

Mover & shaker of big hauling — a South side story

Chandramohan 'S Namakkal Transport Carriers is one of the largest players in the over dimensional segment of the freight industry



As an entrepreneur, K Chandramohan has often taken risks that make others shy away. In December 2002, the founder of Namakkal Transport Carriers (NTC) got a call from KP Ajit Menon, a senior executive at wind turbine manufacturer Vestas Wind Technology. 'Could Chandramohan transport a 1.65MW turbine from Gujarat to Tamil Nadu?' Menon asked the businessman. Chandramohan said, "Yes." This was the break that the entrepreneur needed to take NTC, which was then five years old, to the big league.

"It was the largest turbine to be transported till then in India. The original transporter had backed out, given the complications. But Chandramohan took on the challenge and delivered," recounts Menon, who later joined Chandramohan at NTC.

Bets like these have helped the 44-year-old Chairman and CEO make NTC one of the largest players in the over dimensional consignment (ODC) segment of India's freight transport industry. Shipping ODC cargo involves transporting heavy objects such as turbines and blades of a wind mill. NTC, which now has a fleet of over 500 vehicles, had a turnover of Rs. 400 crore in fiscal 2014. Its net profit margin was 11 per cent. "As the economy was sluggish in the last two years, our revenues also stagnated. But we expect to touch the Rs. 1,000-crore mark in revenues by fiscal 2016," says Chandramohan.

Starting from Namakkal

Growing up in Namakkal, a transport hub in central Tamil Nadu, Chandramohan was in awe of trucks and trailers plying on the road. "I dreamt of starting a transport company," says the entrepreneur, who had finished his Diploma in Automobile Engineering from a polytechnic college near Namakkal.

The opportunity came after stints at Namakkal Trailer Owners' Association, an industry body, and Junior Chamber International, an international non-governmental organisation. "I had saved about Rs. 4 lakh and, in 1997, moved to Chennai to start a transport company," says Chandramohan, whose father was a farmer. The young entrepreneur struggled initially, often travelling 200 km a day

on his second-hand Vespa scooter, meeting prospective clients. “Once, after giving Diwali bonus to my staff, I just had Rs. 50 in my pocket,” he recounts.

Through these years, he built a team that has stuck by him. He also integrated the business and set up service Centres in seven cities. “To reduce our dependence on others and reduce transport time, we make most of our trailers in the service Centres,” says Menon. NTC has warehouses to cater to its clients’ distribution requirement. “We want to be a single-window solution provider for all of our clients’ needs,” says Chandramohan, who plans to raise Rs. 150 crore through an initial public offering later this year. In 2012, the promoter had sold a 10 per cent stake in NTC to the Spain-based logistics major Kaleido. “We wanted to take NTC international, and Kaleido has an excellent network,” explains Menon.

Transporting huge parts of a power or a steel plant is cumbersome and time consuming. The trailers, some of which have up to 100 wheels, often move at a speed of one km per hour. Given India’s poor infrastructure, companies are forced to build roads and – like in NTC’s case – even a bridge. To overcome these challenges, Chandramohan has created teams that conduct surveys of routes and construction of roads. A helpline uses GPS to track each truck, which is installed with cameras.

The captains

While these steps helped improve his service, Chandramohan realized early that the backbone of the company is its drivers, whom he calls ‘Captains.’ One of them is K Natarajan. A 13-year veteran in the company, Natarajan has been selected as the ‘Best Driver of the year’ and will be awarded on Driver’s Day in April. “Money comes and goes, but the most important thing is respect. Unlike in other companies, in NTC we drivers get respect,” says Natarajan, over the phone from rural Madhya Pradesh where he is on the road. “On Driver’s Day, with five years of experience get Rs. 20,000 from the company. Those with over 10 years of work get 1,500 sqft plot in Namakkal,” adds Natarajan.

And Chandramohan ‘S aim? “To be India’s Mammoet, the \$2-billion Dutch major.”