



# Actions of maitri

*in the service of others*

MAITRI

Charitable Trust

Dhandhwa, Bodhgaya, Distt. Gaya, Bihar 824231, India

Tel.+Fax: (91) 631 2200841; Email : [ferranti@vsnl.com](mailto:ferranti@vsnl.com); [director@maitri-bodhgaya.org](mailto:director@maitri-bodhgaya.org)

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## EDITORIAL

After skipping one issue, we will try to bridge the gap in this newsletter so as to reassure our friends of the uninterrupted functioning of our programmes and informing them about new developments.

Respecting our "tradition", this editorial opens with news about this year's monsoon, the vital South-Asian rainy season. Although somewhat delayed, the rain god hasn't forsaken us and has met the forecasts predicting the end of El Nino and the coming of a satisfactory monsoon, although in the north and the east severe floodings have wrought destruction and even death - a reminder of the nature of this existence.

Being here and devising ways to bring help and support to some of the many people who do not seem to have profited from the trumpeted development of the country frequently feels like straddling, in a surreal way, two coexisting and overlapping worlds - one enjoying the trappings of modern society like fancy saris and even cellphones and the other beset by poverty and malnutrition. Setting aside the deceiving appearances of the former, we decidedly try to concentrate on the latter and to at least give help to some of the more deprived people in our area. Bringing about lasting changes throughout the country remains the task of governments, daunting as it is. Great hope is laid in the present Minister for Women and Child Welfare, Mrs Maneka Gandhi, for her intelligence, passion and dedication.

After 18 years our litigation with the builders of our campus reached the conclusion of the second arbitration ordered by the High Court and MAITRI has been victorious again! We do not however fool ourselves and expect the other party to appeal again. With the passing of time it has become imperative to make mental reality checks periodically to keep the interest in the case alive. For me such exercise is helped by the visual immediacy of the situation, since I live in one of the buildings at the centre of the dispute. And it's not fun.

*Adriana Ferranti, Director*

## THE VISIT OF OUR SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

In 2016 Rinpoche did not come to Bodhgaya and we missed the excitement of the preparations and particularly the soothing effect of his blessings.

Finally this year Rinpoche made it to Bodhgaya and on February 5 he came to visit MAITRI, where the staff, patients and a high number of pupils of Fulchar school greeted him. We were joined in the welcoming by volunteers and guests of Root Institute. It was very joyous with MAITRI people in an orderly line offering *katag* to "Guruji" and myself introducing them one by one by name, while various dogs were milling around strangely quiet. When finally Rinpoche made it to the community hall, which quickly filled with people of all ages, I read a welcome note to the Guru. After apologizing for his delay, Rinpoche addressed all as his brothers and sisters from previous lifetimes.

Rinpoche's speech could be divided into three parts - one addressed to the students, another one to the patients, and a third one to the workers, with the common theme of the selfish mind as the source of all problems as it "gives harm, suffering to others besides oneself". Therefore students should pursue education "not just for oneself" but "to help everybody, [...], to bring happiness to them, tempo-rary happiness and ultimate happiness. Then as a result, all others will bring hap-

*piness to you.*" Then Rinpoche spoke more directly to the boys in the hall about their general attitude towards girls. "So here at school the boys should not put down and treat the girls badly. That doesn't bring peace and happiness in the world, in your country, your people, your family... [and] next life you'll be put down by all others. You will experience that karma,.... [therefore] you should respect everybody, you should treat them well. This way you will have so much happiness and success in this life".

Regarding leprosy and TB patients, Rinpoche said: "Remember that this [the disease] came from the mind, not from outside. The cause of this disease [is due to] past lives' negative karma, so the advantage of sickness, of the suffering that you have now is that it makes you finish past lives' negative karma, [which is] the cause of this disease, and then in the future your



*Our Spiritual Director blesses the welcoming crowd*

continued...

life will have so much happiness, like sun shining. This sickness you [will] transform into gold, diamonds, even if you die. OM



Rinpoche blesses some rescued puppies

**PAKSHIM SO HA** is the mantra to recite to cure the leprosy disease. The purpose of my life is here to serve all sentient beings, so I need a healthy body, a healthy mind, therefore I practice the mantra”.

Rinpoche then addressed MAITRI workers and said: “So now all the people who are working taking care of dogs, people, sick people, who are taking care of sentient beings - that is the best meditation, that is the best Dharma. To serve others is more important than yourself. You help others to be free from problems, to have happiness, so then in this life you will get happiness and success, whatever you think [will] happen. You are here because of

a job, [but] you get the opportunity to help, to practice that, the good heart, to not harm, to help as much as you can. So every day you collect so much merit, virtue, good luck every day. You have to recognize that you've got an opportunity here, you were given a good job, so this is best - to take care of the dogs, take care of the animals, take care of the people from your good heart.”

In the end Rinpoche addressed the few parents of the stud-ents present and renewed his appeal against the custom of dowry that forces families to get into debt. “Maybe some family here will agree to



Rinpoche distributes fruit to all attending people while Ladakhi Lama gives away blessed strings

marry without need to pay money. Then we can start more and more like that.”

And finally, before proceeding to bless all the people attending the gathering, Rinpoche said “I want to thank very much from the heart everybody, Adriana and all the staff who benefit so much the different projects here.”

As I was accompanying Rinpoche to the car, he recommended that his teachings be translated into Hindi and the text be distributed among MAITRI school children “so that they may read and understand them better”.



