

## **KALAKSHETRA FOUNDATION**

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Kalakshetra, as the name suggests, is a centre for artistic endeavour. Founded in 1936 by the vibrant visionary Rukmini Devi Arundale, the Institution stands testimony to her dream of creating a space where the essence of Indian thought would find expression through artistic education. An institution she established with the vision “of imparting to the young the true spirit of Art, devoid of vulgarity and commercialism.” Spread over almost 100 acres by the seashore in Chennai, the Kalakshetra Foundation, as it is known today, is a vital centre for the study and performance of fine arts, envisioned and designed with the style and proportion of Indian aesthetics. It was recognised by the Government of India as an Institute of National Importance by an act of Indian Parliament in the year 1993 and is now an autonomous body under Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Though it had its genesis in the estate of the Theosophical Society (which formed the bedrock of the institution’s philosophy), by the very nature of the work it was intended for, Kalakshetra moved to its own space – what is now a sprawling, sylvan 99 acre campus by the seashore in Thiruvannamiyur, Chennai. Rukmini Devi along with her trusted aides, faced the challenge of moving campus with the resolve and energy she was so well known for, saying “Even if I have to start with only one acre and gradually add half acre by half acre...we must erect our own buildings, studies, theatres, a hostel...all very simple and yet beautiful.”

Encouraged by her husband, Dr. George Arundale, Rukmini Devi had acquired land in the village of Tiruvannamiyur, a short distance away from the Theosophical Society. In 1951, a sapling of the great banyan tree in the Theosophical Society’s grounds was planted at Tiruvannamiyur. The new campus was consolidated in the years that followed until it covered one hundred acres beside the sea. Gradually, other trees were planted on the sandy stretches of land. Rukmini Devi and her associates undertook the Herculean task of finding the funds and the energy to build up the institute once again. They built roads, planted trees, found committed architects, engineers and building material during a period of shortages, to create a sylvan oasis of art and education. By the year 1962 Kalakshetra had moved into its new home, a campus that reflected (and continues to reflect) its founder’s dream, bringing to the institution its own unique identity.

In 1993, the Government of India deemed Kalakshetra an Institute of National Importance by an Act of Parliament. However, Kalakshetra’s challenge today is to preserve the aesthetic essence of its founding while continuing to move ahead and evolve, to usher in modernisation and artistic exploration while adhering to the spirit of its founding. Because, Kalakshetra, to those who have passed through its portals, is far from being just another school or institution. Kalakshetra is a grammar that helps its students not only to be able to perceive the beauty of art, but to carry its fragrance within them through their life. A grammar that is secretly embedded in the green trees and natural ponds, in the handloom fabric and adherence to meticulous hard work....the rationale for walking barefoot on mud paths and learning under the banyan.... an aesthetic hidden in the appropriateness of living, hidden in romancing the sunrise over the ocean....