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The Invisible Nation-Builder

Dr. Sanjay Agarwal spent 38 years building the highways and townships India travels on. Now he's teaching the next generation how to build what comes next.

Every morning, millions drive highways they don't know he built. They live in townships whose foundations he poured. Infrastructure builders remain invisible—but their work connects nations.

In 1986, when Dr. Sanjay Agarwal graduated from Manipal Institute of Technology, India was barely emerging from License Raj stagnation. He joined IRCON International, the Ministry of Railways' construction arm, as Assistant Project Manager, beginning a 38-year journey paralleling India's physical transformation. From Asia's largest Rail Coach Factory in Kapurthala to major bridges and Jakarta developments, the IRCON years taught him that Indian infrastructure required not just engineering but stakeholder management mastery—navigating bureaucracy, coordinating contractors, managing acquisition.

Then came 1999: India's highway revolution. Golden Quadrilateral. Build-Operate-Transfer models. Agarwal moved to IJM Corporation, leading the Malaysian giant's Indian push. Over sixteen years, he produced 5,000+ lane kilometers across multiple BoT projects, handling both EPC contractor and developer roles. "People think infrastructure is concrete

and steel," he observes. "It's actually about relationships. Every kilometer involves hundred negotiations, thousand compromises. Engineering is straightforward. The human dimension is complex."

In 2008, he established Team Universal Infratech, growing it to ₹2,200+ crore projects. IJM called him back for a bigger challenge: leading India operations (2015-2024). He built mega townships across Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Nagpur, managing international teams and thousand-crore projects, earning Honorary Doctorate in Construction Science from University of De Milano.

In April 2024, Dr. Agarwal stepped back from execution to focus on mentorship. SA Associates, his consultancy, isn't a typical advisory firm—it's knowledge transfer institution. "I've spent 38 years handling highways, bridges, railways, buildings, and townships. Today I mentor others to build India's next infrastructure phase. Experience alone doesn't create leaders. Someone must teach pattern recognition, stakeholder navigation, and crisis management textbooks doesn't cover."

Recognition followed: FLUXX Conference Middle East Hall of Fame (Doha 2025), India's Greatest Brands

& Leaders award (Dubai 2023). But he measures success differently: "Infrastructure builders remain invisible. Highways, townships we created serve millions who never know our names. Nation-building satisfaction transcends individual recognition."

His mentorship emphasizes creating stakeholder value, filling leadership gaps through collaborative strategy, and maintaining ethical foundation. "I tell aspiring leaders: failures are stepping stones. Have courage to start again. Ethics and hard work are the foundation. Technical brilliance without integrity builds nothing lasting."

As India Today marks 50 years, Dr. Agarwal's journey embodies infrastructure evolution. The highways don't carry his name. Townships don't feature plaques. But every kilometer of 5,000+ he produced, every family in townships he built—these are monuments more lasting than marble. Through SA Associates, he ensures the next generation builds even better, teaching them infrastructure isn't just engineering achievement but nation-building responsibility. In an era celebrating tech entrepreneurs, builders like Dr. Agarwal remind us India's transformation required decades-long commitment to connecting everything else.