Rinpoche is offered a gift before teachings

**Please Note :** The text has been kindly translated by **Ven. Dekyi** from the Maitreya Project School.

## The Fate of MAITRI Village Schools

When our Annual Report was issued in June 2016, MAITRI was still counting 3 village schools, which however turned to just 2 by the end of the summer vacation (mid May-mid June): that's when it became clear that the villagers of Paner had lost interest in the maintenance of the school building that was seriously damaged. Our repeated requests were stonewalled, and it turned out that most of the Manjhi (untouchables) section of the village had converted to Christianity and had thus free access to a Christian school built 1 km from our school. Since they formed the majority of the pupils registered with us, the mood in some of the vil-lages served by our school had completely changed and we had no option but to declare it definitely closed.

The same fate seemed to be pending over Ramnagar school, as towards the end of the summer vacation, it turned out that the villagers had not managed to even start the repairing work they had been postponing for the past

several years. Realizing that we had reached the last stand, we called our teachers to the headquarters, where they were assigned some office work. A few days later the villagers seemed to realize

foregone sprinkling of complaints, pleadings, and promises by the villagers.

We made an “indirect move” and relocated our monthly mother and child care mobile clinic from Fulchatar to Gapha, which is half way between our two schools, thus serving also villages that up to then had been left out. However after months of “false alarms” from their side and of stoic, apparent stony immobility from our side, we had to accept that the school was forever gone.



The director's last visit to Ramnagar School in March 2017

that we actually meant our threat, and the usual ritual of telephone calls, visits of parents to MAITRI, visits of our coordinator to Ramnagar started, all that with the

Thus we turned our undivided attention to Fulchatar school and, as soon as the villagers had completed the repairing of the second building, we went ahead with the registration of 33 new pupils. The school was assigned our two old teachers, Ganesh Sharma and Vinod Kumar, who are experienced in maintaining communication with the villagers. The school has now 115 pupils who have maintained an average attendance of 95%, excellent by all standards.

# MAITRI's Programme for Young Girls

by Arun Kumar

For the past 4 years I have been working at MAITRI as paramedical worker for leprosy, TB, and mother and child programmes in one area of the district.

Our director has showed particular interest in women's health and frequently motivates us to take better care of women's health and hygiene as if they were our family members. As we paramedical workers do school surveys to check students, one day I went to a government high school to give health education and spoke about hygiene and its advantages. I noticed that most of the girls looked weaker than the boys, and asked if any of them felt weak or had any other problem. About 30% of them raised their hands and I wrote down the names of the girls that looked weaker, too thin, and anaemic along with their fathers' and mothers' names. I took also their addresses and went to visit them at home, where I saw that they did different

chores like washing pots, cleaning the house, sweeping the floor, cooking, etc. However, when I asked their parents about how they fed their daughters, I found that they gave priority to the boys of the family

very thin, mainly water. I have rarely seen any grain of pulse in the cooked food.

When I told my director about my findings, she looked worried for those girls and said that they should be registered as our patients at MAITRI clinic, so that they can be checked up regularly and can be given medicines and supplements. After 4 months' treatment the girls feel and look much better and are very grateful to MAITRI. In the past 18 months we have detected and registered at our 8 monthly clinics – 4 mobile and 4 at the centre, **456** weak and anaemic girls, who can now look forward to a better future.

I think that it is necessary that much more be done to create more awareness and provide better health facilities for young girls, so that weak girls may become healthy women for a healthy society. There should be more organizations like MAITRI taking care of women's health.



Check-up of girls at MAITRI Mother and Child Care clinic in Barachatti province

and that girls were given only rice, potatoes and sometimes pulse, which in any case is

*What is this work really going to achieve? Is any change in society taking place, so that service of the kind MAITRI provides shall not be required for much longer?*

*I am sure that these are the questions people who read us ask to themselves, if not aloud. Older people know that changes for the better take place slowly amidst obstacles of all kinds and that sudden spurts can rarely take roots. Improvements in women's lot are among the most ostracized of phenomena in this world, also because of women's general lack of awareness in their own rights and because of the family environment in which most of them live and work. MAITRI can only support such changes by providing some little help that, by improving women's health, infuses energy and will to achieve a better life.*

The Telegraph, 28th October 2016

## STILL UNFAIR

Women got their voting rights as recently as the 19th century. Counting from 2016, it could take 170 years to close the gender gap in terms of economic opportunities, according to a report by the World Economic Forum. [...] In spite of working 39 more days per year on an average than men, women are still paid less and have fewer chances of holding senior positions at work. But this cannot be interpreted as a comment on their capacities or qualifications [...] So the fault lies neither in women's stars nor in their abilities, but in the age-old perception that women are underlings.

Expectedly, India ranks 135th among 144 countries when it comes to women's participation in the labour force. What is unexpected is that India has supposedly become a more equal place for women, in one year to land up in the 87th position. Equality is a lived experience too: how many Indian women would

second the claim of the WEF? Increasing the discomfort at the experiential plane is the WEF's finding that India has bridged the gender divide in primary and secondary school enrolment. The Right to Education Act, aimed at giving free and compulsory education to children till the elementary

level must be working its magic. While it may well have increased the number of children who get admitted to schools, there are many students, especially girls, who drop out midway. Marriage is one of the chief reasons for taking girls out of school. This starts the cycle of early motherhood

and the damage to health, leading to maternal and infant mortality. India has indeed performed dismally in the area of women's well-being and survival in the WEF report. Nationwide surveys have already shown that even educated and affluent families spend less on women's health than on men's. If the world thinks of women as underlings, India, it seems, looks upon them as disposable goods. A hundred and seventy years may be too short a time for this position to change.



