



## A Strategic Playbook for Startups

### Description

India's startup revolution is poised to define the nation's next century, driven not by unicorn valuations but by the ambition to solve real, high-friction problems that touch millions of lives. Strategic clarity, frugal innovation, cultural intelligence, and purpose-led leadership form the backbone of ventures that endure in India's complex landscape. Founders who master customer discovery, validate across diverse geographies, design differentiated value, and build inclusive, learning-driven organizations gain a powerful edge. As they scale with sustainability, collaborate across sectors, harness government initiatives, and institutionalize continuous innovation, they transform from fledgling startups into national assets. India's diversity becomes the ultimate proving ground and those who embrace it with empathy, discipline, and bold creativity help shape a future of opportunity, dignity, and shared prosperity for all.

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## Strategic Roadmap for Startups in the Indian Context

# I. Introduction: The Promise and Paradox of the Indian Startup Landscape

## A. Setting the Stage

**India's startup story in the 21st century is not merely an economic narrative—it is a social revolution in motion.**

A startup today is far more than a small business chasing profit. It is an experiment in transforming lives, uplifting communities, and redesigning how India works, learns, earns, or accesses essential services. In a nation where diversity is both a strength and a challenge, startups act as catalysts that bridge social gaps, democratize opportunities, and solve deeply rooted problems through innovation and accessibility.

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A startup in India is therefore:

- **A problem-solving engine:** It tackles inefficiencies in health, education, agriculture, finance, and employment.
- **A societal equalizer:** It leverages technology to include those previously excluded—rural citizens, women, gig workers, neurodiverse individuals, micro-entrepreneurs.
- **A source of dignity and empowerment:** It creates new jobs, reshapes aspirations, and enables people to participate in the digital economy.

This transformative potential has exploded due to a combination of powerful forces:

### 1. Digital Acceleration

- India has one of the lowest mobile data costs globally and over 850 million internet users.
- Platforms like UPI, Aadhaar, and India Stack offer frictionless digital identity, payments, and authentication—fertile soil for innovative business models.

### 2. A Demographic Dividend

- With more than 65% of the population under age 35, India possesses a workforce that is energetic, entrepreneurial, and hungry for change.
- Youth-driven innovation is reshaping sectors from fintech to femtech, electric mobility to medtech.

### 3. Government Catalysts

- Initiatives like **Startup India, Digital India, Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat**, and state-level incubators have dramatically improved regulatory support and access to capital.
- Tax exemptions, patent rebates, and simplified compliance have lowered entry barriers.

### 4. Funding Inflows and Investor Confidence

- India now hosts 100+ unicorns and thousands of funded startups.
- Global funds, domestic VCs, family offices, and impact investors are betting big on India's capacity to innovate for the world.

Together, these forces position India not just as a consumer market but as a **global startup powerhouse** capable of producing both billion-dollar companies and billion-life impact stories.

## B. The Promise and the Paradox

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The Indian startup landscape radiates extraordinary potential, yet hides equally powerful contradictions. This dual reality defines both the challenge and opportunity for emerging founders.

## The Promise

- India has become the **world's 3rd largest startup ecosystem**, behind only the U.S. and China.
- Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities (â??New Indiaâ?? , or Bharat) are digitizing at unprecedented rates.
- Consumers are jumping directly from offline to mobile-first or mobile-only experiences, creating entirely new markets.
- Indian startups have shown they can lead globally: think of Zerodha in fintech, Freshworks in SaaS, BYJU'S in edtech, boAt in consumer electronics, Ather in EVs.

The promise is clear: **the market is massive, the need is urgent, and the appetite for innovation is rising.**

## The Paradox

But behind the triumphs lies a sobering truth:

**Nearly 90% of Indian startups fail within the first five years.**

Why?

- **Poor strategic clarity:** Many founders jump into building without understanding their customers deeply.
- **Imitation over originality:** Copying Western models rarely works in India due to diverse income levels, cultural dynamics, and infrastructure gaps.
- **Scaling misalignment:** Startups often scale too quickly before achieving a robust product-market fit.
- **Operational inefficiencies:** Weak systems, lack of financial discipline, and hiring mismatches plague early teams.
- **Fragmented markets:** What works in Bangalore may fail in Jaipur, Guwahati, or Coimbatore.

This paradox is India's greatest opportunityâ??those who can navigate it intelligently can build resilient, category-defining companies.

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## C. Purpose of This Roadmap

The role of this roadmap is to provide founders with **clarity, structure, and confidence** in navigating India's unique startup terrain.

### 1. Bridging Global Wisdom with Indian Realities

This article synthesizes:

- Proven frameworks from the **Business Strategy Hub**,
- Timeless insights from foundational startup literature (*Zero to One*, *The Lean Startup*, *The Startup Owner's Manual*, *Jugaad Innovation*, *Playing to Win*),
- And crucially, **India-specific cultural, economic, and policy realities.**

The goal is not to force-fit foreign strategies into India, but to **translate, adapt, and enrich them** for the Indian founder's journey.

### 2. Intended Audience

This roadmap is crafted for:

- **Early-stage founders** seeking clarity and direction
- **Social entrepreneurs** building impact-first models
- **Incubator and accelerator mentors** guiding startups toward sustainability
- **Policy architects and NGO leaders** shaping inclusive innovation ecosystems
- **Investors** wanting to understand the ground realities of Indian markets

### 3. Purpose: From Idea to Impact

At its heart, this article exists to help Indian startups:

- Build with discipline and structure
- Innovate with frugality and empathy
- Scale sustainably across India's diverse geographies
- Create businesses rooted in purpose, ethics, and inclusion

It aims to ensure that founders do not repeat the classic mistakes that lead to premature failure. Instead, they gain a **practical, field-tested blueprint** to navigate complexity and unlock India's immense potential.

