

The New Multi-Purpose Hall



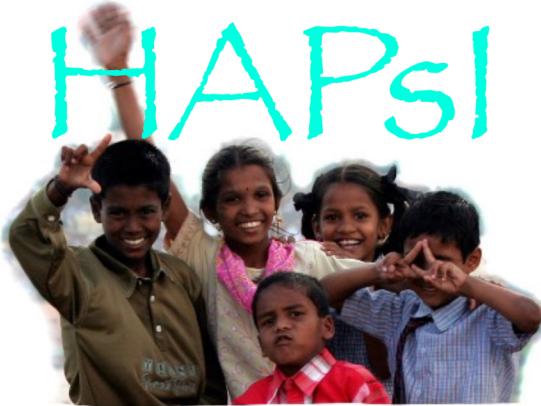
This year has seen a new addition to the site which will tremendously improve the facilities and greatly enhance the children's welfare and education.

The building concerned is being constructed to house a communal, social space in which the children will have meals, lessons and be able to use

for sport and drama, music and dancing. At the present time meals are taken in the main building in which the girls have their sleeping quarters. Teaching also takes place there and in the boys building which has no upper floor, so the boys sleep there at night. Official guidelines state that the girls and boys must have separate quarters and can only meet in a separate communal hall which is not used as sleeping quarters. The area required per child also needed to be increased.

A UK family who visited the Awake Home many years ago when there was only one building on site and have loyally supported the home through HAPsI ever since, have very generously donated the funds for this dining hall/schoolroom, realising the future of the home was in danger because of the new regulations. Many homes in the area have been closed down in the last couple of years and the children living in these homes have either been accommodated in school hostels or have had to go back to their original homesteads, some of which have no functioning school nearby.

The children are very excited by the prospects of working and playing in this new block which should be fully operational in the next few months.



Helping Alleviate Poverty in south India

Registered UK Charity No. 1122876

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Contents

- Page 2 The New Building
- Page 3 Sathyia Priya
- Pages 4 & 5 Collage

- Page 6 Sathyia Priya
- Page 7 Sathyia Priya
- Page 8 A.A.A.

Sathy Priya - a short autobiography



Thick, heavenly forests with nature at its best. Beautiful mountains make for a lovely place for living. Fruits are plentiful in these hills. This is the place where I grew up, Sirumalai.

People of many castes live in Sirumalai, but I come from the tribal community. My people live in houses in mountain crevices, natural

caves or in houses made from coconut leaves, plastic sheeting and old saris. There are none of the basic necessities of water or electricity. There were six of us living here with two goats.

We didn't have the habit of brushing our teeth when we woke up in the morning. We didn't bathe or wash our clothes. To be honest we hadn't the sense to realise that our bodies and clothes smelled. If we got hurt while playing on the mountain paths no one cared. It would get better on its own.

Sometimes we applied extract from medicinal leaves. All we could do was bear the pain.

We didn't own any good house or land. When it rained our parents couldn't cook, so they waited until the weather was fine.

Sometimes this was days of waiting and we would sleep instead of eating. After heavy rainfall our house or cave would just disappear. Wild animals lived in that area – poisonous snakes, wild cows, elephants and pigs used to trouble us. We had always to be aware of danger.

Roads, electricity, water and schools were all out of our reach. That is why none of us were educated. At the same time tobacco, snuff powder and other similar undesirable substances were easily available. At a very young age we learned this and started to take them. Without sufficient education there were no proper marriages and there were many thirteen and fourteen year old girls who became mothers.



This was my life. My parents were working as farm labourers mostly picking coffee berries or collecting oranges. Murugan, my father was a drunkard. Every day we saw him hit Aandiymall our mother. That is why we have so much love for our mother. I hate my father so much. When he used to drink he often used to hit we kids also. We were always scared of him.

After understanding our family's situation my grandparents took myself, my elder brother and my sister to stay with them. They left our younger brother as he was too little. During my first three years of school I stayed there and then lived in a hostel connected to a government school until I was ten. Even though my grandparents weren't rich they were rich in their hearts and the love which we didn't receive from our father, we had from them. When I used to study there I always wanted to see and talk with my mother but no one was able to take us to her.

Sometimes I used to talk to her on the phone using a neighbour's mobile but I still wanted to see her.

