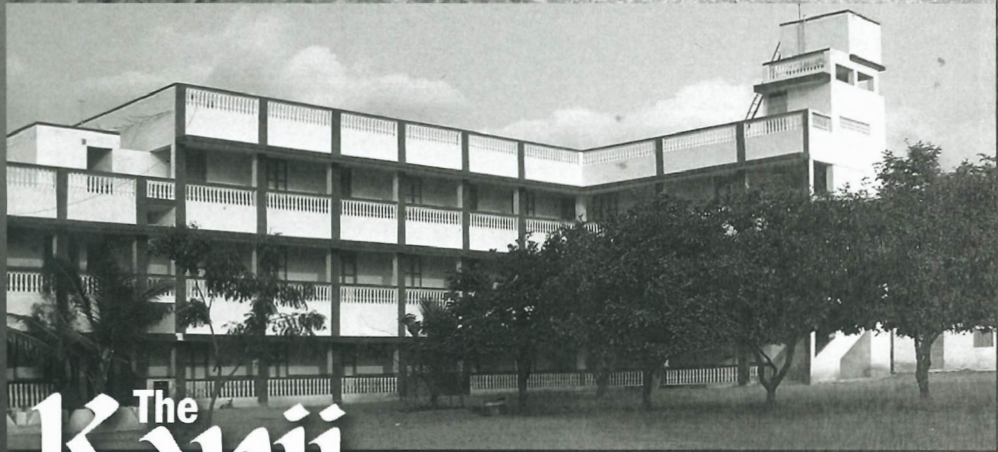
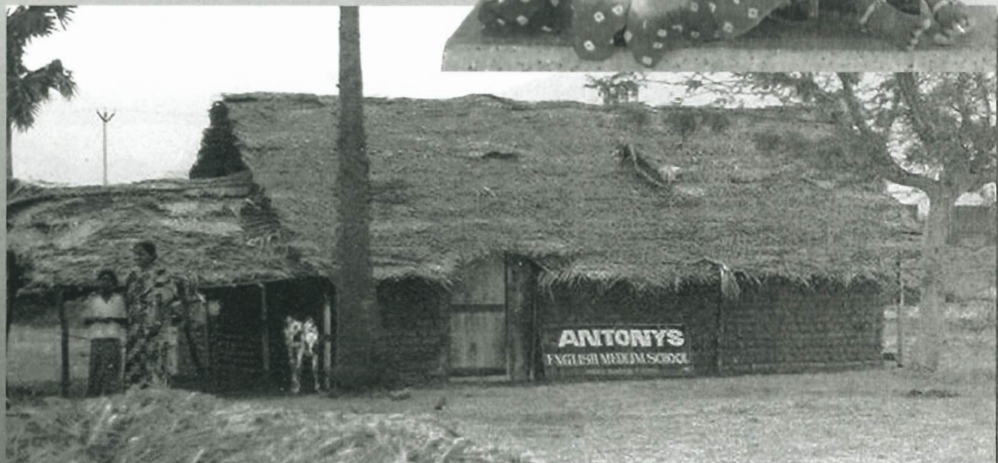
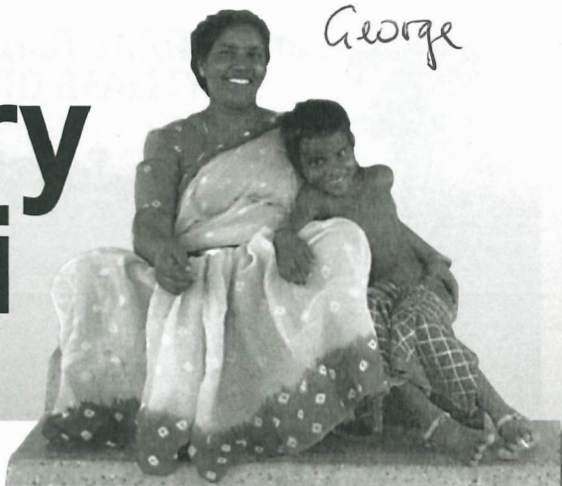