## In short:

This roadmap equips founders to convert **ideas into impact, vision into value, and innovation into inclusive growth.**

Startup strategy and targets free illustration | Reshot

## A. Start with Why

(Inspired by *Zero to One*, *Playing to Win*, and core strategic-design frameworks)

The most important early strategic question is not **“What should we build?”** but **“What game are we here to win?”** This reframes the startup from a frantic pursuit of opportunities to a deliberate act of value creation.

### 1. Redefining “Winning”

Winning is not defeating competitors; it is creating value that is:

- **Unique** – meaningfully differentiated.
- **Enduring** – sustained through strategy, capability, and system design.
- **Hard to replicate** – because it is rooted in advantage, not hype.

Peter Thiel’s electric principle from *Zero to One* remains timeless:

**“Competition is for losers. Build a monopoly by doing something uniquely valuable.”**

In India, this often means resisting the temptation to copy Silicon Valley templates and instead designing for India’s deep structural problems.

### 2. Why-First Thinking in India’s Reality

India is not one market. It is *many Indias* divided by:

- Language and culture
- Digital access gaps
- Urban vs. rural aspirations
- Economic constraints
- Social mobility barriers

A powerful **“why”** creates the coherence needed to navigate these complexities.

## Examples of authentic 'Why-First' differentiation:

- **Zerodha:** Demystified investing for middle-class Indians by lowering friction, not by chasing hype or vanity growth.
- **Dunzo:** Solved hyperlocal chaos through reliability, not discounts.
- **nStore in Tamil Nadu:** Built rural commerce on trust networks, not tech jargon.

## 3. High-Friction Problems: India's Path to Monopoly

India's true opportunities lie in **pain points most tech founders ignore**, such as:

- Affordable healthcare and diagnostics
- Credit access for informal workers
- Job pathways for neurodiverse individuals
- Agriculture supply-chain inefficiencies
- Small-town logistics and delivery
- Skilling gaps for blue- and grey-collar workers

These are multi-billion-dollar arenas where brand loyalty is built through **solving**, not **selling**.

## B. Purpose-Driven Mission and Vision

*(Drawing from Playing to Win, The Social Entrepreneur's Playbook, and design strategy)*

A startup should articulate its purpose and vision with clarity and courage — not as lofty statements but as **strategic tools** that guide choices.

### 1. Purpose: Why We Exist

A good purpose integrates:

- **Economic value** — solving a profitable, meaningful problem
- **Human value** — improving life outcomes
- **System value** — reducing friction or inequality in society

Founders who integrate social good early (employment, accessibility, environmental impact) build more resilient public trust and long-term legitimacy.

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## 2. Strategic Aspiration: Where to Play

Borrowing from *Playing to Win*, founders must choose their arena deliberately:

- Customer segment
- Geography
- Problem space
- Value pool
- Business model
- Technological advantage

“Everyone is our target customer” is a death sentence.

## 3. Advantage: How to Win

Advantage comes from **capabilities + systems**, not slogans.

Examples in India:

- **Udaan:** Distribution logistics as a capability.
- **Jio:** Scale infrastructure as advantage.
- **Meesho:** Low-cost seller acquisition engine.

Purpose + Where to Play + How to Win = **Strategic Core**.

This becomes the north star during uncertainty, funding winters, and pivots.

## C. Discovery vs. Execution

*(Inspired by The Startup Owner's Manual, Lean Startup, and Indian market realities)*

One of the biggest Indian startup mistakes is scaling too early – hiring for departments that don't need to exist, buying cloud capacity that is never used, and spending on marketing without product-market fit.

### 1. Discovery First, Not Execution

The early phase is **NOT** about:

- Growing fast
- Capturing market share

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- Building the full solution
  - Hiring 20 people
  - Raising seed rounds prematurely

It **IS** about:

- Problem discovery
- Hypothesis testing
- Customer conversations
- Iteration
- Validation
- Learning loops

This is the heart of *The Startup Owner's Manual*.

## 2. Customer Discovery: The Indian Twist

India requires more rigorous validation because variability is high.

Your MVP must be tested across:

- Languages
- Price sensitivities
- Digital literacy levels
- Regional behaviours
- Rural vs. urban expectations
- Trust-building patterns

If you validate only with:

- your friends,
- college alumni groups, or
- English-speaking upper-middle class early adopters,

you're designing for 2% of India.

## 3. Customer Validation: Before you build for scale

Key validation signals:

- Paying customers, not free users

- Retention, not downloads
- Net Promoter Score in real cohorts
- Repeat usage in non-metro regions
- Clear, stable willingness to pay
- Acquisition cost stability, not discount-driven spikes

A scalable business emerges **after** validation, not before.



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## III. Environmental Mapping: Understanding the Indian Terrain

***Startups win in India not because they have the best ideas, but because they understand the terrain better than anyone else. India rewards founders who are deeply aware—aware of policies, culture, technology stacks, economic transitions, and behavioral nuances. What follows maps the Indian environment using enhanced PESTLE, internal diagnostics, and the powerful Juggad mindset. This section gives founders the clarity to navigate complexity instead of being crushed by it.***

### A. Macro-Environment Analysis (PESTLE with Indian Adaptations)

A startup's reality is shaped not only by its product but by the **environment in which it operates**. In India, this environment is uniquely dynamic, sometimes chaotic, but often full of asymmetric opportunity.

#### 1. Political

India's political architecture is unusually supportive of enterprise when founders know how to leverage it.

