

## India is facing a dual pandemic

India has been reporting the highest numbers of daily Covid 19 cases in the world for the last several weeks. Infection may continue to rise further over the next months before reaching a peak.

Following the strictest lockdown from March-end to May, India has been unlocking itself on the principle that « *we need to learn to live with Covid-19* ». Now, with Unlock-4 (June to September), every where people are free to move. The only restricted areas are containment zones where the epidemic is prevalent.

Along with the Covid-19 pandemic, the country is also battling a financial pandemic. India's GDP has crashed at the worst rate in several decades. Unemployment is high, inflation has shot up, private investment is negligible, and the government doesn't have enough money to spend.

Though the resumption of some economic activity has helped part of the informal workers to get back to work, some 19 million salaried formal economy jobs have been lost after the lockdown.

An estimated 4 million Indians below the age of 30 have lost their jobs due to the pandemic, the worst hit are those below 30. The next batch of job seekers graduate in 2021, they will join the army of unemployed. Another category are women, 4 women out of 10 are estimated to have lost their jobs.

Many of our ITI graduates (from St-Anthony's School Dugawar) who have been working



Ankit is one of the ex-graduates from St. Anthony's ITI who lost his job due to the lockdown. He was working in Delhi for Amazon India.

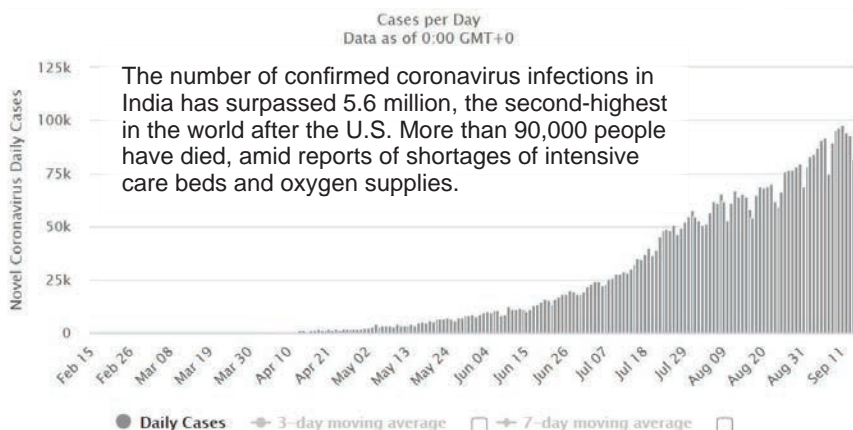
in the cities have lost their jobs and are back home. Though they are trying to find jobs elsewhere, it is very difficult at the moment. Many activities of our SHG women (*self help groups*) suffered during the lock down. The milk collection centres they set up one year ago were running well. With the lockdown, the demand for milk came down and they had to stop their business. This sudden shutting down caused them a big loss. We are now helping the groups to regain the confidence and to get back to some profitable activities.

## There are still no students allowed in schools

Two government officers who came to our office for village animation programs were tested positive to covid-19. After that, our field staff were put on quarantine. However, in our projects area, the Covid cases as per our knowledge can be counted on the fingers.

Earlier, the test for Covid was available only in the nearby city of Sambhal, but now, the government is making it available locally.

St. Anthony's School teachers have been collaborating well to make the online class successful. Each class teacher has been making the best effort to be in touch with their own students and to motivate them to learn on line. Around 90 % of our students from





classes 9 to 12 are attending the online classes. However, the turn out of the smaller ones are only an average of 65 per cent. Some students who cannot get a smartphone to use in their families, are seeking the help from friends from the same villages or other relatives.

Parents from different villages requested the teachers living in the same villages to spend few hours with their children and our teachers willingly accepted it. Many teachers have small groups of children coming to their houses for classes.

Teachers from *Rahrai* project took the initiatives to go to villages and have small groups of children gather and teach them.

Children from the *Tahirpur Leprosy colony* started classes at different shifts. *Mr. Babu*, who is in charge, is taking enough precaution to keep the protocol.

As many as 120 million students, 47.5% of total students in the country, attend private schools, making India's private school sector the third-largest school system in the world. Having the schools closed for almost



Parents share their houses for organising teaching sessions in small groups.

7 months, and no fees coming from the students, the schools have no income to pay the teachers. Teachers and their families depending on their salaries have been struggling for a square meal per day. Images of teachers selling vegetables on the roads, trying to find some manual work, etc. are viral on social media.

