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35 years later, woman reunites with her mom

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CHENNAI: The last one week, Sonia felt, has almost made up for all the adversity she has faced for 40 years of her life. All it took was one sweeping moment of homecoming. Born Lakshmi, The Banyan resident has been reunited with her mother after 35 years, and the events that led to their meeting are “nothing less than a miracle,” said Dr Shanta, The Banyan’s consultant gynecologist and the person who made the reunion happen.

Sonia’s parents, both intellectually disabled, left her under the care of her grandparents who took her to Mumbai when she was a few months old. By the time she turned eight, her grandparents too passed away and Sonia and her brother once again changed homes to live with their

maternal uncle.

When the family could no longer shelter Sonia, she was left with The Banyan, where she had been helping with housekeeping, caring for patients and working in the kitchen.

“For the last three years, the search had been on to find Sonia’s mother, after she recalled her affinity to Sri Raghavendra Swamy Mantralayam temple in Karnataka. Although we had no luck all this while, last week when I went to the temple on a personal visit, I came across a woman doing seva (service) at the prasadam counter. Unlike visitors, she seemed to be working there for a while. Her looks and mannerisms bore a striking resemblance to Sonia and with a little enquiry, I realised that she was indeed her mother. This has been unexpected and wonderful,” said Dr Shanta.

After a few photo and video exchanges to verify identity, Dr Shanta, along with Dr KV Kishore Kumar, director of The Banyan, helped bring down Sonia’s mother Malathi Rao and brother Uday to The Banyan, where the family reunited on Tuesday amid joy and bewilderment.

“So many years have passed, and I can still recall their faces. All I could ask my mother was how she was, and we both embraced. She will now stay with me and I can finally take care of her,” says Sonia, who has been accommodated with her family at The Banyan’s Home Again facility in Mogappair.

“There is a need for investment in inclusive community living spaces that offer longterm care and support for people who are unable to return to their families,” says Kamala Easwaran, assistant director, partnership, The Banyan.

According to the not-for-profit, over 2,000 women from across the country have accessed their Emergency Care and Recovery Centre till date, of which more than 1,700 have been reintegrated with their families.