



Quintessential EDucational Resources And Knowledgeware

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# IN Focus

## EMBRACING THE INVISIBLE

Education plays a very significant role in the transformation and development of the individual and society; however, it does not function in isolation from the society of which it is a part. Neurodiversity, unequal socio-economic & power equations deeply influence *children's access to education* and their participation in the learning process.

QEDpress issues of January '24 and March '24 have already covered the aspects of 'Inclusion' & 'Equity' in education. Another marginalised & invisible segment of students are the street kids and tribal children.

**Street children's** access to education is one of the *glaring issues* in most of the developing countries. Typically they have been treated as extensions of their parents' labour services for construction, or for illegal trade activities, begging, or even human trafficking. Despite GOI initiatives like RTE Act 2009, the concern persists.

RTE doesn't reach them at all. The other section of society continuing to face marginalisation in India (even after 75 years independence) are the tribals. Tribal children's dreams to someone remain just that - dreams! The government perhaps has been myopic in addressing the tribal marginalisation issue with respect to poverty alone, and programmes & policies implemented are either to remove poverty or for serving the nation's economic & infrastructural development. As per the 2014 census, 6.1 million students aren't in schools. The key their empowerment emergence as levelled citizens with the others, lies in *mandatory* implementation of RTE 2009. Given the situation, many NGOs work in this area - especially for the street & tribal kids. QEDpress November '24 covers the story about Pathshala.

### WONDER WORD

**Marginalise:** To treat someone or something as if they are NOT important, insignificant, on the periphery.

**Marginalisation:** The process by which individuals or groups are pushed to the periphery of society, denied access to resources, and excluded from meaningful participation in the economic, social, and political life of society; a complex phenomenon manifested in various forms with long consequences for the affected.

**Factors of marginalisation:** It can occur due to factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, or a combination of these identities.

**Socio-economic Marginalisation:** restricting access to quality education, healthcare, ownership of land, and basic amenities like clean water and sanitation facilities (lack of access to the *basics of human existence*).

**Street-child:** "...any girl or boy... for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood; and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults". (UNICEF)

"... our interests and our conscience compel us to act on behalf of those who long for freedom. And we must be a source of hope to the poor, the sick, the marginalized, the victims of prejudice."

- Barack Obama

# QED Talk

### NEP 2020's focus on INCLUSION

## From the Heart - reaching out to the **INVISIBLE**

### DR JUIN DUTTA

**Founder - Srotoshwini Trust** (Pathshala, Pathbhavan & Churni initiatives) B Sc Eco., Post Graduate in Library Sciences, Ph D. Recipient of several Awards for Social Impact & Welfare. Passionate about Rabindra Sangeet, Theatre, Social reforms, Skill-development, Women & Child Empowerment.



#### Tell us about the beginnings and origin of your initiative.

I came to Vadodara in1997, and with a few Bengali friends, we formed a cultural group (Srotoswini Trust) - most Bengalis the worldover form groups! ha ha ha! Through this we engaged in cultural events (music & theatre shows) as well as discussions on societal concerns that bothered us. I had worked at various places (including the Womens Studies Research Centre - MSU). On the suggestion of a friend, I pursued Library Sciences (which I thoroughly enjoyed) and then I served at New Era School, full time, from 2002-2010. But my passion had always been with performing arts (although I haven't really had formal training in it - except learning basic dance and music); in fact my first independent production was when I was in Grade 12! So, given the opportunity, I joined Navrachana International School (IB) as Performing Arts Coordinator.

Anyhow, our bonding, synergy and friendship in the Srotoswini Group was very strong - we continued to put forth annual stage performances (ticketed shows) with the hope that with the earnings from the shows we would do something impactful to give back to society. A key member of the group, Mousumi Dutta then working with Navrachna School, Sama, (now looks after Pathbhavan full time), is very vocal and she expressed her restlessness at a meeting one day, "Hum sirf boltey rehtey hain, par hum kuchh bhi nahin kar rahein hain!"

