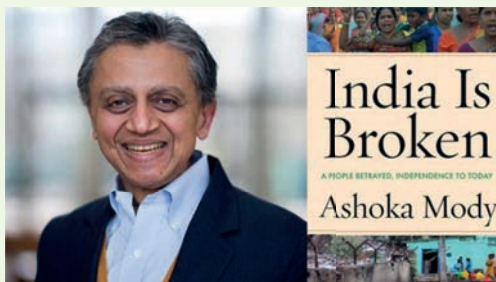


In his recent book « *India is Broken* », *Ashoka Mody*, an Indian-American economist and an author of several books, portrays a depressing story of how India has ended up broken with a struggling economy, soaring unemployment and a fractured society. He is not very optimistic for India as no major steps are taken to empower the rural poor by providing quality education, healthcare, agricultural productivity and job creation.



The immediate need of the politicians are to stay in power and the long term investment for the human developments are neglected. Adding to that is the big challenge of global warming that will further worsen the situations. In 2019, 125 million graduate and post graduate youth appeared for 35 thousand jobs as clerks, time keepers and station masters in railways. One out of 350 got a job. The grim reality is that to employ all working age Indians, the economy needs to create 200 million jobs over the next decades. While India tries to project an image of an emerging economy and a super power, to him India is a people betrayed from Independence to today.

## Building Temples... Government's priority !

Inauguration of *Ram* temple by the prime minister *Modi* on January 22 in *Ayodhya* was a national event. All the *BJP* ruled states have shut down schools and colleges and declared a full or a half-day government holiday to encourage people to watch the ceremony. Even the Indian stock markets were closed ! *Modi* asked people to light up lamps and party supporters to put up saffron flags with images of the Hindu god *Ram* on their rooftops. Many Hindus believe that the Muslim



The inauguration of the *Ram* temple in *Ayodhya*.

emperor *Babur* destroyed a temple that stood at the birthplace of their god *Ram* and built a mosque over it more than 500 years ago. The riots in 1992, following the demolition of this mosque by Hindu nationalist, took the lives of over 2000 people and caused a big divide. It was a pivotal event in the political rise of the Hindu right-wing that is now seeking a third consecutive term in power.

Just one month after the inauguration of the *Ram* temple, *Narendra Modi* visited a village not very far from *St. Anthony's School Dugawar*, to lay foundation stone for another temple in the heart of a Muslim majority area.

Although *Saint Anthony's* is a private school, we were obliged to accommodate *Modi's* security forces in the school and the



*St Anthony's School* was requisitioned by security forces...

buses were requisitioned to transport the villagers to the ceremony ! Classes had to be suspended. What can we think of a government that puts its re-election ahead of the education of its youngest citizens ?

While the adults vote for their political representatives, students of *St. Anthony's* cast their vote to elect their head boy and head girl and their representatives for the next term. This exercise not only helps them learn about their responsibility but also to help them bring changes in their villages. They could be attuned to the happenings in their villages and could influence their families and neighborhood with a rational thinking.



School representatives's elections are organized in *St Anthony's* school following strict rules.



The elected head boy and head girl of this year !

Though many students apply, final selection is done by an election committee, after scrutinizing their disciplinary records. The campaign in the campus gets the attention of the whole school and it is the main talk of the day. The candidates are given the last hour of the school to go to different classes and to present their agenda. Debates are conducted in the assembly on the last day. On the election day, each candidate has his/her team in the election booth and at the ballots counting to make sure the smooth functioning of the voting. Votes are counted at the end of the day and the results announced in next day's assembly.

## ***St. Anthonians are winning their race !***

Last November, while we were in the project, *Prashant* came to us with a big smile. He just got an appointment letter for a government job in the railway. His dream of getting a government job has come true. What a joyful news ! We were optimistic that he would be soon in the list of the students who have qualified for a government job. We discussed about the students of his batch and about the passed out students of *St. Anthony's Dugawar* and most of them are in good post. The joy of seeing our children taking off in life is our reward !



*Prashant* was one of the senior boys from *Dugawar village* who was fortunate enough to get the maximum benefit of *St. Anthony's School*. He was just 5 when we started the school. His older brother, like other older children of the village, didn't have this privilege of education. His two younger sisters followed him to our school.



*Prashant*, when he was small, at *St Anthony's School* sports day.

Life was not easy for the family because they didn't have enough land and his father was an unskilled labour. He struggled to meet both ends. Things got worse when the father contracted tuberculosis. Proper health care was out of reach for him, like it was for the vast majority of the rural Indians. They sold a part of their land but that was not sufficient to save him. He died at the age of 42 leaving his family without any substantial savings. *Prashant* was 13 at the time. The elder brother took the family burden on his shoulders and let him and his sisters continue their schooling. *St. Anthony's School* was already sponsoring the girls and after this event, we took over the educational expenses of *Prashant* too. The micro-credit program of *St. Anthony's Bread* also supported the family.

*Prashant* was an outstanding student, and the struggles made him stronger. He completed his schooling in the year 2017 and continued with graduation in Science and Bachelor of Education. He had already a big responsibility on his shoulders and to get a job was not an option, but a necessity. While doing the higher studies, he simultaneously prepared for the upcoming government exams to get a job. He appeared for all the exams he was eligible till he got selected. Now, his

post is in the railway, as assistant station manager. He is happy with this job and he consider it as a platform to stand and prepare for better opportunities to climb up the ladder. His job is well paid, so he can support his family now. He has got accommodation and because he is not very far from his home, he can visit his family occasionally.

*Rekha*, his sister was also sponsored by *St. Anthony's Bread*. After passing out from *St. Anthony's school* she worked in a local private school for some time. Recently she got married to a boy from an educated family. Her husband with his parents are running a nursing home. The family wants *Rekha* to continue



*Prashant* is happy and proud of his new job in the Indian railway.

her studies in the medical field and to work in the family clinic. The alliance was brought by a relation of *Rekha*. While the girls of her age to the majority of rural villages all over India stay illiterate and confined in the four walls, she has got deeply rooted in a good family and she has got strong wings to fly away to another horizon. This is the gift of education. The educated girls in the rural areas are only handful and they are much in demand in the « marriage market ».

We were told by one of our staff that nowadays, whenever there is an alliance coming, they first bring them into our school campus to show the school. A well educated girl is an asset to a family and when it is from a rural background, she is much more prepared to lead the family efficiently. This is a new change happening.

### A Jadwar story

Little *Rahul* and his older sister got admitted in *St. Anthony's School Jadwar* in the month of July 2023. He is in class LKG and his sister, in UKG. They are from a village called *Kiratpur*, 2km from the school. Their father used to drop them to school using his bicycle.

One morning, while he was getting ready for the school, *Rahul* had a small clash with his mother. He saw that his father was still asleep and his sister was not around, so he decided to sneak out of the house with his school bag and walk directly to school.

The autonomy he gained in two months of schooling gave him confidence to set out this journey... alone ! Meanwhile, there was a panic at home. *Rahul's* parents searched for him everywhere. At last his father reached the school to check if he was in the school and indeed he was in his class ! Just as if nothing has happened. Neither the teacher did notice



*Rahul* in his class. (In front)

anything unusual. When he was called in he was kind of embarrassed to face his father and told the teacher that he was angry with his mother and that coming to school was making him happy, that is why he took his bag and left the house.

If he can walk to school alone, why should he be dropped ? The father decided to send him to school with his sister on foot. Today, all the kids from *Kiratpur* come to school on foot !



*Rahul* and his sister *Aarti*.