Decisive reforms towards expansion, equity and excellence, have transformed the Indian higher education system and its institutions, particularly in the last few decades. The present doctoral thesis focuses on plans, strategies and actions taken up as part of university governance by examining three salient terms in their unique institutional contexts: expansion, equity and excellence. As these terms have become markers of the direction in Indian higher education, my thesis engages them in depth as part of an intensive study of two universities in Karnataka.

Higher education in India has witnessed an unprecedented growth. In the 1940s there were 20 universities and about 500 colleges with an enrolment of less than 1.5 lakh, whereas at present Indian higher education is the third largest in the world in terms of the number of institutions. Enabling a remarkable transition from an elite system, having deep colonial roots to a more accessible system with diverse participation.

In this backdrop, research on higher educational institutions in India has evolved over the years focusing on a number of issues that are part of university governance and culture. Tensions between cosmopolitanism and parochialism (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1972), biographies of innovation and progress (Datta, 2017; Subbarao, 2008 and Chand & Rao, 2011); university and the project of nationalism (Batabyal, 2014); social exclusion operating in many forms (Deshpande and Zacharias, 2016; Rao, 2012); have been some of the ways in which universities have been studied.

Focusing on both internal and external factors influencing university practices and decisions my work takes up a qualitative approach. The two sites, a Public-State University (University I) and the Private-Deemed University (University II) are examined thoroughly in terms of their meaning and practices of university governance among its actors - top-management,
leadership, administrators, faculty members, students, alumni and community. My analysis shows different translations of the three terms in two universities.

The thesis attempts to develop a governance framework for universities by connecting actors, influences and processes. The empirical details highlight local contextual dynamic, and the study also unpacks questions pertaining to the challenges before research on contemporary higher education.