

This Isn't Fiction: Literature Goes to B-School

Booked to Lead

Don Quixote (Miguel de Cervantes) How to convert dreams into action

Saint Joan (George Bernard Shaw) Leading by example

An Enemy of the People (Henrik Ibsen) Need to maintain individual integrity against social odds

My Experiments with Truth (MK Gandhi) Holding on to an idea & self-realisation

Man & Superman (George Bernard Shaw) Moral Passion & Life Force

Tughlaq (Girish Karnad) How to avoid arbitrary decision-making

Top institutes using old classics to teach leadership

RICA BHATTACHARYYA
MUMBAI

When Sumedh Sen, a second-year PGP student at the Indian Institute of Management-Calcutta, joined the programme, he had no clue the institute would turn to the 17th century novel *Don Quixote* for leadership lessons. But today, it's not just *Quixote*, Sumedh reads the most influential works of the Spanish Golden Age, discusses with his peers and professors in his elective class and tries to learn some tenets of leadership by drawing parallels from day-to-day life and examples from the modern corporate set-up.

At a time reading old literary mas-

terpieces is a waning practice, several top B-schools, including the top three IIMs, are harking back to the Arthur Millers, Ibsens, Shaws and Gandhi to teach students how to lead in the challenging business environment of the modern times.

The enthusiasm among students, mostly from engineering and commerce backgrounds, has prompted IIM-Calcutta to offer an elective this year on Organisational Leadership, Inspiration, Dilemmas and Action, which uses inputs from literature.

Down south, IIM-Bangalore this year invited Sankaran Manikuttu, faculty at IIM-Ahmedabad, to give leadership lessons.

A Growing Trend at the Country's Top Institutes

► From page 1

Manikuttu was invited to give leadership lessons to post-graduate management students at IIM-Bangalore through innovative use of literature.

Not only is the use of literary masterpieces to teach tenets of leadership becoming a growing trend among top business schools, several institutes are even offering final year electives that use literature to teach leadership.

Some of the new topics institutes are talking about include ethical dilemma in leadership and diversity, how leaders should have the ability to dream or have a vision and translate that into action, managing interpersonal conflict, search for identity and career choices, among other aspects of organisational behaviour, leading and team-building.

"This is a new and growing trend. That is why this year, for the first time, IIM-Bangalore invited me to teach leadership through literature, something similar to what I do in IIM-Ahmedabad," says Manikuttu. "Classics are great for trying to bring out various issues of leadership and connecting with organisational behaviour," he adds.

Among the books that Manikuttu used at IIM-B were TS Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* and Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq*. He is currently

on the lookout for more contemporary works of literature that he can use in his classes.

Agrees Chetan Joshi, professor at IIM-Calcutta: "Leadership lessons need not be confined to examples from the world of business. You can get leadership lessons from different facets of life. I have started using literature this year in my second year elective course where students can analyse the dilemmas the characters face, introspect, and write a reflection paper."

"We offer this 20-session elective in the very last term of the second year so that students take it with them as future leaders and managers," adds Joshi, who uses Ibsen's play *Doll's House*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Irawati Karve's *Yuganta*, among other classics.

Globally, top management institutes such as Harvard Business School, The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and Stanford Graduate School of Business use several innovative pedagogies, including art and humanities, to talk about leadership and leading. James G March's pioneering use of literature to teach leadership at Stanford is an example.

Says Leena Chatterjee, professor of behavioral science at IIM-Calcutta: "(A) novel tells how protagonists change and develop through various events, and how they face challenges."

Bharatidasan Institute of Management-Trichy's Innovative Leaders and Leadership programme has this year introduced a module on Experiencing Leadership through Literature. The programme will discuss *Man and Superman* of Bernard Shaw that cultivates moral passion, and Ibsen's *Enemy of the People* that underscores the need to maintain individual integrity against social and circumstantial pressures. The other two classics to be discussed are *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* by Mahatma Gandhi and the 'If' poem by Rudyard Kipling.

Others such as IMI-Delhi also offer a three-month course on leadership that ties in literature to get future managers to read, talk and reflect on leadership.

"A study of literature develops acuter understanding of aesthetics and heroism, both critical to leadership," says Abhishek Kumar, assistant professor, BIM-Trichy. Adds Asha Bhandarkar, professor at IMI: "Literature provides a powerful method of engaging the complete person and enhancing the capability to learn." She feels that a person who is taught leadership as a concept has the intellectual understanding, but literature helps engage values, emotions and the entire personality to convert the learning into practice. She uses *The Difficulty of Being Good* by Gurcharan Das in her leadership class to bring out

the dilemma faced by managers through reading the predicament of major characters in Mahabharata as the novel puts forth.

According to Anil Gupta, professor, IIM-A: "People who have evolved as great leaders have dug deep into their spirits, which is not possible without art and literature."

Gupta uses Sukumar Ray's *Abol Tabol*, paintings and photographs of nature, among various modes of art, in his Creativity, Innovation, Knowledge, Network and Entrepreneurship course.

"Art brings out sensibilities and sensitivities in future leaders. Art generates compassion, which we need more in this world of ethical and moral dilemma," says Gupta of IIM-A.

Managers also get enthused by the process as it makes the classes more participative and leads to open discussions. "It is very popular with the students," says Chatterjee of IIM-Calcutta. The classes are centred around students learning on their own through group discussions under the guidance of the professor.

Professors say most students who come with an engineering background are usually enthusiastic about these classes which can be interactive with students acting out or making presentations. "People don't get bored with such classes," says Manikuttu.