

Quality Education Support Trust

Annual Report for the year 2007-08

Genesis - The 'Thane study group', an informal learning-sharing group, was established by a few grass roots functionaries, active in the field of education, in order to bridge the gap between practical and theoretical work. A need was felt later to formalize the discussion group into an action group. This led to the formal registration of QUEST (Quality Education Support Trust) as a not for profit trust. QUEST received its registration certificate on 25th April 2007. The registration no. is E-4476/Thane, Dt 25-4-07. This Research-Action Group still meets every month to deliberate upon quality education related issues.

Selection of Work Area

Area Profile - Thane district is adjacent to Mumbai, the financial capital of India. Most of the district is blessed with a good monsoon that helps to not only maintain the forest cover on the mountain slopes of the Sahyadri range, extending into parts of the district, but also to feed many rivers.

Katkari, Malhar Koli and Warli tribes are prominent in Thane district. These 3 tribes together constitute nearly 70 % of the population there. A detailed scientific survey was arranged by QUEST in this area before the geographical location of our work area was fixed. Also, since the local community was willing to support the effort, QUEST selected this area as a work area. QUEST is now actively involved in the Wada tehsil of Thane district, situated at a distance of 120 km. from Mumbai city.

Status of Education in the Wada tehsil of Thane district

Several government and non-government studies regarding status of education of tribal children point out the following:

- a) Acute shortage of expert human resources in schools.
- b) Poorly planned learning programmes for tribal children at school level.
- c) Inadequate availability / use of teaching-learning material in schools.
- d) Inappropriate strategies of teaching, leading to undue importance to rote memorization.
- e) Early childhood education is either absent or very weak. As a result children are not ready for formal education when they enter the school.
- f) School education is a non-priority for most of the tribal populace.
- g) Seasonal migration leading to high rate of school drop-outs.

Our Objectives

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

Programme Overview

1. "Maze Pustak"

A programme for teaching of beginning reading-writing in Marathi. This programme is developed by Nilesh Nimkar which is based on his long experience and study. It is a series of

graded booklets, to be used by students from the grade 1 and 2. This programme focuses on making learning of basic reading and writing child-friendly and enjoyable. A handbook for teachers on how to use the booklets is in-process. Teachers using these booklets are supported through training workshops and interactive website.

The programme is divided into eight milestones and children from grade 1 and 2 are expected to complete these milestones over two years. At the end of each milestone a test is conducted and 75% is the acceptable score. If a particular child scores less he repeats certain aspects of the same milestone.

Some details regarding this project are given below.

Name of the school	Students from the Grade 1	Students from the Grade 2	Students from the Grade 3	Total
Vidyavikas Mandir, Goregaon	64	57		121
Shri Siddhivinayak Vidyarthi Shishu Mandir, Juhu	71	77		149
St. Catherine's Primary School, Andheri	205	200		405
Bairamji Jijibhoy Prathamik Vidyalay, Goregaon	112	103		215
Maharani Saibai Vidya Mandir, Malad	152	168		322
A. K. Joshi School, Thane (English Medium)			160	160
Total	604	605	160	1372

The teachers from these schools have reported getting a very positive response from the students. These teachers send their reports and queries by e-mail. This entire project is being coordinated by Nayana Yeole.

“Maze Pustak” programme in the Balbhavans at Sonale - Children were grouped according to their progress in beginning reading-writing, while implementing the “Maze Pustak” Programme.

Before starting the programme, QUEST volunteers conducted the baseline tests for language learning of 2nd grade students in the schools mentioned above. This testing was done in the second week of July 2007. Training programmes for teachers were conducted through-out the whole year.

Although the program is meant mainly for Grade 1 and Grade 2, almost all the children from Grade 3 and Grade 4 have undergone the programme because of their poor previous attainment levels.

“Maze Pustak” has been a research programme because beginning reading-writing is one of the important fields in education. QUEST is trying to measure the impact of “Maze Pustak” in rural, tribal and urban areas. 137 students in Grade 1 from eastern part of Wada block have undergone the programme. Similarly 604 students in Grade 1 from the schools in Mumbai have used “Maze Pustak”.

A final test has been administered for these students in March 2008 to assess the impact of the programme. The progress of the Grade 1 students is going to be measured in comparison to the Grade 1 students' control group, which is not using these booklets. These tests are administered in Balbhavans as well as in the 5 government schools. The results of these tests are awaited.

“Maze Pustak” is being used as a remedial at two places. These places are Manor in Dahanu tehsil and Bilghar in Wada tehsil. The tests administered at these places will show us the results as to how “Maze Pustak” is working as a remedial.

The first edition was a test edition of "Maze Pustak". QUEST wanted to get it reviewed thoroughly by the experts working in the field of language and education for a long time. The sets were given to 8 experts and the review done by them has been very helpful for the next edition.

2. "Grameen Balbhavan"

"Grameen Balbhavan" is a learning support, independent of the village school.

QUEST has currently translated the "Grameen Balbhavan" concept into practice across the 7 villages of Wada tehsil in Thane district.

