

By Allen J. Mendonca

Eighteen years ago a new born babe was found abandoned in a garbage bin in Bangalore. Sixteen months later she was adopted by a visiting German couple and taken to West Germany. Now, all grown-up, she is back in the City of her birth "to discover and experience first hand what kind of a City I was born in..... get to know the people who reside here."

Meena, that's her name, knows only a smattering of English, pronouncing the words with a heavy German accent. She's painfully aware of the irony: in Germany her dusky Indian-looks result in people speaking to her in English and she 'snubbing' them in impeccable German! And here, people speak to her in English and when she stutters speak to her in Tamil, Kannada, Telugu.....!

Tell us something about yourself, your life in Germany.

"We belong to the upper-middle class in Germany. Out here we would be considered rich.....In the small town where we live I knew from a very young age that my two adopted sisters and I were different. In school some kids used to taunt me...my colour, my looks. I used to wonder how come my parents and most of the others in the neighbourhood were so fair, pink and blond. My parents explained our background and I tried to understand, to make sense of my life.

They were staunch Roman Catholics and taught us to distinguish right from wrong... I did not grow up confused in spite of having been traumatised in primary school. It was my parents who helped me not to be defensive but face the world with calm understanding."

"Sure in Germany these days there's a resurgence of racism. My saddest day in school was when a teacher bluntly told my parents that it was not right that an Indian girl do better than her German schoolmates. And my parents replied that I was as German as any one of them.... I tried not to compete but then better sense dawned on me," she says.

She knows that all Germans are not racists. But the prevailing atmosphere of hatred in Germany "saddens me deeply and scares me."

It is because of this that her parents agreed to let her visit Bangalore and "reflect on life". Six months from now she'll go to England to a school in Manchester to do her 'A' levels and then go to college and hopefully medic-

## RETURN OF THE NATIVE

Seventeen years ago a visiting German couple adopted an orphan baby girl and took her home to Germany.

Meena is back to the City of her birth to discover her country and its people



ALFONS SARRACH



MEENA



ANNELIESE SARRACH

**'I am not looking for her (real mother), for I don't know who she is. My papa and mama are the Sarrachs, now and forever'**

al school to become a doctor. "Will you return to India?" "I don't know" she says.

The genesis of this Indo-German story is rooted in the 60s - a time when the youth of the West

were fired with idealism and a desire for Peace. Her adopted father - Alfons Sarrach, a disting-

uished journalist, political commentator and writer had accompanied the Pope on his tour of India and had instantly fallen in love with the land. It's spiritual richness and its cultural ethos so overpowered him that he stayed behind after covering the Pope's tour and scripted three documentaries. When he returned to Germany he told his professor-wife Anneliese about the stark social contrasts in India and of his desire to adopt a child. Political creatures, they belonged to different parties but struck a perfect coalition at home. In 1977, they arrived in Bangalore and adopted Meena, who was then 16 months old, from the orphanage where she had been kept, and took her home. They returned twice to Bangalore in the next two years and adopted two more orphan girls Geetha (now 25) and Sumana (now 22).

Meena lives with her family in Fulda near Frankfurt and studies in High school. "Geetha, my eldest sister is a nurse and Sumana is a dietitian."

Meena walked into the Indian

Express office on Thursday accompanied by her former violin teacher Kerstin Linder-Dewan "to help me communicate" and and take a look at the story of her adoption published in this newspaper on August 15, 1977.

As she looked at the edition and read the report, her expressive eyes clouded over. A great sadness seemed to weigh upon her. But she quickly regained her poise and said, "I love this City."

Kerstin who's married to a Punjabi performed in concert in New Delhi on an invitation from Lufthansa recently and got an SOS from Meena in Bangalore. "I want a violin to learn Carnatic music." And Kerstin obliged, "for Meena and her family are a part of my life in various ways and I have kept in touch."

Meena is at present residing in a boarding house on Brunton Road and will be staying there for six months, learning Kannada and Carnatic music "for that will give me a greater insight into the cultural ethos of the people".

Do you hope to find your 'real' mother?

"I am not looking for her, for I don't know who she is. My papa and mama are the Sarrachs now and forever," she says.

Abandoned at birth, showered with love by her adopted parents, this young woman now asks that most primordial of existential questions as she explores this vast metropolis.....

"Why?"

If only there was a straight answer!