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SME DRONE PLAYBOOK

A STRATEGIC GUIDE TO BUILDING,
SCALING & LEADING IN INDIA'S
DRONE ECONOMY



MARKET INSIGHTS
& TRENDS



INVESTMENT
OPPORTUNITIES



BUSINESS MODELS
& STRATEGIES



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THE SME PLAYBOOK FOR INDIA'S DRONE ECONOMY

*A Commercially Actionable Guide for Investors with ₹50 Lakh–
5 Crore*

Techadyant Labs

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Chapter 1: Executive Summary

1.1 The Opportunity in Brief

India's drone economy has crossed the Rubicon. What was once a niche, experimental sector has matured into a structured, regulated, and commercially viable industry with 38,500+ registered drones, 39,890 DGCA-certified remote pilots, and 244 approved training organisations as of February 2026. The ecosystem now encompasses manufacturers, software developers, service providers, training institutions, and a unified digital regulatory framework.

The India drones market was valued at USD 797.83 million in 2025 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 17.30% through 2035, reaching approximately USD 3.93 billion. Commercial drones alone were valued at USD 878.53 million in 2025. Defence and government segments lead the market, but agriculture, logistics, infrastructure, and inspection services are scaling rapidly.

Why this report matters now:

Three converging forces create a unique window of opportunity:

1. Policy tailwinds — The PLI scheme (₹120 crore outlay, 20% value addition incentive) has already benefitted MSMEs, and Budget 2026 is expected to introduce a ₹10,000 crore manufacturing-focused incentive scheme under Drone Shakti, combining 10–15% capex subsidies with output-linked incentives.
2. Regulatory maturity — Simplified type certification, the DigitalSky single-window platform, and expanded permissions have reduced entry barriers.
3. Market pull — From Operation Sindoor's defence procurement urgency to Namo Drone Didi's 1,094 drones deployed with women SHGs, demand is broad-based and accelerating.

The ₹50 lakh–₹5 crore sweet spot: This capital range is neither too small to be irrelevant nor too large to require institutional backing. It is the **SME sweet spot** — sufficient to build a credible operation in MRO, training, inspection services, or software, and enough to enter component manufacturing or fleet operations with a phased approach.

1.2 Key Findings

Market Sizing Summary

Metric	Value
India drones market (2025)	USD 797.83M – 1,316.48M (varies by definition)
Projected market (2030–2035)	USD 1.39B – 3.93B
CAGR (2025–2035)	8.45% – 24.4%
Commercial drones (2025)	USD 878.53M
Registered drones (Feb 2026)	38,500+
Certified pilots (Feb 2026)	39,890
DGCA-approved RPTOs	244 (as of Feb 2026)

Sources: Expert Market Research, Research and Markets, IMARC, TechSci Research

Segment-by-Segment Opportunity Assessment

Table 1 — Summary — Segment-by-Segment Opportunity Assessment

Segment	Investment Required	Gross Margin	Payback	SME Suitability
Manufacturing (Components)	₹2–5 Cr	25–40%	24–36 mo	Moderate
MRO	₹50L–2 Cr	30–50%	12–18 mo	Very High
Fleet Operations	₹1–5 Cr	25–45%	18–30 mo	High
Training	₹50L–2 Cr	40–60%	12–18 mo	Very High
Payload Systems	₹3–5 Cr	30–50%	30–48 mo	Low–Moderate
Software	₹1–4 Cr	60–85%	12–24 mo	High
Infrastructure	₹50L–5 Cr	20–40%	24–48 mo	Moderate
Inspection Services	₹50L–3 Cr	35–55%	12–24 mo	Very High



