

Design in India: A new chapter in India's manufacturing revolution

The call for 'Design in India' marks a new chapter in India's manufacturing revolution.

by  **Sujatha Vishnuraj** | August 18, 2024 SHARE     



India's journey towards becoming a global manufacturing hub has been marked by several landmark initiatives, most notably the 'Make in India' and 'Made in India' campaigns. These slogans have defined the country's industrial ambitions and reshaped its economic landscape over the past decade. However, in a significant shift, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently called for a new mantra: 'Design in India.' This call, made during India's Independence Day celebrations, signals a transformative vision beyond manufacturing to encompass innovation, creativity, and intellectual property. Let's explore what 'Design in India' means for the earlier slogans of 'Make in India' and 'Made in India,' and how this new direction could impact the future of Indian manufacturing.

From 'Make in India' to 'Design in India'

The 'Make in India' initiative, launched in 2014, was a clarion call for the world to recognise India as a manufacturing powerhouse. The campaign aimed to boost manufacturing, create jobs, attract foreign investment, and transform India into a global manufacturing hub. It sought to increase the manufacturing sector's contribution to the GDP from 16% to 25% and create 100 million jobs by 2022.

'Make in India' brought about significant changes in the manufacturing landscape. The government streamlined regulations, improved ease of doing business, and attracted significant foreign direct investment (FDI). As a result, India became one of the most attractive destinations for global manufacturers, with companies like Apple, Samsung, and Boeing setting up manufacturing units in the country.

Parallel to 'Make in India' was the 'Made in India' narrative, which focused on producing goods that could be proudly labelled 'Made in India.' This slogan aimed to boost domestic production, reduce reliance on imports, and encourage Indian consumers to buy locally produced goods. 'Made in India' complemented 'Make in India' by fostering a sense of national pride and self-reliance.

While these initiatives succeeded in enhancing India's manufacturing capabilities, they primarily focused on production rather than innovation. The emphasis was on assembling and manufacturing products designed elsewhere, leading to concerns about India's dependence on foreign technology and intellectual property. This is where 'Design in India' comes into play, representing the next logical step in India's manufacturing evolution.

The significance of 'Design in India'

'Design in India' marks a shift from merely being a manufacturing hub to becoming a global centre of innovation and creativity. It recognises that in today's competitive global economy, the true value lies in designing and creating unique, technologically advanced products tailored to the needs of diverse markets. By focusing on design, India aims to move up the value chain from producing goods to creating cutting-edge technologies and solutions.

Designing in India means fostering a culture of innovation, where Indian companies and entrepreneurs take the lead in conceptualising, designing, and developing products that are not only 'Made in India' but also 'Designed in India.' This involves creating indigenous intellectual property, developing advanced technologies, and establishing India as a global leader in product design.

The 'Design in India' initiative is also closely aligned with the goals of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India), which emphasises self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on foreign technologies. By promoting design and innovation, India can reduce its reliance on imported technologies and intellectual property, thereby enhancing its strategic autonomy and economic resilience.

The intersection of 'Make in India,' 'Made in India,' and 'Design in India'

While 'Design in India' represents a new direction, it still needs to negate the importance of 'Make in India' and 'Made in India.' Instead, it complements and enhances these initiatives by adding a new dimension to India's manufacturing aspirations.