Key initiatives:

- **Startup India:** Tax holidays, easier compliance, patent rebates, funding support.
- **Make in India:** Manufacturing incentives, localization benefits, PLI schemes.
- **Digital India:** Broadband expansion, digital literacy, public digital infrastructure.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat:** Push for indigenous technology, strategic sectors, and import substitution.

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**Actionable insight:**

Build your model *with policy*, not *despite policy*. Policy tailwinds can become free growth accelerators.

## 2. Economic

India's consumption is no longer metro-dominated.

Key trends:

- **Tier-2 and tier-3 cities** show faster digital adoption and income growth than metros.
- **UPI** has fundamentally democratized payments; microtransactions and micro-entrepreneurship are exploding.
- **SME and informal-sector digitization** is unlocking new B2B and B2C opportunities.

**Actionable insight:**

Design solutions for Bharat, not just India. Growth is accelerating in places most startups overlook.

## 3. Sociocultural

India's social environment is not Silicon Valley's playground; it is a complex web of family, tradition, and trust.

- **Family influence:** Major life and financial decisions involve parents, spouses, or extended family.
- **Trust deficit:** Consumers trust *people* more than *brands*. Reputation and word-of-mouth drive adoption.
- **Multilingual reality:** 90% of India is more comfortable in a language other than English.

**Actionable insight:**

Localization is not optional. Multilingual UI, relatable storytelling, and community trust-building are foundational.

## 4. Technological

India is a global pioneer in digital public goods.

- **India Stack:** Aadhaar + eKYC + UPI + DigiLocker = instant onboarding + low-cost operations.
- **AI localization:** Demand for Indic-language AI, voice interfaces, and dialect-sensitive models.
- **ONDC:** Open networks redefining commerce, logistics, and discovery.

**Actionable insight:**

Use India Stack + AI to build frictionless, low-cost, high-scale products for millions.

## 5. Legal

Compliance in India can be painful—but predictable if handled early.

- **Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA):** Consent, data storage, accountability.
- **GST:** E-invoicing, input credits, interstate complexities.
- **IP protection schemes:** Patent assist, startup fast-track, reduced fees.

**Actionable insight:**

Build compliance into the product from day one. Indian regulators reward proactive clarity.

## 6. Environmental

Youth in India increasingly value sustainability.

- Eco-consciousness affects purchasing, brand loyalty, and lifestyle choices.
- ESG visibility helps attract investors, partners, and talent.

**Actionable insight:**

Green practices aren't "good-to-have"—they are strategic differentiators in a competitive landscape.

## B. Internal Landscape (SWOT + Gap Analysis)

To thrive in India's external complexity, a startup must know itself with ruthless honesty.

### Strengths

- **Cost competitiveness:** India's talent and operating costs create natural advantage.
- **Large talent pool:** Engineering and digital talent available at scale.
- **Cultural resilience:** Indian teams operate well under constraint and uncertainty.

## Weaknesses

- **Managerial depth:** Middle-management capability is still maturing.
- **Infrastructure gaps:** Logistics, supply chains, power reliability vary by state.
- **Overreliance on discount-led acquisition:** The startup graveyard is full of companies that grew only because of subsidies.

## Opportunities

- Public digital infrastructure
- Tier-2/3 digital consumers
- Government incentives
- ESG and green innovation
- Social impact sectors

## Threats

- Hyperlocal copycats
- Price-sensitive consumers
- Regulatory unpredictability
- Fragmented supply chains

## Gap Analysis

Founders must align **vision** with **capability**:

- If vision exceeds resources → **Partner** (government, NGOs, corporates).
- If capability exceeds vision → **Expand** strategic aspiration.
- If both are misaligned → **Pivot early** before burning capital.

### Actionable insight:

Bridge capability gaps through government schemes (SIDBI, MSME, NABARD), accelerators, university partnerships, and inclusive hiring (especially neurodiverse talent—a strong and often overlooked asset).

## C. The Jugaad Mindset

*(Inspired by Jugaad Innovation and Indian frugal-engineering traditions)*

Jugaad is often misinterpreted as a shortcut. In its true essence, it is **creative improvisation under constraint**, a powerful source of innovation in emerging markets.

### Core Principles

- **Frugality:** Do more with less.
- **Flexibility:** Adapt quickly to chaos or market shifts.
- **Inclusivity:** Innovate with underserved communities, not merely for them.
- **Empathy:** Understand human behavior, not just metrics.

### Why It Matters

In the Indian startup journey, constraints are not obstacles—they are ignition points for breakthrough innovation.

### Examples

- **Ather Energy:** Localized R&D, battery design, and supply chain for Indian roads and climates—this is premium innovation, not penny-pinching.
- **AgroStar:** Built trust with farmers by using their preferred channel: WhatsApp. Simple, frugal, effective.
- **Zomato's early play:** Partners onboarded via feet-on-street field teams when digital adoption was low.

### Actionable insight:

Make frugality a strategy, not a survival mechanism. India rewards those who innovate under real-world limitations.



## Designing a Winning Playbook: Where to Play and How to Win

***Indian startups win not by copying global playbooks, but by understanding India's unique competitive landscape, creating uncontested value, positioning themselves strategically, and collaborating even with rivals. This section provides founders with a practical, deeply Indianized strategy toolkit to choose the right battlefield and design the right weapons.***

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# A. Industry Analysis (Porter's Five Forces in Indian Sectors)

Porter's Five Forces remains one of the strongest lenses to evaluate competitive intensity but it must be **localized** for the Indian market, which behaves differently from Western economies.

