



### **Maitreya Project Trust ongoing Blanket Distribution Program update as of 5<sup>th</sup> January 2015**

We are pleased to report that the 1<sup>st</sup> Phase of Maitreya Project Trust Blanket Distribution Project was successfully completed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December.

With deep thanks to everyone who supported the appeal, it was possible to purchase an initial quantity of 1,200 high quality thick woolen blankets from Khetriya Shree Gandhi Asharam at a highly preferential rate. The huge volume of blankets was delivered to Maitreya Project land in Kushinagar.



The next few weeks will see the most bitterly cold days of the year in Northern India. Temperatures drop to freezing and many people live literally on the streets, or in homes little more than shelters, without power, heat, insulation, and with only the thin clothes they wear in the hot remainder of the year.

The goal of this year's Blanket Distribution Project has been to work with local authorities to identify the poorest and most at risk, and offer to each a blanket as a gift from Maitreya Project Trust.

Distribution of items of such relatively high value has to be done carefully to ensure the right people receive and that distribution is done in an orderly manner. To do so it was essential to enlist the help of the Kushinagar District Magistrate and his team of local officials and police.



In the days preceding the distribution, tokens were distributed to recipients in villages close to Maitreya Project land. On Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> December a tent was erected on the land, and with the help of Project volunteers and the local administration, lines were formed and approximately 1,100 blankets were distributed throughout the day. It was intensely cold and foggy and bonfires were lit around which people could keep warm while they waited.



At night time from about 11 pm onwards, our volunteers went through the streets of Kushinagar and distributed more blankets to people sleeping on the street in doorways, and to rickshaw pullers who have to sleep by rickshaws to prevent them being stolen. Many rickshaw pullers come from the surrounding villages in order to support their families. They bring no possessions with them as they have

no city home, shelter, or place to store them. They literally sleep on the street. Some people woke up and thanked the volunteer – others remained asleep and hopefully will wake up warm.

Project volunteers also visited a local hospital where it is the responsibility of family or relatives to provide for the patient in care. Many are desperately poor and have no blankets or bedding. Relatives sleep by a patient's bed on the floor or on the floor in corridors. Those without means were offered a blanket including a child with severe burns.



Our volunteers walked through the streets of Kushinagar late at night seeking out those for whom a blanket may mean the difference between life and death. In the past few days more than 50 deaths due to cold have been reported in Uttar Pradesh. The volunteers will also distribute to an orphanage, a home for developmentally delayed children, and others.





MPT plans to distribute an additional 1,200 blankets over the next week. The goal remains to distribute a total of 3,500 blankets by the first half of January.





Thank you all again so much for the generosity that has made this blanket distribution possible. Please read the blog below written first hand by our Advocate Atul Chopra and kindly continue to support this effort which makes so much difference to thousands of people at this bitterly cold time of year.

**Within India**, Indian Rupee funds may be sent or remitted directly to the bank account of Maitreya Project Trust as follows;

**Maitreya Project Trust,  
HDFC Bank.  
Account number: 50200004162830.  
IFSC: HDFC0002549.**

In the, "Message to Beneficiary", please kindly indicate for "Blankets"

**Outside India**, foreign currency donations may be made through the FPMT website under the following link;

<https://my.fpmt.org/donate/maitreyabuddhaprojectkushinagar>

In the, "Comment" box, please kindly indicate donation is for "Blankets"

**Blanket Distribution Daily Blog** - The following accounts are from daily reports written by MPT's legal Counsel, Advocate Atul Chopra, who has personally coordinated the entire distribution program in and around Kushinagar;

**Night of December 27th December 2014**

We walked the streets of Kushinagar after 11pm and found people sleeping on the road side and some in verandas of shops, others in bus shelters, and covered them with blankets.

Some woke up and thanked us, others were fast asleep and they would discover the blankets whenever they got up.

Another strange phenomenon that we encountered was the rickshaw pullers. We saw a lot of them sleeping next to their rickshaws out in the open in the freezing winter night.

We talked to some of them and realized that most rickshaw pullers come to cities from their villages and pull rickshaws for their living .They have no home here and sleep on the streets. However for the safety of their rickshaws they cannot sleep away from them in the night and have to sleep right next to the rickshaw.

There are no organized rickshaw parking lots in small cities and they just find a convenient place on the street and sleep next to their rickshaws .This is ok in summer but in this freezing cold it's very difficult.

Also more than 56 deaths have been reported in our state last week and the number keeps growing. We will distribute the balance left over blankets by walking the streets every night after 11 pm when the temperature is at its lowest.

The going is tough as we have to be out in the open for hours at a stretch. We started at about 10.30 in the night and returned home at 2.00 AM in the morning last night.

However this has to be done as we can come back to our warm homes in the night but the homeless who are suffering in the extreme cold must be cared for.

**Night of 28th December 2014, we were able to do the following:**

**Home for abandoned children with severe special needs:**

There is one home in village Saraya run by nuns from Kerala. They have 30 children who are mentally retarded. Most of them are girls who have been abandoned by their families on the roadsides, on railway platforms and bus stops because they either did not want to bear the responsibility of bringing them up or could not afford to do so.