All the private schools have the same questions like us : « *Getting absolutely no money from the Indian government, how to manage this crisis ?* » We are doing much more effort than during a normal school time to keep children on line and our office stays open for any parent/student enquiries. Our teachers have established a good contact with the parents as well to facilitate the study of their children. In spite of it all, when it comes to the payment of fees, many don't respond to the phone calls !

The instructions given by the government and the supreme court are to stay closed, conduct online classes and get the fees from the students to pay the teachers. Parents who are not happy are appealing against this decision. Those who don't want to pay are even blocking their children from attending



Teachers who are staying in the campus are going to the villages to help children with their studies.





the online classes in fear of having to pay the fees. Though farmers in our project area are not affected as such by this pandemic, they have false hope that the government may wave off the fees. We try to convince the parents that we will follow the decision of the government whatever it might be. Some parents understand the need of the school and are collaborating. With their support, we managed so far to pay half the salary of our staff. Those who are more in need, we make sure that they are taken care of.

Even before the outbreak, India was struggling to keep children in school. Now, with the pandemic, children are forced to work into farms. If these children face delays in entering school, there may be an increase in the numbers of never-enrolled children, which could in turn push up child labor numbers.

Last year, we had 325 new students admitted in *St.-Anthony's School Dugawar*. This year, we had only 40 so far ! This means that the children who were supposed to start the school this academic year will lose one year.

This is the first summer that nobody from Belgium could make a visit to the projects, we have been working in collaboration via video conferences.

### ***Homage to Deepa\*, sponsored child***

« *Deepa was raped and murdered* » this news struck us like a lightning. News about rape and murder is getting more frequent specially in the state of *Uttar Pradesh* and now it was our turn to face this dreadful reality. *Deepa* was one of our sponsored girls from *Rahrai* project area, we were supporting her to fulfil her dream of higher education. She chose science stream for higher secondary and was working hard to get good score. She wanted to go in the medical line. Her father had passed away some years ago, leaving his 4 children with their mother. The family has been going through a real hardship and *Deepa* being the oldest child in the family,



Admission in ITI closes by mid September. The staff, like every year, organised meetings to motivate girls to join the courses.



was the main support for her mother and siblings. Anybody who knows *Deepa* would say she was a matured girl, hard-working and very kind.

### **How it happened...**

March 10, 2020, was the day of *Holi Festival* (the famous 'feast of colors'). *Deepa* went to cut grass for the cattle with her little sister in their sugar-cane field around 1 pm. At one point they got separated and not being able to trace *Deepa*, her sister went back home to call her mother. The mother came running and found her daughter's slain body in the sugar-cane field.

Neighbors rushed to the site and took the body immediately to a local clinic at the back of a two wheeler, and then from there, the *Pradhan* (village leader) took her body at the river Ganges and made it burned at the ghat (as per the Hindus tradition). This way, there was no trace of her body, neither any evidence, she just vanished in a few hours ! Since *Deepa's* father died few years ago, her mother was feeling utterly helpless, she had not much say on the situation.



## We really wanted justice for Deepa and her family !

After getting news about the incident, our field staff went to visit her mother. She was alone with her children, heart broken. We were shocked to learn all that happened. No 'FIR' (First Information Report), no police case, a clear effort to bury all the evidence of this heinous crime.

Soon, we informed the police and the enquiry started. Next morning, our staff went again to visit her mother, hoping to help her out. Meanwhile the situation had changed, our staff was not welcomed. There was a clear evidence of the interference of people who wanted to get away with the crime. However, police forced her mother to file the case and the investigation started. That was just at the beginning of the lockdown so we could not go out to the village any more but we were able to follow the news in the local newspaper.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> June, the news about the arrest of three culprits was published ! It brought such a solace to our wounded spirit.

Uttar Pradesh tops list in crime against women in India and most of the criminals get away without being caught. We are happy and thankful to the police officers who brought justice to Deepa's soul.

Each year, Deepa's mother was accompanying her daughter to the *Rahrai School* to get her books. This year also, Deepa was supposed to be with her friends who came to take their books for this academic year.

The Spirit of Deepa will be with us and motivate us to work even harder to empower girls and bring justice to girls !

