

More women, no cry

The IIMs are determined to improve the boy-girl ratio on their campuses. Women managers may be good for India's business environment, experts tell **Shabina Akhtar**

It all began with Kozhikode. The Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in the Kerala city opened its doors to 100 women in its 2010-2012 batch — which was 30 per cent of the total student strength.

"This is perhaps the largest intake of girls in IIM-K in an academic session," says director Debashis Chatterjee, pointing out that only 10 per cent of the students were women the year before that.

At IIMs, efforts are on to admit more women students. In Bangalore, 78 of the 375 students this session are women. The Lucknow school is planning to send out letters to more women candidates.

Clearly, the situation has changed since Durga Rani Sinha, now associate dean of the Indian Business School, Calcutta, was a student at IIM, Calcutta. When she joined the institute 35 years

ago, there were five other women in her batch. In those days, recounts the management expert, IIM-C admitted 12 women one year, and six the next year. The reasons were unclear. Perhaps it was their way of dealing with accommodation problems, speculates Sinha. But what was clear was the fact that IIM-C didn't have much space for women.

The situation wasn't very different even a few years ago. But today, the IIMs are going out of their way to woo women. And that's not such a task, for almost 25 per cent of candidates taking the Common Admission Test for management studies every year are women.

Most IIM directors welcome the change. "In every profession, the participation of women is a must," says Devi Singh, director of IIM, Lucknow. "We hope to achieve this in the management sector."

The move has elicited its share of criticism. Some believe the IIMs — considered the best management schools in the country — are compromising on quality. Sinha firmly believes there shouldn't be any gender bias in the admission procedure. "The skewed ratio needs to be mended but on the basis of merit," she says.

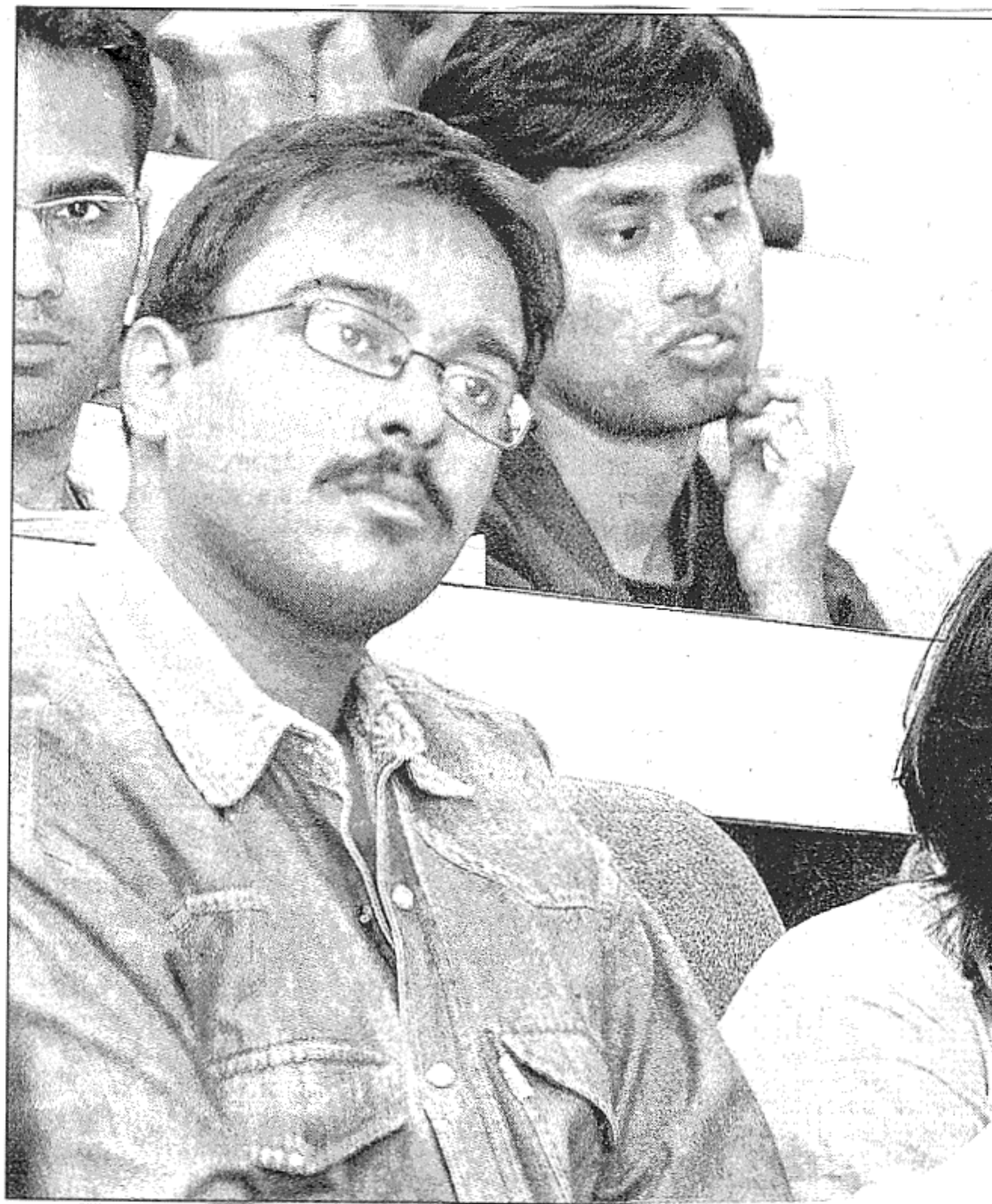
But others point out the move follows demands in industry, which sees women as better managers. "I am not being sexist, but I think in this scam-tainted environment we need more women CEOs. They would lay emphasis on corporate gover-

nance as well as positive moves on the corporate social responsibility front," says public relations expert Rita Bhimani.

Questions are being asked if more women joining the IIMs would mean dilution of merit. Not so, say the directors. "We at IIM-K have introduced an innovative selection method wherein we will consider an applicant's academic track record as well as

his or her CAT scores for both the short list and the final selection," says Chatterjee.

Indeed, institutes are coming up with different admission patterns. For instance, IIM-L is now giving points to a candidate's school leaving marks as well as five bonus points for his or her participation in co-curricular activities. This, many feel, would open up doors for more women.



Bhimani stresses that this is not a question of quotas for women. "If we see it as reservation for women, we are taking several steps backward," she says.

The move, asserts Singh of IIM-L, is not about reservation. "We want diversity in management institutes. Most of us view this change as a balancing act," he says.

And why not? After all, women do have better managerial skills, feel experts. "The trend seems to be to hire more and more women," says Chatterjee of IIM-K. "At our institute this year, 75 per cent of the offers went to girls."

Most IIMs seem happy with more women aboard. They believe women not only bring a large repertoire of management skills — informality and social abilities — but also an emotional understanding of mundane managerial jobs. "A manager needs to have an emotional quotient along with analytical skills," says Chatterjee.

This spells good news for women. And perhaps for industry as well.