## 1. Threat of New Entrants

- Low digital entry barriers, high imitation risk.
- Cheap cloud infrastructure and abundant talent increase fast replication.
- But **trust** and **distribution** remain hard to crack.

**Indian Reality:** Competition enters fast but dies faster without differentiation.

## 2. Supplier Power

- Highly fragmented supplier ecosystems (retail, agriculture, logistics).
- Negotiation leverage varies drastically across states.
- Startups often must educate and digitize suppliers before scaling.

**Example:** ONDC-based startups need to standardize wildly inconsistent seller data.

## 3. Buyer Power

- Indian consumers are **price-sensitive, value-driven, and impatient**.
- Switching cost is low; loyalty is earned through convenience and trust, not discounts.
- Reviews, referrals, and vernacular content heavily influence purchasing.

**Example:** In e-commerce, consumers switch platforms at the slightest delivery delay.

## 4. Threat of Substitutes

- India has strong informal alternatives (kirana stores, cash lending, local services).
- Digital substitutes rise fast due to rapid smartphone penetration.

**Insight:** The enemy is often not another startup; it's the informal local solution that already works well enough.

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## 5. Industry Rivalry

- Most Indian sectors (food delivery, fintech, edtech) experience **heavy discount wars**, thin margins, and copycat models.
- Winning requires differentiation on technology, trust, or underserved markets.

### Case Example: Swiggy vs. Zomato

- Fierce rivalry, narrow margins, high CAC.
- Scale does not guarantee profitability value innovation does.
- Lesson: Don't play the volume game unless you're built for it.

### Actionable Takeaway:

Choose markets where the forces allow **value-led** growth, not pure capital burn.

## B. Creating Blue Oceans

*(From Blue Ocean Strategy and Zero to One)*

The Indian startup graveyard is full of founders who fought in crowded, red-ocean markets. The path to lasting advantage is in **creating new demand**, not squeezing existing pockets.

### Principles

- **Stop competing; start innovating.**
- Build something 10x better, not 10% cheaper.
- Redefine value: simplicity, access, trust, speed.

### Identify Noncustomers

India's richest opportunities lie in segments most startups ignore:

- **Rural and semi-urban households**
- **Underbanked and credit-invisible citizens**
- **Informal economy workers**
- **People with disabilities or neurodiversities**
- **Elderly and non-English-speaking users**

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These groups represent **millions** of potential customers with unmet needs.

### Example: Navi Finserv

- Reimagined lending with **instant, paperless, collateral-free loans**.
- Product design prioritized speed, transparency, and literacy simplicity.
- Targeted users rejected by traditional banks – a classic Blue Ocean move.

#### Actionable Takeaway:

If your startup can turn *nonconsumption* into *mass adoption*, you are building a monopoly.

## C. Strategic Positioning (Bowman's Strategic Clock)

Bowman's Clock helps founders avoid the dangerous middle ground and consciously choose how customers perceive value relative to price.

### India-Specific Positioning Strategies

#### 1. Low-Price + Acceptable Value

- Works in high-volume categories (FMCG, budget mobility).
- Example: *Jio* disrupted telecom by delivering acceptable quality at unbeatable prices.

#### 2. Hybrid (Moderate Price + High Value)

- Sweet spot for Indian middle-class consumers.
- Example: *boAt* used stylish design + affordability to build an aspirational brand.

#### 3. Differentiation (Premium Price + Unique Value)

- Appeals to rising affluent segments and youth who equate identity with brands.
- Example: *Ather Energy* positioned electric mobility as premium innovation, not cost saving.

### Actionable Guidance

- Avoid pure price wars – India is a battlefield where only giants win on price.
- Deliver disproportionate value relative to cost.
- Use brand storytelling, vernacular marketing, and community-led trust to increase perceived value.

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## D. Co-opetition: The Indian Way

*(Inspired by Co-opetition Strategy)*

In India, ecosystems â?? not individual companies â?? win. Partnerships with competitors, NGOs, state bodies, and local institutions often unlock scale that no startup can achieve alone.

### Why Co-opetition Works in India

- Fragmented markets require shared infrastructure.
- Trust is often mediated by community or government entities.
- NGOs and public institutions open doors to underserved communities.

### Example: Airtel Payments Bank + India Post Payments Bank

- Collaboration enabled last-mile cash-in/cash-out services nationwide.
- Leveraged India Post's physical reach + Airtel's digital backbone.

### Additional Indian Examples

- **UPI ecosystem:** Banks + fintechs + NPCI â?? unified digital payments revolution.
- **Edtech + state governments:** Blended learning at scale.
- **Agritech + FPOs:** Building trust and supply chain reliability.

### Actionable Takeaway

Build alliances early. Collaborate on distribution, data, compliance, and community engagement. In India, collaboration converts friction into distribution power.

Startup business project launch. Idea through planning and strategy, time management, rea

## From Product to Market Fit: Lean, Local, and Frugal Execution

***Indian startups reach productâ??market fit only when they stop building for an imagined user and start***

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***testing in the chaotic, multilingual, price-sensitive, trust-dependent real India. This section shows how to achieve PMF through lean experimentation, precise segmentation, localized growth paths, and pricing innovations uniquely suited to the Indian market.***

## **A. Buildâ??Measureâ??Learn (from *The Lean Startup*)**

India rewards speed, iteration, and humility. The Lean Startup model is not optionalâ??it is the operating system for survival.

### **1. MVPs as Real-World Experiments**

- Build **Minimum Viable Products**, not polished prototypes.
- Test assumptions about value, usability, willingness to pay.
- Validate problemâ??solution fit before spending capital on features.

#### **Indian Reality:**

Your first 100 users will teach you more than any business plan.

