economic development of eastern Uttar Pradesh while remaining globally competitive?

Eastern Uttar Pradesh is a region of remarkable human potential and equally remarkable structural constraints. A university like ours cannot behave as if it were an island of learning that happens to be located here.

Our contribution has to be rooted, not merely regional. In agriculture, we launched a B.Sc. in Natural Farming precisely because our region's farmers face soil health, water, and diversification challenges that need scientific engagement. In healthcare, our MoU with ICMR-RMRC enables our faculty and students to address public health questions that matter locally. In entrepreneurship, our incubation activities and industry partnerships are building small ventures grounded in local resources, spanning food processing, media, and services.

We also see internationalisation not as a distraction from this local mission, but as an extension of it. We have signed over 30 international MoUs, including with UEF and HUTECH in Vietnam, and AUGP in the United States. Fifty-four of our doctoral scholars are from Nepal, and we have received 64 new international applications for 2025-26, including Bangladesh, Nepal, UAE, South Africa, and Sudan. This global engagement gives our local students exposure they would otherwise have had to leave home to acquire.

Universities today face a complex balancing act—preserving academic autonomy while responding to regulatory frameworks, funding requirements and rapidly changing societal expectations. How can institutional leaders protect academic freedom and intellectual inquiry while ensuring accountability and quality governance?

These are not opposing values, and I resist the way they are sometimes framed as if we have to choose between them. Academic freedom without accountability drifts into indifference. Accountability without academic freedom collapses into paperwork. The task of institutional leadership is to hold both, honestly and quietly.

In practice, this means protecting the intellectual space in which faculty can teach and research without unnecessary interference, while ensuring that recruitment, promotions, grievance redress, and financial management follow transparent processes. It means engaging seriously with accreditation frameworks like NAAC and ranking systems, without letting them dictate our academic priorities. It means, from time to time, representing the university's autonomy where it needs to be preserved, even when that is uncomfortable.

We have also strengthened governance in concrete ways, from the Ordinance 2025 for the D.Litt., D.Sc., and L.L.D. degrees to strict plagiarism norms, to Anti-Ragging committees, to a formally constituted Ranking Cell. These are not glamorous reforms, but they are



the plumbing of good governance. Without them, everything else leaks.

Governance is about quiet stewardship. It is less about visible authority and more about creating an atmosphere in which good teachers can teach well, honest researchers can conduct their research patiently, and students can learn without disruption. When that atmosphere exists, accountability tends to take care of itself.

Several universities have made substantial investments in infrastructure over the past decade, but faculty development often receives comparatively less attention. In your view, what reforms are urgently needed to attract, retain and continuously develop



high-quality faculty capable of mentoring the next generation of researchers and innovators?

I have said this in many forums. Buildings do not teach. People do. The last decade has seen serious investment in physical infrastructure, and we have benefited from that ourselves. On our own campus, ₹231.61 crore worth of infrastructure work is underway, including the Mahant Digvijaynath Auditorium at ₹43.10 crore, the IET Building at ₹31.63 crore, and the Central Instrument Facility at ₹30.82 crore. But investment in the human dimension of the academy has not kept pace with investment in its walls.

Four reforms are urgent. First, recruitment cycles must become predictable and timely. Prolonged vacancies erode institutional memory. Second, we need real research support for early career scholars, including seed grants, protected research time, and travel funds. Third, professional development for faculty has to be treated as a right, not a favour. Our MMTTC-based refresher programmes, including recent ones such as Biotechnology for Sustainable Development, reflect this thinking. Fourth, promotion frameworks must afford dignity to those who choose teaching as their central vocation, because not every excellent academic is a researcher, and not every excellent researcher is a great teacher. At DDUGU, we are practising this.

If we get this right, everything else in the university becomes easier. If we get it wrong, no ranking will save us.

During your tenure, DDU Gorakhpur University has expanded initiatives related to digital governance, research promotion, industry engagement and skill development, including collaborations in emerging technologies. Looking ahead, what are the next milestones you have set for the university over the next five years, and how do you envision its position in the national and global higher education landscape?

We have set ourselves ambitious but honest goals, and I would like to share them plainly.

First, we want to consolidate our NAAC A++ standing and improve our position across national and international ranking frameworks. This is not vanity. Ranking outcomes have material consequences for the students we admit and the recognition they carry into the world.

Second, we want to deepen our research culture. Our Scopus publications have grown from 98 to 312, our Web of Science publications from 73 in 2021 to 169 in 2025, our PhD scholars from about 500 to over 1,800, and our sponsored projects have crossed 140 in the last three years alone. The ₹100 crore sanctioned under PM USHA MERU will help us take the next serious step, particularly in building a centre of excellence.

Third, we want to expand meaningful international engagement rather than ceremonial partnerships. Our recent MoU with the American University for Global Peace in New Jersey and our expanding footprint in Vietnam are examples of the direction we are moving in.

Fourth, we want to strengthen our students' employability and entrepreneurial readiness. Between the TCS training for 3,500 students, the Samsung Innovation Campus training for 6,500, the HURL NSDC stipend programme, and the E2E Career Lounge, we are trying to build a placement and entrepreneurship pipeline that is real, not decorative.

Fifth, we want to institutionalise our student support ecosystem so that it outlasts any individual administration. Because in the end, that is the test of leadership.

If, five years from now, DDU Gorakhpur is recognised as a serious research university while remaining a place of dignity for first-generation learners, we will have done our work.

Global university partnerships are often viewed as a benchmark of institutional excellence. However, meaningful internationalisation extends beyond student exchange programmes. Based on your recent international engagements, what should Indian universities do differently to build sustainable global collaborations in research, innovation and academic mobility?

Real internationalisation is not measured by the number of MoUs on the wall. It is measured by the depth of academic exchange that happens under those agreements. Too many Indian universities have paper partnerships that produce neither joint publications nor genuine mobility.

For a collaboration to be sustainable, three things need to be in place: first, reciprocity of scholarship. International partners must find real intellectual value in what we bring, not just a market for their programmes. My own Fulbright and Humboldt engagements, and the joint work our faculty does with institutions in Germany, France, Japan, and Brazil, all rest on that reciprocity—second, institutional continuity. Partnerships must survive beyond the tenure of any one Vice Chancellor or Dean, and that requires dedicated offices, clear budgets, and long-term commitment. Third, authentic mobility, not just for students but also for faculty and doctoral scholars, whose exposure eventually reshapes the classrooms they return to.

Our own trajectory reflects this thinking. Over 30 international MoUs, 54 PhD scholars from Nepal, applications from Bangladesh, UAE, South Africa, and Sudan, and specific research and training partnerships in Vietnam and the United States. These are not just numbers. They are relationships we intend to nurture patiently.

As only the second woman Vice-Chancellor of DDU Gorakhpur University and a leader who has held several prominent academic positions, your journey reflects both personal achievement and institutional change. What leadership lessons have been shaped by your experiences, and

what advice would you offer to young women aspiring to lead India's universities and research institutions?

Leadership, for me, has been less about arrival and more about steady arrival. Every position I have held, from Head of Department to Dean of Student Welfare at Lucknow University to the founding Director General of UPCRAM to Vice Chancellor here, was built on years of research, teaching, and administrative work done quietly and consistently.

Three lessons have shaped me. First, credibility precedes authority. A scholar's laboratory is where her leadership is first tested. My Fulbright, my Humboldt, my UGC Research Award, my 260-plus publications, my 45 doctoral students, none of these were pursued as steps to leadership, but each of them gave me the moral standing to lead when the time came. Second, quiet persistence is more effective than loud ambition. Institutions respond better to consistency than to charisma. Third, lifting others is not a distraction from leadership. It is leadership. Mentoring young colleagues, supporting the next generation of women scholars, and building structures that will outlast one's own tenure is the truest measure of what a Vice Chancellor leaves behind.

To young women aspiring to lead India's universities, I offer three thoughts. Build depth first. There is no shortcut to substance. Refuse to internalise scepticism, because the ceiling is not always made of glass. Very often, it is made of hesitation, and hesitation is entirely within our control. And build a community of collaborators, because leadership is never a solitary act, even when it looks like one from the outside.

The recognitions I have received in recent months, including the Vice Chancellor of the Year 2025 award at the Making India Employable Conference, the Rishika Gargi Samman, the honorary title of Colonel Commandant from the Ministry of Defence, and my inclusion in the World's Top 5 per cent Scientists in the 2026 SciRank Global Registry, are all humbling. But I hope they encourage younger women in academia to see that this journey, though long, is entirely possible.

If you were asked to design the blueprint of an ideal Indian university for 2047, when the nation completes 100 years of Independence, what three transformative changes would you consider absolutely non-negotiable, and why?

If I were asked to design the blueprint for an Indian university at the centenary of our Independence, three transformations would be non-negotiable.

First, universal access with uncompromised quality. By 2047, no student from any background should be excluded from higher education because of geography, gender, language, or income. And no student, once admitted, should receive an inferior version of what elite institutions offer. Access without quality is a betrayal. Quality without access is an injustice. The Indian university of 2047 must resolve that false trade-off. Our own enrolment jumped from 14,151 to 18,855, and our female enrolment growth to 10,530; all this is possible as we work at it.

Second, a genuinely research-intensive culture rooted in Indian problems. Our universities must become places where original research is the norm, not the exception, where doctoral training is world-class. Where the questions we ask are meaningful for India, from water, climate, and health to agriculture, energy, cultural preservation, and Indian knowledge systems, and where our answers also contribute to global scholarship. Research must be both indigenous and universal.

Third, the institutionalisation of dignity. The University of 2047 must be a place where students, faculty, and staff experience the institution as a humane environment. Safe, transparent, mentally healthy, gender just, and free of the small daily indignities that quietly erode confidence. Rankings and rupees are meaningless without this.

If Indian universities can guarantee these three by 2047, that is, universal quality access, indigenous research depth, and institutional dignity, we will have built something that reflects the fullness of the civilisation we inherit and the republic we serve. That is the horizon I hold on to, and that is the work we are trying to do, in our own small way, at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University. EP

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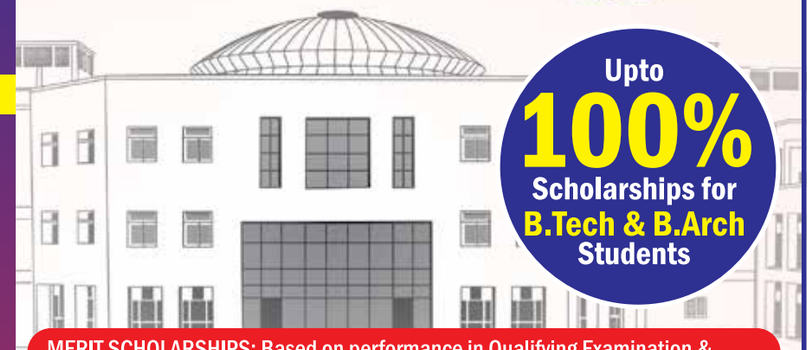
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NEET AFTER THE UPRISING

CAN INDIA REBUILD TRUST IN ITS BIGGEST EXAMINATION?

PRABHAV ANAND

The Examination That Millions Trusted — and the Crisis That Shook It

On a humid morning in early May, examination centres across India witnessed a familiar ritual. Students, many accompanied by anxious parents, queued outside school gates clutching transparent pouches, admit cards and years of relentless preparation. Some had travelled overnight from remote districts; others had spent two or even three years in coaching hubs like Kota, Sikar, Patna and Hyderabad, chasing a dream that, for millions of Indian families, represents not merely a profession but a pathway to social mobility.

For these students, the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) has never been just another examination. It is the single gateway to undergraduate medical education in India, determining admission to nearly every government and private medical college in the country. In a nation where demand for quality medical education far exceeds the number of available seats, NEET has long been viewed as the great equaliser—a common examination that promised every aspirant an equal opportunity, irrespective of geography or socio-economic background.

Nearly two million candidates appeared for the 2026 examination, competing for fewer than 1.5 lakh MBBS seats nationwide. The numbers themselves reveal the scale of the challenge: fewer than one in every thirteen aspirants would eventually secure an MBBS seat. For many, failure would not simply mean another attempt the following year; it could mean mounting financial burdens, emotional exhaustion and the uncertainty of delaying an entire career.

That extraordinary pressure is precisely what makes public confidence in the examination system indispensable. Competitive examinations derive their legitimacy not merely from rules and regulations but from a shared belief that every candidate is being judged on merit. Once that belief begins to erode, even a perfectly conducted examination struggles to command public trust.

The events that unfolded in the weeks following the examination would test that trust more severely than any previous controversy in the history of India's medical entrance system.

The first signs of trouble did not emerge from official notifications. They surfaced on social media.

Students began circulating screenshots, alleging that questions had been accessed before the examination. Telegram groups, WhatsApp forwards and online discussion forums quickly filled with claims, counterclaims and speculation. Initially, many dismissed these as the routine rumours that accompany almost every major competitive examination.

But unlike previous years, the allegations refused to disappear.

As investigative agencies began examining complaints from multiple states, what initially appeared to be isolated accusations gradually evolved into a national controversy. The National Testing Agency (NTA) eventually cancelled the examination after concluding that the integrity of the test had been compromised by question paper leaks, compelling nearly two million candidates to prepare for another examination within weeks.

The cancellation was unprecedented.

For policymakers, it represented an administrative crisis.

For students, it felt like something far more personal.

Months of disciplined preparation had suddenly become uncertain. Those who had believed their examination was over found themselves returning to books they had mentally closed. Coaching schedules resumed. Hostel leases were extended. Families that had already stretched household budgets to finance coaching, accommodation and travel now faced another cycle of expenses.

What remained largely absent from the early television debates, however, was the psychological cost.





