

Sonika gets a job after ITI training

Sonika is an example of positive changes a project can bring about in a society. If there were many with her courage and determination, we could get expected changes much faster in a community. She used every opportunity to make progress in her life, joining *St. Anthony's Industrial Training Institute (ITI)* last year was one of it.

Sonika lives in the village of Dugawar with her parents. She has one older sister who is married and settled in another far away village. Her father owned two acres of land, which was the only source of their income before *Anthony's Bread's* project started in the village. Sonika's mother joined the Micro-credit program in 2008 and, after two years, took Rs. 30,000 as a loan to buy a buffalo. Sonika completed a tailoring course and received a sewing machine from *St. Anthony's Vocational Training Centre*. With the income from the milk of the



buffalo and her tailoring work, they could start living a better life. When *St. Anthony's Industrial Training Institute (ITI)* started in 2015, she joined the one year training course of 'Computer Operator and Program Assistant' (COPA). It is during this period that her father fell ill. His heart valves were damaged, needed surgery immediately. She wanted to keep her father alive at any cost and sold part of the



Sonika is working in the showroom of an auto-mobile agency...



...After the work, she takes care of her father.

land to pay off the heavy hospital bills. In spite of this tragedy in the family, she finished her study and looked for a job to sustain her family.

The field staff of our project helped her out in finding a job and she found a job in an auto-mobile agency in *Asmoli* (4 km from her village). She works from 9 am till 5 pm, from Monday to Saturday. She is in-charge of the office, manages the financial transactions and customers. Her colleagues, 5 young men, are untrained. Though she is courageous, we cannot rule out her concern about the safety as she is the only woman in the office and the women are not yet working in offices in these areas. « *I don't feel safe some times as I am the only girl working in the office. All are male customers and I need to gather courage at times.* », she says. In winter it is more challenging as it is becoming dark earlier and she has to get back home alone after 5pm by public transportation. Normally at this time of the day, young women don't travel alone. Her courage needs to be admired in an area like this and she has broken the barriers the villagers put on the young women. The burden on her shoulders is heavier today as she has to depend on this job to take care of her sick and almost bed-ridden father. She stands out among many for her courage and determination to get along in life in spite of all the unfavorable conditions. She is an inspiration for many who are still afraid of stepping out of the traditional way of life.

Empowerment of young women

We selected COPA as one of the trades for St. Anthony's ITI to promote employment opportunities for young women. We had a group of girls in the first batch of COPA in the year 2014-15. After the completion of their course, we wanted to find some job for them in the nearby cities. Though they all showed interest to work initially, when



it came to a point of going to the near by cities, their parents objected. We trained two of them for the clerical job in the school offices of *Dugawar* and *Rahrai*. The one who agreed to go to *Rahrai* changed her mind later, because of her parents. Though we explained that in *Rahrai*, we already have set up a team of lady teachers, it did not work. This is the early beginning and we need more patience.

Electrician and Fitter are two other trades



The 'COPA' training is giving the computer knowledge needed to do office work in a company.

which we started along with COPA. Admission to the students (young men) for these two year course was given as they came in. When



the classes started, we realized that many of these students were not ready to attend the classes regularly. Many of them turned up only when the exams dates approached. We tried to motivate and even force the students to regularly attend the class, but it did not bring much difference to the actual situation. Some of them are working in the nearby cities and have some practical knowledge already. They joined the ITI only to get an official certificate. Some others don't have the culture of attending schools regularly and think about getting a diploma, like in many other places, by cheating.

A new scope for our ITI's students

« I call upon the nation to make India the skill capital of the world. If we have to promote development in our country, then our mission has to be skill development and skilled India ». This is the invitation of the prime minister to the youths of his country. The Government of India launched skill development programs in 2014. The objective of this scheme is to enable and mobilize a large number of Indians to take up outcome based skill training and become employable and earn their livelihood. Under the scheme, monetary reward would be provided to trainees who are

