

**QUEST**

**Quality Education Support Trust**



**Annual Report**

**2010-11**

233, Vadavali Road, Sonale, Taluka Wada, District Thane, PIN: 421303

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## Our Quest



In January 2011, QUEST completed four years of its educational journey. In these four years we have made an earnest attempt to impart quality education to students from district places as well as remote villages. Given the vastness of the education system in Maharashtra, our modest reach to about 4000 students in primary schools may not seem like a great achievement. However it is important to note that QUEST is working with the complex and dynamic concept of 'Quality of Education', where solid educational foundation matters more than large outreach. Educational reform is always a slow process. Despite this, the data show a considerable improvement in the educational attainment levels among the students enrolled in Balbhavans, the learning centers of QUEST.

Teacher is a key constituent in the education system. Empowerment and professional development of teachers has direct relation with the quality of education they impart. Unfortunately, pre-service and in-service Teachers' education system in Maharashtra is severely neglected over the years. QUEST has designed programmes for the professional development of teachers, which would go a long way in paving QUEST's future direction. This year QUEST triumphantly surmounted the challenge of institutionalizing an online course for pre-service teachers, which was implemented in Nandurbar. With this feat we have now stepped up momentum to reach our goal of 'Quality Education for everyone'. Yet, there is a long road ahead.

In the time to come QUEST needs to focus more on research work. Early Literacy, one of the core area of QUEST's work, lacks rigorous research in the Indian context. Therefore, QUEST will have to walk the tightrope between its field activities and hard-core research. In the near future, we intend to collaborate with the research wings of universities and independent researchers for the same. To provide an institutional base for such work would be a challenging task and require strong alliances with like-minded people.

With deep gratitude I acknowledge our financial supporters Sir Ratan Tata Trust and Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust, SPA Education Foundation, Aurum Foundation, Praj Foundation and individuals like Vijaya Mulay, Dr. Keki Gharda and Anuya Mhaskar. Thanks to their unwavering support we have been able to pursue our mission.

Any organization in its formative years requires selfless manpower willing to undergo hardships. Throughout this journey my colleagues and external resource persons have stood by me with unflinching commitment. I am indebted to all of them for their invaluable contribution.

I am confident that by the end of its fifth year, QUEST will be ready to catapult itself into newer orbits of educational space.

**Nilesh Nimkar**  
**Director, QUEST**

# About Us

## Genesis

A stimulus to impart 'Quality' education and unshackle regressive pedagogies galvanized few educationists in an informal group called "The Thane Study Group" in the year 2005. The group brainstormed various ideas to bridge the gap between practical and theoretical work undertaken in the field of education. As the group reinforced ideas and broadened its horizon it felt the need to form an action group as well. This led to the formation of **Quality Education Support Trust (QUEST)** in 2007 to enhance quality of elementary education. Right from the beginning, QUEST is committed to hard-core research in elementary education and transacting the same for action oriented field-work. The headquarters of QUEST and its main activities are based in Sonale, Wada taluka, Thane district. Another important project is also going on in Dhadgaon taluka, Nandurbar district.

## Our Objectives

1. To provide quality education to every individual.
2. To promote education as an enjoyable journey of self discovery.
3. To develop inspired educators for widening the reach of progressive, child-centered education.
4. To develop replicable models of quality education, for children going to pre-school and elementary school from rural, tribal and urban areas.
5. To share knowledge and latest developments in pedagogy amongst educators and educationists.
6. To undertake and support research activities in the field of education

## Our strengths

1. Multi-faceted governing board comprising educationists, practicing educators and professionals from the fields of art, engineering, medicine, law and computers.
2. A diverse, experienced and committed team actively engaged in education in rural, tribal and urban settings.
3. An open, active and dynamic research-action group on quality education and pedagogy.
4. Acceptance by the tribal communities where QUEST is endeavouring.
5. In-house learning material development and production by qualified educationists and educators of QUEST.
6. Learning and sharing association with urban and rural schools from Maharashtra and Karnataka.

# Our Team

## Board of Trustees

### **President: Atul Kulkarni**

A national award winner renowned professional actor. Concerned with the issue of education out of personal experiences

### **Vice President: Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar**

A medical doctor who is running an experimental school in Phaltan (*a tehsil place in Satara district*) and is actively associated with many experiments in the field of education over the last decade.