Disposable who?

# India accounts for 60% of new leprosy cases globally

**New Delhi:** India accounts for 60% of the world's new leprosy cases, with more than 127,000 confirmed cases in 2015 largely because of the stoppage of active surveillance after reaching elimination levels, says the fourth WHO Report on Neglected Tropical Diseases released on Wednesday.

Around 210,000 new leprosy cases were reported worldwide in 2015, with only 14 countries reporting more than 1,000 cases and accounting for 95% of the global cases.

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae* that mainly affects the skin, peripheral nerves,

eyes, and the mucous membrane of the windpipe. It is completely curable using multi-drugs therapy available free in public hospitals and treatment in the early stages prevents disability.

India successfully eliminated (less than one case/10,000 population) leprosy at the national level in December 2005, but 118 districts still have to reach elimination levels. Chattisgarh and Dadar and Nagar Haveli are the worst affected. "Four states – Delhi, Lakshadweep, Chandigarh and Odisha – reported increased prevalence over last year, though they had earlier achieved elimination," said a health ministry official.

What's more worrying is that India has not recorded a drastic fall in new cases since elimination in 2005. New cases have gone down marginally over the past decade, from 139,000 in 2006 to 127,000 in 2015. The annual new cases detection rate and prevalence rate, the two indicators of programme success, have not improved since 2005 largely because India stopped active surveillance after reaching elimination levels. "India now relies on voluntary reporting, which may lead to many cases being detected late and for people getting treated after disability has set in," said the ministry official.

*Leprosy workers have always known the hard truth and watched with dread the WHO-backed decision in 2002 to stop the survey programme and rely solely on self-reporting. The aim was to reach elimination at the earliest by all means. So they did, and now we are back to square one.*

*Thousands of NGOs dedicated to the fight against leprosy closed down, but MAITRI never quit and kept offering assistance and support both to the government services and to the leprosy affected people.*

## 2016



1. January 31, 2016 World Leprosy Day at MAITRI stall in Bodhgaya



4. Distribution of blankets to former and winter patients, winter 2015-16



3. Training of Gaya AMC trainee nurses on Dec. 2, 2016

2. POD camp at Bodhgaya Primary Health Centre



## 2017



1. World Leprosy Day awareness drive on Jan. 29, 2017

3. Explaining about reaction signs in leprosy



2. Child case, PB (non-infectious leprosy) with hypopigmented patch



4. Distribution



# Government tuberculosis scheme comes up short

by G.S. Mudur

**New Delhi, Oct. 26:** Only about half of all tuberculosis patients in India who seek diagnosis and treatment from the government enjoy a successful cure, a new study has suggested, highlighting dropouts and gaps that can harm patients and threaten public health.

The study by an international team of health researchers has estimated that among the 1.9 million patients who approached government clinics across the country during 2013, only about a million or 53%, had relapse-free survival for at least one year after treatment.

[...]The RNTCP has consistently published claims that it has achieved 85% “treatment success rates” since 2001. But health officials in private concede that this fraction represents those who complete the six-month long anti-TB therapy – and not the fraction that remains relapse-free for a year.

“The programme has viewed treatment completion as the end point and has not actively followed up patients to see that they remain disease free for at least a year,” said Srinath Satyanarayana, [...] co-author of the study. But health experts say it is not just the relapses that are troubling.

The number of patients who engage with the RNTCP is itself only a fraction of India's total number of TB patients. Many patients seek and receive treatment in the private sector. But the number reaching the government drops at each point in the cascade of care – from diagnosis to treatment to completing treatment.

[...] While 1.9 million approach government clinics for treatment, only 1.6 million are diagnosed with TB. The current diagnostic protocols for patients who are sputum negative are long and elaborate and miss an estimated 300,000 patients, [...]

*Various are the reasons for this state of affairs, and it is certainly not up to MAITRI to come up with analyses and let alone solutions. Our aim has always been much less ambitious – reach out to some of the less privileged, more vulnerable persons affected by TB in Gaya District and help them in the process of getting treatment from the government health services and, in more serious cases, offer monthly rations and even hospitalization at MAITRI.*

*Being however aware of the mounting needs and the trust that our reputation gives to many people, we have approached the government services to reestablish a closer collaboration that would enable us to be more effective in our activities. To achieve that, though, a chasm of mistrust created by our ongoing dispute has to be bridged over. Good intentions and perseverance may help us this time too.*

**2016**

1. Departing from MAITRI for awareness drive on World TB Day, March 24, 2016

2. Paner School students in a procession on World TB Day, March 24, 2016

3. Young patients at MAITRI hospital

4. Follow-up in the field of under treatment TB patient

5. Distribution of food rations to poor under treatment TB patients

**2017**

1. Awareness drive in Gaya District on World TB Day, March 24, 2017

2. Procession from Fulchar School on World TB Day

3. Distribution of supplements along with food rations to running TB patients

4. Sputum collection at MAITRI OPD

of blankets, winter 2016-17

# Sumitra's Story - About Suffering and Hope

by Arun Kumar

Among MAITRI's various projects there is a tuberculosis project since 1995, which is very important and effective for patients affected by TB, who are poor and landless and without proper nutrition, living in unhygienic conditions. I have seen this type of TB patients, feverish and coughing, so many times at the government hospitals, where they are treated poorly and even ignored. I always feel very bad about this behaviour towards TB patients and then I understand why my Director always tells us that patients need to be helped, treated with respect, because they have emotions and feelings like us.