1. Sonale
2. Baliwali
3. Bilghar
4. Sonshiv
5. Gavthan
6. Kasghar
7. Dadhare

Sonale is a central place for these villages, so it has been selected as an administrative centre.

Balbhavan timings

From Monday to Friday

- 8.30 am to 10.30 am – Activities for Grade 1 & 2

- 5.30 pm to 7.30 pm – Activities for Grade 3 & 4

* **Balamitra** – Interested local youth are selected and trained to support children in their education through the Balbhavan.

Training of Balamitras

Training of Balamitras was undertaken during 20th March to 20th April 2007 at Vikramgad for Balbhavan programme. They were given orientation and by the end of the training the action plan for learning centers for the first 3 months was evolved. Principal trainer Mrs Meena Nimkar and Shalini Nanavare have documented the training modules.

Balamitras also underwent theater workshops. Geetanjali Kulkarni, past student of National School of Drama, an actress from Marathi Theater and films and also a member of the Thane study Group, conducted these workshops. The objective of the series of theater workshop was to develop tools of communication like voice, body language, expressions etc. There has been a series of 10 workshops for Balamitras spread over one and a half year.

Two Origami workshops also took place for Balamitras in which they learnt 32 things from Sruja Sakhdeo, a student in 8th grade from Pune. Sruja taught all the basic folds in Origami in this first workshop. Now the Balamitras are teaching these to the children in Balbhavan regularly.

One workshop regarding sky-gazing was also conducted. Mr Hemant Mone from Kalyan guided the Balamitras in this workshop. He's a knowledgeable person and so the workshop was fun. Two teachers from local Zilha Parishad schools also participated in the workshop. Mr Mone gave lectures in the day time (for 5 hours daily) about reading the sky and basic concepts regarding space observation and at night as well as in the early morning he guided us in observing the sky. The lectures became very helpful to the participants. One special thing about Mr. Mone is that he teaches sky observation with the "naked eye" first and not with the help of a pair of binoculars or a telescope. Mr Mone gave us a new vision of "aakaash-darshan" and taught us the basic concepts regarding it.

Immediately after the workshop the two teachers from government schools and some Balamitras started some experiments, learnt from the workshop, with the help of students.

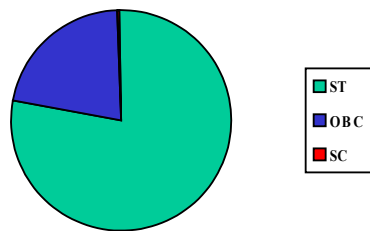
Mr Mone is interested in "Astronomy Education", as is QUEST. In the future we may have some joint project on this subject.

* **Education Attainment** – Through Balbhavan, the Balamitras assist children in improving their educational progress in language, mathematics and environmental studies. Periodic tests are conducted to assess these levels.

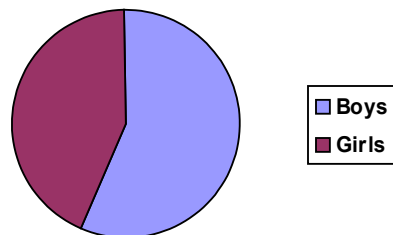
* **Chhanda Varga** – An avenue for the children to nurture their hobbies. Children are assisted and encouraged to take up extra-curricular activities like sports, sky-gazing, bird watching and understanding bio-diversity in the immediate surrounding.

Following figure shows the category-wise breakup of the students enrolled in Balbhavans in December 2007.

The percentage of SC students is 0.2 % only so it is difficult to locate it in the figure given below.



The Gender-wise breakup of students as in December 2007 is shown below:



Sonale center is headed by Meena Nimkar.

Summer camp

Under Hobby Center Programme, an Athletics camp was conducted from 18th April to 22nd April 2007 in the village Sonala. It was a residential camp for 5 days. 45 children from 7 villages participated in the camp alongwith the Balamitras. Mr Pralhad Bhangle, renowned coach for Athletics and also a trustee of QUEST, conducted the camp with his team. The local Yuvak Mandal extended a lot of support to this camp. Villagers offered their houses for the stay of children and the food was managed by a self-help group in the village. Valley crossing and rope climbing were the centers of attraction for children as well as for the villagers. This was a good start and Mr Bhangle has accepted the responsibility of taking the programme ahead.

Current Activities at Sonale

1. Grameen Balbhavan
2. Chhanda Varga
3. Teachers' Study Group

Activities starting in the near future

1. Anganwadi Strengthening Programme
2. Teachers' Resource Center
3. Vocational Education
4. Mathematics education center - which will be providing input to children from grade 5 to 8

3. Teacher Training

Training workshops are conducted for pre- primary and primary school teachers on:

1. Teaching mathematics in elementary schools (Part I & II)
2. Teaching of beginning reading writing
3. Teaching elementary geography

QUEST has trained more than 500 teachers in schools across Maharashtra and Karnataka during 2007-2008.