### **Director: Nilesh Nimkar**

An educationist working for last 15 years in tribal belts of Thane district as an educator and as a teacher educator at State and National level. Has also worked as a training consultant to DPEP (District Primary Education Programme, Government of Maharashtra) and consultant to UNICEF and Sir Ratan Tata Trust

### **Treasurer: Manoj Karyekar**

An engineer based in Pune, who has worked for the development of eco-friendly architecture and construction

### **Trustees:**

#### **Aparna Bhole**

A trained and qualified art teacher managing the pre-school section of A K Joshi English medium school in Thane for the last 10 years and has co-founded the "Thane Study Group".

#### **Sanjay Borkar**

A practicing high court advocate by profession who has provided legal help to quite a few NGOs from Thane.

#### **Dr. Rajeev Chhabra**

A renowned gynaecologist from Thane and an active supporter of voluntary work on people's issues.

#### **Anuya Mhaiskar**

Entrepreneur, Film Producer and a Kathak dancer.

#### **Nitin Nimkar**

A computer professional and co-founder of "Thane Study Group" and is actively involved in the development of interactive multi-media instructional software programs.

## **Project Officers**

### **Meena Nimkar**

Project in-charge at Sonale. She has several years of experience of teaching in tribal areas. She has co-authored 'Maze Pustak', which is used extensively in the QUEST Balbhavans. She looks after the overall running of QUEST Balbhavans, and trains the Balmitras.

### **Nitin Vishe**

A resident of Sonale, Nitin Vishe is responsible for generating community support for QUEST work. He oversees the Anganwadi component, specially the coordination with the ICDS authorities. He also supervises accounts and construction activities of QUEST.

### **Archana Kulkarni**

Archana is based in Pune, and oversees the component on 'Material Development'. She also coordinates the QUEST Resource Centre activities. She has co-authored 'Maze Pustak'.

### **Nayana Yeole**

Project in-charge of QUEST's project in Nandurbar and Dhadgaon. She is based in Thane, and oversees the functioning of the project, in addition to liaising with the funding agencies.

## Our Activities

### 1. “Maze Pustak”

“Maze Pustak” is a programme for teaching of beginners reading-writing in Marathi. It is a series of graded booklets to be used by students from Grade I and II. This programme focuses on learning of basic reading and writing by making it relevant to the local context, child-friendly and enjoyable. QUEST uses a series of eight booklets and a handbook for teachers on how to use them. Teachers, using these booklets are supported through training workshops and interactive website. The programme has been implemented in fifty one Marathi as well as English medium schools in tribal, rural and urban areas across Maharashtra over the years.



### 2. “Grameen Balbhavan”

The “Grameen Balbhavan” is a learning support center independent of the village school. Local youths interested in education are trained to support children in educational activities through this Balbhavan. These ‘Balmitras’ act as mentors for the village children who assist them in their education. Through the Balbhavans, the Balmitras support children in improving their education attainment levels in language, mathematics and environment studies. Periodic tests are conducted to assess these levels. Children are also encouraged to take up extra-curricular activities like

sports, sky-gazing, bird watching and understanding the biodiversity in the immediate surroundings.

At present, QUEST runs Balbhavans in 10 villages in Thane district and 9 villages in Nandurbar district.

### 3. Teachers’ Study Group

The Teachers’ Study Group was initiated on January 27, 2008 in Sonale. The members include QUEST team members as well as well teachers from the nearby Zilla Parishad & private schools. This year a few teachers have joined from faraway places such as Badlapur, Shahapur and Murbad. The meetings are held once every month. There are input sessions on language, math, English, geography and astronomy. The members discuss teaching methodologies, new innovations in education, problems in implementing them, training etc. In addition, each member is given some reading material, on which he/she is expected to make a short presentation.

### 4. Development of Library and Resource Centre at Sonale

‘Saraswati Sadhan Kendra’ was inaugurated at Sonale in 2010 to kick-start various educational initiatives. The centre wants to be at the forefront of educational activities in the region. With this resource centre QUEST wishes to reach out to the students of Grade V to VII, as well as teachers, parents and other villagers in and around Sonale.

Saraswati Sadhan Kendra boasts of charming library with books on education, encyclopedia, fiction and non-fiction books, and various other types of books. QUEST wants the local teachers, parents and other villagers to visit the centre and inculcate long-term reading habit. This service will be free of cost. QUEST is confident that library arrangement would help to engage local community in a thoughtful and gainful manner.