We collect sputum from those patients who live in hard-to-reach villages with no transportation facilities or communication, we drop the samples to the government labs, and if the report is positive, we arrange for them to receive DOTS treatment. To the poorer patients MAITRI provides food and supplements and, if some patients' family cannot take care of them, MAITRI admits them to our hospital where they receive regular, nutritious meals plus eggs, milk, protein powder, multi-vitamin caps, liver tonic along with the TB treatment until their sputum is negative.

On 8.7.17 I was taking sputum samples I had collected to the government lab and stopped at a market to eat something. There I saw the restaurant owner yelling angrily at a lady worker, who looked ill, for being late at work, and she was weeping silently. Suddenly, I remembered the words of our Director regarding helping this type of people, so I asked her about herself and she said her name was Sumitra and her story has touched my heart.

Her home was in Mohanpur Block's village Akola, which is so far from district

towns and is surrounded by forest. Her parents are very poor and landless, and in 2006 she went with them to the State of Rajasthan to work in a brick kiln. Over there she met a young man named Prahlad, who was also working there, and they fell in love. They decided to marry without her parents' permission, as they were not happy about this.

After 1.5 years Sumitra had a son and came with her husband and son to visit her parents, who with her brothers did not allow them even to enter the village. They returned to Rajasthan and after some more time she had two daughters. She was happy, but a few years later her husband got ill. Initially they did not understand it was TB and finally he died in December, 2016. Sumitra was left alone with her children, so she returned to her parents, but they showed no love or mercy for her and the children and she decided to move to Itwa, a small market place at 27 kms from there, to work for the survival of her children, named Bheem, 10, Rakhi, 7, and Ragini, 4. She took a small room on rent and started working as a cleaner and washing pots in a restaurant. After 3 months she started suffering from cough and fever and took some pills but had no relief.

At that point I told her she had the symptoms of TB and she accepted to go with me

to the government hospital. Because she was with MAITRI staff, the doctor willingly checked her up and, after the positive sputum report, her treatment was started on 11.7.17. Sumitra was afraid to die like her husband and nobody would look after her children, but I told her she would be cured if she completed regular treatment.

I requested my Director to provide her with food and supplements, liver tonic, multivitamin caps, protein powder until



Sumitra and her children

completion of the treatment, so now she is happy and her health is improving very much. When I see her, I feel at peace in my heart and really think that thanks to this type of service, I am getting good *karma* for my next rebirth. I am very grateful to MAITRI for saving the life of so many TB patients who were going to die due to this dangerous disease and poverty.

*I thought that Sumitra's story could acquire a wider meaning in the backdrop of the situation as described in the article below though related to another part of the country.*

The Times of India, Oct. 2, 2016

Excerpts from

## 'Mumbaikar spends 2 yrs of income to get rid of TB'

Some forms of tuberculosis are so expensive to treat that an average Mumbai family could spend over half its annual income on a single patient.

[...] The TB bacillus has evolved in the last decade to render many anti-TB medicines ineffective; higher antibiotics that are expensive are now needed to treat the drug-resistant forms of TB.

Dr Zarir Udawadia, the study's main

author who jolted Indian health officials in 2011 by reporting the presence of totally drug-resistant TB cases in Mumbai, calculated that [...] it was on drugs that patients spent the most [...] "Many took loans. Some sold jewellery and property to fund their medication. TB is a disease of poverty but also causes poverty," Udwa-disa told Times of India.

Another chunk of the expenses come

from hospitalization, doctors' fees, taxis, blood tests and nutritional supplements needed to balance the side effects of TB medication. [...]

[...] Dr Udawadia's study clearly shows that TB causes poverty and we know poverty also in turn leads to more TB. If India is serious about development, it must get serious about providing free quality TB services.

# MAITRI's Daily Life

by AF

Visitors, who mostly come in the afternoon-evening, a're struck by the quiet of the place except for the cacophony of dogs "welcoming" the intruders. Some people are amused, some others are scared, in any case the impression is the same – MAITRI's life turns around dogs. If they have the time or the willingness to tour the place, they see the presence of human patients, but still they

leave with a limited view of our life and work and particularly of the people working and collaborating to make things happen.

I thought that images could do better than so many words to illustrate the various aspects of MAITRI's daily life and its interpreters, as echoed in volunteer Valentina Lo Presti's emotional article [see page 9] about her experience at MAITRI.



1. Preparing breakfast; 2. Collecting wood for the kitchen; 3. Feeding MAITRI goats; 4. Cleaning up the grounds; 5-6. Preparing the main meal for MAITRI dogs; 7. Ulcer dressing in the leprosy wards; 8. Milk time for the TB patients at MAITRI hospital; 9. Leprosy patients playing games; 10. Watering plants; 11. Preparing dinner for inpatients and making chapattis for animals; 12. MAITRI dogs' lunch; 13. Cleaning up the buildings;



1. Mother and child care clinic at MAITRI OPD on Saturdays; 2. Suspect case being checked up; 3. Suspect TB cases waiting for medical check-up; 4. Checking sputum samples; 5. Taking diseased MAITRI animals to burial; 6. Distribution of blankets during winter; 7. Surgery at MAITRI animal clinic; 8. Loading sterilized dogs to be released to their areas; 9. New Year picnic at MAITRI; 10. Unloading of food provisions for the hospital; 11. Snake charmers collecting poisonous snakes; 12. Distribution of food to TB patients

# Our Volunteers

In 2015-16 we were blessed with 5 volunteers, where-as 2017 has been dry so far. Here are some brief recounts in chronological order. **Mrs Valentina Lo Presti's** will be found in the next page.

