



Research of origins in Sri Lanka

In order to support adoptees' autonomy, the adoptee-led interest group Back to the Roots, Switzerland, presents this document as a guide for roots search in Sri Lanka based on adoption papers.

The aim of this document is to provide helpful information for adopted persons in order to examine the available adoption papers and give them the opportunity to take the search into their own hands without having to rely on third parties, agencies or other providers of possibly overpriced search services.

The information was collected with the best of our knowledge and belief from several adoptees who have conducted their own and others' roots search and have collected years of experience working with these documents and with local authorities and customs (special thanks to Sander Breeman).

All information is provided without warranty. Back to the Roots accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of the information, nor for the consequences of a roots search. Back to the Roots recommends the consultation of professional psychological support for the search process.

Content

1 Relevant adoption papers

- 1.1 Original birth certificate**
- 1.2 Translated birth certificate**
- 1.3 Adoption order**
- 1.4 Affidavit**
- 1.5 Social report**
- 1.6 Medical report**
- 1.7 Sri Lankan passport**
- 1.8 Photos**
- 1.9 Narrative by adoptive parents**
- 1.10 Acting mothers**
- 1.11 The "players"**
- 1.12 Analysis of documents**

2 Research on location

- 2.1 Hospital birth register**
- 2.2 Divisional Secretariat**
- 2.3 Grama Sevaka**
- 2.4 Address of mother**
- 2.5 Post office**
- 2.6 Searchers**
- 2.7 Acting mothers**
- 2.8 DNA testing**
- 2.9 Unsuccessful search**



Research of origins – IG Back to the Roots

1 Relevant adoption papers

1.1 Original birth certificate

The Sinhalese birth certificate is issued by the Divisional Secretariat of the municipality of the former residence of the mother. It is based on the information in the registry of the hospital. Registration of birth is usually carried out by the mother within a few days after birth at the Divisional Secretariat. In cases where the mother can not do this herself, the information is transmitted by the birth hospital to the Divisional Secretariat. Every birth certificate has its own number. The birth is then reported by the Divisional Secretariat to the national birth register in Colombo.

It is possible that the information on the birth certificate is already incorrect. For example, there were high-ranking hospital employees involved in child trafficking. It was easy for them to make false statements. Some documents also have missing stamps and signatures. This may indicate that the birth has never been officially registered in a hospital (and thus in no other office). If the child was stolen from the mother, all information can be fictitious or refer to another, existing person (eg acting mother)

සමාජයේ සියලුම කාරණා ලදී.
ALL INFORMATION IS FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY
Formal Price of charge

ජනරජයේ ලියාපදිංචි කිරීමේ ලේඛනය
REGISTER OF BIRTHS
විවාහයේ පවතින පුද්ගලයන්
Married persons

ජනරජයේ ලියාපදිංචි කිරීමේ නියෝගය (110 වන පනුව)
Births and Deaths Registration Act (Cap. 110)

1981 (ජූනියා) මැදුමක පැහැදිලි කළ බව සිදු
කරන ලදී.
1981 (June) clearly stated in the birth certificate.

2a දිස්ත්‍රික්කය
District

2b නගරය
City

3 උපන් දිනය හා ස්ථානය
Date and place of birth

4 නම
Name

5 ජාති
Sex

6 පියාගේ විස්තර
Father's details

7 මවගේ නම
Mother's name

8 උපන් දිනය
Date of birth

9 උපන් ස්ථානය
Place of birth

10 ජාති
Sex

11 වයස
Age

12 විවාහයේ පවතිනද? (විවාහයේ පවතින බවට තීරණය කරන්න)
Was parents married? (Decide if parents were married)

13 දුටුවේ කවරෙකුද?
Who gave the information?

14 දුටුවේ කවරෙකුද?
Who gave the information?

15 දුටුවේ කවරෙකුද?
Who gave the information?

1981 (ජූනියා) මැදුමක පැහැදිලි කළ බව සිදු
කරන ලදී.
1981 (June) clearly stated in the birth certificate.

