



# NEED FOR AN INDIAN CIVILISATIONAL APPROACH TO STUDY INDIA'S FOREST AND HILL PEOPLE

**S GURUMURTHY**

Chairman, Vivekananda International Foundation



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## FOREWORD

S Gurumurthy's recent thoughts on the issue have redirected our attention to an age-old problem related to Indian history and civilization. The purpose of the present brief note is to define the problem in terms of some salient features of the research already done on it.

There have been researches on whatever is known of the people of the forests and hills on the basis of the various textual sources. The relevant publications provide a good starting point of the problem. Eventually, what is important is an assessment of the position these people have in the Indian caste hierarchy. This assessment is possible only on the basis of a close analysis of our ritual texts from this point of view. One is not sure if such assessment has yet been done with the kind of thoroughness which is required to examine this issue. Pending this kind of thorough research, sundry observations have been made by miscellaneous scholars on people living at the margins of the Hindu caste society. Let us see what some of these observations are and the extent to which they are rooted in the historical reality.

Right from the very beginning of Western historical interest in India scholars have explained the presence of Indian tribal groups living in the forests and hills of the country by claiming that they stood for the real indigenous people of the land and that they had been pushed to the forests and hills by the pressure of various immigrant people coming from outside the country and occupying the plains. Once the idea of the Aryan invading groups became a dominant hypothesis, this idea of the indigenous people being pushed into remote areas by

invading Aryan groups acquired the status of almost a historical truth. In Indian archaeological literature this assumed a somewhat different but related form.

Some influential Indian archaeologists divided the country into a number of self-revelatory divisions: 'areas of attraction', 'areas of relative isolation' and 'areas of isolation. It can be pointed out in criticism that such attempts to attach different categories of importance/unimportance to various parts of the country ignore the simple fact that an area which may not be agriculturally rich and thus may not be an area of attraction, may have other important elements in their favour such as major non-agricultural resources (important mineral and forest resources, for instance) or important position on some major trade routes.

From the archaeological point of view I selected for my survey the Chhotanagpur plateau which is a richly forested and hilly area full of various indigenous people living at the level of various subsistence techniques from hunting-gathering to the collection of metallic ores and metal-smelting. The plateau comprises most of Jharkhand and the extensions of the plateau in West Bengal and Odisha. The ethnography of the region has long interested scholars beginning with E D. Dalton in the 19th century. Apart from outlining the principal features of archaeology in different parts of the plateau, the present author's report on the region established it as an important and integral part of the historical development in eastern India because of its major resource-bearing potential. At no point of its history was the plateau isolated from the developments in the adjacent plains. In fact I could argue with some logic that one of the earliest trade routes of historical India which spanned the area from Rajagriha to Paithan or Pratisthan on the Godavari carried raw materials sourced from this plateau. Further, there is evidence that the plateau region interacted with many important political phases of the adjoining Ganga plains and there is absolutely no reason to relegate this to a position of isolation in Indian archaeology and history.

What is important, however, and gave some distinct feature to such areas is that the pace of social transformation in them was relatively slow. In the Chhotanagpur plateau, for instance, the local process of state formation continued to the 18th/19th century. An anthropologist argued this on the basis of the formation of Ichhagarh state of Singhbhum in Jharkhand. A Gandhian anthropologist of repute, Nirmal Kumar Basu, explained how Hindu society devised a process of incorporating tribal society into its fold. For instance, the tribal group which specialised in basket-making and survived by exchanging the baskets with the peasant producers was eventually given the status of a caste in the Hindu fold and thus became a part of that society. The process has gone on for centuries and thus Hindu society became one of accommodating diverse productive elements within a single, overarching non-competitive system where everybody was assured a place in the social mechanism. It is this 'Hindu method of tribal absorption' which, according to Basu, has helped survive it through all challenges.

November 2023

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**Introduction – Rising Global Civilisational Consciousness**

Asia's economic and geopolitical rise in the last decade is powering a civilisational consciousness across the world earlier dominated by political and economic ideologies of the post-World War II period. Even Communist China, which had sworn to destroy its own civilisational consciousness during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960-70s, is now recalling and talking about its antiquitous civilisation of thousands of years not only with pride, but also as a guide for the future.

A neo-Confucian China is now being seen as emerging from the ashes of pure Communist ideology. This rising new civilisational consciousness is perceived to have the potential to cause a paradigm shift in the global order and relations. As rising civilisational consciousness of individual nations weakens Western universalism, it is forcing the diffusion of global power and, in turn, this diffusion of power is leading also to a rise in the civilisational consciousness of individual nations.

This rise of civilisational consciousness in the world has also raised deeper questions on whether the West and its "Age of Enlightenment", which the Euro-centric world once assumed as the singular source of modernity, are the only sources of modernity. The West as the single

source of modernity also had negated any new civilisational approach as anti-Modern. The world is beginning to recognise that there are multiple sources of modernity and that each nation is evolving its own modernity. For example, there is Japanese modernity, Chinese modernity and Indian modernity.

