

Globalization and Spiritualism: From Local to Global

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Abstract

The Akhil Vishwa Gayatri Pariwar (AWGP) is a movement of thought transformation, one that puts consciousness first and, in accordance with the transformational approach, initiates change from the inside out. The AWGP's motto, "*Hum Badlenge, Yug Badlega; Hum Sudhrenge, Yug Sudhrega,*" meaning "If we transform ourselves, the era will be transformed; if we reform ourselves, the era will be reformed," is chanted daily at gatherings with complete confidence in the arrival of the statement's full fruition. The passion of this movement's volunteers is characterized by both the commitment of a religious movement and the sense of purpose of a political uprising. The purpose of the AWGP is the transition to the New Era and the creation of a new divinized human culture. Part of this Mission's successes are reflected in its explosive expansion. Conservative estimates suggest that approximately 90,000,000 members are currently engaged in the organization's many social services initiatives or in the outreach work for sharing the methodology for personal and social transformation throughout the world. The story of how the AWGP has increased so rapidly since its inauguration in 1958 is a testament to both the power of Pt. Shriram Sharma Acharya's vision and the need for the solution he provided. The present paper makes an attempt to analyze the emergence and rise of Akhil Vishwa Gayatri Parivar (AWGP) as a spiritual movement from the local level to the global level in terms of four major turning points in the organization's history. These are: 1. The publication of the first edition of the Mission's Akhand Jyoti Magazine, 2. The Grand Fire Ceremony of 1958, 3. Creation of the *Shantikunj Ashram Complex* (popularly called *Shantikunj*) in 1971, and 4. Spread of movement beyond the country as a global social reform movement.

Keywords: Globalization, Spiritual Movement, Spiritualism, Thought Revolution.

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The present paper makes an attempt to analyze the emergence and rise of Akhil Vishwa Gayatri Parivar (AWGP) as a spiritual movement from the local level to the global level in terms of four major turning points in the organization's history. These are: 1. The publication of the first edition of the Mission's Akhand Jyoti Magazine, 2. The Grand Fire Ceremony of 1958, 3. Creation of the *Shantikunj Ashram Complex* (popularly called *Shantikunj*) in 1971, and 4. Spread of movement beyond the country as a global social reform movement.

The Gayatri Mission is a movement of thought transformation, one that puts consciousness first and, in accordance with the transformational approach, initiates change from the inside out. The mission's motto, "*Hum Badlenge, Yug Badlega; Hum Sudhrenge, Yug Sudhrega,*" meaning "If we transform ourselves, the era will be transformed; if we reform ourselves, the era will be reformed," is chanted daily at gatherings with complete confidence in the arrival of the statement's full fruition. The passion of this movement's volunteers is characterized by both the commitment of a religious movement and the sense of purpose of a political uprising. The purpose of the Gayatri Mission is the transition to the New Era and the creation of a new divinized human culture. Part of this Mission's success is reflected in its explosive expansion. Conservative estimates suggest that approximately 90,000,000 members are currently engaged in the organization's many social services initiatives or in the outreach work for sharing the methodology for personal and social transformation throughout the world. The story of how the Gayatri Mission has increased so rapidly since its inauguration in 1958 is a testament to both the power of Acharya Sharma's vision and the need for the solution he provided. The present chapter makes an attempt to analyze the emergence and rise of All Gayatri Parivar (AWGP) as a spiritual movement from the local level to the global level in terms of four major turning points in the organization's history. These are: 1. The publication of the first edition of the Mission's Akhand Jyoti Magazine, 2. The Grand Fire Ceremony of 1958, 3. Creation of the Shantikunj Ashram Complex in 1971, and 4. Spread of movement across the boundary of the country as a global social reform movement.

Phase I: The establishment of the "Akhand Jyoti" Magazine

The beginning of the AWGP can be traced back to the late 1930s when Acharya Sharma began to prepare for the launching of the Gayatri Mission. As per the instructions of his master (guru) he lived on only one glass of buttermilk and two barley flatbreads for 24 years. He was also supposed to perform six hours of mantra practice every day. In the late 1930s, he was instructed by his guru to spend part of everyday writing, a practice he continued for the rest of his life. In the early morning hours, long before sunrise and even before his prayer was to begin, apart from this he has also taken the task of writing articles, letters, and books as well as engaged himself in discourses with people who came in his contact during that period. Much of this literary outpouring was intended for the pages of the Akhand Jyoti Magazine. The name "Akhand Jyoti", means Eternal Flame. This name came to Sharma as he was sitting before of prayer lamp, which at that time had been burning

continuously for twelve years. The Magazine, as he envisioned it, would be positioned to fill a void in the offerings of the existing Magazines in 1938. The spiritual Magazines that existed at that time presented a ritualistic approach to spirituality that was no longer in keeping with the spiritual thought in India. In those days, a magazine that presented a practical spirituality for the villagers of India did not yet exist.