Rapes and sexual violence have been in the spotlight in India since December 2012 when a 23-year-old physiotherapy student was gang-raped on a moving bus in Delhi. She died a few days later from injuries sustained

## कम में नाकाम होने पर गला

### मार्च को होली के दिन खेत पर चारा लेने गई किशोरी

हजारी

हजारी)। होली के य किशोरी के साथ शिश में नाकाम गांव कों ने गन्ने के खेत र उमकी हत्या कर । ने तीन आरोपियों कर घटना का है। घटना के बाद को सूचना दिए ही पो पक्ष के लोगों ने में अंतिम संस्कार था। तीन दिन बाद ना को जानकारी हुई



हसनपुर में खुलासा करते अधिकारी।

पहुंची थी। गन्ने के खेत में किशोरी का शव मिला था, गले पर उसका ही दुपट्टा बंधा हुआ था। कपड़े फटे हुए थे। किशोरी की माँ के गया था, जहाँ मृत घोषित होने पर पुलिस को सूचना दिए बिना ही गांव के कुछ लोगों आनन-फानन में शव का गंगा किनारे दाह

गांव के चौ हसनपुर। गांव में नहीं दी। आनन प नीरज कुमार ने ब उसने घटना की नहीं है। इसके दि होली के दि

हसनपुर। किशोरी था। मृतका की म सुनील को साथ गुलाब लगाया था किशोरी ने इसका

के बाद मृतका पर गांव के ओमप्रकाश पर और नरेश. रा

The three youths who killed Deepa were arrested and are now in jail. They are from the village of Deepa.

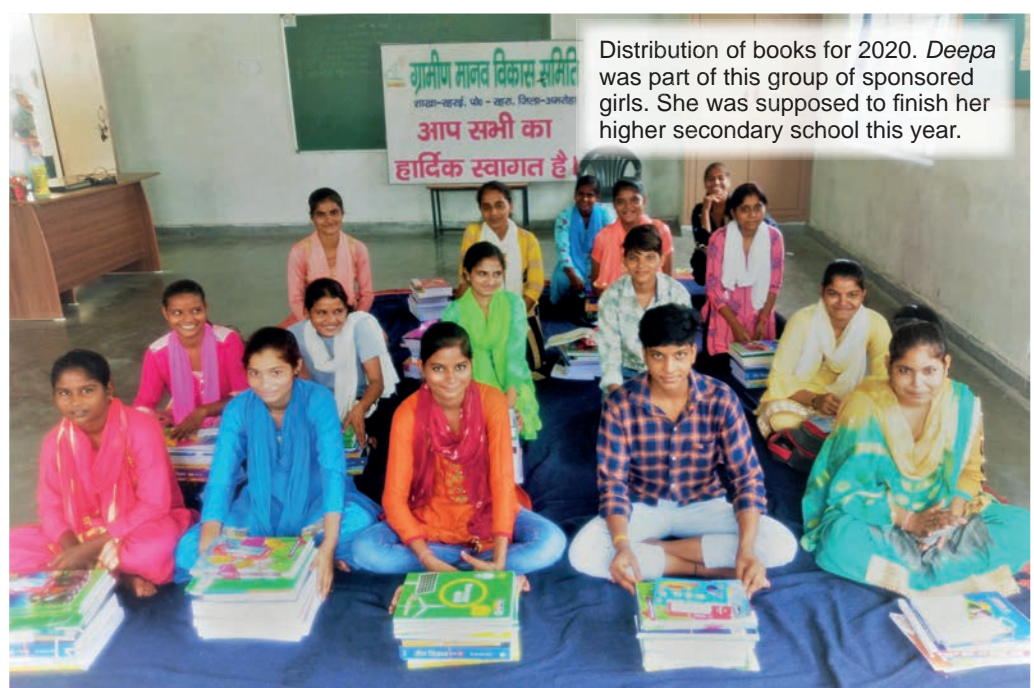
during the assault. Four of the accused were hung in March 2020. But despite the increased scrutiny of sexual crimes, their numbers continue to rise. Tens of thousands of rapes are reported in India every year, but some stand out for being deeply disturbing.

\* Deepa is not her real name, for privacy reason, we decided to change the name of the victim and not to publish her picture.

Now it is possible to read the recent news of our projects and even to make donations on :

facebook

<https://fb.me/StAnthonyNGO>



Distribution of books for 2020. Deepa was part of this group of sponsored girls. She was supposed to finish her higher secondary school this year.