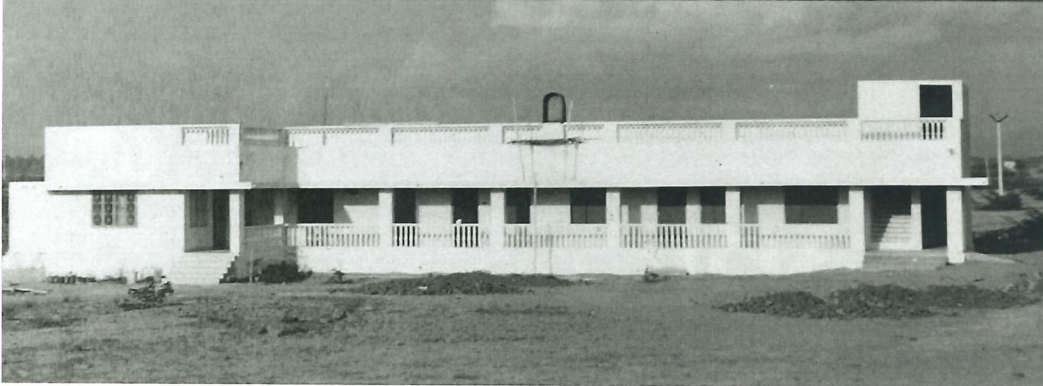
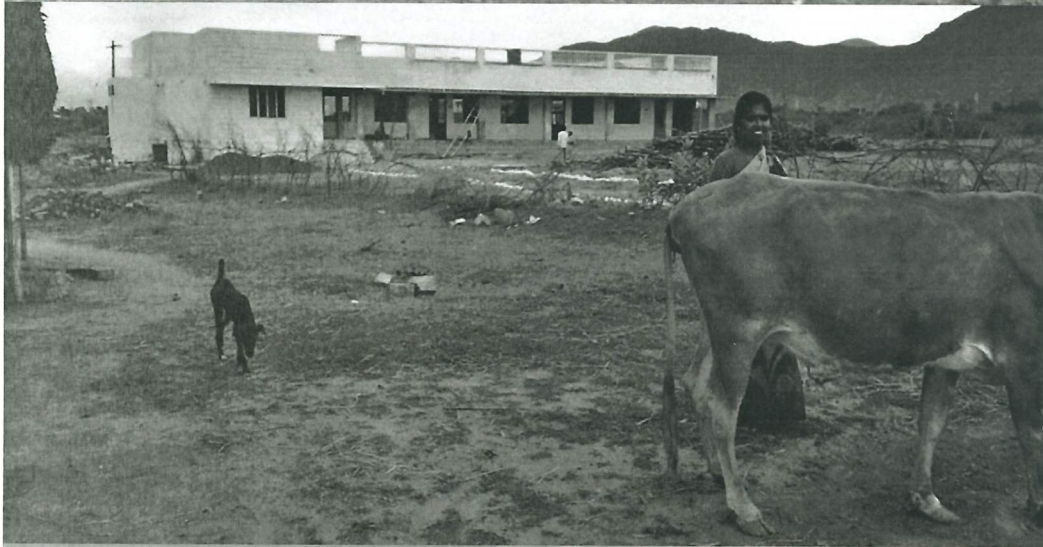
The Story of Kanji

George



The
Kanji
Project

Working to advance education and relieve poverty in India



THE FIRST THREE YEARS IDEA TO REALITY

How it all began

The charity began in a very humble way in 1993. Maria Rayappan, the founder, came from a small and remote village named Kanji, a village in an extremely poor and drought ridden part of south India with no industry, poor soil and little employment and surrounded by 22 similar villages. Many of the people in these villages come from the lowest caste system in India called 'Dalits'; they used to be called 'untouchables'.

Maria left her village to become a nun working with the poor in Africa and spending time also in England, returning to India after 20 years in 1993 for the funeral of her mother. But she had never forgotten the plight and poverty of the people she grew up with, especially the poor children, the orphans and the widows. There was no orphanage where these unfortunate children could be looked after and no school where the children could receive a good standard of education and so the children had no hope for the future. They were caught in the poverty trap.

It was during Maria's visit home for her mother's funeral that her desire to try to help these poor people grew even stronger. This led her to making the very painful decision to leave the religious life and 'do something' for them. She hoped she might be able to build a small 'hut' to look after and teach five to ten orphans, with some help and support from her family.

The birth of the charity

One of the many friends Maria had made in England offered her £10,000 to buy a plot of land to build a hut to look after the children. But without regular donations, the project could not become a reality.

In the summer of 1993, Maria returned to England to earn some money to support her project and met a new friend, who was to form a committee and set up the UK charity dedicated to raising money to fund Maria's work in Kanji.

Fundraising began in a number of ways. Penny jars were handed out to friends and funds were raised by arranging coffee mornings, tabletop sales, sponsored walks etc. Five months later, Maria returned to India to carry out the work that had to be done.

The start of the orphanage and the school

Maria built a hut and 'took in' about ten orphan children. She also began building the school, knowing that the only hope for a better life for the children would be through education.