In the early days of Akhand Jyoti, the magazine's future appeared extremely tenuous. The first issue was published during the economic downturn before the outbreak of the Second World War. Aside from actual production, which was contracted to a local printer, every aspect of the magazine was done by Acharya Sharma and the occasional volunteer. After all the writing was completed, Sharma spent the weeks leading up to the release of the first edition collecting one-issue subscriptions. By the time the first issue was printed, he had sold 350 subscriptions at the rate of 13 paise (0.2 cents) each. To complete a total first run of 500 copies, Sharma distributed an additional 150 copies door to door.

Though the first issue received favorable acclaim, there were complications right from the start. Due to the impending outbreak of war, paper was becoming increasingly scarce. What little there was was both inconsistent and expensive, and soon presses began to close. Thus, the second issue was delayed for several months, and Sharma decided that what was needed was a fresh start. To increase efficiency, he decided to switch to a one-year subscription, paid in advance. In the months before the release of the magazine's second issue, Sharma, his family, and the magazine operation moved to the town of Mathura, where it has remained to the present day. Though things in Mathura began to expand, due to a continued shortage of paper and additional press closings, the timely release continued to be difficult. By 1943, almost all of the original Mathura printing presses had closed, and so, a loan was taken out to purchase a tiny hand-operated printing press. By that time, the magazine had gathered a small group of volunteer workers and a subscription base of over a thousand. Today, the Akhand Jyoti magazine is unique in the world of journalism. It has been running continuously for 71 years based on its subscription price, currently 108 Rupees. The reason it can keep its subscription price so low despite its refusal to use advertisements for financial support is that the magazine is produced from beginning to end exclusively by mission volunteers. Today, the Akhand Jyoti is translated into 12 languages and has a subscriber base of over 1,500,000. As we shall see in the story that follows, fifteen years later, the Akhand Jyoti was the perfect messenger to bring the news of an unprecedented religious ceremony, the first-ever Grand Gayatri Mahayagya.

It is clear from the above that Sharma who had the experience of working in a newspaper in his early days adopted a well-thought communication strategy in order to spread his spiritual views among his followers through a spiritual magazine and developed a mass base through it.

Phase II: The Gayatri Mahayagya of 1958

By the time the mid-1950s arrived, Acharya Sharma's vision had expanded considerably. Sharma had come to understand that the spiritual culture that would one day emerge from his organizing activities would rest on two practices: the recitation of the Gayatri Mantra and the "Yagya" Fire Ritual. Despite the important role that these two spiritual practices played in the history of the Indian culture, due to having been restricted to the caste of Hindu priests, the practice of each had almost completely ceased to exist.

The silent repetition of the 24-syllable Gayatri Mahamantra is a form of inner cleansing and worship of the Goddess Gayatri, the Goddess of spiritual wisdom and power. Since it was first envisioned approximately 10,000 years ago, this mantra has been passed down from guru to disciple. Mantra is an extremely precise science in which each syllable and combination of syllables has been specifically chosen for its effects on the inner human faculties and the subtle dimensions of reality. The vibrations released by mentally reciting a mantra encourage the subtle realms of reality to unfold in an orderly way through the specific qualities of the mantra.

Like the Gayatri Mantra, the ritual of Yagya is also a means of sending positive vibrations into the subtle dimensions of reality for the purpose of promoting order and well-being. A yagya ceremony is conducted around a centrally located fire pit called a "*kunda*" (a square pit-like structure often fashioned as an inverted pyramid made of copper, brass, or bricks) into which offerings are made. Symbolic offerings of ghee (clarified butter), sticks of wood, incense, sugar, herbal mixtures, rice, and other items are the vibrations of the mantra and their accompanying positive emotions. To the Western ear, the practice of infusing higher vibrations into the subtle atmosphere may sound superstitious or at least unscientific; however, laboratory studies have recently begun to verify its claims of healing and environmental purification.

Yagya-kunda comes in all shapes and sizes. On the smallest scale, *Yagya* can be practiced by one or two individuals in the comfort of their homes. A full-sized *Yagya* takes place outside and involves groups of eight to ten. A *Mahayagya* (large-scale *Yagya*) is a synchronized performance of this ritual offering that, at a single time, can involve tens or hundreds of *Kundas* and thousands or tens of thousands of participants. The combined effect of the synchronized chanting and fire offering at a *Mahayagya* is said to have a world-changing effect on the subtle atmosphere.

