

**Inspiring Stories from Mirambikans,  
now pursuing their own passions**



**Khyati Trehan**  
***Mirambika, 1996 - 2006***

Khyati Trehan is an Indian graphic designer, visual artist and tinkerer, currently based in Brooklyn, New York. Her work blends a fascination for texture, play, and curiosity, with a recurring influence from her interest in the sciences. At Google Creative Lab, she develops visual systems and experimental tools, while also dedicating time to personal art projects and exploration of early-stage technology outside of her day-to-day practice. Khyati's approach is rooted in drawing inspiration from the context of each project and exploring the edges of all things visual for the likes of the Oscars, The New York Times, Apple, Instagram, WIRED, Vogue, and The New Yorker. Her contribution to design has been recognized with honors such as Print Magazine's '15 New Visual Artists Under 30,' the Type Directors' Club Award, Artistry Creator of the Year awarded by Adweek, winning ADC Young Guns 19, and a spot on Forbes India's '30 Under 30' list.

***Mirambika and I***

Whenever I've done an interview—whether for a magazine, a blog, or a podcast – Mirambika always comes up, especially when I'm asked about what led me to the career I'm in and my journey. I feel very lucky to have spent my formative years in a place that was dedicated to helping children figure out what they're good at and love; drawing out inherent potential rather than prescribing it. Learning was free of structures and sounded more like 'look what I discovered' rather than being confined to the year's syllabus. We'd make bridges over ponds to learn about architecture, go to France to learn French and do pottery and

carpentry between math and science.

A large part of the day's timetable was dedicated to 'topic' where we'd get to pick an area of interest to explore independently or in groups for a couple of weeks. So when I picked up a subject to study, I did it because I really wanted to learn about it, not because I was obligated to. The research material wasn't limited to a single textbook; we had a whole library at our fingertips and diyas to guide us through the project. I've always been fascinated by scientific concepts—so much so that, as an 11-year-old, I chose 'symmetry in biology' as a topic. How an 11 year old gets that idea still escapes me. Coincidentally, this early curiosity seems to have foreshadowed a part of my career. I now find myself in the niche of creating editorial illustrations, specifically for scientific articles published in publications such as New Yorker, NYTimes and WIRED Magazine.

Those years and the agency that came with the format of 'topic' helped me build a great relationship with learning which lingers even in my adult life. I'm constantly teaching myself whatever I'm curious about. This translates to having built a lot of versatility into my design practice without intentionally trying to. Visual design is an incredibly broad field. Type design and publication design may seem like distant cousins but they flex different muscles. Digital product design needs a different set of skills than building a brand identity does. Designing surfaces is vastly different from designing experiences. Most people in the industry eventually find a focus and specialize in just one area. I've clearly taken a different path by identifying as a 'sum of parts' kind of designer. And all that has led to everything else: the breadth of projects that come my way, the diverse clients I get to work with and the recognition I receive for that work.

Not many people can say that they're still close to the people that they befriended when they were 3 years old. I can say that 4 times. The friends I made in the sand pit have gone on to do great things, and more importantly, grown into bright, thoughtful, empathetic and kind human beings. I will forever be grateful that my Mirambika-born friendships have remained a part of my life into adulthood.

Khyati Trehan



**Ita Mehrotra**  
***Mirambika, 1993 - 2003***

I am an author, visual artist and educator. My graphic narratives and illustrated text stem from engagements within socio-political and feminists movements around me. My book *Shaheen Bagh, A Graphic Recollection* (Yoda Press) captures moments and memories from the countrywide anti-CAA movement in India. I have led the community arts organisation Arteach India between 2017-24 and continue to lead art education initiatives with community schools and grassroots organisation across the country. I have been teaching courses in graphic narratives and socially engaged arts practice as Visiting Faculty in Ashoka University, and have an MPhil from the School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU.

My journey in Mirambika and beyond: My ten years at Mirambika - studying, growing, discovering, self-learning, wandering and making friends for life, has shaped me in the most fundamental, life-long and beautiful ways that any place or time ever can. It is that decade of my life that still grounds and roots me in who I am, and what my intuitive sense of self, purpose and belonging in this world is. It is also that decade I can look back to, always, for that pure sense of crisp joy - remembering how it felt to run freely through a field during morning games, or sit together during music time, silently in classrooms whose large windows let the world in, gently.

Mirambika, I have realised overtime, gave me not just a sense of being self-directed and passionate about the politics and practice I believe in, but has also given me the quiet resilience to see me through the highs and lows of life. Because of the way that education was consistently rooted in who we are as people, alone and together, and with nature, my work as an artist, writer and educator continues to be deeply grounded in what is meaningful to

those I work with. Because we were always exploring learning through multi-dimensional ways - research on our own, debates and discussions and being urged by our diyas to talk to those who can guide us outside of school - I have grown to be able to be interdisciplinary, connecting worlds and ways of thinking across fields that are otherwise over compartmentalised today.

While it was our ever caring diyas during school, and that building with its many turns and slides and home to many animals, that gave us immense nurturing through the time we were there, the friends we made during mirambika have been anchors ever since. We may move in different and opposing directions, but we are always and unfailing there for each other. It is the kind of friendship that books are written about, and that is very rare to find. I know today, that while because of my open minded mess and self-directed feminism I often find myself at odds with the world around me, it is my years in mirambika that have allowed for me to be who I truly and fearlessly am, to cherish a sense of inner freedom which I would not trade for anything in this world.

