

Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

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Thank-you Edition
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Giving Back

by *Abhishek Subba, Taktse '17*

After a year of studying computer science at Jain University in Bangalore, I traveled back home to Gangtok for college break. On the mountain road along the mighty Teesta River, I reflected on my days at Taktse. Those last months before graduating were a time of paralyzing fear and uncertainty. I

remember the big question, "What next?" looming like a dark monsoon cloud. As the car roared closer to Gangtok, I wondered if the seniors at Taktse were struggling with the same question. It was then that I decided to visit Taktse to make a presentation about education at Indian colleges after life at Taktse.

At Taktse, I was warmly greeted by familiar faces. Their tales of mischief were hilarious and familiar. When the time came for my presentation, I was ready and felt confident standing before students I once tutored and chased on the basketball court. I began by leading them through an exercise on empathy that I had learned at the Global Citizens Initiative program at Harvard four years earlier. I asked them to sit facing a partner in meditative silence and try to communicate their feelings without words or movement. When I asked them to share what they thought their partner was trying to communicate, Shagyal said, "I think she is worried about her exams." Yukta remarked, "I think he is nervous about where he will go to college." It took me back to when I was in their shoes. I followed this with a fun activity where everyone closed their eyes and expressed their anxieties through dance moves.

As I watched them, it occurred to me that Taktse is like life on a hill where one can choose to climb up to view the glorious mountains, descend to the frothing river in the valley below, or simply sit and contemplate, no pressure added. By contrast, college in India is like a high stakes video game where one has only one chance to prove oneself.

I had prepared a presentation to introduce Taktse students to the educational experience at an Indian college. The inspiration came in realizing how terrified they were of Indian universities. I wanted both to confirm their fears and to reassure them of the rewards. College in India feels like climbing a tall tree while a committee of screeching vultures constantly reminds you of the consequences of falling. Students are pushed to climb ever higher but never told why. Where does this tree end? Why this tree? Can we climb a different branch? Such questions are shot down with stinging arrows of silence or curt replies. At college, 'failure' did not gift me with a learning experience as it had at Taktse. It just cast doubt on my ability to learn.

After a few months, I was convinced that if hell were empty, it was because all the devils had become college professors. **(continued on page 3)**

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





The post-Taktse chapters

Testimonials from graduates & past students
a video by Gyani Wasp
To watch, click [HERE](#)

One of the things that Taktse taught me, that I would not have learned had I gone to another school, is the importance of collaboration.

Kitsho Wangchuk, United World College, Isak, Japan



Taktse has really helped prepare me for college, especially when it comes to writing and adjusting.

Pemma Lhazin, international relations, Endicott College



Taktse has given me the confidence to think out of the box and not be afraid of making decisions.

Prateek Agarwal, business startup consultant, India



When I joined Taktse, I couldn't speak a single word of English. [Learning English at Taktse] helped me land the job that I have now.

Nicha Kamnerdmanee, graduate of London School of Economics and Political Science



If not for Taktse, I don't think I would have pursued creative writing, but because of my teachers at Taktse, who saw the writer in me, who saw my potential, gave me the courage to pursue creative writing as my major.

Sagun Limbu, teacher-in-residence, Branksome Hall Asia International School for Girls, Jeju Island, South Korea



Giving Back (continued from page 1) Despite all this, I'm still glad I decided to study in India. This caught the students off guard. Nonetheless I continued to explain why I felt this way. My Taktse education helped me change my attitude toward college. Recalling Taktse's motto "Rang Sem Ran Ki Tawa" (Your mind is yours to observe), I realized that college was not torturing me. I was torturing myself by closing my mind about my situation. I was failing to empathize with my peers, who had not received the support I did at Taktse. Having an open mind, empathy, courage and appreciating effort are values that Taktse nurtured in me. My college tested my ability to apply those values, and I am glad it did.

To go beyond the narrow confines of my college curriculum, I took learning into my own hands. I supplemented my text books with podcasts, online courses, long talks with thoughtful people, and visits to interesting places in the city. I wanted the students to know that no matter where they landed, the intellectual tools they acquired at Taktse would enable them to realize their potential.

I ended my talk with the students by saying that I went to hell willingly and learned something of value from that experience. I am convinced that college, no matter how stressful, has many more lessons to teach.

When the time came to leave, I was approached by Tshering, Tsharanla, Yeshey, Yonten Gurung and Yonten Namgyal, who all expressed how inspired they were by my talk. Their small gesture made me realize how important it is to share our experiences.

I attended Taktse for ten years and received what Taktse had to offer. I returned with the intention to give something back. I have started a new relationship with Taktse. I hope to continue to give back to the school community that gave me so much.

Sagun Limbu was one of the first three graduates of Taktse in 2014. She won a scholarship at Endicott College in Beverly, MA and graduated in 2018. She is now a teacher in residence at [Branksome Hall Asia International School for Girls](#) in Jeju Island, South Korea. The following quote is excerpted from an article by Ms. Limbu.