Prime-time discussions largely revolved around politics—who should resign, which party should be blamed and how the controversy would affect Parliament. Lost amid those debates were the stories unfolding quietly inside thousands of Indian homes.

For an eighteen-year-old aspirant, competitive examinations are rarely just academic assessments. They become emotional milestones around which entire families organise their aspirations. When the examination itself loses credibility, students are left questioning not only the system but also the value of their own sacrifices.

Parents interviewed during the crisis repeatedly described a similar emotion—not merely anger but helplessness. Many had taken loans to finance coaching programmes. Others had relocated temporarily to coaching cities. Some had invested years of family savings in pursuit of a medical seat that now seemed increasingly uncertain.

- This dimension of the crisis rarely occupied headlines.
- The dominant narrative focused on the leak.
- The deeper story was the collapse of certainty.
- The controversy also exposed structural vulnerabilities that had received relatively little public attention before 2026.

India conducts some of the largest competitive examinations in the world, involving complex logistical chains that extend from confidential question paper preparation to secure printing, transportation, storage, distribution and local administration across thousands of examination centres.

Every additional human interface introduces potential risk

Experts in examination security have long argued that paper leaks are seldom the consequence of sophisticated cyberattacks alone. More often, they result from weaknesses within administrative chains, insider collusion or failures in maintaining custody protocols.

The 2026 controversy reignited longstanding questions about whether India's rapidly expanding examination ecosystem has evolved faster than its institutional safeguards.

These concerns extend beyond NEET

Over the past decade, several recruitment and entrance

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examinations across different states have faced allegations ranging from paper leaks to impersonation rackets and organised cheating networks. Each incident may have appeared isolated, but together they reveal a recurring pattern: technological advancement in examinations has not always been matched by equivalent investments in governance, accountability and risk management.

That broader institutional context was often overshadowed by the political spectacle surrounding the protests.

Yet it is impossible to understand the scale of public anger without recognising this accumulated history.

The protests were not simply about one examination.

They reflected years of growing frustration with recurring irregularities in India's competitive examination system.

As allegations intensified, so did public mobilisation.

What began as online expressions of disappointment gradually transformed into coordinated demonstrations across multiple cities. Students who had spent years competing against one another suddenly found themselves standing together, united not by rank or score but by a common demand—that the country's most important medical entrance examination should once again become worthy of the trust placed in it.

For perhaps the first time in recent memory, the debate surrounding NEET shifted away from cut-offs, coaching institutes and toppers.

Instead, it centred on a far more fundamental question:

Can merit survive when faith in the examination itself begins to collapse?

The Reckoning After the Protest

The question that followed the protests was more difficult than the one that had brought students onto the streets. It was no longer simply whether NEET-UG 2026 had been compromised, whether a re-examination should be conducted or whether those responsible should be arrested. The larger question was whether the institutions that administer India's most consequential entrance examination could restore the confidence they had lost.

For millions of students and their families, the controversy had already changed the meaning of the

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examination. NEET was supposed to be a common benchmark, a system in which a student from a government school in a small town and a student from an expensive coaching institute in a metropolitan city would ultimately compete on the same paper. That promise of standardisation was one of the principal reasons the examination had acquired such importance. But once questions began circulating about whether some candidates had gained access to the paper before the examination, the idea of a level playing field itself came under scrutiny.

The protests therefore represented something larger than anger over a cancelled examination. They were a demand for institutional credibility.

And credibility, unlike an examination date, cannot simply be announced.

From Anger to Accountability

In the weeks following the controversy, the focus gradually shifted from the streets to the investigation. What had initially been dismissed by some as a collection of social-media allegations increasingly became the subject of a formal probe by investigative agencies. The Central Bureau of Investigation's investigation brought the controversy into a different phase, one in which allegations had to be tested against evidence and individual responsibility had to be established.

According to the investigation presented by the authorities, the alleged leak involved people who had access to the examination process. The CBI identified individuals connected with the examination and coaching ecosystem and alleged that students had received access to questions and answers before the examination. Investigators also cited handwritten material that allegedly matched questions appearing in the actual NEET paper. Such findings, if established through judicial proceedings, would transform the controversy from an allegation of administrative negligence into evidence of a deliberate criminal conspiracy involving multiple actors.

That distinction is critical. Competitive examinations are vulnerable to rumours almost by definition. Every year, candidates circulate claims about leaked papers, incorrect answer keys, unfair invigilation or suspicious scores. Most disappear within hours. What made the 2026 controversy different was that investigators began producing evidence that required formal examination by the courts.

By late July, the CBI had filed a chargesheet against 13 accused in the NEET-UG 2026 paper-leak case. The allegations included criminal conspiracy, cheating, criminal breach of trust, destruction of evidence and offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024. The chargesheet reportedly ran into thousands of pages and relied on a substantial body of documentary and witness evidence.

The investigation also highlighted the alleged role of material recovered from the phone of a coaching-centre operator in Latur. Investigators told a Delhi court that 111



of 136 handwritten questions recovered from the device matched questions from NTA's master sets. The claims remain subject to the judicial process, but they underscore the central issue exposed by the controversy: examination security is not simply about protecting a question paper once it reaches an examination centre. It begins much earlier, with every person, institution and process that comes into contact with confidential examination material.

That is where the NEET crisis becomes more uncomfortable for policymakers.

A question paper does not leak by itself.

Someone must be able to access it, copy it, transfer it or misuse the information.

The investigation, therefore, has raised questions not merely about individual wrongdoing but about the chain of custody through which one of the country's most closely guarded examination papers moves before it reaches millions of candidates.

The System Behind the Paper

India's examination machinery has grown enormously in scale. The National Testing Agency conducts examinations involving millions of candidates spread across thousands of centres, often requiring a complicated network of question setters, moderators, printers, transporters, examination officials, centre superintendents, invigilators and technology providers.

Every additional layer creates another potential point of failure.

For years, the discussion around examination security has focused heavily on technology. Biometric authentication, CCTV surveillance, encrypted communication, digital monitoring and artificial intelligence-assisted systems are increasingly presented as solutions to cheating and impersonation. These tools undoubtedly have a role to play. But the NEET controversy demonstrates why technology cannot be treated as a substitute for institutional discipline.

The strongest encryption cannot protect a paper if an authorised individual deliberately shares its contents. A CCTV camera cannot prevent a breach that occurs before the material reaches the examination centre. A biometric system cannot correct a failure in the chain through which confidential documents were handled.

The security of an examination is therefore only as strong as its weakest link.

That realisation has pushed the debate towards a much broader question: does India's examination architecture need to be redesigned rather than merely patched after every controversy?

The answer may eventually involve a combination



of technology and procedural reform. The government has considered models in which question papers could be digitally transmitted to examination centres and printed under controlled conditions, reducing some of the risks associated with physical transportation. Such a hybrid approach could potentially shorten the period during which physical question papers remain vulnerable. But it would also introduce new cybersecurity and infrastructure challenges.

- The lesson should therefore not be that paper is insecure and computers are secure.
- The lesson should be that security has to be designed into the entire examination ecosystem.
- The Courtroom Becomes the Next Battleground

As investigators pursued the alleged leak, the Supreme Court became another important arena in the crisis. The Court's scrutiny went beyond the immediate question of what had happened to NEET. It also raised questions about the institutional accountability of the agencies responsible for conducting examinations on behalf of the state.

The judiciary's intervention was significant because the consequences of an examination failure are fundamentally different from those of an ordinary administrative error. A delayed government service can often be corrected. A compromised examination can alter the distribution of scarce educational opportunities. For a student competing for a limited number of medical seats, an unfair advantage enjoyed by another candidate is not merely an inconvenience. It can determine whether years of preparation culminate in admission or another year of waiting.

The Supreme Court's observations during the proceedings reflected precisely this concern. The Court questioned the adequacy of existing safeguards and the accountability mechanisms surrounding the examination process. It also sought responses from the Centre, the National Testing Agency and investigative authorities on measures intended to prevent similar failures in the future.

The judicial scrutiny placed an uncomfortable burden on the administration: it was no longer enough to say that an investigation was underway. Institutions had to explain how the failure had occurred and, more importantly, what would prevent its recurrence.

That is a much harder question.

Finding those responsible for a leak addresses the past.

Preventing the next leak requires changing the system.

The Re-Examination Was More Than a Re-Test

The re-examination that followed the cancellation was therefore watched with a level of scrutiny that an

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ordinary NEET examination would rarely receive. For NTA, it was an opportunity to demonstrate that the system could respond to a failure with stronger safeguards. For students, however, it was also an uncomfortable reminder that they were being asked to trust the same institutional machinery that had already failed them.

The authorities introduced additional security measures, including tighter verification and examination-centre protocols. The examination was eventually conducted and the subsequent answer key and results were released.

Administratively, the immediate crisis could now be described as resolved.

Psychologically, it was not so simple.

A re-examination can replace a question paper. It cannot replace the months of uncertainty surrounding the original examination. Students had already reorganised their lives once. Coaching schedules had been extended, travel arrangements changed and family finances stretched further. For candidates who had taken a gap year specifically for NEET, the disruption carried an additional cost: another period of uncertainty in an already highly competitive academic journey.

This is one of the least discussed consequences of examination failure.

The system measures candidates in marks, ranks and percentiles. But candidates experience the system in months and years.

A cancelled examination consumes time that cannot be recovered.

That is why the cost of an examination failure should not be calculated merely in administrative expenditure. It should also be measured in the opportunity cost borne by students and their families.

When a Protest Becomes a Political Crisis

The political consequences eventually became unavoidable. The sustained protests and criticism surrounding the examination placed considerable pressure on the Union government and the Education Ministry. On July 25, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned, marking one of the most significant political consequences of the controversy. Pralhad Joshi subsequently took charge of the Education Ministry.

For the protesters, the resignation represented accountability. For the political establishment, it was an acknowledgement that the controversy had developed beyond an ordinary administrative dispute.

But a ministerial resignation, however significant politically, cannot by itself repair an examination system.

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calendar may continue. New guidelines may be issued. Committees may be established. Yet if the underlying weaknesses in the system remain untouched, the next crisis will simply be a matter of time.

That is why the real measure of the political response will not be who occupies the Education Ministry.

It will be whether the ministry can create an examination system in which such a crisis becomes substantially harder to repeat.

The NTA Question

At the centre of that discussion is the National Testing Agency.

NTA was established with an ambitious objective: to create a professional, standardised and technologically capable institution for conducting major entrance examinations across India. Its creation reflected a recognition that examinations involving millions of candidates could no longer depend entirely on fragmented arrangements managed separately by different institutions.

But scale brings its own risks.

An examination agency responsible for millions of candidates must maintain not only operational efficiency but extraordinary levels of security, transparency and accountability. The NEET controversy has consequently revived questions about whether the NTA's institutional structure, technical capacity and oversight mechanisms have kept pace with the scale of its responsibilities.

The debate should not be reduced to whether NTA should be abolished or retained. That is the easiest political argument to make and the least useful policy question to ask.

The more difficult questions are institutional.

Who independently audits NTA's examination-security architecture? How frequently are its systems subjected to stress tests? How are individuals with access to confidential material vetted? What happens when a security protocol is breached? Who investigates an internal failure? How quickly are students informed? And can an affected candidate challenge an administrative decision without having to navigate an extraordinarily complex legal process?

These questions matter because accountability cannot begin only after a paper leak.

It has to exist before one occurs.

The New Problem: Trust Creates Its Own Vulnerability

There is another consequence of the NEET controversy that deserves greater attention.

Once students begin believing that examination papers can be leaked, an entire ecosystem of fraud can develop around that belief.

After the controversy, authorities warned candidates about people claiming to possess leaked or advance-access copies of examination material and attempting to sell them through social media and messaging platforms. For students already convinced that the examination system is vulnerable, such claims can become dangerously persuasive.

The result is a vicious cycle.

A genuine breach damages trust. Damaged trust creates demand for advance information. That demand creates a market for fake papers. Fake papers produce more rumours. Those rumours deepen suspicion about the examination authority.

The only sustainable way to break that cycle is credibility.

When students have confidence that the examination process is secure, a message promising a leaked paper is more likely to be recognised as a scam. When confidence has collapsed, even obviously dubious claims can find an audience.

This is why communication has become an important part of examination security.

During a crisis, silence creates a vacuum. Social media fills it, often faster than official institutions can respond. A modern examination authority therefore needs not only technical security but a credible public-information strategy capable of responding rapidly to misinformation without dismissing legitimate concerns.

Beyond NEET: India's Examination Crisis

The greatest danger would be to treat NEET-UG 2026 as an isolated episode.

India's examination system has witnessed controversies involving recruitment examinations, university admissions and other competitive tests across different states and institutions. The recurring nature of such episodes suggests that the underlying problem cannot be solved by focusing on one examination agency or one particular paper.

The events of August have reinforced that point. On August 10, youth protesters in Jharkhand clashed with police while demonstrating over alleged irregularities in recruitment examinations and paper leaks. The protest was linked to a broader movement over examination and employment concerns.

The significance of these protests extends beyond Jharkhand.

For millions of young Indians, examinations are the gateways to scarce opportunities. A medical seat, a government job, an engineering college or a university admission can determine years of a person's life. When the examination that distributes those opportunities is perceived as unfair, frustration quickly moves beyond the classroom.

It becomes economic because families have invested money.

It becomes social because educational opportunity determines mobility.

And eventually, it becomes political because young people begin questioning whether institutions are capable of delivering the merit-based opportunities they were promised.

That is why the NEET controversy should be understood as part of a wider crisis of confidence in India's competitive examination ecosystem.

What Real Reform Would Require

If the lessons of 2026 are to produce meaningful change, reform cannot stop at additional CCTV cameras or another set of examination-day instructions. The entire chain of examination security needs to be examined—from question creation to final result publication.

