

## Five selected as Indian Rhodes Scholars for 2022

*Cohort includes a philosophy major hailing from Kohima, medics from Bhopal and Hyderabad, a zoology major from New Delhi and a law student from Kolkata*

**November 16, 2021:** The five Rhodes Scholars-elect for India 2022 were selected over the weekend, marking the culmination of a rigorous national selection process. For the second year running, the entire selection process was conducted virtually.

After a competitive application process and two rounds of preliminary interviews, the shortlisted finalists were interviewed and five were chosen to receive the prestigious scholarship. They will now have the opportunity to pursue their academic interests at the University of Oxford.

The five Rhodes Scholars-elect for India 2022 are:

**Mr. Akumjung Pongen:**

*Akumjung is a final year philosophy student at St Stephen's College, Delhi. He is from Kohima and is India's first Rhodes Scholar hailing from Nagaland. His academic interests lie in theology and philosophy. Akumjung is a singer and plays the piano and the classical guitar and is committed to making philosophy more accessible to society, especially by translating key texts into his mother tongue.*

**Dr. Varad Puntambekar:**

*Varad is from Bhopal has completed his MBBS from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, and is currently a Public Health Fellow at the Society for Education Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH), situated in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra. He enjoys problem-solving in the field of public health and is committed to improving access to quality healthcare for all. He has helped develop an innovative device to help screen congenital heart defects. Varad is keen to pursue research on interventions for maternal and infant well-being at Oxford.*

**Dr. Aishwarya Vedula:**

*Aishwarya is completing her MBBS degree from Osmania Medical College. Aishwarya is from Hyderabad. At Oxford, she hopes to pursue further research in clinical and molecular neuroscience, with the aim of eventually becoming a physician-neuroscientist. Aishwarya has interned at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, and conducted a study of the diagnosis experiences and information needs of parents of children diagnosed with autism. She has been at the frontlines of the Covid-19 pandemic, putting in additional hours to educate patients and track vaccinations. Aishwarya also enjoys poetry, writing and quizzing.*

**Ms. Ritika Mukherji:**

*Ritika is a final year BSc (Hons) student at Miranda House, University of Delhi, specialising in Zoology. She is interested in the neurobiology of sleep and wakefulness and is currently remotely assisting with non-invasive sleep studies on northern elephant seals in California. At Oxford, she is interested in exploring the cellular and molecular workings of sleep in animals and humans. Ritika grew up in Delhi and is trained in Indian classical singing, the electronic keyboard, and is also a roller hockey coach.*

**Ms. Adrija Ghosh:**

*Adrija hails from Kolkata and has completed the BA, LLB (Hons) from the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences. She has undertaken research on sentencing in death penalty cases in India and has also worked as a volunteer at the legal aid clinic Parichay. She aims to read for the BCL degree at Oxford, and to take up a career in strategic public interest litigation.*

**Dr. Elizabeth Kiss**, Warden of Rhodes House, said: “We are so proud of the exceptional young people who are chosen every year to become Rhodes Scholars and become part of our community. We are proud that Scholars come from a vast array of backgrounds and have attained remarkable accomplishments in a wide range of fields. What unites them is their curiosity, character, academic excellence and their desire to make a difference.

**Mr. Nandan Kamath**, National Secretary, Rhodes Scholarships for India, said: "As always, and despite the challenges that students have encountered over the last year and a half, we had a fantastic field of applicants. We are thankful to our many volunteers who assisted us with our rigorous selection process and very proud of the five Rhodes Scholars-elect who have emerged from the process. These brilliant people will benefit from the rich intellectual resources of the University of Oxford, and can become part of a lifelong community of global impact."

The Rhodes Trust, based at the University of Oxford, brings together and develops exceptional people from all over the world, and in all fields of study, who are impatient with the way things are and have the courage to act.

The Rhodes Scholarships are postgraduate awards providing transformative educational opportunities. Established in 1903, they are the oldest and perhaps the most prestigious international graduate scholarship programme in the world. Nearly 8,000 Rhodes Scholars have gone on to serve at the forefront of government, education, the arts, NGOs, commerce, research and other sectors. They are well known advocates for expanded social justice, and have advanced the frontiers of science and medicine. The Rhodes Trust provides the Rhodes Scholarships in partnership with its Second Century Founders, John McCall MacBain O.C., The Atlantic Philanthropies, and many other generous benefactors.

Each year, five Indian Scholars are selected on the basis of their intellect, character, leadership, and commitment to service, to join Rhodes Scholars from around the world at



the University of Oxford. The Rhodes Scholarships include all university and college fees for two to three years (depending on the academic route taken), an annual stipend, health insurance and travel expenses to the University of Oxford before the start of the programme and a return ticket following the course of study. Studying at the University of Oxford will give the chosen Scholars access to world class academics in their field as well as an international alumni network that includes heads of state, Pulitzer Prize winning authors, Nobel Prize winners and Olympians.

More information about the Rhodes Scholarships can be found at:

[www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/india](http://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/india)

For further information, or to request an interview with the Rhodes Scholars-elect, please contact:

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