

## **Crossing 'knowledge bridge' on an Azamgarh river-Abu Zafar**

Azamgarh (Uttar Pradesh), Nov 30 (IANS) They wanted their children to get good quality education which they were bereft of. So people in a small village of Uttar Pradesh funded a bridge to send their kids to study in a town across the river.

The number of students has been increasing in schools, colleges and madrassas on the other side of the Kunwar river in Saraimeer town, which has several educational and technical institutions and shopping areas.

The construction of the bridge at Towa village, 35 km from Azamgarh city and 240 km from Lucknow, started in 2004 but it was stopped several times for want of money. The bridge was completed in 2009, but there was no road to link it. It became finally operational in 2010.

Towa, which has schools of up to Class 5 only, has a population of 5,000, but the bridge connects around 100,000 people of over 50 villages in the area.

The bridge has six pillars and was built with Rs.65 lakh contributed through public donations.

The entire construction was supervised by Shakeel Ahmed, a Class 5 pass out and resident of Towa, who took the initiative to build the concrete bridge which seems like a 'knowledge bridge' for the nearly 800 students who cross it daily for their studies.

He took the lead after a boat containing a dozen students overturned, leaving an eight-year-old student named Saifullah dead and several injured in the flood season in 1998.

Preeti Yadav, a housewife of Lahideeh village, sends her five children through the bridge to different schools. She is not worried about their security.

'I feel comfortable now and send my youngest son and daughter also to school for their bright future.'

There are two other pathways that lead to Saraimeer town but these are 20 km long and the road through the bridge is only two kilometres. Even public transportation is rare.

Mohammed Arshad, head of the primary section of Madrasatul Islah, a century-old Islamic madrasa, said the number of students from Towa and neighbouring villages is increasing.

'There are more students in Islah from the region now. Younger children also take admission now,' Arshad told IANS.

'Earlier, it was very hard for them to attend the class timely, especially in the rainy season,' he said.

According to Shakeel, it was not an easy task. 'It was hard to collect money from people. In the beginning they thought that I will cheat on them.'

'I was out of home because I was collecting money. My elder brother was headman of the village and thought that it was a matter of insult,' he added.

'I couldn't study much, but I wanted to make my children educated,' he said.

To collect money Ahmad visited Mumbai, Delhi and Dubai where people from Azamgarh and neighbouring areas go frequently to earn their livelihood.

Naeem Akhtar, who survived the boat accident, remembered: 'I can't forget it. I will remember that painful moment my whole life.'

'Whenever I go through the way, my legs shake with fear and the image of Saifullah suddenly comes in front of my eyes.'

And there are only good words for Shakeel.

'Shakeel did a marvellous job to spread education and he should be given some award,' said Akhtar, who has completed his post-graduation in English literature from Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University in Kanpur.

(Abu Zafar can be contacted at abuzafar@journalist.com)

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<http://www.bhaskar.com/article/UP-uttar-pradeshs-azamgarh-district-has-built-a-bridge-over-a-river-2607098.html>

<http://news.in.msn.com/national/article.aspx?cp-documentid=5636948>

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