Confidential material should have a clearly documented chain of custody, with every transfer recorded and every individual with access identifiable. Access should be limited to the smallest practical number of people, and independent audits should be conducted before—not after—major examinations. Technology can help create tamper-resistant records, monitor unusual activity and strengthen identity verification, but technological systems themselves must be independently tested.

The human element is equally important. Personnel involved in sensitive examination processes require background verification, regular training and clearly defined accountability. There must also be credible mechanisms through which insiders can report suspicious behaviour without fearing retaliation.

Most importantly, responsibility cannot disappear behind the phrase "procedural lapse". When an examination involving millions of candidates is compromised, institutions need to establish precisely where the failure occurred, who was responsible for that stage of the process and what consequence followed.

Otherwise, accountability becomes symbolic rather than structural.

The objective should not be to create a system in which nothing can ever go wrong. No examination system in the world can promise that. The objective should be to create a system in which a failure is detected quickly, contained effectively, investigated independently and communicated honestly.

That is what resilient institutions do.

Rebuilding Trust Will Take Longer Than Conducting NEET

The NEET crisis will eventually disappear from the headlines. Another examination will occupy the news cycle. Another set of toppers will be celebrated. Counselling will begin, colleges will fill their seats and the academic calendar will move forward.

But institutional memory will remain.

The student who spent another month preparing after an examination was cancelled will remember it. The parent who borrowed additional money to keep a child in coaching



will remember it. The candidate who believed another student had gained an unfair advantage will remember it. And every future examination will be measured, consciously or otherwise, against the experience of 2026.

That is why rebuilding trust cannot be reduced to conducting the next NEET without a major incident.

The system must demonstrate transparency before the examination, security during it and accountability afterwards.

Students do not expect perfection.

They expect fairness.

They understand that an examination can be difficult. They accept that thousands of candidates will receive marks lower than they hoped. They understand that only a fraction of applicants will secure medical seats.

What they cannot reasonably be expected to accept is the possibility that the examination itself may not have been fair.

That is the line between a difficult competition and a broken one.

The Examination After the Examination

NEET-UG 2026 began as an examination for medical admission. It became a controversy over a question paper, then a national protest over accountability, and eventually a test of the institutions responsible for administering India's competitive examinations.

The first test was whether India could conduct an examination for millions.

The second was whether it could respond when the integrity of that examination was questioned.

The third—and the one that will ultimately define the legacy of this crisis—is whether the country can make the next examination demonstrably more secure, transparent and accountable than the last.

That test is still underway.

Investigations will have to survive judicial scrutiny. Accused individuals will have the opportunity to defend themselves through due process. Administrative reforms will have to be implemented rather than merely announced. New security systems will have to withstand real-world pressure. And the government will have to convince students that reform is not simply a response to a protest that has already faded from the streets.

Ultimately, the students are asking for something remarkably simple.

They are not asking for an easier NEET. They are not asking for guaranteed admission. They are not asking for an advantage over anyone else.

They are asking for a system in which the person who prepares honestly has a fair opportunity to compete.

That was the original promise of a common national medical entrance examination.

The uprising of 2026 showed what happens when that promise is threatened.

The years ahead will show whether India has truly understood why the students rose—and whether the institutions entrusted with their future are capable of earning their trust back.

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SIMPLY PRODUCING MORE DOCTORS WILL NOT HELP IF THEY LACK CLINICAL COMPETENCE AND MORAL PRINCIPLES



Dr. Devesh Kumar Singh
Chairman, Noida International University &
Noida International Institute of Medical Sciences (NIIMS)

As India's medical education landscape expands, the conversation is increasingly shifting from quantity to quality, clinical competence, research and innovation. In this interview, **Dr. Devesh Kumar Singh,** Chairman, Noida International University and Noida International Institute of Medical Sciences (NIIMS), discusses the priorities shaping the future of medical education in India. In this exclusive interview with Education Post's **Prabhav Anand,** Dr Devesh shares his perspective on integrating artificial intelligence and simulation-based learning with hands-on clinical experience, strengthening research and preventive healthcare, and encouraging doctors to serve underserved communities. He also outlines how stronger industry-academia collaboration and interdisciplinary learning can prepare Indian doctors for a globally competitive healthcare environment.

India has significantly expanded medical colleges over the past decade. In your view, what should now become the country's biggest priority—adding more seats or improving the quality of medical training? Why?

While expanding access to medical education has been a great accomplishment, the main focus going forward has to be improving the quality of medical education. Simply producing more doctors will not be helpful if the doctors lack clinical competence and moral principles and are not equipped to respond to the changing medical demands. The quality of medical education depends on the infrastructure, faculty, methods, and provision of clinical experience.

Medical education is increasingly expected to produce not just skilled clinicians but also researchers, innovators, and public health leaders. How should universities

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redesign their curriculum to prepare students for these multiple roles?

To improve medical education, its range should be broadened to include research, innovation, leadership, entrepreneurship, and public health. Students should participate in joint projects, community health projects, research publications, and technology in health care very early on.

Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, simulation-based learning, and virtual reality are rapidly entering medical education. How do you see these tools transforming the way future doctors are trained without compromising clinical judgement and patient interaction?

The purpose of technology in healthcare is to help and not supplant the human touch involved in practicing medicine. Technological innovations, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and simulation, allow students to learn and practice various medical skills without any risk. All these procedures can improve the diagnostic skills of medical students and provide them with a broad range of clinical situations experienced. Understanding the importance of empathy and ethics, as well as belief in patients, is crucial. A successful combination of technological innovation and clinical hands-on experience is the best solution.

Rural India continues to face an uneven distribution of healthcare professionals despite the growing number of medical graduates. What practical role can medical institutions play in encouraging young doctors to serve underserved communities?

In the medical education program, the participants should engage in structured training, internships, and primary healthcare assignments in rural areas. When medical students encounter the difficulties of living in underserved communities, they become socially responsible individuals.

The healthcare industry often points to a gap between classroom learning and real clinical practice. From your perspective, how can stronger collaboration between medical colleges, hospitals, and industry bridge this gap?

Perpetual collaboration between academic institutions, hospitals, and other organisations is vital. Joint research initiatives, practical training funded by institutions, advanced clinical simulations, internships, and exposure to new digital innovations in health, along with interaction with health experts, guarantee that students not only know about medicine but also have practical skills. Such partnerships produce graduates equipped for the modern clinical environment.

Preventive healthcare is gaining greater importance as lifestyle diseases continue to rise. Should medical education place greater emphasis on community medicine and preventive care than it traditionally has? How can this shift be achieved?

Definitely. The reason for India's increasing disease burden is preventable lifestyle diseases. It should be the responsibility of medical education to promote preventive health care by enhancing community medicine practices, health promotion, nutrition, mental health education, and early disease detection. Students should be part of community activities to learn disease prevention rather than treatment.

Research has become an important benchmark for medical institutions worldwide. What steps do you believe are necessary to build a stronger research culture among undergraduate medical students in India?

Research should be added to the curriculum of undergraduate medical education as a necessity rather than as a choice. Students should receive mentorship from professors with experience, funds for research, and access to laboratories while being given chances to present their research and to form collaborations.

Looking ahead over the next decade, what major transformation do you believe medical education in India must undergo to ensure that Indian doctors remain globally competitive while continuing to address the country's unique healthcare challenges?

The future of medical education lies in training doctors who are capable of functioning in a global environment while being socially responsible as well. To achieve this, it is necessary to fuse modern technology, research, innovation, preventive medicine, interdisciplinary studies, and international cooperation, smartly weaving these innovations into established clinical and ethical principles; medical institutions have to be able to train specialists capable of improving the global health system while doing their best to respond to the various needs of India's healthcare. EP

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THE FOCUS HAS SHIFTED FROM **EMPLOYABILITY TO CREATING VALUE FROM DAY ONE**

Gaurav Jain
Director – Business Development
SP Jain London School of Management

A good academic record may open the door, but increasingly, it is what a graduate can do beyond the classroom that determines whether that door stays open. As employers place greater emphasis on practical skills, adaptability, communication, AI readiness, and global exposure, India's campus placement ecosystem is undergoing a fundamental shift. In this interview, ***Gaurav Jain,*** *Director – Business Development, SP Jain London School of Management, examines how business schools must respond to these changing expectations. Speaking to Education Post's* ***Prabhav Anand,*** *Jain discusses the future of campus hiring, AI-driven recruitment, employability gaps, global learning, and the structural changes needed to prepare graduates for an increasingly competitive world of work.*

According to recent industry reports, hiring has become more selective, with recruiters prioritising demonstrable skills over academic scores alone. Do you believe India's placement ecosystem is moving away from the traditional CGPA-driven model, and how should business schools respond to this shift?

There is a clear shift in the way recruiters are evaluating talent today. While academic performance continues to matter, it is no longer the primary differentiator during the hiring process. Employers increasingly want graduates who can solve real business problems, collaborate across diverse teams, communicate effectively, and adapt quickly to dynamic work environments. The findings from the HirePro report reinforce this reality, with only 9 percent of corporates believing graduates are job ready from day one, while more than half expect them to undergo structured training before they can contribute meaningfully. This calls for business schools to rethink how they prepare students for the workplace. The focus has to move beyond classroom learning towards experiential education, industry engagement, and global exposure. At SP Jain School of Global Management, our multi campus learning model allows students to study across business hubs such as Mumbai, Dubai, Singapore, and Sydney, exposing them to different markets, cultures, and business practices. This develops adaptability, cross cultural competence, and the confidence to work in international teams. It is these practical capabilities, rather than academic scores alone, that increasingly influence hiring decisions and help graduates create value from the very beginning of their careers.

AI is increasingly influencing recruitment—from résumé screening to interview assessments. How should management students prepare for a hiring process where technology evaluates candidates before a human recruiter does?

AI is fundamentally changing how candidates are evaluated. Recruitment today often begins with AI driven résumé screening, online assessments, and behavioural analysis long before a recruiter interacts with a candidate. As a matter of fact, students need to focus on demonstrating practical capabilities rather than relying solely on academic credentials. Recruiters increasingly want evidence of problem solving, decision making, adaptability, and the ability to apply knowledge in real business situations. Recognising this shift early, SP Jain School of Global Management has redesigned parts of its learning model to reflect the realities of an AI enabled workplace. Students use the AI enabled Learning Tutor (AI-ELT) to build conceptual understanding before class, allowing classroom sessions to focus on case discussions, strategic thinking, and solving complex business challenges. Equally important is the emphasis on meta learning, which develops the ability to continuously learn, unlearn, and relearn as technologies evolve. In an era where AI can process information instantly, the graduates who stand out will be those who combine technological fluency with sound judgment, curiosity, and the ability to make informed decisions.

Several companies have reported cautious campus hiring over the past year despite improving business sentiment. In your view, is this a temporary market correction, or does it reflect a long-term change in how organisations recruit young talent?

I believe what we are witnessing is a combination of a short-term market correction and a longer-term structural shift in hiring. While macroeconomic uncertainty has certainly made organisations more cautious about campus recruitment volumes, the bigger change lies in what employers now expect from graduates. Companies are no longer hiring at scale with the intention of training talent from scratch. They increasingly expect graduates to contribute meaningfully from the outset. This is evident in the growing preference for internships, specialised qualifications, and skill-based hiring. Employers are looking beyond degrees to assess whether candidates can solve problems, work with emerging technologies, communicate effectively, and adapt to changing business environments. Campus hiring is therefore becoming more selective rather than disappearing altogether. For business schools, this means moving beyond conventional classroom teaching and creating stronger industry integration through live projects, internships, experiential learning, and global exposure. The institutions that prepare graduates to be workplace ready rather than simply academically qualified will continue to remain relevant, even as hiring models evolve. The focus has shifted from producing employable graduates to producing graduates who can create value from day one.

Many graduates possess strong theoretical knowledge but still struggle to convert interviews into job offers. What, in your experience, are the three most common employability gaps that institutions need to address before students enter the placement season?

What I see is that the biggest employability gap today is not a lack of knowledge but a lack of workplace readiness. Industry reports consistently show that while nearly seven in ten students believe they are job ready, only a small percentage of employers agree. Three gaps stand out. First, graduates often struggle to apply theoretical concepts to real business problems. Second, many know how to use AI tools but not how to critically evaluate AI generated outputs or make decisions based on them. Third,



communication, collaboration, and business judgment remain underdeveloped despite being the capabilities employers value the most. This requires a fundamental shift in how future managers are prepared. Learning models are increasingly using AI to deliver foundational concepts outside the classroom, allowing faculty to spend more time on case discussions, simulations, negotiations, and solving real business challenges. AI Enabled Learning Tutor (AI-ELT), combined with a strong focus on meta learning, encourages students to continuously learn, unlearn, and relearn as industries evolve. As AI becomes embedded in every business function, organisations will increasingly differentiate candidates not by what they know, but by how effectively they apply knowledge, question assumptions, and make sound decisions in complex situations.

Global exposure is often considered a competitive advantage, yet many students ultimately seek careers in India. How does international learning translate into better placement opportunities within the Indian job market, particularly across consulting, finance and technology sectors?

Global exposure is not merely about preparing students for international careers, rather it has become a significant advantage even for those building careers in India. Employers across consulting, finance, and technology increasingly value professionals who can work across cultures, collaborate with global teams, and approach business challenges with an international perspective. This is particularly relevant as Indian companies continue to expand globally and multinational organisations strengthen their presence in the country. The outcomes of the Master of Global Business (MGB) 2025–26 batch reflect this trend. The programme recorded 65.26% international placements and 84.36% international internships, while graduates with prior work experience reported an average four-fold increase in post-program earnings Graduates secured roles with organisations such as Apple, Deloitte, Aon, Siemens, Grant Thornton, Honeywell, and DP World, demonstrating that employers value graduates who combine business knowledge with cross-border exposure, adaptability, and the ability to operate in globally integrated business environments.

