

# A walkabout at IIM-A

Tracing heritage and transition through sepia-tinted photos and young blood

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It's a rain-soaked morning at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, India's premier B-school. Fat raindrops are dripping off the leaves in this verdant campus. The grassy green cricket field looks slushy.

The famed red brick façade of the Louis Kahn-designed buildings is partly visible through the foliage.

A morning walkabout on this iconic campus is quiet. The institute is yet to crank up for the day. Spread over two campuses across 104 acres connected by an exclusive road underpass, you realise that India's oldest management institute isn't very large, considering the sprawl of some of the IITs. To your delight you see that the campus is home to many sparrows, a fast disappearing species in most cities. A mission of monks decides to position itself across a road near the fitness centre.

The residential quarters of the faculty lie cheek by jowl with the student dorms and hostels, all sporting the same open brick finish. The tree-lined bylanes are tranquil.

Old-timers on the 52-year-old campus remember a time when IIM was "far away", on the fringe of the city. Now,

Ahmedabad has expanded way past and put IIM very much in the heart of the city. The buildings, with their high arches, wide, airy corridors, and large, spherical and oblong windows, show their age, with leaks at many places following the onslaught of unprecedented September rains.

## HARVARD STEPS

You enter the main building up a long flight of stairs, called the Harvard Steps, a bit in awe, when you recall the legion of top business managers who have walked up those steps. One of its famous sons, Raghuram Rajan, whose picture you spot as chief guest of the 2005 convocation, and a 1987 batch alumnus, is today the RBI Governor. There are scores of top managers who emerged from this school of CEOs: Bhaskar Bhat of Titan, Venkatesh Kini of Coke, Harish Bhat of Tata Global Beverages, Prakash Iyer of Kimberley Clark, to name a few. Many from the institute have also gone on to become thriving entrepreneurs: who says management education militates against entrepreneurial zeal?

In the foyer of the main building, to the right of which is the office of Director Ashish Nanda, also an alumnus, are



**THE MAIN** buildings of IIM-A... Salubrious surroundings that have nurtured generations of illustrious alumni.

panels of photographs of all the luminaries who were chief guests at convocations over the years.

## RICH LEGACY

Looking at those photographs you realise it is virtually a history of young India in the making; the giants who contributed to the building of modern India had visited the campus to give away certificates to a legion of young managers who would go on to earn fame in corporate and public life.

From jurist M.C. Chagla, at the first convocation in 1966, to physicist Vikram Sarabhai, from whose home IIM's office

operated before the campus sprang up, to Indira Gandhi, T.A. Pai, C. Subramanian, M. S. Swaminathan, Keshub Mahindra, V. Kurien, Raja Ramanna, Russi Mody and Manmohan Singh (in 1994 and 2011), and modern-day corporate icons M.S. Banga and K.V. Kamath (both alumni) and L. N. Mittal in 2013.

Step out of the foyer and you can see the large courtyard of the Louis Kahn plaza, the lawns glistening in the rain and flanked by tall buildings on three sides. This is where all the convocations take place, against the backdrop of the Vikram Sarabhai library block. To the right of

the main block is an auditorium, named after Ravi Mathai, founder-director of IIM-A.

The corridors of this auditorium are lined with sepia-toned photographs, captured from the time a young institution was being built up. Farther on is a swank new indoor sports complex with badminton, squash and table tennis facilities, and a basketball court with a synthetic surface. The 1989 PGP batch has contributed a significant chunk to erect this complex. A 25th year reunion bash is being planned by these alumni.

A short walk around the Louis Kahn plaza and you find your way past cafes where

groups of students are huddled in intense discussion over cups of tea and snacks. Walk past the cafes and you go on to the underpass that takes you through to the new campus which came up in the past decade.

## NEW CAMPUS

The new campus is very different in character. It's more built up, and the greyness of the cement buildings does not have the same character as the red brick structures.

The underpass also has many vignettes of IIM's history, with pictures from the time the campus was being built, under the supervision of the renowned University of Pennsylvania architect Louis Kahn, along with NID-trained designers.

Returning, you spot a different group in a huddle. And now you notice the name of the café: Café Tanstaaff! Gobbletygook, you think. Till a second year student points to the expansion displayed below: "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch!" It's run by an alumnus. Quite true, you think.

By now I'm drenched, but it's all part of soaking in the atmosphere at India's top B-school.

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