On Feb 17, 2011 **Jill Amery** asked MAITRI to keep two puppies, Momo and Ellie, rescued and cared for by her and her husband Dale during their stay in Bodh-



Jill and Ellie

gaya. Since then they have unerringly sent their contributions and Jill in 2015 (Nov. 21-Dec. 11) and 2016 (Nov. 7-25) spent her time at MAITRI taking care of the dogs. Here are her thoughts on her experience.

*My MAITRI experience evolved over a few years from the day I took two tiny puppies to this large fenced complex for medical attention. I decided to return.*

*If I could sum up my experience at that time, I'd use the word 'need'. I had a need to see 'my' baby girl Ellie (Momo had died) again. When I arrived, I had a strong need to help. I was only there four short weeks, but felt compelled to help as much as possible; whether it was the animals or people MAITRI care for. And MAITRI, like any charity, needs support.*

*Over several years, I only have a few weeks' experience of MAITRI. I have found each of them difficult as... a female, a person travelling alone, a foreigner, a non-conformist from an Indian perspective (ie no children, short hair, no makeup or jewellery, etc) and a person who has lived a predominantly privileged first world life adapting to this poor part of the world. Once I put all of this aside, I was able to sit in the dust and dirt with a dog to detick, give him comfort and love, to show that someone valued him. Bathe him to rid him of fleas, apply aloe gel if he had skin problems. I had learnt a basic massage course in preparation for my second visit and very quickly, I had a morning queue of dogs waiting for my practice to ease their aches and pains. I also had my entourage. Wherever I went, they went. At times, I had to tie one or more to a tree to allow me to work on another dog. Their own needs could be very demanding.*

*Although the work I did at MAITRI was very basic, it has been some of the most important of my life. It has challenged and changed me and I continue to be in awe of Director Ferranti and the incredible strength of character she has to continue her work as a non-conformist, foreign, lone, female who could be living a life of relative privilege and ease in the west.*

*I can't wait to come back to the dirt and flowers, the fleas and love of MAITRI.*

**Daniel Mier**, nephew of Ven. Roger Kunsang, Rinpoche's secretary and FPMT CEO, came to MAITRI on Dec. 15, 2015. He was a 24 year old Australian gifted with various skills, the most important to us being painting, in the artistic way. In fact he repainted completely our stupas which at that time were in a sorry state - in other words he was a god sent. Daniel however liked to use his hands in many other ways and did some landscaping by transplanting some of our cactuses to some more "empty" places and planting some flower plants he himself bought. He also helped a lot with the dogs, whom he liked very much, and participated in the distribution of blankets during the winter. and particularly enjoyed very much giving out chocolates to the staff's children on our New Year picnic.



Daniel painting our stupas

Daniel got himself a beautiful cycle and would take off daily to burn his extra young energy. He endeared himself to the staff, as he drew some portraits of them, and on April 13; 2016 he finally left to go and further explore India.

Australian old Dharma friend and



Daniel shampooing Leslie

supporter, **Phil Hunt**, writes of his brief experience (Jan. 30-Feb.14; 2016)

*Due to fog my flight was delayed but I still managed to make it to MAITRI for World Leprosy Day and was able to join the team on its full day program of events. Being with the paramedical workers as they travel to varying parts of the district and meeting the communities helped by MAITRI first hand is always special. World Leprosy Day is an opportunity of raising awareness about leprosy and the importance of early detection and treatment. It was also an opportunity to put some video and photos together to promote MAITRI's work, which is usually the last thing on everyone's minds as staff deal with the overwhelming nature of Bihar's health and social situations.*

*So many programs, so many people and animals being helped, so much to do! I always feel inadequate but always leave feeling privileged to have made even the smallest contribution.*



Phil (right) and Gabriel on World Leprosy Day 2016

After volunteering at Root Institute in the winter season 2015-16 former Root Institute director and old time friend, Dutch **Gabriel Forrer**, generously offered to stay on site during my month-long absence.

*I offered to volunteer for two months in April-May at MAITRI as Adriana was attending to her mother in Italy. It was my responsibility to make sure the staff working at the compound were doing a good job. It just happened that unexpectedly there was a sudden heat wave and the temperature went up to 48C for several weeks. In this weather condition I was amazed to see the performance of the staff. The dogs were looked after properly, washed and cleaned every second week, maintenance work continued as usual and regardless of the extreme weather everybody seemed to be happy. MAITRI has several projects.*

*The compound is very serene and located away from the buzz of Bodhgaya. So at night you have a perfect view of all the stars and unless there is a marriage party nearby it is very quiet, just the sound of insects.*



# A Day at MAITRI

by Valentina Lo Presti, Volunteer

When I had the opportunity to take off from my job for a whole month, my first thought was that I would spend my summer vacations differently. Deep in my heart I felt the desire to do volunteering work in India and I set out to identify an organization where I could volunteer. A friend of mine told me about MAITRI and I was particularly struck by the fact that the person who runs the organization is a woman from my home town, Trieste. I had never heard of MAITRI before, so I searched in the website and then exchanged some emails with the director. But when I finally arrived at the Centre "a new world appeared to my eyes".

