In Pursuit of the
World-Class
University
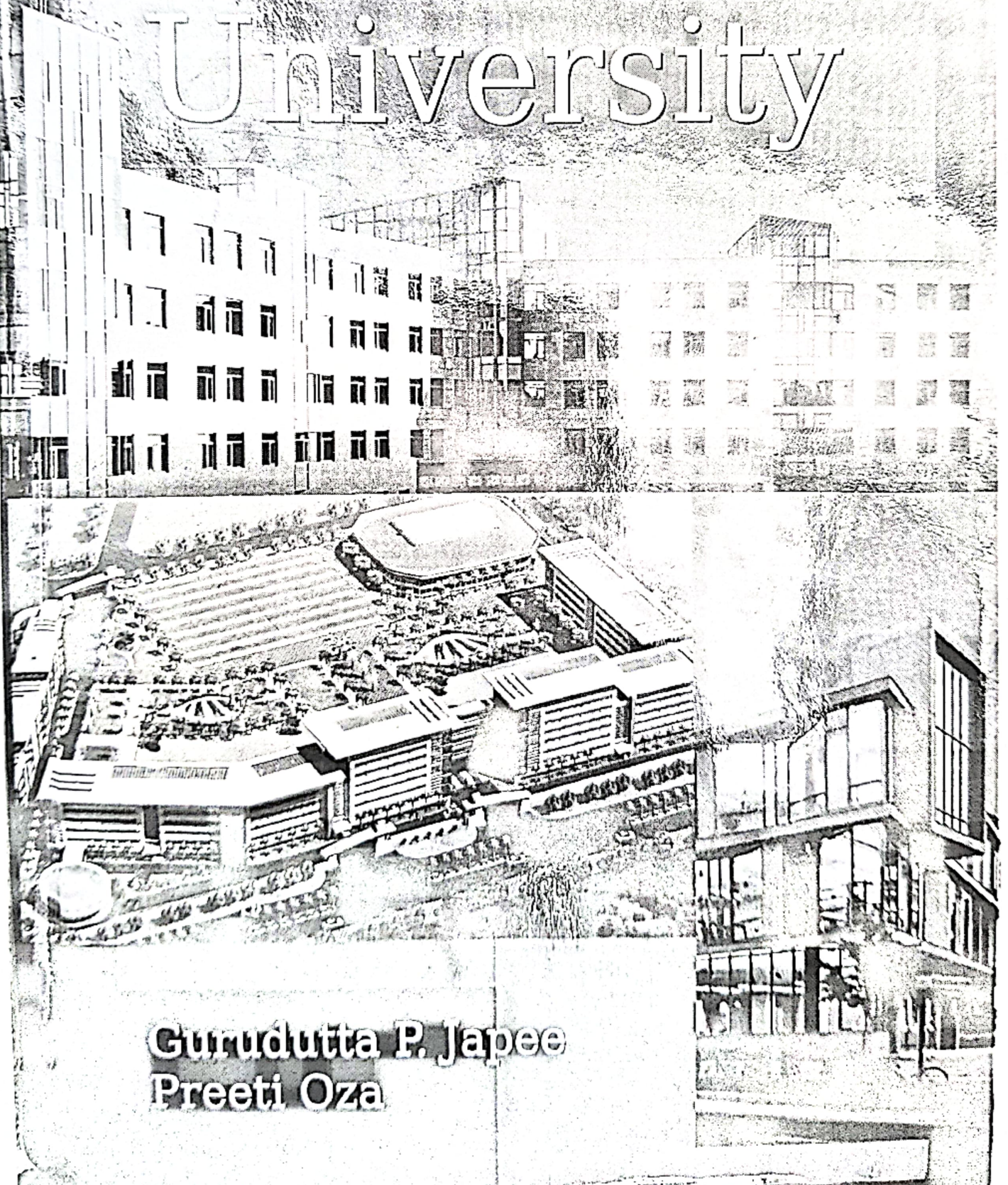
Gurudutta P. Japee
Preeti Oza

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World Class Universities: An Elusive Concept in India

Deepkumar J. Trivedi

Abstract

India's demographic trend means it will soon overtake China as the world's largest population, and with an average GDP annual growth of 8 per cent over the last decade, its middle classes that demand higher education will swell to over 500 million people in the next ten years. India's higher education system, originally designed to serve the elite, will now have to serve the people. Innovation and change are required and understanding that change will be essential and this is an age of academic hype, with universities of different kinds, and in diverse countries seeking and claiming the status of world-class—generally little justification. Those seeking to certify 'world-classness', often for them it is difficult to justify the same. *Asiaweek*, a recognized Hong Kong-based magazine produced a ranking status of Asian universities for many years until their efforts were widely criticized and they had to stop dealing with the same. We too have been debating on the need for Indian universities to be in the listed ranks of the world and the urgency of seeking reforms that will make way for promoting excellence in higher education and research. The issue of a kind of deterioration, or maybe change/transition in the academic standards in most Indian universities needs to be scrutinized well as the demand for higher education and the magnitude of planned reforms over the next ten years in India will provide the largest opportunity in the world for international higher education institutions and education businesses.

