



Politics is elsewhere

If only a B-school classroom could teach you how to be a politician

THREE months and Rs 4.7 lakh at IIM-Bangalore are enough, apparently, to turn any woman into a “professional politician”. Or so it seems, to the 26-odd women enrolled in the course. They include a software engineer, a daughter of a politician, a corporator who wants a faster career track. It is heartening that the middle class, after decades of treating politics with disdain, now wants to shake up a tired patronage-driven system. But it is also true that many of them come with an ideologically vacant vocabulary of “efficiency” and “cleanliness”, without engaging with grassroots politics or governance. How can a crash course in public administration or a pep talk about leadership at a B-school prepare you to compete with rooted party workers who spend years doing constituency spadework?

While there has been a tidal wave of women in local politics, thanks to reservations in panchayats and municipalities, their representation thins out at higher levels of party politics. How does the IIM course

plan to address the reasons for this deficit? The reason politics is not an easier ladder, for men or women, is because most parties lack internal democracy and open primaries where the best candidate is given a chance, or where routes of advancement are made clear. Money and power influence party decisions. The system is further stacked against women, in terms of managing perceptions, networking and negotiating. How can the art of politics, the wrangle of interest groups, electoral calculations, the messy division of resources, the provision of public services, the incremental improvements in districts be learnt any other way but by doing?

The B-school conceit is that intangibles like leadership and decision-making can be transmitted in a classroom, rather than arising from contact and friction with reality. Whatever IIM teaches these women about leveraging best practices or shifting paradigms or exploring core competencies to come up with win-win solutions, politics is elsewhere.