There was a great need for a school in the area that could provide a good standard of education, where the children would learn in English. In the state schools, with class sizes of 120 and a very low standard of education, pupils are taught through the local language of Tamil. English is only taught in government schools situated in the cities and big towns and out of the reach of the poor and disadvantaged children of Kanji. Knowing English is

Front Cover top to bottom

- Maria Rayappan with Mary Jane, one of the first children's home residents after being abandoned as a baby
- The original hut used as home and school
- The school buildings in 2005

Facing Page top to bottom

- Maria Rayappan looks on as the school building gets started
- The first phase nears completion
- The school, in 1994, ready for its first pupils



a gateway to government jobs such as the Civil Service or the Police. Without English, only menial jobs, if any at all, are possible. This is why Maria wanted to establish an English medium school in Kanji to give the poor deprived children from the surrounding twenty-two villages an equal opportunity to get out of the poverty trap.

Towards the end of 1994, the school doors were opened to the local children, who occupied the few classrooms already built.

The orphan children were moved from the hut into the school assembly room, where they would eat, sleep and play. This was because the roof of the hut, made of coconut leaves, leaked in the monsoon and the hut would flood. However, the greatest danger came from poisonous snakes dropping from the roof.

With so much work to be done, Maria was joined by her nephew, Lourdasamy, who was training as a priest. A summer job became a full time job, and Lourdasamy, who had decided his vocation lay in Kanji, became headmaster of the school.

Daily, poor people would come to the school to try to get a little rice to eat; widows with their children, old men and poor children from the villages. Maria gave what rice she could afford. Some of the widows were employed as 'ayahs' or ancillary staff. The little wages they received helped them to feed their children.

A second-hand bus was bought to transport the children to and from school each day. Since the school had the only bus in the entire area, it was in demand day and night to transport patients to the nearest hospital 20km from Kanji along very poor roads. The majority of the patients were mothers in labour or attempted suicides. Caught in poverty and hopelessness many attempted suicide by drinking poison. Other patients included women following self induced abortions and baby girls. Families feel they cannot cope with another female child so they try to kill them by making the baby eat sand. Female children are often seen as a burden because of the dowry system.

The craft centre

In 1996 a three-roomed hut was built to use as a tailoring and craft centre equipped with thirteen sewing machines. Many uneducated teenagers and young adults have little hope of employment. The craft centre caters for between forty and fifty students. With a wonderful teacher, Siva, it has become a great success. Ninety five percent of the students have gone on to set up their own small businesses or to work in clothing factories. Once they have done their apprenticeship, they can earn their living to support their families and themselves.

The first three years –a sense of achievement

Within three short years, Maria's vision for providing shelter, love and an education for the very poorest in Kanji had become a reality with 160 children attending the school and fifteen babies and young children being cared for in the orphanage - but with many more waiting to get in. The craft centre also provided opportunities for older children.



Top to bottom

- Lourdasamy with a group of orphan children outside the school
- The first bus
- A seamstress, busy in the craft centre

THE YEAR 2000 A YEAR OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The new children's home

We purchased a new property 2km from the school. Although neglected and in need of renovation it was well suited to house the orphan children and was being sold cheaply, for a quick sale, at £15,000. This included two acres of fairly good land. The renovation work involved building and renewing a dining hall, two rooms with concrete floors for both boys' and girls' dormitories, kitchen, storeroom, playing area and some staff accommodation. All this work was completed in 2000.

The children's home was named 'Shanthi Lumin' (Home of Peace and Light). The home to this day has certainly lived up to its name. Everyone who visits 'Shanthi Lumin' remarks on the laughter and happiness of the children and experiences a great peace surrounding the place.

The children are also taught a number of practical skills, e.g. gardening, looking after animals, social interaction, play and study.

Each child has their own locker where they are responsible for keeping their clean clothing and toiletries.

Many of the children attend St Antony's School and are picked up by our school bus each morning and taken back every evening. Others, who have not had the opportunity to learn English from a young age, attend the local Tamil medium school. Everybody contributes to making the home a real home where there is love and genuine caring.

School Improvements

Five new classrooms were added to the school and two bore wells were sunk; providing water for domestic use, drinking water for the school children and water for planting the paddy field.

Thanks to a further generous donation from a special friend in England, Maria and Lourdasamy are able to live on the school site. This house also provides a base for visitors.



- Progress is made as classrooms are added during 2000
- Children newly settled at the Shanthi Lumin children's home



Clockwise from top

- The school and St Antony's grotto, October 2003. The then new bus is just disappearing out of shot
- Happy faces at Shanthy Lumin 2002
- School Assembly 2002
- Teachers with Maria and Lourdasamy in 2002
- Building in progress - showing the water tower - making the most of the bore wells sunk in 2000

PROJECTS FUNDED SINCE 2000

2001

Five more classrooms were added to the school and the whole property was fenced with some sturdy fencing. The number of teaching staff was increased due to the growth in student numbers. A much needed second and bigger bus was bought (second-hand) for approximately £5,000. All of the big projects were funded by fundraising, donations and the kind and generous support from four church communities two in Brighton, one in Worthing, and one in Whitehaven Cumbria.