The Shortage of Teaching Staff

One of the relevant aspects of the problem facing the universities in India is in relation to the lack of availability of outstanding faculty members who are inspiring teachers and faithful researchers. For years, India has had a considerable problem with a shortage of teaching staff, made steadily degrading, as in the process of rapid expansion of its higher education system. The appeal of pursuing other career options for those graduating, coupled with the lack of facilities for postgraduate education and the retiring generation of current professors has caused an unsustainable student-teacher ratio.

World class universities around the world are established and developed through a great deal of commitment of resources. The question of funding of Indian universities is inevitably connected to the role of state and regulatory bodies. There is a crying need for major reforms that can address the crisis that prevails due to acute shortage of funding and availability of resources. The Indian university landscape has a range of actors: state government funded public universities, central government-funded public universities, state private universities, deemed universities and many other colleges in the form of degree awarding institutions. The system is beset by the issues of quality in many of country's institutions: a chronic shortage of faculty, poor quality teaching, outdated and rigid curricula, and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching.

Cash-starving state universities in India are often unable to hire new staff due to the lack of funds. Unregulated private colleges are often profit-driven, so cost-cutting in areas like the staff is all too common, but staff shortages aren't the only cause for concern. The gross enrolment rate of college-aged people in tertiary education in India was 25 per cent in 2013. This compares to around 60 per cent in countries like France and Britain, and 36 per cent in Brazil—a BRICS country. Clearly, there remains a significant unmet demand for places at universities in India and because of this demand, and the lenient system, which regulates higher educational institutions; there are hundreds of privately set-up colleges offering a sub-par standard of education in India in order to turn a profit. This results in graduates who are unable or unfit to enter the professions their degrees are supposed to train them for. The acute shortage of experienced and senior faculty; this hampers curricular development, research initiatives and the general management of institutions. Universities departments and colleges do not suffer from this shortage as severely as affiliated colleges do. Again, many affiliated colleges are privately owned and have limited incentives to employ

senior faculty members by paying higher salaries. Many private colleges are now employing teachers on a contract basis and paying them meagre salaries, sometimes on per lecture basis. This defeats the goals of quality teaching and learning. The Supreme Court in its landmark judgment in T.M.A. Pai matter had severely castigated institutions which do not employ full time qualified faculty.

The solutions could be as following:

- Need National Policy for Full Time International Faculty for a longer duration.
- Globally competitive salary structure.
- Globally attractive taxation policy for international faculty.
- National Brain Gain policy.
- Use of a variety of tactics to bring talented global faculty.
- Infrastructure and facilities to attract foreign faculty.

The existing hierarchies of classifications for funding and resources have not been able to identify properly the true potentiality of Indian universities to become quality institutions. Every aspect of funding and resource allocation, ranging from tuition fee, scholarships for students, infrastructure in universities, faculty salaries, library development, research funding, including research infrastructure, endowments and philanthropy and many other issues for which substantial resources are required, needs a thorough re-examination.

Among all the significant inputs that go into the making of a world-class university, it is necessary to recognize that the faculty is the most important concern. Outstanding faculty members who can make great substantive contributions to teaching and research create world-class universities. It is only by hiring and retaining inspiring teachers and rigorous researchers that we can hope to establish world-class universities in India. At best, most Indian universities are largely teaching institutions. The focus of the academic agenda is to be engaged in teaching and the faculty members tend to teach a disproportionately higher number of hours in a week. This has undermined any possibility for the faculty members to be engaged in research and publication.

Indian aspirations to build world-class universities ought to centre around the hiring of faculty from India and overseas. Globalization has created new opportunities for Indian academics to be able to move around the world and India is not their only option to pursue serious academic careers. In fact, many graduates from universities in India seek higher education opportunities around the world and even if some of them choose to come into academia, they rarely decide to work in India.

There are a number of reasons why Indian universities are not in a position to attract very bright graduates across disciplines to come into academia in India, but this situation is changing with new opportunities.

