

Quite Natural for Raghunath Kamath to taste success

Maulik Vyas

MUMBAI

**rising
STAR**

FOR some one who could make any bowler's worst nightmare come true any day, Sir Vivian Richards gave Raghunath Kamath a day to remember and reminisce about his entire life. It was an unexpected surprise for the Mumbai-based owner of Ourtime Ice Cream when the West Indian icon told Sunny Gavaskar in that famous 80's TV program 'Sunny Days Are Here Again' that he loved Natural's Custard Apple flavour Ice Cream. The 55 year old entrepreneur says that he was over the moon and was happier that day than even when he had started his first joint in Juhu in 1983.

"It was difficult to believe that a legend like Richards liked Natural's Ice Cream," he says. Though there have been other celebrities too, like octonegarian Bollywood star Dilip Kumar who personally picked up the phone to order Natural's Ice cream for his 25th marriage anniversary, but Richards comment remains special.

Little did Kamath know that the tony shop in up-

market Juhu serving ice cream to a few would turn into a 65 store chain (18 outside Mumbai) that Mumbaikar's love going to and the fruit based ice cream that he was peddling would be a staple for everyone with a sweet tooth - marathi and non marathi manoos alike.

Kamath's a classic rags to riches story - a immigrant who comes to town with a dream, works odd jobs, and then starts small and slowly works his way to riches. "My father was a fruit vendor in Mangalore and I used to assist him right from choosing the fruit to selling it. That's where I acquired knowledge and love for fruits, its different varieties," he says. "When I landed in Mumbai, I joined my brother in his restaurant business, where I used to handle his ice cream business."

It was during that association with restaurant business that he experienced his Eureka moment; why not combine his knowledge of fruit and ice

cream and create new flavours. And his canny business sense told him that an untapped market was ready as eating out was the only entertainment for Mumbaikars in an era of no malls, no multiplexes, no cable.

It was grass root innovation at its best and that ingenuity coupled with a deep understanding of Indian customers worked for Kamath. "True to its name, we do not use any preservatives or stabilizers in our ice creams. Only fruits, milk and sugar go in the making of an ice cream as we strongly believe that fruits are blessed with such diverse flavors that you don't need to add anything more to it," he says.

Revealing his source of inspiration for various flavors, the Ice-cream Man says "For me all begins at the dinner table and fond memories of my mother's kitchen - be it turmeric leafs, ginger, coconut gravy or wild mangos (kairy), I am open to experiment with my ice creams. I

introduce jackfruit flavored ice cream after having a South Indian dish prepared by jackfruit from my wife." Natural' has innovated with traditional fruits such as sitaphal, pomegranates, jack fruit, chickoo, figs, guava and coconuts. While it has also done some combinations with traditional flavours like papaya-pineapples with others.

Marketing expert Harish Bijoor, CEO of Harish Bijoor Consults says that it was a canny move. 'Natural Ice cream' has very wide offering which is very much Indian. Moreover, Indian psyche tends to accept whatever is natural. In that sense its calculative move for the company."

Over the last two and half decades Natural brand has expanded to Pune, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Goa. Eighteen of the outlets are located outside Mumbai in emerging tier I and II cities while going forward. "For us now, our majority of expansion activities will now be outside Mumbai," says Raghu. The company is bullish about adjoining international markets and will soon expand into Sri Lanka, Nepal, Mauritius and the Gulf region. "It will be a mixture of franchisees and company owned outlets," he says. With such aggressive plans, the company is putting in motion an expansion and

