

# A GLORIOUS BEGINNING

ALOK MEHTA

Life suddenly brightened in the small sleepy railway station of Amethi during this summer. Whereas normally hardly four or five strangers would alight at this station even during the pleasant



days of the year, crowds of 30-40 educated youth started getting down at Amethi under a red-hot merciless sun. Coming from big cities like Delhi, Bombay, Patna, Indore, Simla, Jaipur, Chandigarh, etc., used to the comforts and luxuries provided by the 20th century, these youngmen started spreading out into the neighbouring villages of Amethi on foot. In the beginning the villagers thought that these city-lads would soon collapse before the rural way of life and beat a hasty retreat. But their misgivings turned into amusement when they found that the city-boys not only lived in the vilfages but also transformed every village with which they came into contact. These youngmen put a number of small vilfages on the road map of Uttar Pradesh and made the vilfagers aware of their rights and duties in the bargain. The inspiration of harnessing these youth in this constructive direction was given by their leader Shri Sanjay Gandhi. The Youth Congress accorded the top priority to the implementation of this pointer from their leader. Shri Mahesh Joshi, the erstwhile General Secretary of the Organisation and now one of the senior members of its national council shouldered the responsibility of making an affective beginning in the constructive movement towards rural reconstruction.

As soon as Shri Mahesh Joshi

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## THE HISTORIC RURAL CAMP OF INDIAN YOUTH CONGRESS AT AMETHI

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and his colleagues got a go-ahead signal, a camp was pitched in the Amethi tehal of Sultanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. The vilfages in this part of Uttar Pradesh are more backward and the farmers more simple than anywhere else. The life led by them is almost identically *humdrum*. But each small vilfage remains isolated from the others. Whatever roads exist are merely the tumbling bullock cart tracks. To send children to school is a problem here and it is well neigh impossible to rush a seriously ailing patient even to a neighbouring town.

It was with a view to tackling the problem of backwardness in such an area that Indian Youth Congress chose Amethi as the launching ground of its rural upliftment programme. Under a hot blazing Sun, three miles away from Amethi in the small vilfage of Kherona, Shri Sanjay Gandhi inaugurated this voluntary labour camp by using a shovel himself. Since then till the final day of the camp shovels and pick-axes remained in action. Be it morning or evening the feeling to work with doubled enthusiasm persisted. The two conveners of the camp, Shri Mahesh Joshi and Shri Shiv Pratap Mishra had only one worry—how to stop their team from overstraining themselves. That this two-some was also busy with the shovels and pick-axes throughout

the day is another matter. Often the campers would go back to work at 3 A. M. in soothing moonlight. In sun, everybody was intoxicated with the fervour to work. This was the reason why every camper, who would return to this city, would be relating his experiences with such excitement and joy that a new batch would start clamouring for Amethi. Shri Shiv Pratap Mishra not only kept the exuberance of his comrades in proper control, but also lived up to his loving nick-name, "Baba" by providing all necessary things and maintaining the morale and enthusiasm of the campers with his inimitable charm.

Nearly 2,500 youngmen participated in this voluntary service camp. They levelled the hard,

road built through Shramadao and pits dug for planting saplings by the youth workers of Amethi Voluntary Labour Camp.



Paving a way for the reconstructive of rural India with a shovel in hand. The twin camp-chiefs, Shri Shiv Pratap Mishra (bespectacled) and Shri Mahesh Joshi (with hands on waist) are seen in the picture.

uneven ground and dug pits-in As a part of the daily programme, the participants would get up at





## ROADS BUILT THROUGH SHRAMDAN

1. Road linking village-Kherona to Amethi-Durgapur main road.

Builders : Delhi, Uttar Pradesh.

Duration : 10 days

Length : 1 Kilometre

200 youth workers donated labour daily.

2. Link road from Amethi to Raidepur

Builders : Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Duration : 6 days

Length : 4 Kilometres

350 youth workers donated labour daily.

(Local youth took over the construction work later and completed the road.)

3. Road linking village-Parsauli to Amethi-Durgapur main road.

Builders : Madhya Pradesh

Duration : 7 days

Length :  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Kilometres

83 youth workers donated labour daily.

4. Road linking village-Sarai Rajshah to Amethi-Durgapur main road.

Builders : Punjab

Duration : 7 days

Length :  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Kilometres

105 youth workers donated labour daily.