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Recent placement outcomes at SP Jain's global programmes indicate that over 65% of graduates secured international offers, while a significant proportion completed overseas internships before graduation. What lessons can Indian business schools draw from this model to strengthen career outcomes for their own students?

The lesson is that career outcomes improve when global exposure is embedded into the curriculum rather than offered as an optional experience. Today's employers are looking for graduates who can operate confidently across markets, work with diverse teams, and apply business concepts in real business environments. This requires business schools to move beyond traditional classroom teaching and create opportunities for international immersion, industry engagement, and experiential learning. More importantly, exposure to different business ecosystems fundamentally changes the way students think. Studying and working across multiple global business hubs develops adaptability, cultural intelligence, resilience, and the ability to navigate ambiguity, qualities that are becoming increasingly valuable across consulting, finance, and technology. As organisations become more global in their operations, recruiters are looking beyond technical knowledge to identify candidates who can collaborate across geographies, understand diverse customer markets, and make decisions in complex environments. Business schools that integrate these experiences into their programmes will be far better positioned to produce graduates who are not only employable but also future ready.

Recruiters today frequently describe adaptability, communication and business acumen as equally important as technical knowledge. Should business schools formally assess these professional competencies alongside academic performance, and if so, how?

The workplace has evolved far beyond evaluating candidates solely on academic excellence. Recruiters today want professionals who can think critically, communicate with clarity, collaborate across functions, adapt to rapidly changing environments, and make informed business decisions. These capabilities often determine long term success far more than examination scores. Business schools therefore need to assess students in environments that closely resemble the workplace through case based learning, boardroom presentations, cross cultural team projects, industry internships, consulting assignments, and simulations. These provide a far richer indication of workplace readiness than traditional examinations. AI is also reshaping management education by supporting foundational learning and providing personalised feedback, allowing classroom interactions to focus on application, discussion, negotiation, and strategic decision making. Equally important is developing the mindset of meta learning, the ability to continuously learn, unlearn, and relearn as industries evolve. In an AI enabled economy, the graduates who stand out will not necessarily be those with the highest scores, but those who consistently demonstrate sound judgment, adaptability, and the ability to create value in complex business situations.

Looking ahead, what structural changes do you believe are necessary in India's campus placement ecosystem to ensure graduates remain employable in an economy increasingly shaped by AI, automation and global competition?

India's campus placement ecosystem needs to evolve from a placement centric model to a career readiness model. The focus can no longer be limited to matching students with recruiters during the final semester. Institutions need to integrate industry exposure, international learning, internships, and experiential projects throughout the academic journey so that students graduate with practical business experience rather than just academic knowledge. As organisations become increasingly global and technology driven, employers are looking for graduates who can work across markets, functions, and cultures. The strong outcomes of the Master of Global Business programme demonstrate the value of this approach, with graduates benefiting from international internships, multi country learning, and exposure to diverse business ecosystems before entering the workforce. Building stronger industry partnerships, embedding global experiences into the curriculum, and creating opportunities for students to solve real business challenges will be critical to ensuring graduates remain relevant and employable in an economy shaped by AI, automation, and global competition. EP

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TECHNOLOGY ALONE WON'T SOLVE EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE; GOVERNANCE MUST LEAD



Swaminathan Ganesan
Co-Founder & CEO, Smartail

India's examination crisis may no longer be solved by simply making exams harder to cheat—it may require rethinking how they are designed, monitored and evaluated. From paper leaks and organised malpractice to AI-assisted responses, technology is reshaping both the vulnerabilities and the possibilities within India's vast examination ecosystem. In this conversation, **Swaminathan Ganesan,** Co-Founder & CEO, Smartail, speaks to Education Post's **Prabhav Anand** about how AI can move examinations from reactive investigations to predictive risk intelligence. He examines the potential of AI-powered evaluation, the need for explainable and accountable systems, and why competency, reasoning and application must increasingly take precedence over rote learning.

India conducts some of the world's largest examinations, with millions of candidates appearing for entrance and recruitment tests every year. Yet repeated incidents of paper leaks, impersonation, and organised cheating continue to undermine public trust. From your perspective, where does the examination ecosystem remain technologically weakest, and which vulnerabilities can realistically be eliminated through AI over the next five years?

India has built an examination system capable of handling extraordinary scale, but scale also exposes weak points. Paper leaks often dominate public attention, but they are only one symptom of a much broader examination integrity challenge. From question paper security and candidate authentication to evaluation consistency and post-examination analytics, the examination lifecycle still contains multiple fragmented processes where technology can strengthen transparency and governance.

AI cannot solve all types of fraud or malpractice. However, it can make multiple elements of the system more robust. Authentication, detection of anomalies, digital trails of actions during the exam, and analysis of answer patterns can all limit the possibilities of manipulation. Similarly, assessments will need to be made more consistent and fair. Over the next five years, I believe that AI can help institutions at the point where it reduces risk from an early stage, increases transparency, and supports more effective human decision-making rather than replacing it.

Technology is often introduced after a crisis. Can AI help shift the examination system from a reactive model—where malpractice is investigated only after it occurs—to a predictive model that identifies risks, suspicious patterns, or vulnerable examination centres before results are declared?

Yes, and I think that is where AI brings its most promise. Today, investigations tend to be initiated after a complaint is raised or a paper leak is reported. By that stage, the damage is often already done.

Today's AI can continuously analyse operational and assessment data to identify unusual patterns abnormal behaviours early, such as identifying strange similarities between answer scripts or peculiar response patterns in specific centres, anomalies in candidate performance, or operational issues which require further investigation. These signals can be treated as indicators that warrant human investigation.

Similar to that seen in banking fraud detection, banks don't wait until the fraud is confirmed before checking transactions. Education can follow this lead. Predictive intelligence will not eradicate malpractice, but it can reduce the blind spots within institutions and give authorities a chance to intervene before one issue becomes a systemic failure.

In your recent writings, you've argued that assessment should evolve into a source of "learning intelligence" rather than merely producing marks. Can the same assessment intelligence also become an integrity tool by identifying statistically unusual answer patterns, coordinated cheating, or systemic irregularities that traditional methods may overlook?

Certainly, while the intelligence of a test can commonly be considered in terms of learning, it has another important function of safeguarding the integrity of testing.

Every examination generates a rich layer of assessment intelligence not just marks. Patterns in descriptive responses, conceptual errors, answer similarities, score distributions, and candidate behaviour can all provide valuable signals that traditional manual review may never detect.

Having said that, AI should be used as an alert system to raise anomalies to the test conducted by expert assessors and the examining officers. The final decision must always remain with humans. Under proper use, assessment intelligence can enhance equity and public confidence by increasing the evidentiary and transparent basis of the examination.

Integrity is not limited to preventing malpractice. It also includes ensuring that every candidate is evaluated consistently against the same academic standards, regardless of who evaluates the answer.

Smartail's AI-powered evaluation platform has focused extensively on improving the consistency of assessment. As AI becomes more deeply integrated into high-stakes examinations, how can institutions ensure that these systems remain transparent, explainable, and free from algorithmic bias—particularly when students challenge evaluation outcomes?

Trust comes before technology. If students don't understand how a system arrived at a decision, they will not trust it, even if the system's output is accurate.

Institutions should adopt AI that is explainable rather than opaque. Every recommendation should be traceable to the well-defined evaluation points of the model, so that teachers or the evaluator can always check or override the automated suggestions. Smartail's AI assessment intelligence platform is built around responsible AI, where every evaluation is transparent, explainable, and guided by human expertise.

UNESCO has always agreed that, in education, AI tools are meant to augment 'professional judgment', not replace it. AI can bring consistency and efficiency, but we need to

hold learning institutions accountable. Responsible AI is born of good governance, not just good algorithms.

Generative AI has fundamentally changed the assessment landscape, making AI-assisted responses more accessible than ever before. Does this require stronger invigilation alone, or does it call for a complete redesign of how India assesses knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving?

More stringent invigilation can help, but only tackle one aspect of the problem. The real issue is whether or not our examinations continue to test the right stuff.

Where assessments emphasise memorisation or rote answers, generative AI will naturally become a shortcut. But if assessments focus on reasoning, application, problem-solving, creativity, and contextual understanding, AI becomes much less capable of replacing genuine learning. The objective should be to assess how students think, not simply what they produce.

This is already on the mind of India's National Education Policy (NEP), which is pushing towards competency-based assessment rather than rote memorisation. Generative AI is an opportunity to reimagine assessment rather than to increase general surveillance. The point shouldn't be to prevent all use of AI; it should be to design assessments where it focuses on understanding. That's a more sustainable response than increased monitoring.

Examination fraud today is increasingly organised, often involving sophisticated networks rather than isolated instances of cheating. Can AI eventually identify patterns that connect suspicious activities across examination centres, evaluators, and candidate cohorts, or are there technological limitations that institutions should realistically acknowledge?

To a significant extent, yes. Organised malpractice often leaves patterns that are difficult to identify manually but become more visible when large datasets are analysed together.

AI can compare information across examination centres, answer scripts, evaluation timelines, attendance records, and historical performance to detect unusual correlations that may otherwise go unnoticed. Similar approaches are already widely used in banking, insurance, and cybersecurity to detect fraud.

But there are practical limitations. AI is exceptionally good at recognising patterns across large datasets, but it cannot establish intent or determine culpability. Those decisions must always remain with investigators and examination authorities.

Indicators like regional learning trends, candidate coaching ecosystems, or simply coincidental similarities between candidates will all have to be scrutinised. The technology is strongest when it helps humans ask better questions, not when it attempts to provide definitive answers.

If you were advising the Ministry of Education and the National Testing Agency today, what would be the three most impactful technology reforms that could significantly reduce examination malpractice over the next three to five years—not just detect irregularities faster, but prevent them from occurring in the first place?

The first priority should be an End-to-end digital examination governance with every step-from question paper handling to evaluation creating a transparent, traceable digital trail. Fragmented systems make it much harder to identify risks early.

Establishing the use of Continuous AI-powered examination risk intelligence during the examination lifecycle is also recommended. Importantly, Don't wait for complaints to receive and process; proactively analyse operational data for anomalies that should be promptly looked into.

Finally, Redesign assessments around competency and application rather than memorisation. As long as examinations continue to reward memorisation, malpractice will remain attractive. Competency-based assessments, supported by AI-enabled evaluation and learning analytics, can reduce dependence on rote answers while providing richer insights into student understanding.

Technology alone will never solve examination malpractice. But when combined with strong governance, transparent processes, and responsible implementation, it can make the system significantly more resilient, fair, and trusted. EP

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INDIA CAN BECOME NOT MERELY AN EDUCATION DESTINATION, BUT A CONSEQUENTIAL GLOBAL CLASSROOM



Vineeth Thomas
Founder & Managing Partner, Immersion India

What if the most important lessons in education cannot be taught inside a classroom? As universities rethink what it means to prepare students for a rapidly changing world, experiential learning is moving from the margins to the centre of global education. In this conversation, with Education Post's ***Prabhav Anand, Vineeth Thomas,*** *Founder & Managing Partner, Immersion India, examines how immersion in real markets, companies and communities can turn knowledge into judgement, adaptability and cultural intelligence. He also explores India's potential to become a global classroom, the line between meaningful immersion and educational tourism, and how technology can deepen – not replace – real-world learning.*

International education has traditionally been associated with pursuing degrees abroad, but experiential learning is rapidly gaining importance. How are global immersion programs changing the way universities define learning outcomes, and can they become as valuable as traditional classroom education?

International education is changing quite fundamentally. It is no longer only about spending two or three years in another country and returning with a degree. Increasingly, students are looking for shorter, more intensive experiences that expose them to a different market, culture and way of thinking.

The demand is certainly there. UNESCO estimates that 7.3 million students are studying outside their home countries today, compared with around two million in 2000. That is part of a much larger global higher-education population of approximately 269 million students.

A good immersion programme takes this one step further. It places students inside real companies, communities and institutions, where the information is incomplete and the answers are not conveniently waiting at the back of a textbook. They have to listen, interpret, ask better questions and make sense of unfamiliar situations.

That develops qualities such as judgement, adaptability, cultural intelligence and comfort with ambiguity. These are difficult to teach through lectures alone.

I do not see immersion replacing classroom education. The classroom gives students frameworks and intellectual discipline. Immersion tests whether they can use them. The most powerful learning happens when the two are deliberately connected through preparation, field engagement, reflection and assessment.

Despite its rich cultural, industrial, and academic diversity, India is yet to emerge as a leading destination for experiential education. What are the biggest barriers holding India back, and what reforms are needed to position the country as a global hub for immersive learning?

India has almost everything required to become one of the world's great experiential classrooms: economic scale, cultural diversity, globally relevant industries, a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem and social and developmental challenges that demand innovative solutions.

Too many programmes are still assembled as a mixture of company visits, lectures and tourism. The logistics may be excellent, but the learning architecture is often unclear. Universities need to know what students will learn, how they will be engaged and how the outcomes will be assessed.

India needs professionally designed programmes that bring together academic rigour, industry access, cultural preparation, safety and reliable execution. We also need simpler processes for short-term academic visits, stronger university-industry partnerships and clearer quality standards.

India does not need to manufacture compelling learning experiences. They already exist. We need to curate them intelligently.

Many universities now include international immersion programs as part of their curriculum. In your view, what distinguishes a truly transformative learning experience from educational tourism, and how should institutions measure its long-term impact on students?

For me, the distinction is quite simple. Educational tourism asks, "What did you see?" Transformative learning asks, "What did you understand differently as a result?"