The originally West-centric UN in whose dictionary the term diversity never featured throughout the last century too has begun to recognise this diversity of cultures. The Cultural Diversity Convention [2001] recognises the cultural diversities of the world. The UN, which mandated the rest of the world to adopt the Western anthropology of Modernity in the Measures for the Development of Underdeveloped Economies in 1951, for their development, gradually retraced its position and recommended a culture-led development model for all in the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. Undoubtedly, the world is in the midst of a new civilisational revolution.

### **India's rising civilisational consciousness**

India is no exception to this global trend. Ancient India has been a civilisation since time immemorial. It was no surprise that the Indian freedom movement itself was civilisational. In his foundational treatise, "Hind Swaraj", Mahatma Gandhi defined India's struggle against the British as civilisational. His chosen successor, Jawaharlal Nehru, also said in his article on the freedom movement in the Foreign Affairs magazine in 1938, that India's battle for freedom was cultural. Yet shockingly, the millennial civilisational consciousness that drove the freedom movement went underground post freedom in the euphoric economic, secular and ideological politics of that time, which worked against the civilisational impulses of all nations, including India. The sudden disappearance of Indian civilisational consciousness impacted various aspects of national life and even national security. It is only as late as the final decades of the previous century that pre-independence

Indian civilisational consciousness once again began to manifest. This coincided later with the rise of global civilisational consciousness. A rising Indian civilisational consciousness has undoubtedly begun informing different aspects of national life.

## **Yet no civilisational approach for the forest and hill people of India**

But in one important and critical area of national life, the relation between the forest and hill people and the people of the plains, there hasn't been a perceptible effort to undertake a civilisational approach.

India's forest and hill communities constitute a fifth of the country's population, yet, even after 75 years of attaining freedom, the Indian establishment is still blind and continues to ignore the reality about these communities. It is shocking to see the western colonial anthropological approach and their methods of dealing with forest and hill communities in colonised countries, continuing to dominate the Indian establishment narrative and public discourse and still uncritically remaining institutionalised in India..

A few testimonies from India's past, dating not just centuries, but thousands of years back, on the relationship between the forest and the plains, and peoples' of both, will irrefutably settle the differences that exist between Indian reality and the Western approach. And, that would be adequate to show how wrong, or even ridiculous, is the adoption of the Western approach to the forest and hill people of India.

One, the Western colonists' approach to the forest and hill people was that of them being savages, which led to their total elimination and genocide in the Americas, Europe and Oceania. The small number that survived this genocide are labelled as an indigenous people and presented as curios by the West. While that is a fact of Western history and geography, it is not so in the case of Africa and Asia, where no one

was exterminated by anyone, including by the colonisers. And yet, this labelling of those small number of peoples and communities leftover after colonial genocide as “indigenous” by colonial explorers in the Americas, Europe and Oceania, is mechanically applied to the people of the forests and the hills in other parts of the world, particularly India. This has resulted in an artificial dividing line being drawn in India, in particular, distinguishing the forest people from their millennial civilisational and cultural cousins in the plains.

Two, in the Americas, Europe and Oceania, there was nothing in common between the forest people exterminated during the colonial exploration and the colonisers who occupied their land and called it plains. But Bharat was a total contrast. In Bharat, there has been a common and continuous cultural, civilisational and religious interface and integration lasting over several millennia that transcends all other differences between the people of the forests and hills, and the people of the plains. Such civilisational integration is unknown anywhere else in the world. In 1962, the UN Dhebar Committee on People of Forests, labelled as a study of tribals, had cited the Ramayana, Mahabharata and ancient texts to show that there was no dividing line between forest and plains. The Committee said that because of the continuous migration between the forests and the plains, it has been difficult to distinguish between who is from the forest and who is from the plains. And yet, government policies and public discourse in India continues to be more in alignment with Western views institutionalised by Verrier Elvin as explained later on.

Three, it would have shocked Western anthropologists who considered the forest and hill people as dark, backward, savages and barbarians, had they known that the forest civilisation in India was considered as a source of higher knowledge and enlightenment. Aranyakas, ancient India's most revered text and part of the Vedas, meaning “The Book of Forests”, had its origins in the calm and

quietude of the forests and the hills through the contributions of sages and rishis, i.e., India's greatest and most revered sages were themselves forest dwellers!

On the contrary, the people of the plains were known as the consumers of this great enlightenment emanating from the forests. Therefore, in those times, to seek purer knowledge one had to move to the quietude of the forests. Even today, there are many in India, who in the autumn of their lives, give up their material comforts in search of higher spiritual pursuits, leaving the plains and going to the forests. This stage of life is called Vanaprastha, meaning "Journey to the Forest".

The Vayu Purana, which is at least 2000-years-old, says that the father of Bharath (from whom the name of Bharatvarsha for our country originated), handed over the kingdom to his son Bharath and went to the forest for higher seeking!

