

The sun peeked from behind the mountains to salute our beloved Hanumanji, the ideal sevak, as He stood guard at the entrance of Chinmaya Vibhooti. The still, crisp morning air came alive with the sound of the mantras chanted by children sitting around several homa kundas in front of the Chinmaya Maruti Mandir. It was a scene reminiscent of an ancient gurukula. The first balvihar camp at Chinmaya Vibhooti was in session, with the children performing Gayatri Havan.

Puja Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda's life mission was to transform the lives of people through Vedantic knowledge. His entire life was one great yajna to propagate the ancient knowledge of our scriptures and lead us to our true blissful nature. At Chinmaya Vibhooti, nestled in the embrace of the stately Sahyadri mountains, our beloved Guruji Swami Tejomayananda's dream unfolds - a dream of keeping Gurudev's vision glowing in the heart of all devotees. A humble tribute to the great Master unfolds day by day at this ashram, as Mother Earth joins hands with Mother Nature and hundreds of selfless devotees in this great yajna. Like a beautiful statue coming alive as it is carved out of a piece of stone by a great sculptor, the ashram slowly takes shape to become a live testimony to the Master's Glory, His Vibhooti.

Surya Bhagavan (Lord Sun) saluted Hanumanji first, when the murti was consecrated in December 2005. He continues to do so daily as the priest chants the sacred mantras in the morning, while the stars come out to pay their homage in harmony with the temple bell chiming at the evening arati. The clouds stoop down low as though saluting Hanumanji and Pujya Gurudev, proclaiming His glory in their own silent way.

The Sahyadri mountains, standing tall and majestic, covered with lush green vegetation after four months of the rainy season, protect the landscaped ashram from all sides. Mount Kailas, as visitors call it, at the North end of the ashram ensures the auspicious presence of Lord Shiva, while Tikona and Tunga forts stand a little distance away, inviting eager trekkers and Chyks of all ages.

In 2007, during the rainy season, when the Swaranjali group was in session, these mountains wore a beautiful green velvet garment, while the gusty winds hollered, and the rain rap-tapped as though wanting to get in on the action. As the season changed, colorful butterflies and dragonflies buzzed around, and birds twittered and chirped basking in the bright warm sunlight, speaking to each other in their own language, singing the Master's Glory. They were visibly happy that our beloved Guruji chose this place to pay tribute to our Pujya Gurudev, so they could be part of this auspicious vision in their own small way. The colorful hibiscus flowers and white lilies danced to a common rhythm, orchestrated by none other than Pavan Devata (Wind God) himself in his own unique style. The lemon grass stalks waved their hands, spreading their gentle fragrance as they waited to serve the ashram devotees for their morning tea.

## **THE FACILITIES**

The red rooftops of Anashree (the dining hall) stand out against the ochre coloured sides, looming bright and tall in front of the Vichar Vatica (Garden of Contemplation),

ever ready to serve one and all during meal times. The mammoth dining hall, which can seat more than 750 people at a time, is a model of efficient design. All hot water in the kitchen (and the residential complex) is heated by solar panels. Vegetables are precooked in large steamers before being transferred to separate vats, where the spices and other ingredients are added. The gigantic idli maker can produce 240 idlis in 8 minutes, while the chapatti assembly line can manufacture rotis at a speed that even the most efficient Indian mother would struggle to match.

The first four residential blocks that Guruji named Anjani, Kaushalya, Sumitra, and Yashoda, each with their unique pastel color, surround the Vastal Vatika, proudly proclaiming the presence of the great ladies of Bharat whose names they share. The donar's cottages and the remaining residential blocks, still in the process of completion, eagerly wait to join the rest in doing their bit of seva.

Each 450 sq.ft. residential unit can house up to five people and includes attached shower and bathroom. The washbasin, dressing cubicle, bathroom and shower are separate for convenience. Adjoining units can be connected to provide twin-sharing facilities. Each residential block has a central atrium. The rooms are well lit, and comfortable, with ample storage space.

