

# Sagar Sandesh

Guiding Spirit to Shipping Industry

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KANOOSHIPPING

## Talk with Nikolai Norman, CCO and Capt. Amresh Jha, VP of Kanoo Shipping

**S**agar Sandesh (SS)- Mr. Nikolai, how do you reflect on your 24 years of career in the Shipping Services industry and the important learning during your career.



Mr. Nikolai Norman, CCO

NN- Looking back at my career I was grateful when I commenced my career in shipping, I did not call myself a Seaman or a Sailor but I had an opportunity to be on board and sail on a small bulk carrier for 11 months early in my career, trading around Europe in the Mediterranean, **these have been great attributes** to understand better what a ship requires calling a port and services rendered. Later I worked for 2 well-known Shipowners in London as well as a ship brokering house all adding additional experience. That being said, my career took off when joining a large global ship agency

house, spent some years in the Black Sea (Russia & Ukraine) and Asia prior to UAE where I am still located. When you are young and eager your mindset and patience are not always your best friend. You have to learn by trade as you go along the value over the years meeting people from different cultures. Being a typical northern European, you need to have an open mindset and you must try to be receptive and show respect for the different people you meet in all corners of the world. What I have learned is that you need to have patience and even with good intentions to achieve like many businesses, relationship plays a big role. You don't develop a relationship by meeting someone the first time, you create trust by meeting and creating value over time. When I meet young people, I say there is nothing wrong to meet potential customers 4, 5, and 6 times and you must not give up because you are the one that must build the trust for the door to open. In my career, many times you must accept to be next in line when our competitor makes a mistake or an operational shortcoming takes place and an opportunity will arise. Only trust and respect are not going to give you business, **you have to create value over and above your**

competition. Never forget that a ship agent plays an important role in the local port on behalf of cargo and vessel owners.

SS- Tell us about the growth

story/ achievements of Kanoo Shipping.

NN- Every time I say this, it

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## Talk with Nikolai Norman, CCO and Capt. Amresh Jha,..... FROM PAGE : 1

surprises me that Kanoo Group was established in 1890 and Kanoo Shipping commenced operation in 1911 in Bahrain. I have lived in the middle east for more than 20 years, it surprises me to learn that Kanoo Shipping commenced as a ship agency house in 1911, 111 years ago! Yes, we are the oldest local regional ship agency house and it took us 100 years to migrate and diversify our business outside the Middle East to nearby countries. Five years ago we decided to acquire a network of port offices in South Africa that has been a very successful acquisition. A fully-fledged network of offices in South Africa and a strong knowledge base, bearing in mind our people and human capital remain our most important

assets in our industry. During the last 5 years, South Africa has gone from strength to strength combining traditional agency services and certain niche businesses, which we are very proud of. We are the preferred, exclusive agent for a number of polar institutes' seasonal research trips to the Antarctic, it is quite interesting to see every year from October to April where we assist polar institutes from England and Norway in supporting the annular expedition in Antarctica. It is prestigious and gives a lot of publicity as well as seeing The Kanoo Flag blowing in the wind in Antarctica every year. **SS- How did the idea of establishing of office in India in 2019 come in.**

**NN-**It's the trading relations between India and

the Middle East that made our decision to enter India a "no brainer". If you start to count the flights between Dubai and various cities in India, an enormous number of flights that tells you the number of people moving indicates the amount of trade and business taking place every day. In the oil industry, we know an enormous amount of petroleum-related products move to India and we know that an enormous amount of bulk commodities move from the Middle East to India. **Over the last number of years, trade has become mutual, it is seen that the commodities move both ways.** A big question for us when we discussed how to open up in India, and we could see three ways 1. we could partner with an established Indian agency house 2. We could



Capt. Amresh Jha, VP

acquire one or more agency houses in India and 3. We could set out a strategy to grow organically. **We chose the latter one.** Be humble, we had a platform to start from. Naturally, Mumbai is a good location to start from, based on the business we had in-house. As I said earlier the people are everything in our industry, to think that we could sit in the Middle East and open an operation in India, was

not possible so we were blessed that we were able to convince **Capt. Amresh Jha** to take home this project based on organic strategy and moving forward step by step. **Our strategy was very simple in the sense that we will strengthen our service offer, and open new offices by following our customers, so as soon as they can see potential in a certain port and have the business to justify the investment, we will open the office and that is where we are now.** We are also opening an office in Paradip, East coast of India. **Our strategy is not to have as many offices as possible, but open offices and ensure that we are positioned with our own people and Kanoo brand in ports which we believe there is a demand from our customers.**

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We can safely say that India is a complex country and there are a couple of things we can look back at number one organic growth was the right approach for us, and number two we are very sure that had we entered into a local partnership with an established Indian agency house we will never be close to where we are today, we will probably be fighting for survival without any brand identity. Having said this, it has been an enormous success, we are pleased and proud at the same time to go back to our owners and show them from day one **the operation has been contributing to the group. It has been a success story in the history of Kanoo,** no doubt about that.

