

## The Telegraph

OBITUARIES 26th March 2005 ~ Nareshbhai Patel

Nareshbhai Patel, who has died aged 63, founded Colorama Processing Laboratories, the company which revolutionised film processing for the ordinary customer by providing cut-price developing and overnight processing services.

Patel had originally established Colorama in Nairobi in 1963, but moved the business to Britain 10 years later, working alongside his three younger brothers and a brother-in-law. In the early days they would travel around London by bus, collecting undeveloped rolls of film from chemists who had agreed to try out their promised overnight service. The films were then taken back to their shop at Greenwich, where they would work throughout the night. The bus journeys were repeated the next day, this time with the developed prints ready to be given to the customers.

In 1973 it cost £16 to develop and print a 36-exposure 35mm roll of film, and it could take up to two weeks for developed pictures to be returned. Patel realised that by reducing the time, as well as the cost, for developing and printing, he would attract many more potential customers. He also increased the standard size of prints to 6in by 4in (from 5in by 3.5in), and offered prints with rounded edges instead of the traditional sharp corners. When he came up with the idea of giving customers a free roll of film with their holiday snaps, the scheme was dismissed as madness by his British rivals. The family business is now valued at £70 million.

Nareshbhai Patel, one of eight children, was born at Kisumu, Kenya on February 9 1942, and was educated locally. His father, Mohanbhai Patel, who ran a grocery shop, was originally from Gujarat in India but had travelled to Mombasa in 1938, settling, like many Indian immigrants, in the interior.

From an early age, Nareshbhai's chief interest was photography, and he would develop films at night in the bathroom. When he was 16, his father bought him a one-way ticket to London, where the boy studied colour film processing at the London College of Printing.

Having completed his course, he returned home and persuaded his father that Bina Studios, the laboratory which the family had established at Kisumu and which dealt only with black and white film, needed to expand and to be moved to Nairobi. At the time, there was no colour processing in Kenya (correction by David Runyard ~ Kodak were already offering a colour negative/print (C22) d&p service at that time, though Kodachrome slide film had to be sent to Paris for processing. So in 1963, having imported the necessary second-hand equipment from Germany, Patel set up Colorama in Nairobi. (Colorama was situated in the main thoroughfare in Nairobi and gave a much quicker turn-around than the local Kodak lab, which was in the industrial area and probably only offered a two to three day service. Almost certainly Colorama would have been cheaper as well!).

In the early 1970s Nareshbhai Patel decided to expand the business still further and took it to Britain where, with the help of his brothers Mahesh, Vinod and Haresh, and a brother-in-law, R K Patel from Uganda, he turned Colorama into a traditional Asian family venture. Their first breakthrough came when they won a contract from

Selfridges, after which Dixons, itself a photographic chain, transferred some of its developing and printing to Colorama's laboratories.

Soon other chemists and photographic shops from all over the country began sending work to the brothers. In 1992, Colorama set up an additional plant in Manchester, and 10 years later, they set up a Glasgow plant. The company currently has 120 red vans collecting films from all over Britain. The business has continued to thrive, embracing advances in technology and the growing popularity of digital cameras. Today, customers are encouraged to e-mail their pictures to Colorama, which prints and sends back hard copies within two days.

With the money from film processing, Patel diversified into pharmacies and, in 1985, into the Europa supermarket chain, which was sold last year to Tesco for £56 million.

The youngest of the Patel brothers, Vanish, became a sadhu (holy man) in the Swaminarayan sect, a relatively modern branch of Hinduism, and over the years the family has made donations to the Swaminarayan Hindu temple at Neasden, north London, as well as to the Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan (Indian Cultural Centre) in west Kensington.

Patel had a lifelong love of Gujarati theatre and would arrange for Indian theatre groups to visit Britain. He also had a passion for acting; in one comedy-cum-thriller, "Who is the Wife of My Husband?" he played the hero who solves a murder by using a photograph as clinching evidence. As he took out the photograph, he made sure that the audience could see "Colorama", printed in large, bold letters, on the red envelope.

In 1990 when The Telegraph Magazine published the first Asian rich list, Patel and his two children appeared in the cover photograph, posing with the family's Ferrari, which was painted in Colorama red. The headline read: "My other car is a Rolls."

Nareshbhai Patel died on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2005 while on holiday in southern India. His wife, Harshavanti, died last year. They are survived by a son and a daughter.