

Suddenly, Gandhian studies have a lot of takers!

Call it a post 'Munna Bhai' phenomenon, but students in and around this city are suddenly showing a keen interest in courses like Gandhian studies, environment studies, peace studies and conflict management.

This is evident from the number of applicants this year at Panjab University's Department of Gandhian and Peace Studies here.

The department is flooded with applications for admission to the 2008-09 session, getting nearly 10 applicants for each of the 25 seats. In fact, the department has increased its intake from 20 to 25 seats this year.

'This year the department has received scores of applications for admission. On an average we have received 10 applications for one available seat,' J.N. Sharma, chairperson, Department of Gandhian and Peace Studies, told IANS here.

Students from diverse backgrounds like commerce, science and even business studies are applying for the Gandhian studies course.

The course is the foremost choice of students interested in various aspects of Gandhian thought, the freedom movement, conflict resolution, peace and international studies, Sharma pointed out.

The 2006 film 'Lage Raho Munna Bhai' popularised a street-smart version of Gandhian philosophy that came to be called 'Gandhigiri'. But if there are students who have been influenced by the film to take up the course, admission is not going to be easy.

The applicants will have to take an aptitude test and academic merit will count too. This was done as it was felt that students were seeking admission to the department for frivolous reasons - to somehow join the university or get hostel accommodation or avail themselves of library facilities.

The department, which came into existence in 1965, initially used to offer only a one-year certificate course in Gandhian philosophy. But now, it is offering MA, MPhil and PhD courses.

'There was a time when students were not serious about this course. They were opting for it just for the sake of hostel accommodation and library facilities. But to make the course more receptive we have introduced many cosmopolitan elements with changing times,' said Ashu Pasricha, a faculty member.

The department of Gandhian studies is making full use of multi-media tools and has introduced many practical subjects in its curriculum.

The department has also adopted a village, Mahadev Pura, in Haryana. Its students go there every year and work for the uplift of underprivileged kids of the village. These activities are all under their subject, 'Literacy Mission', in which students have to submit a report on the village.

'We have a full-fledged library of more than 6,000 books. We have a series of books written by Mahatma Gandhi on his life and experiences. This year, 16 out of 20 students appeared for the final

exams - much better than before,' Pasricha pointed out.

Students passing out of this department are placed in various NGOs and self-help groups. Full assistance is provided to the students for placements.

'I have a keen interest in Gandhian studies and even want to pursue a doctorate in it. Seeing the tough competition, I am keeping my fingers crossed for admission,' said Yogesh Ghai who had come from Himachal Pradesh to apply to the department.

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