Four, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, two of the oldest epics of Bharat, are full of episodes of people of the plains, the emperors and the ordinary folk, adopting and relating to the people of forests and hills as brothers. The most revered godly personality in Indian civilisation, Sri Rama, embraced Guha, the boatman as his brother, Hanuman and Sugreeva, the monkey heroes of the Deccan, as his friends, and the revered Sabari, the elderly forest woman of Kerala, as his mother, and as a saint, and even ate the fruit which she had already tasted. When hundreds of great seers were waiting to see Sri Rama, he went straight to Sabari's home. This is the civilisational relationship between the forests and the plains.

Ignoring this millennial civilisational relationship that existed in India, post-Independence Indian establishment studies and public discourses, nose-led by Western scholars and ideas, have attempted to civilisationally divide the foresters and plainsmen, like the colonists

did. Regrettably, there has been no systematic thought or attempt to study them from an Indian civilisational perspective. But with the kind of historic, epigraphic and civilisational testimonies tumbling out in the last few decades via different disciplines, the colonial assessment of the role of forests and hills needs total review. A survey of Indian civilisational testimonies will prove that adopting a systematic and comprehensive approach to understanding the forest and hills people of India from an Indian perspective, not so far undertaken, is needed to come to terms with Indian reality.

Such a survey is not only a social, cultural and civilisational imperative, but also strategically important for the nation, its security, peace and harmony. Because the colonial ruler's approach was to divide and not to integrate them with the plains people, it was part of the overall colonial game to separate and disaggregate the people of India as Hindus and Muslims, or as belonging to this caste or that caste, or as belonging to this language group and that language group. Yet, even decades after the nation became free, the Indian academic and establishment has not found the need to revisit this flawed and dangerous colonial approach.

The result is that in the academic, social and political discourse, the approach to the people of the forests and the hills, the tribals, unfortunately continues to be based on the colonial view that they are civilisationally different from the rest of Bharathiyas, very much 'the other people', viz, savage, barbaric and primitive, to be studied by the plains people, who by implication, were seen as more civilised. The original and privileged burden of the colonialists' and their mission to civilise a colonised people, i.e., a fundamentally racist approach, later got transformed into a social science discipline and as anthropology of modernity, for the people of the plains to perceive and treat the hills and forest people as ones to be modernised and civilised.

## **Negation of Indian reality and its philosophy of harmony in diversity**

The western anthropological approach, which considers the foresters backward and the plainsmen as forward, is the very negation of the Indian view of them, as related by a higher philosophy of integrated humans as a whole. The ancient Indian philosophical exposition “Isavasyam Idam Sarvam” in the Isavasya Upanishad, translated by Mahatma Gandhi as meaning that “Everything down to the tiniest atom is divine” integrates not only the humans inter se but also humans, animals, and all animate and inanimate things that constitutes the earth. On the integration of the humans Swami Vivekananda said, “Every soul is potentially divine – Amritasya Putrah”. These were not just philosophical declarations, but informed practices of a people, ranging from kings to commoners. Let's just take one celebrated and revered example from the epic Ramayana. Rama, a self-exiled prince, related to Guha, the boatman, Sugreeva, Hanuman and the monkey population of forest, and Sabari, the dweller in the hills, as being integral to his own life. The Ramayana is no ordinary piece of literature, but one that is revered throughout Bharat, both plains and forests. Lord Rama is a national symbol of reverence and worship. The Ramayana is so deeply entrenched in the Indian DNA that there are over 300 versions of it that have penetrated the Indian consciousness, including in the minds of the forest and hills people, whether it be in the remote North East, the Mizos, or elsewhere [Rama Katha in Tribal and Folk-Traditions: Introduction by K.S. Singh.pdf].

Many more versions of Ramayana have travelled outside India, to South and South East Asia. The number of people who viewed the “Ramayana” serial 1987 is estimated to have been 650 million, according to the BBC. The episodic messages of Sri Rama in the “Ramayana” and off it, are recited by millions of humans, rich or poor, socially deprived or dwellers living on the banks of rivers, or in the forests or the hills, even today. Sri Rama did not regard the forest

and hills people as savages, or barbarians, or even as animists and soulless worshippers devoid of core spiritual knowledge.

This understanding flowed from the higher philosophy expounded in the “Isavasya Upanishad”, that not just humans, but creation in its entirety, is divine. This foundational integral approach is totally absent in Western civilisation which saw everything that we saw as interrelated internally, as separate externally. It is this thought and attitude that led to forest and hills people being described as savages, barbaric and primitive.

It is not just that the forest and hills, and the plains people are related and integrated. In ancient Indian civilisational view, the forest was not backward, but a place for contemplation and a source of enlightenment for people coming from the plains. In contrast, the Western perspective saw the forest as dark, backward and devoid of civilisation. The Western view was based on brick and mortar structures, while the Indian view was built on spiritual and human consciousness. That is why there is a paradigm difference between the Western anthropology of modernity and the ancient Indian approach to the forests and the hills, and their respective inhabitants. Unless this fundamental difference between the two approaches is recognised, the Indian civilisational approach to the people of the forests and the hills will never be understood. While there is a need for an Indian civilisational test for every colonial version of Indian history, theory and assessment, the approach to the foresters and hills people of India as related to the plains people, it is inevitable that this realisation would even benefit other branches of knowledge.