Like the Gayatri Mantra, the *Yagya* fire ceremony was traditionally restricted to Brahman men. Women and other castes were welcome to watch from the outside, but they were not permitted to sit around the *Yagya-kunda* to make offerings themselves. Sharma had long known that he would be instructed to remove these restrictions and make both of these practices available to the public. The Maharaja was chosen for this unveiling. The date for the world's first Gayatri *Mahayagya* was set years in advance for November 23rd through 26th in the year 1958.

To call together the enormous crowds needed to conduct a *Yagya* of this scale, the Akhand Jyoti, which by that time had reached a circulation of nearly 10,000, made the perfect messenger. Everyone was invited. However, in order to participate, participants were asked to begin recitation of one mala of the Gayatri Mantra per day and to fast for one meal per week. Sharma also sent out a call for volunteers to come early to help build the encampments and make arrangements for food and housing in the area surrounding the Mathura Ashram. In response to this invitation, volunteers began to arrive months in advance. With the donated resources and volunteer labor, seven temporary encampments were constructed with tents for sleeping, temporary bathroom facilities, and stands from which food could be distributed free of cost. During the week leading up to the event's commencement, volunteers stationed at the bus and train terminals provided the arriving participants with instructions as to which encampment they had been assigned. With every new arrival, the workforce and the capacity to erect the structure of a massive *Yagya* pavilion to house the 1024 *Yagaykundas* were laid out, constructed, and finally decorated with colored cloths and strings of mango leaves.

Regarding the enormous finances needed to host an event of this size, Acharya Sharma simply said that those who have faith can give. He added that if money did not come, the event could also be conducted using simple arrangements. Despite his lack of concern, all of the financial resources needed to create the *Yagya* facility, accommodation feed all of the guests, and purchase all of the necessary preparations flooded in.

Acharya Sharma declared that the gathering force that would produce India's first Gayatri Mahayagya was a 'Brahmastra', meaning a weapon that cannot be stopped.' As predicted, however, they did try. Fearing that the release of these hidden practices would weaken their effectiveness, the orthodox community gathered to protest the proceedings. Sharma simply guided the volunteers to respect their message. "Let them work in their way, and let us work in ours." He said, "Let us see who is the more convincing." Meanwhile, the mounting bustle to prepare for the arrival of the big day went on and by the time homes, or decided, perhaps, to join in themselves.

As was the tradition, the four-day *Yagya* began at 4:00 a.m. with a "*Kalasha Yatra*," a parade of women bearing small water vessels on their heads. Each vessel (kalasha) supported a coconut adorned with mango leaves in its mouth, representing the entirety of the universe. 1024 water vessels were prepared, but many more women arrived for the opening blessings than could be given jugs. All along the sidelines, the men and the children cheered the winding procession. Others went out in front to clear the way for its smooth passage. The pavilion began a flow of circumambulation around the ceremonial grounds that continued almost unbroken for the duration of the four-day ritual.

By 5:00 a.m. the next morning, the first batch of *Yagya* was ready to begin. Over the top of the anticipatory chatter, the long and unmistakable wail of the conch shell signaled all attention. "Now give a cheer to the great Mother Gayatri!" called the preceptors, and the crowd responded in

unison, "Jai!" meaning "Let Her be victorious." Now give a cheer for the great culture of India!" called the preceptors, the "Jai!" again shouted out the crowd. "Now give a cheer for the practice of Yagya!" replied the preceptors, and again the crowd responded in unison. After several more volleys of calls and responses, the long-awaited ceremony had finally begun. The tens of thousands of participants and onlookers, in their ancient grandmother tongue of Sanskrit, began the synchronized supplication of gurus, ancestors, and spirit guides of the past and present to join them. The hierarchy of Hindu deities was requested. The participants were blessed. Each word was an ancient formula, a primordial incantation, dating back to the Vedic Texts from which it was derived. The collective power of the synchronized voices, beating out the ancient syllables like a massive drum, was carried by the smoke for miles around. It washed over everything in its path, on its way to the sky and beyond, until the very air began to reverberate with its change.

When the first run-through was complete, it was time for the second shift to take its turn. To coordinate a series of shifts, everyone had been given a number from one to five upon arrival that represented the shift to which they were assigned. More dried sticks of wood were brought. More dried herbal mixtures were given out and, once again, the ritual began.

