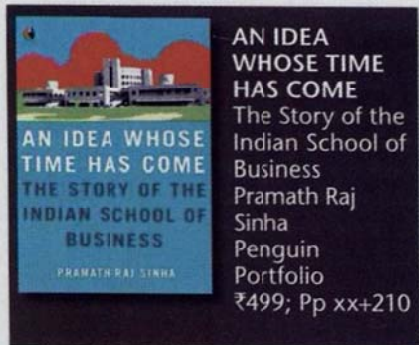


Schooling entrepreneurship

A look at the heart of a school that has become a benchmark of global repute

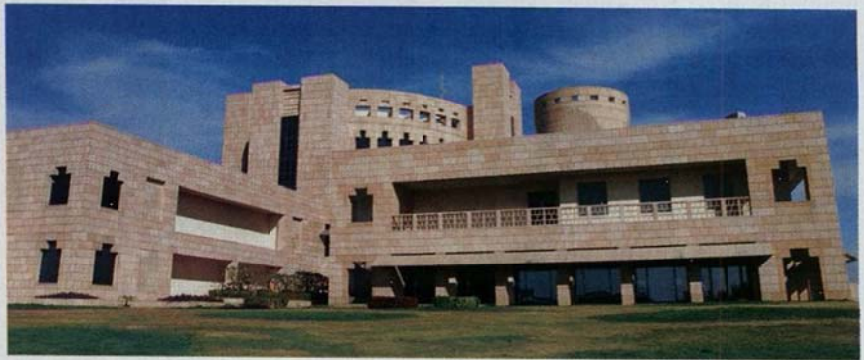


As an alumnus of the Indian School of Business, Sinha's part-documentary, part-biography treatment of the school's story reads like an exciting episode of *How I Met Your Mother*. ISB for me has involved the best years of my life and it was fascinating to go back to its conception through the eyes of its founders. In a short period of time, the ISB has established itself as an institute of global repute. But beyond the rankings and placements, what lies at the heart of the school is a strong sense of belonging. The book tries to establish, quite convincingly, the reasons why, proclaiming that the ISB was an idea that could not have been resisted. Its time had come!

The story of ISB is that of entrepreneurship in its full (and brutal) glory. Each of the big names associated with the school clearly share an emotional bond that goes beyond business needs and material wants. As Rajat Gupta, founding chairman, ISB, admits sheepishly in the foreword: "Did we really understand what we were embarking upon? We were idealistic entrepreneurs for whom nothing was too difficult." Or as Adi Godrej, chairman, ISB, shares in the prefatory note: "15 years ago, a small group of Indian businessmen came together in pursuit of a shared dream. I was fortunate enough to be one in that group." What transpired in the next 15 years is nothing short

of a beautiful symphony unfolding, largely by design, but marred by several jarring moments.

How did ISB come to establish itself in Hyderabad? How did the initial funding come in? And what happened when it was realised that the funding will be inadequate? How was top faculty from across the world convinced to be part of this project at a time when India was not known as a source of higher education? What happened when the first batch of 2001 started, without the campus completely functional? The 9/11



attacks threw the fate of the same batch in jeopardy. And how did ISB come to be the youngest school ever to feature in the Top 20 Global ranks? The book provides a detailed 'from-the-heart' narration of this and more – enough to leave the reader in admiration at the sheer impact that such an idea has created.

Personally, one of the instances that best captures the power of the idea is when Rajat Gupta met Daniel Vasella, chairman, Novartis Pharmaceuticals, and happened to mention that he was looking for companies to help support ISB in 1999. Vasella was instantly interested and asked, "How much do you need?" Rajat answered that they were asking for donations of \$1million. A few days later, a cheque arrived for \$2million. "This is a good cause," said the accompanying

letter, "but I think you may need a little more."

Or when an ISB delegate met Chandrababu Naidu, the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, over breakfast and heard him say, "Since you will be visiting other states, whatever they offer, please let me know. If they offer X, I will make it X+1."

Travelling through the years, the book includes personal interviews with the key faculty of the school that have been critical to the success of the school. And select alumni who share their experiences on how ISB happened for them, and what they think makes ISB a success. But before the author goes on an introspective assignment of whether ISB

has achieved what it had set out to, Sinha, at this stage, objectively navigates through the goals that ISB had started with and critically evaluates where ISB has scored and where there is still room for improvement.

As an alumnus, I personally think ISB is one of the finest schools in the world right now. And Sinha has done a great job summarising the road that led us to this stage. It's a school that is not perfect but at all stages strives to uncover the wrong and rectify it instantly. It has flourished on the back of an excellent faculty and governing body but, more importantly, on the feedback that its students, alumni and the corporate world have shared. Fascinating read! A celebration of achievement.

♦ ANKUR WARIKOO

The reviewer is CEO, Crazeal.com