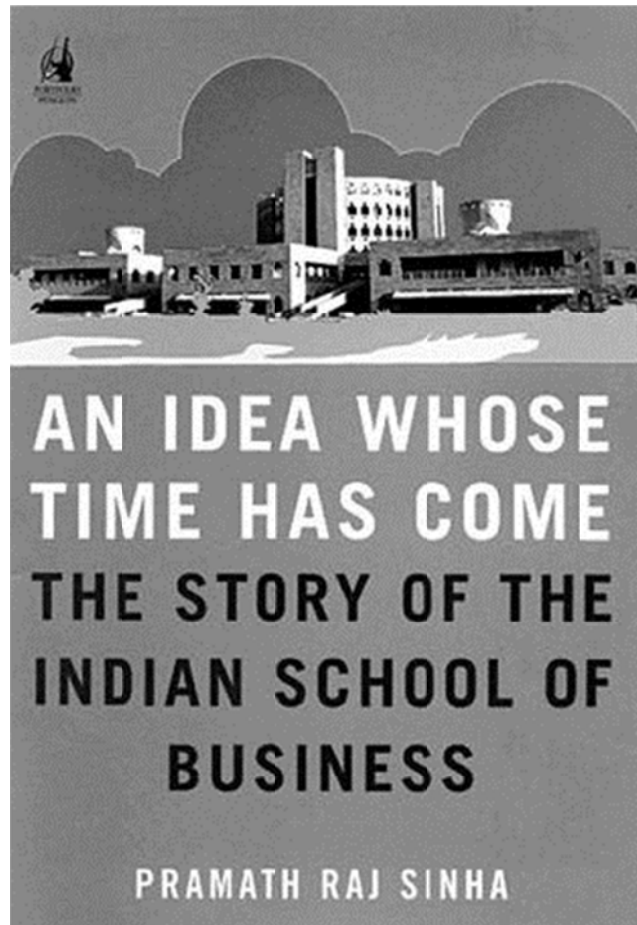


# How ISB came into being



It is on a low hill in Gachibowli, about ten miles from Hyderabad, that the book **‘An Idea Whose Time Has Come: The story of the Indian School of Business’** by Pramath Raj Sinha (Penguin) opens. “The hill was unremarkable. Part of it was covered with scattered boulders, some of them enormous. In between the big stones there was nothing but coarse grass and a few scattered trees, among which goats browsed here and there...” And, getting out of cars on a damp summer day in 1998, a group of government officials and leading members of India's business community were studying the scene.

Three years later, on that same hill, the Indian School of Business opened its doors to its first students, 128 in all, the author recounts. The founding chairman, Rajat Gupta, reminisces in the foreword how the idea transformed from a Department of Management Studies (with a Master of Business Administration programme) at the Indian Institute of Delhi to an independent, world-class business school. As for the financial resources, he mentions the initial questions – such as, who would fund such a start-up, whether the initial funding could be raised, and more importantly, whether a sustaining financial model could be built. “The initial board members provided generous seed funding. We attracted lots of additional funding and were feeling euphoric, but the dot.com bust put us in somewhat of a crisis...”

The author, who took charge of the project as the CEO early in 1999, narrates an incident to highlight the difference between putting together a plan and implementing it. He was a full-time consultant with McKinsey, and had undertaken the job of CEO as an additional duty. “I remember that at first I had the tendency to continue to behave like a consultant, coming up with recommendations for the board and options they might like to consider.” A moment of truth, however, was when Yogesh Deveshwar took him to one side and said, “Pramath, you are the CEO. Your job is to come to us with decisions, not to ask us to make decisions. We will provide inputs and tell you if we think you are wrong. But it is up to you to make the decisions.”

Three cities were in the shortlist for locating ISB, after an exercise to visit more than fifty locations. “All the governments were very proactive and very keen to have us in the city,” reads a quote of Arvind Pahwa, cited in the book. For instance, Thackeray was in favour of giving land at below local market price in Maharashtra, but the demand was for a quota for students, staff and faculty. “There is some justification in what he said, and he was passionate about developing Maharashtra. But the board needed a free hand,” recalls Deepak Parekh. And, in Karnataka, the Chief Minister offered a site with good infrastructure near the Ring Road, away from central Bangalore's infamous traffic jams, but the ISB delegation felt the price was on the high side, the book informs.

Meanwhile, in Andhra Pradesh, the then Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu was determined to expedite the economic development of Hyderabad. He would call each member of the Executive Board personally, and send them a letter. And, after a breakfast with the Chief Minister, the delegation would hear 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.”

An exciting story about building a functioning institution in the field of business education, by turning barren land into a vibrant campus.