13 දුටුවේ කවරෙකුද?
Who gave the information?

14 දුටුවේ කවරෙකුද?
Who gave the information?

15 දුටුවේ කවරෙකුද?
Who gave the information?

> above example is missing a stamp/seal

- 1 birth certificate number
- 2a district
- 2b city
- 3 date and place of birth
- 4 name of the child
- 5 sex
- 6 information about the father
- 7 name of the mother
- 8 date of birth of the mother

- 9 birthplace of the mother
- 10 ethnic affiliation of the mother
- 11 mother's age
- 12 marital status of the mother
- 13 name and address of the person giving the information (normally = mother)
- 14 signature of the person giving the information (normally = mother)
- 15 signature of the registry official

1.2 Translated birth certificate

The translation of the birth certificate into English is commissioned in case of adoption. Usually this was done by the adoption lawyer. On the back is usually a handwritten note and a stamp to confirm that it is a correct translation.

☛ Many translations have minor translation errors. The spelling of place names and personal names occurs in different forms. In some cases, major discrepancies are possible. Thus, it should be worked as much as possible with the birth certificate in the original language during the search of origin.

1.3 Adoption order

The adoption order is issued by the court in which the adoption is validated.

☛ This information is not reliable. For example, a birth mother tells how the entire court case was reenacted for the sake of adoptive parents, with a fake judge, fake staff, etc. on a day the court was officially closed. In addition, acting mothers were often used in court (see 1.10).

1.4 Affidavit

An affidavit is a document where the mother gives consent to the adoption. Sometimes in addition to the name of the mother, her place of residence, religious affiliation and other information can be stated.

☛ Even a signed affidavit does not guarantee that the written content is in line with reality. There is no way to verify the authenticity of the signature.

1.5 Social report

This document is intended to outline the family situation of the child.

☛ The questionable purpose of this document was probably to present the child to Europeans as adoptable. Keywords such as illegitimate, poverty, runaway father and clay house are often used. Also the sentence that in the future no contact with the mother will be possible, is often used. A large number of such documents were written by a female official named Somaratne (Retired Probation Officer). Somaratne was the sister of the notorious lawyer Thavanesan. Thus, you can not rely on this information. There are several known cases where the information given there has been found to be incorrect.

1.6 Medical report

Information on the physical condition of the newborn

☛ Often the medical report on the newborn was issued by a doctor named Goonawardane. This doctor too is one of the well-known names involved in illegal adoptions. However, finding among your documents a report by this doctor does not allow conclusions to be drawn as to whether it was a legal or illegal adoption.

1.7 Srilankan passport

In order for the adoptive parents to travel with the child from Sri Lanka, the child needs a passport. This is usually issued shortly before departure. The Swiss embassy then issues the entry visa for Switzerland. In the passport, the child already has the surname of the adoptive parents.

☛ The details in the passport are based on the above mentioned documents. In part, even there, the information was not correctly copied. Due to different photos, crossed out and contradictory information, it is obvious that such passports were issued very negligently. You can not rely on the data in the passport.

1.8 Photos

Some adoptive parents can meet the child's mother. In most cases, this is prevented by the mediating persons, so that the only meeting takes place in court.

☛ Since it often happened that the real mother did not appear in court to hand over the child to the adoptive parents, there can be no guarantee that the woman in a photograph is actually the right

mother. For example, there are cases where the same woman is pictured as a mother on photos of different adoptees. However, DNA testing in these cases proved that it was not the mother of any of them.

1.9 Narrative by adoptive parents

Stories or travel diaries of the adoptive parents may contain interesting details.

☛ However, there are several reasons why the stories of the adoptive parents are not always reliable:

- Memories fade and change over time
- It can not be checked if what was told to the parents back then corresponds to reality.
- There are adoptive parents who purposely state wholly or partially incorrect facts in an attempt to "protect" themselves and / or their adoptive child from a painful truth.

