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### **THE GOAN IMPACT**

# Goan gets studentship at Oxford in memory of Goan scientist

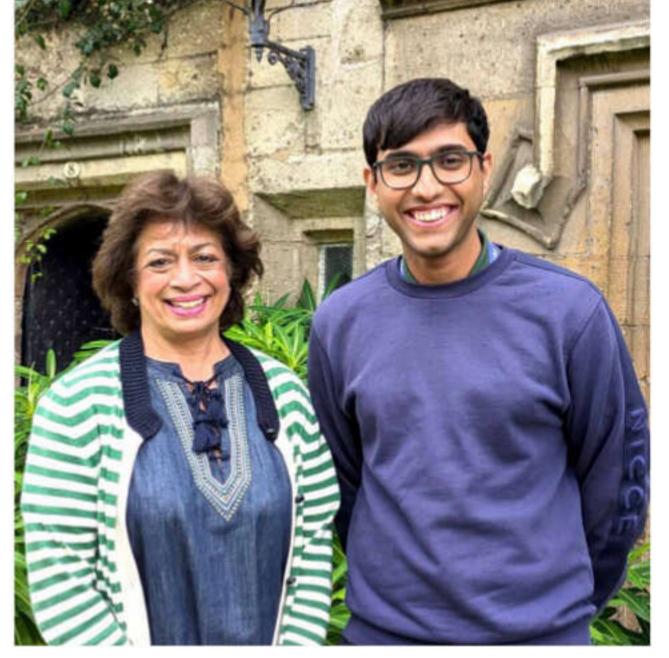
Akshat Pai Fondekar read article in 'The Global Goenkar' two days before deadline to submit applications

### LUI GODINHO THE GOAN | LONDON

n 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



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

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

## **Goans mark São João** fest in Abu Dhabi



### THE GOAN | ABU DHABI

ecked in colourful attire, beautiful 'Kopels' adorning the heads, armed with 'Pidde' and carrying seasonal fruit, Abu Dhabi Goans brought the Goan community together in yet another spectacular Viva São João celebration at the 11th traditional event in the prestigious Abu Dhabi Country Club.

In keeping with tradition, for the first time, the Abu Dhabi Goans welcomed not a newly married couple, but a newborn baby.

Nine-month Sophia Silveira was the star of the show decked in her little white Kopel while her parents, Meryl and Dreferd, pushed in a trolley with a 'Dha-

Goan and Portuguese songs, especially a march that snaked its way all through the ballroom.

The best Kopels were awarded to Lourdes D'Costa whose headdress was created from traditional date palm fronds accompanied by his family, all carrying baskets of fruit and 'Pidde', and Maria Eutropia Pereira, whose Kopel was adorned with seasonal fruit.

Abu Dhabi Goans are a group committed to the community and to keeping Goan tradition alive amongst the diaspora in the UAE as well as introducing Goan culture to the wider community.

In addition to 'Viva São João', the oth er events presented by the Abu Dhabi Goans are 'Viva Goa, Viva Carnaval' and the flagship 'World Goa Day Abu Dhabi', which will be held on October 5. The group also gathers the community at smaller social gatherings, supports the holistic development of the youth and encourages upcoming talent. The events are all organised on a non-profit basis with the organising team often pooling in to offset expenses. The organising team has also been supporting and responding to various appeals from Goa as well as supporting the Konkani community in various celebrations.

of Chemistry at the University of Oxford. The programme had been inaugurat-

ed 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 eightweek 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."



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, 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.

which he plays for

"I hope to continue further studies on completion of my course Strathclyde at 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-

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.

li' of fruit enough to feed all the guests.

The São João procession made its joyful entry to the tunes of C Alvares' 'São João, São João' accompanied by the Ghumot and tambourines, and the smacking of 'Pidde' on the dance floor.