I cannot imagine my life without the sense of being Mirambikan. It is not just a school for me, or for most of us who were there, it is so much of who we are and choose to be. Over the past ten years, I have been able to lead arts initiatives for social change, organisations and teams across the country and to research and write books that have travelled far and wide - and through it all, much of my experiences and time as a self-learning and deeply inquisitive student in Mirambika - has guided me. Today, I also am able to take the ways I was taught, back into opening out classrooms as a teacher, to being spaces of questioning, healthy debates, and self-learning, to have joy in the experience and have the strength to break hegemonies in the process. To have the vision and determination to create new paths and ways of working that have yet not been thought of before.

I am forever grateful that I was once in the most dreamlike school possible, and that it will always be a part of me.

*Ita Mehrotra*



**Ilango Deenadayalan Aaron**  
***Mirambika, 1993-2001***

I'm the founder of Patagonia Arisca and co-founder of erratica, they are adventure-expedition companies in Patagonia, Chile. I own a ranch with 16 horses, a few dogs, cats and other animals. I have my own organic farm and we have sustainable energy sources like solar and hydroelectric power; on the whole making the ranch self-sufficient. I'm also a certified fire fighter in Chile.

### **My Story**

The alternative education in Mirambika gave me the tools to see through hegemonic structures that society places in your way. This fluidity and absolute freedom of perception certainly encouraged me to do what I love doing the most and that is - exploring and studying wildlife and wild places.

Over the last 17 years I worked as a field biologist in India, Malaysia, Botswana with organizations like Wildlife Conservation Society and WWF Malaysia to name a few.

The projects I was most involved with were with large carnivores like tigers, leopards etc., where we looked at population density surveys, movement, behaviour. Human-wildlife conflict mitigation was always an important topic as we need to come up with ways to coexist with wildlife. Our research contributed to successful conservation projects.

Now I am living in Chilean Patagonia for the last 8 years exploring, guiding, educating and living a life that I always wanted to live.

In Hindsight, Mirambika gave me an education that not only pushed intellectual boundaries but spiritual boundaries as well. I feel this balance is vital, (skills are important but qualities like humility, compassion is equally important).

I live at the end of the world, on a beautiful ranch overlooking the Patagonian ice fields, happy and living the dream!

*Ilango Aaron*





**Kabir Sharma**  
**Mirambika, 1993 - 2003**

My name is Kabir Sharma and I was a student at Mirambika from 1993 to 2003 (From Red group all the way to Equality group, equivalent to 8th standard). As of 2024, I am a researcher working on climate change and sustainability using systems thinking and simulation modelling. I am also founder of a research and consulting firm on applied systems thinking, DESTA Research LLP. After Mirambika, I went to Mother's International School where I completed my Class 12. I went on to pursue a Bachelor's of Science in Physics (Hons) from St. Stephen's College, and a double Masters in Physics and Engineering from University of Paris and Delhi University. I worked in France before returning to India and working with research organizations such as TERI and ATREE before founding DESTA.

My time in Mirambika has had a profound impact on me, professionally and personally. The approach to learning in Mirambika - learning beyond any disciplinary boundaries, learning by doing, encouraging exploration, learning for the joy of learning and not for marks, and many others, which are embedded in the ethos of Mirambika. These are great enablers for life-long learning, staying curious and encouraging exploration. Mirambika always encouraged us to think of topics in the real world as they are, in their totality, not limited by the boundaries of any discipline like geography or history or chemistry. This was exemplified most by 'Project Work', which was the method by which we learnt about the social, physical and life sciences. Today, as I work on sustainability and climate change, which impact, and are impacted by

everything - from nature to agriculture to industries to livelihoods to cultures, I find that the kind of interdisciplinary thinking which is necessary, comes to me naturally. Further, the method I use professionally, systems thinking, is inherently about understanding the emergence of change in systems caused by the interplays between environmental (air, water, forests), economic (livelihoods, income, incentives and policies) and social (cultures, skills, education) factors. Due to the learning in Mirambika, I took to it naturally. The focus on 'learning by doing' at Mirambika, e.g. setting up a bank account to understand money, doing vermicomposting and vegetable farming to understand agriculture, candle and soap making, tie & dye, papier mache, etc., has left a profound impact on me and an appreciation for craft and skill. I am always eager to apply my learning and see what can be created. I find this is a great strength.

Other facets of life in Mirambika have also had a positive impact on me, such as the importance of physical activity, which I try to keep up today, by playing tennis, running and exercising; interest in music, which I picked up in Mirambika, and I enjoy playing guitar to this day; and theatre, which I still enjoy doing, although I would like to do more. Encouraging reading is another such aspect. We read some full texts of Shakespeare, Charles Dickens and Harper Lee when we were in middle school, which has led to a deep interest in literature, and I enjoy both reading and creative writing. Spending a lot of time in nature, playing in the grounds, and on our trips to various parts of India has also played a key role in shaping my love for ecology and the environment. Also, softer aspects have got ingrained through such an education, such not being afraid to ask questions, being eternally curious about the world, being more cooperative than competitive, being naturally empathetic towards others, among others. These are all big strengths, and getting rarer in the world. At the same time, the quality of teaching of key subjects such as English, Hindi, Mathematics, Science, was effective and engaging and I was able to grasp everything well. It also led to a life-long love for learning. To give just one example, the maths I learnt from Jasbir Bhaiya, Tarun Da, Anuj bhaiya and Baren bhaiya has led to a life-long love for Mathematics and contributed to my taking up mathematics and physics for my higher studies. The English I learnt from Shweta Didi has led to a love for literature. I was also a good student throughout my education, in and beyond Mirambika as well, scoring well in the mainstream system too, so that can attest to the quality of teaching. Mirambika has also left a deep impact on me personally. It gave me the frame of reference that I use in my life, to understand and parse the world, and I don't think I could have had a better one. My best friends to this day are all my classmates from Mirambika. I am grateful every day for having gone to Mirambika and learnt from the amazing system it has.

Kabir