Vedic astrology is another term which fascinates people and captures their imagination about its ancient origin. Actually, there is no mention of horoscope and planetary influence in Vedic literature. It only talks of Tithis and Nakshatras as astronomical entities useful for devising a calendar controlled by a series of sacrifices. Astrology of planets originated in Babylon, where astronomers made regular observations of planets, but could not understand their complicated motions. Astrology spread from there to Greece and Europe in the west and to India in the east. There is nothing Vedic about it.

It appears that some Indian intellectuals would use the word Vedic as a brand name to sell their ideas to the public. It is imperative that scientists should study ancient literature from a rational point of view, consistent with the then contemporary knowledge.

1. Balasubrahmanyam, S. N. *Curr. Sci.*, 2004, **87**, 9–10.

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Shanghai rankings and Indian universities

The editorial 'The Shanghai Rankings' is a shocking revelation about the fate of higher education and a slide down of scientific research in India[1]. None of the reputed '5 star' Indian universities qualifies to find a slot among the top 500 at the global level. IISc Bangalore and IITs at Delhi and Kharagpur provide some redeeming feature and put India on the score board with a rank between 250 and 500.

Some of the interesting features of the Shanghai rankings[2] are noteworthy: (i) Among the top 99 in the world, we have universities from USA (58), Europe (29), Canada (4), Japan (5), Australia (2) and Israel (1). (ii) On the Asia-Pacific list of top 90, we have maximum number of universities from Japan (35), followed by China (18) including Taiwan (5) and Hongkong (5), Australia (13), South Korea (8), Israel (6), India (3), New Zealand (3), Singapore (2) and Turkey (2). (iii) Indian universities lag behind even small Asian countries, viz. South Korea, Israel, Taiwan and Hongkong, in ranking.

I agree with the remark, 'Sadly, the real universities in India are limping, with the faculty disinterested in research outnumbering those with an academic bent of mind'.

The malaise is deep rooted and needs a complete overhaul of the Indian education system.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2004, **86**, 1347–1348.
2. http://ed.sjtu.edu.in/ranking.htm.

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Water storage in *Terminalia tomentosa*

Terminalia tomentosa, a member of the Combretaceae family, is a large tree found in deciduous forests. As the tree stands bare during winter (November to February), it can only be identified by its scissored and cracked bark and for this reason is sometimes known as crocodile bark tree.

Two forest watchers at Bandipur National Park had informed me about the tree's remarkable ability to store water in the stem. Some members of this species develop a lateral ridge (called 'wing', sometimes two on the opposite sides) 2–3 feet long and half a foot thick on the stem, 5–10 feet above ground. The wing is an indication for the presence of water in the stem.

Large amounts of water (at least 4 to 6 l) can be collected by making a small hole in the tip of the lateral ridge with the help of a sickle (see Figure 1 *a* and *b*). I believe that the water stored in *T. tomentosa* is not from rains as there are no cracks in the stem.

Although slightly off-flavoured and orange-yellowish in colour (may be due to dissolved phytochemicals), the water

Figure 1. ***a***, Water rushing out of *T. tomentosa* stems. ***b***, Potable water being collected from the stem.