

pulp-it

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India, believe it or not, is not a country of jugaads

In the past 70 years, businesses have produced several innovations, which have found global acceptance

The Jugaad is a rural transportation vehicle usually built around the engine of a water pump (or motor). Its body is anything that can be found lying around farms—wooden beams and planks, trailer- and tractor-parts. Found predominantly in the northern parts of India, it has become a synonym for Indian ingenuity. Over the years, the term has also acquired some respectability, with Jaideep Prabhu, Navi Radjou, and Simone Ahuja authoring *Jugaad Innovation*, a book that prescribes this wholly Indian hack as a way of creating breakthrough ideas and products.

Radjou, as it turns out, is an Indian, and his surname is the French way of writing Raju. You still encounter such names in Pondicherry. One of my friends was Coumarane (the French way of writing Kumaran). I guess there's a bit of Jugaad in that too.

As someone who has shared the road with Jugaads many times, I don't think the term is particularly flattering. And India is capable of birthing proper innovations, not Jugaads. Indeed, over the past 70 years—yes, this is my contribution to the veritable rash of listicles that everyone is churning out to mark the 70th anniversary of India's Independence—the country has engendered several fundamental innovations, some of which have found global acceptance.

On top of my list is the sachet revolution in packaged consumer products. The now ubiquitous sachet was most probably the invention of a school-teacher turned entrepreneur named Chinni Krishnan. Krishnan himself didn't achieve any great success with his innovations but his sons did. One of them, CK Rajkumar, launched the first shampoo in a sachet (Velvette) in the 1980s. Another, CK Ranganathan, went on to start a company (now CavinKare) that once gave managers at Hindustan Unilever Ltd sleepless nights. It wasn't till the late 1980s/early 1990s that multinational packaged goods companies realised the true potential of the sachet (it made expensive products accessible by offering them in single-use packs, although most Indian consumers ended up

either sharing sachets across members of a family or increasing their life to at least two uses). As the late, great CK Prahalad used to say, this was a classic BoP (or bottom of the pyramid) strategy. Management guru Prahalad came up with the theory that there was a "fortune waiting to be made at the bottom of the pyramid".

In 2007, at an event held to mark India's 60th year of independence, Prahalad made a presentation titled *India@75* on what India could be in 2022. It's a presentation today's policy makers would do well to look up.

Indian software's global delivery model (a term popularised by Infosys Ltd) has to be on the list too. This innovation's most faithful biographer was Thomas Friedman (and Nandan Nilekani, in turn, was his muse). The global delivery model was brought about by data (and knowledge) becoming central to business processes, and inexpensive and efficient communication networks that make the transmission of such data to countries such as India, where they could be analysed, processed and manipulated, by armies of engineers. It is a model whose contemporary relevance is being challenged by Artificial Intelligence and automation but the global delivery model remains an innovation, and it did originate in India.

For my third choice, I am going to pick frugal, or low-cost manufacturing.

Some people may find this difficult to believe but India has always had significant strengths in manufacturing, albeit in pockets. For evidence, one only need look at the long list of Indian companies, starting with Sundaram Clayton Ltd, that have won the Deming Prize. In the late 2000s, Tata Motors Ltd parlayed this, in combination with the typical Indian company's expertise in value engineering, to launch a ₹1 lakh car, the Tata Nano. Irrespective of the fate of the car, that remains a defining moment in the history of manufacturing innovations. Carlos Ghosn, perhaps the world's most respected automobile company CEO, says it opened his mind to the limits of possibility.

There are more interesting business innovations that originated in India, including Bharti Airtel Ltd's decision to outsource information technology, networks, and network management—something no telco anywhere in the world had done before, although some of these became standard practices after—but for me, the three listed above stand out.

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