Reflection on my Taktse Education

by Sagun Limbu

"The values I took from Taktse is something that I will carry with me wherever life takes me. From seeing the ability to express myself in the form of creative writing, to encouraging and pushing me to step out of my comfort zone, my school taught me the skills to adapt anywhere despite the social and economic settings. If not for the foundation that was laid for me at Taktse, I wouldn't have survived Endicott College, and if not for Endicott, I wouldn't be in the position that I am now; just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects."





Congratulations to Manjushree Donsel Pradhan for winning second place in the Rising Star Singing Competition. She competed with 59 students from 12

schools at Pangthang Junior High School.

To hear her performance, click [HERE](#).



Mr. Ganesh Mukhia, currently in his 8th year at Taktse, has been biology teacher. He currently works as a Cambridge Exam Officer. As a science teacher, his inspiration for writing a poem came from a workshop he took while visiting Harvard called 'Writing across the curriculum' by John Collins.

Teak

by Mr. Ganesh Mukhia

Kingdoms inhabit my lush canopy
Microorganisms accumulate lipids and proteins
And shrubs become obese extracting ions from my compost
When my annual ring strikes five hundred I yield world-famous timber

I am *Tectona grandis*
Generous host to the lichen
I shield the earth from torrential rain
Fossils of my breed offer non-renewable coal and natural gases
Afforestation is what I am capable of as I reduce global warming and pollution

But felled I was to fulfill the contractor's selfish desire
I was tortured for forty nine days
Lying in the scorching sunlight I could feel my tough cells go flaccid

White blood trickled out from my twisted branches
My trunk was bruised and my roots lay exposed and thirsty

Annihilated before my adolescence
I wanted to grow and learn and laugh with the squirrels that tickled my epidermis

My desire to dance with rainstorms was cut short
My privilege to reproduce and evolve was decimated
Darwin's survival of the fittest theory is something I never got the chance to apply to myself

Gyani Wasp, who attended Taktse, is currently a senior at the Waring School in Beverly, MA. He is studying filmmaking.

The Taktse Library a video by Gyani Wasp

This summer, I went back home to Sikkim and visited my school there, Taktse. I conducted a filmmaking workshop with ten middle school students.

Click [HERE](#) to see the product of that workshop.



Shakespeare's 'The Twelfth Night' at Taktse

One warm morning in the Taktse courtyard, the 5th Graders enacted Shakespeare's play 'The Twelfth Night' directed by recent Taktse graduate Ngawang Choden Lachungpa with assistance from Grade 5 teacher Ms. Purna Pradhan. The court jester, the disguises, the stage crew, the musician, the costume designers, and the young actors enthralled the entire Taktse Community.

Ngawang was a "topper" in all of India on the English literature Cambridge board exams.





Harvesting Rice in Sajong

In November, Taktse students and teachers traveled to Sajong to harvest the rice we had planted last summer.

When we reached Sajong, Mr. Lok Babu, one of our Board members, and his sister welcomed us. We went to the field to check out the rice paddy. Only a few plants were standing upright. The rest looked like they had gone to sleep after having a warm sun bath in the field. The students and teachers worked hard in the field for almost three and a half hours harvesting, threshing, winnowing, and stacking the hay to use as fodder for cattle during the coming winter.

After a brief reflection on the day, the students expressed their appreciation for each other for the hard work they had put in that day. Everyone enjoyed the mouth-watering lunch provided by the host family.

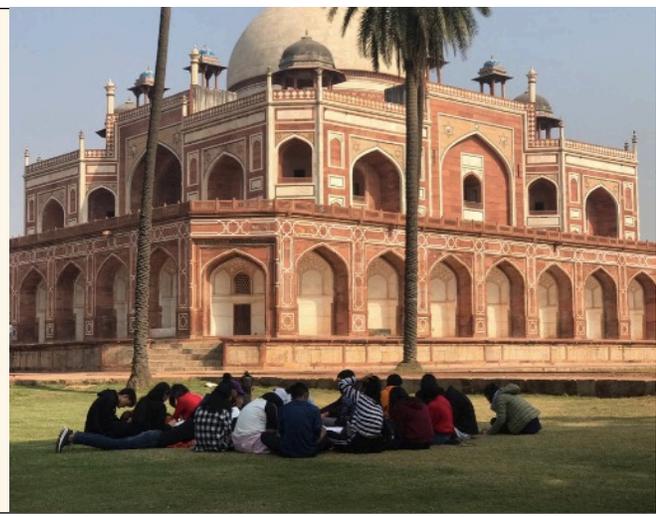
At the end of the day, Mr. Lok Babu talked to us about the importance of hard work in our lives. He emphasized that we should focus on whatever activity we engage in. He reminded us that we would only be able reap what we sow, and the end result of any of our activities would depend on the work we put in.



