

Converting Trash into Gas: A Journey

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Growdiesel is a renewable oil and gas exploration and production organization, primarily based in Delhi, dedicated to the cause of environment, energy and empowerment of fuel farmers. It was founded in the year 2005 by Mr. Atul Saxena. Growdiesel's core business is to produce and sell renewable clean fuels. Growdiesel is now establishing modern manufacturing facilities to produce advanced renewable cleanfuels known as Growdiesel NextGenFuels™. The biggest USP of Growdiesel NextGenFuels™ is that they are Drop-in Fuels which means they can replace fossil fuels in existing engines, vehicles, equipments and entire existing petroleum infrastructure without any modifications.

IMI Konnect: *What has been the primary motivating factor for Growdiesel to enter the Renewable Energy sector?*

AS: As in the year 2000, after spending nearly two decades as a technology consultant with United Nations, giving shape to Maaza Mango and after failing in five ventures, I eventually realized that there was a global boom coming in the field of biofuel. Biofuels were supposedly the alternative to the traditional fuels. During that time, if we talked about renewable energy sector as a whole, only wind energy had started making a mark and that too, in South India. Solar energy and biofuels were yet to take off. I saw an opportunity in the field of biofuels and started learning about it. Having worked with the UN in the past, I had enough global contacts to travel and learn about this subject. I had unofficially began working in this sector in 2001. The biggest motivating factor for me to enter this field was that these projects were

Triple Bottom Line projects, i.e., projects that had Social RoI, Environmental RoI and Economic RoI. Though most of the projects just have Economic RoI. Also, we are solving two problems at once: *Waste Elimination plus Fuel Generation* by converting waste into biofuel. When I had enough resources, a team in place and a clear vision, we officially registered Growdiesel on 5th August 2006. Since then, there was no looking back.

IMI Konnect: *Please share some insights on the status of biofuel industry in India. what are its major facilitators and challenges?*

AS: Before I answer this question, we need to understand how the commercials of this industry work. Fundamentally, biofuel industry is very different from solar/wind industry. Mostly, there are players who only sell the equipment. The energy or fuel generated is the property of the person/organization who bought those

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equipment. However, we at Growdiesel do not believe in that. Every project we undertake, we have a stake in that project and thus we have a lifelong association with our partner. This not just ensures that the project is successful for years to come but also ensures that we have heavily reduced our capital expenditure (CAPEX). Since we are not into selling equipments and doing joint ventures, we do not have any margins in CAPEX. This is a sustainable business model that we have successfully implemented. The major facilitators in our field are municipal corporations. The biggest challenge is maintaining the supply chain as people from extreme ground level are involved. Keeping everyone on the same page can turn out to be a challenging task at times.

IMI Konnect: *How enthusiastic is Growdiesel in the implementation of renewable energy sources in business?*

AS: If we talk about solar, it took off really well, thanks to the government schemes and political will. Talking about “Waste to Biofuel”, the rules for Municipal Corporations came in the year 2016 that waste to biofuel projects must be promoted. We had been working since 2001 and the policy came in 2016. By 2016, we had already four commercial projects up and running. This gives us enough credentials along with first mover advantage.

IMI Konnect: *Do you think the awareness of common people about using alternative energy*

has grown over the years? What are the initiatives required to create such awareness?

AS: The awareness has drastically grown. We were appointed as the official consultants to Delhi government to conduct a survey. In the eight month survey, we were supposed to provide a complete solution of how Delhi can use all its waste to generate enough biofuel for its consumption. During this survey, we discovered some facts that the millennial generation has actually started to care more for environment friendly products. Many organizations have already installed huge solar energy panels. Government schemes have indeed given a boost in raising the awareness. Talking about Growdiesel, we have done numerous conferences and adopted innovative ways to raise awareness. We have conducted street plays, educational sessions in colleges and corporates. Our projects have been inaugurated by Chief Ministers and other highly ranked officials that has given us media coverage which we again used to raise awareness.

