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## OPINION

### How Miranda House went from 33 students in 1948 to a top public HEI

Topping the charts is not an easy enterprise. However, Miranda's rise proves that educational institutions can excel by motivating stakeholders to act in concert for setting and achieving goals of collective excellence

By Chandrachur Singh and Hena Singh  
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They say once is a chance, twice is a coincidence, thrice is a pattern. But what can be said about the fourth and fifth time? Repeated feats at the top can be termed hegemonic, and this holds true in the case of Miranda House which has yet again been declared by the NIRF (National Institute ranking Framework, ministry of education, Government of India) as India's top-ranked college.

Irrespective of one's belief in the ranking systems or otherwise, it needs to be accepted and acknowledged that the college has come a long way through its administrative leadership, and the academic and co-curricular brilliance of its faculty and students.

Interestingly, Miranda's rise has coincided with flickering positions in the NIRF rankings of some of the most sought-after colleges. Despite having similarities in structure and process, particularly in Delhi University, of which Miranda House is a part, a few of the reputed colleges have seen a drastic fall in their rankings, lagging in terms of functional outputs.

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With the roll-out of the National Education Policy (NEP), sweeping changes in higher education institutions (HEIs) are set to occur, with a sense of urgency to find answers regarding what makes academic institutions eminent, and what begets their fall.

Given the asymmetric information system that characterises the higher education system in India, a college ranking system appears beneficial. However, the methodologies involved in ascertaining its credibility must be realistic. Arguably, a lot still needs to be settled on methodologies, parameters and metrics of comparisons, or even the categorisations of institutions under NIRF.

Given the fact that public-funded institutions need to be mindful of equity, numbers that aggregate quantifiable components may or may not be relevant on account of the mission of India's higher education system.

And yet, the process is important as a student's decision to enrol in an institution is a once-in-a-lifetime decision. Further, given the fact that lateral and peer learning is becoming defining features of higher education, finding the right institution to facilitate this is key.

Ranking systems are often understood as natural outcomes of the rapidly proliferating privately-funded institutions of higher learning, where survival-of-the-fittest is the mantra. The market is the backdrop providing a level-playing field for all private players.

However, a ranking system in a publicly-funded system of higher education may not be that easy a process. But it can mark out exemplary institutions that may have travelled the extra mile in their endeavour of excellence.

To that end, apart from being informative, ranking systems can promote competitiveness among HEIs, which will lead to the identification and emergence of new centres of academic excellence and eminence, and can also be the *raison d'être* for the allocation of public funds and resources.

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NIRF rankings have some intuitive variables such as research and professional practices, under which colleges are assessed on the metrics of quality publications and research footprints. A comparative reading of marks obtained by Miranda House under this metric shows that, with a score of 59.21/100, it is way ahead in comparison to the other colleges with similar structures, though it fares low on the same metric in comparison with Loyola College and Presidency College (ranked fourth and seventh respectively).

Now, while both Loyola and Presidency are autonomous colleges, and hence, are in a different fold altogether, credit must be given to Miranda House for creating and nurturing a strong culture of innovation and research within a larger university set up. Both research outputs and perceptions are important markers since other outcomes of other parameters such as graduating outcomes, outreach and inclusivity do not vary much.

Bound by structures that govern them, publicly-funded colleges rarely have the freedom to design innovative mechanisms for recruiting their students or any say in sanctioning teaching positions. Hence, the near similarity in scores. However, they do have a role to play in creating an environment for qualitative teaching and learning, and almost all top colleges remain committed to that goal.

Miranda House still falls behind Lady Shriram and St Stephens College on the metrics of perceptions, yet it has improved from the previous years.

In a system of intense competition, topping the charts is not an easy enterprise. However, Miranda's rise proves that educational institutions can excel by motivating stakeholders to act in concert for setting and achieving goals of collective excellence.

Unmindful of the numbers games, which have their inherent red herrings, the college which began in 1948 with just 33 students has come of age. To remain committed to its motto of "learning through self-education", it must expand its horizons to include new and innovative educational goals by gearing towards academic partnerships with educational institutions within the country and abroad and with industry. It must also build on its network of alumni across the globe. Its contributions to new India will be determined by the standards it sets in empowering students in meaningful and qualitative ways. It must make them aware of developments not only in their respective fields, but in ensuring that information and knowledge are at par with its peers on a global scale.

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The views expressed are personal.*