

Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

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Technology and Tradition at Taktse

by Mr. Phuntsog Namgyal

(To hear Mr. Namgyal's narration, click [HERE](#))

Dzongu, home to the indigenous Lepcha tribe, is one of the most remote regions in northern Sikkim. Perched inside deep jungles, one can see orange trees bobbing amid lush green ferns, rivers and brooks that border small houses dotting the hillside. Once in a while if you get lucky, you might hear a battered old jeep rattling down the steep road making its way into town.

Dzongu is also home to Solyop, a Taktse 12th grader. Since the pandemic struck three months ago, he has been forest-bound amid wild fauna and flora. Every few days, one may find Solyop taking a 12-kilometer trek through the forest in the early morning, making his way to the power station that provides electricity to Dzongu.

"Anum, anum, batti kahile auncha la?" "Anum, anum, when will the electricity come back on?" he asks the lineman, eager and anxious as he has already missed a couple of his online classes this week due to the frequent power outages ensuing from the torrential monsoon rains.

He does not get a satisfactory response from the lineman. Exasperated and a bit worried he pulls out his dying phone and drops a quick Whatsapp message to his teacher explaining his predicament. The message is quickly followed by a "sad" emoticon to express how he feels about the number of lessons he has already missed this week. This is a glimpse of Solyop's life in Dzongu.

Another glimpse finds him in his brightly-lit room engrossed in a literary discussion with classmates about Tennessee Williams or Emily Dickinson as he sits in front of his laptop. His classmates are scattered all the way from Solukhumbu in the foothills of Mount Everest in Nepal, to the busy town of Gangtok in Sikkim, to the paddy fields in Paro, Bhutan.

Yet another glimpse of Solyop's daily life is caught when, after all these classes, he steps into a warm, muddy rice paddy along with his cousins and friends. It is the onset of monsoon. The rain that causes power outages in his village and prevents him from attending online classes is the same rain that tells him it is time to go to the fields and plant rice seedlings. And Solyop does exactly that. He gets into the muddy field with literary discussions still buzzing in his head while his bare feet are planted in the murky water.

And this is just one of the things, one of the amalgamations that Taktse strives to achieve in its community. Taktse wants students who can connect with the wider world, discuss any topic, master new technology, and solve problems, yet at the same time preserve things that speak of their culture and their roots. Solyop is doing just that in the furthest corner of Sikkim, and we cannot be any prouder of what he is learning, both through his online classes and also as he participates and extends his hand to the bigger community.

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*Thank you Mr. Namgyal, and to all
who contributed to this newsletter!*





Teaching Remotely

by Ms. Pujamani Pradhan

On March 15th, as the pandemic crept into our nation, my phone beeped with an email, 'School will be closed indefinitely due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers to report on Monday to plan next steps for the closure.' A chill ran down my spine as I wondered, "Is this real? Will we all become victims of the disease? Will I get to be with my family? Did the students take all their belongings? How will I cover my chemistry syllabus? How will my students get lab experience for the board exams?"

When I arrived at school on Monday, the hallways were eerily silent. Basketballs that had been flying to the basket lay unattended on the court. Animated discussions turned to gloomy speculation about the pandemic. Instead of teachers gathering their students to get ready for the day, there were no students to gather. Over the weekend our school had become a ghost town.

Ms. Ann Lindsey, the academic head, instructed the anxious teachers to gather in the library. The topic of discussion that day was far from usual. We discussed how to conduct online classes. During the ensuing week we learned a lot about the technical aspects of presenting curricula and teaching online. Taktse was venturing out into unknown territory, teaching in new ways in response to the challenges presented by the pandemic.

The onset of the rainy season meant unreliable internet connectivity. On a stormy afternoon I turned on my Zoom app for my first online class. Only Shivani and Tshering were present. I started to feel nervous. Where were the other students? Where can I find the list of participants? Should I do a demo class to get acquainted? The wifi is so slow – will Zoom work smoothly? Will there be a power outage during the class?

I spotted the 'share screen' button and displayed a recap question for Shivani and Tshering to work on while others drifted in. Ten minutes went by. Jigden and Sherab were still not online. Where were they? Should I start the class? If I don't start now I'll run out of time, which would be unfair for the students who were on time. Gathering my thoughts, I decided to begin despite the missing students. I clicked on the white board feature, texted the lesson objective, and began illustrating atomic structures. I tried to

draw circles but they came out like clouds, and my crosses had curly lines. I felt silly and started apologizing to the class. Then I noticed a student doodling on the white board. Already frustrated with my inability to deal with technical issues, I could not bear any more disruption to my class.

I clicked on the 'stop sharing' button, took a deep breath, and, trying to hide my exasperation, said in a stern voice, "Let's go around recalling classroom expectations, after which we will generate expectations for online classes too."