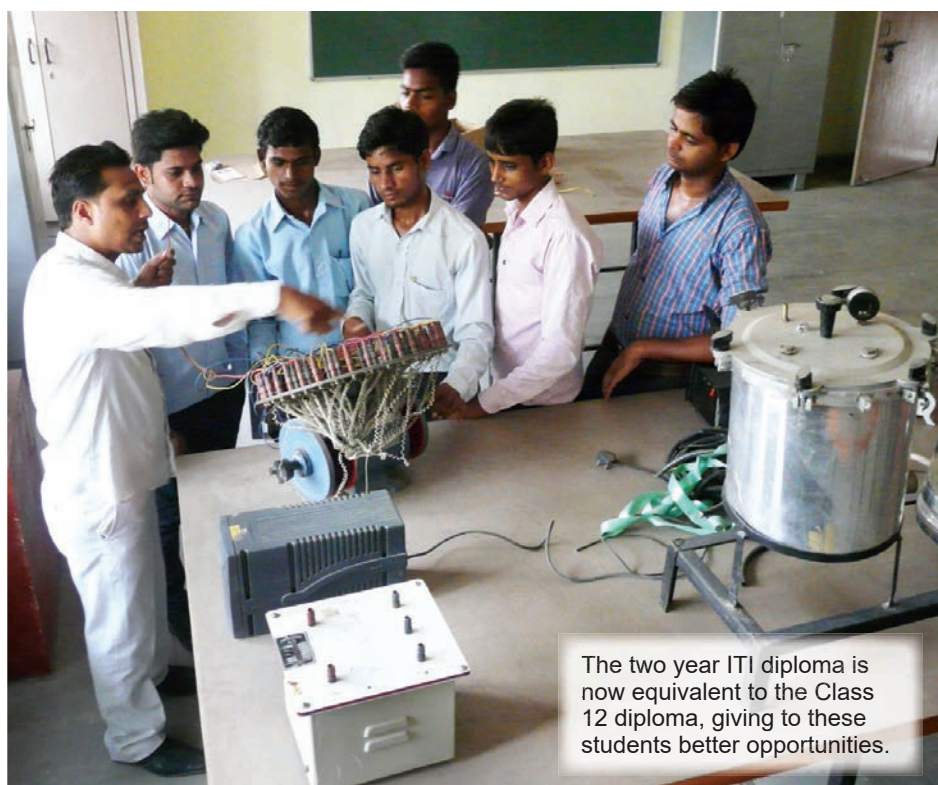


successfully trained, assessed and certified in skill courses run by affiliated training providers. St. Anthony's ITI has also applied for this grant last year. Our name has come in the list of eligible Institutes, but the scholarship money for the students has not reached. Why some of the Institutions got the money and not some others ? The reason given : 'Fund exhausted' ! This is the real India, where at every step, even to get what is promised to you, it is needed to bribe.

As a further step to the efficient implementation of *Skill India program*, the Central Government recently declared that the two year ITI diploma courses will be equivalent to the Class 12 diploma. If a student completes an ITI course, s/he will be now eligible for admission in a graduate degree programme at a college or university. This is a new development and we have to wait and see the response of the students.

Examination Malpractice

There are many universities and colleges in the country, specially in North India where education is a big business. These colleges get affiliated to a University, the students who join pay fees and mostly stay at home. At the time of exams they get support from the college and pass the exams without



The two year ITI diploma is now equivalent to the Class 12 diploma, giving to these students better opportunities.

even studying anything. This is the main reason why we do not find qualified people even among the post graduate degree/diploma holders !

