

# IIM: Indian spirit with global reach

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India's civilisational journey is marked by extraordinary intellectual, cultural, and spiritual achievements.

Yet, the long interlude of colonial rule not only disrupted our economic and institutional foundations but also eroded the cultural confidence of generations. When India emerged from colonialism, it did so with a literacy rate of barely 12%. The subtle yet profound loss was related to the distancing of young minds from their own cultural moorings.

In recent years, there have been concerted efforts to regain the lost heritage. The improvement of Indian higher educational institutions in international rankings reflects the coexistence of quality, research, and global engagement with a renewed cultural self-awareness.

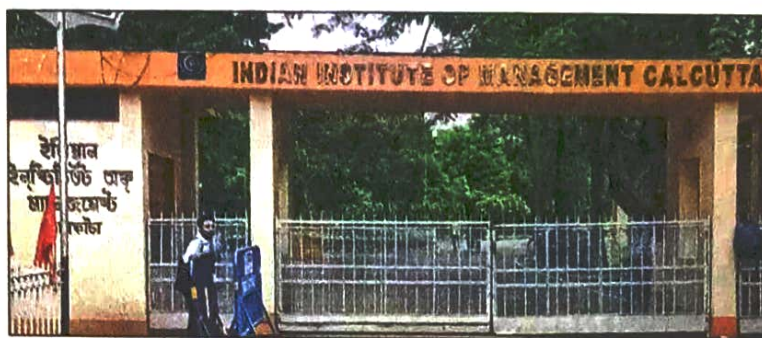
In this evolving landscape, premier higher education brands such as IITs and IIMs own greater responsibility. But they are confronted with the challenge of not letting them be cultural islands.

They have to be living ecosystems that engage dynamically with their surrounding communities and stay in symphony. They should realise that it is essential to sustain the system.

Campuses of educational institutions have a distinct cultural character shaped by their geography, sociology, demography, and history. Just as Indian culture thrives through its multiplicity of languages, traditions, and expressions, so too must our educational institutions celebrate their individual identities.

Recognising and nurturing this individuality enriches not only campus life but also strengthens the national narrative.

Institutions like IIM Calcutta attract a vibrant and diverse student base from



**IIM Calcutta**

across India. The classrooms are microcosms of social plurality.

Yet, diversity alone does not automatically translate into cultural depth. It requires intentional engagement. A campus must be more than a confluence of individuals; it must be an immersive experience that fosters intellectual rigour alongside cultural sensitivity.

Located in Calcutta — epicentre of the Bengal Renaissance and a city synonymous with literature, culture, art, and philosophy, IIM Calcutta carries both privilege and responsibility.

The city's legacy of intellectual ferment and social consciousness compels us to ensure that our management education is informed not only by global best practices but also by the cultural wealth of our surroundings.

In this spirit, IIM Calcutta has started playing Rabindra Sangeet at the entrance. It has also fenced its lakes with bamboo crafted by the artisans of Dinajpur district in their inimitable style. The attire for convocation is also being changed to use *kantha* stitch — a traditional Bengali needlework art form.

When students don these gowns, they symbolically carry forward a living craft tradition even as they step into global leadership roles.

The institute also aims to introduce Bangla as a language course for students from non-Bengali backgrounds to connect and carry the flavour of the ecosystem.

This, on one hand, facilitates meaningful engagement

with the local community, and on the other, offers students exposure to a literary and cultural tradition of remarkable depth. Connecting the institute's ethos with the history, culture, and geniuses of the region offers immense significance.

The institute is naming buildings after iconic figures of Bengal's cultural and intellectual heritage. These edifices are not merely structures of brick and mortar; they are reminders of the transformative power of ideas and inspirations. The new buildings are being designed to reflect Bengal's architectural footprint.

Similarly, the campus experience extends to everyday interactions, including cuisine. Authentic regional food traditions offer more than gastronomic pleasure; they are subtle yet powerful instruments of cultural familiarisation. These initiatives are a conscious effort to connect budding industry leaders with the exclusivity of the region where they were trained.

Through such immersive experiences, students gradually internalise an appreciation for the ethos of the land that hosts them.

At IIM Calcutta, the functional framework has been transformed to rest on Five Is — Innovation, Integration, Inclusion, Internationalisation and Indianisation.

Internationalisation and Indianisation are not contradictory impulses. Internationalisation ensures that students are prepared for global challenges and cross-border collaboration.

Indianisation ensures that they remain anchored in ethical frameworks, community consciousness, and cultural empathy. Together, they create leaders who can take the local to the global without losing authenticity.

Historically, educational institutions across civilisations maintained porous boundaries with their communities. *Matribhoomi* (motherland), *matribhasha* (mother tongue), and the Latin term *alma mater* — the nourishing mother — underscore the deep interconnections between geography, language, and learning.

Education has always been more than credentialing; it has been about shaping identity and responsibility. In reclaiming this wisdom, reaffirming the purpose of higher education is essential. It is not only to produce competent professionals but also conscientious citizens.

Management education, in particular, must cultivate leaders who are sensitive to society's needs — leaders who understand that profitability and progress must align with inclusivity and cultural respect.

Infusing local culture into campus life is a strategic and moral imperative. It grounds students in empathy, contextual intelligence, and social awareness.

It strengthens institutional character and makes them sensitive to the challenges that are not apparent and immediate.

To contribute to India's aspirations of becoming a developed nation, our campuses must become crucibles where tradition and innovation meet, where local narratives inform global strategies, and where education once again becomes a nourishing force — deeply Indian, confidently international, and profoundly human.

It is therefore important to appreciate how institutes handhold their surrounding society and take them along in this journey of sustenance.