

Girl from capital bags Darwin scholarship

• Staff Reporter



"In the U.K., I will represent the entire fishing community here," said Aneesha Ani Benedict at a meeting to felicitate her at the Sister Rose Memorial Education Resource Centre (SRMERC) at Valiyathura on Sunday.

Aneesha is the only person from the country and one of 25 in the world to secure the Darwin scholarship instituted by the Field Studies Council to celebrate the work of Charles Darwin. She will rub shoulders with other young scientists during the 10-day scholarship programme in August where she will gain exposure in biodiversity and taxonomy. Aneesha is doing her M.Sc. in Marine Biology and Ocean Studies at the off-campus centre of Pondicherry University at Port Blair.

"I feel proud to say that the circumstances I grew up in helped me reach here," said Aneesha at the function, organised by the UAE-based organisation Voice of Valiyathura. Citing Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, Aneesha said the thought in the book that if one wanted something bad enough, the entire world would help one achieve it was true for her. At every difficult stage in her life she had met people who had helped her. Aneesha who passed her SSLC from the Vithura government school and her class 12 from St. Antony's school, Valiyathura, did her graduation at St. Xavier's College, Thumba. She worked part-time at the SRMERC simultaneously to fund her education. Aneesha was part of the first Marine Biodiversity Register preparation in India under researcher Robert Panipilla for the Kerala State Biodiversity Board.

Aneesha who belongs to a fishing family told students that nothing was impossible, and their circumstances should be seen as their strengths. They shared an umbilical bond with the ocean, and if they linked it with their studies they would succeed.

"Never stop studying. Valiyathura should develop, and the coastal community too," she told them.

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