



### MUMBAI, INDIA: January 12 - 24, 2003: 6,000 Bedkits

BY PETER NEWTON  
TORONTO, ONTARIO

It's quite a shocking experience to witness the incredible poverty and squalor that exists in India. It's a huge problem, and there appears to be all too little progress to fix it. In Mumbai, there are slums everywhere. More than half of Mumbai's population of about seven million live in the slums. 60% use community toilet facilities located in "better" slums. The rest do their toileting in open spaces, and that includes the sides of streets. It's not a pretty sight – and it's not a pleasant smell.

This was my fourth trip to India with SCAW. I had been there three other times as a tourist and/or on business. SCAW's Mumbai distribution is not an easy trip to do, but it's an important one. In the midst of all that poverty, there is a sea of smiling faces: smiling children, smiling parents/relatives/teachers/social workers, and Rotarians. With the smiles there must be hope. With hope there must be a chance for progress. And there is! And SCAW is part of it—part of the hope and part of the solution.

In this, my report to our generous and caring donors, let me confirm that we continue to keep our promise that 100% of every donor dollar went to a needy child (6,000 of them this time). In the two Indian states of Maharashtra and Karnatika, our four person SCAW team (two first-timers, Sally Jo Martin, and Peter Birnie; one twenty year SCAW office veteran, Laurie-Beth Davidson, making her second overseas distribution, and me, on my eighth SCAW overseas trip) worked non-stop for 12 straight days; travelling in excess of 2,000 km, setting up at 21 distribution sites and working with 87 different Rotary Clubs. This distribution was quite an achievement, and we were proud to be part of it.

It requires a whole lot of effort for the Indian Rotarians to organize this distribution project. In fact, it's a phenomenal effort. Our Rotarian Mumbai leaders, both old friends of SCAW, Shamaldas Perekh and Rajnikant Reshamwala, want to ensure maximum impact, and also maximum return on our SCAW investment. To adequately describe the incredible accomplishments of these two gentlemen, and their hundreds of Rotarian volunteers, would take much more space than allowed here. I can only give you a brief summary as follows.

#### MUMBAI BEDKIT 2003

- Girls: 2 dresses & 2 pair of knickers  
or
- 2 sets of blouses, skirts & knickers
- Boys: 2 sets of school uniforms  
consisting of shirts & shorts
- 1 *shetrangi* - colourful woven mat
- 1 *chaddar* - woven cotton coverlet
- 1 woolen blanket
- 1 pillow with pillow case
- 1 raincoat
- 1 sweater
- 1 towel
- 1 school bag
- 1 stainless steel lunch box, with  
inner stainless dish
- 1 water bottle
- 1 stationery kit consisting of pencils,  
ballpoint pen, coloured pencils, ruler,  
eraser & 4 notebooks
- 1 reusable packing bag containing all  
the above items

**Bedkit:** There are actually four versions of the "Mumbai" bedkit (one shown above). The Mumbai/Pune version is the basic model for the four, as there are different products and manufacturers in the other three versions from Belgaum, Hubli and Ramebenur, (all cities in Karnatika state).

To avoid the cost of middlemen, all of the 13 items are purchased directly from Indian manufacturers, and since Shamaldas doesn't want to lose his bargaining leverage, there are usually two manufacturers for each of the 13 main items.

A few days before the distribution day, each manufacturer delivers his consignment to the 21 different distribution sites throughout the vast area. Avoiding storage costs, the local Rotarian Clubs volunteer their time to assemble the components into bedkits, usually just the day before their distribution. This tight scheduling can result in last minute complications, all of which are resolved by the ever-resourceful Rotarians.

Over the 21 previous distributions since 1981, Shamaldas, Rajnikant and their Rotarian colleagues have, through a process of trial and error, learned which component products survive over time, and which do not. All are durable and practical for their intended usage. For example, since all the fabric components have a criterion to be washable, the dyes used must be guaranteed to be colourfast. Some donors might wonder what a school bag (back-pack), stationary kit, and food and water containers are doing in a bedkit? The reason is that Shamaldas insists that each recipient child must be a regular school attendee. To fuel the mind, a good night's sleep goes hand-in-hand with having the tools to work with at school.

One of my responsibilities as trip leader is to review the financial report prepared by our Rotarian friends. This has been reviewed, and I can hereby report, that all SCAW funds (C\$180,000) have been appropriately spent according to strict SCAW guidelines. The average cost of a bedkit was 915 rupees x 0.03279 = C\$30.00.