The circumambulation and chanting that was initiated by the Kalasha Yatra resumed as well and continued for the entire duration of the four-day event, or perhaps this procession took a break between 12:00 and 3:00 in the morning, but by and large, for four days the procession continued around the clock. For four days, between the hours of five a.m. and twelve noon, the Yagya fires were burning, and coordinated collective chanting of the Yagya liturgy was performed. No sooner had the final offerings been made at around Noon than hundreds of volunteers ran to clean the pavilion, hundreds more to help with giving out the food to the pilgrims, or continuing to coordinate the flood of new arrivals. Every train or bus that rolled into their respective stations brought another load. Thousands arrived by the hour. In the end, as many as 400,000 were said to have attended.

In the evenings, after all the ceremonies had been completed and many of the preparations for the next day were arranged, Acharya Sharma delivered a sermon about the science of spiritual practice for personal and societal transformation. Within these lectures, the first signs of what later became the international organization of the Gayatri Mission began to emerge.

After the *Mahayagya* of 1958 had been completed, Acharya Sharma began giving official initiation to the Gayatri Mantra to anyone who would pledge to follow the disciplines he prescribed. In this way, he came to assume the role of Guru to the students who wished to follow his teachings. His life partner, Bhagwati Sharma, was the first to receive initiation. For this reason, though the official inauguration did not take place until years later, the *Mahayagya* of 1958 is the moment that many consider to be the birth of the Gayatri Mission.

After everything was said and done, and all of the money was spent, and all the pilgrims had returned to their homes, and all of the tents were dismantled, how it all came to pass could

scarcely be explained. From where did the organizational capacity come to manage an event of this size? From whence had the coordination of food, sleeping arrangements, and bathing facilities come? Perhaps no one could explain. It seemed that the faith and enthusiasm of the participants had willed it into being. Or perhaps it was just meant to be. Whatever the case, once the *Mahayagya* had happened, everyone could feel that a new movement was beginning to coalesce. Those who attended knew that a movement had begun.

He was able to establish Gayatri Tapobhumi, Mathura as a centre for the training of volunteers who joined him from different parts of the country, and His residence at Ghiya Mandi was a place of his publication, which was later known as Akhand Jyoti Sansthan. Thus, he made an effort to spread his spiritual movement at the national level and also two organizations at Mathura to spread the activities of the mission.

Phase III: The Departure from Mathura and Establishment of Shantikunj at Haridwar

In 1971, Sharma was informed by his guru that he would once again be called back to the Himalayas, this time for an indefinite period. By that time, the hand-operated printing press had grown into a full-fledged operation employing over ten people, an Ashram, and a parochial school. When he revealed that he would depart Mathura, where he and his family had been residing for 30 years, his wife and partner said she would like to gather the family and depart as well. So when the time came near, Sharma set out to acquire a piece of land to which his family could move. As it turned out, his chosen site was a marshy strip of jungle situated near the holy Ganges River, approximately 300 kilometers to the north in the town of Haridwar. At that time, this choice was not well understood by his collaborators. Sharma writes,

“I stayed at the place in Haridwar that was indicated by my Master. It had been a place of spiritual practice of seven ancient Rishis, which was lying deserted and was for sale. It was marshy. The Ganges River used to flow through it. The owner of the land was contacted, and a deal was struck and reduced to writing. I had to make the decision alone, as my counsel and the advisors could offer no support. I failed to make them understand the mystical significance of the place and the proposed construction. Even the supervisory work of construction had to be done by me. Thus came into being the Shantikunj Spiritual Centre at Haridwar”(Sharma).

Next year, he traveled back and forth from Mathura to oversee the construction of a small two-story building that would house his wife and family. By then, his wife Bhagwati Sharma was referred to by all as “Mataji” (mother) as she had then assumed the role of mother to the huge extended family called ‘Gayatri Parivar’.

The day of the Sharma family’s final departure, Shriram for the Himalayas, and the rest of the family for Shantikunj was set for the 20th of June, 1971, the day of Acharya Sharma’s 61st Birthday. To commemorate both of these occasions, his discipline arranged a four-day *61-kundiya Mahayagya* (fire ceremony). On the day of his departure, Shriram gave a particularly unforgettable address, in which he tearfully described his anguish upon departing Mathura, never to return. The

next morning, Shriram and Mataji, their attendants, and the carefully guarded "Eternal Flame," which by then had been burning continuously for forty-five years, set out by car for their new lives in Haridwar. To see that the family was properly relocated and to meet with those who arrived to receive his final guidance, Acharya Sharma stayed in Haridwar for ten days. After assuring himself that everything was in order, he set off on foot on the first of July 1971, for what would be his final visit to the Himalayas.