A company visit by itself is not experiential learning. Nor is listening to several senior executives speak about their organisations. Those interactions can be valuable, but only when they form part of a larger learning journey.

Students should arrive with a clearly defined question or challenge. They should understand something about the market before they enter it. During the immersion, they need to meet different stakeholders, not only chief executives, but entrepreneurs, employees, customers, academics, policymakers and communities.

They must also be expected to do something with what they learn. That could mean working on a live business problem, developing a market-entry strategy, analysing an innovation ecosystem or presenting recommendations to an organisation.

The measurement should continue after the aircraft has taken off. Institutions can use reflective assignments, capstone projects and assessments immediately after the programme. They can also revisit participants three, six or twelve months later to understand whether the experience influenced their decisions, leadership behaviour or approach to unfamiliar markets.

A good immersion should certainly be memorable. But memory alone is not a learning outcome.

With AI, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration making global learning more accessible, some argue that physical travel is becoming less essential. What unique value does in-person immersion continue to offer, and

how can technology strengthen rather than replace experiential learning?

Technology has made global learning far more accessible, and that is a very positive development. In India alone, AISHE reported 44 lakh students enrolled through distance education and another 2.8 lakh through online mode in 2023–24. Digital learning is clearly no longer peripheral.

But technology is very good at transmitting information. It is less effective at transmitting context.

A virtual presentation can explain how an Indian company operates. Being physically present allows students to experience its pace, constraints, informal relationships and decision-making culture. They notice what does not appear on the PowerPoint slide: how people negotiate, how teams respond when plans change and how solutions are adapted to local realities.

Physical immersion also creates a degree of productive discomfort. Students encounter unfamiliar social cues, working styles and assumptions. They cannot simply close the laptop when the situation becomes complicated. That is where humility, adaptability and cultural intelligence begin to develop.

Technology should strengthen the experience rather than attempt to replace it. It can support pre-programme orientation, virtual meetings, data collection, translation, reflection and post-programme collaboration.

The future is therefore not digital or physical. It is blended. Technology provides access and continuity; physical immersion provides depth and lived understanding.

As someone who works closely with universities and industry leaders worldwide, what skills do you believe employers will value most in the coming decade? How can experiential education help bridge the gap between academic learning and workplace expectations?

Technical knowledge will remain important, but it will become less of a differentiator because technology is making specialist information increasingly accessible.

The real differentiator will be judgement: knowing what question to ask, what information to trust and how to make a responsible decision when the data is incomplete.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025, based on input from more than 1,000 employers representing over 14 million workers, estimates that nearly 40% of the skills required in jobs will change by 2030. It also found that 63% of employers see the skills gap as a major barrier to business transformation. AI, big data and cybersecurity are growing rapidly, but employers continue to place a high value on analytical thinking, creativity, resilience, leadership and collaboration.

Experiential education is particularly relevant because it brings these skills together. Real organisational challenges rarely arrive neatly labelled as finance, marketing, technology or human resources problems. They cross functions and require people to balance commercial, cultural, ethical and human considerations.

The gap between education and employment is therefore not always a lack of knowledge. It is often a lack of practice in applying knowledge under real-world conditions. That is precisely the gap experiential education can help close.

International students often arrive with preconceived notions about India and its education ecosystem. Based on your experience, what are some of the most common misconceptions, and how do immersive experiences help change these perceptions?

Many international students arrive with a fairly narrow picture of India. They may see it principally as a low-cost services economy, a very large consumer market or a country defined by complexity, poverty and congestion.

Those elements exist, of course, but they are only a small part of a far more complicated story.

Students are frequently surprised by the sophistication of India's technology and financial ecosystems, the scale of its entrepreneurial ambition and the quality of leadership within Indian organisations. They also quickly discover that India is not a single, uniform market. Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad and



smaller industrial centres can present very different economic and cultural realities.

India's foreign-student population already comes from 173 countries. Nepal accounts for 24.1% of enrolment, followed by the UAE at 7%, while students from the United States and Bangladesh each account for 5.9%. This diversity is encouraging, but it also shows that India's international-education story reaches different regions very unevenly.

Another misconception is that Indian innovation is largely about copying an existing product and making it cheaper. What students discover is innovation designed for scale, affordability, infrastructure constraints and extraordinary customer diversity.

An immersion does not replace a negative stereotype with a positive one. Its purpose is to replace simplification with understanding.

Experiential learning is often seen as accessible only to students from well-funded institutions. How can universities, governments, and industry work together to make these opportunities more inclusive and ensure they become a mainstream part of higher education?

This is one of the most important challenges. Experiential learning cannot become mainstream if it remains an expensive optional trip for students from well-funded institutions.

Globally, around 7.3 million of 269 million higher-education students study outside their home countries. That works out to roughly 2.7%. International mobility is expanding, but it is still available to a relatively small minority of students.

Universities can address this by making immersion part of the formal curriculum rather than treating it as an extracurricular activity. Once it carries academic credit, it becomes easier to justify institutional funding, scholarships and financial support.

Industry can contribute through sponsored places, live projects and access to organisations. Governments and philanthropic institutions can create mobility grants for students from less privileged backgrounds. Universities can also share programme costs by forming consortia rather than designing every experience independently.

We should also broaden our definition of immersion. It does not always require a long-haul flight or a two-week international programme. Regional immersions, shorter residencies and carefully designed blended experiences can deliver meaningful learning at a lower cost.

Inclusivity cannot be an afterthought. It must influence programme duration, pricing, location, accessibility and assessment from the beginning.

With the National Education Policy placing greater emphasis on global engagement and holistic learning, where do you see experiential education fitting into India's future? What steps are needed to establish India as a global destination for real-world learning experiences?

Experiential education sits at the intersection of several ambitions India has already articulated: internationalisation, employability, multidisciplinary learning, stronger industry engagement and the development of more confident, adaptable graduates.

The National Education Policy calls for pedagogy that is more experiential, holistic, inquiry-driven and learner-centred. It also specifically encourages internships, community engagement and closer exposure to the practical side of learning. On internationalisation, the policy states that India should attract more international students and develop itself as a global study destination.

The scale makes this especially important. India now has around 4.5 crore higher-education students, and its Gross Enrolment Ratio has risen from 23.7 in 2014–15 to 30 in 2023–24. As access expands, the next question must be about the quality and relevance of that education.

India also has an opportunity to reverse the traditional direction of international education. We should not think only about sending Indian students overseas. We should attract international students, managers and executives to India to learn from its companies, communities, markets and institutions.

India's advantage is not simplicity. It is precisely the opposite. It offers rapid change, innovation under constraint and real-world complexity on an extraordinary scale. Properly structured, that makes India not merely an education destination, but one of the most consequential classrooms in the world. EP



THE EXCELLENCE TRILEMMA

THE QUIET CONTRADICTION AT THE HEART OF INDIAN UNIVERSITIES

Prof. Shri Vardhan Pathak
Senior Professor
Department of Commerce
Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University,
Gorakhpur



A Classroom, a Monsoon, and a Question

It is a humid August morning somewhere between Nagpur and Nashik. We shall call her Priya, though she could be any of the millions of young women who have entered Indian higher education this decade. She walks into a classroom she still cannot quite believe she belongs in. She is the first person in three generations of her family to attend college. Her father, a small farmer, sold half a hectare of land to fund her first year. Her mother packed her lunch that morning in yesterday's newspaper.

The classroom has an interactive display panel. Her state university, in a burst of enthusiasm inspired by the National Education Policy, installed forty of them across the campus the previous year. They cost the equivalent of two years of the library's book budget. The panel hums to life. The campus Wi-Fi, on which the day's blended lesson depends, does not.

The professor is a woman in her early forties, with a PhD from a respected university and a pending Scopus paper on her desk. She does what good teachers do: she improvises. She turns to the whiteboard. Half the class follows. The other half, largely students from Marathi-medium schools whose English is functional but not fluent, stop taking notes around the eleventh minute. Priya is among them. She does not raise her hand. In her village, girls who ask too many questions are still described as "too forward".

Outside the gate, a coaching centre promises a "100% Placement Guarantee." A billboard for a private university displays a global ranking beneath photographs of five graduates who are transparently models. A visiting NAAC peer team is expected the following Tuesday. So is the monsoon.

That single morning contains almost everything that is right about Indian higher education, and almost everything that remains unfinished. We have opened the doors. We have bought the technology. We have written ambitious policies. Yet somewhere between the display panel and Priya's silence, something is still being lost.

This essay is about that loss: the quiet contradiction at the heart of our universities, and the patient, largely unglamorous work required to resolve it.

Three Ambitions, One Institution

Every major policy document of the past decade, from NEP 2020 and the AISHE reports to the strategic plans vice chancellors present to their governing boards, carries the same three words like a mantra: innovation, inclusion and excellence.

Each is compelling. Innovation asks for redesigned curricula, smart classrooms, data-science electives, startup incubators, AI-enabled learning platforms and MOOCs on SWAYAM. It imagines the university of 2035 rather than the university of 1995.

Inclusion asks institutions to open their doors wider: to the daughter of a landless labourer in Vidarbha, the son of a fisherman in Kerala, the tribal student from Bastar, and the young woman from Old Delhi whose family has never allowed her to travel alone. It asks the university to look more like the country it serves.

Excellence asks for publications in Q1 journals, stronger placement outcomes, highly credentialled faculty, internationally competitive research and steadily improving NIRF ranks.

Individually, none of these ambitions is controversial. Together, inside one institution, pursued by the same faculty, through the same budget and within the same six-day working week, they collide. Quietly, but consistently.

This is the Excellence Trilemma: not a rhetorical flourish, but a structural feature of academic life in India. It explains why so many worthy reforms arrive at their destination looking oddly depleted.

The Arithmetic of an Ordinary Tuesday

Consider Dr. Kavita, an assistant professor in her early forties and a mother of two, halfway through an ordinary Tuesday in a district-town university.

She teaches 187 students across three sections; 63 are the first in their families to attend college. Her head of department has asked her to adopt a flipped-classroom model because "innovation" is now an internal performance indicator. The dean has reminded her, gently, that her career progression depends on two Scopus-indexed publications that year. The IQAC coordinator wants five criterion documents by Friday for the next NAAC cycle. At home, her twelve-year-old daughter has a school project due the next morning.

Kavita is not an indifferent teacher. In a different system, she could be excellent at any one of these tasks, perhaps even two. But all of them, at once?

Something has to give. Most often, it is the unrecorded fifteen minutes after class when a student like Priya might have stayed behind to ask what "opportunity cost" actually means. Those fifteen minutes do not appear in an accreditation matrix. No ranking rewards them. No journal publishes them. Yet they are where the promise of Indian higher education most often lives or dies.

Multiply Kavita by two lakh and the problem becomes systemic. The trilemma is not a story of lazy institutions or mediocre teachers. It is a story of impossible arithmetic, imposed politely and repeatedly through circulars, targets and mission statements written far from the Tuesday on which they must be delivered.

How Good Intentions Pull Apart

Once the contradiction becomes visible, it appears everywhere.

Innovation, when poorly designed, can deepen exclusion. A flipped classroom assumes that students watched the assigned video the previous night. That assumption collapses where broadband is unreliable, devices are shared, or the language of instruction is still being acquired. A brilliant online course without mentoring can become a book written in a language half the class cannot yet read.

Inclusion, honestly pursued, can depress measured excellence in the short term. A university that admits students with weaker school preparation and spends two years helping them catch up may look worse on paper than one that admitted stronger students in the first place. Bridge programmes, remedial hours and additional tutorials rarely receive the weight they deserve in ranking systems. Inclusion therefore carries a hidden performance penalty.

Publication pressure can cannibalise teaching. A physics professor at a university in Marathwada once confided that he had not spoken to a first-year undergraduate outside class for nine months. He had, however, published four papers. The department's metrics had improved; its students' understanding of physics had not necessarily done the same.

Compliance consumes the time that innovation requires. A NAAC cycle can absorb a semester. A NIRF submission can consume a month. The Academic Bank of Credits brings another layer of documentation. What disappears first is the time to sit with colleagues, rethink a course and make it genuinely better.

Each trade-off appears manageable in isolation. Together, they form an academic culture in which institutions are always active, frequently compliant and only intermittently able to improve.

The Trilemma Is Not Inevitable

This need not become a lament. Some institutions are showing that the tension can be managed, even if it cannot be abolished.

IIT Madras's online BSc in Data Science challenged the assumption that reach must dilute quality. It has

enrolled learners from small towns, women returning after career breaks and working professionals in tier-three cities, while retaining academic rigour in its domain.

Ashoka University's financial-aid architecture makes a different point: inclusion is expensive, and serious institutions must be willing to pay for it. Azim Premji University places education for the public good at the centre of its academic mission rather than treating it as a concession to excellence.

Krea University's interwoven-learning model, FLAME's liberal-education experiment, Shiv Nadar University's research-intensive undergraduate approach and the bridge programmes quietly run by state universities across Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra offer further variations. Internationally, Arizona State University has spent two decades demonstrating that a large public university can expand access, pursue innovation and maintain academic ambition by refusing to treat the three as separate agendas.



These institutions are not identical in budget, size or ownership. What they share is more consequential: sustained funding, faculty depth, mission clarity and governance stability. Where all four are present, the contradiction softens. Where one or more are absent, it hardens.

There Is No Single "Indian University"

The debate also suffers from a basic category error: India does not have one higher-education system. It has several, and each experiences the trilemma differently.

A central university may have a legacy library, institutional gravity and greater academic depth, but it is often slowed by procedural weight. A state university, the true workhorse of Indian higher education, serves the largest and most diverse student populations with the thinnest resources. Grants arrive late, faculty positions remain vacant and administrative burdens multiply, even as these institutions shape the lives of the majority of students.