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**Child Selection:** Donors might wonder why in Mumbai bedkits cannot be given to the “poorest of the poor”. Unfortunately, if it were to be, the Rotarians guarantee us that a bedkit would be sold in the slums by nightfall for about 20 to 30 percent of its original 915 rupees wholesale cost. To avoid this, the Rotarians have established a time-consuming child selection process. Each of the 87 Rotary Clubs volunteers will visit schools to interview teachers as to which children would be worthy recipients and why. All must have a family – often a single parent – and a home. Often, site visits are then made to a child’s home to verify the teacher’s assessment. Schools selected are chosen from the slum districts in urban and suburban areas, or increasingly from rural areas. Since about half of India’s population of one billion comes from “village India”, it is important to note that the SCAW Rotary team allocated about half of these 6,000 bedkits to rural areas. We followed a number of recipient children to see how they lived, and actually paid visits to three homes in one village, and four in another. The one or two room homes were hand-built by tying together a frame using posts (tree trunks), and the roofs were thatched. For walls, split bamboo strips were tied together and plastered with a mud/dung mixture. The family slept on the mud/dung floor, so the bedkit becomes a treasured new acquisition.

To reach these rural areas, the Rotary volunteers must invest a lot more time and effort than for the distributions in the cities. For example, at the Karjat distribution on January 24<sup>th</sup>, one hundred kids and their 13 teachers travelled 100 km from the Melagon Tribal School, with the three-hour bus trip paid for by the Harbour Rotary Club. At the Thane distribution, the Thane East Rotary Club paid 16 rupees for each of the 30 children and three teachers, for the 40 km train trip from a hillside village. There were also 100 children from four different villages adopted by the Mumbai West Coast Club, from whom five Rotarians made the 2½ hour drive, attended by eight teachers and four village volunteers (Rotary Village Co-Op leaders).

**Distribution Day:** Imagine the supporting cast required for the 6,000 recipient children: the parents, siblings, teachers, community

workers, site donors, Rotarians, on-lookers, and our four member SCAW overseas team. Often times, there is an elaborate welcoming ceremony, such as in Hubli, where the speeches lasted more than an hour, with the longest coming from a holy man, a swami of considerable local fame. Or, at Markal Village School, an hour from Pune, where a spirited welcome included dancing and music. To me, the most meaningful of the 21 distribution sites was at Belgaum where a clinic of five Rotarian medical doctors (three specialists and two GP’s), a Rotarian dentist, and three dental students, examined all 500 children before they lined up for their photos, and then the handing out of their bedkits. There’s always a master list (name, school, class, age, sex) used to check off each child’s name before he/she receives his/her cherished bedkit. Whenever it takes a lot of time to travel to a distribution site, the Rotarians provide drinks and food to the waiting children, teachers, and to us, as well.



**Co-ordination:**

Shamaldas Perekh and Rajnikant Reshamwala are two names to remember. So much of the work is done by these two senior citizens. Both are widowers, dedicated Rotarians, committed SCAW volunteers, and good friends. Rajnikant invited our Canadian team to his Malabar Hills flat for dinner where we feted Shamaldas on his 80th birthday. For more on Shamaldas, donors can refer to the February 2001 Newsletter.

In closing, on behalf of the 6,000 happy children, the hundreds of Rotarians/Teachers/Community Worker Volunteers in India, and our Canadian SCAW family of volunteers, I want to thank our generous donors. Our SCAW program is worthy, it’s meaningful, and it’s working. With your continued financial support we can put many more smiles on many more young faces.

**BY SALLY JO MARTIN  
ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO**

When children are selected to receive a bedkit, or slumber kit as it is known in Mumbai, the mat, covers, and pillow are chosen to be comforts for a good night’s sleep. But that is not all that your generous donation brings to the children.

On distribution day, their excitement bubbles over as they open their bags to discover clothing and school supplies too. School uniforms and notebooks are beyond the budgets of these families, so these additional gifts encourage the children to continue their studies. Laughter and giggles convey a happiness that no words can describe.

At many sites, the parents were present to help carry home the bedkits, and we would often see them delving into their bags before loading them onto their heads, or a bicycle, for the journey home. For others, both the bedkits and the children were crowded onto rickety buses, trucks, or even tractors, as they departed with waving arms and radiant faces.

There are many other benefits for the selected children. A team of doctors, nurses and dentists conducted examinations of all 500 children at the Belgaum site, with follow-up procedures provided free of charge by Rotarian professionals. Eye surgery, polio corrective operations, dental work and nutritional supplements are among those benefits. One boy, with a severe harelip, and another with clubfeet, will soon have surgeries— thus enhancing their quality of life. What a shame that these quite simple procedures were not done at an earlier age!

In addition to these health benefits, the children had some opportunities that might have been new to them and which introduced them to a broader society. Some of the Adavasi tribal children travelled by train, for the first time, while others came to the distribution in modern cars driven by the Rotarians.