### **2. Measure the Right Metrics**

Avoid vanity metrics (downloads, website visits). Focus on:

- **Retention** â?? Will people stay after the hype?
- **Daily/Weekly Active Users** â?? Is the product a habit?
- **CAC vs. LTV** â?? Are you creating a scalable business, not a discount-driven illusion?
- **Referral Rates** â?? Are users bringing others organically?

#### **PMF Indicator in India:**

If users are recommending your product on WhatsApp without incentives, youâ??re onto something.

### **3. Local Testing: The Indian Twist**

India is not one marketâ??it is 30 markets held together by history and shared chaos.

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### Actionable Approach:

Conduct MVPs across at least three environments:

- **Tier-1 urban metros** (digitally mature)
- **Tier-2/3 towns** (value-driven, community-led adoption)
- **Rural clusters** (trust-first, low-friction experiences required)

This prevents metro-bias and builds inclusive, national PMF.

## B. Customer Segmentation and Persona Development

Indian founders often over-index on English-speaking urban youth. But the real opportunity lies in serving **Bharat**, a population governed by affordability, trust networks, and vernacular communication.

### 1. Move Beyond Narrow Segments

Segment not by demographics but by:

- **Digital maturity** (new-to-tech vs. digital-native)
- **Income volatility** (salaried vs. gig vs. informal workers)
- **Cultural context** (language, festival cycles, community values)
- **Trust channels** (WhatsApp, offline agents, local leaders)

### 2. Vernacular and Affordability as Strategic Levers

- Build in Hindi + one regional language to start.
- Add voice UX for low-literacy audiences.
- Use simple flows: fewer screens, fewer taps, fewer decisions.

### 3. Social Proof as a Growth Engine

Trust spreads horizontally before vertically in India.

**Effective Indian social proof channels:**

- WhatsApp group testimonials
- Local micro-influencers
- Teacher, ASHA worker, or shopkeeper endorsements

- 
- Community events in schools, panchayats, small businesses

**Actionable Insight:**

Trust is not bought—it is borrowed from someone the user already believes.

## C. Growth Paths (Ansoff Matrix Adapted for India)

The Ansoff Matrix becomes much more powerful when contextualized for India's fragmented but aspirational market.

### 1. Market Penetration

Deepen reach in existing metro markets before jumping tiers.

- Hyperlocal campaigns
- Referral-led growth
- Partnerships with delivery networks, coworking spaces, colleges

### 2. Market Development

Enter new regions through local enablers:

- Regional distributors
- NGO networks
- Rural entrepreneurs
- State government collaborations

**Example:** Fintechs expanded to the Northeast using local community leaders as trust anchors.

### 3. Product Development

Adapt products to reflect regional tastes, needs, and cultural rhythms.

- Language packs
- Local festival-related features
- Contextual pricing and demand cycles
- Localized UX (e.g., farming calendars, religious timings, vernacular content)

## 4. Diversification

Move into adjacent verticals when you have trust and distribution.

- Edtech → Skilling → Employment
- Fintech → Insurtech → Wealthtech
- Agritech → Supply chain → Rural commerce

### Actionable Insight:

Don't diversify for valuation optics → diversify when your user pulls you there.

## D. Pricing Innovation

Pricing is not math; it is psychology → especially in a country where affordability is everything but cheapness is not admired.

### 1. Sachetization : India's Legendary Innovation

Indians invented micro-pricing before startups made it fashionable.

- Small packs → low risk → high trial → large-scale adoption
- Works for content, courses, software, fintech, consumer goods

### Examples:

- KukuFM's **monthly ₹199 micropayments** create low-friction entry.
- Paytm's **micro recharges** built the habit that led to national scale.
- Razorpay's **per-transaction pricing** helped MSMEs adopt digital payments.

### 2. Micro-Subscriptions

Perfect for tier-2/3 customers who prefer predictable small outflows.

- ₹20/day skilling courses
- ₹150/week premium features
- ₹1/day insurance subscriptions

### 3. Value-Based Pricing

India rewards products that feel like a bargain, not just cheap.

A product must show **10x usefulness for 2x cost**.

**Actionable Insight:**

Your pricing must reflect the middle-class mindset: low-risk entry â?? strong value perception â?? predictable renewal.



## **VI. Building the Organization: Alignment, Culture, and Capability â?? Improved Outline**

### **A. Applying the McKinsey 7S Framework to Indian Startups (Reimagined for the Next Decade)**

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A sharper, practical version tailored to India's unique constraints and opportunities.

### 1. **Strategy: Purpose + Profit + Planet + People**

- Align business goals with social impact (insight from *The Social Entrepreneur's Playbook*).
- Build "dual value propositions": customer ROI + societal ROI.
- Strategy must be assumption-based and validated continuously (*Lean Startup* principle).

### 2. **Structure: Adaptive, Networked, Frugal**

- Move from rigid hierarchies to pod-based execution teams.
- Use India's talent asymmetry: combine senior expertise with young hustlers.
- Leverage fractional CXOs to reduce burn.

### 3. **Systems: Intelligent, Cost-Efficient, Data-Driven**

- Use Indian SaaS ecosystem (Zoho, Freshworks, Kylas, Darwinbox).
- Build dashboards for weekly learning loops (*The Startup Owner's Manual*).
- Standardize onboarding, customer interactions, and sales scripts to achieve consistent execution.

### 4. **Shared Values: Ethical, Inclusive, Long-Term**

- Embed values from day one; do not backfill culture later (*Good to Great*).
- Make "frugality + dignity" the norm.
- Promote accessibility, gender inclusion, neurodiversity. India has untapped talent pools.