**Did Indian civilisation ever regard its foresters and hill-men as savage, backward, or as “the other” people? The answer is a big ‘NO’.**

The most critical and primary question for understanding the forest and hill communities is whether they were “savages and barbaric” in

the Indian philosophy and practice, as western anthropology thought and taught, which the West later modified as “the other people, tribal, backward”, and finally as indigenous people. The answer to this question comes from Indian philosophy that originally included and described all human diversities as one harmonious whole. Western colonial ideology, on the other hand, divided humans as either being civilised, or being savages. The fundamental and shocking difference between the Indian and Western approaches is that while the latter considers the forests as dark and backward, the former celebrated them as sources of enlightenment. In the Indian philosophical view, foresters and hills-men cannot be considered backward, and if by applying the Western view, they are described as such, then all Indians have to be considered backward which is how the colonists regarded the colonised elsewhere. It is, therefore, necessary to now explain how the origin of Indian civilisation was in the forests and the hills, and not in the plains.

In Indian civilisation the plainsmen supported and defended the right of the foresters to remain in the forests and contemplate on the higher reaches of human consciousness and the plainsmen themselves moved to forests to gain higher knowledge. Both plainsmen and foresters were joint developers of Indian civilisation. In that context, the plainsmen appear more as consumers of and less as contributors to the origin and development of Indian civilisation. Therefore, in Indian civilisation, the foresters and the hill people are not “the other people” in relation to the plainsmen, but function as co-partners in its evolution.

### **Forest, backward in Western anthropology, is the origin of knowledge in Indian civilisation**

Irrefutable textual, historic and civilisational testimonies exist to show that the forest is the primary source of knowledge in Indian civilisation. The etymological meaning of the earliest literature in the

Vedas – the Aranyakas, that is the Book of Forests as the Upanishads were known– shows how the forest is the source of true knowledge in Indian civilisation. This is explained in detail later. There are two broad divisions of the Vedas – the Upanishads and the Brahmanas.. The Upanishads, which originated in the forests, are called the Aranyakas, or the “Book of Forests”. The Aranyakas are regarded as the source of Gnana or source of knowledge. The Brahmanas, which contain the ritualistic part of the Vedas, are observed and practiced by the plains people. It would not be incorrect to say that knowledge generated in the forests through the Upanishads was deployed in the plains. The Bhagavata Purana originated in the forests. Naimisharanya (modern day Nimsar in Uttar Pradesh), where according to the Bhagavata Purana, thousands of rishis assembled to discuss the dawn of Kali Yuga and ways to handle the evil effects and challenges of the future. This is how and why the plainsmen looked up to the foresters for guidance in Indian civilisation. The issue is not whether that happened or not; the message is that in Indian civilisation the forest was the source from which the plains got their guidance and that the foresters were not a backward people.

### **Vedas of the Forest and Indus Valley of the plains — the sources of India's past**

There are two ancient Indian civilisational testimonies -- -- the Vedas and the Indus Valley. It is undisputed that the Indus Valley and the Vedas constitute the very beginning of Indian civilisation. The Vedas originated in the forests representing the higher consciousness of Indian foresters, while the Indus Valley Civilization manifests the development of India's plainsmen. There have been and still there are , disputes whether the Indus Valley predates the Vedas, or has a mix of the Vedas. It is necessary to analyse both the Vedas and the Indus Valley to understand the origins and nature of Indian civilisation.

Originally, the Western view that followed the discovery of Sanskrit, was that cultured Aryans White people who conquered and civilised India. [See: *The Shape of Ancient Thought* by Thomas McEvelly]. This entire theory turned on its head after the Indus Valley discoveries of nomadic and pastoral Aryans invading and destroying that civilisation. The Aryan invasion theory, which was groundless, was gradually given up and replaced by the Aryan migration theory. The migration ridiculed the theory that the Aryans invaded destroyed the Indus Civilisation, but changed the narrative to Aryans overpowering Dravidians. And now the Aryan-Dravidian racial divide itself is suspect and has changed into linguistic difference. Originally the Vedas were considered mythological as the Saraswati River mentioned in the Vedas was considered non-existent and imaginary. Slowly the theory gaining ground is that the Saraswati River, which is mentioned in the Vedas, thought of as imaginary and therefore, the Vedas itself, did indeed exist and that the most probable reason for the destruction of the Indus Civilisation was the drying up of the Saraswati due to natural causes. There are satellite imageries and hydrological studies which tend to support the view that the Saraswati which existed could have been diverted by natural calamities, or earthquakes, into the Sutlej, or the Yamuna and the Ganga. One thing that emerges as a certainty is that that the theory river, which described river as a myth, is now untenable [See *Saraswati: The River that Disappeared* by K.S.Valdiya published by ISRO]. Consequently, like the Saraswati, which was considered a theory, the description of the Vedas as a myth, too has become an outdated theory. While the existence of the Saraswati River establishes that the Vedas are not a myth, subsequent researches by renowned scholars like Iravatham Mahadevan show that the Rig Vedic "Soma Ritual" is depicted in the seals of the Indus Valley as sacred ritual and filter [See *The Cult Object on Unicorn Seals: A Sacred Filter* (1983) by Iravatham Mahadevan]. When Mahadevan wrote his research paper, the theory of Aryan-Dravidian divide was almost undisputed. Further

pioneering research by him also pointed to a possible convergence between Vedic texts of the forests and the Indus Civilisation of the plains