4. Anganwadi Strengthening programme

While working with children of Grade 1 in Grameen Balbhavan Programme, a need was felt for strengthening early childhood education. QUEST has planned a support programme in Anganwadis present in the vicinity of Grameen Balbhavans. Twelve Anganwadis have been identified from where the children come to Balbhavan in Grade 1.

QUEST will be focusing on the project of strengthening early childhood education in Anganwadis, along with its present activities. We have already initiated dialogue with concerned Anganwadi supervisors and the child development officer of the block. The actual programme will start by the end of March 2008.

This programme trains Anganwadi workers for implementing pre-school education programmes. As a part of this programme, on-site support is provided to Anganwadi workers through Anganwadi mentors as well as through the Balmitras. This will help children in project villages towards school readiness. This programme will develop a tool for measuring school readiness of rural & tribal children.

5. Teachers' Study Group

QUEST has organized a study group of local primary teachers who are working in the government schools. These teachers meet once a month on a holiday and discuss the reading assignments given to them. Normally the assignments are articles related to elementary education published in books, magazines, and journals.

Some more to share

1. Sponsor a Child programme

QUEST has announced "Sponsor a Child programme" for the children coming to Grameen Balbhavan". You may support this drive by donating Rs. 2000/- per annum towards the sponsorship of one child undergoing the programme. Anjali Karyekar has taken the total responsibility of this programme.

2. Project by Sir Ratan Tata Trust at Nandurbar

Sir Ratan Tata Trust is going to undertake a project in Nandurbar district with the goal of enhancement of quality of primary education. It is necessary to undertake a systematic baseline study of the current status of primary education in the district. Sir Ratan Tata Trust invited a proposal from QUEST for developing these tests and tools for conducting the baseline.

QUEST has developed the tests, with a team of experts, to assess achievement level of the students in Mathematics and language at the end of Grade 1 and Grade 4. Also, a tool to study teachers' competence in teaching Marathi, as a first language, and in teaching Mathematics in primary schools has been developed.

QUEST's team conducted a pilot testing exercise in Nandurbar in the first week of April 2008. Now, on the basis of pilot testing, modification of the above-mentioned tools will be done. After that the workshop for the training of investigators on how to use the developed tools will be conducted.

3. Participation in the seminar on elementary education

This year Maharashtra Balashikshan Parishad Adhiveshan took place in Thane. QUEST participated in this seminar. There was a display about QUEST's activities. Poornima Sathe and Geetanjali Kulkarni, members of the study group, presented a paper on the following subject – "A Comparative Study of the Understanding of the Mathematics of American and Chinese Teachers by Liping Ma".

4. Teachers' visit to Sonale

A group of teachers from the schools at Mumbai, where "Maze Pustak" programme is going on, visited Sonale for 2 days. All of them were impressed by the Balbhavan's work. A teacher from the local government school conducted 2 hours' sky-gazing workshop for this group.

5. QUEST's establishment at Sonale

QUEST has started to build its own small establishment at Sonale. Vijayatai Muley and her family have accepted the responsibility of donating the necessary amount for the same.

6. The Brochure of QUEST

QUEST has completed the important task of preparing its brochure.

7. 80G Certificate

QUEST has received Income Tax exemption certificate under Sec 80G of IT Act.

Gratitude towards our Donors

We are very much grateful to all our donors as they have helped us a lot to run all our activities.

1. Sir Ratan Tata Trust has given a grant for the Grameen Balbhavan programme under its small grants' programme.
2. SPA Education Foundation has given a grant for Anganwadi Strengthening programme.
3. Vijayatai Muley and her family will be donating a substantial amount for a small establishment of QUEST at Sonale.
4. Our special thanks to Gilda Matthew, Rajani Patel and Sister Celestine as they have extended their help by appealing to many people to be a member of "Sponsor a Child" programme of QUEST.

List of Donors

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Members of "Sponsor a Child" Programme

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Governing Body of QUEST

Function	Responsible Person	Brief Introduction
President	Atul Kulkarni	A national award winning renowned professional actor. Concerned with the issues of education out of personal experiences.
Vice President	Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar	A medical doctor who is running an experimental school in Phaltan (<i>a tehsil in Pune district</i>) and is actively associated with many experiments in the field of education over the last decade.
Director	Nilesh Nimkar	An educationist working for the 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	A professional engineer, has worked for development of eco-friendly architecture and construction.
Trustee	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 co-founder of the "Thane Study Group".
Trustee	Pralhad Bhangale	An athlete and athletics coach based in Thane district since the last 15 years, whose students, <i>especially tribal students</i> , have excelled at the national level. Believes that sports form an integral part of education.
Trustee	Sanjay Borkar	A practicing high court advocate by profession, who has provided legal help to quite a few NGOs from Thane.
Trustee	Dr. Rajeev Chhabra	A renowned gynaecologist from Thane and an active supporter of voluntary work on people's issues.
Trustee	Nitin Nimkar	A computer professional and co-founder of "Thane Study Group", he is actively involved in the development of interactive multi-media instructional software programs.

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