IMI Konnect: *What is the market share of Growdiesel? What is the scenario in terms of competition and regulation?*

AS: We are a player in the oil and gas sector. Oil and gas sector is a \$200 billion market in India. By 2030, it will be \$1 trillion market. As of now, we are not even a drop in the ocean. The cake is so huge that even if there are over 1 lakh companies like ours, the cake wouldn't get finished.

IMI Konnect: *What is the “Waste to Fuel” project undertaken by Growdiesel?*

AS: In the year 2008, we realized that waste management was another big problem that needs to be addressed. Also, we identified that biofuels could be derived from things that people dump inside their dustbins every day. We started devising a sustainable technology which could solve this problem. Once we were ready with the technology, we started approaching a number of government organizations. After a lot of persuasion, the former Chief Minister of Delhi, Smt. Sheila Dixit invited us for a presentation in February 2010. We presented it before the IAS officers, engineers and IIT professors.

We got the opportunity to install it in her office. We took 3 months time. On 25th August 2010, she inaugurated the project at Delhi Secretariat. It’s been 8 years and even today, the project is still running. We have supplied 7500 LPG cylinders equivalent of biofuel to their canteen where 3000 people eat food every day. It was a turning point for Growdiesel. We wish to achieve fuel independence for India by 2030.

IMI Konnect: *Growdiesel has undertaken a \$ 2 Billion project of Indian Railways. What is this project all about?*

AS: Indian Railways had thought of implementing a project that they would establish an oil bearing plant named “Jatropha” in all the wasteland available with them. Through a two stage global bidding

process, Growdiesel was finally selected as the official consultant to oversee this project, from among over twenty countries. However, the project was discontinued with a change in political regime.

IMI Konnect: *Tell us something about the “Growdiesel Opportunity Accelerator” programme.*

AS: That’s an interesting question which I didn’t expect but I am glad you asked. In this world, we have 2 kinds of people – Employee and Employers. When Growdiesel was appointed as the governing council member of SCGJ (Skill Council for Green Jobs), we realized that the only way to create more jobs is to create more entrepreneurs. That’s when we devised this initiative “Growdiesel Opportunity Accelerator (GOA)” through which we aim to provide mentorship, funding and technical backing to all those people who want to have their own biofuel company. Each of this company will be backed by Growdiesel’s rich experience.

IMI Konnect: *You are now present in select cities of India. What is your future expansion plan?*

AS: We had kept ourselves very grounded until last year when government announced the Biofuel Policy 2018. We have introduced a channel partnership model in which anyone who is interested to enter this business can get our channel partnership and we will give him/her exclusive rights for a particular area subject to some conditions. This will not only give an opportunity to that entrepreneur but

also one such person will be able to create 10 – 100 direct and indirect jobs per project. This is how we plan to create jobs after we have created an employer.

IMI Konnect: *Is Growdiesel planning to move forward to venture into other alternative energy sector?*

AS: As of now, we are quite pre-occupied with ‘Waste to Biofuel’ sector. Currently, we have no plans to diversify in other renewable energy sector.

IMI Konnect: *What were the challenges faced by Growdiesel for taking several alternate energy initiatives in the country?*

AS: Whenever a person or a company is trying to bring a change, it faces a lot of resistance. We had our share of them. The biggest challenge, however, has been maintaining the supply chain.

IMI Konnect: *You have innovations like biofuels from organic and plastic wastes. How are these products positioned in the market?*

AS: We have a very different and unique business model in which we aim to establish in-house project for an organization which can generate its own fuel for its own consumption. This initiative will help organizations to be fuel independent. We have exited from consumer market for now.

IMI Konnect: *You also have Clean Air and Clean Water projects. What is the market potential of such products in India?*

AS: KalpVriksha, the outdoor air purifier isn’t a traditional air purifier. It was an R&D project with All India Institute of Medical Science, Delhi (AIIMS, Delhi). One KalpVriksha is equivalent to 50000 full grown trees. The idea was to purify air, extract the carbon and use it further for fuel production. For us, air is the byproduct. Talking about clean water projects, these are the projects we will be taking with utmost seriousness. We are very aggressively looking to expand and take up “Waste Water to Clean Water” projects. Water, after all is the mother of all fuels. We are yet to achieve commercially tangible things here but the technology has already been tried and tested.