The eight-hour event had the crowd on the floor all through with music provided by the Party Rockers (Tavia and Darine), DJ Moses, DJ Dad, DJ Rudy and MC Perviz. The dance floor was packed to its limit for renditions of traditional





My London to Paris ride to raise funds for cancer charity

### **NISHAD SANZAGIRI** THE GOAN | LONDON

n the morning of Sunday, July 7, I embarked on an unforgettable journey from Blackheath, London, to Le Trocadéro, Paris with a group of 13 riders, all raising money for various charities. My mission was to support Macmillan Cancer Support, with an initial goal of £1800, which I am proud to say I surpassed by raising over 125% of that target.

Our adventure began by tackling the undulating hills of Kent, which presented a mix of challenges and stunning scenery. By the late afternoon, we reached Dover and took the ferry to Dunkirk, preparing ourselves for the next leg of the journey. The following morning, we cycled 160 km to Cambrai. The ride was demanding, but the camaraderie and shared purpose kept our spirits high. From Cambrai, we headed to Soissons, a day marked by trying to speed over a blanket of clouds and enduring a few steep hills. As we approached Soissons, torrential rain greeted us, adding a layer of complexity to our ride.

The final leg of our journey began the next morning, setting off for Paris. We concluded our ride at the iconic Arc de Triomphe and then took the straight



road to Le Trocadéro, where the sight of the Eiffel Tower awaited us, a fitting end as Paris prepared for the upcoming Olympics.

Cycling these 543 kilometres, with a climb of 3997 metres, was not just a physical challenge but an emotional journey. I rode in memory of my paternal grandmother, Sulbha aaji, who lost her battle with breast cancer just shy of her 45th birthday. Growing up, her story loomed large in our family, filled with love and loss. The shadow of cancer has loomed over my family for decades, claiming lives and leaving a lasting impact.

I've often found myself captivated

by the stories my father told me about her; anecdotes that would come out of nowhere, surprising me with glimpses into a life he rarely discussed. It makes sense, given how young he was when she passed. I once asked him why he never spoke about her, and he simply said, "I never realised I didn't tell you much about her," before pausing and adding, "I guess it's just been that long." This topic has been the unspoken pain that has haunted our family for decades, leaving me to build a blurry jigsaw of a woman I never met. Cancer does that to you.

What I know for sure is that the world epaper.thegoan.net



back then didn't have the right affordable technology to save her. Despite these challenges, she fought bravely, embodying a spirit of tenacity that I like to think has been passed down through the generations. But if we want many others to be so lucky and beat the 'emperor of all maladies,' we need to support people through the social, emotional, and practical impact cancer can have.

Then, when I was 15 years old, we received the devastating news that my dad had been diagnosed with cancer too. However, due to the tremendous progress in cancer research and diagnosis, as well as the financial and emotional



support my family received - not to mention his own steady resilience – he was able to fight it off and is healthy today.

My father's battle with cancer, which he overcame, thanks to advances in cancer research and the support we received, further motivated me. This ride symbolises not just a personal triumph but a collective effort to support those battling this disease and their families. Macmillan Cancer Support provides vital services, research, and campaigns to achieve better cancer care, making a profound difference in the lives of many. Every pedal stroke was a tribute to those fighting cancer and a step towards

a future with better care and support for patients. This experience has been profoundly meaningful, symbolising the fight against cancer and the support needed for those affected.

They say almost everyone knows someone who has been affected by can cer – not surprising, given 1 in 5 people develop it in their lifetime, and approximately 1 in 9 men and 1 in 12 women die from the disease according to the World Health Organisation. To combat this, we not only need to invest in research and treatment but also need to support those living with cancer and their families at every stage of their cancer journey.

This is why I cycled the full 532 km from London to Paris to raise money for Macmillan Cancer Support, which provides vital cancer services, research, and campaign to achieve better cancer care. They not only support the cancer workforce but also give emotional, financial and practical support to the patients and families of those suffering from the disease.

(The writer who hails from Arambol holds an MSc (Distinction) in Modern South Asian Studies from the University of Oxford and an MA (Honours) in International Relations with Quantitative Methods from the University of Edinburgh and is director at DGA Group (formerly Dentons Global Advisors) London, England, UK)