



Rinchen Zangpo Society For Spiti Development

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Ice Hockey Comes to Spiti Valley



All six of the women's ice hockey teams, lined up and ready to compete on our outdoor rink in Kaza (image: TOI)

On January 6, 2022, the 9th Annual Indian National Women's Ice Hockey Championship took place in Kaza, the subdivisional headquarters of Spiti Valley. It was the first time that Spiti hosted this event with six powerhouse teams competing in the tournament. These hockey heroines skated, stick-handled and scored goals on our high-altitude outdoor rink cheered on by local and visiting spectators who surrounded the venue on the west side of town. This year there were teams representing Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Delhi, Chandigarh, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, and also from far away Telangana in southern India. Four girls from our school played on the Himachal squad and the Ladakh women won this time around.

This now yearly sporting event is organized by the Ice Hockey Association of India (IHAI).

❧ **Big congratulations to all the teams!** ❧



The Himachal Pradesh Women's Ice Hockey Team representing our state in the 2022 tournament, including four students from Munsel-ling

Drimé Kunden, Traditional Tibetan-style Opera at Ladarcha Fair



Students from Munsel-ling school performing the *Khar*, an ancient traditional dance preserved by the Spiti community



The major annual celebration in Spiti is the summer Ladarcha Fair held at Kaza. Forty of our students staged a grand performance telling the story of Drimé Kunden (Skt. *Vishvāntara*), a previous life of the Buddha in which he practices vast generosity with royal wealth. A well-known musical performance in the Tibetan speaking world, it was here sung in Hindi for the benefit of a wider audience, including a much-revived tourist presence.

A scene from the Tibetan opera, Drimé Kunden, performed by students from Munsel-ling school

Also, to encourage traditional culture in the valley, a dance master, Phunchog Namgyal from Kibber village, was invited to Munsel-ling School to teach the *Khar*, Spiti's oldest dance. Very slow and complex, out of keeping with the modern pace of life and in danger of being forgotten altogether perhaps; nevertheless, once the children had learned the steps and hand gestures, they liked to keep dancing. ☺

The student performers of Drimé Kunden



Building Projects



GIRLS' HOSTEL, MUNSEL-LING SCHOOL

We are building a new girls' hostel at Munsel-ling school. It is mainly for 10+2 students who are in the last two years of their secondary education. Munsel-ling has only recently been able to include senior secondary education in its educational provision, so now more rooms for seniors are needed. Accommodation for fifty girls, two to a room. The sponsors, German Aid for Tibetans (GAT) have generously covered the costs of solar lighting, solar water heating, plus a separate traditional toilet.

Three views of the Girls' Hostel under construction at Munsel-ling



BOUNDARY WALL, REWA SCHOOL

At Rewa School, Rongtong, a complete boundary wall is being built. Even very young children in the kindergarten classes are boarding here to access the education that they cannot receive in their often tiny home villages. The children have to be kept safely in and roaming livestock out. We are very grateful to Tibethilfe Niederosterreich (Austria), the main benefactors of this blossoming school, who are backing the boundary wall project with financial collaboration from Tibetfreunde Schweiz (Switzerland).

Morning assembly at Rewa School, Rongtong



BASKETBALL COURT, MUNSEL-LING SCHOOL


We are also very grateful to the Urmil Trust of Bombay who have funded a basketball court at Munsel-ling School. It would have been finished this year except for late delivery to Spiti of poles and hoops. ☺

Workers prepare to begin construction of our basketball court at Munsel-ling

Medicinal Herbs and Traditional Ecological Knowledge



From a distance the hillsides of Spiti might seem barren and lifeless, but they are in fact a rich alpine pharmacy full of botanical remedies

A valuable educational programme that connected students with the herbal healing resources of our local natural environment was organized and funded by Omisha, an Indian lady visitor. With the help of two of our former students, she recruited several local *amchis* (traditional doctors) expert in the medicinal plants on our hills and under their supervision students went out on Sundays for two summer months to identify local medicinal plants in various parts of Spiti and learn their uses. We hope to continue this exercise in future years, giving Spiti children a chance to develop their knowledge of Spiti nature. 

Visitors and Other Connections


KHEYZE RINPOCHÉ

Ngor Thartse Kheyze Rinpoché, head of one of the main branches of Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism, visited Kaza Public School in June 2022 and gave blessings to the students and staff.