As Sharma was soon to learn, on this voyage, he would receive an initiation himself to prepare him for the final phase of his mission. This trip, far from being the end of Sharma's legacy of movement leadership, actually marked the beginning of the most important 20-year phase of his life. The Gayatri Mission was to become the progenitor of a Divine-human culture.

The Birth of Shantikunj

In the fall of the next year, just 14 months after his departure, Acharya Sharma suddenly returned, inspired by the mission to begin the popular personal transformation programs for social service volunteers. These programs would train the volunteers who would work with him to revive the ancestral "Rishi" traditions of ancient India. The first camps were for retirees who wished to dedicate themselves more fully to social service. These were extremely strict five-day camps involving 20 or so participants at a time. Participants were asked not to speak for the camp's duration and to walk in a line with their eyes down when they moved from one place to another.

Soon, Sharma began to feel that training camps were needed for young people as well. In March of 1974, a 30-day training camp was established for youth that included a mandate that attendees dedicate an additional month after the camp to volunteer in villages throughout India. These camps were offered free of charge, inclusive of all expenses for room and board. With each successive camp, attendance grew. Soon, new buildings were needed for housing, and before long, more land was needed for a one-thousand-person lecture hall and a row of permanent Yagya pavilions. As these camps developed, they evolved to pursue three main goals. The first was to help participants begin a new lifestyle of spiritual practice. For this, the training camps involved a radical departure from the laxity of conventional life. Practically every moment between 3:30 a.m. and 8:30 p.m. was prescribed. Beginning with morning meditation and the Yagya fire ritual, the routine included training and practice in yoga, *pranayam* (breathing exercises), and the recitation of the Gayatri Mantra. The most important of these was always the Mantra. This Mantra, which had been Sharma's core practice, was said to contain the essence of the wisdom of the Vedas. Using this great Mantra alone, discipline can adopt all of the generous tendencies and righteous behaviors of a world-changing sadhak. To train in the control of the senses, camp participants were also asked to eat daily only one meal of unseasoned food and to make a pledge to give up one bad habit of their choosing.

The second intention of these training camps was social services training. To this end, program graduates were expected to be capable of offering practical solutions to the problems

faced by the villagers of India. For this purpose, training was offered in agriculture, entrepreneurial business management, and medical practices, which could be supplied locally.

The third purpose was to create a workforce of 21st-century change agents who would actively engage in the work of reviving the roots of ancestral Indian culture to bring about the change of the era. The course came to be called “Yug Shilpi”, which means “Era Architect”. Producing the individuals who would orchestrate the return of Rishi Culture came to be the program’s ultimate objective. Today, nine and 30-day programs, almost identical to what is described above, run concurrently and produce approximately one thousand graduates every year.

The three preceding vignettes have provided a window into the beginnings of Acharya Sharma’s revolutionary ministry. In addition to these, the mission’s storied history contained many other milestones as well. Centers were created throughout India, schools were launched, additional magazines were created, specific social reform movements were launched, and the identity of the organization further coalesced as members took an 18-point Pledge of Conduct.

In every case, the beginnings may have been insignificant in terms of their size but they were remarkable in their moral standards and lofty intent, and they were remarkable in terms of their results. As will become apparent in the next chapter, they were also remarkable in terms of the hidden power that propelled them into the hearts and minds of all who came into their field of attraction. Acharya Sharma’s guides, we will soon learn, were of a most unusual sort.

Phase IV: Globalization of Gayatri Mission

After the establishment of Shantikunj at Haridwar, Sharma worked for the expansion of his mission not only in the different parts of the country but also abroad. He established Gayatri Shaktipeeth in the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha to organize his followers. He visited all these places personally and emerged as a charismatic personality among his followers.