### **5. Anganwadi strengthening programme**

Anganwadi is a centre at the village level introduced under the 'Integrated Child Development Scheme' (ICDS) of government of India, wherein pregnant women and village children between the age group of 0 to 5 years are supported on health, nutrition, basic education and school preparedness. Usually a literate woman from the locality is appointed by the government to manage the Anganwadi. As part of the Anganwadi strengthening programme, on-site support is provided by QUEST's Balmitras to Anganwadi workers. QUEST implements a developmentally appropriate curriculum (based on the programme developed by the Maharashtra Balshikshan Parsihad, the federation for pre-school education in Maharashtra) in the Anganwadis. The curriculum is broadly divided into seven areas i.e. free play, motor development and group games, art experience, language, mathematics, exploring the environment and activities of daily living.

At present QUEST is providing input to six Aanganwadis in and around Sonale.

### **6. Math Remedial Programme**

This programme is tailor-made for students of Grade V to VII who have a weak base in mathematics due to lack of orientation at the primary level. The Math Remedial Programme is carried out for ten weeks, wherein students attend a one-hour session on every school day. Currently this programme is active for the students of the Sonale High School.

## **Other Activities**

### **1. Doorstep Library**

In order to foster reading culture in the village and keeping in mind the limited success of centralised libraries in rural areas, QUEST has started Doorstep Libraries in some villages. The Balmitras enroll members from the village for the Doorstep Library and create reading clubs of a given number of households. Unique sets of books have been specially selected for rural adults as well as children, which the Balmitras take to their doorstep every week.

Doorstep libraries have been started in 5 villages of Wada taluka in 2010-2011.

### **2. Content and material Development**

Absence of quality reading material for children in Marathi has inspired QUEST to generate story books. Ten such books are ready for printing. Eklavya publication has agreed to publish two of the books in English and regional language.



### **3. Innovation activities - Teaching Music and Dance to rural children**

Apart from teaching QUEST also runs a programme for teaching classical song and dance to the rural children, who are mostly from tribal communities. Experts from Mumbai – dancer Prarthana Patil and singer Shraddha Kirkire - visit the villages once in 15 days to conduct the classes.

### **4. Science Toys**

Science education can be fun only if activities related to its pedagogy are creatively stimulating. To invigorate Science pedagogy and make it more engaging QUEST has started classes for making science toys, which will be open for students of Grade V to VII. Toys will be made from waste materials. The classes will be held on Fridays for twelve weeks. Children will learn to make about twenty toys.

### **5. Film Club**

On every first and third Saturday of the month, QUEST hosts a film screening at the Resource Centre. A number of different films have been collected for this purpose; from regular mainstream entertainment films to thought-provoking films to award-winning international films. This club is open for all age groups, and the membership fee is Rs. 250/- for attending 10 film screenings.

### **6. Resource Support for other organizations:**

QUEST is also committed to give resource support to other educational organizations. Some of them are Kalike Samruddhi Upakram (KSU), Karnataka; Action Research in Community Health & Development (ARCH), Dharampur and Samarthya, Umarga.

### **7. Teacher Education**

Apart from conducting workshops on subject pedagogy Quest also runs an internet base forum for the teachers and teacher educators which is accessible from the website [www.quest.org.in](http://www.quest.org.in)



## Highlights of the Year

**Educational activities of QUEST are located at two places-**

1. *Sonale village, Wada Taluka, District Thane ,Maharashtra*
2. *Dhadgao Taluka, Nandurbar District, Maharashtra*

### Projects in Sonale

QUEST has received a grant from the Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust for the 3-year project **Building Replicable Model to Enhance Quality of Elementary Education in Rural and Tribal Areas** in Wada taluka, since August 2009. This support has helped QUEST to consolidate and spread out the academic work which was started since 2007.

#### 1. Grameen Balbhavan Programme

QUEST is reaching to around 359 students of 10 Balbhavans in Wada taluka with the support of NRTT and other donors.

In December, an external review of the Sonale Project was conducted by Dr. Shailaja Menon, an educationist from Bangalore who has considerable experience in the field of Early Literacy and Language Attainment. Dr. Menon summarized her review in the following words:

“QUEST has laid a strong groundwork for expanding upon its educational program in the Wada Tehsil region. Notable among its achievements are:

- Identification of learning needs in the region
- Development and identification of curricula and materials to support the Balbhavan work
- Training of Balmitras; working out a routine and schedule for the planning and implementation of activities in the Balbhavans and Anganwadis
- Motivating the local population to support their efforts
- Developing systems for monitoring, supervising, assessing the functioning of their Balbhavans and Balmitras; and
- Establishing an Educational Resource Centre at Sonale.

These are big achievements, and deserve much credit, given the demanding and ever-shifting context in which they work.”