**COMPANY : Kamath Ourtimes
Icecreams Pvt Ltd**

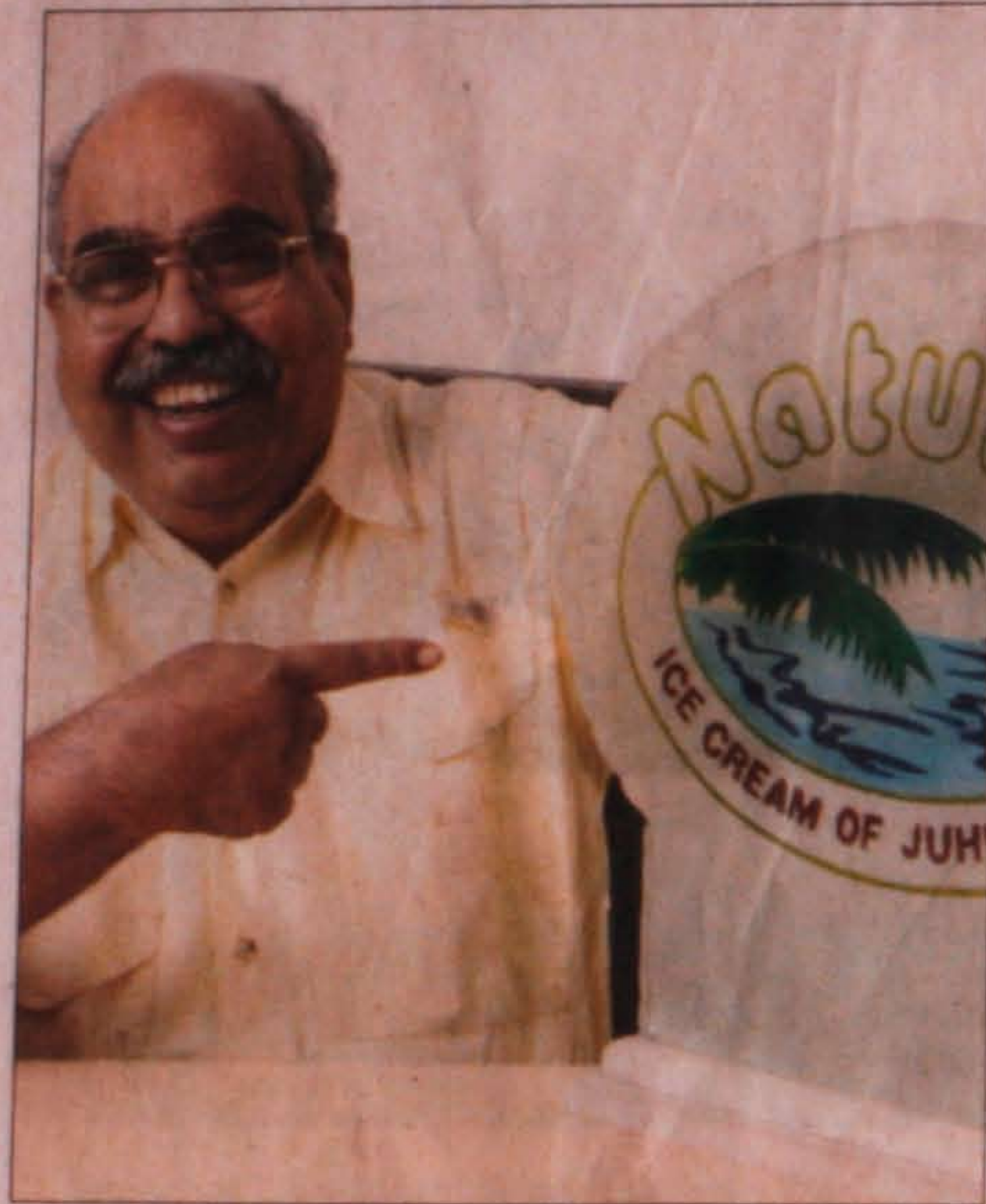
SALES (2009) : Rs 25 Crore

PROFITS : Rs 5 crore

HQ : Mumbai

**KEY PRODUCTS : Tender coconut,
Sitafal, Jack fruit, Musk Melon**

**KEY MARKETS : Mumbai
suburbs, Pune, Bangalore**



RAGHUNATH KAMATH