The Private Universities in India

The establishment of private universities in India did not lead to effective changes in the quality of education. Unfortunately, some private universities in India have been equated with all the problems of the public universities. In addition, many private universities tend to be engaged in malpractices that have undermined the reputation of private university education. They have fostered a culture of mediocrity and dubiousness, both of which have led to adverse consequences for higher education. There is thus, need for a paradigm shift in the availability of funding and resources. For example, resources for pursuing research, knowledge creation leading to publications should not be given on the basis of whether a university is public or private. It should be based upon the nature of faculty and research capacities that prevail in the university and how best to augment those available resources with a view to advancing the research agendas.

However, it is encouraging to note that several institutions, particularly new central institutions and well-regarded private universities, are adopting innovative hiring practices; these include instituting probation periods of five to seven years for young faculty and offering top-up salaries and variable pay to motivate the faculty. Much of the rest of the system is inert.

The Role of Government

The role of the government in higher education and university governance demands a serious examination. At present, the role of the government in the case of state universities is significant and the higher education department of the state government is deeply involved in every aspect from the creation of the university to granting of approvals and permissions that need to be obtained for administering the university. This poses serious problems for university governance. The existing framework for the establishment of a university (public and private) in India requires legislation passed in the state legislative assembly or the national Parliament or through a decision of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. There are long enough procedures in place led by the higher education departments within the state government that are involved in every aspect of institution building even before the establishment of the university. There is a need to recognize that once the university is established, the role of the government departments and

agencies will have to undergo a significant action change. They ought to become facilitating agencies and ensure the autonomy and independence of the universities so that the institutions are able to grow on their own.

A serious concern for the higher education policy makers, representing the government and educationists, is the need to maintain high academic standards. There is a fear that in the absence of external checks, universities might exercise powers in an arbitrary manner and offer courses and programmes, which may not oblige academic content. This argument is difficult at different levels as it questions the university as an academic institution which is expected to act with a sense of responsibility; second, it creates an atmosphere of ambiguity and animosity where faculty members of a university, may not be in a position to drive the academic agenda; and third, it creates opportunities for vested interests and corruption at the level of government departments exercising such powers.

An approachable way to deal with this problem is to make the process of establishing a university more transparent. The necessary conditions that need to be fulfilled to create a university should reflect the highest academic standards, availability of qualified faculty members and the necessary resources and objective measures to assess the intentions of the promoters of private universities. Once the decision to establish a university is finalized, the government's role should be one of a facilitator and not that of a regulator. The role of the government should be to empower departments, faculties, and internal governance mechanisms within Indian universities so that they take responsibility forthe required amount and are duly accountable for their decisions. World-class universities are not developed through government departments exercising powers over institutions; they are nurtured only when faculty members, students, staff and other stakeholders of the university are able to make decisions about the university in an independent and transparent manner.

The Regulatory Bodies

There is a need to ensure quality in universities and higher education institutions. Some degree of regulatory assessment and external accountability is essential and also if we don't achieve the right balance, there is a serious risk of regulatory capture where higher education policies may not be driven by innovation and creativity in institution building, but by bureaucratic influence, archaic rules and regulations and callous indifference of the regulatory bodies. Besides nepotism and outright corruption, significant challenges for Indian universities is the role and responsibilities of regulatory bodies such as the University

Grants Commission (UGC), Bar Council of India (BCI), Medical Council of India (MCI), All Indian Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and such other bodies. The current approach does not motivate innovation and creativity in the Indian university system where the regulatory bodies play a significant role in many aspects of university governance. Apart from the more pivotal role that the regulatory bodies play in the inspection of universities to determine their suitability and worthiness for state funding, these bodies are also constantly involved in formulating policies that have a direct impact on the governance of universities. Given the fact that there are over 700 universities in India, there is minimal scope for any consultation whatsoever before any set of rules or regulations are drafted by the regulatory bodies.

Research Opportunity

The Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) Report stated that "An alarming trend is a decline in India's share of world researchers, which stood at 2.2 per cent (2007) down from 2.3 per cent (2002). A study on India's research output by Thomson Reuters in 2010 estimates India's global share of scientific publication to be about 3.5 per cent. On the other hand, China's share increased from 14 per cent to 21.1 per cent during the same period (2002-2007). The numbers of Ph.D's produced by India are less than half of those in the US. China's steady increase in Ph.D's is worth noting; in 2002 India and China were not too far apart in the number of PhDs.

