

'I live in two worlds. One with parents I know, another with parents unknown'

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Dreams and milestones hardly matter when one's identity and roots are blurred. And Lise Meenaxshi is one of many in a quest for their roots. The 45-year-old India-born woman, a social worker helping young adults in Denmark, was adopted by Danish couple Niels Henning Rasmussen and his wife Ella in 1982 when she was five years old. The Rasmussen family adopted two children from India, Meenaxshi and her foster brother David, through the Danish adoption agency Dia.

Meenaxshi knew she wanted to find her biological parents despite being showered with love and care by her foster family, if only to discover herself. That's how her journey began in 2012 when she began to collect information about her adoption from the Danish government. "I wanted to make sense of my world where in one version, I have known parents, in the other, unknown parents," says Meenaxshi.

It took her years to acquire little details about her adoption from the Danish government. With the documents, Meenaxshi was hopeful about her journey to find her roots. In the meantime, there was a pleasant surprise for her family in 2016 when her adoptive brother David found his biological brother Martin, who was in Denmark as well. Seeing David's emotional reconnection, Meenaxshi was determined to find her parents. Among the details she pieced together, Meenaxshi found out that for a while she was at Madras Christian Children's Home in Pallavaram, Chennai, headed at the time by Pastor George.

“It’s strange but I keep remembering the trees in front of the institution.

When we got there, I knew the way to Pastor George’s office inside the institution. It was as if I had been there before. But I couldn’t remember anything else inside the institution. ”When she got there, Meenaxshi was heartbroken. “The staff at the home said they had discarded all the documents after Pastor George got ill. I am now speaking to the lawyer who finalised my adoption papers hoping they have more information on this matter. ”

Meenaxshi says she has three different versions of her adoption. One from her adoptive parents with the Danish documents as proof, a second from a petition filed in the Delhi high court, and the third from what she learned and experienced about her childhood in India through hypnosis. Meenaxshi isn’t sure which of these is the real one.

According to documents provided by the Danish government which were sent to them from India, Meenaxshi was born on April 27, 1977, in Madras to Vanaja and Pa neer Selvam. It is stated that she was with her mother for 40 months after which she was sent to the children’s home on August 12, 1980. Meenaxshi, David, and Martin, David’s bi ological brother, were together at the home.

After looking through the correspondence between F Lund Nielson from the adoption centre in Denmark, and Pastor George, Meenaxshi realised her adopti on was delayed multiple times for legal reasons regarding the veracity of the documents and to ensure it was not a case of abduction. For instance, says Meenaxshi, there weren’t any documents from her birthparents regarding her adoption or admission into the home.

Meenaxshi was then shifted to Holy Cross Social Service Centre in New Delhi where she stayed for three months, while a plea for her adoption was filed in the Delhi high court by a guardian from the Delhi institution.

In the petition, it was stated that Meenaxshi was born to ‘unknown’ parents and brought to the Madras institution by an unknown person on May 4, 1977, when she was a week old. The legal petition which app r oved Meen axshi’s adoption did not match the documents provided to the Danish government from India. A legal notice about the adoption was published in a local newspaper in Delhi for the birth parents to seek custody. Meenaxshi still wonders why a legal notice was published in a

local newspaper in New Delhi when she was originally from Chennai.

Meenaxshi decided to try hypnosis in the hope that it would help her remember her childhood as a three year old when she lived with her birth parents and grandparents. “I had flashes of a large house with a lawn, fountain, and two huge gates. I cannot remember faces or names, but I keep getting visions of being snatched by two men on a scooter from in front of my house. I remember they put me in a van. Then I remember meeting my uncle and aunt, who drove me to the children’s home. In my memory, I can see them taking money in exchange for me.”

Meenaxshi says though her father’s name was recorded as Paneer Selvam, she thinks it was Prasanna Janaki. “I also remember my childhood home being in a place called ‘Kappur’ and people calling me Pooja.”

With three versions of her identity, Meenaxshi is more determined than ever to find her birth parents before it’s too late. She is being helped by child’s rights activist Arun Dohle and Anjali Pawar, an advocate and a consultant at the Adoptee Rights Council.

“There are many cases where adoptees are searching for their birth parents. Nothing will change if we do not know how these children are entering the system,” says Pawar.

“In the 1980s, there were several reports about the business of ‘exporting children’. These children have grown up and want to find their birth parents,” says Dohle, who was born in India but adopted by a German family.

An individual’s identity is the foundation of their purpose in life. “My parents won’t live forever and I’ve to go now before it’s too late,” says Meenaxshi.