Research Programmes – Emphasis on Quality

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What is the issue?

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- The reality in the vast expanse of higher education in India is, degrees aplenty, but only limited opportunities for growth.
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- The current outcry about the University Grants Commission (UGC) decision to curtail MPhil and PhD seats in universities perhaps needs to factor in this as well as what goes on in universities.
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What is a doctoral reseach?

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- The pursuit of doctoral research (in the social sciences) is ostensibly with a purpose **to examine a problem with fine-tuned research,** doing first-hand fieldwork, and making sense from different perspectives.
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- The task of writing about it comes later. That is why doing research, in the social sciences at least, takes a phenomenally long time.
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- It needs substantial commitment, abilities for meticulous data collection and analysis and, above all, the strength to persevere despite all odds.
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- But, the MPhil degree at the risk of being pilloried, **does not adequately prepare a student for all this**.
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- A good PhD programme must have compulsory coursework, and it is this coursework that prepares a student for doctoral research.
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- It is a myth to assume that our programmes helps prepare students for

research.
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- The MPhil degree in itself also does not result in eligibility for a university position. It is passing the ubiquitous National Eligibility Test or State Level Eligibility Test (SLET), that in fact ensures eligibility for a teaching position in the university system.
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Why the supervisor is struggling?

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- At present, the number of students a supervisor is allotted is significant.
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- **The supervisor is critical to the student's intellectual life** and is called upon if a student seeks a job reference, participation in a conference or workshop, funding, a hostel seat, or action on any form of injustice.
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- In order to be efficient in her interaction with students, it is impossible for a professorial supervisor to deal with more than six-eight PhD students or one or two MPhil students at any given time.
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- A professor also teaches. So, he/she struggles to find time for research.
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Why quality is more important?

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- All students who register for the MPhil programme do not necessarily have their eyes set on doctoral research.
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- While many students committed to research may at first seek entry into the MPhil programme, some of them also do so for other reasons, notably, waiting for admission to universities abroad or simply remaining in the university system.
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- A reality check would tell us **how many of them have their eyes set on an eventual PhD programme.**
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- It is those students, whom one must nurture and help to grow, as

researchers and scholars, in our efforts as educators.
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- **Retaining MPhil and PhD seats merely because we seek to keep vistas of opportunity open is not the reason we should do so.**
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- An emphasis on quality in our research programmes in a range of discipline, rather than in the number of seats at our disposal, is the only way we can contribute to the growth of higher education and scholarship in this country.
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Source: The Hindu

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