During my short stay I noticed that every week day at MAITRI is spent differently as the centre looks after a number of activities that make a 'typical' day hard to come by. I shall however try to explain what I meant by "a new world appeared to my eyes".

When a new day dawns, life starts buzzing at MAITRI. The staff from farther villages come by cycle or even motorcycle, the nearby ones come on foot. Each of them has a specific job to carry out within the organization. At the very start of the day there is great activity everywhere, even in the surrounding nature, and the Centre's guests are ready to go. The entire atmosphere of the place is imbued with trust and hope.

Some workers take care of the maintenance of the entire site – they are the invaluable electrician, the carpenter, the driver or the dedicated workers who make sure that all green areas are kept clean and in order.

MAITRI's site has a unique identity, as people affected by various types of ailments and diseases come to it, while various types of animals needing treatment are provided care and others are even rescued from a dreadful fate and hosted temporarily or permanently side by side with human patients. I did not expect to find in a country like India, beset by numberless problems, people keen to lovingly take care of animals. As such attitude is in fact in line

with my own sentiments, it has made me very happy. When you stroll in the garden, you meet dogs running around freely, horses and cows munching grass, while in some especially built spaces reside some other small friends: chicks, pigeons, parrots, rabbits.

Nestled between two buildings lies the kitchen with an extended large outside wood fireplace, where most of the courses are cooked. The persons entrusted with the extremely important task of feeding all hosts on campus carry out their tasks with great goodwill and dedication. I must say that during my weeks-long stay I have had excellent meals. They are based on the Indian cuisine and tradition, are varied and balanced with special attention to nutritional therapy, which is of basic



Photo taken on Independence Day, August 15, 2016  
importance in the prevention and treatment of diseases affecting this part of the world. The same care is applied to the preparation of meals for animal friends.

Another group of people of utmost importance in the organization are the field workers. Every day of their weeks is different and some days are spent at the Centre where they run clinics under the guidance of Dr Verma and take care of the distribution of medicines and food. Most days their work is in the field, where they go from village to village and contact the poorer rural population to provide information about MAITRI's activities and thus enable those who need medical help to use the health assistance provided by MAITRI..

Of particular importance are the mobile clinics, set up by the doctor and the field

workers in areas of Bodhgaya and two other provinces, as they are mainly dedicated to the care of pregnant women and children who live too far away from the Centre enabling them to get proper assistance. Both at the clinics at MAITRI and in the mobile ones some food products are also distributed. The rest of the day is dedicated to the assistance and care of leprosy and TB patients who are hospitalized at MAITRI hospital.

At the clinics, amid the crowd of persons I was always struck by the calm I saw in their eyes and the patience in their demeanour while they asked for the services offered or waited for the medical check-up. Particularly striking was the trusting look in the eyes of extremely young mothers with their quiet babies in their arms while queuing

for hours in the scorching sun for a pack of milk or cereal powder. I could detect a desire to improve their lot, their hard lives, especially so in women affected by MAITRI's awareness programme which is integral part of its work.

Such an organization requires a sound administrative foundation, thus in the office the staff and the director carry out the task of providing for all of the centre's requirements besides squaring the accounts.

MAITRI's work never stops - from sunset to a new dawn there are persons watching over the entire structure and enabling us to sleep safe and sound.

All I have described above is organized and supervised by the director who has dozens of years' experience in this field and, sustained by a profound faith, succeeds in ensuring the smooth running of all services. I am very happy I have had the opportunity to meet her on my path!

The overall atmosphere at MAITRI is one of respect towards others whatever their species which shows an overall sentiment of love.

THANK YOU, MAITRI, FOR BEING AMONG US ♥☐

# The Year of Personal Losses - Remembering Friends and Collaborators

As years go by, we are bound to witness the passing away of people, some closer than others, but generally this experience does not occur with such frequency within the span of one year. Unfortunately in the past 12 months I have lost my mother and a number of persons who have had an important part in my life and in my heart. My mom I shall write about separately, and here I shall commemorate in chronological order the demise of five persons – two FPMT friends and two local close collaborators, and in between an old high school class mate.

The first is **Thubten Kunsang**, the “Tahitian” Buddhist monk with the impossible French accent and the big, kind



*Rinpoche and Kunsang*

heart, who was totally dedicated to Rinpoche. I met him first at Tushita Delhi guest house in 1993 as he was hurriedly passing through from presumably France to Dharamsala. He was very friendly, perhaps a tad overenthusiastic, and I forgot about him. I met him again, now an ordained monk, at Root Institute in 1997, where he had been assigned as the Spiritual Coordinator. He would always greet me with big smiles and kind words and in January 1998 he came looking for me to announce that His Holiness had accepted to come and visit MAITRI on Rinpoche's request. I was absolutely stunned, but energized by his incredible enthusiasm and promise of help – there goes the “overenthusiastic” label I had given him! It was his generous heart. He even made a generous donation to

MAITRI on behalf of his family..

In 2000 I spent a day in Paris and Kunsang, then Spiritual Coordinator of the Kalachakra Centre, welcomed me with great warmth and gave me his room for the night. In the evening we walked all the way to the Seine, took a tour by boat, and finally had dinner in a bistro. It was like being with a lifelong friend. The next day, on parting he gave me a *tsa-tsa* mould which we put to use one year later.