A private university may have agility and capital, but it must reconcile academic purpose with market pressures and fee-paying parents who understandably care about placements. A deemed-to-be university operates with freedoms that can also become liabilities. An autonomous college may innovate faster than any of them, but at a scale that rarely receives national attention.

A newspaper column that treats these institutions as one story will misdiagnose the problem. So will a government circular that asks all of them to move in lockstep. Policy must distinguish among institutional types before it can ask them to pursue the same ideals.

Measuring What Universities Actually Add

NAAC and NIRF have brought genuine transparency. They have compelled institutions to produce data, articulate processes and compare performance. Those gains should not be dismissed.

But every metric carries an instruction: do more of what is counted. When publications are counted, institutions produce publications. Some are rigorous; others come through the grey market of predatory journals. When placement percentages are rewarded, institutions produce placement numbers. Some are durable; others rest on offers that quietly disappear within months.

What we still measure poorly is value added: how far a student travels during her years at university relative to where she began.

A university that admits highly prepared students and produces highly capable graduates may be excellent, but it may also be functioning primarily as a filter. A university that admits average or disadvantaged students and helps them become highly capable graduates is creating talent. The difference is not semantic. It separates the institutions that identify advantage from those that expand it.

The OECD's AHELO experiment, UNESCO's equity indicators and India's emerging work on learning outcomes offer imperfect starting points. Ranking formulas are not laws of physics. They can be revised, and the scholarly community has a legitimate responsibility to press for measures that recognise learning gains, completion, equity and long-term outcomes.

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Orchestration, Not Triumph

If the contradiction is a permanent feature of academic life in a country as unequal, ambitious and rapidly changing as India, the right verb is not achieve. It is orchestrate.

A conductor does not eliminate the tension between the violin and the timpani, nor ask the brass to sound like strings. She sequences their entry so that the piece coheres. Each section remains distinct; each serves the whole at the right moment.

For a university, orchestration begins with four disciplines.

First, name the trade-offs. A leadership team that admits it cannot simultaneously double intake, transform pedagogy and climb the rankings within the same three-year cycle is not confessing failure. It is beginning to govern.

Second, sequence priorities. Decide what comes first, what follows and what must wait, then explain that sequence to faculty, students and parents. That is the difference between a strategy and a slogan.

Third, distribute responsibility. The vice chancellor cannot carry the trilemma alone. The board must protect long-horizon investments from short-horizon politics. The dean must defend mentoring time. Department chairs must resist gaming metrics. Faculty councils must treat teaching as seriously as research. Students must be trusted with a voice.

Fourth, build the capabilities that make patience possible: stable governance, honest data, sustained faculty development and the willingness to invest for five years before the results appear in a ranking. These capabilities cannot be summoned by circular.

What Orchestration Looks Like on Tuesday

Grand frameworks are easy to admire in essays. Tuesdays remain difficult.

Orchestration looks like a state university saying publicly that, for the next two years, it will prioritise faculty development and student support over ranking gains, and accepting accountability for that choice.

It looks like a private university publishing not only placement percentages but longitudinal alumni outcomes: where graduates are three and five years later.

It looks like an autonomous college in coastal Andhra running a three-week bridge programme every July, in Telugu and English, for first-generation entrants. It also refuses to call the programme "remedial", because language shapes dignity.

It looks like an IIT pairing each new online course with an offline mentoring circle in a small town, because the digital divide is not solved merely by adding devices.

It looks like a regulator rewarding completion rates and learning gains alongside publication counts.

For vice chancellors and principals, mission clarity is the discipline that makes refusal possible. A regional state university that imitates a research-intensive private institution may do neither job well. For faculty, innovation, inclusion and excellence cannot remain three unrelated instructions from three committees; they must be recognised as one integrated academic task. For policymakers, measurement is behaviour-shaping infrastructure. For parents, the useful question is not only "What is your rank?" but "What happens to students who arrive less prepared?" For journalists, the obligation is to distinguish among India's different higher-education systems rather than collapse them into one.

None of this makes headlines. All of it is the work.

The Excellence Worth Measuring

Let us return to Priya's classroom.

She did not raise her hand that August morning. Six months later, in a bridge session led by a young lecturer who stayed back on Saturdays, she asked her first real question. Two years later, she led a project on rural microcredit and won a small grant. Four years later, she became the first woman from her village to accept a job in a city.

None of this appeared in the university's NIRF submission. It did not improve the institution's rank or make the newspapers.

Yet the lecturer's Saturday, the bridge programme's three weeks in July and the head of department's decision to protect a mentoring hour from being replaced by "quality documentation" are where the future of Indian higher education is being written. Not on display panels, in accreditation files or on billboards outside the gate.

The universities that will matter in the India of 2035 will not be those that most loudly claim to have transcended the trilemma. They will be those that learn to name the contradiction, sequence their ambitions and live with the tension through a durable, unglamorous sense of purpose.

Orchestration is neither triumph nor resignation. It is the quieter craft of holding several legitimate ambitions within one institution, at the same time, with enough honesty and patience that the student in the second row, the one who did not raise her hand, eventually finds a reason to speak.

That is the only kind of excellence worth measuring.

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UNIVERSITIES ARE DROWNING IN DATA, MOST OF IT IS GOING TO WASTE

Nachiket Paratkar
Strategic Business Head, EdTech, Straive

Today's universities operate in one of the most data-rich environments anywhere in the world, running on learning management systems, student information systems, digital classrooms, and assessment software. Every academic year, institutions generate enormous volumes of data through the routine work of producing syllabi, rubrics, assignments, feedback, and accreditation records. Yet by most accounts completion rates have moved little, faculty report rising administrative strain, and truly personalized learning remains more aspiration than reality. The natural tendency has been to add more technology: more dashboards, more analytics, more AI tutors, and more automated assessment.

But this misreads the problem entirely. Universities do not suffer from a shortage of data or tools; they suffer from an inability to operationalize intelligence within the workflows where academic decisions are actually made. Institutions that miss this distinction will keep deploying AI without ever scaling it. Consider what actually happens to academic data once it is created. At many institutions, a large share of assessment results, feedback, and learner-activity data is stored but never used again. It becomes what might be called dark academic data captured at scale, but put to work almost nowhere.

The cause is not negligence. It is architecture. Most universities have digitized their systems without redesigning their workflows. Learning management systems handle courses. Student information systems hold records. Advising and tutoring platforms operate independently. Accreditation workflows exist in yet another environment entirely. Faculty and administrators move across mismatched platforms daily, manually reconciling what integrated intelligence should surface automatically. The result is a decision-latency problem.

Faculty spend more time locating and assembling reports than acting on them. Advisors lack a consolidated view of student progress. Leaders hold vast amounts of data but little that is usable at the moment a decision is needed so decisions default to instinct rather than analysis. This is the fundamental mistake most institutions make when implementing AI: conflating deployment with integration. So far, AI adoption in higher education has largely stayed at the surface content generation, detection software, and chatbot-style advising.

These have value, but they treat symptoms rather than the root cause. Take assessment. When students began using AI for research and writing, institutions responded with detection tools. But detection answers the wrong question. The more consequential one is what assessment should measure in an AI-enabled environment. As knowledge retrieval becomes commoditized, evaluation has to shift toward reasoning, applied problem-solving, collaboration, experiential learning, and iterative performance. That is a workflow-redesign challenge, not a tooling one and it cannot be solved without touching the accreditation frameworks and governance structures in which assessment is embedded. Faculty cognitive load tells a similar story. Educators now operate at once as teachers, administrators, advisors, content managers, and compliance operators.



Much of their time goes to reporting, LMS management, and documentation rather than teaching, and grading and feedback cycles can stretch across days or weeks. AI's most immediate institutional value lies not in generating content but in reducing that administrative burden grading against rubrics, clustering common misconceptions, drafting feedback, and coordinating workflows across departments, all of which save effort and improve consistency. But that value only materializes when AI is integrated into faculty workflows rather than bolted on beside them. Student services show the same pattern.

Early signals of disengagement absence, declining performance, irregular submissions — are often visible but rarely trigger coordinated action. A warning sign for one student seldom becomes a prompt for everyone positioned to help. Yet student support, when properly coordinated, is one of the clearer levers institutions have on retention. Institutions also operate within governance frameworks shaped by accreditation bodies, compliance requirements, faculty autonomy, and ethics policies that prioritize stability over continuous adaptation. This is not an obstacle to be bypassed; it is a constraint to be designed around. For AI to scale in higher education, institutions must stop thinking about it as a capability to be added and start thinking about it as an operating model to be built. That means unified academic data foundations, where learning, assessment, advising, and administrative data are brought into a common analytical layer.

It means AI embedded directly into LMS and student information platforms rather than sitting alongside them; continuous pipelines that surface insights at the point of intervention rather than in retrospective dashboards; faculty-in-the-loop governance that preserves autonomy while reducing administrative drag; and institutional workflows redesigned not merely digitized to embed intelligence into everyday academic decisions. On one side sit institutions deploying AI experimentally in pockets, across disconnected teams, with no common data foundation underneath. On the other sit institutions rebuilding their academic operating models around continuous intelligence. That gap will widen considerably over the next decade, and it will not close through incremental tool deployment. The AI-native institutions of 2030 will not necessarily be those with the largest technology budgets.

They will be those that redesigned curriculum governance around real-time labor-market signals, rebuilt assessment frameworks around applied reasoning, gave faculty back meaningful time by automating the administrative layer, and connected student-support signals to coordinated intervention in something closer to real time. For anyone working alongside higher education institutions as a technology partner, a consultancy, an accreditation body the implication is direct. The conversation cannot begin with capabilities. It has to begin with where decisions are actually made, where data goes dark, where latency accumulates, and where embedding intelligence would genuinely change the outcome.



DR. CHATGPT WILL SEE YOU NOW:
ALGORITHMIC BIAS & THE ETHICS OF AI TRIAGE

Dr Abhinav Nikunj

It's 2 a.m., and instead of calling a nurse hotline or driving to urgent care, you open a chatbot and type: "sharp chest pain, left arm tingling, should I be worried?" Within seconds, you have an answer. Multiply that moment by millions—surveys now suggest a majority of adults have consulted an AI chatbot for a health question, and hospital systems from Boston to Bangalore are quietly running AI triage software behind their ER front desks, sorting patients by algorithmically predicted urgency before a human clinician ever says hello.

This is the quiet revolution nobody voted on. AI hasn't replaced doctors—but it has become the front door to medicine for an enormous and growing number of people. And that door, it turns out, doesn't open the same way for everyone.

The Promise: Faster, Cheaper, Everywhere

The appeal is obvious. Emergency rooms are chronically overwhelmed; the average U.S. ER wait time can stretch past two hours before a patient even sees a physician. AI triage tools promise to compress that bottleneck—flagging a stroke or sepsis case in seconds, prioritizing the sickest patients, and freeing nurses from paperwork so they can focus on people. In rural clinics and low-income countries with a severe shortage of doctors, a chatbot that can ask the right follow-up questions at 3 a.m. isn't a luxury; it can be the only accessible triage available at all.

By the numbers: Some estimates suggest AI-assisted triage can cut ER wait times by up to 30%, and one widely cited Stanford study found that a leading chatbot answered patient questions with equal or greater empathy—as rated by clinicians—than human doctors.

The technology isn't just fast. In some respects, it's already good.

But speed and scale are exactly what make the next problem so dangerous. When a biased algorithm makes a mistake, it doesn't make that mistake once. It makes it identically, consistently, and invisibly—for everyone who looks like the population it was never designed to see.

How Bias Sneaks Into the Machine

Algorithmic bias in medicine rarely comes from malice. It comes from math meeting history.

AI models learn by finding patterns in enormous datasets of past medical records, imaging, and outcomes. The problem is that "the past" of Western medicine is not representative of humanity. Clinical trials have historically underenrolled women, Black and Hispanic patients, and people outside a narrow BMI range. Pain scales were calibrated on populations where certain symptoms—like the "atypical" heart attack presentation common in women, involving nausea and fatigue rather than crushing chest pain—were dismissed as anxiety for decades. An AI trained on those decades doesn't correct that bias. It memorizes it.

Consider pulse oximeters, the clip-on devices that measure blood oxygen. Research has shown they can overestimate oxygen levels in patients with darker skin, sometimes missing dangerously low readings. Any triage algorithm trained on that data doesn't just inherit a device flaw—it launders it into a "neutral," data-driven decision that's harder for a human to question. That's the essence of algorithmic bias: it takes yesterday's inequity and repackages it as today's objective science.

Three Ethical Fault Lines

The Misdiagnosis Risk: When a triage algorithm underweights symptoms in a specific demographic, the harm isn't hypothetical—it's a missed heart attack, a delayed sepsis diagnosis, a chatbot that reassures someone their pain is "likely benign" when it isn't. Because these systems operate at scale, a small statistical blind spot in the training data becomes a systemic pattern of harm across thousands of patients who never know they were shortchanged.

Liability & Accountability: If an algorithm downgrades a patient's urgency and that patient later suffers harm, who answers for it? The hospital that deployed the tool without fully vetting it? The developer who built it on flawed data? The clinician who, trusting the software, didn't double-check? Medical malpractice law was built around individual human judgment, not probabilistic black boxes—and right now, the legal system is largely improvising.

The question nobody's fully answered: If an algorithm's error contributed to a patient's death, does the doctor who deferred to it bear the same legal weight as a doctor who ignored it? Courts, insurers, and regulators are only beginning to work this out in real time, with real patients.

The Loss of Human Empathy: Even a technically flawless algorithm can cause a different kind of harm: the erosion of the therapeutic relationship. Being told your symptoms by a screen instead of a person can leave patients feeling processed rather than cared for—a subtle but real psychological cost, especially for those already distrustful of a medical system that has historically dismissed them.