Likewise, Western scholars had originally theorised that the Indus Valley Civilisation was an extension of the Babylonian Civilisation. But that also changed when they conceded that the Indus Civilisation had evolved independently, unconnected with any other [See V Gordon Childe *New Light on the Most Ancient East*]. Now with both Western theories becoming untenable, it is clear that the Indus Valley of the plains and the Vedas of the forests were real and constituted the twin sources of the Indian civilisation of that time. It could well be that the Indus Valley constitutes the civilisation of the Indian plains and the Vedas, the Aranyakas and the endless continuum of sacred texts that followed them, constitute the soul of that civilisation. Now a brief account of how the Indus civilisation has been accepted as home grown in India.

### **Indus Valley — thoroughly Indian, not a derivative any other contemporary civilisation**

It is now an undisputed fact that the Indus Valley Civilisation was an autogenous evolution and not a derivative of any of its contemporaries. The Encyclopaedia Britannica says that the civilisation is thoroughly Indian in origin, independent in evolution and unconnected with either the Babylonian or the Egyptian Civilisations. It says that the elements of Indus civilisation are present in the contemporary Indian way of life. To quote historian V. Gordon Childe:

*“While the Indus (or Harappan) civilization may be considered the culmination of a long process indigenous to the Indus valley, a number of parallels exist between developments on the Indus River and the rise of civilization in Mesopotamia. It is striking to compare the Indus with this better-known and more fully documented region and to see how closely*

*the two coincide with respect to the emergence of cities and of such major concomitants of civilization as writing, standardised weights and measures, and monumental architecture. Yet nearly all the earlier writers have sensed the Indian-ness of the civilization, even when they were largely unable to articulate it.*

*India confronts Egypt and Babylonia by the 3rd millennium with a thoroughly individual and independent civilization of her own, technically the peer of the rest. And plainly it is deeply rooted in Indian soil. The Indus Civilization represents a very perfect adjustment of human life to a specific environment. And it has endured; it is already specifically Indian and forms the basis of modern Indian culture.” (New Light on the Most Ancient East, 4th ed., 1952.)*

*The force of Childe’s words can be appreciated even without an examination of the Indus valley script found on seals; the attention paid to domestic bathrooms, the drains, and the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro can all be compared to elements in the later Indian civilization. The bullock carts with a framed canopy, called ikkas, and boats are little changed to this day. The absence of pins and the love of bangles and of elaborate nose ornaments are all peculiarly South Asian. The religion of the Indus also is replete with suggestions of traits known from later India. The significance of the bull, the tiger, and the elephant; the composite animals; the seated yogi god of the seals; the tree spirits and the objects resembling the Shiva linga (a phallus symbolic of the god Shiva) of later times—all these are suggestive of enduring forms in later Indian civilization*

[<https://www.britannica.com/place/India/The-Indus-civilization>]

That the Indus Valley Civilisation was home grown and grew autogenously, is critical to the study of the civilisation of the Indian people which includes all people of India.

Now a brief account of how the Vedas, the soul of the Indian civilisation, emanated from the forests and foresters.

## The Vedas emanated from the Forests and Foresters

That in the Indian paradigm, the forests and the hills, and their inhabitants, were not backward, and were in fact, the light of Indian civilisation, is self-evident from the very source of knowledge in Indian civilisation – the Vedic texts – was forests. The ancient Vedic texts, not less than 4000-years-old, are divided into two parts. One, Aranyaka [etymologically derived from “Forest”] regarded as the Book of Forests and the other, Brahmanas, regarded as the Book of Villages; that is the Plains. The Indira Gandhi Centre for Arts, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, says that in the Indian civilisation, it is from the forests that the people of the plains sought enlightenment. To quote:

*The term Aranyaka is derived from the word ‘Aranya’ meaning ‘forest’. The Aranyaka texts are so-called because ‘they were works to be read in the forest’....it has to be understood that Vedic rituals [Yajnas] are intended to confer not only material benefits but also mental purity by constant discipline. Having obtained purity [by Yajnas] one must seek the solitude of forests for further concentration and meditation.....the Aranyakas containing explanations of the rituals and allegorical speculations thereon are meant for Vanprasthas, who renounce family life residing in the forests for tapas and other religious activities. Winternitz calls them as ‘forest texts’ to be studied by forest hermits. Or the reason might be that these texts were propounded by the Rishis who resided in the forests and thought upon the secrets of the Yajnas. Aranyakas describe the actions of life and also the acquisition of knowledge.*

Vedanta emanated from the Aranyaka [Upanishads]. If the high Vedic text is identified with the forests, can anyone say that the foresters are savages, barbaric, or backward?

