

Sunday Read

A 7-second embrace & a spiritual high

A recent satsang of hugging saint Amritanandamayi Devi saw people from all walks of life reaching out to her to experience a sense of elation

By Ahmedabad Mirror Bureau

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◆ Time: 11.30 pm

◆ Place: AES ground

Hundreds of people have left behind the comforts of their homes and are waiting impatiently in a line on a balmy night. They are bickering and using all their remaining strength after a day's toil to either hold their ground or move forward, all this to experience something — an embrace — that lasts for only a few seconds.

To many, this exercise may seem a complete waste of time. However, to those who queued up at the aforementioned venue on Wednesday to get a quick embrace from Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, it was the only way to improve, or correct, the course of their lives.

Did these people, driven by faith, see their stars suddenly change, or troubles end, after being greeted by the spiritual leader known to everyone as Amma, "the hugging saint"? Probably not.

Were they moved by the meeting? Most certainly. More than 6,000 people visited Amma's satsang on Wednesday, which continued way past midnight.

The flow of followers slowed down a bit by 11.30 pm, when we visited the venue, but it never seemed to completely stop. People from Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Mumbai and even abroad continued to line up near Amma's stage. Some disorder, like at all religious and spiritual gatherings, prevailed at the AES ground, but it was dwarfed by the enthusiasm and devotion of Amma's devotees.

A 28-year-old Indian-origin woman from Melbourne, Pinki Jadia, said that she had been to several of Amma's gatherings, and yet felt invigorated after each meeting. "I have read many books on her philosophy. I strongly believe that she has made a difference to mine and many other people's lives," she said.

A senior official of pharmaceutical firm Claris, Akshay Mahapatra, said that he was overwhelmed by spiritual leader's embrace. "I almost cried, and didn't feel like leaving," Mahapatra, 38, said. People of every age group turned up at AES ground to seek Amma's blessings.

A 25-year-old Amdavadi, Labhesh Asandas, met Amma for the first time. "I think her positive energy has rubbed off on me," Labhesh, who lives near Subhash Bridge, said. The energy showed by the hugging saint's followers was matched only by children, part of a singing group on stage. Devotional songs sung by these kids added to the satsang's atmosphere.

While many were moved by the revered figure's 'divine' touch



More than 6,000 people visited the AES ground on Drive-in Road on Wednesday to seek Amma's blessings



While hugging every person, Amma sonorously whispered "my child, my ch either in Hindi or Gujarati



"I almost cried when she held me. I didn't feel like leaving her"
— Akshay Mahapatra (38), a senior officer at Claris



"I strongly believe that she has made a difference to mine and many other people's lives"
— Pinki Jadia (28), who came to the city from Melbourne