

Success has many doors—IIT is just one of them

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For several decades, the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) have represented the pinnacle of engineering and technological education in India. To many young aspirants, admission to an IIT is seen as a prestigious milestone, symbolising academic excellence and a promise of career success. While the IIT dream is compellingly inspiring, it is equally important to understand the challenges that accompany it and the possible alternative paths to reach the same goal, if the student is unable to make it to the IIT.

The IITs enjoy global recognition, as their alumni have distinguished themselves as entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders across the world. Excellent infrastructure, brilliant

peer group, and extensive alumni network make the IITs, the most sought after institutions. For many, the intellectual environment is as valuable as the academics itself.

Admission to the IITs is, however, extraordinarily competitive. The process involves two stages: JEE Main, which primarily tests knowledge in Mathematics and Sciences, followed by JEE Advanced, which evaluates the clarity of concepts and their application in a problem-solving situation, under pressure, both in time and psychologically. In 2025, approximately 15 lakh candidates applied for the JEE Main examination, out of which about 2.5 lakh students qualified to appear in JEE Advanced. Out of them, some 54,000 qualified and only around 18,000 of them secured admission across 23 IITs. A number of the selected ones would not have got the campus or branch of their choice, due to non-academic considerations like social inclusivity.

This means that only 1.2% (one in 80) of the aspirants ultimately succeed, making the IITs the most competitive in the world, with the reputed global institutions such as MIT and Stanford, having higher selection rates of about 4–5% of the applicants. This competition has intensified in recent years, accompanied by a rise in the coaching centres. Middle-class families spend most of their savings, and students spend years preparing for the examination, even at the expense of health and leisure. Ultimately, while a few aspirants succeed in the first go, some others, after repeated attempts, many others that do not make it, experience frustration and mental stress, lose precious time and peace of mind, and, more importantly, the sight of alternative opportunities, possibly better aligned with their aptitude and interest.

Even after securing admission, the pressure does not vanish. The IIT academic system is highly demanding, and the students must navigate rigorous coursework and meet high expectations, amid stiff competition from their peer groups. However, it is precisely this environment that fosters resilience and adaptability, the qualities that lay the foundation for the subsequent success of the IIT alumni.

It is crucial to recognise that studying at an IIT is not the sole path to achieving professional success. While most of the IIT alumni have been highly successful abroad, several of India's most respected scientists, leaders, and innovators did not study at the IITs. A few examples that readily come to our mind are Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, India's "Missile Man", Dr. K. Kasturirangan, one of the architects of India's space mission and

Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft. These examples affirm that success is not confined to a single institution. Consistent effort, passion for learning, and the ability to build strong networks often matter more than an institutional brand.

Going beyond IITs, India, today, offers multiple avenues for quality education, like NITs, IIITs, IISERs and a host of private institutions. Some of the premier institutions are offering innovative programs in areas like Computer Science, with flexible and innovative formats like online and hybrid learning, without compromising the rigour. It is equally important to recognise that engineering is not the only path to a successful and fulfilling career. There are ample opportunities, abound in finance, management, science, humanities, law, arts, sports, and entrepreneurship.

IIT graduates excel in their careers, due to not just academics, but their resilience to face challenges and achieve under pressure. At the same time, history shows that non-IIT graduates have also attained remarkable success, through smart work and perseverance. While it is admirable to aspire for an IIT, it is equally important, not to allow it to become an obsession and overshadow the alternative pathways to success. In case the doors of IIT are not open, for whatever reason, it is better to open the doors to other institutions and pursue the course, best suited to the student's aptitude and interest, with vigour and passion. Success will beckon such students.

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