It is also necessary to consider whether the Vedas are relevant any more, or are they merely a proud heritage and just a treasure of the past only to be exhumed to study Indian civilisation and the relation

between the forest and hill people? No. There is abundant scientific testimony to support the view that the light which the Vedas contain has the potential to answer many unanswered questions of contemporary science.

## **Nobel Science laureates on Vedas as answers to questions of modern science**

From the testimonies of global scientists and scholars, it would appear that the Vedas are no ordinary literature, and the Vedanta is no ordinary knowledge. They are probably the only ancient texts whose validity today is acknowledged and celebrated by the high minds of the West and East, as containing the clue to answering modern scientific questions. The Vedas and the Upanishads in particular, are regarded as containing the highest scientific truths by the world's leading scientists and intellectuals, many of them Nobel Laureates, and as revealing the most advanced scientific knowledge.

Here are acknowledging comments of some Nobel scientists on the Indian philosophy, Vedas and Upanishads as containing answers to the questions of contemporary science.

*After the conversations about Indian philosophy, some of the ideas of Quantum Physics that had seemed so crazy suddenly made much more sense.* Werner Heisenberg (1901-76), One of the greatest physicists and co-founder of Quantum Physics, a Nobel Prize Winner

*Some blood transfusion from the East to the West is must to save Western science from spiritual anaemia. Vedanta teaches that consciousness is singular, all happenings are played out in one universal consciousness and there is no multiplicity of selves.*---Erwin Schrodinger (1887--1961), Austrian physicist, known as the Father of Quantum Physics, a Nobel Prize winner for his invention of Wave Mechanics

*In all world there is no kind of framework within which we can find consciousness in the plural; this is simply something we construct because of the temporal plurality of individuals, but it is a false construction.... The only solution to this conflict in so far as any is available to us at all lies in the ancient wisdom of the Upanishad.*

-Erwin Schroedinger (1887-1961), one of the greatest physicists of 20th century, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for his invention of Wave Mechanics

*I go into the Upanishads to ask questions.*-Niels Bohr (1885-1962), a Danish nuclear physicist who developed the 'Bohr Model of the Atom'. A Nobel Prize winner for physics in 1922 for his Theory of Atomic Structure

*The Vedanta and the Sankhya hold the key to the laws of mind and thought process which are co-related to the Quantum Field, i.e. the operation and distribution of particles at atomic and molecular levels:-*

Brian David Josephson (1940), a Welsh physicist and the youngest Nobel Laureate

*Indian students should value their religious culture and, of course, the classical Indian culture bears importantly on the meaning of life and values. I would not separate the two. To separate science and Indian culture would be harmful....I don't think it is practical to keep scientific and spiritual culture separate* - Charles H. Townes (1915-2015 ), an American Nobel Prize winning scientist, who worked extensively during World War II designing radar bombing systems and invented the microwave spectroscopy.

Robert Oppenheimer (1904-67), another great scientist, said: "Modern physics is exemplification and refinement of the old Hindu system". He further stated "The greatest privilege this century may claim over all previous centuries is the Vedas", adding that the,

“Most terrifying scientific achievements of the West were the mystical experience of the Bhagavad Gita”.

David J. Bohm (1917-1992) said: “Brahman is scientific consciousness”. [ “The vastest knowledge of today cannot transcend the Indian rishis”, said Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947).

“To the Indian Rishis the ‘Divine Play’ was the evolution of the Cosmos”, said Austrian-born American author, physicist, systems theorist and deep ecologist Fritjof Capra (1939).

“Hinduism is dedicated to the idea that the Cosmos itself undergoes an immense, indeed an infinite, number of deaths and rebirths. It is the only religion in which the time scales correspond to those of modern scientific cosmology”, said Dr. Carl Sagan (1934-96).

“Deepest thinking of India made its way to Greece”, said John Archibald Wheeler [1911-2008].

“(The) motion of stars calculated by Indian thinkers 4500 years (ago) vary not even a minute from modern tables”, said French astronomer, mathematician, freemason, and political leader Jean Sylvain Bailly (1736-1793). “Hindu astronomy was the source of knowledge for all world civilisations”, he added.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica said that the “atomic structure of matter is mentioned in the Hindu treatises Vaisesika and Nyaya”.

Emmelin Pluneret said: that the “Vedas contain an account of the dimension of Earth, Sun, Moon, Planets, and Galaxies”.

Many great philosophers, thinkers, writers and poets of the world have described ancient India in a number of ways.

