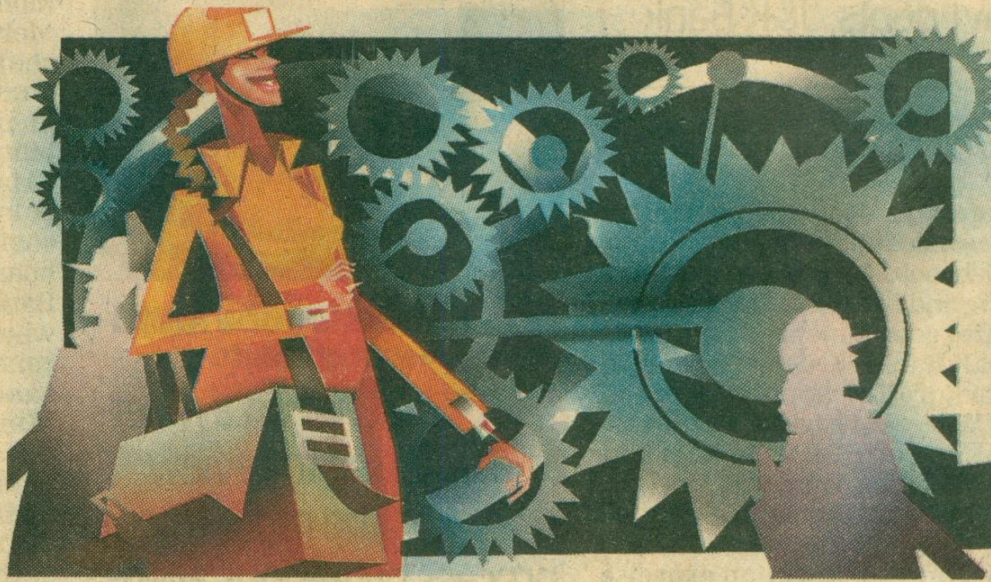


ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

# 'To Improve Gender Ratio at IITs, Start at School Level'

Institutes focussing on creating 14% seats for women this year; experts call for mindset change



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**New Delhi:** With the admission process a few months away at the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), this year's focus is on creating 14% seats for women. The government has recently sent out a directive to the IITs urging them to increase women's numbers in admission by creating supernumerary seats (if required) from this year. Experts appreciate the move but said that intervention at the school level is the need of the hour. Only 8% of women got admitted last year to the IITs.

"There needs to be a shift in how families and female students think about professional choices for women. A large percentage of women decide not to join IITs despite having qualified the exam—their decision to opt out is a huge loss to the institutions and to the society at large," said Ruchira Shukla, regional lead, South Asia, venture capital-International Finance Corporation. "This is often driven by the misconception that engineering is not an ideal profession for women," said Shukla, who graduated from IIT Delhi in 1994.

Despite outdoing the boys at the boards in the 12th standard, women either do not get through or do not opt for the IITs. The ministry of human resources development (MHRD) sent out a directive to all 23 IITs to have a better representation of women at India's premium engineering colleges. This directive states that each of

the IITs should bring up the percentage of women by 14% in 2018 (by creating supernumerary seats, if required) Shukla advocates for successful women who graduated from IITs to serve as role models to inspire young women. "This will help groom a strong set of women leaders bringing a multitude of benefits to India and the world economy," she said.

## SKEWED GENDER DIVERSITY

Last year, when IITs admitted nearly 11,000 students, the percentage of women at some of the institutes fell even below 10%. IIT-Kanpur had only 54 women among the 826 it admitted in 2017, a percentage of 6.5% while IIT-Guwahati had only 6.3% women among 643 students. IIT Delhi and Bombay admitted over 10% women students last year.

Among all the IITs, IIT Mandi fared better in terms of women admissions last year with over 14% women joining the institute.

"Every year, many highly talented women just miss a seat at the IITs. The main reason is societal biases that place geographical constraints on women and deny them equal access to preparation for the highly competitive JEE (Advanced) entrance exam," said Timothy A Gonsalves, director, IIT Mandi.

IITs are also targeting schools to inspire young girls to take up STEM courses in higher studies. "Going forward, a strong effort is needed to expose school girls to engineering as a career," Gonsalves explained.