I live in the Sama area and even while I was still working, I had noticed an open ground where construction labourers lived in makeshift tents they were street dwellers; mostly from tribal & rural areas from here and other states. The adults would go for their daily wage jobs and the kids would be left with some aged adults -playing freely in the mud or returning on tractors with their parents at the end of the day (having done nothing!). That hit my core. I shared with the Srotoswini members that we could initiate something for these children. Time just flew and I think Mousumi's words woke me up and I realised that to take on a genuine initiative of societal reform, of education & empowering these invisible children, would require full time effort. Much to the shock of my well-wishers, I quit my job in 2013 - thankfully, my family supported me fully.



Three of us started by approaching the construction labourers' site near my home - the place that sowed the seeds of my life's mission. They outright refused claiming their kids studied in the village (totally untrue!). We even offered them food (thinking a basic human need would coax them), but they weren't interested (fearful of our move being a lure for wrong deeds). We realised that **they weren't able to perceive the genuineness of our mission and the advantages** of good food, education, health-hygiene, etc. We had to look elsewhere.

Our focus shifted to the larger construction labourers site at the upcoming Sama Indoor Stadium. We met Mr Pandey, then project leader - who supported our mission and allowed us to meet the labourers. We approached the group with food first - thinking that would attract them (there were close to 80-90 children, from 5-15/16 yrs). The group came to us - very confused, questioning who we were - what we wanted from them. *But food didn't attract them.* We went back to the discussion mode of what to do get across to them.

#### So how did Pathshala start and how did you evolve as a person?

Frankly we started with our gut instincts! We decided we would persist! We got 2 very large durries from *Khaadi Bhandaar* and then...on 5th May 2013, (*close to 9th May, a very auspicious day for us -Tagore Jayanti*), we started. Armed with food, durries, basic colouring books and simple ABCD. *We went every day, without fail* - we were there from 9am-1pm. Soon the group grew (*in fact one of the tiny ones then, is still with us*).

We continued there for 1 year; almost 60 to 70 children came. Sadly some left and went away (which for me was heartbreaking). I still remember little Lakshmi (who loved the ghee-rice I got for her every day) and how emotional I became when she left. I literally drove around the city for 3-4 hrs looking for the family! That's when I realised I could not (should never) get so emotionally attached to the children - because such departures outside of our control would be a part of life! Our group's passion for performing arts and got these children to perform at a cultural programme there - Narration - Dance - Acting - Songs. Parents and audience from the society could see the change. But the Stadium end date was nearing and Mr Pandey hinted we had to vacate. Some parents said - "Aap yahan se chaley jaogey to bacchon ki padhai ka kya hoga? Aap unko saath mein rakhiye"

# ee.

We need a more holistic approach in which we take account of society's most vulnerable sectors. We shouldn't just do broad averaging of country statistics, but rather, we need to disaggregate the data to determine where the resources are most needed. In most cases, it's usually the reverse: those who are most marginalized - minorities and rural & remote communities - get the least attention and money.

- Mary Robinson



Now THAT became a huge question mark; how could we? With my husbands and well-wishers support we got two small adjoining plots and set up a small hostel on 5th June 2014, at Sama, and started housing, feeding and teaching the children there, with a 24 X 7 caretaker lady who looked after them. This outreach education initiative is what we called PATHSHALA. After basic literacy, we enrolled the kids in Navprerna (the CSR initiative of Navrachna Education Society). Despite being Gujarati medium, the kids did well.

Then in **2014**, we started with the footpath initiatives - **Pathshala** in *Fatehgunj* (with amazing funding support from *Mahavir International School*) - at that time we didn't have money to start anything new. After a few months, we expanded our mission's reach to **Pathshala** in *Jetalpur* (*Parshuram Bhatta*). And, by **2015**, we also started **Pathshala** in *Sardar Estate*.

So we had 4 sites where the Srotoswini members would divide themselves and teach the kids (*mornings in the first two, afternoons all of us at Sardar Estate*), not just studies -but literacy, hygiene, art, songs-dance, activities, GK & public speaking. Change started.

We **enrolled them ALL to Navprerna** (although all of them didn't go to an organised school) - but we made sure that access to structured and formal education for these invisible street dwellers was available.

One important aspect - we never charge the kids or their parents anything! Those who saw the difference we were making (general public & corporates), started giving us donations, even corporates. We do everything as per NGO rules, norms & policies.

#### What about Pathbhavan - what was that model?

So initially, for that first site's children (the ones who refused and turned us away), we rented a room at Sanjay Nagar (Sama), where we took interested children into a safe & stimulating environment, and we started with basic activities.

