

## A Brief Encounter with Masini Magar

by Rupa Dithal

A curly haired little girl in a soiled frock is strenuously breaking lumps of stones into smaller bits with a hammer. She squats on a stone, her face is red and sweaty, obviously caused by hard labour. The area around her is full of stone bits and stone dust. The regular sound of the beating hammer fills the air. Thirteen-year-old Masini Magar is just one of the



Photo by CWIN

are signs of ensuing lung damage - a sickness which almost every worker on the quarry site, becomes a victim to.

Masini lives with her mother and brother, aged fifteen, in one of the miserable shacks made up of thrown away plastic and cardboard in the squatter area nearby. In their little household, Masini's meagre in-

come makes up almost half of the family's belongings. Her mother, ailing and sick, cannot work regularly. Her brother, who also works along the river bank, delivering sands and stones to the trucks, earns between Rs. 14 to Rs. 20, a day.

Under the bridge, Masini Magar, along with her mother, works from 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening. Squatted on a single spot, she breaks stones into "roda" or chips. It is a strenuous job indeed, specially when the sun blazes mercilessly on her fragile body and her stomach is empty. But this is her lot - she must earn a living. The workers are paid by piece-rate basis which fetches no more than Rs 1.50 per "doko" or roda. A doko is a conical cane or bamboo basket that men and women carry on their backs at work. Thus Masini has to break at least ten "dokos" or roda to earn a meagre ten to fifteen Rupees. Masini who is still childishly small, but nevertheless experienced, goes on hammering the heavy stone, tack .. tack ... tack ..., making pieces fly to the air. She hardly stops, for there is no time to waste. So engrossed is she, that she often ignores the bruises on her hands, caused by the coarse brush and hammer which are her main work tool. The dull and continuous pains around her shoulders, arms and chest by the end of the day, speak of the physical pain that is sometimes difficult to bear. She has even started coughing just like her mother. Perhaps these

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After the twelve-hour long work at the quarry, Masini also has to look after the house, and help her mother wash and cook. Life means just work, and more work for this thirteen year old. Not a moment of rest or enjoyment is she entitled to.

Masini has never been to school. Very naively, she admits that she has really no idea what a school looks like. Asked what she would like to do most, she lifts her face, wipes her forehead and replies candidly, "I would like to play with dolls." But her miserable self, her pattern of life, the hammer in dusty hands, and the pathetic environment of the quarry site, confirm the contradictions of life that this little girl is subjected to.

*Rupa Dithal is associated with Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Center (CWIN). More on CWIN on page 40. SOURCE: CWD NETWORKER, January 1991*