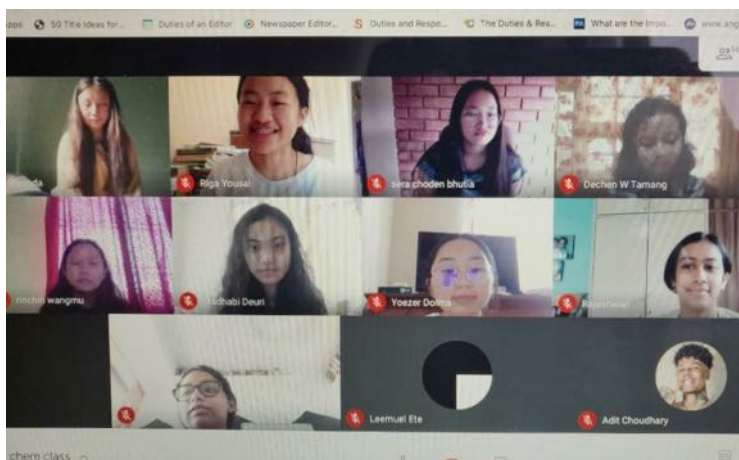
'No side conversations,' Rhea started. 'Being on time for class,' Tshering muttered. 'Have all your resources,' Shivani mentioned.

Then Jigden suggested new rules for online classes. 'Keep your mute button on if you are not talking,' and added, 'Inform the teacher ahead of time for absences.'

In a serious tone, I added, 'No writing on the shared white board unless asked by the teacher.' I hoped the students could not tell that I was struggling.

As soon as the class ended, I grabbed a cup of strong coffee and got back into action making a plan for the next class. In subsequent classes, the students remembered the class expectations. Jigden and Sherab were never more than five minutes late, allowing me to utilize the whole class time. Nobody doodled.

Even the worst classes have a silver lining if you learn from them. This is what Taktse has taught me: to learn from my failures with a growth mindset. In the weeks since my first online class, my classes feel smoother, students follow instructions and participate in discussions about chemical bonding and complex equations. We are, however, still not perfect (we never will be) but things just keep getting better as I learn how to engage my students online.



Dechen Tamang is an aspiring writer and poet. Her work was recently published by "[Gen Z Writes](#)", a website which strives to empower youth voices across the world by sharing their stories.



by Dechen Tamang

The moon fell,
In slivers of silver pages
For you and me
To write to each other
I remember once,
When the world still remained upright,
Unchaotic,
I tucked a strand of sunlight hair
Behind your ear and whispered
'I'm better at writing words
Than saying them'
Now, we have only
But written words between us

I'd give all of
This paper world,
Moonbeams of silver reams,
People of origami dreams
Lives of caged fear overturned
I'd give all of it away In exchange
For your touch upon my own,
And your voice mingling with mine

But the moon fell,
For you and me
To write to each other,
So please,

Don't stop writing to me



"Marg" means "Road" in Hindi. The most important road in many Indian cities is called "Mahatma Gandhi Road" or M.G. Marg for short. Gangtok is no exception, and M.G. Marg is its town center.



M.G. Marg, A town in Gangtok, Sikkim

by Sneha Agarwal, Grade 11

I wake up to the
Birds chirping and muffled voices
Lingering back and forth
Through the street

Everyday like an alarm that
Does not need to be set.
Where,
Nature's heavenly
Light blue glaze
Penetrates through the
Parallel doors of the town
Like a blessing.
Bustling with life and fun,
And with
The pungent smell of
The combined air,
Fresh and Floral,
Yet stale.
The cool breeze crossing
Past me
Always arouses a feeling of
Being embraced and welcomed
With warmth.
A place where once entered,
It feels like
"I'm finally home."

A gigantic religious tree
Standing upright in the
Middle of this town
Acts
Like a soldier and a guard ready
To protect us all.
This is where I grew up
And created everlasting memories at,
A great companion
Throughout my
Childhood and life,
M.G.Marg.



The following essay was written for an on-line creative writing class offered by Maria Lauenstein for teachers and staff at Taktse.

Memories of my “Maam”

by Rinchen Pakhrin

“That’s my “maam” (my grandmother) perched on her favorite wicker “mura”, her wrinkles are the inscriptions of her soul, made intricate by the paths that she walked through since birth. Her calloused hands are testimony to the hardships that she had to overcome. Yes, that’s the four-and-a-half-foot giant who remains forever etched in my heart”

My grandmother was never outwardly affectionate. In fact, it came well camouflaged under her seemingly strict demeanor. Although she couldn’t speak English she would occasionally swear like a sailor. Maybe it was the result of all the years of working as a maid in a British household. She took pride in the fact that her “Saab” and “Memsaab” took good care of her before returning to the UK after independence. The silverware that they gave her as a parting gift was one of her most prized possessions.