Then, in 2013, we converted that room into a **library** to encouraging these children into reading, playing games and doing activities. So, **PATHBHAVAN** was originally just a **library & activity centre**. Then in 2014, Mousumi Dutta (the one who *fuelled* my dream into a mission) gave up her job and started looking after Pathbhavan and made it into a *full -fledged learning centre* - tutoring poor kids from Sanjaynagar, studying in nearby schools - in areas of academics, vocational skills, life lessons, etc. We also used to take the footpath children there for activities.

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Education is the key to opportunity in our society, and the equality of educational opportunity must be the birthright of every citizen.

- Lyndon B. Johnson

# ■ What propelled you into starting the remote residential PATHSHALA facility at Lasundhara?

Across all the initiatives, what was evident was the difference in the skills, ability, literacy and overall confidence in the residential Sama hostel children (with full time involvement) v/s the footpath ones who had 3-4 hours of interaction per day; The magic of round the clock proper food, proper guidance, regular monitoring, talking & sharing, exposure to basic life skills and presentability was visible - a HUGE difference!

That's when (*around 2015*), the seeds of a **full fledged residential hostel** started germinating. The bigger reason was that the labourers had to move to their next destination once their contract construction job was completed. The children refused to move away from us and their new found thrilling education.

Of course - big dreams and no money (barely 1 Lakh in the bank)! Luckily we had well-wishers and contributions from Srotoshwini members and friends. As a result, we acquired land at Lasundhara (about 35 kms from Vadodara) and build a co-ed hostel for 100 children so that we could make the maximum holistic impact to their lives. Our hostel for 100+ children has been operational since September 29, 2019.

We have been blessed with a very good team, really passionate and genuine love for children. Some live here on campus - since we have a hostel (separate for boys & girls), the others commute by bus every day (bus donated by a corporate well-wisher).

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### READ TO SUCCEED

#### **FOR TEACHERS**

**Lost Childhood:** Unmasking the Lives of Street Children in Metropolitan India

by Kapil Dev, Dipendra Nath Das,
 Sangeetha Esther

Lost Childhood explores the everyday lives of street children in India. It presents insights on their life on the streets to provide a comprehensive understanding of why they are driven to extreme means of livelihoods. Apart from shedding light on the social injustice experienced by these children in every aspect and the discrimination faced by them, the book also explores a way forward that would not only benefit street children but will also be of use to the community in understanding their lives, problems, and help explore this issue in further detail. It will also be of interest to policymakers, social workers, and field workers who work with street children - as also 'awakened schools' and NGOs wishing to help these kids.



#### **FOR PARENTS**

Here are some books that will help spark important conversations with your kids about privilege, socioeconomic differences, and empathy for others.



Is There Really a Human Race - by Jamie Lee Curtis & Laura Cornell

Those Shoes - by Maribeth Boelts , art by Noah Z Jones





My name is not Migrant - by Kate Milner

#### ■ What are the initiatives for the marginalised groups under Srotoshwini Trust?

**Pathshala** plays a big part. The residential hostel campus is a hybrid learning program that marries the guidelines of *Reggio Emilia Philosophy* of child-centric education (**Project Based Learning**) with **NIOS Board** learning expectations. Kids are exposed to academics, sports, performing & aesthetic arts, extra curricular activities, vocational training & career counseling. By the end of their journey with us, our aim is to groom them into becoming very skilled, responsible individuals ready to join the workforce. Some of the kids have left the centre and moved into Nursing, some are doing higher education courses and ITI.

I want to mention here - the PBL is guided by a very qualified & effective trainer, Ms Paras Mahendru. She has trained the other teachers here. Also, our **study groups** are based on LEVELS - each level with **mixed age-groups** (because the children come with different skill levels). So Level 1 could have different chronological ages but their literacy level would be almost the same. Then, as and when the kids attain proficiency at that level they move into the next group level and so on.

**Pathbhavan** is a Learning and Development Center that runs in the after-school hours and focuses on nurturing the children of Sanjay Nagar Slum area (Vadodara) through academics, extra curricular & vocational activities for all round development.

**Churni** is a creative initiative that started when we started teaching the street children. **The mothers got interested.** Our Churni team vocationally trains the mothers to empower them by providing a steady income by selling the products they make. We have two centers, one in Gotri, Vadodara and another in Lasundra, Savli.