### 5. **Skills: Learning Agility + Multidisciplinary Capability**

- Hire for curiosity over credentials.
- Build internal academies or nano-learning systems.
- Encourage T-shaped skill development (one deep skill + broad generalist thinking).

### 6. **Style: Servant Leadership for the Indian Workforce**

- Adopt humility, empathy, and accountability (*Good to Great* Level 5 Leadership).
- Replace command-and-control with coaching-and-context.
- Leaders must spend 50% time on customer reality (*The Startup Owner's Manual* advice).

### 7. **Staff: High-Potential, Mission-Driven, Diversity-First**

- Recruit for "internal drive + mission-fit."
- Reward intrapreneurship, not seniority.
- Tap Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities to build cost-efficient, loyal teams.

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## B. Lessons from *The Startup Owner's Manual*: Operational Excellence After PMF

### 1. Customer Development as a Lifelong Discipline

- Never stop interviewing users—even post-growth.
- Product-market fit is not permanent; markets shift continuously.

### 2. Build Repeatable and Scalable Processes

- Develop GTM playbooks: sales scripts, onboarding flows, feedback loops.
- Document tribal knowledge early before scaling chaos ensues.

### 3. Institutionalize Iterative Learning Loops

- Weekly metrics reviews tied to hypothesis testing.
- Continuous learning cycles: Build → Measure → Learn (*Lean Startup* integration).
- Every team (sales, support, engineering, HR) adopts experimentation culture.

### 4. Cross-Functional Alignment

- Reduce silo behavior through joint OKRs.
- Use customer journey maps to align responsibilities.

## C. Cultural Branding: Building Identity That India Feels, Not Just Buys

### 1. Infuse Indian Cultural Archetypes

- Community-first, resilience, humor, ingenuity (jugaad—but structured).
- Celebrate diversity and the emotional nuance of Indian consumers.

### 2. Study India's Most Iconic Cultural Brands

- **Amul**: Built a multi-decade cultural narrative through satire and cultural commentary.
- **Tata Tea Jaago Re**: Purpose-led storytelling.
- **Fevicol**: Humor + insight into Indian behaviour + consistency.
- Each demonstrates: Brand logo; brand = consistent cultural memory.

### 3. Use Cultural Asset Building Strategy

- Create stories that reinforce social identity, not just utility.
- Use festivals, linguistic diversity, and community rituals as brand touchpoints.

### 4. Become a Meaning-Maker, Not Just a Service Provider

- From *Zero to One*: aim to be a monopoly in meaning, not only in technology.
- Build emotional moats: trust, familiarity, social belonging.

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## D. Building a Mission-Driven, Resilient Organization (Cross-Book Synthesis)

### 1. From Zero to One

- Create a “defensible uniqueness” in culture and capability, not just product features.
- Encourage contrarian thinking within teams: reward ideas that challenge norms.

### 2. From Good to Great

- Get the “right people on the bus” before deciding “where the bus is going.”
- Discipline > motivation. Routines build performance.

### 3. From The Lean Startup

- Replace grand strategies with validated learning.
- Scale only when the model is predictable, measurable, and stable.

### 4. From The Social Entrepreneur’s Playbook

- Bring social mission into everyday execution.
- Build financially sustainable impact, not charity disguised as business.
- Create value for underserved communities as part of your business DNA.

### 5. From Indian Startup Success Patterns

- Frugality + customer obsession + grit consistently outperform glamour.
- Example: Zoho, Zerodha, Freshworks – values-driven, employee-centric, long-term thinkers.



## **VII. Scaling with Sustainability and Social Impact â?? Improved Outline**

### **A. Impact as a Competitive Advantage (Purpose as Strategy, Not Decoration)**

#### **1. Impact as a Moat, Not a Marketing Tagline**

- Indian social enterprises such as **SELCO**, **Rang De**, **Aravind Eye Care**, and **Akshay Patra** demonstrate that solving real problems builds trust, loyalty, and long-term resilience—advantages no discount war can buy.
- From *The Social Entrepreneur's Playbook*: impact-led organizations outperform when they design market mechanisms that solve social frictions at scale.

## 2. Purpose-Driven Execution Enhances Operational Discipline

- *Good to Great*: Core values must be preserved while stimulating progress.
- 
- Impact creates internal discipline because teams rally around shared meaning, not just KPIs.
- Builds morale, retention, and a culture of personal accountability.

## 3. Integrate ESG, SDG, and IRIS+ Metrics Early

- Track environmental footprint, inclusivity, governance, and social outcomes.
- Use accessible frameworks:
  - **ESG for startups**: lightweight scorecards across resource efficiency, labor practices, governance.
  - **SDGs**: map key business activities to SDG 4 (education), SDG 8 (decent work), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 12 (sustainable consumption).
  - **IRIS+** common metrics for transparency in impact measurement.
- Early measurement ensures credibility when approaching investors, CSR donors, and global partners.

## 4. Build Emotional Equity Through Social Relevance

- Brands with purpose create deeper emotional resonance—Amul, Tata Trusts, Zoho's rural hiring model.
- Impact becomes part of the story customers want to associate with.

# B. Funding and Financial Innovation (Building a Sustainable Capital Mix)

## 1. Blend Venture Capital with Philanthropic and Patient Capital

- Social enterprises rarely scale through traditional VC alone due to longer ROI cycles.
- Combine:
  - **Equity capital** for growth
  - **Grants** for experimentation
  - **CSR funds** for community-facing programs

- **Philanthropy** for long-term capacity building
- *Insight from Social Entrepreneur's Playbook*: hybrid capital is essential for scaling impact without compromising on mission.

