

# AMMA'S Followers On A RAMPAGE

BY PREETI PUJA

**A**shwani Khurana has an ugly blue-purple bruise, just inches away from his spleen, on his side and back. His head, nose and lips are bruised. His eyes were saved simply because of the selfless act of friend Vikas Sardana who bravely became a human shield as blows from over 40 goons were rained on them aimed specially to kill his friend. Today, he is shattered both physically and emotionally. The welts and sores of *lathis* and rods mark his whole body. But what transpired on that day has shaken the peaceful South Delhi colony to the core and the scars will remain with them forever. All this violence just because the residents were on a clean-green drive in their colony!

Khurana, a resident of the Green Avenue colony, Vasant Kunj, says, "The ashram of Amma is in the adjoining colony. Over the last few years, residents of the Green Avenue are trying to transform the place into an eco-friendly haven by planting trees. To maintain a clean-green environment, the Resident Welfare Association (RWA) has taken a decision not to allow any unnecessary posters, banners, private boards or hoardings (religious or otherwise) to be placed on the walls or the nearby area. The only signage allowed is a Green Avenue direction board."

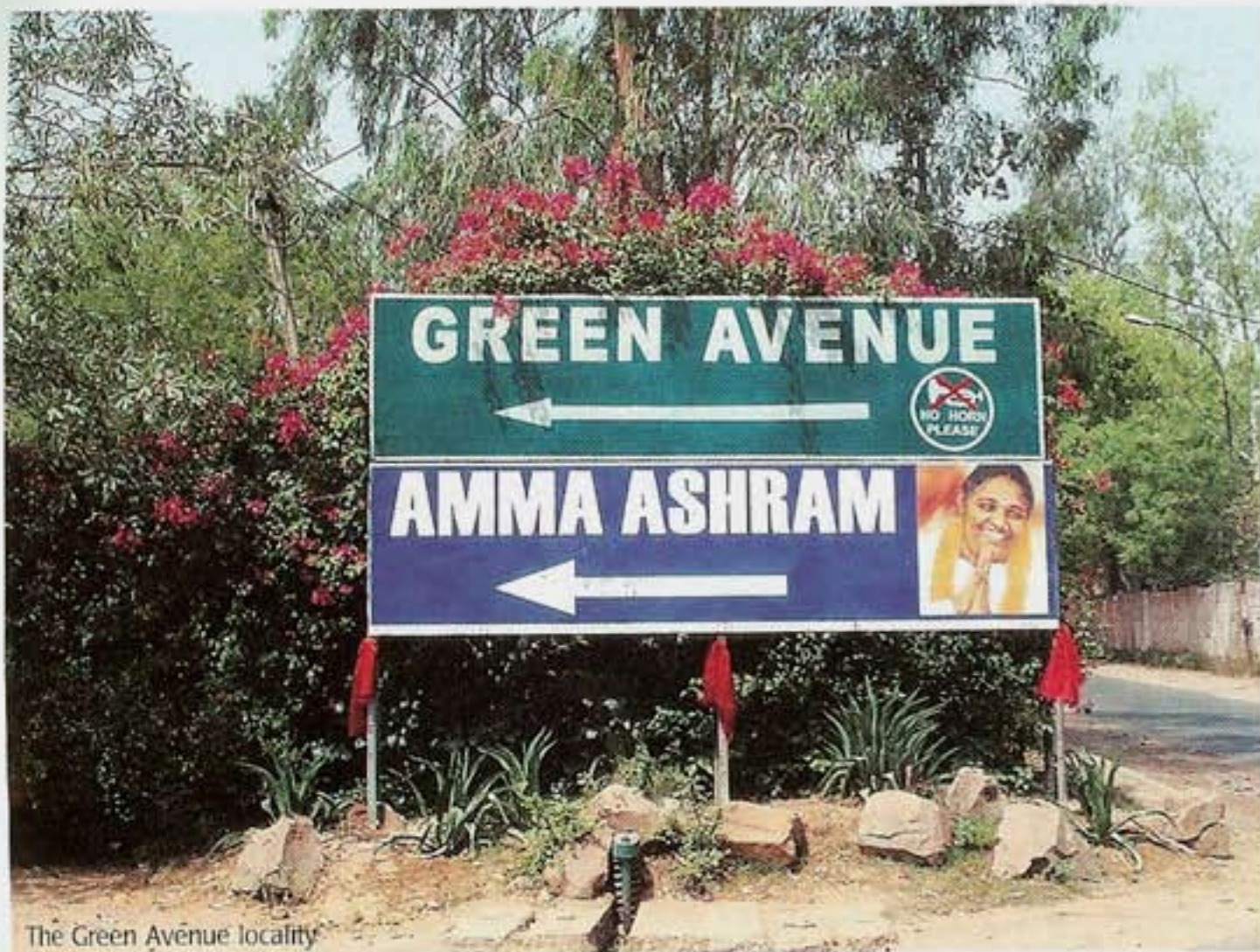
Mata Amritanandamai, more popularly known as Amma, is said to be an embodiment of peace, one who can comfort the hearts of thousands with her unconditional love and her popular hug. She has inspired many humanitarian activities around the world.

