

Goan gets studentship at Oxford in memory of Goan scientist

Akshat Pai Fondekar read article in 'The Global Goenkar' two days before deadline to submit applications

LUI GODINHO
THE GOAN | LONDON

An article in "The Global Goenkar" in March, which was widely circulated among Goans across the world, described the opportunity for studentships at the University of Oxford established by the Joseph Rufino Cordeiro Foundation (JRC Foundation) in memory of Goan scientist and inventor, the late Joseph Rufino Cordeiro.

The article had a direct impact on Chemistry undergraduate, Akshat Pai Fondekar (21) who traces his roots back to Margao in Goa.

Not only did Akshat get to read the article just two days before the deadline to submit applications, but he also became the first Goan to secure a summer research studentship in sustainable chemistry at the prestigious Department of Chemistry at the University of Oxford.

The programme had been inaugurated by the JRC Foundation in summer 2023. This year there was strong competition to be awarded the studentships from Chemistry undergraduates globally.

FROM GOA TO UK

Akshat's family hails from Comba-Margao, but he was born in Mumbai and brought up in Thane and later in Panaji. Akshat continued his studies at Sharada Mandir in Miramar-Panaji and then did his higher secondary at Dempo Higher Secondary School of Science, Miramar, before applying to the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

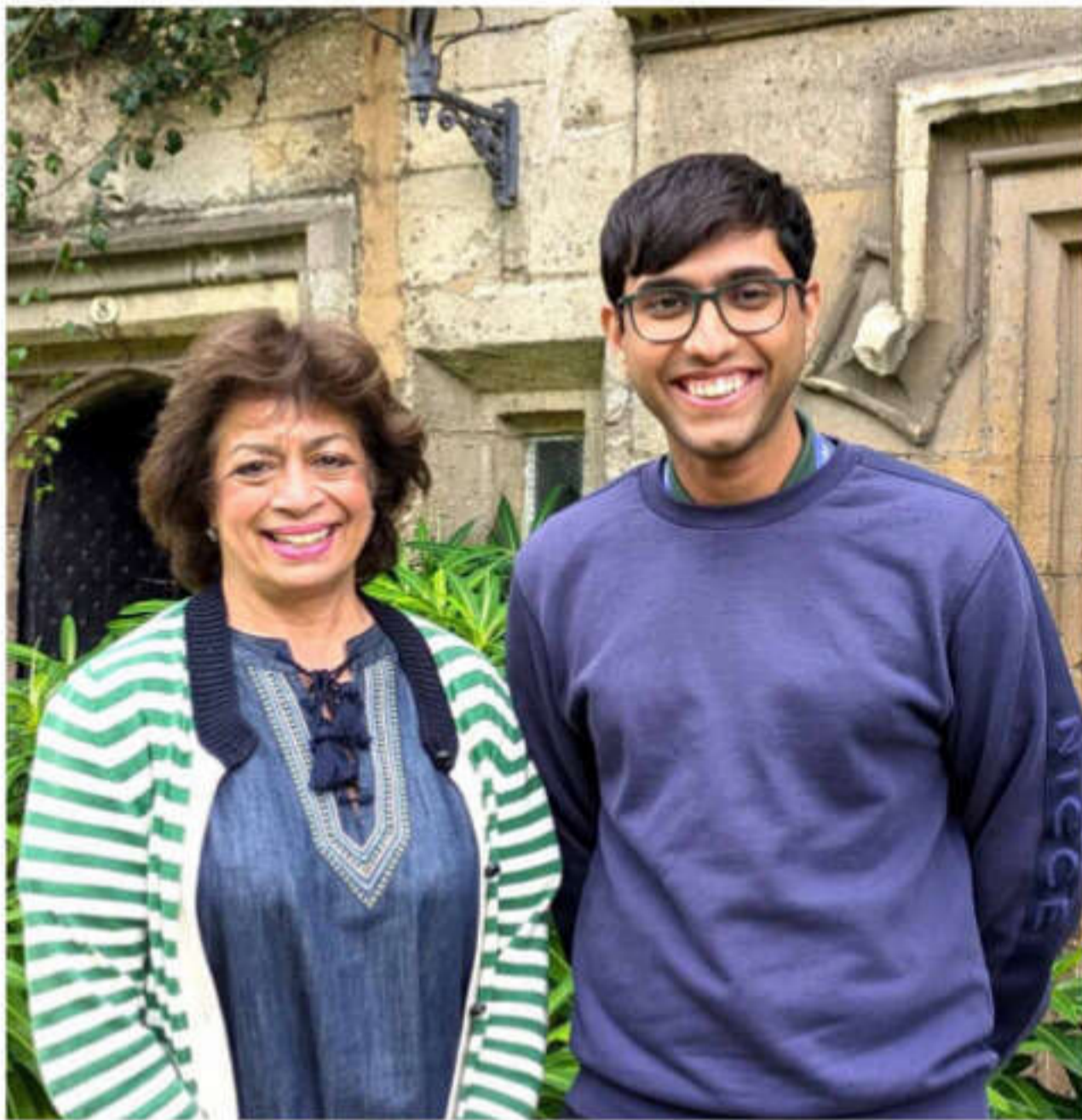
He matriculated at Strathclyde in 2021 and is presently studying for his MChem in Chemistry, which is a 5-year course.