You can learn more about us from our website - https://srotoshwini.org/

■ I attended your recent concert "Jungle Book" - an amazing performance! But what intrigued me was the initial letter "U" in all the projects you spoke about!

Oh thank you, thank you - it was remarkable to see how the children came through - with on stage improvisations! I made a conscious effort to name our efforts with 'U':

**Udukku**: Performing Arts Group, that brings forth the Annual Concert productions (like the Jungle Book one you saw)

**Udham**: The Founders Day programme to celebrate Tagoreji's birth anniversary.

**Udaan:** Career Counselling, to show the kids the various options available for different types of careers, after 10th, 12th, higher education and how to prepare for it.

**Unnati**: Entrepreneurial initiative (beginning with Shark Tank style presentations, followed by funding by audience). Children offer a part of their earnings to Pathshala in gratitude - the Unnati team plows the receivables back into arranging resources and apparatus for the student business initiatives.

**Udyam**: Vocational Skills Programme that trains students in weaving, Jewelry making, Pottery, Auto garage & mechanics training, Beauty Parlour skills & Mehendi, Digital Graphic Designing (most of our invitation cards are now made by the kids).

■ I have heard you downplay competition and that even your Sports Day is sans competition? Tell us more about that...

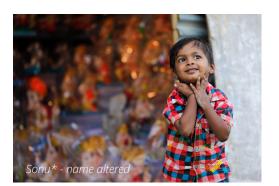
I have always felt uncomfortable with the *ugly head competition rears when we focus on celebrating singular high marks and ranks*! The message hit home for me, when we had a debate at Pathshala during the pandemic. The topic was "Competition is necessary in life." I can still hear the voice of that little child (maybe 9-10 yrs old), who said, "Maine bhi competition mein part liya, maine bhi apna pura effort dala. Pran bhaiya ne bahut achha bola aur 1st Prize jeet gaye; par mere mehnat ka kya?"

Since the last 2-3 years, our sports day events are organised to bring out the best in teams, powered by individual effort. In life too, if the kids can pull the team along, everyone wins. I believe in that and our children have also seen the value in it.

Your final words?



Transformation happens through the language of love.
- Juin Dutta



# "Can you see me?"

Hello, I am Sonu\*. Remember me?

Did you see me, when you tried that 'royal ignore' while waiting at a traffic light, and I was beseeching you to buy a national flag, or long pencils, or soap bubble kits, that fluorescent plastic bouquet,...or offering to clean your windshield?

Hmm... perhaps, you saw me when you drove superfast past my crudely stitched tarpaulin street-home, erected with bamboos, & you kicked up a magical cloud of street dust into my face?

Wait! Or were you the one who glanced over me, while walking along the footpath, where I was playing with dried leaves, discarded bottle caps and bricks; trying to humour and entertain my 6 mth old sibling?

You didn't?....You can't remember? I am not surprised. You see, I am a part of the 'invisible class', who the 'more privileged than us' people, hardly notice! Some miss 'seeing' us because they are preoccupied and take us just as much for granted as the lamp-post at the street corner. Some others consciously DON'T see us because they fear a mere eye-contact may make them poorer by a few coins, or by a much worn attire or by some handy snacks! The funny thing, most people are apprehensive about us; even though we are powerless.

How old am I? Well, my physical age is 5 years, but mentally I am a mature boy with street smartness that can knock you over! I know that's not enough for life! But I am very skilled - while Dad and mum are out at their day-wage construction work, I baby-sit my younger sister, cook a simple meal, clean the house and entertain myself with whatever I can find - and I tell you, every day the street blows in amazing things! Again, not enough skills to live life, eh? What was that? Did you say those were dirty and unhealthy? Ha ha ha ha - that's okay, since we can't afford vaccinations, a bit of street filth helps to naturally build our immunity & resistance!