In most cases, the Indian universities fail to provide sufficient opportunities, both in terms of time and space for pursuing and completing research; there is a serious lack of funds and other forms of resources to pursue research and documentation. This has to change. So long as we do not provide for research to be the central focus of higher education, at least in some of our premier universities, we will not be able to build world-class universities. Universities are expected to be knowledge generating institutions and knowledge cannot be created in the absence of scholars who are prepared to read, think, reflect and write. The essence of a successful university is its ability to influence change through research and the process of the discovery. This is true in the case of hard sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Indian universities need to recognize this aspect of university education for them to develop higher standards in their pursuit of excellence.

Above all, our research capacities, in general, tend to be mediocre, primarily because the faculty expertise in most Indian universities lacks academic rigor. The debate over teaching versus research is old. Indian universities must ensure that teaching and research complement each other, and there is a lot that the universities need to do to strike a balance between these equally important objectives.

An important question, that Indian universities need to address, is about the importance of research and scholarship that can not only generate ideas for change. Research in every discipline should be promoted as it can have a profound impact on our society and beyond. Indifference and complacency to research have led to the inability of universities in India to produce knowledge that can influence policy, produce innovation, or provide solutions to social, economic and political problems that affect India as a nation. Rigorous research in all fields is important to India, as it will expect to respond to new problems for which old solutions and perspectives may not be helpful. Research produces knowledge that gives clarity on the basis of an informed and deeper understanding of the issues involved.

Student Accountability

The existing framework of accountability of the university to the students needs to be considered. Most Indian universities do not even have a structure for students to be able to provide a feedback on the teaching of the faculty. There are limited faculty development programmes with a view to enhancing the teaching abilities of the faculty. Students and research scholars need to be given a holistic learning experience that not only helps them acquire substantive knowledge, but also develops their critical thinking and writing skills and their abilities to articulate effectively. The current paradigm of a significant number of students largely engaged in learning on their own without value additions from outstanding teachers needs updating. It is important to mention that over the years, the students' own institutional expectations from most Indian universities have substantially reduced. Teaching and research constitute the centrality of the pedagogy of learning and primacy of knowledge in a university. Almost all rankings use both these as benchmarks for assessing the quality of universities. The weightage given to research tends to be more in the rankings of universities recognizing the importance of research. Indian universities face the twin challenges of both teaching and research in their efforts to build institutions of excellence as there has been a serious shortage of faculty members, including in the most prestigious institutions.

Global Collaborations

Indian universities must consider their policies for establishing global collaborations and activities that promote global interaction and provide for a global student experience. It may not be meaningful to sign numerous memoranda of understanding that do not translate into concrete forms of collaboration among universities leading to the implementation of programmes for students and scholars along with placements. Universities, as a part of their internal governance

mechanisms, need to generate and practice policies that will guide them in establishing collaborations with other institutions. We need to innovate on programmes that enable direct interaction between foreign teachers and Indian students, and a true collaboration that provides for a rich student experience as opposed to collaborations that remain only on paper. One important area in which global collaboration can revolutionize student experience relates to teaching and learning. Today's technologically advanced world provides scope for innovation in terms of promoting e-learning and virtual global classrooms based on meaningful international collaborations. Such methods can provide students the benefit of interacting with academics and experts from around the world and gain from their knowledge and pedagogical methodology.

Transnational Education

If India is to create World-class universities, its focus also should be of providing an experience of transnational education to the students. This will expose them to new and emerging frontiers of knowledge and perspectives. It will also introduce them to new cultures and people and help them to appreciate diversity in an increasingly cosmopolitan and interdependent world. Transnational education is no longer the luxury of a few, but a necessary aspect of educational and learning experiences around the world.

The Goal Worth Pursuing

Establishing world-class universities in India is a goal worth pursuing. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings have underscored the importance of research and publications for rankings. The rankings assess the universities on the basis of the following criteria: teaching (30%); research (30%); citations (30%); international outlook (7.5%); and industry income (2.5%). The QS World University Ranking's methodology has further reinforced the importance of research and publications for universities to be globally recognized as institutions of excellence. The weight for the six indicators used for these rankings are as follows: academic reputation 40 per cent; citation per faculty 20 per cent; faculty-student ratio 20 per cent; employer reputation 10 per cent; international faculty ratio 5 per cent; and international student ratio 5 per cent. Academic reputation, one of the most significant indicator, is based on the views and perspectives of fellow academics around the world, which are producing the best research in their field of expertise. This essentially means that 60 per cent of the weight for these rankings are based on research contribution of universities.