Many had never had their photograph taken and needed coaxing to get them to smile. Rural villagers would not likely have seen white people before, or heard English spoken, so we did our best to put them at ease. I took a plush hand puppet with me that resembled my family’s golden retriever. An electronic sound box in the puppet sang a tune “I love you”. Maggie, the puppet, and I walked among the waiting groups encouraging the children to laugh, wave and become accustomed to our English phrases of “Hello, Bye Bye, Thank You, and You Are Welcome.” So when they received their precious bedkits many of them understood our greetings and would respond with a grin and a happy “Tank U”.

I will not soon forget the smiles on their faces or the joy of their laughter, and I feel most fortunate to have been part of the team of donors, SCAW office volunteers, Rotarians in India, and we four travelling volunteers, who helped bring comfort and happiness to these 6,000 needy children.

## BY PETER BIRNIE, TORONTO, ONTARIO

### Sounds, Sights and Smells of India

#### Morning in Kalyan

Birds of the morning sing, the rooster crows, chanting Muslims are heard before dawn. It is pleasantly cool and the valley is filled with mist waiting to be burned off by the sun. Sweepers are at work swinging their thatched hand-brooms. Swish, swish, swish! They push the dirt to the edges of the roads and will move it again tomorrow. A black pig snorts and paws the garbage. Her army follows. Bullocks lumber by dragging their ancient chariots. Pots and jars rattling at the water tap and the women will walk away with two or three stacked on their heads, like models on a runway. Children giggle and kick stones as they make their way to school. Some bikes can be heard before the other vehicles take over the road—first a car, then a truck is heard, followed by another and another, a motor cycle, and auto-rickshaws, and all are constantly ‘tuning’ their horns. Their windows are down as they chatter to each other seeking direction on these unmarked roads. The chaos starts to sound normal. Time for breakfast!

Why not drive from Hubli to Goa this afternoon and give ourselves a morning on the beach before flying to Mumbai?. Sounds like a good idea. We could be finished in Hubli by 4:00 pm. Our driver is ready and we estimate a three to four hour drive. Like several other rides we’ve had recently, the drive was horrible. The road was completely overburdened with cars and trucks that are constantly passing and weaving in and out. We were stopped at the level crossings six times in the first hour as a passenger train zigzagged across our route. It was getting dark, and to our surprise, a herd of bullocks appeared being shepherded down the road. There were more than a 100, some tied together for safety. They seemed oblivious to the honking.

At the state border crossing our driver was detained by the police and then directed to the excise office. We assumed there was a border tax to pay. Time dragged on as the clerk shuffled his papers and finally, after some prodding by the kingfisher, we discovered that the car license was out of date and we paid a 700 RPS levy. The road improved in Goa, but the road signs did not. Our driver stopped at every fork in the road to confirm our direction, and then continued our journey. Our mission finally completed in  $4\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour. A walk on the beach the next morning was our reward. It was worth it!



The spices that enhance the Indians’ daily foods are extraordinary. This vegetarian culture has turned the “dumpling” into a vehicle coated with exotic tastes. The variety appears infinite, and we were able to try samples of many. I should have made notes, as the names are now a blur. Our hosts are so gracious, always encouraging us to experience everything—tempting us by explaining the ingredients, the spices, the sauce and the combinations. A *chapates* (Indian flat bread) is rolled into a tool and used to pick up their food. Their fingers and *chapates* are their knives and forks. They have a sink in the dining room to clean up. I hope to master their eating techniques on my next visit, and I will also be sure to take notes.

Thank you.

## BY LAURIE-BETH DAVIDSON ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO

What a great team! We four Torontonians met each morning for early breakfast and a short team meeting. The sense of excitement prevailed as we packed into a vehicle each day for two or three distribution sites, along with our driver, Aman, and two Rotarians, Shamaldas and Raj, who accompanied us almost every day.

The adventure began immediately as we travelled the potholed, crowded roads of India with an incredible number of vehicles: cars, trucks, auto-rickshaws, scooters, and carts pulled by oxen and pushed by people. There were also animals of all descriptions, and people carrying water vessels and baskets on

their heads, with babes in arms. Everything and everyone all were vying for the best positions on the roads, there was no apparent order, no lanes were being followed, and horns were constantly blowing!

Often our distribution sites were two hours away, but our approach was usually welcomed by sounds of cheering, happy children in uniforms lining the pathway as an honour guard, throwing rose petals and singing welcome songs.

“Welcome, welcome, glad to meet you,  
Welcome, welcome, glad to greet you.”

An official greeting included the marking of our foreheads with a red *bindi* sign, floral leis, speeches by teachers and/or Rotarians, and in one instance, a noted *swami* (spiritual prophet).

One school principal, at a site beside the Arabian Sea, said and I quote excerpts:

“My dear Canadians, behalf of all the friends and my nation, I like to say big thank you. Let me say from point of view of humanity that whatever co-operation you are offering, it is very much valuable to my needy children. I can say that child may be from anywhere but he belongs to only one category i.e. child, who need love, care and correct direction. Please convey my hearty thanks to my Canadian brothers and sisters who are thinking for Indian children. God bless you all.”