Taktse 8th Graders visit New Delhi

In November, Taktse 8th graders journeyed to New Delhi to participate in the Bookaroo Festival of Children's Literature. They also visited the Indira Gandhi Memorial Museum, the headquarters of Scholastic India, and Humayun's Tomb, described as follows by one of the students:

"We sat on the sprawling garden outside the Humayun's Tomb and imagined ourselves to be young Akbar, walking the same grounds with his mother Hamida Begum, overseeing the construction of his father's tomb. We thought of what it must have been like for Akbar to lose his father at a young age, to become the Emperor at 13 and how he must have prepared himself for the challenges that came with the responsibility. Hamida Begum's tribute to her husband and a precursor to the Taj Mahal, Humayun's Tomb remains our favorite destination."



Indira Gandhi Memorial Museum

We walked through the hallways of the massive bungalow where Indira Gandhi, India's first female prime minister, once lived, breathed and went about her daily life. It was surreal.

Our 8th grade scholars were fascinated by the details of her assassination, the spot where she was shot by her bodyguards and her blood-stained sari neatly laid out in a glass case. We saw snippets of her life in newspaper clippings, personal photographs and artifacts, her journal entries and letters to her sons and husband.

We left the building wanting to know more about this powerful woman and wondering about what her last thoughts must have been as she was gunned down that fateful morning in 1984.





Visiting Scholastic India

Taktse and Scholastic India publishing house have years of connection that has strengthened through their annual book fairs, book clubs and Mrs. Denjongpa’s children’s books that they have published.

We got an opportunity to visit the corporate office of Scholastic India in Gurgaon just outside of New Delhi. We interacted with the editors and marketing heads who showed us the process a book goes through from a manuscript to a finished book. An impromptu story telling activity had some of our students share funny 3-minute stories that managed to garner a few laughs, followed by a scrumptious

meal and a visit to the nearby Scholastic warehouse.

Our 8th graders (or rather, scholars, as we like to call them) asked many thoughtful questions and readily participated in the activities.

It was wonderful to be surrounded by books – lots and lots of them, and the interesting people who create these books. We thank them for their warmth and hospitality. We hope to return next year!



Bookaroo Festival of Children’s Literature

We created crazy characters, drew our own comic heroes, and learned about the myths and legends of the greatest navigators in the Pacific Ocean.

In addition to attending the workshops, we engaged with authors after their sessions, offered them khadas and tea boxes and told them about our school in the mountains. It was an opportunity to practice conversational skills, firm handshakes and express our gratitude.



1st Graders Field Trip

by Ms. Kalika Mangrati, Grade 1 Teacher

As the yellow bus honked in the courtyard, my first graders, with their tiny backpacks stuffed with lunch boxes and water bottles, rushed out of the class. Letting out excited giggles, they ran down the stairs and obediently assembled in front of the bus, waiting for instructions. After a headcount, we boarded the bus. The team consisted of our art teacher, Mr. Amrit; our U.S. resource person, Ms. Suzanne Newman; Grade 1 teacher Ms. Mamta Rai, and me. It was a perfect sunny day for our much awaited field trip.

Ms. Suzanne and I had been planning this field trip for weeks. The first graders had finished a unit on different kinds of occupations and we wanted to bring the unit to life by having them interact with real people in different occupations. Ms. Suzanne helped me prepare a lesson plan for before, during and after the trip. We made a list of places to visit, helped students come up with a questionnaire, and practiced how to interact with the people we would meet and how we would reflect on our experiences after the trip.

Our first visit was to the police station. The lady police officer, who is also a Taktse parent, took us around the office and the cells where a few offenders were locked up. The more they saw, the more inquisitive they grew. They bombarded her with questions like: “What is that?”, “How is it used?”, “What will happen if...”. Half the day was already over and the first graders were still jailed inside the police station with curiosity. We had to drag them out of the police station as we had other places yet to visit.



When we reached Gangtok’s main market area, the scorching heat was beating down on our heads. The kids were hungry, so we rested for a while on some stairs, munching on a chips and savoring cold water.

After a few minutes, twenty little voices chirped “I need to go to the toilet, Ms. Kalika.” We rushed the students up the hill to the nearest public washrooms. Getting twenty tiny kids down those steep steps and into the dark, dingy washrooms was daunting, but somehow we managed it and were soon back on the hot street again.

Our final destination was the bakery. As we entered, the first graders glued their eyes on the display cases piled with colorful pastries, chocolates, doughnuts and muffins, eyes sparkling and mouth watering. Tiny fingers pointed and excited voices cried out, “I want this”, and “I want that”. Their innocent excitement made me smile and think of myself as a child. When asked to interview the baker, they all forgot their interview questions. They could only imagine how those confections would taste. The only questions they could think of were “How much for this?”, and “How much for that?” Pointing at the ones they wanted, they said, “I’ll ask my mom to buy those!”

Back on the street Ms. Suzanne surprised us all by treating everyone to an ice cream. The children beamed and relished every lick.

On our way back to school, the students could not stop talking about everything they had seen. We hadn’t opened a book throughout the day, but it had surely been a day filled with learning experiences. The sleepy students stepped out the yellow bus and dragged themselves up the stairs. We sat in a circle on the grey carpet of our classroom reflecting on what a terrific day it had been. ‘ Ms. Kalika, when are you taking us for our next field trip?’ Karma asked. I smiled at him and replied, “Soon Karma, soon!”

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