But from the incident that happened in New Delhi recently, it appears that she hasn't instilled the same teachings of love and compassion in her disciples.

Last month, followers of Amma at her Shanti Kunj ashram adjoining the posh Green Avenue residential area at Vasant Kunj were involved in an ugly clash and physical assault on the residents of Green Avenue.

Reason? The residents objected to the sudden mushrooming of the huge hoardings of Amma in and around the area.

*Society* investigates



**■** "A bus loaded with about 40-50 *goondas* armed with *lathis* and iron rods came out of the bus and attacked us. The goons snatched our mobile phones and a lady ashramite tore her clothes and threatened us that she'd tell the police we molested her."  
 —Ashwani Khurana, resident of Green Avenue

Talking about the ugly clash, he adds, "However, during Amma's recent visit to Delhi, ashram workers put up promotional boards in the adjoining colony. We kept quiet and co-operated with the ashram during the course of the visit. Later, however, residents asked the ashram people to remove the boards from the colony, but they refused to do so. As a result, a conflict started between the residents and the ashram workers."

Ashwani agitated by the goings-on continues, "I don't know why exactly they denied to remove the board and were hell bent upon creating an unnecessary mishap. After their refusal, we decided to approach the police of the Vasant Kunj area but they did not help us. Ironically, later, a police party visited the RWA President Romesh Bhandari and demanded permission on behalf of the ashram to restore the board on the same place. But Ramesh clarified that it was illegal and completely against the RWA's ethos to allow any private board to be put in the area."

In accordance with this decision, the governing body of the RWA then decided to remove the boards put up by the ashram. The boards were apparently anointed with fresh red *chunnies* and *sindoor* in a repulsive attempt at legitimacy. On the very next day, when the members of the RWA reached the spot to remove the hoardings, they found ashram workers waiting for their arrival.

When the staff refused to be bullied, they observed some ashram people making mobile phone calls and suddenly a bus loaded with armed people approached to attack them. Ashram goons along with some ladies viciously smashed the golf cart in which Ashwani and another member of the association, Vikas Sardana, had reached the spot and started beating up people. The association guards were told to run away and they were also bashed up with rods and *lathis*.

Recalls Ashwani with a shudder, "A bus loaded with about 40-50 *goondas* armed with *lathis* and iron rods came out of the bus and attacked us. The crowd was led by Gopal and a lady in-charge of the *Rasamritan Chetanya* ashram. The goons snatched our mobile phones and a lady ashramite tore her clothes and threatened us that she'd tell the police we molested her. Vikas Sardana, Munazir and the security guard of the colony too suffered major injuries. The hooligans started shouting, 'we will kill the bald man' and charged vengefully screaming at Sardana to get out of the way."

The police was informed about the incident but they refused to file a complaint against the ashramites. According to the Station House Officer of the Vasant Kunj area, "The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has to deal with this issue. We have already forwarded the complaint papers to the MCD commissioner and now they will have to resolve it. Apart from this, we are shortly going to call a meeting with the

The injured residents of Green Avenue



Assistant Commissioner of Police where we will try to solve the matter between the two parties."

However, according to association members, "How can we let go of an issue like this? We need an unconditional written apology from the ashram that such kind of hooliganism shall not recur and they must apologise for whatever they have done."

Surrounded by allegations of the worst kind, ashram workers claim there's no reason to cry hoarse. They are quiet and don't want to comment on this matter. "We have no idea about the incident. The day the confrontation happened, we were not there. Apart from this, loads of devotees come to the ashram usually and it's really difficult to talk about the alleged person but I must clarify that we don't have a lady in-charge here," says Shanti, one of the workers at the ashram.

"Considering the fact that the Mata Amritanandamai ashram has its headquarters in South India and an insignificant presence in Delhi through their small outfit in Shakti Kunj, ashram people are trying to grab that specific land. First they captured the gram panchayat land and now they are looking for the Green Avenue property," says a close friend of Ashwani.

"We don't expect such behaviour from a religious group. In our colony, five foreign diplomats live. There is also a church, a temple and a school in the colony. But we have not allowed anyone to put any kind of board here. There is no reason why we must allow them to do so," says Bhandari.

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While protesting against the criminal trespass, RWA members organised a peaceful dharna condemning hooliganism under the banner of a respected ashram. They have planned to take the matter to the Chief Minister of Delhi, Lieutenant Governor, MCD commissioner, Delhi Police chief and Amma herself demanding for requisite action and support.

Concludes Ashwani, "The Green Avenue RWA has no problem with religious practices of any religious cult but such blatant acts of hooliganism and premeditated criminal activity, that too under the guise of religion, must be deplored by all the right thinking people. If such blatant land grabbing in the garb of religion and spiritualism can happen right here in an upmarket area of the capital, imagine what must be happening with less informed or underprivileged sections of society? We can and must tackle this together and stop it now, before it spirals out of control and urge one and all to express solidarity against criminal injustice." Looks like it's time Amma gave some lessons to her errant disciples and set them on the right path. <<