

## **2016 BLANKET DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM BY MAITREYA BUDDHA PROJECT KUSHINAGAR**

### **Introduction:**

Thanks once again to our kind and generous donors, this winter Maitreya Buddha Project was able to distribute 1,000 heavy woolen blankets to the poor and needy around Kushinagar during January, the coldest time of the year, when temperatures fall to freezing at night. The following account of the distribution effort was filed by Advocate Atul Chopra, Legal Counsel to Maitreya Project Trust, who, as in previous years, led the Blanket Distribution initiative

### **1. Blanket distribution to the Musahar community in Village Koluha in Kushinagar :**

The Maitreya Project Team in the month of January 2016 distributed blankets in Kushinagar District, to Koluha Village having nearly a population of 100 people of the Musahar community. This is the poorest of the poor community who are landless laborers and since they have no financial means for their food, they catch and eat rats as their staple food.

The word ' Musahar ' comprises of two Hindi words. The first is 'MOOS' which means RAT and the second is 'HAR' which means EAT. Put together, it means the community which eats rats.



There is a very strong caste system prevailing in India and the lowest in the cast system are the Harijans or untouchables. However, the small community of Mushahars in the caste system hierarchy are even below the Harijan community. This community of Mooshars is only found in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and the Tarai Regions of Nepal. They are all landless laborers who have no Agricultural Land of their own and survive by working as laborers and for their food they depend on catching and eating rats.

They are amongst one of the most marginalized groups in India. Strangely, this community exists in 2 or 3 pockets of Kushinagar district. One of the largest groups lives in the Musahar Tola in Koluha Village in Kushinagar. This year, the Maitreya Project Team went



directly to the Mushahar community and collected them in the local primary school and distributed blanket. The team also went door to door in the village distributing blankets.

## 2. Blanket Distribution in Hospital Corridors :

In the Indian villages it is very common that when someone suddenly falls sick or meets with an accident or gets burnt, the whole family immediately rushes to the hospital in the nearest city. Almost of all these patients get admitted in the Hospital and the hospital provides them with a bed. However for the relatives, family members and attendants who come from the village and have to stay overnight, there is no provision of rooms and beds and they simply end up spending the nights sleeping on the floors in the hospital corridors and verandas.



Most of the Indian villages use huge cotton sleeping quilts at home and it is not possible to carry these into the hospital and hence these poor families including children are forced to sleep in the winter on the hospital floor without any protection from the cold. The Maitreya Project Team goes every night and visits the hospital corridors and verandas and gives blankets to the families sleeping in the floor. Priority is given to those who have old people and children with them. The attendants who use the corridors for sleeping normally huddle around tea shops just outside the Hospital where there is always a fire going for making tea. These people come to the corridors to sleep between 11 and 12 midnight. Hence the blanket distribution team starts its patrolling of the hospital corridors around midnight and works till early hours of the morning throughout winter.

## 3. Anirudhwa Village adjacent to the Maha Parinirwana temple.

During the land acquisition for Maitreya Project the maximum amount of land was given by the farmers of Anirudhwa village in Kushinagar. This land is most important as it touches the boundary wall of the Maha Parinirvana Stupa as well as the Temple of the Reclining Buddha. The system of distribution of blanket is that the Maitreya Project Field Team visits the village along with Gram Pardhan ( Elected Village Head ) as well as the

Revenue Department Government officials and a list is prepared of all the families who are poor and needy. After that based on the final list blanket coupons are given to each and every member of the family. On a fixed date, a camp is put up on the Maitreya Project land and all the coupon holders come and collect a blanket each in exchange for their coupons. In this way each and every eligible person receives a blanket in the peak of winter and there is total transparency in the distribution. This year 1,000 blankets were distributed.



#### 4. Blanket distribution in Hospitals :

Inside hospitals one red colour blanket is given to each patient. Government supply blanket are of very poor quality and not at all warm. Except for the critical care hospital ward, there is no central heating or heater in any of the hospital wards, as a result the poor patients in the hospital face the harsh winter cold.



The Maitreya Project Team with the help of the nurses, and hospital staff makes a list of those poor people who are using only the hospital blanket and do not have any other warm covering. Blankets are then given to those needy patients. Again the priority is for the women, children, and old people. The team worked this winter every night till the early hours of the morning. The going was tough but the happiness at the end of each night was well worth the hard work.

#### 5. Blanket distribution to Lepers:

There is a Leprosy Ward in the Hospital where lepers come for treatment. This ward is normally considered taboo as nobody wants to go near the lepers as the patients stay for long periods. However, the Maitreya Project Team distributed blankets to each and every leper in the Hospital.



## 6. Old and Destitute Persons Home :

There is a small home for old and destitute people in Kushinagar which is named after a scholarly Buddhist Monk who recently passed away. Blankets were given to each and every room of the home.



A very big thank you on behalf of all who received blankets this winter, to all who made this year's distribution possible.

This is an annual program the Project intends to continue during the coldest time of the year. During the summer months the Project intends to continue the distribution of mosquito nets to help prevent mosquito-borne diseases which seriously affect especially the very poor in the Kushinagar area.

If you would like to contribute towards either of these programs or to contribute generally to Maitreya Buddha Project in Kushinagar, please visit our website

[www.mbpkushinagar.org](http://www.mbpkushinagar.org)

Where you may make a donation on the How to Help Page.

<http://mbpkushinagar.org/support/>

To follow Project activities and to receive important announcements about Project progress, please sign up for our mailing list under "Subscribe" also on the How to Help page.

With many thanks and best wishes

Maitreya Project Trust