Figure 1 — Segment opportunity at a glance

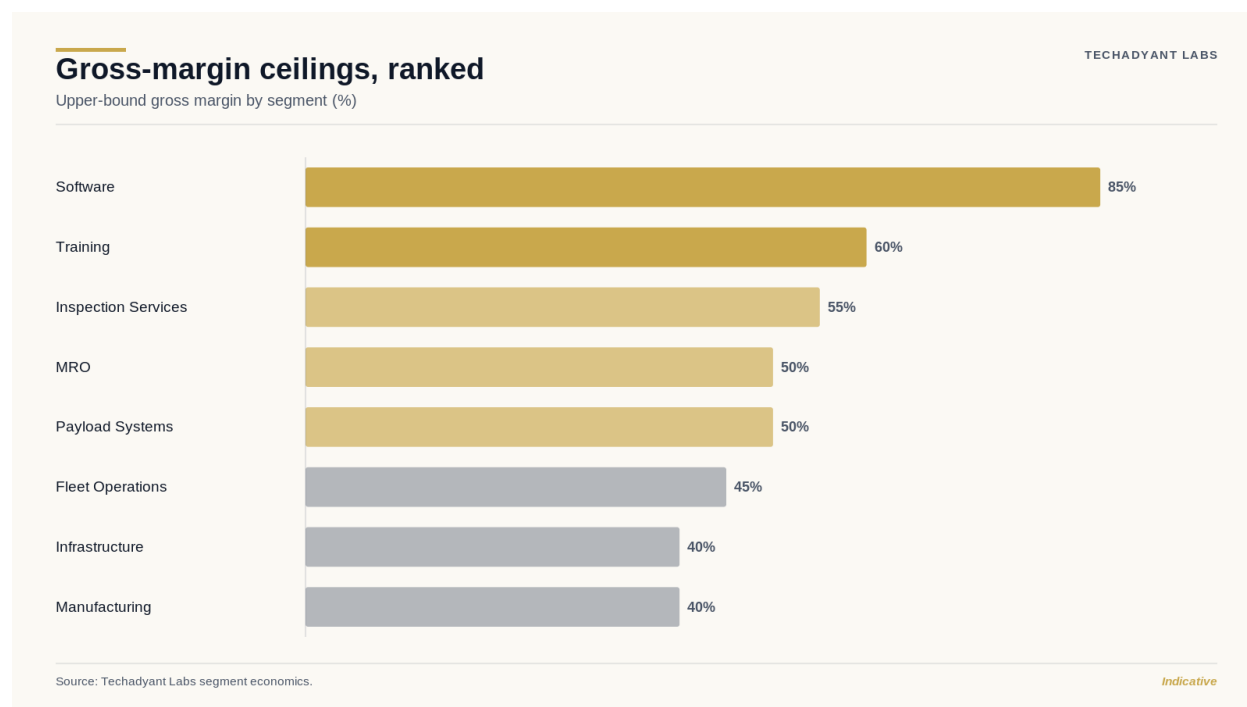


Figure 2 — Gross-margin ceilings, ranked

Policy Tailwinds at a Glance

Existing PLI Scheme (2021–2024):

- Outlay: ₹120 crore over 3 years
- Incentive: Up to 20% of value addition

- MSME eligibility: ₹2 crore turnover (drones), ₹50 lakh (components)
- Component coverage: Airframe, propulsion, batteries, flight control, communication systems, cameras, sensors, spraying systems, and more

Proposed PLI 2.0 / Drone Shakti (Expected Budget 2026):

- Outlay: ~₹10,000 crore over 5 years
- Structure: Two-tier (10–15% capex subsidy + 10–15% output-linked)
- Domestic content requirement: 50–60%
- Localisation target: 40% of critical components by FY 2027–28

1.3 The Actionable Takeaway — By Investor Profile

Investor Profile	Recommended Entry Point	Rationale
Defence-sector aligned SME	Manufacturing (components) + Payload Systems	Operation Sindoor accelerated defence procurement; iDEX and DRDO programmes accessible
Agri-tech focused entrepreneur	Fleet Operations (agri-spraying) + Training	Namo Drone Didi (1,094 drones deployed); 15,000 SHGs targeted
Technology-first founder	Software + Payload Systems	Lowest capital intensity, highest scalability; SaaS margins 60–85%
Services-led operator	Inspection Services + MRO + Training	Low entry barriers, quick payback, relationship-based moats
Component manufacturer diversifying	Manufacturing + MRO	Leverage existing capabilities; PLI incentives available

1.4 How to Use This Report

For the strategic decision-maker: Read Chapters 1–3 for the macro picture and investment framework, then the chapter most relevant to your profile.

