

immersion INDIA®

FIELD NOTES · SHEET 21

The Constraint Is the Design Brief

What the West Keeps Getting Wrong About Jugaad

JUGAAD · MADURAI · BENGALURU · NATIONWIDE

A roadside workshop. The tools are ordinary; what is being rebuilt was never designed to be rebuilt.

$64m
the Chandrayaan-3 mission
₹615 crore, first to the lunar south pole

~$2,000
an open-heart operation
against six figures in the US

2,000+
cataract surgeries a surgeon
a year, against about 300 in India

$800
a portable ECG machine
replacing a $2,000 machine

> Jugaad is usually translated as a clever hack and dismissed as duct tape. The more useful reading is harder: it is what design looks like when cost is a specification rather than an outcome.

Fix the price and the design has to move. Aravind Eye Care splits the surgeon's work the way a production line does — over 2,000 cataract operations a surgeon a year against roughly 300 elsewhere in India, and half the patients pay nothing.

The same logic goes to orbit: Chandrayaan-3 landed near the lunar south pole for ₹615 crore. And it travels back — GE built an $800 portable ECG for Indian clinics, then sold the idea into rich markets.

THE SIGNAL TO WATCH Whether cost-first design appears in your own industry's roadmaps. It will not arrive labelled jugaad.

Make India your classroom

A field guide for global executive education. Turn over for the site visits, the questions for the room and what we run.

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BENGALURU, KARNATAKA, INDIA

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Bring the cohort to the case.

Every sheet in this series is a place you can stand in. The dark store, the fab, the swap kiosk, the mandi, the GCC floor — all of them within a day of Bengaluru, and all of them take visitors.

Field Notes is a series on the forces shaping India now, designed to give decision-makers exploring India the right perspective before they commit to it. Each one takes a single force, gives you the argument and the four numbers that anchor it, and names the places in India where you can go and stand in front of it. The series is drawn from *The India That Is Unique*, Immersion India's field guide for global executive education.

ON THE GROUND — JUGAAD

Aravind Eye Hospital, Madurai
An assembly line applied to surgery. It takes visitors.

Narayana Health City, Bengaluru
Cardiac surgery at volume, with published outcomes.

A roadside workshop
Repair, reuse and substitution as daily practice.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR THE ROOM

01 Jugaad is praised as ingenuity and criticised as compromise. Where is the line between frugal and unsafe, and who gets to draw it?

02 Aravind and Narayana cut price by changing who does which task, not by buying cheaper inputs. Which tasks in your own industry are done by the most expensive person in the room purely out of habit?

03 Reverse innovation assumes a product built for a poor market can win in a rich one. When has that worked in your sector, and when has it failed?

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READS WELL WITH

06 Startups & Unicorns
20 The Health System

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