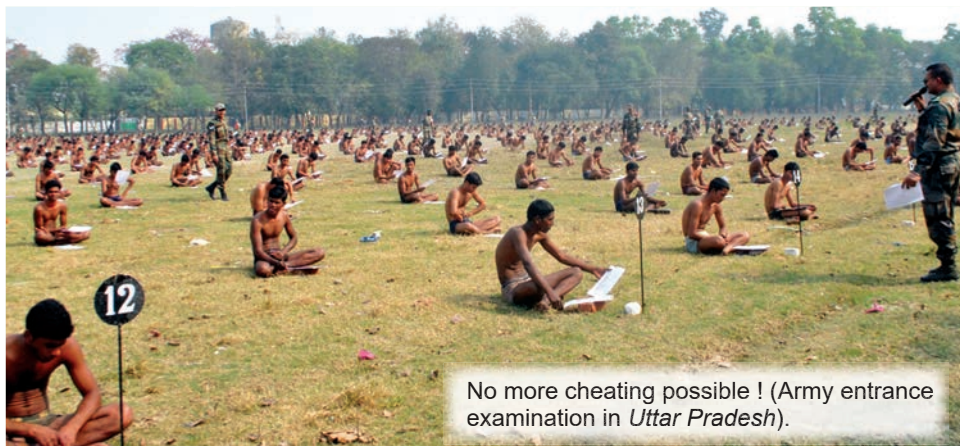
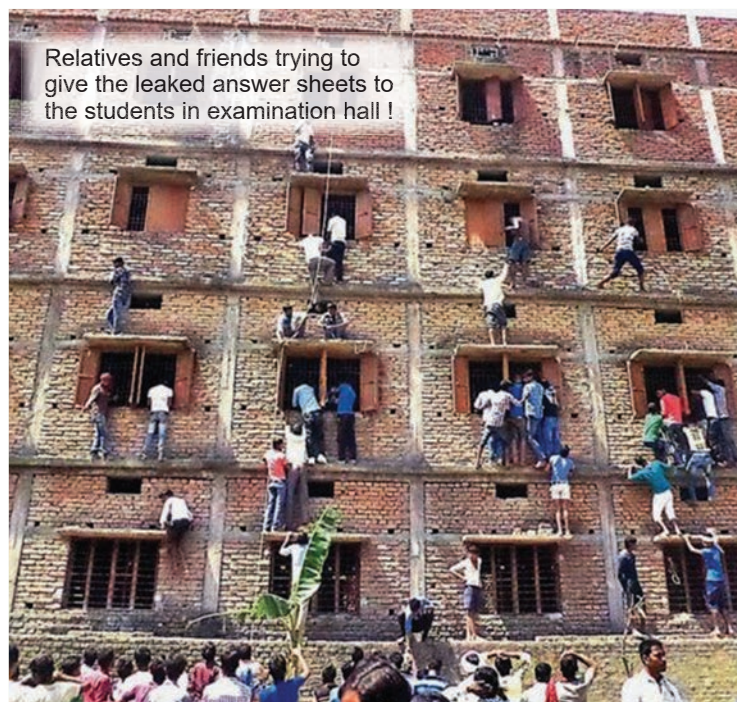
ITIs are affiliated to the Central Government and the exams are conducted all over India the same day by the Government. While these exams are very seriously conducted in the southern states of the country, it is not the same in the North where we have our projects. As unbelievable it might sound, the teachers of our ITI were asked to collect money from each student and give that money to the examiners in-charge before the central exams !

Mr. Roy Mathews, who is the current director of *Anthony's Bread* projects in India had been previously the director of ITIs in the South of the country. He finds it difficult to handle this situation and entrust this part of the work to the in-charge of ITI.

To change this scenario from this academic year, we will admit only students who would attend the classes regularly. A team of our field staff and ITI staff are already working at it.

Students Caught on Cheating

Last year, 600 students were arrested in the State of *Bihar* for cheating in exams. Many



students smuggled in textbooks and notes into the examination centres despite tight security and parents and friends were photographed climbing the walls of test centres to pass on answers to students during the current secondary school examinations.

Some photos even show policemen posted outside the centres accepting bribes to look the other way. Those caught cheating can be barred from taking an examination for up to three years, they can also be jailed or ordered to pay a fine, but punishment in such cases has rarely been reported in *Bihar*.

The interview of students who topped in class 12 exams went viral this year also. The student who topped the humanities stream told during an interview that 'political science' was all about 'cooking'. The student who came first in science named 'aluminium' as the most reactive element in the 'periodic table'. A retest was taken for the students who scored the first 14 ranks. The first and the third rank holders of science failed in the re-exams and both these students were coming from the same school !

Though cheating is very common in many parts of India, this news shows how large and blatant it can be.

A lot of efforts are done to control cheating in exams. Here is an incident that shows over 1,150 candidates, dressed only in their underwear, sitting cross-legged on an open ground in *Muzaffarpur*, in *Uttar Pradesh*, putting pen to paper in the hope of making it into the Army. They said they were ordered to do so by supervisors to ensure they don't cheat in the recruitment exam for soldiers (see picture).