For the operational planner: Each segment chapter (4–11) contains a detailed **Actionable Entry Roadmap** with step-by-step guidance.

For the risk-conscious investor: Chapter 12 synthesises the comparative analysis with risk mitigation strategies.

For the policy advocate: Chapter 13 provides strategic recommendations for ecosystem development.

1.5 Visual Summary: The Drone Economy Value Chain

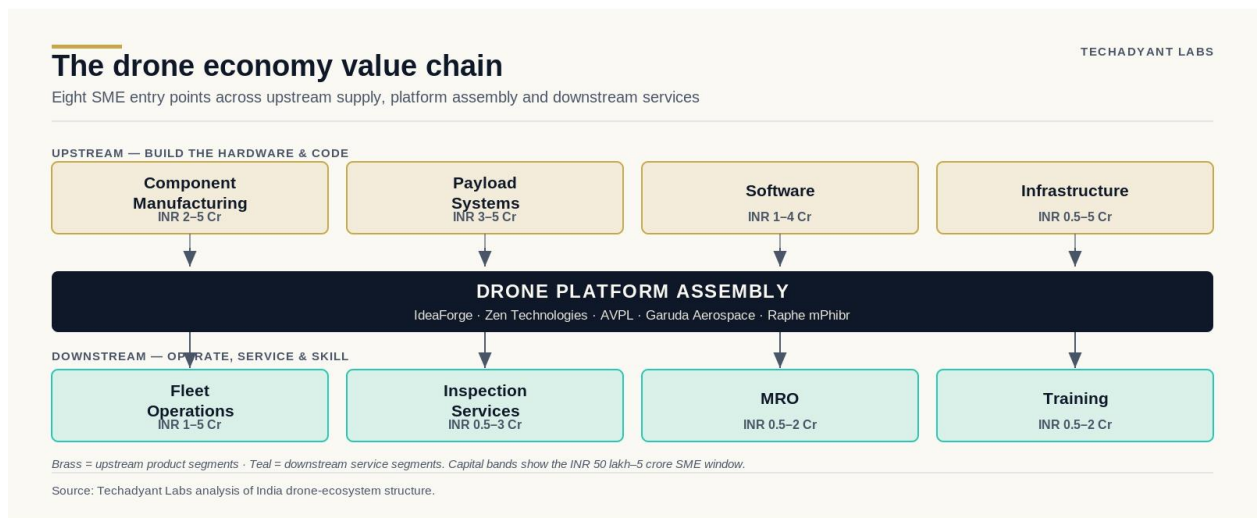


Figure 3 — The drone economy value chain

Appendix D — Glossary

Term	Definition
BVLOS	Beyond Visual Line of Sight — drone operations beyond the pilot's visual range
DaaS	Drone-as-a-Service — service-based drone operations model
DGCA	Directorate General of Civil Aviation — India's aviation regulator
DLI	Design Linked Incentive — proposed incentive for indigenous design
EO/IR	Electro-Optical/Infrared — sensor payloads for surveillance
FPV	First-Person View — drone piloting using onboard camera feed
GeoAI	Geospatial Artificial Intelligence — AI applied to geospatial data
IDEX	Innovations for Defence Excellence — defence innovation ecosystem
LiDAR	Light Detection and Ranging — 3D mapping technology
MRO	Maintenance, Repair & Overhaul — aftermarket services
MSME	Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
NPNT	No Permission, No Takeoff — mandatory pre-flight authorisation
PLI	Production-Linked Incentive — government incentive scheme
RPTO	Remote Pilot Training Organisation — DGCA-approved training provider
SHG	Self-Help Group — women's collective under government programmes
UAN	Unique Authorization Number — manufacturer registration
UAS	Unmanned Aircraft System — complete drone system
UIN	Unique Identification Number — drone registration
UTM	Unmanned Traffic Management — airspace management system
VLOS	Visual Line of Sight — drone operations within pilot's visual range

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