Hang on a sec! Look, there's a car that has slowed down - finally 'they' DID see us, through the shiny glass windows of a smart ride with 4 rings!!! Must be the usual kind of visitor on a usual day on our street.... you know the kind, right? No? Well, People actually SEE us when:

- they want to give away hand-me-downs that have lived their time in their cupboards and are now ready to adorn our semi-bare bodies. Oh no, I am not complaining! We welcome them with gratitude, since buying such things is simply not possible.
- they wish to remember their dear departed and through some organised religious framework they must feed the needy. Again not complaining; the day 'daan' food arrives it is party time / feast time,....God knows when the next meal will come our way.
- school kids come to us, give us notebooks, colouring books, story books, toys and take a
  bunch of photos that we pester them to show us! I guess these photos serve as evidence
  of their compassion, ....for 'seeing' us on that ONE day in the year.



I wish one person... just ONE person, a child, a mourner, a donor would ask - Hey! Why aren't you in school? Want to study?

Every morning between 6:15am and 8:00am, our alarm comes alive....no, no, clocks aren't our time-devices! We wake up to the non-stop stream of autos, vans, buses that honk their way down the roads with bunches of squealing, laughing, happy-faced children. Time to get up! But for me, not to go to school; for me, another day on the street...trying to find magic in simple things, and hoping that some day things might be somewhat different. Why am I on the streets? Oh...a lot of complicated reasons ..... bottom line? Survival!

#### **OUR PERSPECTIVE:**

There were an estimated 18 million street children like Sonu in India, in 2000 AD. Street Children are often victims of poverty, neglect, abuse, facing unimaginable challenges every day. As per reliable studies and world predictions, India is expected to top the world in the 'Number of Children' by 2050.

Figure 1.3 Countries with the largest number of children in the 2050s, medium variant			
Country	Number of children (millions)	Share of children in country population (%)	Share of global child population (%)
India	350	20.7	14.9
China	141	11.7	6

Source - SOWC 2024 Report: https://data.unicef.org/resources/sowc-2024/

If the Children of today are the Future of the Nation and education, awareness, life-skills, vocational skills, etc are 'MUST To Be Dones' to meet future demands,......then why are Sonu (& his like) still on the streets? One can claim...'but there is good work happening in this segment'. Sure, the GOI stared RTE Act 2009, and there are many NGOs that are doing commendable work with street-children (like Pathshala). How many beneficiaries of RTE admissions are authentic and how many get missed? NGOs in this space are just drops in the ocean for the rising 'street-kids' crisis. Failed farming, urbanisation & the lure of urban income bring them to cities. The city laps up the cheap labour, but little is consciously done to provide them with basic life-sustaining facilities; & constitutional rights remain a far dream!

#### Finally, from Sonu\*

I wish the RTE Act would ensure that I too were in a school receiving education. I wish I wouldn't be discriminated against. I wish I wouldn't be shunned and looked upon with apprehension, disgust and pity. I don't wish to be at risk of being left behind in the plan for 'Vibrant india'? I wish I wasn't INVISIBLE.

Imagine the power of collective wishes, if each responsible societal unit took up the citizenship & societal moral responsibility of reaching out to me / some of us, and ensured that WE too became a part of the bright Indian future; then I'd be writing another story! \*\*\*

# MAGIC in the STREET-Classroom

At Team QEDRAK, we are passionate about innovative, creative, future-relevant ideas and our thinking caps are rarely laid to rest on the coatrack! While discussing this month's newsletter theme, we were mulling over various aspects, including what 'society at large' could do to help in educating the 'invisible' segment. While driving through the city, the visual inputs of the cityscape suddenly struck us with an idea......

Most cities in India these days, have brightly painted wall-panels, depicting the cultural & bio-diversity heritage, as well as some new trending initiatives, past & present national leaders, scientists & technology achievements, to name a few. While some are aesthetically colour-coordinated, artistic and well proportioned, there are those that you may find very, very challenging to appreciate! Painted in haste perhaps for a dignitary's short visit? On the right is a sample of a wall-panel.



#### It was time for our thinking caps!

What if we could suggest some ideas for creating Magic on the Streets? The synthesis of these ideas came from our seeing the wall-artworks, fused with the activities we had witnessed during the very happening "Happy Street" events, which used to be organised by the Times of India, every other Sunday!

The idea that Streets themselves could become vibrant, open, large-scale learning & knowledge spaces - that offer visual stimulation for a start for street kids; with the hope of inspiring passion driven activists to get involved with some planned programmes, to cater to the dire needs of these street children, hungry to learn, read and write!