The 700sq.ft. cottages (kutyas) are fully furnished, self-contained residences that include a living room, bedroom, bathroom, pantry, and storeroom. Clusters of four cottages share a common courtyard. The cottages are ideal for devotees planning long-term residence in Vibhooti.

The entire complex is environment friendly, with arrangements for the biological processing of the sewage water, allowing 100% recycling, and zero water discharge outside the perimeter. Solar heating of water is already implemented. Equipment for the solar water recycling is being set up and this technology will be implemented in a few months' time.

The Vatavriksha (banyan tree) in front of Chinaya Swagatam, the administrative building of Chinmaya Vibhooti, welcomes all. Chinmaya Swagatam came alive when Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda and Pujya Swami Bramhananda addressed a large crowd of devotees in the North Block after the Kalasa Puja on Hanuman Jayanti day in April 2007. The South Block serves as the administrative wing, where the devotees and staff start their day with humble salutations of gratitude to the Master. Chinmaya Swagatam will also hold a large bookstore and a shop where snacks, toiletries, and essential items are available.

### SPECIAL FEATURES

As the road curves from the entrance of the ashram around Chinmaya Swagatam, one cannot help but notice the unique structure still under construction, consisting of seven truncated pyramids and interconnecting spaces bracketed by the prayer dome at one end and the pradakshina dome at the other. Chinmaya Jeevan Darshan is the highlight of the ashram where devotees and other visitors can have a multilayered experience of Pujya

Gurudev's life and teaching through giant frescos, statues, artifacts, and interactive media. We often stand in awe watching this structure with its enormous blocks come to life. Once completed, one can visualise the visiting devotees transported into a different realm while chanting the 108 names of Pujya Gurudev in the prayer dome, several others experiencing the magnitude of the Master's work, and finally bowing down to pay their homage to Gurudev in the pradakshina dome while circumambulating the 108 jyotis (lights).

It was a memorable moment when Pujya Guruji, during one of his visits, inaugurated the Pavan Vahan - the electric golf cart that would ply around the ashram for the convenience of the devotees. The devotees cheered and laughed with glee, as Guruji broke a coconut in front of the cute little vehicle and sanctified it with an Om. The Pavan Vahan glided out of the porch of Chinmaya Swagatam, commandeered by none other than our beloved Guruji, on its maiden trip to Annashree. The Pavan Vahan true to its name, now plies dutifully to and fro on the asphalt spinal road and by-lanes of the 70-acre ashram, ensuring an enjoyable trip while helping sevaks with their duties.

Swami Sadan, the residence of the head of Chinmaya Mission, had a class of its own. The kutia, fashioned in the traditional Indian style with a central courtyard, is surrounded by stone clad pillars to present an interesting elevation. The staff quarters, Ramdas and Krishnadas, are already bustling with the activity of its inmates. The curving road continues past the donar's cottages and the residential blocks under construction to the top of the hill, where Pranav Ganesh, the main deity at Vibhooti, will take up residence in the near future. When complete, Vibhooti will also be home to a Convention Center, an open-air theatre, Chinmaya Nada Bindu (school of music), and Guruji's brainchild, the Enlightenment Park.

Every morning the sun rises from behind the stately mountains to pay his homage to the Ramadoot mandir. It is a rare sight indeed to watch his rays fall directly on Hanumanji's face, as it glows brightly, and the two together humbly prostrate to the lord of the Universe. The still morning air resounds with the priest's chanting and the chiming of the temple bell during the morning arati. The ashram comes alive with the hustle and bustle of the construction workers slowly manifesting the Master's Glory. An occasional group of visitors walk around in awe and administration, as the sevaks joyfully go through the day's duties. The aroma of simple sattvic food wafts through the air at meal times, and the housekeeping staff quietly goes around keeping the premises clean and tidy. As the sun slowly sets behind the mountains to the West at dusk, the stars come out, the clouds bend low almost touching Mother Earth, and the temple bell rings to the rhythm of the evening arati after the chanting of Hanuman Chalisa and Maruti Stotra. The construction workers return to the workers' colony up the hill and the ashram inmates retire peacefully, their hearts filled with Gurudev's Glory, happy to be part of His great yajna.