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Nation Building Through the Lens of Design Thinking

A perspective on how design thinking, technology, and business principles can be combined to create scalable models for rural India, with the larger vision of nurturing an entrepreneurial ecosystem that can fuel the nation's growth



Arun Jain
Founder, Polaris Group and Chairman & MD, Intellect Design Arena Ltd

ARUN JAIN

I have always believed that the true purpose of leadership is not just to build successful enterprises but also to create models that strengthen society. At Intellect, I have seen how 'design thinking' can shape powerful digital platforms for banks and financial institutions across the world. The same question has guided my social journey: could design thinking be applied to one of India's most complex challenges, rural transformation?

That question took me to Yavatmal in Maharashtra in 2016. It was here, while listening to farmers and their families, that I realised the limitations of piecemeal interventions. What was required was not charity but a structured, holistic model that enabled communities to take ownership of their future. That experience became the foundation of Mission Samridhi.

Mission Samridhi is built on empathy translated into action. We created a Community Development Framework that places the Gram Panchayat at the centre of transformation. The framework

focuses on five dimensions: personal, social, economic, ecological and institutional development. It uses measurable indicators, a self-assessment process and a five-year cycle, making change both structured and replicable.

The philosophy is simple: celebrate what works, connect communities with resources and technologies, and catalyse change by building competence and confidence. Over time, this approach has shown remarkable results. Villagers have drafted their own Gram Panchayat development plans, converged government schemes, shifted from chemical to natural farming, revived water bodies and adopted waste management practices. Youth have taken up leadership roles, while adolescent girls have participated in programmes on health and self-confidence.

The cultural changes have been even more powerful. In Sonbhadra, Gram Sabhas have passed resolutions to stop child marriages and curb alcohol production. Families have broken long-standing barriers by conducting marriages within the community without costly

rituals. These shifts, owned by the people themselves, show that transformation becomes sustainable only when it is community-led.

Mission Samridhi today works across seven states, covering hundreds of clusters and thousands of villages. With the support of NGOs, experts and foundations, the model has scaled collaboratively. The Samridhi Yatra has become a catalyst for inspiration, proving that seeing transformation firsthand can spark belief and action in other communities.

For me, Mission Samridhi is proof that design thinking is not confined to products or enterprises. It can also be the basis for nation-building. By inspiring communities to design their own future, we are laying the foundation for a replicable model of prosperity that can help India move closer to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

About the Author:

Arun JAIN is a 'Design Thinking' advocate dedicated to building institutions, inspiring communities, and shaping India's journey toward inclusive growth