1.10 Acting mothers

Acting mothers are women who are hired to hand over a child which is not their own in court. An acting mother should pretend to be the mother of the child, even to the adoptive parents. Some acting mothers were given a small amount of money, others were manipulated or coerced. Some women have previously given their own child for adoption and have been recruited for other children because they already knew how to do it. Others have not given their own children for adoption.

1.11 The „players“

Dawn de/da Silva: controversial mediator; active especially in Switzerland, Germany, France; worked with the lawyer D.E.B. Perera; managed a baby farm in Wadduwa; was arrested in the 80s but acquitted; worked with various "dealers" in various regions who provided babies; today 80 years old, lives in Sri Lanka and/or USA

Ms Rukmani & Mr Arumugam Thavanesan: both are attorneys; corrupt working method; good network of corrupt officials, including her sister M.F. Somaratne (Retired Probation Officer); died January 2008

D.E.B. Perera: lawyer; Dawn de Silva worked mostly with him

Mallika Flora Somaratne: retired Probation Officer, wrote reports on the family situation of the child to be adopted, sister of Rukmani Thavanesan; died June 2006

& various employees of the Probation Office, various other civil servants, lawyers, hospital employees, middlemen etc.

1.12 Analysis of adoption papers

- ✓ Comparison of names, addresses, case and document numbers between the different documents. Are there already contradictions? Are the mentioned villages and hospital near each other?
- ✓ Comparison of location information. A pregnant woman may only give birth at government cost in a hospital that is in the same district as her place of residence. Use Google Maps to verify that the birth hospital is in the same district as the mother's place of residence.
- ✓ Does the birth certificate have a stamp on the back? If this is missing, the birth was likely not registered in this hospital.
- ✓ Did the mother provide the birth certificate details herself? Did she sign? (see 1.1) Is the mother's signature on the birth certificate the same as on the affidavit?
- ✓ Who issued or signed the documents? (see 1.11)

☛ This analysis can provide clues as to whether the official steps have been followed and whether well-known illegally acting players have been involved. Nevertheless, no definite conclusions can be drawn on the accuracy of the information or the authenticity of the documents. More definite answers may only be found by doing the research outlined in the next pages.

2 Research on location

The steps shown below can be taken by the adopted person himself. For language reasons, it is advisable to have a local person with you, but it is usually not necessary if you speak some English. Third parties can carry out these steps on behalf of the adoptee.

2.1 Hospital birth register

Checking the registry of the hospital is important because it may contain information that is not mentioned on the birth certificate or in other documents, such as an address of the mother or information about possible siblings. Further, it shows whether the birth actually took place in this hospital.

If a birth certificate is present in the adoption documents, the first step is to travel to the hospital to check the entry in the birth register. Whether one gets granted access to the book, whether an employee looks up the information, whether no insight is allowed or whether the books of the corresponding year are still available, depends on the respective hospital. If there is no birth certificate in the adoption records, but information such as birth date and name of the mother are known, the index can theoretically also provide information. However, some hospitals only give access if you have first obtained a new, official copy of the birth certificate from the Divisional Secretariat.

If no date of birth is known, checking the registry may prove difficult as the entries are sorted by date (e.g., a register book per year). Some hospitals have already digitized this data, others have not.

NB: The hospitals are not legally obliged to provide information. Thus, it is advisable to act with a modest attitude. The employees in the register room are mostly quite helpful.

2.2 Divisional Secretariat

All births are registered at the Divisional Secretariat. With Google you can find the respective Divisional Secretariat, which is responsible for the district in which the birth hospital is located. If the right Divisional Secretariat can not be determined, it is best to ask for it locally. People are usually very helpful.

The "records" section in the Divisional Secretariat can provide you with a new, official copy of the birth certificate for about 200 rupees (about CHF 1.25) upon showing the copy of the birth certificate or providing all available information. This can be helpful because the original entry may include information that has not been copied to or changed on the handed out copies. There are cases where the original birth certificate had a different birth certificate number, a different hospital, and different names of the parents than the birth certificate owned by the adoptees.