#### 1. Organised wall-panel painting projects:

Kids have a natural tendency to be attracted by visuals with interesting concepts & colours. City authorities, in association with schools in a particular area, can plan for the city's wallpanel painting to portray educational goals and visual stimulants for learning, for street dwelling children.



Even the **footpaths can be painted** to complement the walls, with educational games - maybe to stimulate sequencing, shapes, numbers, procedures,...to promote learning with **kinaesthetic movements.** Such visual inputs can help to create positive change in the lives of street children - they can discuss, question, experiment, and in the process learn - leading to basic literacy, simple math and general awareness.

#### 3. Embracing the streets into regular classrooms:

Once the street-children are under a semi-organised literacy and awareness programme (by individuals or an NGO), regular schools must practice inclusion and invite them - to attend a class/es, celebrate festivals, annual days, art fests, etc. These should be in mixed groups with their regular students (under guidance and care). A relationship of trust must be gained before the children can engage in such co-learning activities. Conversing and skills that they can swap with each other, can build empathy, compassion and a healthy respect.

#### 4. Efforts vs Need:

Many NGOs & individuals have dedicated their lives, time, efforts to the emancipation of Street Children. But their success sadly rests on an uncertain inflow of donations. The need of the hour is for ALL responsible Indian homes, to take the onus of addressing their plight. Slogans like 'Each One Teach One' & "Teach for India" should become a reality for school kids - to walk the path with a 'buddy in need'.













**Each one, reach one. Each one, teach one. Until all are taught. - Mark Victor Hansen** 

# NALANDA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Vadodara











# TOWARDS LEADERSHIP & GREATNESS

Just as trees shed their vibrant, seasoned leaves in Autumn, so too does **November & Term 2 offer a powerful opportunity for School Leaders and Educators** to shed their old School Education garbs—those that have served them well, but no longer fit the demands of the future.

For *passionate educators and visionary leaders*, Team QEDRAK brought in 2 new (but very relevant) topics:

- Transformational Leadership (*Leading* with a Difference)
- Mastery in Teaching (*Effectiveness to Greatness*)

**Team QEDRAK** conducted these stimulating, case-study based, interactive training sessions: on-site at **Nalanda International School** + online for the **USF - Maharashtra Chapter.** 

Leaders explored casting aside past, redundant routines, & boldly embrace new ways of leading. For Teachers who had journeyed from being 'good' to 'effective,' the autumn of their careers is a reminder that Greatness awaits; what shifts are needed to get there.

Transformation & Greatness are not destinations; they are Mindsets - with a commitment to continuously grow, and be willing to make bold changes for the betterment of our students and the profession. It is only through such transformational shifts that educators and leaders can leave behind a legacy—one that is remembered, respected & can be modeled by others.

#### RIB TICKLERS

#### KIDS SAY THE DARNEST THINGS:

"There is no school the day after Mahashivratri, so everyone can poop after overeating the fasting food!"

"My parents decided to get married because they wanted to remain BFFs."

"It seems like being a grown up is all about paying a lot of money, but not having a lot of money!"

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# UNAIDED SCHOOLS FORUM (USF)

Maharashtra





GREAT TEACHERS bring out the best in EVERY CHILD "The dinner part of my tummy is full.....bu the dessert part still has room."

"Anyone can be a family; they just have to love each other and feed each other."

"I had an argument with my parents because they didn't get that I just needed to stay home in my pajamas today."

"Did you know that sleeping is the body's way of telling other people to go away?"

"Mum, I am just your friendly 'cheese vacuum'."

"I can't wait to grow up to be a baby-sitter, then I can eat amazing food from other people's fridges!"

"Lock the car door Ma! My Kurkure is inside!

"When I go to school, I miss my toys. When you go to work, do you miss the dishes?"

"I don't wanna wake up. I haven't grown any legs yet; in fact I am not a person yet. I am still a part of the bed."

"I know standing is a human thing. But sometimes standing outside the class makes me kinda tired."

"I don't know if I will have my own kids...I think I'll just become Grandma and forget the rest!"

"Mum asked me to do some soul-searching. I did - my soul just replied : Pizza!"

(source: boredpanda.com,

The **December 2024** issue will focus on **"GIFTEDNESS**". Please send your contributions of an effective classroom strategy / class humour / vocab word / a featured article / book titles, to - **team@qedrak.com** 



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