Information and Communication Technology played an important role in the Globalization of the mission. The mission has its website (www.awgp.org), which has a number of folders like Home, Literature, We Offer, Multimedia, Social Initiatives, Downloads, Mission and Vision, Sahitya Vistar, Patron Founder, Gayatri, Yagya, Scientific Spirituality, and Contact Us. A folder “Hindi me” was also put there to cater to the needs of Hindi-speaking followers. From the very beginning, Sharma used Communication Technology to spread his ideas when he started to publish *Akhand Jyoti* magazine from Mathura and established a live personal contact with his readers through his letters. Some of them also met him personally at Mathura. *Akhand Jyoti* magazine, today published in Hindi (since 1942), English (since 2003), and Marathi (since 2008) languages, and a separate magazine, *Yug Shakti Gujarati* (since 1972), are the major links between the mission and its followers. *Akhand Jyoti* today has a readership of about 1.2 million persons in the country and abroad. A new publication, *Yug Nirman Yojana*, was also published in 1964. A Newsletter *Pragya Abhiyan* is also published fortnightly by the mission in Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati. A video magazine,

Yug Pravah (by now 258 issues have already been released), was also started by the mission. The mission also has a multimedia cell at its headquarters, which produces Audio Cassettes, Audio CDs, VCDs, and DVDs of Pragma Geet (songs containing the messages of the mission), live recordings of the events of the mission at Shantikunj as well as at different places in the country and abroad, prepared by the Multimedia Cell of the mission. These CDs and VCDs are usually available the next day to the *parijans* (followers of the mission) on the spot. It helps in spreading the message of the mission among the masses. Those who participated in these activities not only watched/listened to these activities again and again but also showed/give it to listen to other *parijans* of Gayatri Pariwar at their respective places. The mission also sends SMS regularly on the mobile phones of its *parijans* and also e-mails on different occasions like Guru Purnima, Ganga Dushehara, Dipawali, New Year, and Raksha Bandhan (special letter from Shailbala Pandya (daughter of Pt. Sriram Sharma), popularly called "Didi" by *parijans*). One of the important features of these messages is that a personal touch is given to these messages by heads of mission, Dr. Pranav Pandya, popularly called "*Doctor Saheb*", and Smt. Shailbala Pandya is called "*Didi*" (sister) by *parijans*. It links the *parijans* (members of the Gayatri family) emotionally with the mission, and they feel connected directly with Dr. Saheb or Didi, heads of the family. This approach to the mission is distinct in connecting the masses with the mission. Communication technology plays an important role in connecting the mission with its followers at the global level. The mission also provides online spiritual guidance through e-mails (spiritual guide@awgp.in) to its followers. An e-commerce shop has also started for online purchase of Books, Audio, and video CDs, as well as to subscribe magazines. A lot of literature is also available to read online and to download from the website in PDF format.

In 1972-73, he visited a number of East African countries, particularly Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, to attract the Indian Diaspora into his fold. He was welcomed by the people of Indian origin who had adopted the lifestyle prescribed by him and became his followers. However, his main focus remained to expand the mission within the country during his lifetime. After his Mahaprayan in 1990, the mission was led by his wife, Smt. Bhagwati Devi, popularly called "Mataji" (mother) by the followers. She took a new initiative to expand the mission by starting a series of *Ashwamedh Yagna* (traditionally, Ashwamedh yagna was performed by a king to win over the territories beyond his state by sending a horse (Ashwa) the king of that territory had the option either to accept subjugation of the owner of the ashwa or to fight against him but here basic idea was to win over the heart of the people through spiritual message of Gayatri Parivar and individuals were asked to sacrifice their bad habits in Yagna). The first *Ashwamedh Yagna* was held in Jaipur in November 1992. It was followed by a series that continues. In 1993, six such yagnas were organized in India (Bhilai, Guna, Bhuvneshwar, Lucknow, Baroda, and Bhopal) and three abroad (Leicester, UK; Toronto, Canada, and Los Angeles, USA). Next year witnessed as many as 11 Ashwamedh Yagnas but all within the country (Nagpur; Brahmipur, Orissa; Korwa, Chattisgarh; Patna, Bihar; Kurukshetra,

Haryana; Chitrakut, MP; Bhind, MP; Shimla, HP; Bulandshahr, UP; Haldighati, Rajasthan; and Rajkot, Gujarat). In 1995, six yagnas were performed, five within India (Jabalpur, MP; Kota, Rajasthan; Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh; Indore, MP, and Anwalkhera, UP) and one abroad (Chicago, USA). Next year, only one Yagna was performed, i.e., in Montréal, Canada, on 26th July 1996. In 1998, the single *Ashwamedh Yagna* could be performed, i.e., in New Jersey, USA. In 2000, only one *Ashwamedh Yagna* was performed at Haridwar, Uttarakhand. In 2001, only one *Ashwamedh Yagna* was performed at Tirupati, AP. This tradition was then resumed in 2005 and witnessed two such yagnas, one at Madurai, TN, and the other in Sydney, Australia. In 2006, one Yagna was performed in Johannesburg, South Africa. In 2008, one yagna was performed at Kashipur, Uttarakhand. In 2009, one yagna was performed at Oakland, North Island, one in Ludhiana, Punjab, in 2010, one at ShantiKunj Haridwar in 2011, two in 2014 - one at Bangalore, Karnataka, and the other in Brisbane, Australia, as shown below.

