



Why I chose Pondicherry University to pursue a PhD

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Choosing a university for Ph.D. Research is a daunting task which is made all the more difficult if you are considering universities outside your own country of origin. Although I am an American, I have been a professor of English at a South Korean university the last four years. I wanted to pursue a PhD in English specializing in the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view or what is called ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is a new field and there are only a handful of universities in the world that have strong English departments in this area. Most are in the United States with the University of Nevada Reno arguably being at the forefront with its strong ecocriticism faculty and involvement with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE).

In the Eastern half of the world there are five universities that are heavily involved with ASLE, located in Korea, Taiwan, New Zealand, Japan, and India. Pondicherry University is the intellectual home of Ecocriticism Studies and the ASLE in India. This is largely due to the work of Dr. Murali Sivaramakrishnan who heads the English Department at Pondicherry University and is founder and president of ASLE India. The fact that Pondicherry University is one of five universities in the East associated with ecocriticism and the ASLE is in and of itself a profound and compelling reason for me to choose Pondicherry University for PhD research.

But for me, the main reason for choosing Pondicherry was the strong English Department that has developed and the chance to work directly with Dr. Murali. One of my deep interests is consciousness studies involving the ecology and

evolutionary dynamics of whole systems. I was already familiar with a small part of Dr. Murali's broad and interdisciplinary work when I cited his paper, *Involution and Evolution: Some Conceptual Issues in the Contexts of Indian Discourses* in an earlier paper I did during my MA research. Dr. Murali has written numerous books across several areas, has lectured worldwide, and has created paintings, photographs, sculptures, and poems of world renown. He is well known at University of Nevada, Reno, and the ASLE, having won a Fulbright Postdoctoral Travel Grant to teach and do research there in 2006-2007. I especially love his new book *Learning to Think Like Myself* which left me stunned for a couple of days after reading it because it echoed so closely some of my own thoughts and doubts about the cost to my family for wandering the world in search of wisdom and understanding, and the loss of rootedness and home you trade for this privilege. For me, the opportunity to study under Dr. Murali is the most fortunate opportunity of my lifetime. When people ask me why I am studying at Pondicherry, I know I cannot really explain to them how blessed and fortunate I feel, but I always have the thought "My God, why would I study anywhere else!"

There is an intellectual excellence at Pondicherry I have never seen or felt anywhere else. Recently, at the India National ASLE Conference at Pondicherry I was amazed at the depth of articulation and understanding in the research presented. I had been used to presenting in a much more informal manner. I was outshined by every other paper presented. That Pondicherry has such academic rigor and passionate students and faculty only deepens my belief there is no better place in the world for me to pursue my research than Pondicherry University. Combine this with the warmth of the students and faculty, the beauty and location of the campus, and the low cost of an education that I do not feel I could get anywhere else in the world, why would I go anywhere else?

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1. Guests' Columns

Date Created

December 15, 2011

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