The Path Forward: Building a Fairer Front Door

None of this is an argument to abandon AI triage—it's an argument to build it responsibly. Several concrete fixes are already underway:

Diversify the data: Health systems are beginning to intentionally audit and rebalance training datasets to include underrepresented groups, ages, and rare presentations of common diseases, rather than relying on whatever data happened to be easiest to collect.

Keep a human in the loop: The safest deployments treat AI as a co-pilot, not an autopilot—flagging cases for human review rather than making final calls alone, especially for ambiguous or high-stakes symptoms.

Demand transparency and regulation: Regulators, including the FDA, are pushing for "algorithmic transparency" requirements—disclosure of what data trained a tool and how it performs across different demographic groups, similar to a nutrition label for AI.

Audit continuously, not just at launch: Bias can creep back in as populations and diseases change; ongoing performance monitoring, broken down by race, sex, and age, needs to be standard practice, not a one-time check.

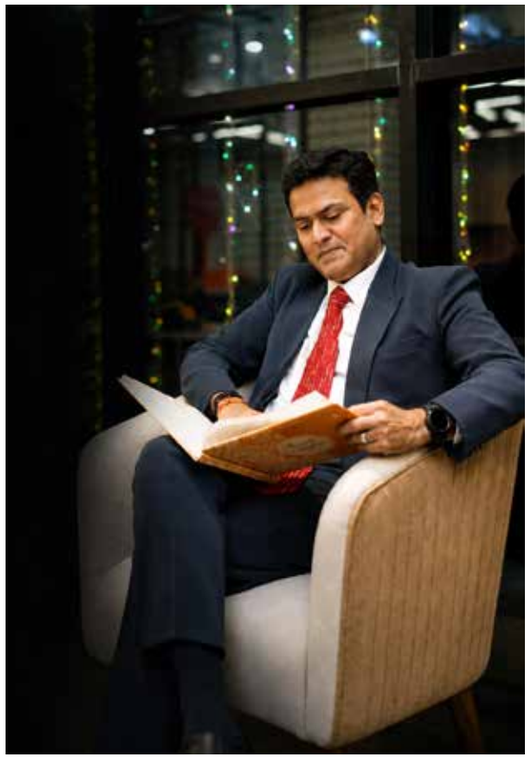
For patients using these tools today, a few habits go a long way: treat a chatbot's output as a starting point for a conversation with a real clinician, not a diagnosis; be specific and thorough when describing symptoms rather than assuming the tool will ask the right follow-up questions; and if something feels dismissed or off, seek a second opinion—human or otherwise. AI is a remarkably good research assistant. It is a much riskier final word.

The Human Essence of Medicine

There's a version of the future where AI triage makes healthcare radically more accessible—faster, cheaper, available to the billions of people who currently have no reliable doctor at all. There's another version where that same technology quietly hard-codes yesterday's inequities into tomorrow's infrastructure, at a scale no single biased doctor ever could.

Which future we get isn't a technical question. It's a values question about whose pain we've historically believed, whose data we've collected, and whose lives we're willing to double-check the algorithm for. Medicine has always been part science, part judgment, part trust. The challenge now isn't teaching machines to triage. It's making sure that when Dr. ChatGPT sees you now, it actually sees you—not just the version of you that history happened to write down.

AI WON'T REPLACE TEACHERS, IT WILL REDEFINE THEIR ROLE IN THE CLASSROOM



Dr. Prannay G Sharma
Vice President - Sales (India), TutorCloud AI

The debate around technology in education has often been framed around a simplistic question: Will AI replace teachers? This framing, however, overlooks the larger opportunity. The more important question is how intelligent technologies can enable teachers to move beyond repetitive administrative responsibilities and focus more deeply on what they do best—teaching, mentoring, motivating and understanding learners. The classroom of the future will not be defined by technology replacing human interaction, but by a stronger partnership between educators and intelligent systems.

Education leaders should focus on building an environment that supports human expertise with technology. Teachers provide context, empathy, judgement and creativity; intelligent systems process large quantities of learning data, recognise patterns and offer timely insights. This blend can help education be more responsive to the needs of each student while maintaining the human element that is at the core of learning.

From Content Delivery to Learning Facilitation

Teaching has had several responsibilities assigned to it over the last few decades. These include the assessment of pupils, evaluation of their development, creation of learning materials, and finding out what individual learning requirements are in addition to classroom teaching. Intelligent learning systems can make things more even by analysing the learning patterns and assessment results, finding out which areas need improvement.

This allows teachers to spend less time interpreting fragmented information and more time acting on it. The teacher consequently evolves from being primarily a source of information to becoming a facilitator who guides students through more personalised learning journeys. Technology handles some of the routine, while educators focus on helping students understand, question and apply what they learn.

Personalisation Will Become a Teacher's Superpower

One of the biggest challenges in education is that classrooms bring together students with different learning speeds, backgrounds and levels of understanding. A standardised approach cannot always address these differences effectively. Intelligent platforms can provide teachers with a more granular view of individual learners by highlighting progress, identifying knowledge gaps and indicating where additional support may be required.

However, the real value lies in combining these insights with human judgement. A system may identify that a student is falling behind, but only a teacher can understand the context behind it—whether it is a conceptual difficulty, lack of confidence, language barrier or challenge outside the classroom. Technology can surface the signal; the teacher provides the interpretation and intervention.

Teachers Will Become More Important, Not Less

Teachers will no longer be the sole curators or custodians of information but will also be 'architects' of meaningful learning experiences as information becomes ubiquitous. While students already have access to a vast amount of information through digital platforms more than ever, they are also being asked to evaluate information, think critically, collaborate effectively, and apply knowledge to real-world situations that they need guidance in.

These capabilities cannot be reduced to automated responses. Teachers will continue to play a critical role in developing curiosity, challenging assumptions and helping students navigate complexity. As technology takes on more routine tasks, educators can dedicate greater attention to the higher-order skills and human connections that shape long-term learning.

The Real Transformation Will Happen Behind the Scenes

The most significant impact of intelligent technology in education may not always be visible to students. It will increasingly be used in the background to assist institutions in comprehending learning outcomes, to assist educators in recognising patterns, and to aid in better-informed academic decisions. Data about learning connections can give institutions a more comprehensive picture of what is effective, where students are struggling, and how instruction can be enhanced.

However, this transformation must be accompanied by responsible governance. Student data is highly sensitive, and institutions need robust frameworks around privacy, security, transparency and accountability. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2023 highlighted that technology can play a valuable role in education, but its benefits depend on equitable access, appropriate use and strong governance. Technology should complement, rather than replace, the human interaction at the heart of education.

The Classroom of Tomorrow Will Be Human-Centred

Education in the future is not dependent on the volume of technological tools being employed in the classroom, but on how it could aid in the education process. The organisations that see intelligence technology not only as a replacement for teachers, but as a complement to them, will be the ones to succeed. They will have a greater understanding of what learners require.

While technology can assist with automation and with recognising patterns and providing insights, education is about human connection. A teacher who sparks curiosity, knows what is possible and gives confidence cannot be replaced by a machine. The job for the teacher isn't going to be eliminated; it's going to be more strategic. With technology filling in so much of the routine, teachers will have more time to devote to the human aspects of learning; and that might be the most significant change in the classroom that has come along.

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PREPARING ENGINEERING STUDENTS FOR CAREERS IN AN AI FIRST SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT WORLD

Naresh Agarwal
SVP, Engineering, India

Though India produces close to a million and a half engineering graduates every year, and the India Skills Report 2026 puts employability for engineering graduates at just over 70 percent, this year's Unstop Talent Report found that 83 percent of engineering graduates left college without a job or even an internship offer.

Both of these credible studies, done around the same time, arrived at almost opposite conclusions, highlighting that "employable" and "job-ready" are not the same thing, and the gap between them is where most fresh graduates spend a tough first year.

For two decades, the entry point into software engineering was simply writing code.

The budding engineers had enough time to design functions, modules and small features under supervision, with sufficient room to be slow and occasionally wrong, thereby helping them build their judgement, one small mistake at a time.

Until AI came along and changed that starting point drastically.

Now, a good coding assistant can write a working function faster than a graduate, taking away a lot of the low-stakes, repetitive work that used to double as training.

The junior engineers are now tasked with more demanding tasks like checking AI-generated code for correctness and security, knowing enough about system design to spot when a suggestion is subtly wrong, and explaining trade-offs clearly to a team.

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While that's a real, valuable skill, no standard college course is built to teach it yet.

That's why companies are responding to this in very different ways. IBM, for instance, announced it would triple entry-level hiring in the US through 2026, on the belief that junior engineers who spend less time on routine coding can work closer to customers and real systems, which makes them more valuable.

Another significant technology employer chose to pair senior engineers more closely with AI tools instead of expanding its junior hiring.

Both are reasonable responses to the rising shift brought in by AI. However, hiring and training junior engineers well today is really an investment in who leads engineering ten years from now, and it's worth remembering that experienced engineers don't appear out of nowhere. Somebody has to hire and train them as juniors first.

If judgement can only be built through hands-on exposure to real systems, and AI has quietly removed a lot of the low-stakes practice that used to provide that exposure, then companies need to create it deliberately. Aligning on that belief, at the Harness R&D centre in India, the first months on the job are treated less as onboarding and more as a compressed apprenticeship. Fresh graduates are paired closely with senior engineers to work on real systems and failure cases.

It's a small but telling sign of a bigger shift, and companies are responding by rebuilding inside their own walls, the kind of hands-on, mistake-tolerant learning that engineering education has always been best placed to provide.

And that's really the opportunity here, for colleges and for students both.

While colleges can't rewrite a four-year curriculum every time a new model ships, there's a lot they can do within the curricula they already have. For instance, teaching AI literacy as a way of thinking, the ability to question and verify an AI's output rather than simply trust it, will always matter more than teaching any one tool, since new tools emerge dynamically while judgement is eternal. Additionally, academia should work in collaboration with industry experts to continuously review and evaluate the curriculum to be more aligned with real-world requirements, as opposed to focusing only on academic and theoretical coursework.

Instead of waiting for the curriculum to catch up, students themselves can focus on core capabilities like understanding the fundamentals of distributed systems, databases, networking, and operating systems, since judging whether a machine-generated system will hold up under real failure and scale requires understanding how systems behave, and that's exactly what employers look for in new hires. Coursework can only take them so far, so investing time in building something real outside it, deploying an application, breaking and fixing an API, working with cloud infrastructure, builds instincts no lecture can.

In an age where AI is embedded in how software gets built, shipped, and delivered, learning to use it well, questioning and refining its output rather than trusting it blindly, matters as much as knowing how to write it. Explaining why a system exists, what trade-offs it introduces, and how a decision affects users or costs, is just as much part of the job now as the code itself.

AI has changed what a junior engineer's job actually is, and the line between education and early-career learning is shifting because of it. Industry is moving a little faster than academia to adapt, which is natural given how quickly things are changing on our end. But this is best solved together, by colleges, companies, and students all doing their part.

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EIGHT DECADES, THIRTY MINISTERS, ONE EDUCATION SYSTEM
PROGRESS AMID PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

Pragya Kumari

India's medical entrance examination system is facing one of its biggest credibility crises in recent years. Allegations of paper leaks, repeated examination irregularities, and nationwide protests over NEET UG have shaken public confidence in a test that determines the future of more than 20 lakh aspirants every year.

For millions of students, NEET UG is not just another competitive examination. It is the single gateway to undergraduate medical education, deciding admissions to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH, veterinary, nursing, and other allied health science courses across the country.

Any disruption in its conduct has consequences that extend far beyond examination halls, affecting academic calendars, admissions, and ultimately the healthcare workforce.

The controversy reached a political flashpoint with the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on July 25, 2026, following mounting demands for accountability over examination irregularities.

Pralhad Joshi was subsequently entrusted with the additional charge of the Ministry of Education, inheriting one of the most challenging phases in the ministry's recent history.

While the immediate focus remains on restoring the credibility of India's examination system, the episode has also reignited a larger debate. Nearly eight decades after Independence, has India's education system lived up to the vision of the leaders who shaped it?

From expanding access to education and establishing world-class institutions to introducing landmark policies such as the National Policy on Education and the National Education Policy 2020, successive governments have transformed the country's educational landscape.

Yet recurring paper leaks, governance lapses, institutional vacancies, implementation gaps, and concerns over examination integrity continue to cast a shadow over these achievements.

The Ministry of Education, entrusted with shaping the nation's academic future, is responsible for formulating education policies, improving school and higher education, promoting research and innovation, strengthening teacher education, and expanding equitable access to quality learning.

Since 1947, more than 30 Union Education Ministers have led the ministry, each contributing to India's educational journey through reforms, institution-building, and policy interventions. Their tenures reflect not only the evolution of the country's education system but also the changing priorities and challenges that have defined every era.

From Independence to reforms

The history of India's education system is, in many ways, the story of the country's own transformation. From overcoming the challenges of low literacy and limited educational infrastructure after Independence to becoming home to some of the world's largest school and higher education networks, the sector has undergone sweeping changes over the past eight decades.

Successive Union Education Ministers have played a pivotal role in shaping these reforms, introducing policies that expanded access to education, strengthened institutions, promoted research, and adapted learning to the needs of a rapidly changing society.

The journey began with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Independent India's first Education Minister, whose vision laid the foundation for the country's modern education system. Serving from 1947 to 1958, Azad believed that education was essential to nation-building.

At a time when India was recovering from the effects of Partition and widespread illiteracy, he championed universal primary education, adult literacy, women's education, scientific research, and technical education.

Azad also played a pivotal role in establishing institutions that continue to shape Indian education today.

He played a key role in setting up the University Grants Commission (UGC), supported the expansion of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), and encouraged the creation of premier cultural institutions such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Sahitya Akademi, Sangeet Natak Akademi, and Lalit Kala Akademi.