A few years later I met him again at Rinpoche's residence in Aptos, California, where he stayed “to serve Rinpoche in various special ventures around the world” (his mysterious words) and as the cameraman for Rinpoche's international tours. Thus we met again in Bodhgaya and the usual enthusiastic, generous Kunsang made me a copy of the recording and photos of Rinpoche's visit to MAITRI. The last time was in 2015. Months later we came to know that he had pancreatic cancer at a rather advanced stage. He followed some courses of treatment, all along communicating with friends all over the world, including myself a couple of times, always reassuring that he was well. He posted photos of himself, his big luminous smile always there, even right before the end.

So long, unforgettable Kunsang.

**Xavi Alongina** and I never really got in close contact until September, 2011 when I requested him to arrange for the translation of our World Leprosy Day brochure into Spanish. He promptly accepted and collaborator Aurora would kindly take up the task every year.

In late 2012 Xavi contacted me regarding the coming Buddhist tour of his group with a visit to MAITRI and they arrived on Jan. 1 as veritable belated SaClauses nta with



*Xavi Alongina with MAITRI director*

bags full of gifts. As I went to greet them, Xavi stepped forward and declared: “I am a friend of MAITRI!” I was really moved and grateful for the sincerity in his voice. He asked me to illustrate MAITRI's work and translated it all into Spanish. In the end they made a very generous donation and rushed out.

In our exchange of emails I came to know that he had been fighting stomach cancer, but kept a positive attitude about it and did not allow it to curb his life. When he came to visit us again a couple of years later with another group Xavi looked his usual handsome self, calm, assured, and determined to put together a video of MAITRI. He was very much the leader of the group. It was the last time we met. Months later I wrote to him and he told me that the cancer had returned and he was under treatment. Earlier this year, when I contacted him again wondering how he was doing, I got no reply. To my shock I later read in the FPMT News that Xavi had passed away.

Veritably eclectic, Xavi personally touched the lives of scores of people who will miss him greatly, and by his contribution to the spreading of Dharma in all Spanish speaking countries with unshaken loyalty to Lama Yeshe's legacy, Xavi affected the lives of hundreds of thousand.

In October 2016 I came to know from my high school friend Betty that some time earlier **Giampiero Peccelli**, with whom we had gone through all five years of high school, had been diagnosed with MSA (Multiple-Systems Atrophy) and, when



*Giampiero in his professional life*

finally his condition had taken a very serious turn, he had been admitted to a long-term care facility where he was slowly declining. Later we learnt that he soon was taken to hospice care and had finally passed away on May 19, 2017, one day after his 75th birthday.

After graduating from high school, our lives diverged to the point that we barely met again ever since. Occasionally I came to know from other former coeds that he had finally realized his cherished dream of living in the USA and had become a

successful researcher. Over 20 years ago I was told by our high school Latin professor that Giampiero had expressed interest in my work and would have liked to hear about it personally from me. However our visits to our home town never coincided and the only image of him I have in my mind is that of Pecelli of old times..

So why do I have this sense of loss? Because the disease that killed him was degenerative and irreversible in nature like the one that affected my mother. Their diseases were different, their lives poles apart, their intellectual choices so dissimilar, but the progressive devastation of the person to be powerlessly watched was similar – so painful to see for any loving family member. For Giampiero the progress was rather fast, making it more difficult for him and his family to adjust to the inevitable end.

I grieve for the loss of the brilliant mind but rejoice for the accomplished life he lived both in the scientific and in the personal fields. He can be remembered with a smile and a warm heart. What more can one wish for?

**Fulia Devi** came to MAITRI about 15 years ago to work as a “sweeper” in the



*Fulia in my residence*

campus and a few years later entered my residence to do the cleaning, wash clothes, take care of the dogs around and in the house.

Widowed with two children when still a young woman, Fulia was wiry, seasoned by many years of very hard labour in collieries in then East Bihar, while raising her children single-handedly. Being originally from Gaya District, after marrying off her children she settled in Mastipur Village, Bodhgaya Town, with her brother. In her mid forties she came to know about MAITRI from a young relative who was already working with us. Fulia was not beautiful, but her features were always lit up by her easy smile and her



*Fulia as a midwife*

simple ways helped her get through a place full of males and a bossy female director. She was unobtrusive and very mindful, constantly taking care of something or the other, unquestioningly responding to sudden needs. She loved doing massage and, when I agreed to get one, she proved to be extremely skilled with untiring powerful hands. When I offered her services to some visitors, they were very pleased and praised her warmly.

Fulia's life was all about working at MAITRI and helping her children financially. She loved going every night to the Mahabodhi Temple with the driver and do light offerings for MAITRI. However, as we came to know when her health started deteriorating three years ago, she used to drink a full glass of strong booze every night before going to bed. I intervened, made her stop for a while, had her treated and she recovered a couple of times, but she would not give it up completely. Finally in mid April of this year Fulia stopped coming to work and in early May we had her checked up at a clinic in Gaya. The doctor said there was something serious in her intestine and she should be referred to Patna. While I was making arrangements to take her to a major Patna private hospital, Fulia left for another town to stay with her sister. We were told she was being treated over there.