Ashwamedh Yagna in India and Abroad
<p>Uttar Pradesh: Lucknow (1993), Bulandshahr (1994), Anwalkhera (1995), Gorakhpur (1998); Uttarakhand: Haridwar (2000), Kashipur (2008), Shantikunj (2011); Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh: Guna (1993), Bhopal (1993), Bhilai (1993), Korwa (1994), Chitrakut (1994), Bhind (1994), Jabalpur (1995), Indore (1995); Rajasthan: Jaipur (1992), Haldighati (1994), Kota (1995); Bihar and Jharkhand: Patna (1994); Odisha, West Bengal, and Assam: Bhuvneshwar (1993), Brahmapur (1994); Andhra Pradesh: Tirupati (2001); Tamil Nadu: Madurai (2005); Karnataka: Bangalore (2014); Maharashtra: Nagpur (1994); Gujarat: Baroda (1993), Rajkot (1994); Haryana: Kurukshetra (1994); Himachal Pradesh: Shimla (1994); Punjab: Ludhiana (2010).</p>
<p>Abroad: UK: Leicester (1993); Canada: Toronto (1993), Montréal (1996); USA: Los Angeles (1993), Chicago (1995), New Jersey (1998); Australia: Sydney (2005), Brisbane (2014); South Africa: Johannesburg (2006); North Island: Oakland (2009);</p>

The organization of Ashwamedh (5000 kundiya) Yagna for three days, along with the distribution of literature on the mission at half the rate and many other activities, was a mega event of the mission aimed to expand it at the mass level. This effort was made not only within the country but also abroad. These activities of the mission helped in the expansion of the mission at the global level, and the Gayatri Pariwar was given a new name i.e., All World Gayatri Pariwar

(AWGP). These mega-events abroad attracted the Indian Diaspora in the USA, Canada, UK, Australia, and South Africa, and the Gayatri Consciousness Centre was established in all these places as a follow-up action of the Ashwamedh Yagna. These Gayatri Consciousness Centers organized their activities at the local level. Several persons have joined the training camp organized by Shantikunj, Haridwar, from these countries who are devoted to contributing a definite amount of money to the mission as well as sparing their time for the activities of the mission, which is called *Anshdaan* and *Samaydaan*, prescribed to every follower of the mission. Shantikunj has also established an Abroad Cell to assist the partisans (followers) abroad.

Case Study 1: Brisbane Ashwamedh Yagna

AWGP organized the Fortieth Ashwamedh Yagna at Brisbane, Australia, from 18th April 2014 to 20th April 2014. In order to create public awareness about Ashwamedha Maha yagya and to purify the environment, Gayatri Pariwar, Brisbane, had taken a Sankalp to perform large numbers of *Five and Nine Kundiya Yagya* before *Ashwamedha* under the aegis of Shantikunj, Haridwar. All *parijans* were engaged in the campaign to invite and to organize Yagya and seminars/talks. Yagya has been conducted along with a Book Exhibition and scientific spirituality talks on Yagya, Gayatri, and *Ashwamedha*. Vedic Gayatri Mahamantra chanting and melodious Divine songs were performed and sung by the *Shantikunj toli* (a group of preachers, singers, and musicians who usually go for preaching at different places for a period of 1-2 months in India and abroad) and Brisbane *parijans* during some public programs. The importance of *Samuh Sadhana* (group worship) was explained by the Shantikunj team. Also, through these Yagya, Deep Yagya, people were taught the importance of sacrifice and generosity in purifying a person and making a strong and capable nation. People from all walks of life attended and benefited from these *Yagyas*. Youths participated and took an interest in large numbers. All participants were invited to attend the *Ashwamedha* Gayatri Maha Yagya on April 18-20, 2014. Interactive Thought Provoking Seminars on Stress Management, Scientific Spirituality, Personality Refinement, Spirituality in Corporate Culture, etc. were organized during and before the *Ashwamedha Yagna*. These were attended by eminent personalities from various spiritual organizations and corporate houses. As part of the *Anuyajprogram*, *Deep-Yagya* was organized at different occasions and places before the *Ashwamedha Yagya*.