#### 2. QUEST students participate in Wada Kala Kreeda Mahotsav, 2010

The students of the ‘Grameen Kala Shikshan Karyakram’ of QUEST participated in the Wada Kala Kreeda Mahotsav (Art and Sports Festival) on December 25-26, 2010. This annual local festival is being held for the last 3 years, to encourage students to take part in sports and cultural activities and to showcase local talent. At the festival, QUEST students presented a dance item in Odissi style and sang a folk song. Their performance was appreciated by the chief guests and the audience alike.

### **3. Workshop on Science Toys**

In India, 'National Science Day' is celebrated on February 28. The QUEST team and the 'Teachers' Study Group' celebrated it on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011 by organizing a workshop on Science Toys for children. It was held at Swami Vivekanand Vidyamandir, Wada, for the students of Grade V to VIII. The objective of this unique initiative was to spread a message to children that science education can be fun!

A total of 77 children from Wada and nearby villages participated in this workshop, and learnt to make three toys each. Looking at their enjoyment the parents urged QUEST to organize such events regularly.

### **Project in Nandurbar**

Nandurbar is a tribal district in the northern Maharashtra. Dhadgaon is the northernmost block of the district in the Satpuda ranges. Majority of the population here belongs to the Pawara & Bhil tribes. This region bears the stigma of being the most backward region of Maharashtra and therefore is extremely challenging for resolution of developmental issues. **Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT)** has planned a long term investment in improving quality of education in Nandurbar and has endowed the responsibility to QUEST to provide resource support to their District level work in Nandurbar. The Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust has sanctioned a three year support to QUEST (from November 2009) for the Project **Enhancing Elementary Education: Developing Working Models through Direct Intervention and Resource Support**.

The activities conducted in this project are

#### **1. Balbhavans: Direct Implementation and Resource Support**

QUEST has established Balbhavans in nine villages in the Dhadgaon block and is reaching to around 900 students from Grade I and II. Systematic implementation of Maze Pustak, continuous monitoring by the team of Project Associate, Supervisors and experts over two years has resulted in encouraging results as compared to the baseline data of the Nandurbar District. One of the major problems faced in Dhadgaon is that the local language, Pawari and Bhilori are very different from the medium of instruction, Marathi. The process of transition from local language to Marathi is very crucial. QUEST is developing bilingual material in Pawari and Marathi to facilitate this process.

QUEST is also providing resource support to 9 Balbhavans run by Jeevan Vidya Trust with an outreach of 545 students from Grade I to IV.

#### **2. Nurturing Rural Sports talent**

A constant rue of people in tribal areas is the lack of opportunities and facilities to nurture tremendous sports talent in the region. QUEST along with Prasoon Sports Academy is trying to identify and nurture talent from the area by providing appropriate training and facilities. Forty students from four Ashram schools have been selected after conducting number of tests.

Regular inputs are given by the sports experts every month through two-day camps. Each student has been given a sports kit. QUEST also provides dietary supplements to these students.

<b>Success Stories</b>
Four Students from our camp cleared the selection hurdle for Taluka, District and Divisional Levels, were selected to perform at State Level competitions in Kho-Kho and were part of winning team
Three Girls from our camp group have scored 1st, 2nd and 3rd positions in the Marathon hosted at Surwani, Taluka Level
Four students from our camp were selected from Taluka to perform at District and Zone Levels in Athletics

### **3. Intensive input for D.Ed. students**

This is a pilot project undertaken to give intensive input to D.Ed. students. Spread over an academic year, through workshops, students were exposed to various topics like National curricular framework, constructive learning theories, pedagogy of teaching reading and writing, constructive approach to math education etc. which are not yet part of D.Ed. syllabus. QUEST conducted workshops for Language (4 days), Mathematics (4 days) and Geography (2 days). This being a pilot project only one D.Ed. college at Lonkheda was selected for the project.

### **4. Online course in Math for D.Ed students- First ever in regional language**

Geographical distance of educationists from Nandurbar was the key constraint in giving pedagogical inputs to D.Ed students. Therefore, QUEST along with a team of subject experts developed an 'Add on' module on Mathematics and made it available online. The strategy was to give students a more comprehensive input in the form of 'Add On' course during the pre-service training. This would be more effective to strengthen their Mathematics content as well as pedagogic knowledge.

An acknowledged 'Course Management System' called 'MOODLE' is being used for the same. Online articles will be developed in Marathi. The course will be conducted partly through contact sessions and partly online through MOODLE. Students are expected to submit their assignments online.