Leadership Crisis

There is a need in Indian universities to reflect upon the major crisis of leadership and its inability to make reforms relating to institution

building. Leadership is important not only for providing an institutional vision that will garner and galvanize academic consciousness among faculty and students to fulfil the goals and aspirations of the university but also to reflect upon the larger role and responsibilities of the Indian university that connects it with the professions, government, intergovernmental organizations and think tanks. Leadership is also about taking responsibility and being accountable for one's decisions. Unfortunately, the existing model of governance of the Indian university system does not consider leadership as a critical aspect of building institutions of excellence.

The Vision

World-class universities are built on the basis of a strong foundation that has an inspiring vision and a mission. The vision should reflect the ideals and aspirations of the university. The vision of a university should reflect that pluralism while recognizing that there is no one model of a university. Indian universities may re-examine their founding vision. It helps to articulate a vision of the university even after many years of its establishment, as the vision will help in galvanizing the academic consciousness among faculty, students and staff towards fulfilling a set of goals and objectives. The vision of the university should incorporate a farsighted approach towards learning and imagination among faculty and students, but be fully conscious of the reality of the university's existing challenges.

Universities don't become world-class institutions as soon as they are established, but evolve to become world class through long years of work pursued by the commitment and dedication of students, faculty, and staff. Even then, promoting excellence is an evolving project and that is why the vision of the university helps shape its present and future.

Conclusion

The concept of World Class University (WCU) requires to deal with pressing global challenges, such as climate change, migration, global epidemics, a turbulent world economy, financial instability, increased inequality, global trafficking, and terrorism, to name only a few. They must also continue to assume their role model responsibility in the way they operate as institutions of higher learning. Unfortunately, the international rankings that identify which universities are in the top do not measure fundamental dimensions of the role of WCUs, such as the importance of instilling ethical principles, the ability to foster engaged learning experiences (critical thinking, connecting disciplines and applying knowledge to the real world), the need to be socially inclusive institutions, the extent to which research remains unbiased and intellectually independent from the political and business world that contributes to its funding, etc.

In a globalized, complex context, WCUs are facing growing risks. They are increasingly driven by the market and the never-ending search for additional funds, rather than by their own sense of higher purpose. Seen for a long time as a temple of knowledge where dedicated researchers are serving science, they have lost part of their standing. This has generated a decline in people's trust in scholarly expertise.

International students not only bring in revenue, but they also help cultivate a university's reputation as a collaborative, attractive and reputable. Currently, India's international student rate is much lower than many other countries, but that is something the nation is trying to change.

In 2000/2001 there were only around 7,000 international students in the country, a minuscule number compared to the size of the population (at that time 1.06 billion). In 2012/2013 that number rose to around 20,000—still much lower than the average growth in international student mobility.

The primary objectives for the country are, naturally, to improve the enrolment rate and employability of the Indian population, before focusing too heavily on bringing in international students. However, if the higher education system in India is able to address the major issues it is facing and establish a number of internationally renowned institutions, international collaboration is also likely to play a growing role, as more talented students and academics flow into the country—not just out of it.

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Policy makers in India and other developing countries, since last decade are talking about creating what they called the 'World Class' universities. When it comes to the Indian scenario, we have a very complex situation out there. Indian Higher Education system suffers from a lack of adequate financial resources, intellectual resources, and the government will, in absence of which, the creation of academics is undesirable in the hands of the bureaucracy. And when such fashion overhypes, and talks about creating World-Class universities instead of tackling any constraints in the existing system, it becomes tricky. It is important to appreciate the ideas of institution building and global excellence that would constitute a World-Class university. There may not be a global consensus on the definition of what a 'world-class university' is. This book is a humble effort to assimilate different views and informed opinions of the senior and experienced fraternity from various areas of Higher Education.

Dr. Gurudutta P. Japee (PhD, M. Phil, MBA (USA), M. Com (Gold Medallist), MA, MDBA, LLB, B.Ed., CCA, and DCST): Head of the Department- Advanced Business Studies, School of Commerce, Gujarat University. He is also working as an Associate professor in SD School of Commerce-Gujarat University. He was the Director and Joint CEO (Quality Assurance and Research and Innovation) at Knowledge Consortium of Gujarat, Department of Education; the Government of Gujarat. He has published so far 63 books and having teaching experience of more than 13 years.

Dr. Preeti Oza (Ph.D., M.Phil., PGD in Mass Communication and Journalism) is a faculty at the St. Andrew's College, University of Mumbai. She is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Hong Kong working in the area of Dalit and Buddhist studies. Her major research areas are Marginal Literature, Dalit Literature, and Skill Development through Language Acquisition. She has teaching experience of more than 15 years, published (edited) five books and has presented and published papers in many international and national seminars and conferences.