On June 2 her niece rang us up to inform us that Fulia had passed away at 7 am; being very ill, she had come home two

days earlier. I rushed to her home and found her ready to be carried to the cremation site. She was wearing the shawl I had given her a year earlier and she liked so much. I offered a contribution to her brother towards her cremation and the pujas to be done afterwards and left in tears.

Every day I see and hear Fulia in the house and miss her unhurried yet steady walk, her not minding the frequent soiling of paralysed dogs in the house and her giggling while cleaning after them, her patiently feeding them when very sick, shedding sincere tears at their death, her ironing my clothes with dogged determination after refusing the difficult job for years, her unavoidable offer to do massage whenever I was not well against the foregone conclusion that I would refuse....

Everybody liked Fulia including all the animals at MAITRI. Fulia, an obscure and yet very precious human being. Thank you for entering our lives.

When in August 1987 I came to Bodhgaya to set up a leprosy eradication programme requiring an authorization by the state government, **Dr Suresh Prasad** was the Medical Officer In Charge of Bodhgaya PHC (Primary Health Centre) and immediately pledged his full support. Two years later the authorization was obtained and Dr Suresh was a guest of honour at the inauguration of our first clinic at Cherki Village. As further support he rented me out the front part of his newly built house in a residential colony in Gaya, where I stayed from February 1990 to end August 1998. All those years our connection suffered both because of his long absences from home for his service and the per se difficult landlord-tenant relationship. When I finally moved to MAITRI campus, there was relief from both sides.

But *karma* is inscrutable and sometime after his retirement Dr Suresh signalled that he was willing to take up the medical consultancy of our clinics for TB and mother and child care. Thus in 2000 a close collaboration started with periodical ups and downs, which were however ironed out by the mutual respect based for me on Dr Suresh's remarkable and unsurpassed medical knowledge and open-mindedness and for him for the selfless service unstintingly provided by MAITRI. He did not shy away from giving advice or even doing some surgery on animals, as he



*Our last New Year picnic together*

himself had always had a pet dog or two. Our personal relationship seemed to become closer, deepened by the chats we used to have before every clinic and by his family's participation in some of MAITRI's events. About 14 years ago his eldest son, Somesh alias Babloo, took up the educational consultancy for our village schools and two years later his youngest son, Sunish alias Dabloo, came to work full time in the administration at MAITRI till 2008.

The sudden break-up occurred in October 2014, as Dr Suresh opted for a new organization. The competitive nature of their activities made it impossible for the relationship to continue, but when he fell gravely ill last year, I went to visit him on Deepawali. A few months later I came to know from Somesh that his father had improved and at some point he had resumed work.

Life is unpredictable and fate can strike at any time. Late last year son Sunish, who in the intervening years had got married



Dr Suresh at MAITRI Mother and Child Care clinic and had fathered a child, was diagnosed with liver sarcoma. Somesh, who had thoroughly taken care of his father, valiantly took up also the fight against his beloved brother's disease, but sadly Dabloo passed

away on July 27. I understood from Somesh that Dr Suresh had taken all this very badly – on top of everything on August 7 their beloved pet Johnny had accidentally jumped off the roof and was taken to MAITRI for burial. Dr Suresh lost the will to live and on August 29 he passed away at 7 am at Gaya AIIMS Hospital. In the evening I went to their home to pay homage to him and offer condolences to the family I had known for 30 years. I had lived in those rooms for 8½ years and participated to various celebrations including Dr Suresh's and my birthdays. Now he lay there in peace, sorely missed by a great number of people, as he was very popular particularly in Bodhgaya, where he had his personal clinic for decades and had attended to dozens of Buddhist monks, besides thousands of MAITRI's patients. .

## Support MAITRI's Work for Its Steadfast Service to the Suffering

*Two years without news may have caused several persons among those who regularly receive our literature to wonder about the progress of our activities, although we did manage to send New Year wishing cards along with the World Leprosy Day leaflet. As we have striven to do in this issue, we hope that words and particularly images will convey the efforts put in by all workers to keep MAITRI going.*

*We are no heroes, we know that many are the persons in this world and specifically in the FPMT who have been dedicating their lives to serving others, everybody to the best of their abilities and means. We hope to be included in this crowded slot of humanity and be regarded as contributing towards relieving some of the pain and the suffering that pervades existence on this Earth, we too to the best of our abilities and means.*

*We are all interconnected, none of us can exist on their own, so do join in our efforts and contribute as you can, so that our work can continue for a long time to come, beyond individual commitments and life spans .:*

**Donations from India** (1) can be sent directly to

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Portland, Oregon 97214-4702  
U.S.A.

Tel. no. (1) 503-808 1588

Fax no. (1) 503-232 0557

E-mail [info@fpmt.org](mailto:info@fpmt.org)

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Dr. Elisabetta Vivoda

Tel. no. (39) 3405547858

E-mail [amicidimaitri@gmail.com](mailto:amicidimaitri@gmail.com)

Website [www.amicidimaitri.org](http://www.amicidimaitri.org)

For further information please contact

Adriana Ferranti

Director

### MAITRI Leprosy Prevention, Treatment & Rehabilitation Centre

Dhandhwa, Bodhgaya  
Gaya Distt, Bihar 824 231  
India

Tel. +Fax no. (91) 631-2200841

E-mail : [ferranti@vsnl.com](mailto:ferranti@vsnl.com)

[director@maitri-bodhgaya.org](mailto:director@maitri-bodhgaya.org)

Website [www.maitri-bohgaya.org](http://www.maitri-bohgaya.org)

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