*This is a first ever online programme to be initiated in a regional language and has potential to revolutionize Teachers' training system across India.*

Before starting the actual Math course, it was important for the students to learn and practice standardized typing in Marathi. QUEST solicited services of 'Regional language input method expert' for the necessary support. Each student was given a fifteen-day extensive typing programme. Learning Marathi typing was the cornerstone of this program and its implementation led to successful institutionalization of this path-breaking course.

Actual implementation of the programme started on March 28, 2011 with 84 students. A five day workshop from March 29 to April 2, 2011 was conducted during which the students were given basic inputs on Math concepts. Students were also oriented to use MOODLE. The students were given four assignments and were asked to submit them online. Of the total 84 participants, 34 have submitted their first assignment while 18 of them have submitted their second assignment. The rest of the students will submit their assignments in June 2011 after their college restarts.

A parallel programme was also conducted for the faculty of the D.Ed College, Lonkheda. The response from the faculty was also encouraging. The next phase of the programme will be implemented in October 2011. QUEST is developing online tests for geography and Marathi for the D.ED students.

### 5. Remedial Mathematics Programme for Tribal Schools

Many students at middle school level (Grade V, VI, VII) in Ashram schools (Tribal schools) are very weak in basic primary mathematics. They do not know basic concepts like place value and basic skills like addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Due to this conceptual schism they find it difficult to cope with Mathematics in the Middle school.

QUEST, along with subject experts has designed a remedial programme in Basic arithmetic to strengthen the foundation of these students. The topics covered in this programme are

- Numbers – Introduction
- Place Value
- Ordering Numbers
- Addition
- Subtraction
- Multiplication

The programme was implemented on pilot basis in Ashram school at Talawadi and the JVT girls' hostel at Nandurbar. Pre and Post test was conducted at the start and end of the programme respectively.

Test	Pre-Test	Post-test
Level I	32.60%	53.26%
Level II	9.40%	42.47%

This analysis reflects significant improvement in the test scores and depicts conceptual enrichment of students through this programme.

### 6. Educational Resource Centre

The spadework for setting up an Education Resource Centre at Dhadgaon has been completed in this year. QUEST will activate the Centre in the academic year beginning June 2011. The resource centre will cater to teachers, educators and trainee teachers from the block. It will be a meeting point of teachers in the region. QUEST will also start specific programmes like Math Remedial as well as Science Toys for the benefit of the children from schools in and around Dhadgaon.

## Our Achievements

### **Maharashtra Foundation Award for a ‘Young Social Worker’ to Nilesh Nimkar**

(Require photos of the award ceremony)

On January 26, 2011, Nilesh Nimkar was felicitated with ‘**Young Social Worker**’ award by the Maharashtra Foundation for his exemplary work in the field of education in the tribal areas of Thane district. It was recognition of the unstinted mission carried by QUEST to strengthen existing educational network in rural areas. It was also an acknowledgement by socially committed people to our ideals of educational research and pedagogy.

## Our Supporters

Over the years, QUEST has drawn immense support from its partners and involved them in larger educational discourse. This synergetic relationship is imbued in faith which our partners have reposed in us. We are grateful to our partners, donors and well-wishers whose monetary support and timely help has given us the strength to upscale and modernize our work.

### **Some of our benefactors and the work they have supported**

<b>Sir Ratan Tata Trust &amp; Navajabai Ratan Tata Trust</b>	Partial support to activities in Sonale and Total support to the activities in Dhadagaon
<b>Aurum Foundation</b>	Setting of Resource Centre
<b>SPA Education Foundation</b>	Sponsoring a Balbhavan and Nihali Vikaswadi
<b>In the name of Late Dolly Thadani from Mr. &amp; Mrs. Hiroo T. Makhijani</b>	Sponsoring a Balbhavan
<b>Lions Club of Ballard Estate Charity Trust</b>	Balbhavan Construction
<b>Anuya Mhaiskar</b>	Human Resource Fund and Building Infrastructure Development Fund
<b>Dr. Keki Gharada</b>	Building Infrastructure Development Fund
<b>Vijaya Mulay</b>	Building Infrastructure Development Fund

### **You can support QUEST in following ways**

### 1. Sponsoring a Balbhavan:

Rs 2,25,000/- Cost of running a Balbhavan for a year

### 2. Support QUEST:

Rs 2000/- to support programmes such as Math Remedial course, Science Toys from trash, English for the benefit of Rural and Tribal children attending middle school.

### 3. Support the fellowship programme.

#### A) Full time research Fellow (1 to 2 years)

Rs.35,000/- per month towards the honorarium & project costs

#### B) Part time research fellowship in material development and design (1year )

Rs. 10,000/- per month towards the project expenses

## Contact Us

### At Sonale:

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