India is the cradle of the human race” [Mark Twain 1835-1910],

“Indian literature is the profoundest thought”(Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel 1770-1831),

“Vedas contain profoundest power, unfathomable peace” [Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882),

“Upanishads are the products of the highest wisdom” (Arthur Schopenhauer 1788-1860),

“The Veda was the most precious gift for which the West had ever been indebted to the East”(Voltaire 1694-1778),

“India is (the) mother of philosophy to maths, the mother of all us”(Will Durant 1885-1981),

“The only way to salvation for mankind is the Indian Way” [Arnold Toynbee],

““To the philosophers of India, however, the Theory of Relativity’ is no new discovery” adding that if the West applies the Theory of Relativity to make atom bombs, India applies it to create a new state of consciousness” [Alan Watts (1915-1973),

“India is a country to be searched for knowledge” (Friedrich Hegel-1770-1831).

“In comparison with (the) Gita, modern literature is puny and trivial”(Henry David Thoreau 1817-62),

“Facts established by today’s science all are known to the seers who founded the Vedas”(Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919),

“The Vedas fill a gap which no literary work in any other language could fill”(Friedrich Max Müller 1823-1900),

“Vedas still represent eternal truth in the purest form ever written”(Paul William Roberts 1950-2019),

“Whatever be the scientific discoveries, none can dispute the eternal truths propounded by the Upanishads”(Paul Deussen 1845-1919),

“The loftiest philosophy of the Europeans appears like a feeble spark before the Vedanta”(August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845),

What great scientists, Nobel Laureates and other great men and women of the world have read, understood and celebrated as sources of high knowledge unavailable except in India emanated from forests and hills of India, authored by the foresters and hills-men!

### **If Vedas emanated from forests, Indian foresters cannot be backward**

If Vedas which contained the most advanced scientific truths which great scientists and thinkers acknowledge had emanated from Indian forests, can the Indian foresters be regarded as backward? Obviously not. Against this background, it is ridiculous that, carbon copying the Western Anthropology of Modernity, the Indian discourse regards the forests and hills as backward and the rishis who were forest dwellers as savages and semi-barbaric, and their descendants, the forest dwellers, to be uncivilised. Contrary to Western Anthropology, which dismisses the forest as the home for savages and the barbaric, in Indian spiritual and civilisational traditions, the forests have been and are still the source of contemplation, meditation, enlightenment and higher knowledge.

### **Paradigm Difference between the Indian and Western view of forests**

In any attempt to study India's forest and hills people, it has to be clearly told and understood that there is a paradigm difference

between the history, civilisation and background of the traditional Indian forest communities and their contemporary counterparts in the West, whom Western anthropologists understood and labelled as savages first, barbaric next, primitive later and tribal even later, and now as an indigenous people.

To summarise, there are four reasons why there is a paradigm difference between the two perspectives – the Western and the Indian – about the forest and hills people:

One, the Western narrative is founded on the basis that the forests and the hills, and the people residing in it, are backward and that the people of the plains are advanced. But the Indian reality is that the forests are the places of contemplation and the very origin of highest knowledge – the Aranyakas of the Vedas [Book of Forests], which contained the highest wisdom, according to the great men of the world, including Nobel Laureates.

Two, the Western narrative is almost entirely an outcome of colonial history, which distinguished between the original occupants of colonised territories and those who invaded them, but the Indian reality is different as no one invaded or occupied the territories of the original occupants.

Three, in the Western narrative, the people of the forests and the hills are totally separate in history, culture and faith. The Indian reality is that the people of the forests and the hills have a strong to broadly common and shared history, culture and faiths with the people of the plains.

Four, the Western narrative justified the forced segregation or separation of the forest and hills people and disconnected the Indian foresters from their plainsmen cousins. In direct contrast to this forced separation, the Indian history shows continuous migration between the

forests and the plains, and according to the UN Dhebar Commission, which admitted that there was such two-way migration between the forests and the plains, and therefore, it is difficult to say which were the homes of the people of the forests and which were the homes of the hill people.

### **Western paradigm and Verrier Elvin**

But in a bizarre imitation totally inappropriate to the Indian context, the Indian establishment, before and after independence, applied Western anthropological assumptions to the forest and hill people of India. Shaped by the western anthropological thought, the Indian establishment, saw the forest and hills people as savages and barbaric like the West did till at least Independence. Post- Independence, while the Western notion diluted, confusion prevailed over how to perceive them, but the dominant view was to continue with western concepts.

The post-Independent Indian establishment was guided by a Westerner Dr Verrier Elvin who, though not a trained anthropologist, started off as one. A Christian evangelist, he came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, gave up his priesthood but not his faith, married a couple of forest dwelling girls and spent over three decades with foresters in different parts of Bharat. He became the anthropological adviser to the government post Independence. He became the missionary of what he liked to call 'Mr Nehru's Gospel for tribes'. He shaped the policy of the Government of India on foresters and hillmen. His ideas and work on the forest dwelling people became the Bible for the government for which he won the Sahitya Academy Award. He was also a recipient of the Padma Bhushan (India's third highest civilian honour) in 1961. Elvin observed and spent considerable time with forest dwellers unfortunately not from the original Indian civilisational perspective which integrated with the plainsmen. He could not fathom them as a community that had been forcibly separated by the colonists

from the plainsmen and kept isolated in Reserved Forests under British colonial rule, which in turn, led to a deep development-related divide between the plains and forests, making the people of these dwellings vastly different to each other to the naked eye [See infra **Blind import of Western Anthropology caused development Divide**]. As he did not know the Indian civilisational paradigm he could not see a totally different paradigm operated in Bharat.