If nothing is found, it indicates that the birth has not been registered at all.

Sometimes the entry can not be checked immediately. Then an application form must be completed and a Sri Lankan postal address must be given. The information is later sent to that address.

2.3 Grama Sevaka

The Grama Sevaka, also called Grama Niladhari, occupies the office of "village chief" or a kind of mayor. He can consult voting lists and birth, death, and relocation registers. Larger towns employ several Grama Sevakas, e.g. for north, south, east, west. It is recommended to visit the Grama Sevaka of your own birthplace. If nothing is found there, the Grama Sevaka of the mother's birthplace can also be consulted.

The Grama Sevaka can easily be located. On the one hand, you will find a list of all Grama Sevakas incl. telephone numbers on the Internet (Google search: Grama Niladhari + "Name of the village"). In addition, there is also the local population that can give information.

For example, a Grama Sevaka knows whether a surname is common in his area and otherwise knows very well what's going on in his area. Often a new Grama Sevaka has been in office since the time of adoption. It may be worthwhile to find the person who was in office back then, if he is still alive.

2.4 Address of mother

If the adoption papers give an address of the mother, there is a possibility that the mother or other family members are still living there.

Since you never know what kind of family situation to expect, any steps should be taken with care. In some cases, the mother's family does not know about the adoption or even birth of a baby or she has been forced by her own parents to release the child for adoption.

Proceed carefully: The adoption story should not be mentioned for the time being. Another pretext may be used, e.g. the wanted woman is a friend of the family.

If the adoptees appears at the front door themselves, a resemblance in looks may be noticed. So you should consider first having someone else talk to the people.

Only direct contact with mother: Some mothers cannot openly talk about what happened when other family members are present. The best chance of receiving honest answers is in speaking alone with the mother or in the presence of a "neutral" translator.

Patience and understanding: Sometimes it takes more than just one visit to get the answers you're looking for. Building trust takes time, cultural differences and language barriers are additional hurdles. For the mother, the separation from her child was also a traumatic experience and she may feel a lot of shame about what has happened. Memories may have been buried deep and her ability to talk openly may be limited. It would be unrealistic to think that if only you can locate the mother you will get all your questions answered.

If the mother has moved away and nobody knows where she lives now, the Grama Sevaka may be able to help (see 2.3).

Even if an address is given in the papers, there is no guarantee that it is really the real mothers address.

2.5 Post office

The addresses mentioned in the documents are not always straightforward. Sometimes you have to ask many people in the village until you get to the right place. If Google Maps can not provide useful information, ask at the local post office if this address exists or did exist in the past.

2.6 Searchers

Different parties offer search services. Most are costly and many are not very transparent regarding their expenses.

The above-mentioned steps can be done without great financial effort and within a few days. If possible, it is advisable to do this research yourself, if desired with a local guide / translator. In Sri Lanka, a car including chauffeur can be booked for around 60 Euro / day. But also with public transport it is feasible.

If you still want to hire a searcher, you should inform yourself in advance about the costs and ask for transparent billing. Whether the search is successful or not depends on whether the papers are correct. The best and most experienced searcher can not find anything without the relevant information, just as much as an inexperienced person can get positive results following the above steps if the information on the papers is correct.

2.7 Acting mothers

If an acting mother was involved, the search can come to a sudden stop. In some cases, the personal details on the adoption records are based on the data of the acting mother. In some cases she knows where the child came from, but in most cases the trail ends here as the acting mother often doesn't know where the child came from.

2.8 DNA testing

Even if the woman that according to papers is the mother can be found, a DNA test should be done in order to confirm the kinship. Some acting mothers continue to play their role to this day, often out of fear of repercussions.

A DNA test can prevent you from trying to define your identity base on another lie.

2.9 Unsuccessful search

In the best case, the real mother can be located with the steps outlined above. Unfortunately, this is often not the case. If the papers contain incorrect information or if there are no papers, a successful search is almost impossible. The only other measure you can then take is to put your DNA into a DNA database.