2002

A new 'grotto' of St Antony was erected. This was donated by the president of The Kanji Project.

2003

A further fifteen classrooms plus a library and science laboratory and computer room were completed. A new headmaster was appointed which released Lourdasamy to become full-time administrator with Maria as assistant.

The number of teachers grows to seventeen including the craft teacher, headmaster and assistant, a computer teacher, and an art and dance teacher. The school has a clerk, a watchman, two drivers and helpers. There are three 'ayahs' who help to clean the school and help with the children at meal times.

St Antony's helps local employment with builders, electricians, plumbers, carpenters and many 'coolies' or labourers helping with building work.

Many parents have moved into the area so that they can send their children to our school. Every June the school has a new intake of more than fifty students. There is a queue of parents with children applying for a place in the school stretching right outside the school gates. Due to the limited places, many have to be turned down. Students are expected to pay a small fee towards their education but true to the Kanji vision, the poorest of the poor are never turned away and are given free places.

2004

There is a growing number of needy children that Maria just cannot turn away. The charity donates more money to expand Shanthy Lumin to accommodate a total of fifty children.

Three special Kanji stories that show the heart of the Kanji vision

1995

An old widow arrived at St Antony's carrying a little bundle which she had found in a rubbish tip covered in and being eaten alive by ants. It turned out to be a very neglected male child. The old lady had been begging, to feed them both, but she could no longer cope. Maria took them in. The child had bonded with the old lady. They were taken to the children's home where they were looked after and nourished. The old lady stayed to look after the little boy who was named Manoj. He is growing up a very happy little boy, who is always smiling and has a wonderful sense of fun. His real parents were never traced.

1997

One day, Maria had a call from the hospital to come and rescue a new-born baby girl. The baby's mother was only sixteen and unmarried. She wanted to abandon her baby at the hospital because, as an unmarried mother, she would not be accepted in her village. If she did keep the baby only an old man would be likely to marry her; a young girl with a dowry would have no trouble marrying a young man. Maria collected the baby and brought her home to the orphanage where she has grown and flourished into a loving and lovely child. Her mother came to see her but she did not want her back. She realised that she was loved and well looked after.

2004

Two young brothers were being looked after by their ailing partially blind grandmother; left to care for them because their father had abandoned them, and their mother, when they were young. Their mother had been recently raped and murdered because she fell in love and had an affair with a married man who was paying for the boys' schooling. After their mother's death, their schooling was no longer paid for and the boys, emotionally traumatized by the cruel loss of their mother, were sent as child labour to building sites. For a year their grandmother struggled to keep them. Eventually, she heard about Maria and the children's home. She came and begged Maria to take them in. The care of the children's home has enabled them to start looking forward again.



THE KANJI PROJECT CHARITY ITS SPONSORS, DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

The UK charity has grown steadily. It has eight trustees, who are all volunteers, giving freely of their time and their gifts to make a difference to the children of Kanji. Virtually every pound that is given to the charity goes directly to India to support the children's home and the school. None of this would be possible without the wonderful support of our caring and generous sponsors, together with our helpers and supporters. Many lifelong friendships have been made among trustees, sponsors and helpers. All those closely involved will say how their lives have been enriched from their involvement in the charity.



There are many stories to be told about the wonderful kindness and depth of caring of some people, from the oldest to the youngest. Many of those good people have got very little themselves but they make the sacrifice and try to help.

At one fund raising event where we showed a video of the children at St Antony's and the children's home, one five year old boy watched the video with great interest. He came up to me and said 'It is my birthday today, and I want to give my birthday money to help the poor children in India who have nothing'. On another occasion, at a coffee morning, a little girl came up with an armful of clothing. She said 'I want to give some of my best dresses to the poor little girls in India'. At another event, an elderly lady crippled with arthritis had been sitting alone at a table and, as I passed by, she pushed something in my hand. When I looked, to my amazement it was a £50 note. As she pressed the note into my hand she said 'this is for the poor children at the orphanage'. We are constantly amazed at how generous people are.



Matthew Byrne, President

Opposite from top

- Trustees and helpers at an instructive lunch with Lourdasamy (standing) while on a visit to England for a beneficial course
- Raffle ticket folding at a fund raiser
- Lady Sarah Clutton, who became the charity's patron in 2004

The Kanji Project

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Registered Charity 1090901
Patron: Lady Sarah Clutton



• Matthew Byrne, the charity's president, in front of a display designed to create interest at a fund raising event