

A mind-boggling kidney scam - and the man behind it

Once considered a prominent nephrologist, Santosh Rameshwar Raut alias Amit Kumar, the alleged mastermind behind the kidney transplant racket, became a notorious and hounded medico in 1993. That, however, did not deter the freedom fighter's son from amassing a fortune that runs into billions of rupees and building a formidable network to shield him from the law.

It is perhaps that same network that has prevented the police from nabbing Amit, as details of the multi-million-rupee kidney racket come to light. While Gurgaon, the posh Haryana town on the outskirts of the national capital, is where he was running the illegal transplant 'hospital' from, his connections saw him reach out to clients in many countries.

A graduate of ayurvedic medicine from Akola, near Nagpur in Maharashtra, Amit, now in his early 50s, was first arrested in 1993 with 12 other medicos, including some from government hospitals, in a [Mumbai](#) police raid on Kaushalya Clinic in Khar, northwest Mumbai.

During his association with Kaushalya clinic, the police reckon, Amit carried out over 300 kidney transplants that roughly worked out to Rs.450 million (\$12 million.)

That was his first brush with the law.

The following year, in August 1994, the Mumbai Police's Crime Branch raided the clinic again following complaints of his involvement in a thriving kidney transplant racket, said a former member of the raiding party, Suhel Buddha.

The raids at that time followed complaints by three poor labourers from [Hyderabad](#) that Raut and his team had cheated them. He had promised to pay them Rs.60,000 each for a kidney, but short-changed them.

Police found him living in the posh Gulmohar area at Juhu - part of Mumbai's Glamour Crescent that stretches from Bandra to Andheri.

'He secured bail and was back to his practice. Barely two months later, his premises were again raided by the police in a separate case,' recalls Buddha, who left the police force some years back and is now executive vice-president, STAR TV.

Following this raid, alarm bells began to ring. One patient, who had undergone a kidney transplant, did not get the obligatory post-operative care and died in the clinic, Buddha added.

According to another police officer, Manohar Dhanawade, who was part of the special squad that raided him in 1993, Raut came to Mumbai in the mid-1970s and ran a private consultation clinic in Khar before joining the Kaushalya Clinic.

'It was here that Amit made his impact with scores of foreign patients in need of kidneys and who were ever so willing to offer vast amounts to save their lives,' Dhanawade told IANS.

Amit - who was assisted in the racket by his brothers, Jeewan and Ganesh, who were not medically qualified but probably acted as agents to procure gullible kidney donors and needy patients - was

once again released on bail.

At the first available opportunity, Amit jumped bail and disappeared - only to surface in Turkey around 1995-96. He returned to India a couple of years later, and Buddha suspects the reasons were the same.

The lure of money was just irresistible.

Despite the meticulous efforts to book Amit, there were many in the police department who allegedly defended him in return for a hefty compensation, officials admit privately.

Nabbing him was difficult as he moved around and operated under false identities and procured fake passports.

Amit proved elusive even the National Capital Region - Delhi and its environs - where he ran his unlawful activities.

Gurgaon Police Commissioner Mahender Lal said Delhi Police had arrested Amit in 2001 after a case of illegal kidney transplant was registered against him at the Nizamuddin police station.

A year later, a similar case was registered against him and an associate in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh.

A few years down the line, Amit shifted his base to Gurgaon, a rising IT hub on the outskirts of the Indian capital. Amit along with his brother Jeewan and associates, Upendra Aggarwal and Saraj Kumar, formed a well-oiled ring by including drivers and his servants who worked as agents.

'It was also not clear what methods he adopted to change his identity regularly since that would require an official gazette notification,' said one police officer.

In the early 1990s, while a donor got a measly Rs.50,000-100,000 (depending on his physical condition) for a kidney, the middlemen made a whopping Rs.350,000, the operating doctor and his team netted a clean million rupees that included the post-operative costs.

Amit's father Rameshwar Raut, now 93 years old, has disowned his son after he brought disgrace to the family.

'I had a misunderstanding with him and we have parted ways. Everyone in my village knows about my integrity. I am a freedom fighter and everybody knows this. He has made a mistake and put me to shame. One should never lie come what may. He was a big liar,' Raut said in Mumbai.

Even though a nationwide manhunt has been launched for Amit, police suspect the worst. Some are certain that he has bribed his way out of India through Nepal or Bangladesh before proceeding to Canada.

According to unconfirmed reports, it is believed that Raut and his brothers are worth approximately Rs.10 billion, but nobody knows where the trio could have stashed such huge funds.

In the latest expose, a complaint by a labourer, Vidya Prakash Jatav of Purva Mahavir Village in Meerut, blew the lid off Amit's activities.

Mumbai police officials aver that Amit's racket was extremely well organised, secretive and tight-knit involving touts ranging from doctors in prestigious hospitals to cabbies and travel agents.

It is this cloak of secrecy and deception for nearly 15 years that has allowed Amit to thrive. He may have made good his escape this time around but the complete story behind the organised illegal trade in human organs still remains a mystery.

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