

Chakor is 13 years old. She begs on the streets on Lucknow. She used to study in class Vth at government primary school, Bastauli, Lucknow. Her mother's name is Prema who works as a domestic worker. She earns Rs 1500/- through this. Her father Prem Narayan does not do any work as of now, citing reasons that he does not get any work even though he wants to. Along with Chakor's parents, her grand-mother, brother Deepak, (22) Rajeev (17) studies in a private school and sisters Mini, Laxmi (16) studies in class 7<sup>th</sup> and Arushi (8) live in the house. Her elder sister Mini (18) also works as a domestic help and earns Rs 1000/- per month. Her eldest brother Deepak is physically challenged. As per the family members, since the family income is very low, the children are forced to beg along with their 80-year-old grandmother. Chakor and Arushi have been begging for the last 4 years. Her grand mother says that due to old age it is difficult for her to find any suitable work, so she has no choice except begging.

Ananya is 10 years old. She lives in Bastauli. Her mother is Reeta Rawat and father Deepu Rawat died 4 months ago. She studies in class in government school situated near-by. Ananya often goes to beg in the vicinity of her home and to the nearby temples. She joins other friends of her age near the temples. She has started begging post lockdown. As per Ananya's mother, though the economic conditions have deteriorated post lockdown and more so after Deepu's death, both she and her aunt scold Ananya for begging, sometimes she is beaten up but she doesn't pay heed to all the scolding. At the time of begging, Ananya pretends to be dumb and often collects money needed to buy her favourite things like chocolate, chips etc which her family cannot afford. Ananya's mother is a domestic worker and she works in two households where she earns meagre Rs 1000/- a month that does not suffice for the family needs. At times, Ananya supports her mother through her earnings made through begging.

Dakshna is 13 years old and is quiet like other girls of her age. The only difference that marks her from others is that morning hours for her friends mean going to school, while for her it is going to different households to work. Dakshna lives in Samuddipur area of Lucknow with her father who is a construction labour, mother who now works as a domestic help and 2 sisters and a brother. Previously her elder sister had dropped out of school as she could not cope with education pressure and stayed at home while Dakshna and her younger sister Sudha used to study in nearby school. Covid lockdown forced them to stay back at home. During lockdown, like numerous others, both her parents lost their job and it became difficult to make both ends meet. After unlock period started, gradually her mother resumed work in one of her employer's house but that did not suffice for the family. Seeing this situation, Dakshna and her elder sister started going to work as a domestic help along with their mother during unlock period. Now she works in 2 households independently. Schools have opened up but only Sudha is going to school now. Dakshna has joined the work force along with her elder sister and mother. Resuming education is not an option for her now.

She says, "Sustaining my family is now my priority, if I resume school, my work will be lost and that will push my family in further poverty."

Sagar Sahu is a 13-year-old boy. He lives in a rented house with his family in Kamta, Lucknow. The family is originally from Chhattisgarh. His father Mahesh Sahu is a mason. His mother Neera too works as a construction labour. Last year, his father became ill and had to leave his work. Poor family conditions prompted the children to drop out from education and start working to support family. That was the first incidence where Sagar got trapped into the vicious cycle of child labour. Sagar was in class IVth when he had to drop-out. He first worked as a labour to support his mother. During lockdown construction work was abruptly disrupted and the family had no work to do. There were days when the family has nothing to eat. A neighbour of the family then came forward and supported them with ration for a few days. Consequently, Sagar found labour work at a Namkeen factory. Since then, he is working there and supporting his family. School now seems a distant dream for him. His only concern now is to earn enough to help his father recover from illness and get back to work. Says he, *"I wish my father gets well soon and start earning some money. I am not sure if I will ever be able to go back to school"*

Riyaz Ali is 9 years old. He lives in Paltan Chhwani and studies in class 3. He lives here with his parents, aunt, and an elder sister. His sister Shabnam used to study in class Vth at the time of lockdown. Post lockdown, when schools were closed, Riyaz was sent a nearby auto garage run by one of his relatives to 'learn' work while his sister started doing embroidery at home along with her mother and aunt. Now when the school has opened up, Riyaz for now is going to school but after school hours he is sent to the garage since as per his parents, he now likes watching automobile being repaired and otherwise he would be roaming around in 'bad' company of his friends. His sister has dropped out of school and continues to do the embroidery at home. Experiences show that even though Riyaz is going to school, he would soon drop out and enter into work force full-fledged while his sister has already dropped out. Their parents are sceptical about the worth or use of the kind of education being imparted at school. They feel ultimately if their son is forced to work as a labour just like his father after studies, working in a garage still offers a better opportunity.

Riyaz says, *"I like learning new work but my hands and nails get dirty and cracks have appeared. I like to go to school just like my sister but my parents are not ready to send her to school now. I fear I might have to drop from the school soon."*