5 A. M. and work for four hours till lunch time. The simple food which was served to them was prepared in the camp. After lunch, they would visit the villages and begin teaching the alphabet.

The life of the campers was a model of discipline. But they also mixed freely with the villagers, gossiped with them and were moved by the love and regard the simple villagers had for them. Thus, almost light-heartedly these youngmen built link roads 23 kms. long and dug 3,000 pits for the planting of trees. Taking a cue from these youngmen, the villagers also dug more than 2,000 pits for saplings. Local

people have set the target of planting 10,000 saplings during this monsoon.

The Camp-in-Charge, Shri Mahesh Joshi, told this correspondent that 194 youth from Delhi, 188 from Punjab, 119 from Madhya Pradesh, 104 from Haryana, 85 from Rajasthan, 9 from Himachal Pradesh, 10 from Bihar and 1,136 from Uttar Pradesh participated in the camp. 300 youngmen from Sultanpur district helped in the voluntary activities. Besides building roads and digging pits the campers carried out a campaign of cleanliness and mass-contact in the villages. They explained the Prime Minis-



ter's New Economic Programme and Shri Sanjay Gandhi's Socio-Cultural programme to the villagers, popularised them and also understood the problems of the villagers and prepared memoranda to the appropriate authorities and agencies. These youngmen worked in the villages of Kherona, Sarai Rajshah, Parsoli, Karondi, Sarai Kandha, Hathkila Manthar, Patti, Sulapur, Parsaba, Benipur, Ramnagar, Sarai Khema, Pura Datta Mishra, Mahmudpur, Gopalpur, Thora (the village of Daku Barsati), Pithoria, Bandoiya, Jattapur, Jungle Ramnagar, Rairpur, Phulwari, Kushi tali, Ranbir Nagar, Pandit Ka Purwa, Katra Hulasi, Devi Patan, Gahri, Mahua Tali, Jungle Tikri, Thegaha, Shukulpur, Kasara, Tarapur, Misroti, Ramnath pur, Bharlipur, Muniyapur, Barhaipur, Mangalpur, Purey Naathan Shukla, Bisambharpur, Thathudhar, Kushrim Girdhar Shah, Chachkapur, Kurwa, Katra Raja Himmat Singh, Gungoli, Musaiti, Uttar Gaon, Amerua in the region. They also felt that there was an acute scarcity of roads, irrigational facilities, electricity, drinking water and schools for girls.

### No longer Behind the Towns

The impact of the camps

could be gauged by the comments of the villagers. Shri Raj Narain Tiwari, the 105 years old Pradhan of Hathkila village Panchayat for the last 25 years said, "Babu, now our village is in no way inferior to Rai Bareilly. In this long life of mine, I never saw so many city-youths in the village—even if a man from the city would come he would hardly condescend to talk to us. But, Wah, these youngsters built roads by the fields, Cleansed the villages. It is all Sanjayji's benevolence."

Shri Ram Naresh Shukla, the Pradhan of Kharana Village said that what could possibly not be accomplished in 5 years, the young volunteers achieved in less than two months. For the first time one was compelled to believe that even the city-dwellers could work so hard.

Shri Mahadeo Prasad, Vice-Pradhan of Parsoli village said that the youth taught many an old person to read and write. They created, in the children an interest in studying and on top of that they informed the farmers of the assistance they could get from the government.

5. Road linking Inter College to Amethi-Dhammaur main road.

Builders : Uttar Pradesh  
Duration : 34 days  
Length : 2 Kilometres  
100 youth workers donated labour daily.

6. Road linking village Pure Dutta Mishra to Amethi-Munshiganj main road.

Builders : Punjab  
Duration : 8 days  
Length : 1½ Kilometres  
72 youth workers donated labour daily.

Residents of the villages also contributed their labour under the inspiration and direction of the Shibir-in Charge.

7. Road linking Pure Natthan Shukla to Amethi-Kakawa main road.

Length : 1 Km.  
Built by—Gram Natthan Shukla Nav Yuvak Sangh under the direction of Dr. Shital Prasad Shukla.

8. Road linking Mehmudpur to Amethi-Dhammaur main road.

Length : 2 Km.  
Direction : Shri Ayub Khan

9. Road linking Harijan Colony via village—Hathkila to Amethi-Durgapur main road.

Length : 1 Km.  
Direction : Shri Raj Narain Tiwari, Chief of the village Panchayat.

The Village-Chief is 105 years old and is lying in hospital. Since the incep-