**SS- For a family-owned business started more than a century ago, how has Kanoo managed various transformations, including the digital challenge?**

**NN-**Kanoo shipping belongs to as I said earlier, a group of operating companies 100% owned by the Kanoo family and that comes with pros and cons, to be part of a family group. We as Kanoo Shipping, are sort of fighting for attention against 6/7 other operating companies when it comes to investments in our business and technology. We are like the industry we operate within, the shipping industry, nor ship agents is famous for being front runners in technology advancement. We clearly understand that we will not be in the industry tomorrow if we do not invest in technology. One way in which we can be blessed is that we are not the only player within our industry that has been

lacking when it comes to investments in technology, digitalization, and the adoption of new methods in form of increased efficiency. Our industry is catching up during the last 2 to 3 years more and more. It is probably the best-kept secret that **we have a very strong operational platform experiencing continuous software development and without it, you cannot function when you handle 20,000 port calls a year as a regional ship agency house.** We have been able to optimize our operational platform **Kanoo Port Interface (KPI) to meet certain customer expectations.** It's a fully web-based solution that is easy for our customers to use and more importantly it gives our staff, a more standardized and easier way of communicating with our customers, providing data and market intelligence to ourselves and our customers. KPI is built and managed by our own software company allowing us to consistently improve, where we see, we can add value to our customers. So for us, which is quite common today, by all means, we don't need any integration with our customers it is very much "plug and play". On the other hand, there is the amount of data we collect daily that benefits our customers greatly. And we can now see during the last 2/3 years that the data we scrutinize as internal and external customer value. **We can also now say that our operation in India is fully KPI-aligned and operational. It took us a bit of time to bring Kanoo India on board, but the rollout is completed.** Now India looks like other offices so from the knowledge able point of view, let's be rational about

this, we will not be at the forefront of our industry if it was not for technology and digitalization.

**SS- Covid forced us into a 'noncontact' mode of operation. The ship agency is a predominantly 'contact' operation. How did Kanoo manage this transformation? What key changes you have made to overcome future challenges.**

**NN-** On covid, we were scared when we started to see and understand the effects of lockdown but looking back it has been a positive journey for Kanoo India. How to be of assistance to our customers with the endless number of local rules & regulations changing every day. Even different rules being applied in ports of the same country, we were struggling to update our customers with accurate information. We had to constantly try our level best to have a dialogue with local authorities stretching from the port authority, harbor authority, customs, and particular immigration authorities. Even immigration did not know what to say or what to do. So it was our job to get the actual information from the ground and update our customers. There is no need for ship agents if our customers have their own offices in the same location. We act as our customers extended arm locally and that comes with expectations. Customers were desperate, many sad stories from seafarers that were experiencing in tolerable conditions at sea during covid. We were all concerned, trying to find way show to assist and extend our help during that period in time. The effect from Covid on Kanoo Shipping and concern

to myself was the lack of accurate information flow we could trust and share with our customers, having said that, most customers understood that it is a challenging time for all of us. **Going from challenging times to opportunities** then vessels we were getting more & more used to covid and we are starting to handle challenges better and turn them into opportunities. **In our industry communication, information and people are everything.** We can proudly say today that we have had a tremendous amount of positive feedback from our customers that has resulted in new business for Kanoo Shipping India. Understandably loyalty didn't play a part at that point in time customers would just try to find a service provider that can help them. Today there are many positive success stories. **All credit to Kanoo Shipping India, they performed exceptionally during Covid,** having just opened our operations in India 6 months earlier than prior to Covid's set in. This was the last thing we wanted when we were running up and down, trying to secure more customers to support us in India. We started to see the picture of what was going on around the world and the consequences of covid spreading like wildfire. **Kanoo Shipping in India is the "new kid on the block", took a very specific and proactive approach that will never be forgotten by many of us. In Kanoo Shipping India they saw an opportunity and we were still a small team but with a good leader, that did not stop us and we played to our best ability building customer relations in India and**

**being available 24/7.** We started to experience positive movements some months into the covid, particularly India as a nation and willingness to assist their seafarers when vessels called India ports, which was very nice to see compared to other countries and ports where authorities showed little to no interest in seafarers struggling immensely. That gave us the opportunity with the Indian government clearly stating that we will do the best we can, to help our own seafarers when they are onboard our vessels calling Indian ports, we were proud, having only at that point & time less than 6/9 months in operation in India to be the first agency house, to assist in crew change for Indian seafarers. **We were also the first Agency House with the great efforts and success of our local office in India to assist with crew change of international seafarers. This is a success story, and we have to be proud, and we have to also tap ourselves on our shoulders when our competitors came to us for assistance, being the new kid on the block in India that shows that we now clearly have a presence and make difference in India.** This was all due to our highly committed members of staff, passion, and desire to turn severe challenges into opportunities. So in India, looking back covid gave us an opportunity to establish ourselves and expand our business. During Covid we build a much stronger brand that I know for a fact among our customers will be supported in the years to come. From a business perspective, all the good things we did, helping seafarers and customers, it was a big success. **To Be Continued In Next Edition Friday 27th May 2022.**