One day when I was nine years old I was walking home from school and there was a surprise waiting for me. Yes, my lovely, beautiful angel mother was there. She had come for a family marriage. I



cannot express my inner happiness in words but my eyes were wet with tears. My brother and sister were not able to understand this happiness and love as they were too young. Very sadly that was the last time I saw my mother, but whenever I think of her I remember her face on that day.

Once when I was ten and coming home from school one day I saw a very unusual large group of people on the road outside my house. I knew it was related to some tragic event but never thought it would be the death of my mother. My relatives were not able to tell me what had happened at first. After constant questioning eventually, they told me "Yes, your mother has died". When I heard this the pain in me was indescribable, my throat was dry, my hands and legs began to tremble, and I could not move. My head was spinning and the sky caved in. I could not recognize the people around me. I was shattered as the one thing in my life was my mother. The expectation I had of caring for her in the future was destroyed. I couldn't believe it to be true. I rolled around on the floor and cried. No one could console me. I just wanted to go hug my mother and cry but couldn't. After many hours I began to understand that her death was not natural. It was murder. Something I have seen many times with my own eyes. My mother who always had an innocent laugh, was killed by my father. He threw a rock at her head and she died.

To hear that I could only think of how much pain she had to suffer. Can anybody explain why she had so much torture for so many years? At the time of her death would she not have thought of her four children? Would her soul have left her body in peace? Who will fulfil that love? Questions in me led to hatred and depression. It was even more heart-breaking when I found out my father killed her in front of my three year old brother.

At the time my mother had been taking care of my brother in the forested areas of the hills, whilst she worked there. Being very small he was not able to speak about it at first but in time he was able to make them see what had happened. I cannot imagine what damage this would have made in such a small delicate heart.

After crying and struggling for hours I finally went to see my mother's body in the graveyard. I had the silly belief that my mother would come back to life when hearing my voice but her body was only ashes.

I was then not able to give love or even basic necessities to my brothers and sister. I realised that I would have to become mum to them but the love and the care that I could not have now, I had to give to them. On all four of our faces you could see only hatred and anger. This society and my irresponsible father had brought the family to this. My uncle and aunt then took responsibility for us. Our aunt hated my father and blamed him for our mistakes. At that time I faced a deep conflict in my mind that I could not explain and I was not able to face my aunt. I realised I had nowhere to go and spent my time doing nothing. After some days she and other relatives arranged for me and my brother Vijay to go to the Awake Mercy Home.

At first we didn't like it here and I missed my sister and younger brother. My sister should have started school but wasn't getting any education or the basic necessities. I felt bad but Awake understood my feelings and my siblings were given new clothes at the festival time and allowed to stay in the Home. I was very happy.

It took a few months to understand Awake Home and adapt to the new surroundings which gave us food, shelter and education. If I wanted anything I received it. I also had the opportunity to participate in sports, meditation, yoga, karate, cultural competitions and many other things. From this platform I could grow and mature in my thinking. There are many children here who have faced difficulties. All have problems but the size of these differs. I grew to understand this in the Home. Whatever difficulties I face in the future, my main goal is to study well and become a police officer. There are many people avoiding justice like my father, who took my innocent mother's life, and who escape punishment. My main aim is to punish such people. To become a police officer I need to study well and be fit. I am preparing myself to act like a mother for my brothers and sister. Awake has agreed that my sister and brother can stay and study here this year.

I now receive love from my friends here which I didn't get from parents or anyone else in my early life. Living and talking with them gives me such happiness. Celebrating festivals together makes me even happier. The love I receive from everyone here is expressed through this happiness. Now and for always I will feel I have come to the right place and in the right vehicle. My journey has been and will be successful. The difficulties that I may face will be overcome with the help of Awake. I shall be an example for other Priyas out there. Travelling towards my goal will be like moving from darkness to light.

Awake Alumni Association



Old students keep reappearing at the Awake Home. They socialise, play with the children and have a great time themselves. They are also very active in fundraising, recently finding the money to buy a scooter for Vairamani, the Office Administrator and old student herself, who is disabled. Although the Indian traffic can be very challenging Vairamani loves the new freedom the bike gives her and she is always keen to travel. In the collage section on pages 4 and 5 there is a small picture of her ready to go.

HAPsI has no administration costs.

All funds received are used to help needy children in south India. Remember that if you pay tax HAPsI can claim Gift Aid. Please ask for a form to

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Send donations, cheques to **HAPsI**, to the
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