Mura



Angithi

She was also a storyteller. Every evening, I would follow her to her tiny kitchen and sit cross-legged on the wooden floor to listen to her stories. I would watch her as the soft glow of the burning embers from the “*angithi*” reflected off her pale and wrinkled skin. I spent countless hours listening to her stories which largely revolved around her life; of struggles, of perseverance, and of hope. Sometimes, I would catch a fleeting glimpse of her eyes welling up with emotions. Whether she did a good job of hiding it or I was mistaken, I will never know. Sometimes, I would find her sharing funny stories and anecdotes that left me in stitches.

The Japanese occupation of Burma incited fears that it was only a matter of time before they crossed over into India. Speculations were rife about the northeast region being their primary target. While it became mandatory for all the men to join the army, there were special training camps set up for women too. My grandmother was among the first to enlist. She would often describe the pain of the rifle recoil on her shoulder and the pleasure of being able to fire it, which gave her a sense of

empowerment. It meant she would not be running away from adversity. Every time I find myself in a tough situation, it helps to imagine her tiny figure, standing ever so proud, with a rifle slung on her shoulder.

My grandmother taught me the value of simplicity. She lived a disciplined life of hard work and prayers. She often surprised me with her strength, which was so disproportionate to her size and age. If there was anything I disagreed with, it was only her complete faith in the “*jhakris*” or shamans, whom I personally despised. If given a choice between modern medicine and bear bile, she would choose the latter.

Everyone deserves to have a grandmother like mine. Although she didn’t possess any material wealth, she did leave behind a repository of positive thoughts, love, and a lifetime of experience.

You don’t have to know Hindi to appreciate Brinda Thapa’s animated oration. Click [HERE](#) to watch!



Lockdown diaries, by Kenzo Jigme Bhutia, Grade 2: click [HERE](#).

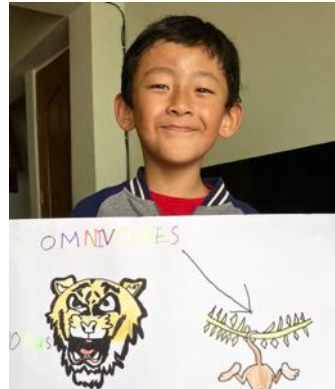
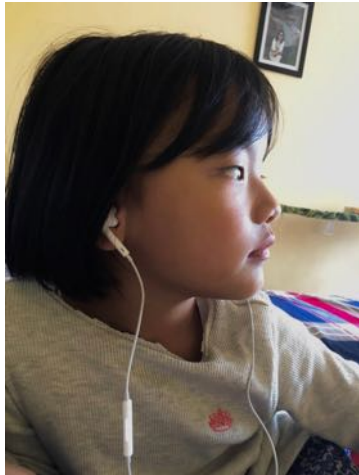
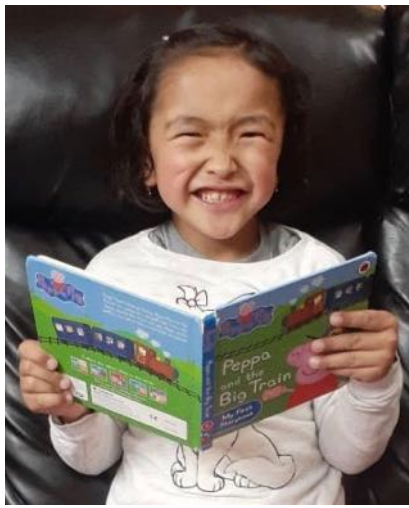


For glimpses of a day in the life of Sonam Choden Bhutia, click [HERE](#).

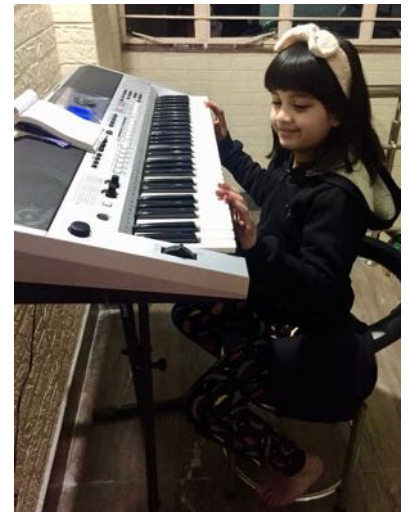


Click [HERE](#) to follow Sherin Dolma Bhutia from Grade 2 through her day in lockdown.





At home, coping with Covid





TAKTSE WANTS YOU

Taktse International School is hosting a series of online workshops called **"The Taktse Platforms"** and are looking for creative thinkers/speakers who could share their knowledge with our students and parents.

If you have the passion for education or skills that you would like to share, we would love you to lead an online session on this.

Taktse Outreach Team

For further details on this email us at:
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www.taktse.org

Donations to Taktse can be made at: <https://www.taktse.org>. The Friends of Taktse UPDATE newsletter is edited by Lonnie Friedman & Paul Lauenstein. To subscribe or add a friend, email Lonnie Friedman at: lonnie.friedman@comcast.net.