The salient Features of *Ashwamedh Yagna* were as follows:

1. *1001 Kalash Yatra* – with different tableaux on different themes and Placard procession.
2. *201 Kundiya Yagyashala*– with its scientific, Vastu, and Vedic importance.
3. Yoga and Meditation – by the exponents of the Yoga faculties of *Shantikunj*.
4. *Ashwamedhik Yagya* - the special *Ashwamedha Yagna*.
5. 51000 Grand Lamp Festival (*Deep Yagya*).

6. Grand Exhibition – covering the Mission & Vision of AWGP and the Divine Culture of India.
7. Interactive Thought Provoking Seminars.
8. Spiritual discourses by renowned spiritualists.
9. Vedic Rituals and sacramental rites were conducted by saints from Shantikunj, Haridwar.
10. Voluntary donations only.
11. Participants from all walks of life.
12. The Honorable Prime Minister of Australia was the chief guest.
13. Other dignitaries from different spiritual organizations.

Conclusion

There is a conscious effort among the religious institutions, particularly those having liberal and universal elements in their ideology, to adopt new communication technologies for dissemination of the message of their sect not only at national level but also in the developed countries. The main target of these organization are non- resident Indians (NRIs). In last two decades, the spread of some elements of Indian culture by a number of religious organizations (Singh, V.P. 2007:5-6). This observation of Singh is very relevant to understand the rise of AWGP as a global movement.

The Gayatri mission started with a magazine namely Akhand Jyoti in 1938, today has expanded not only at national level but also has occupied significant space at the global level. The major emphasis of the mission is not on ritual performance but it is mainly focused on transformation of the thinking of the people through various activities. From the very beginning the Gayatri mission adopted a well thought strategy of mass media communication. The founder of the mission Pt. Shriram Sharma Acharya started a spiritual magazine to disseminate his ideas among the masses. Gradually, he also started to respond the queries of the readers of the magazine through personnel letters and after a period of about 18 years, he was able to mobilize his readers whose number reached to about five thousand and turned them into his strong followers. He organized a big Yagna at Mathura and invited all these followers to participate in this Yagna and formed Gayatri Pariwar at Mathura. Yagna is a very important ritual activity of Vaidik Sanskriti. People of all cult and sects perform this activity in various forms. Sharma used the ritual of Yagna to attract the masses. As Yagna is a ritual generally perform at mass level, he used it as a part of his strategy of mass communication. His basic idea was to spread his ideology to the people gathered to participate in Yagna. He has not only simplified it but also standardized method of performing Yagna at mass level so that anyone can performed this anywhere and at any time. He also trained his followers who joined the mission on full time basis to spread his ideas through this technique of mixing Bhajans (Called Pragya Geets blended with his messages in popular format of Bhajans) and Pravachans before, after and between the Yagna. This innovative method attracted not only people of old generation but also to the youth who understood his messages and his logical explanation of different rituals performed during Yagna. therefore, he emphasized today we need a different kind of

spiritualism based on logical actions and free from all irrational rituals in modern times and called it "Scientific Spiritualism". He tried to connect traditions with modern science and established an institution "Brahmvarchasva", where a number of Scientific experiments started on Yagna and Yoga. In the beginning he focused on print media (books, booklets, magazines and newspaper). Sharma then established a media centre in Shantikunj. In order to make Yagna attractive and interesting activity he mixed with it short musical concerts in Bhajan format (but not actual bhanjas). His messages and short pravachans explaining rituals of Yagna and moral preaching to the masses. It fulfill all the three purposes of communication, namely, information, education and entertainment. In this sense his communication strategy was perfect as per communication theory.

In the nineties, the efforts to extend the net beyond India were started with a new strategy. He shifted his headquarter from Mathura to Shantikunj at Haridwar (a well known religious place from ancient period). In order to make Yagna attractive and interesting activity he mixed with it short musical concerts in Bhajan format (but not actual bhanjas). His messages and short pravachans explaining rituals of Yagna and moral preaching to the masses. It fulfill all the three purposes of communication, namely, information, education and entertainment. In this sense his communication strategy was perfect as per communication theory (Chauhan, Shreepal 2015).

The globalization of the mission started with extension of its activities among the Indian diaspora. In 1972-73, he visited a number of East African countries, particularly Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, to attract the Indian Diaspora into his fold. He was welcomed by the people of Indian origin who had adopted the lifestyle prescribed by him and became his followers. However, his focus was mainly on India. With the era of globalization the leadership of the mission also shifted after the mahaprayan of Sriram Sharma. His wife and son in law took the charge of the mission. They then focussed on Indian diaspora in Australia, USA and UK and organized Ashwamedh Yagnas and established gayatri Shakti Peeths and transform it in a global movement in next three decades.

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