Akshat recalls: "The Global Genkar's article about the JRC Foundation collaboration with University of Oxford, that invited applications for summer research studentships 2024 in Sustainable Chemistry, happened to reach my dad, Kamlesh Pai Fondekar, through a WhatsApp network, which was shared with my mother, Anita."

"They forwarded the news link to me two days before the deadline, and I discussed my candidacy with my parents. My mother insisted that I apply for this prestigious studentship. He eventually applied and got selected for the eight-week research placement in chemistry at the University."

Akshat was overjoyed to be accommodated at Worcester College, Oxford, for the entire duration of his studentship. He brimmed with excitement as he explained: "I am so happy that, in addition to the experience in research I will gain over the next eight weeks, I will also be involved in the student lifestyle and culture at world-renowned Oxford."

"Had it not been for the article in 'The Global Goenkar', I would never have known about this golden opportunity. I have also learnt a lot about the amazing Goan scientist and inventor, the late Joseph Rufino Cordeiro."



Mary Anne Cordeiro, Chair of Joseph Rufino Cordeiro Foundation, along with Akshat Pai Fondekar in the grounds of Worcester College at the University of Oxford.



Joseph Rufino Cordeiro with his daughters Mary Anne and Lucinda Cordeiro when the Joseph Rufino Cordeiro Foundation was established in December 2020

Akshat is very interested to get to know the new campus.

He continued: "Despite being the summer season in the UK, the place is abuzz with activities. Apart from my desire to learn as much as I can in chemistry, this internship will be a vital platform for my life-time passion in chemistry research."

Besides his studies, Akshat's extra-curricular activities include cricket,

which he plays for a Glaswegian club and he has joined the cricket club at Oxford as well. Akshat also plays table tennis and badminton. He also enjoys quiz groups, is interested in travelling and motorcars.

"I hope to continue further studies on completion of my course at Strathclyde in 2026. But the prominent exposure at the University of Oxford is an amazing experience that I will cherish forever," acknowledged Akshat.

LINKS TO CHEMISTRY

Incidentally, Akshat is not the first member in his family to pursue a career in chemistry, as his father, Kamlesh, has a doctorate in Organ-

ic Chemistry.

Having graduated from Goa University in the 1990s, Kamlesh completed further studies in Germany for his PhD in Chemistry, before completing a post-doctorate at Glasgow. Kamlesh now works in the chemical industry in Mumbai.

Akshat's mother, Anita, was born in Tanzania, but her parents moved to Kenya where she lived for 26 years be-



Joseph Rufino Cordeiro

fore returning to India. Specialising in finance with a career involving banking and risk management, Anita is presently associated with the financial sector in Mumbai.

JOSEPH RUFINO CORDEIRO FOUNDATION

The Joseph Rufino Cordeiro Foundation was established by Mary Anne Cordeiro in December 2020 to honour the memory and legacy of her late father, Joseph Rufino Cordeiro (1924-2021), a Goan scientist and inventor, who's expertise in radio navigational aids and communication became recognised worldwide.

Cordeiro invented a digital meteorological measurement system which was granted 2 patents in UK in 1983. His expertise in radio navigational aids and communication became recognised worldwide and his design skills were utilised in 27 international airports around the world.

"My father was a brilliant scientist/inventor and was proud of his Goan heritage manifested through his many philanthropic acts. In recognition of the importance of science to him, we inaugurated the programme of JRCF Studentships in collaboration with the Chemistry Department at the University of Oxford commencing in summer 2023," said Mary Anne Cordeiro, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation.

"Given our family origins, the Foundation is particularly keen to nurture Goan students and we want to encourage these students to apply for the JRCF Studentship sponsored by the Foundation."

After the success of last year's JRCF Studentships, Mary Anne said the Foundation had expanded the 2024 programme to support up to five talented students with fully funded research summer placements in sustainable chemistry.

Mary Anne said her father was a stalwart supporter of Saligao, and dutifully visited his family home there annually.

"He supported many local and international causes to promote fellow Goans. He was delighted to become president of the Saligao Association UK in 1977 and sponsor the Mae De Deus Feast in Saligao in May 1984. Everyone who knew him considered him to be a gentleman of great integrity, strong faith and deep convictions. My family is delighted that Akshat has benefitted from a studentship in my late father's name," she added.