His contribution remains so significant that his birth anniversary, November 11, is observed as National Education Day every year.

The decades that followed witnessed a gradual shift from laying educational foundations to expanding quality and access. Dr. K. L. Shrimali concentrated on strengthening rural education and teacher training, recognizing that improving classroom learning required well-trained educators.

Dr. Triguna Sen focused on technical education during a period that saw the recommendations of the Kothari Commission shape the landmark National Policy on Education, 1968.

Around the same time, Dr. V. K. R. V. Rao advocated research-driven educational planning, while S. Nurul Hasan expanded academic and research institutions, including the Indian Council of Historical Research.

Sheila Kaul further strengthened efforts to improve girls' education and widen access to primary schooling, reflecting the growing emphasis on educational inclusion.

The Changing Priorities of Indian Education

As India progressed economically and socially, the priorities of the education ministry evolved as well.

The focus gradually expanded from improving literacy and school enrollment to strengthening higher education, promoting scientific research, increasing institutional autonomy, encouraging vocational education, and embracing technology-driven learning.

These changing priorities would eventually pave the way for some of the country's most significant education reforms in the decades that followed.

Major policy milestones

As India's education system matured, successive governments shifted their focus from expanding access to improving quality, equity, and institutional capacity.

Several landmark policies introduced over the decades fundamentally reshaped school education, higher education, teacher training, and research, leaving a lasting impact on millions of students.

One of the most significant turning points came during the tenure of P. V. Narasimha Rao, under whom the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, was introduced. The policy sought to universalize elementary education while emphasizing teacher training, women's education, adult literacy, and vocational education.

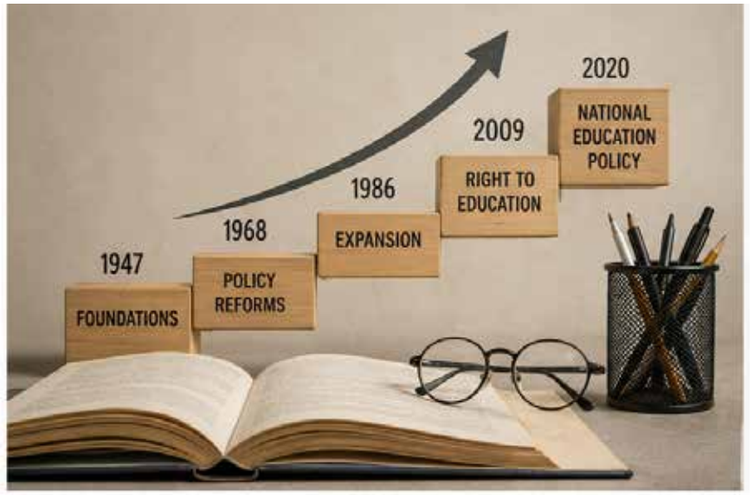
It also paved the way for flagship initiatives such as Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, Operation Blackboard, and District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), aimed at improving school infrastructure and strengthening teacher preparation across the country.

The expansion of higher education gathered pace during Arjun Singh's tenure. His government established additional Central Universities, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs), significantly increasing opportunities for higher learning.

His tenure also coincided with key developments that culminated in the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, making education a fundamental right for children between the ages of six and fourteen.

Murli Manohar Joshi focused on strengthening school education through the expansion of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan while promoting science education and introducing the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2000.

His tenure reflected the growing recognition that



curriculum reforms and universal elementary education had to progress together to improve learning outcomes.

The reform momentum continued under Kapil Sibal, who oversaw the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act. He also introduced the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) system and the CGPA-based grading system for CBSE Class 10 students, while advocating greater use of technology in classrooms.

Although several of these measures generated debate over their long-term effectiveness, they marked a significant shift in the way student assessment and school education were envisioned. M. M. Pallam Raju, who succeeded him, continued efforts to strengthen teacher education, institutional quality, and skill development.

Alongside these ministerial initiatives, India's education system witnessed several landmark legislative and policy reforms. The National Policy on Education, 1968, based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission, introduced the three-language formula and recommended free and compulsory education up to the age of 14.

The National Policy on Education, 1986, later revised in 1992, emphasized educational equity, Operation Blackboard, and the expansion of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas. The Right to Education Act, 2009, transformed elementary education by making free and compulsory schooling a legal entitlement for children aged six to 14.

More recently, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 replaced the 34-year-old policy framework, introduced the 5+3+3+4 school structure, encouraged multidisciplinary learning and vocational integration, and restored the ministry's original name from the Ministry of Human Resource Development to the Ministry of Education. Together, these reforms have shaped the direction of Indian education over the past five decades.

The BJP years: Reforms under scrutiny

The education portfolio entered a new phase after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) assumed office in 2014. Over the past 12 years, five leaders have handled the ministry, overseeing some of the most significant policy changes in recent decades while also confronting controversies that repeatedly tested public confidence in India's education system.

The period witnessed sweeping reforms aimed at improving quality, expanding digital learning, strengthening institutional autonomy, and implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

At the same time, recurring examination irregularities, paper leaks, and governance concerns increasingly overshadowed many of these initiatives.

Smriti Irani, who served as Education Minister from 2014 to 2016, inherited a sector undergoing rapid change.

During her tenure, the controversial Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) at Delhi University was rolled back, work began on drafting a new National Education Policy, and the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was launched to improve transparency and competitiveness among higher education institutions.

However, her tenure was equally marked by intense political debates surrounding the protests at Jawaharlal Nehru University and the death of Hyderabad Central University research scholar Rohith Vemula, placing higher education at the center of national discourse.

Her successor, Prakash Javadekar, focused on institutional reforms and examination systems. His tenure saw the enactment of the Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) Act, 2017, granting greater autonomy to the country's premier management institutes.

Perhaps one of the most consequential decisions during this period was the establishment of the National Testing Agency (NTA), which was envisioned as a specialized body to conduct transparent, standardized, and technology-driven entrance examinations across the country.

He also amended the Right to Education Act by ending the mandatory No Detention Policy. Despite these reforms, the 2018 CBSE paper leak controversy and criticism surrounding the Institution of Eminence status granted to the proposed Jio Institute drew significant public attention and raised fresh questions about examination security and governance.



The NEP Era and Beyond

Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank', who assumed office in 2019, presided over one of the most transformative periods in Indian education. His tenure culminated in the Cabinet approval of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, replacing the country's 34-year-old education policy and introducing sweeping reforms across school and higher education.

The ministry also reverted to its original name from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to the Ministry of Education. However, his tenure also attracted criticism as several Central Universities and IITs continued to function without permanent vice chancellors and directors. He resigned in July 2021, citing health reasons.

Dharmendra Pradhan, who succeeded Pokhriyal, became the longest-serving Education Minister under the NDA government.

His tenure was defined by the large-scale implementation of NEP 2020 through initiatives such as PM SHRI Schools, the National Curriculum Framework, the Academic Bank of Credits, the National Credit Framework, multilingual education, and research promotion through the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF).

The ministry also accelerated efforts to modernize curricula, promote flexibility in higher education, and strengthen digital learning ecosystems.

Yet, as implementation gathered pace, the ministry found itself grappling with an escalating series of examination controversies.

Allegations of paper leaks, irregularities in competitive examinations, and repeated cancellations increasingly dominated public discourse, overshadowing policy achievements and raising concerns over institutional accountability.

The nationwide protests surrounding NEET UG eventually became the defining challenge of Pradhan's tenure, culminating in his resignation on July 25, 2026, amid mounting demands for accountability.

Restoring Trust in India's Education System

With Pralhad Joshi taking additional charge of the Ministry of Education, the government faces the immediate task of restoring public confidence in one of India's most critical public institutions. The challenge extends beyond conducting examinations on schedule.

It involves strengthening institutional governance, ensuring transparency in recruitment and entrance tests, addressing implementation gaps, and rebuilding trust among millions of students whose academic and professional futures depend on the credibility of the country's education system.

From Azad's vision of nation-building through education to the ambitious reforms introduced under the National Education Policy 2020, India's education journey has been one of continuous transformation.

Premier institutions have been established, access to education has expanded, technology has entered classrooms, and policy frameworks have evolved to meet changing national priorities.

However, the recurring controversies surrounding competitive examinations serve as a reminder that reforms are only as effective as their implementation.

As the ministry enters a new phase of leadership, restoring the integrity of India's examination system may prove to be as significant as any policy reform introduced over the past eight decades.

MONTHLY DIGEST

Azim Premji Scholarship 2026 Opens for Girl Students



The Azim Premji Foundation opened applications for its 2026 scholarship programme on August 10. Eligible girl students from disadvantaged backgrounds can receive ₹30,000 annually for the full duration of their first undergraduate degree or diploma course.

Delhi Schools Asked to Promote Free JEE, NEET Coaching



The Delhi government has directed government and government-aided schools to inform Class 12 science students about a free residential JEE and NEET coaching programme. Selected students will receive coaching, accommodation, meals and mock-test support.

Researchers Develop Framework to Evaluate AI Safety in Schools

Researchers have proposed an education-specific framework for evaluating the safety of large language models used in K–12 settings. The study highlights risks surrounding AI interactions with children and the need for stronger safeguards in educational applications.

Scholarship Rules Changed for 2026–27

From the 2026–27 academic year, students can apply simultaneously for one merit-based scholarship and one or more welfare-based scholarships, provided they meet individual eligibility conditions. The change aims to widen access to financial support.

UP Launches Scholarship Scheme for Farmers' Children



Uttar Pradesh has introduced the Mukhyamantri Krishak Chhatravriti Yojana to financially support meritorious children of farming and agricultural-labour families. The initiative aims to reduce financial barriers and help rural students continue their education.

India's Single-Teacher Schools Decline, But Regional Gaps Persist



India had 1,00,843 single-teacher schools in 2025–26, down by 3,282 from the previous year. However, several states recorded increases, highlighting continuing disparities in teacher availability and the challenge of ensuring adequate staffing nationwide.

MONTHLY DIGEST

Noida Announces Single-Window Scholarship Applications for OBC Students

Noida's 2026–27 scholarship and fee-reimbursement process for eligible OBC students will accept applications during a single window, unlike previous years. More than 14,000 students from Class 9 onwards are expected to benefit.

Government Reports 1.09 Crore Scholarships for Post-Matric Students



The Centre provided about 1.09 crore scholarships during 2025–26 under various post-matric and higher-education schemes. The government said the expansion of financial assistance is aimed at improving access for students from disadvantaged communities.

Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme Gets ₹1,300 Crore Allocation

The Centre has earmarked an estimated ₹1,300 crore for the 2026–27 Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme for OBC, EBC and DNT students. The scheme has benefited more than 107 lakh students over the past five years.

NMMSS Applications Open Until August 31



Eligible school students can apply for the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme for 2026–27 until August 31. The scheme provides one lakh fresh scholarships annually to support students from economically weaker sections after Class 8.

₹3.55 Crore Scholarship Takes Tamil Nadu Student to Brown University



Seventeen-year-old Pranav Ilango from Tamil Nadu has secured a scholarship worth approximately ₹3.55 crore to study at Brown University in the US. The award covers his undergraduate education and highlights opportunities for Indian students from smaller cities.

Delhi Proposes 25% Seat Quota for Local Students in Private Universities



The Delhi government has proposed reserving 25% of seats for Delhi students in private universities under a draft Bill. The proposal also includes merit-cum-means scholarships and fee concessions for eligible local students.

UGC to Open Scholarship Portals for Northeast Students

The UGC is preparing to open applications for the National Scholarship for Postgraduate Studies and the Ishan UDAY special scholarship, providing financial assistance to eligible students, including those from the Northeast.

MONTHLY DIGEST

INSPIRE Programme Continues Supporting Young Researchers

The government has highlighted the continuing progress of the INSPIRE programme, which supports young students and researchers pursuing science-related education. The initiative is designed to encourage scientific talent and strengthen India's future research pipeline.

India Wins Four Medals at International Linguistics Olympiad



Indian students won one gold and three bronze medals at the 2026 International Linguistics Olympiad in Romania. The competition exposes school students to advanced language analysis and can provide pathways towards fields such as AI and natural-language processing.

New Research Examines AI Literacy for K–12 Teachers



A new research framework proposes six pillars for responsible generative-AI literacy among school teachers, including technical understanding, critical evaluation, ethical reasoning and human-AI collaboration, reflecting growing concerns over preparing educators for AI-enabled classrooms.

Ahmedabad Teachers Conduct Door-to-Door Drive to Bring Dropouts Back



Teachers in Ahmedabad have been visiting families during the summer to persuade children who dropped out to return to school. The campaign highlights the economic pressures behind school discontinuation and the challenges of retaining adolescents in education.

PM-YASASVI Scholarship Continues Supporting Students from Low-Income Families



The PM-YASASVI scholarship programme is providing financial assistance to students from low-income families, helping them access quality education. Government accounts of beneficiaries highlight how scholarship support can reduce financial barriers to continuing education.

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Evaluate:

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CMT-2020/79:

Evaluate: $\int \frac{1}{1+\tan x}\,\mathrm{d}x$

CMT-2020/80:

Evaluate:

$$\lim_{x\to 0}\left\{\frac{2-\left(\sqrt{1+\sin x}+\sqrt{1-\sin x}\right)}{x^2}\right\} - \left[\lim_{x\to 0}\left\{\frac{x-\sin x}{x^2\left(\sqrt{1+\sin x}+\sqrt{1-\sin x}\right)}\right\}\right]$$

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Answers:

CMT-2020/76: **0** CMT-2020/77: $\frac{1}{4}$

Answers will be published in the next issue. You can ask any queries and send your solution to: Email: ganitmath.india@gmail.com, M: +91 8826337312.
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