

Kalindee Rail Nirman eyes a bigger share of the growing railway pie

Rather than chug along the beaten track, this company ventured into businesses where no one else cared to.

In 1976, the Delhi-Jaipur route was being upgraded for a new train—the Pink City Express—to run at speeds up to 100 km/hr from the existing 40km/hr on old signaling systems.

The Northern and Western Railways brass was at its wits end since it was estimated that it would take 18 months to carry out the work on the Bandikui-Rewari section while the deadline was not even half that time. That's when Ram Dayal Sharma, a former Railways staffer with its S&T (signaling and telecom) department, stepped in to take up the project on a contract. In the face of skepticism from many senior engineers the project, worth Rs 7.5 lakh, was completed exactly a day before its six-month deadline. "Delivering projects on time has its own advantages. Your costs go down and your margins remain intact," says Sharma.

Since then, Kalindee Rail Nirman (Engineers) which now also undertakes telecommunication and track-laying projects for the Railways has used its unique model of resource mobilisation to stay ahead of the pack.

Growing opportunities prompted Sharma to shift base in 2002 from Jaipur to Delhi where he opened a liaison office. Now, sitting in his plush office at Gurgaon's Cybercity, a far cry from his modest beginnings, Sharma is preparing for a new innings. As rail infrastructure projects such as the Dedicated Freight Corridor gather steam, Kalindee is in the right place at the right time and with just the right credentials to make the best of the looming opportunity. What was barely a Rs 50 crore company until two years ago (Rs 281 crore in 2008-09) is now laying the tracks for a Rs 2,000 crore turnover by 2014.

Kalindee's big moment came when it was chosen among the preferred vendors for the Delhi Metro. Today it is laying tracks for many of the ongoing stretches including the new Airport Express line. Kalindee has also worked on 54 stations along the prestigious Konkan Railway route. "During these projects, we created a pool of trained manpower that has come to be our biggest strength."

In 1994 the company went public and Sharma admits it took quite some time to adjust to the transition from a family business to a publicly held one. It has started inducting professionals at senior levels. The company has also moved into related areas such as automatic fare collection,

overhead electrification, and engineering procurement but its inherent strength of execution is where the competitive advantage lies, says Sharma.

Competition comes from within the Railways in the form of IRCON and multinationals like ABB and Siemens. With opportunities opening up even larger Indian players are joining the fray. But Sharma's son Arvind Gemini who runs much of the show these days, says he isn't perturbed. "These players have some catching up to do given the nature of work involved." Kalindee will only stand to gain from its considerable experience and near monopoly in a business where consortiums are becoming the norm. "We will continue to be system integrators , and align with suitable partners to grab future projects," he says.