- From assembly to innovation:** 'Make in India' focused on manufacturing and assembly, attracting global companies to set up production facilities in India. However, much of the value addition in these processes occurred outside India, where products were designed and technologies were developed. 'Design in India' aims to bring this value addition within India, ensuring that Indian companies are not just assembling products but also designing and innovating them. This shift can lead to the creation of high-value jobs, the development of new technologies, and the establishment of India as a global innovation hub.
- Enhancing 'Made in India':** The 'Made in India' initiative sought to promote domestic manufacturing and reduce import dependence. 'Design in India' enhances this by ensuring that the products labelled 'Made in India' are manufactured in India and conceived and designed here. This can lead to the creation of products uniquely suited to Indian needs and preferences, boosting consumer confidence in domestic brands and fostering a sense of national pride.
- Building a knowledge economy:** The transition from 'Make in India' to 'Design in India' is a step towards building a knowledge-based economy. By focusing on design and innovation, India can develop its intellectual property, which can be leveraged to create new revenue streams through licensing, patents, and exports. This can also attract high-quality FDI, as global companies seek to collaborate with Indian firms on research and development (R&D) and design projects.
- Strengthening the manufacturing ecosystem:** 'Design in India' can also strengthen India's manufacturing ecosystem by promoting collaboration between industries, research institutions, and academia. This can lead to the development of new technologies, processes, and products that enhance the competitiveness of Indian manufacturers. For instance, the automotive industry, which has been a significant beneficiary of 'Make in India,' can gain from 'Design in India' by developing indigenous electric vehicle (EV) technologies, reducing reliance on foreign technology, and positioning India as a leader in the global EV market.

Challenges and opportunities

While 'Design in India' presents significant opportunities, it also comes with its own set of challenges. Developing a robust design and innovation ecosystem requires substantial R&D, education, and infrastructure investment. India's current R&D spending is relatively low compared to other major economies, and there is a need for greater public and private sector investment in this area.

Moreover, fostering a culture of innovation requires a shift in mindset. Indian companies, particularly SMEs & MSMEs, need to recognise the importance of design and invest in building their design capabilities. This may involve hiring skilled designers, collaborating with research institutions, and adopting advanced technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and 3D printing.

Another challenge is the need for intellectual property protection. As India develops its technologies and designs, protecting these innovations through patents and trademarks becomes crucial. Strengthening India's intellectual property laws and enforcement mechanisms will be essential to safeguarding the interests of Indian innovators and encouraging further investment in design and innovation.

On the other hand, 'Design in India' also opens up new avenues for collaboration. Global companies looking to tap into India's vast market can partner with Indian firms to co-design products tailored to Indian consumers. This can lead to the development of innovative products that cater to both domestic and international markets, further boosting India's exports and global competitiveness.

The way forward

To realise the vision of 'Design in India,' a multi-faceted approach is required. The government, industry, and academia must work together to create an environment conducive to innovation and design. This includes:

- Policy support:** The government should provide policy support for R&D, innovation, and design. This includes tax incentives for R&D expenditure, design project grants, and research institution funding. Additionally, the government should focus on improving intellectual property protection and streamlining regulatory processes to encourage innovation.
- Skill development:** Building a skilled workforce is crucial for the success of 'Design in India.' The education system should be reoriented to emphasise creativity, design thinking, and innovation. This could involve introducing design and innovation courses at the school and university levels, promoting vocational training in design-related fields, and encouraging industry-academia collaboration.
- Infrastructure development:** Developing world-class design and innovation infrastructure is essential for the success of 'Design in India.' This includes setting up design centres, innovation hubs, and research parks that provide the necessary resources and facilities for designers and innovators to thrive. The development of digital infrastructure, such as high-speed internet and cloud computing, is critical for supporting digital design and innovation.
- Promoting collaboration:** Collaboration between industry, academia, and research institutions is key to driving innovation. The government should encourage partnerships between Indian companies and global firms, research institutions, and universities to foster the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and technology. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can also play a vital role in promoting innovation and design.
- Fostering a culture of innovation:** Finally, fostering a culture of innovation requires a shift in mindset. Indian companies, particularly SMEs, need to recognise the value of design and innovation and invest in building their capabilities. This may involve adopting new technologies, experimenting with new business models, and encouraging a culture of creativity and risk-taking.

Conclusion

By embracing design and innovation, India can move up the value chain, create high-value jobs, and establish itself as a global leader in product design and technology.

However, realising this vision requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders – government, industry, and academia. With the right policies, investments, and mindset, India can become not just the factory of the world, but also the design centre of the world.