Kheyze Rinpoché receives a traditional greeting from Ven. Tashi Namgyal and students from Kaza Public School



RAINBOWS

The 1st Mickle Trafford Rainbows, a junior girls activity group in Chester, UK, as part of their Take Action Make Change badge shared gifts and a video with their counterparts at Munsel-ling. The theme: caring about accessible education. 

Students and teachers from Chester, UK (above) and Munsel-ling (below) exchange greetings, stories and gifts



Academic Excellence

This year several Munsel-ling School students deserve our congratulations for going on to gain places in very competitive subjects at higher education establishments, some of them prestigious, at state and also national level.



Dawa Lamo (above) gained admission to study medicine at Dr B.R. Ambedkar State Institution of Medical Science College, Chandigarh



Champa Dolma (above left) and Ringzin Youdon (above right) will study medicine in Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru Government Medical College, Chamba



Another female success is Tenzin Youmcho, selected to study dentistry at the Sundernaggar Dental College, Mandi District, while a further source of satisfaction is our former student Sonam Kinzom's attainment in coming first in the whole of Himachal Pradesh State in the first year B.Sc. nursing examination, all the more of an achievement given her very modest family background.

Sundernaggar Dental College in Himachal Pradesh

More Academic Excellence



Three of our female students, Sonam Tsomo, Ngotup Dolma and Dikit Dolma were selected to study at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences Nursing College, Bhubaneswar, Orissa. AIIMS colleges are recognised as the most prestigious nurse training institutions in India.

Entrance hall of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in the Indian state of Orissa



Tenzin Norgay (above left) and Tenzin Labu (above right) are enrolled to study engineering at the National Institute of Technology, Hamipur, the best engineering college in the state of Himachal Pradesh



As for this year's school performers, 49 class 10 students sat for the Himachal Pradesh State Education Board's matriculation examination. 48 passed. 17 students sat for the senior secondary 10+2 examinations. All passed. These are much higher pass percentages than the state average. This though was the last year of HP Board exams.

Next year we will face the challenge of teaching to the Central Board for Secondary Education syllabi and examinations. These are prestigious India-wide qualifications. The Rinchen Zangpo Society has worked hard to upgrade both staff and facilities in order to be recognized and certified by the CBSE.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is the Indian national regulating body which sets educational standards for all public and private schools



Remembering Thuktan Yeshay



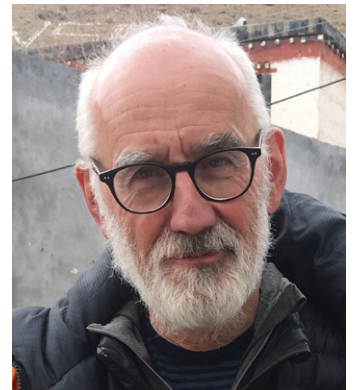
Thuktan Yeshay, a dear friend and dedicated helper

The late Thuktan Yeshay, our invaluable communications manager and project co-ordinator died, after several months of sickness, on 13th November this year at Tanda Teaching Hospital near Dharamsala. He was thirty-nine years old. His cremation was attended by 120 monks and nuns and many lay people. He was

extremely hard-working and a great enthusiast of Spiti culture. For many people dealing with the Rinchen Zangpo Society for Spiti Development he was their first and main point of contact. His demise is a considerable loss for the Society; it has hindered the preparation of this winter's newsletter, for instance. ཕྱི་ལོ་

Spiti, Thirty Years On

Patrick Sutherland is Emeritus Professor of Documentary Photography at the University of the Arts London. He was one of the first westerners to be inspired by Tashi Namgyal's dream of educational progress in the remote mountain fastness of Spiti valley. This was way back in 1993 before Tashi Namgyal had even founded the Rinchen Zangpo Society for Spiti Development and become its general secretary. Patrick Sutherland is a trustee of Aid for Himalayan Education, a UK charity supporting the educational efforts in Spiti. He visited Spiti again last autumn and here he writes about the changes he has seen over the years and shares with us a few photos he made some 30 years ago:



Patrick Sutherland

I first visited Spiti in 1993, accompanied by Graham Woodhouse my old schoolfriend from Sheffield. We travelled with Tashi Namgyal, Graham's classmate from the School of Buddhist Dialectics in Dharamsala. Together we walked around the valley and stayed with Tashi's relatives. I photographed people we encountered. This was my first experience of a culturally-Tibetan community. Spiti had only recently opened up to outsiders and felt isolated and untouched. I had no sense at that time that I might return and keep returning.

