

# Amethi electorate reticent

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Sanjay

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The humble rural folk of the Amethi constituency are very reticent about disclosing who they will vote for judging from the few villages visited by these reporters. A few old and haggard women in tattered saris in one hamlet said they would await the directions of the village pradhan or village elders and vote as these headmen desired.

In this hamlet where the Youth Congress had built a road last summer some younger women said that they had not heard of Mr Sanjay Gandhi.

In another village a mixed group of men and women initially feigned ignorance about the elections and suggested that we should tell them who to vote for. After some coaxing they warmed up and said with some passion that a sterilisation team had descended on the village some months ago and "cleaned up the place". Some young unmarried men had also been sterilised.

In yet another place a couple of small farmers complained about the land revenue collection having been doubled. When they were told that the land revenue rate had been reduced the other day by a government

order they smiled and said, "We know why."

A rickshaw puller in neighbouring Sultanpur said that Sanjay could never win. He said that people were very angry about the police firing and many deaths on the outskirts of Sultanpur about five months ago.



He said that the firing had taken place when people had resisted forced sterilisation.

Despite signs of some individual resentment against the Congress for its actions during the past year it is reasonably clear that the power structure in Amethi constituency will

continue to work in favour of a Congress victory. The area is politically dominated by a combination of Thakurs and Brahmmins who command the vote. These two dominant castes generally favour the Congress even when the opposition candidate is also a Thakur as Mr Ravindra Pratap Singh of the Janata Party is.

The former Raja of Amethi who is an important force in the area has wholeheartedly backed the Congress and Mr Sanjay Gandhi. The Raja's son, Mr Sanjay Singh, is the Youth Congress leader in Amethi. The former Raja of Tilot is also influential in the area and is in favour of Mr Gandhi. Both former rajas are Congress MLAs from within this Lok Sabha constituency.

As for the government projects in the area most of them have yet to materialise except for some minor ones like link roads and small irrigation schemes. The big mill and the industrial area are still in the infrastructure stage of development. It is still just a paddy growing area.

The Amethi Lok Sabha constituency contains five assembly seats, three falling in Sultanpur district and two in Rae Bareilly. They are said to have been for the Congress ever since the 1952 general election. There is no reason to think that Amethi has changed so much that it will vote differently this time.