These nuns bring such children to this home and look after them. We gave 20 blankets to them. The blankets are large and Sister said that she would cut them in half and stitch the edges to prevent them from fraying.

**Hospital corridors and hospital on the night of 28th Dec 2014:**

We again walked the hospital corridors and wards on the night of the 28th. There were two families where 4 persons were huddled under one thin blanket. We gave each of these families 2 blankets instead of 1.





We now have just a few blankets left over and will carry on till this current Phase 1 stock runs out. This has been going every night with the help of volunteer friends. We start at about 9 in the night after dinner and end up at 1 or 2 o'clock in the early morning. We have to be outdoors throughout this period of 4 to 5 hours and the night temperature in this area is about 3 to 4 degrees. It's a little crazy in these long hours but at least we know that we have a warm home to come back to. Hence the good feeling of being able to help so many in few hours of work keeps us going.



It takes very long to distribute very few blankets as in the hospital we first visit all the wards and corridors and then identify the people we will distribute to, and then in the second round quickly distribute and move on. If we don't do this lot of people collect around us to ask for blankets and then we don't know who is in need and who is not.

On the streets it's a little easier. We just distribute and move on.

## Slums, the Crying Beggar Lady, and Lepers, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> December

On the last two nights around midnight, we were able to distribute blankets to some really needy segments. I am detailing the same below :

### 1. The Slums Blankets Distribution:

In front of the Railway station in most small towns are always some slums. This is where homeless people live who make temporary shacks with whatever material is available and cover them with pieces of plastic sheets etc. We went there the night before last and distributed blankets. First are the photographs of the slums followed by photos of the people who received the blankets. There were several people living in each shack but due to our supply of blankets getting low we could give only one per family. Anyway we were happy as these were really needy people.



## 2. The Crying Beggar Lady:

This is one old lady beggar who is invalid and moves on a tricycle which she probably received from some Government scheme for such people. I gave her one blanket and she burst out crying probably from happiness or because she rarely receives kindness. You can see her tears in the second photo.



## 3. The Lepers:

There is one ward for lepers in the Government hospital. These lepers are mostly abandoned persons brought in from the streets. We wanted to distribute blankets to them in the ward. I was behind the camera taking photos and none of the persons wanted to go into the ward to hand out these blankets to the lepers due to the pitiable site, stench, and fear of infection from coming into contact with the lepers.

One of the hospital sisters was there with her daughter who came forward to help. This little girl went from bed to bed and covered the patients with blankets. I salute her for this. In the photos there are also shots of the patients.

These were all blankets that were left over from the Kushinagar villages distribution. We are almost out of stock. There are just 30 or 35 blankets left. This lot will probably go to one small orphanage in Khakilabad which we intend to visit today.



This week has been an eventful one . We all got sick with cold and coughs as we were out on the streets most nights till 1 to 1.30 in the night. The cold was severe with the night temperature down to 4 to 5 degrees. Most of the time has been spent outdoors. However we enjoyed every moment. It was a happy feeling to come back to our heated homes and warm rooms knowing that with a little work from our side several people would sleep comfortably.

### **Night of December 31st**

The last lot of 30 blankets went to an orphanage named Sant Kabir Orphanage which is run by Swami Vichar Das who is the priest in charge of the Kabir Das temple in this area.

There is one place named Maghar near Gorakhpur where the famous Saint Kabir had passed away. He was a poet and saint and had an equal following of both Hindus and Muslims. It is believed that when he died the Hindus wanted to cremate him where as the Muslims wanted to bury him.

The story goes that the two communities were on the verge of drawing swords when the cloth covering the body flew away with the wind and there were a bunch of flowers instead of the body. These flowers were divided into two parts. The Hindus cremated their part and the Muslims buried their part. A temple and mosque were then erected adjacent to each other on the banks of the river Ami and both these buildings still stand today.

Several famous Indian singers like Anoop Jalota have sung his bhajans (religious songs) and the albums are very popular even today. Even new music groups comprising of youngsters have sung his words.

The following of the disciples of Kabir is not large and the institution is not financially strong. Yet they run some projects like an orphanage , school , meditation courses etc.



Their orphanage has 30 children mostly picked up from the streets. Swami Ji looks after them and sends them to school. I visited them and saw the lack of warm bedclothes. There were some old blankets and worn out quilts there and blankets were desperately needed.

We gave one blanket each to these deprived children.



Swami Ji can be seen in the white clothes.

The initial stock of blankets is now nil – we await delivery of Phase 2 stock and will continue with additional village distributions as well as covering the streets late at night and other needy institutions by day.

Thank you again. Please help us continue distributing blankets over the next few weeks. Once the weather warms up we will resume distribution of mosquito nets and information helping to prevent the spread of mosquito borne disease.

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Blanket, "A gift from Maitreya Project Trust"

Please also follow our work on facebook;

<https://www.facebook.com/MaitreyaBuddhaProjectKushinagar>

email us at [maitreya@fpmt.org](mailto:maitreya@fpmt.org)

Thank you, Maitreya Project Trust Management Team