## 2. Leverage India's Public and Institutional Funding Ecosystem

- **SIDBI Fund of Funds** for MSMEs and startups.
- **BIRAC** for biotech, health, and deep tech innovations.
- **DST, DBT, MeitY** grants for research and technology pilots.
- **State innovation funds**: Karnataka Elevate, Kerala Startup Mission, Maharashtra Startup Innovation Fund.
- These often require structured application processes—build a grant engine early.

## 3. Build Hybrid Capital Structures

- **Impact-linked loans**: repayment tied to social outcomes (education completion, job creation, energy access).
- **Revenue-based financing** for low-margin sectors.
- **Social success notes**: philanthropic underwriting of early risk.
- Structures reduce pressure for hypergrowth while supporting mission fidelity.

## 4. Crowdfunding and Community Ownership

- Platforms like Ketto, Milaap, Rang De micro-investments create community-based capital.
- Builds loyalty, marketing reach, and grassroots credibility.

# C. Ecosystem Collaboration (No Startup Scales Alone in India)

## 1. Leverage India's Innovation Ecosystem

- Engage incubators and accelerators:
  - **T-Hub** (Hyderabad) — large-scale innovation networks
  - **C-CAMP** (Bangalore) — biotech and health-focused R&D
  - **NSRCEL** (IIM Bangalore) — top social enterprise incubator in India
  - **StartupTN, Kerala Startup Mission, a-IDEA**, etc.
- Benefits: mentorship, low-cost infra, early credibility, market connects.

## 2. Collaborate with NGOs to Build Community Trust

- NGOs like **MEDA Foundation** bring access to ground realities, beneficiaries, and social networks that startups cannot build quickly.
- Critical for:
  - Pilots

- Behavior change programs
- Employment generation
- Building inclusive ecosystems for neurodiverse individuals
- Encourage partnerships where NGOs handle community relationships and startups focus on scalable systems.

### 3. Engage Academic R&D for Deep Technical Insight

- IITs, IISc, NITs, design schools, and agricultural universities offer:
  - Joint research projects
  - Labs for prototyping
  - Access to faculty expertise
- From *Zero to One*: deep tech advantage comes from knowledge monopolies?? universities are fertile ground.

### 4. Create Cross-Sector Employment Networks for Inclusion

- Build hiring pipelines with social enterprises, vocational trainers, government skilling programs, and NGOs.
- Inclusive hiring (especially neurodiverse individuals) gives companies a sustained competitive edge in problem-solving diversity, reliability, and creativity.
- This aligns powerfully with the mission of **MEDA Foundation**: sustainable employment and dignity for all.



## VIII. From Startup to Legacy: Institutionalizing Growth and Learning â

# ?? Enhanced Section

## A. Systems Thinking (Creating Organizations That Grow Beyond Their Founders)

### 1. Use Systems, Not Heroics, to Scale

- Startups transition into institutions when they replace "founder energy" with well-designed systems.
- *Good to Great* insight: great companies rely on disciplined people, thought, and action—not charismatic heroism.

### 2. BCG Matrix for Portfolio Intelligence

- As startups expand offerings, use the BCG growth-share matrix to categorize:
  - **Stars** "High-growth, high-share offerings" invest and scale.
  - **Cash Cows** "Stable, high-share" fund innovation.
  - **Question Marks** "High-growth, low-share" evaluate for experimentation vs. exit.
  - **Dogs** "Low-growth, low-share" prune ruthlessly.
- Indian context:
  - Consumer startups often carry too many "Question Marks" due to regional variance—evaluate each geography separately.

### 3. Institutionalize Learning and Documentation

- Every pilot, pivot, and experiment becomes a **repeatable playbook**.
- Codify:
  - What worked
  - What broke
  - Why customer behavior shifted
  - How the team responded
- *The Startup Owner's Manual*: learning loops must be embedded in every function—product, sales, operations, hiring.

### 4. Make "Knowledge Equity" a Core Asset

- Document processes, templates, customer insights, and operational routines.
- Turn internal documents into training academies as you grow—Zoho and Jio have thriving internal universities.
- This builds resilience even as teams change.

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## B. Leadership Evolution (From Founder-Led to Institution-Led Growth)

### 1. Founders Must Shift from Visionaries to Orchestrators

- Early-stage leadership = intensity, invention, improvisation.
- Scaling leadership = delegation, resource orchestration, system design, strategic clarity.
- Transition from "founder doing everything" → "founder building people who build everything."

### 2. Apply *Playing to Win* Continuously

Markets evolve. Customers evolve. Technology evolves.

Thus, the strategy must evolve.

Revisit the core strategic questions every 12-18 months:

- **Where will we play next?**
- **How will we win there?**
- **What capabilities must we build or acquire?**
- **What management systems support the next decade?**

### 3. Build a Second Line of Leadership

- Identify future leaders early → operators, thinkers, culture carriers.
- Use structured mentoring, clarity of ownership, and distributed decision rights.
- *Good to Great*: Level 5 leaders build successors who surpass them.

### 4. Embed Ethical, Purpose-Driven Leadership

- India's next generation of buyers is purpose-sensitive.
- Leadership must embody transparency, fairness, inclusion, and long-term responsibility.
- This is also where **MEDA Foundation's ethos → universal love, inclusive upliftment, and self-sustaining ecosystems → can hugely inspire organizational culture.**

## C. Global Scalability via Indian Strengths (India as the Ultimate Testing Ground)

### 1. India's Diversity Produces Globally Resilient Solutions

- If a product works across India → languages, income levels, connectivity variations, climatic differences → it is robust enough for global markets.
- India's extreme heterogeneity is not a challenge; it is a **competitive advantage.**

## 2. Local Innovation as a Launchpad for Global Markets

- Frugal engineering (inspired by *Jugaad Innovation*) gives startups the efficiency edges global players lack.
- India's digital public goods (UPI, Aadhaar, ONDC, India Stack) are admired globally—solutions built atop them often gain international replicability.
- Example:
  - Indian fintech tools are now exported to Africa and Southeast Asia.
  - Edtech platforms built for low-bandwidth conditions find global adoption.