That summer Graham and I visited Pin Valley, a substantial offshoot of the main Spiti Valley. We went to Kungri to find accommodation for the upcoming monastic dance festival. A man who appeared seriously disturbed barged into the room: the local schoolteacher, blind drunk and skipping class. Spiti was sometimes a punishment posting for government officials who were deemed to have misbehaved. India provides free



Lama Tashi Namgyal and Geshé Graham Woodhouse (Losel)

schooling for all its children, but in remote districts much of the available state education was substandard.

Tashi Namgyal, in complete contrast, had an ambitious vision of the potential of the younger generation in Spiti. He wanted to establish an English medium school which would celebrate the language and culture of the local community whilst also teaching sciences and

core academic subjects to the highest level. I came back again in 1995 and photographed Tashi on a bare hillside, holding a rolled-up blueprint for the school. He had been given some land in Rangrik. A year later His Holiness the Dalai Lama inaugurated the first of Munsel-ling's school buildings.

The growth and success of the school over the last 26 years has been phenomenal. I am writing this in one of the rooms kept for visitors. A stove keeps the chill of winter at bay. The surrounding collection of buildings resembles a substantial Spiti village. Classrooms, offices, kitchens, a dining hall, boarding hostels for boys and girls of varying ages, science labs, accommodation for teaching staff, playgrounds and a cultural hall nestled together under a large statue of the Buddha high on the hillside. There is the continuing sign of further development.

Earlier I walked through the village as school was finishing. Groups of pupils were wandering out of school. Many greeted me with both unselfconscious friendliness and respect and asked me who I was and what I was doing. They seemed relaxed, happy and self-confident, at ease within their own community and clearly continuing Spiti's strong tradition of welcoming strangers.



Women tending their barley fields in Upper Spiti Valley

Tashi has always been aware of the substantial cultural, financial and psychological obstacles facing students attending higher educational institutions in cities like Delhi and Chandigarh. To support them he often sets up hostels for groups of Spiti students, with an adult to assist their transition from remote high-altitude village to modern metropolis.

Spiti has changed hugely since 1993 and continues its rapid transformation. Tourism has become a major industry. Hotels and homestays are being constructed in all the larger villages, often with little sense of planning. The traditional mud houses

are being replaced with much larger edifices a few of which have incorporated modern thinking on green architecture. Every village and every hamlet in the valley now benefits from road connections and a more reliable electricity supply. TV is ubiquitous. Access to modern healthcare is also now a part of Spiti life. Villagers commonly travel to Simla, Chandigarh or Dharamsala to access specialist medical centres. Helipads offer emergency



His Holiness the Dalai Lama descends from the Kunzom Pass, the upper entrance to the Spiti Valley after conducting an incense puja

air ambulance support. In the last couple of years, the Jio network has finally connected the valley to a reliable fast internet connection. Spiti no longer closes down for winter. The older generation now travel on pilgrimage to Buddhist sites or winter in the religious resort of Rewalsar.

But Spiti is still quite isolated in other ways. It lacks local



A child riding in a cozy blanket, in the traditional Spiti way

employment opportunities for some of its graduates. In one household I recently stayed in, the two young women have successfully completed zoology degrees but have returned home to till the fields. In another the young woman is leaving for Jammu to take up a nursing post. I wonder how Spiti can best hold on to and benefit from its investment in its educated younger generation.

-- Patrick Sutherland

School Student Statistics, 2022

Munsel-ling School, Rangrik	468	mixed boarders and day students
Kaza Public School, Kaza	276	day students
Rewa Buddhist Model School, Rongtong	118	boarders
Sidhbari Hostel, Sidhbari	48	boarders

Total 910 well-educated students!

Thanks to everyone who contributed to our education programme this year. Great apologies to anyone we have forgotten. Apart from those already mentioned above we extend special thanks to:

Zoe Maogany, France
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Benti Banach, Netherlands

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