After these heartwarming and often overwhelming welcomes, we get down to ‘work’! The team leader chooses the location for the photo shoot, trying to include some local background interest. The other team members arrange three bedkits with all the kit items displayed, and the labels placed in their holders ready for the donor and/or gift recipient pictures. Teachers and Rotarians have helped to dress the children in their new outfits provided in the \$30 Canadian donation (along with all the other articles in the bedkit) and the photo shoot begins. One volunteer brings three little ones, age six to eleven, and seats them on the appropriate stools, while the appointed team member photographer attempts to get smiles by saying “*Mulano, asaw*”—our two Indian words to say “Children, smile”! Then the  
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(Mumbai, by Laurie-Beth Davidson, Toronto, Ontario, continued from page 3) excitement mounts as the children are led to the place where the slumber kits are actually handed to each child, following a handshake and words of love and good wishes. This routine repeats itself until all 200 to 300 children per site are completed. In the course of 12 days, our team greeted 6,000 beautiful and very needy children from city and rural locations on the west coast of India—north, south and east of Mumbai (Bombay)—a total of 2,500 kms. travelled by car, van, train and plane!

The distributions took place at government schools, community centres, a homeopathic college ground, private plantations, Rotary schools and one rural boarding school. The majority of schools that we visited were very primitive—no desks, or desks each seating three pupils, one blackboard 4' x 4', few, if any teaching aids or equipment, and often bare light bulbs, or no electricity. In the rural residential school, the children lived, ate, slept and took their lessons in the same room, with no furniture, and their one suitcase, plate and cup were left on the verandah outside the room.

The children came from villages, remote rural areas, city slums, schools for mentally and physically challenged children, and many were Adavasi tribal aboriginal children. The majority had no shoes, tough calloused little hands, a variety of skin diseases and vitamin deficiency illnesses, anemia, parasites, leprosy, obvious polio disabilities, thalidomide-like presentation, several harelip and cleft palate problems, blindness, deafness, clubfeet and other physical problems, BUT beautiful smiles! Bless them!

**NEXT SCHEDULED  
DISTRIBUTION TRIPS**

**MAY, 2003 - PHILIPPINES  
5,000 BEDKITS**

**JUNE, 2003 - UGANDA  
5,000 BEDKITS**

We were able to visit in the homes of several bedkit recipients in two villages. This experience was very worthwhile and interesting for us as a team, to see where these little ones lived and how carefully the Rotarians had been in selecting the needy children.

The first home was that of a little girl of seven who lived with her parents and four brothers and sisters in a two-room hut; kitchen and bedroom with dung floor, bamboo and dung walls, and thatched roof. The kitchen had an open wood fire on the floor. The father was a goat herder and the owner of eight goats. His monthly income was less than \$40 Canadian, so the bedkit was a totally amazing gift for his family!

The second shelter was also two-roomed of similar construction – no sanitation facilities and water drawn from a well some distance away. The father, a farmer, was not home, but the mother and two of her three daughters welcomed us warmly. One bed was apparent—it belonged to “the owner”, her husband, and the mother and her three daughters all slept on the dung floor!

The principal who accompanied us to the village with the children explained that alcoholism and wife abuse are common here, village life is primitive (150 years ago style) but the children seemed to be loved. All had their jobs to do at home, but they had also been given the opportunity to attend school.

We had many touching experiences: Indian men (fathers and grandfathers) kneeling down and kissing our feet; grandmothers, raising grandsons, who couldn't thank us often enough; mothers greeting and thanking us with *namaste* “I greet the light within you”, their hands held in the attitude of prayer; and the children—one little physically handicapped child of ten, unable to stand or walk unaided, whom I had the privilege of presenting with her slumber kit, her caregiver pulling her to her feet while I held her hand, and as she finally stood tall and raised her head, the most beautiful, radiant smile I have ever received, met my moistened eyes.

The children of India are forever grateful, donors, for your gifts, and I am humbled to have been the recipient of thanks for your kindness and generosity. Thank you for your love and care and for making a difference in the lives of these precious children.

Sally Jo Martin also submitted the following summary of a speech given by Spiritual leader, Dado J.P. Vaswariat, at the Rotary District conference that we attended the first day we were in Mumbai, on January 12th, 2003:

**Five Fingers of Service**

1. Serve silently
2. Serve lovingly
3. Serve with sincerity
4. Don't impose your faith on others
5. Create a soul for service



**THANK YOU  
for your  
contribution to this  
Mumbai, India trip**

**Black's Photography for  
photofinishing**

**Champion Photochemistry  
Limited for continuously  
funding film and photofinishing  
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**Donors and Volunteers!**