## 3. Build Cross-Border Alliances Early

- Join global accelerators, innovation labs, and diaspora networks.
- Leverage Indian diaspora talent pools in the US, UK, Middle East, and Singapore for partnerships and new markets.
- Explore global impact funds and ESG/SDG-aligned investors.

## 4. Think Legacy, Not Exit

- *Zero to One*: enduring monopolies come from solving problems no one else is solving.
- A long-term legacy mindset encourages:
  - Patience over vanity growth
  - Stewardship over short-term extraction
  - Vision over opportunism

Flat illustration design social media strategy concept digital marketing startup business. Vector

# IX. Conclusion: Building India's Century Through Startups

India stands at a once-in-a-generation inflection point. The nation's next decade will not be shaped by how many unicorns it produces, but by how many lives its innovators uplift. The true measure of success will be the number of families empowered, the number of underserved communities integrated, and the number of people—especially neurodiverse and marginalized groups—who find meaningful participation in the nation's growth story.

## The Startup Imperative: From Valuation to Value Creation

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India's future belongs to founders who see entrepreneurship not as a profit machine but as a nation-building mission. Strategic clarity will separate noise from signal. Founders who anchor their work in real human needs—healthcare access, skilling, logistics gaps, financial inclusion, clean energy, education for all—will build the enterprises that last for decades, not fundraising cycles.

The path to enduring success is surprisingly simple, though not easy:

**Discover → Validate → Build → Scale → Institutionalize → Give Back.**

Each phase demands rigor, humility, experimentation, and a willingness to unlearn. But when executed well, this roadmap transforms a small idea into a movement, and a startup into a national asset.

## Frugality, Inclusion, and Collaboration: India's Unfair Advantages

India is uniquely positioned to create breakthrough models for the world:

- **Frugal innovation** ensures value at a price the masses can embrace.
- **Inclusive hiring** harnesses untapped human potential—especially neurodiverse individuals who bring unmatched creativity and pattern-recognition capabilities.
- **Cross-sector collaboration** unites startups, corporates, academia, NGOs, and government agencies to solve problems too big for any one entity.

These strengths form the foundation of an innovation ecosystem unlike any other—resilient, compassionate, and deeply future-ready.

## Startups as Architects of India's Century

In the coming decades, India will write a new global narrative—one driven by youth, technology, social conscience, and the audacity to build what the world has not yet imagined.

Founders who embrace this responsibility—who combine strategy with heart, efficiency with empathy, and innovation with integrity—will not only scale successful companies but help define India's destiny.

They won't just build businesses.

They will build India's century.

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# Participate and Donate to MEDA Foundation

Join us in shaping a future where entrepreneurship is inclusive, sustainable, and accessible to all.

Your support helps:

- Create employment and dignity for neurodiverse individuals
- Build self-sustaining ecosystems for marginalized communities
- Enable grassroots innovators to solve real human problems
- Spread universal love, simplicity, and opportunity

Every rupee, every hour volunteered, and every act of compassion strengthens the movement.

Together, we can build an India where no one is left behind.

**Participate. Donate. Transform.**

## Book References

### 1. *The Startup Owner's Manual* by Steve Blank & Bob Dorf

A foundational text on customer development, emphasizing hypothesis testing, market validation, discovery interviews, and lean experimentation before scaling operations.

### 2. *Jugaad Innovation* by Navi Radjou, Jaideep Prabhu & Simone Ahuja

Explores frugal, flexible, and inclusive innovation rooted in Indian ingenuity and constraint-driven creativity.

### 3. *Zero to One* by Peter Thiel

Argues for building monopolies through unique value creation rather than competing in crowded markets; inspires founders to seek unseen opportunities.

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## 4. *The Lean Startup* ?? Eric Ries

Introduces the Build-Measure-Learn loop, MVPs, and validated learning as essential mechanisms to reduce waste and increase speed of innovation.

## 5. *Playing to Win* ?? A.G. Lafley & Roger Martin

Provides a structured framework for defining ??where to play,?? ??how to win,?? the capabilities needed, and the systems required to sustain competitive advantage.

### CATEGORY

1. Entrepreneurship - EcoSystem
2. Entrepreneurship - Training
3. Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development
4. Youth Entrepreneurship Programs

### POST TAG

1. #AtmanirbharBharat
2. #BharatEconomy
3. #BusinessStrategy
4. #DigitalIndia
5. #ecosystembuilding
6. #EntrepreneurshipIndia
7. #ESGIndia
8. #FoundersMindset
9. #FrugalInnovation
10. #FutureOfIndia
11. #ImpactEntrepreneurship
12. #InclusiveGrowth
13. #IndianStartups
14. #IndiaStack
15. #innovationecosystem
16. #Jugaad
17. #LeanStartup
18. #MedaFoundation
19. #NeurodiversityEmployment
20. #ONDC

21. #PlayingToWin
22. #PurposeDrivenStartups
23. #SDGIndia
24. #SocialInnovation
25. #StartupIndia
26. #StartupStrategy
27. #SustainableGrowth
28. #TechForGood
29. #ZeroToOne

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