

Siddhabari – Pujya Gurudev’s Heavenly Abode

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So, when are we going to Siddhabari? My son Nikhil asked me last year. I knew we had talked about a father son trip to India that included Siddhabari but I had not made up my mind on the dates. My son is finishing second year of college and had been attending Chinmaya Mission since second grade. I felt it was time to take this trip and have the opportunity of the pilgrimage to Siddhabari. We were fortunate to be able to adjust our trip so that we could be in Siddhabari at the same time as Swami Dheerananda.

A typical January cold weather with snow clad mountains added to the beauty of the clear skies. In my imagination, it looked like someone actually took a pencil and drew the mountains in the clear blue sky. The clouds covered the mountains periodically but in general clear sunny skies greeted us.



The ashram itself is in a quiet Kangra valley, right at the foothills of the Dauladhar Mountains. It is said that, this place has been home to many sages including Kapila Muni. Gurudev found this location an academy of knowledge for training the new *Brahmacharis* and named it after Rishi Sandeepany, the guru of Lord Krishna here at Siddhabari.

Gurudev also had a vision of building a temple to Lord Rama for the people of Kangra valley but strong winds was always a barrier. The local folks believed that the strong wind would not allow any plantation to grow and that people would be discouraged to come to worship at this temple. Gurudev’s suggestion to appease the Wind God was to install **Pavanputra Hanuman** here. So in this peaceful setting of Sandeepany is a gigantic twenty-two foot high statue of Hanuman on a base of eight sides. (See picture with Swamiji and Nikhil). This idol construction began in 1979 and was consecrated in 1982. Veera Bajranga Bali stands tall under the milky sky, open to the embrace of his father, *Vayu* the Wind God. As we all know, he symbolizes strength, courage, fame and wisdom. Hanumanji also represents *Bhakti* (devotion), *Jnana* (knowledge) and *Vairagya* (dispassion).



Hanumanji gracefully looks at the **Rama temple** (see picture on left) in the midst of trees. The Rama temple is also unique; its construction started 1983 and was consecrated later that year. It is one of the very few temples dedicated to Vana Rama dressed

(*idols below on left*) as a sage during His fourteen years of exile. A magnificent *mandapam* of polished granite adorns the entrance of the temple. The *Shikara* of the temple is forty feet high and is in the shape of a crown with three kalasas.



Siddhabari is also the final resting place of our Gurudev. His Samadhi overlooks the Dauladhar Mountains. How fitting that the towering peaks of the Himalayan foothills (Dauladhar) in the backdrop of the Samadhi represent the greatness of the Creator and His Creation. Sri **Gurudev's samadhi** (*see picture below right*) stands as a Monument to this great soul that showed us the path to Him. As you may note from the picture it

is by divine coincidence that our own Chinmayam resembles the beautifully constructed Gurudev's *samadhi*. One of the *sevas* we wanted to do was a bhiksha for all the Swamis who honored us by their presence (*Swami Dheerananda, Swami Siddhananda and Swami Mahadavan, see picture below*) and all the 30 or so residents of the ashram. While in principle it would work, we were told the food is cooked on the premises. It was suggested that my son Nikhil perform the *paduka pooja*. The significance of *paduka pooja* can be



explained by the episode in Ramayana when Bhagwan Sri Ramachandra lovingly blessed his brother, Bharata, with his *Padukas*. These *Padukas*, reminded Bharata of Sri Rama's



ideals and symbolized His presence through the fourteen years of Sri Rama's exile. The *Padukas* thus helped Bharata to step into a life of fullness. What could be more enjoyable than to do this seva and what more appropriate place?. We can too, remember Pujya Gurudev in our vision through *Paduka Pooja*. The pooja started with *tilak* being applied to the Swamis and then Nikhil led a "procession" to Gurudev's Samadhi with everyone following and chanting the shlokas. At the Samadhi

we performed the *paduka pooja*. We had the company of many visitors including Vasanthi Athavale, our bhajan teacher from Washington.



Gurudev's hermitage (*kutia*), can be seen with the *linga* on top. We also had the opportunity to go inside the hermitage. The holiness of the place is maintained by the *sevaks*. The room where he meditated and his sitting room



where he blessed his devotees is still looks the same. In his meditation room where he blessed his devotees, one still feels that our guru has left many blessings for us. In his physical absence too, his presence is felt by every

devotee who kneels by his chair. (Picture: Nikhil taking blessings at his feet)

On the second day we visited **Chinmaya Seva Centre** which Gurudev launched in 1992 as an example of Vedanta in action. The Chinmaya Seva Project is designed to help rural women lead a life of self-independence by training them in some skill that they could easily learn and make an income. The centre has training sessions for sewing, weaving and carpet making. The response from the villagers and the supporters has been



encouraging. Various types of dresses for men, women and children are sewn here. A recent show showed that 30-40% of them are earning Rs.1000 to Rs.1500 per month as tailors. Swami Dheerananda took this opportunity to order bags for our Bala Vihar children so that we can benefit this seva from the sales.

A variety of items of daily use like bath towels, bed sheets, woolen shawls, checked shirting, are being made and devotees who come to the camps extend their patronage. A few ladies, after completing their training, have looms in their houses and continue weaving shawls/sheets etc. Rehabilitation of women in need is the intention of continuing with this seva.

We returned to Delhi after a stay of two days. We had not traveled much while we were there but we accomplished many things spiritually and mentally. We saw the very heart of Gurudev's efforts in showing us the path to Him. There is a doha written by Saint Kabir which summarizes our trip to Siddhabari and it is appropriate to end my commentary with these two lines:

***Guru Gobind donon khade, Ka ke lagoon paayen,
Balihari Guru aapne, Jis Gobind diyo milaye.***

गुरु गोविन्द दोनो खड़े का के लागुँ पाँव

बलिहारी गुरु आपने जिस गोविन्द दियो मिलाए

As I look at my Guru and Govinda, I question myself who do I prostrate to first. And Saint Kabir says while both guru and gobind are worthy of worship my first salutations go to my Guru who showed me the path to reach the Lord .

Sri Gurubhyo Namah

Anil Kishore