



Shipping : From an Experienced Captain's View



A Captain who is associated with shipping industry last 40 years, he has successfully steered his "ship" thru stormy seas and smooth waters. With several "firsts" to his credit -his company is the first Non-Govt. Company in India to be granted NVOCC status and the first Multimodal Transport Document [MTD] was issued by his company. We are talking about none other than the MD of Sitara Shipping Ltd. & Director of Astral Freight Forwarders Pvt. Ltd. Capt. Satnam Singh Sahi. In a one to one interview with 'Anchor age' Capt. Sahi shares some of the memorable experiences of his carrier. Below is the excerpt of the interview.

Q: When & how you have started your career?

A: I started my career as a cadet/apprentice at the age of 16 in 1961 and became a Captain at the young age of 25. I sailed with Great Eastern Shipping Company for seven years and a few Indian as well as foreign companies. In 1970 I started my first company Sahi Oretrans Pvt. Ltd. with my brother and operated barges to carry iron ore from the interior of the Zuari river to anchorage for loading on to the ships. The next year I started Illyas Shipping which carried out the activities of ship agents and crew recruitment. After separation from my brother, in 1981 I established Sitara Shipping Ltd. to handle ship agency work and also acted as agent of Qatar Navigation Company for a few years. Keeping pace with time with the advent of containerization, in the year 1991, Sitara diversified into container handling & freight forwarding.

Q: Have you faced any problem at that time? How did you overcome that?

A: At that time the shipping ministry did not allow companies to import containers ex-bond and I personally pursued this matter with Director General of Shipping. Finally they relented and we were the first private company to be granted permission to import containers ex-bond. Then we were faced with restrictions on sending remittances abroad to our agents for disbursements. The RBI officials could not comprehend the business of containers, we took initiative to explain them that operating containers were just like ships or a part of a ship and got the approval to make authorised remittances.

Q: What is your present work?

A: We are the first Non-Govt. Company in India to be granted NVOCC status and the first Multimodal Transport Document [MTD] was issued by Sitara. At present we are mainly involved in NVOCC & Multimodal Transport Operations. Having our own fleet 20' and 40' GP, high cubes, open tops and flat racks. We also charter and operate vessels to carry break bulk cargoes and general cargoes on various sectors.





Face To Face

Q: What is your prestigious project can you share with us?

A: My prestigious project was to carry out shipments from Diego Garcia and is my most memorable experience in my total career spanning over 40 years. Diego Garcia is an island inaccessible to the general public and the U.S. military has considered this 17-square-mile atoll of coral and sand in the middle of the Indian Ocean one of the most valuable pieces of real estate on earth. Diego Garcia is a British Territory, leased to the United States. It is a strategic air base of the U.S. Military today. About 40 British and 1,000 U.S. military personnel and 2,400 support workers of various nationalities, primarily Filipino and Sri Lankan reside there to cater to the needs of the Americans and maintain the island.

The US Navy operates Naval Support Facility (NSF) Diego Garcia, a large naval ship and submarine support base, military air base, communications and space-tracking facility, and an anchorage for pre-positioned military supplies for regional operations aboard Military Sealift Command ships in the lagoon.

My project was to load 4500 mt of scrap plus 20 scrap vehicles with various limitations. There were only five trailers on the entire island, no shore cranes and one can only load with ships cranes during day time as at night time weather is bad and loading operations were not allowed. There were no cargo-gear facilities for loading hence we had to cut the top of 20' containers to convert them into open top containers. The cargo had to be loaded with two cranes simultaneously, and since no manpower was available to go on ship & unhook the slings, we had to tip the container into the hatches to unload the cargo. The entire operation took ten days to completely load 4500 mt steel scrap and 20 scrap vehicles. The ship was self geared with capacity of 40 MT to lift the machines equipment each weighing maximum 35 MT. We were given a time slot of only 8-10 days in a month to complete the operation when we could get our ship in the harbor which is normally occupied by the American naval ships and submarines.



To go to Diego Garcia one needs clearance from British and American governments. I flew from Singapore Airforce base on board an American Airforce cargo plane alternatively one can fly from Bahrain air force base. Priority is given to American armed forces and Government officers and one is never sure when one gets a flight. Flights are operated twice or thrice a week. The island has beautiful greenery and no traffic signals. There are transport buses and taxis free of cost that go around the island every 15 minutes. Nothing is grown and all supplies are bought from Singapore via a chartered ship once a month.

I stayed in the barracks run by American Hotel companies along with the two owners, two engineers, five Philipino crew of the British Contractors of Big Iron Trading Company who had sub contracted the work to us. There are only four places to eat in the Island -an American Seamans Club, a burger joint and two officers messes for the armed forces. There was an open air cinema which was free and only one provisions store which stocked everything from food to sim cards to laptops. I was in Diego Garcia twice, once for inspection of the facilities and the other time to organize and execute the actual loading operations of the cargo.

Q: What is your current Project?

A: Currently we are operating vessels between west coast of India and Arabian Gulf mainly to Iran to carry Indian cargoes. ■





Face To Face : MS. SANJAM SAHI GUPTA

WISTA India provides new platform for Women

Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA) is an international organization for women in management positions involved in maritime transportation business and related trades. WISTA aims to be a major player in attracting more women to the industry and in supporting women in management positions. With networking, education and mentoring in focus, WISTA sets out to enhance members' competence and empower career success.

WISTA INDIA was launched under the leadership of Sanjam Sahi Gupta of Sitara Shipping Ltd. Ms. Gupta comes from a family of 'Shippies' and has had a lifelong interest in the business, entering the family company in 2001 and now heading the NVOCC division of the business. Her interest in WISTA spans nearly a decade, leading to the formation of WISTA India this year.



WISTA India is a national chapter of WISTA and a diverse member base from ship owners, trading houses, port authorities, chartering, ship management companies, lawyers etc.

The ladies at WISTA India draw their inspiration from the First Lady of Indian Shipping Mrs. Sumati Morarjee, the first woman of Indian shipping. She was also the first woman in the world to head an organisation of ship owners -- Indian National Steamship Owners Association, which was later renamed Indian National Shipowners Association. She was elected as vice-president of the World Shipping Federation, London, in 1970.

'Anchor age' has opportunity to meet Ms. Sanjam Sahi Gupta, Director of Sitara Shipping Ltd & President of WISTA India. In a detail discussion, Ms. Sanjam shares the plan of action of WISTA. Here are some niceties of the interview:

Q: What are the main functions of WISTA?

A: Basically, WISTA is an international organisation for the women in management position. My company Sitara Shipping has got the agency of WISTA International for next two years. WISTA India is a registered nonprofit organisation in India.

Over the years the role of women in the maritime industry has evolved and women have been taking up challenging responsibilities at sea and ashore. Women have achieved leadership positions as bankers, lawyers, surveyors in the shipping industry globally. Today there are many exciting opportunities for women in ship broking, forwarding, logistics, ship owning and ship management organisations, across segments.

WISTA India will be a platform for these accomplished women to share their knowledge, experience and contribution in making women more prominent in the maritime industry. One of the key objectives of WISTA India, will be mentoring and spreading awareness about the various growth opportunities, which will done through a mix of workshops, seminars and knowledge sharing sessions by eminent speakers in the maritime industry.

WISTA has three basic functions

- Networking and knowledge sharing amongst the members
- To increase awareness of employment opportunities in the maritime industry
- To facilitate education and mentoring activities to enhance the skills of women in the industry.

The criteria for WISTA Membership are Assistant Manager level onwards for them. WISTA will assist the young talent to rise in their careers.