Because of his association with Mahatma Gandhi who had been highly critical of the Western civilisation, Elvin did not accept, and, therefore, could not apply the Western Anthropology of Modernity which regarded the forest people as savages to be civilised in its entirety. He valued their culture, but wanted their culture preserved without interference from their civilisational cousins in the plains, without understanding the millennial commonality between the plainsmen and foresters. He did not understand that it would not be preserved when the forest people were allowed to be converted in which he was deeply involved. His position on the forest people in principle was the same as the Western – that is they are the “other people ” for the plains people. His solution was to keep them isolated forever like the colonists did. He was a Trisanku – neither was he a modern Westerner to destroy their culture and modernise them, nor a Bharatiya, to renew the cultural common links between the plainsmen and foresters and maintain their culture.

Verrier Elvin was therefore convinced that their culture needs to be preserved without integrating with plainsmen. This was definitely contrary to the modern Western anthropological solution that they must be contracted out of their societies and modernised. Closely looked at, it would be clear that Elvin's solution of complete isolation was far more dangerous to national integration and national security than the Western model of anthropologically modernising them. It was also in total conflict with the millennia of civilisational interaction between the forest and plains people in India.

Verrier Elvin was also confused in his understanding of the Indian foresters and the hillmen of India as compared to their counterparts in the West. The confusion was the result of a gap in his understanding of the foresters' position in Indian civilisation and their contemporary status caused by long years and decades of isolation from the plainsmen imposed by the colonists. Elvin did not have the opportunity to study the Vedas, the Puranas and the philosophic traditions of India relating to the foresters and hillmen. He did not have the overarching civilisational bonds between the foresters and plainsmen in India. He was obviously misled by the bewildering and conflicting diversity of the Indian peoples both in the plains and in the forests. In those times there were debates about whether the people of the plains, who were bafflingly diverse themselves, constituted a nation or not. The plains people too were as bewilderingly diverse as the people of the forests. And yet the entire freedom movement succeeded and the subsequent history of India proved that underneath the puzzling diversity was an underlying unity which did not stop at the plains but extended deep into the forests of India. Had he studied and done a civilisational analysis of India, he would probably have acquired a proper understanding of the nation's civilisational unity and harmony underneath the baffling diversities. He would have been shocked to know that in the Indian perspective forests are not backward and that the forest people are not backward.

### **Western Anthropology Caused Development Divide**

The blind import of the Western idea of the forest and hills people as the other people, into India by the colonial regime, in total disregard and negation of their broadly common civilisation, culture, history, mythology and even worship, forced them to isolate the forest people from those living in plains like they did in the other colonised countries. The colonists segregated the foresters by introducing a reserved forest area policy and cutoff the millennial civilisational and cultural

intercourse that had existed between the foresters and plainsmen from ancient times. The colonists could not understand that the foresters and plainsmen of India were not different like the colonists and the foresters in the lands they had colonised. Many characteristics of the forest and hills people could be found in the people of the plains in India. For example, if the Indian foresters are animists, the plainsmen are no less so. The names of forest and hill communities are found in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the other Puranas. Instead of building on that civilisational integration, the blind application of the Western Anthropology of Modernity allowed the colonists to physically divide the people of the forests from the people of the plains. This physical divide over a couple of centuries of colonial rule, transformed into a developmental divide and eventually became a psychological divide between the plainsmen and foresters during the colonial period itself. Post-Independence, it became a political divide in which external forces intervened and enlarged this into separatism and insurgency that soon turned into national security issues.

This is despite the fact that the first and perhaps the only official study of the forests and hills people of India by the independent Indian state in 1960s – the UN Dhebar Committee – had said that in pre-colonial times the forest and hills people in India were never isolated historically, civilisationally and culturally, and there was a free movement between them in the pre-colonial days. The committee, as mentioned earlier, had also relied on the common civilisational bonds between forest and plains and their peoples'. The committee had said that it was colonial rule that created reserved areas rules and brought about a physical isolation of the forest people. This became easier to accomplish with the colonists co-opting the people of the plains as their subordinates, and even as partners, in the administration of the state. The divide that is seen during the colonial period is a development divide caused by centuries of isolation between the two — the plainsmen and foresters.

## **What the Indian plains people regard as sacred, the Western anthropologists regard as backward — the Goan and Sahyadri examples**

Here is a telling instance of contrast between the plainsmen of the West and the Indian plainsmen about how they see the forests and foresters

In the Portuguese rule of Goa, the colonial perspective that people living in the forests and hills were savage, uncivilised and backward, and this description was extended to hill and forest people of Sahyadri Range. The Portuguese regarded the people of the hills and forests in the Sahyadri Range as uncivilised and backward. But were they? The segregation as civilised and backward was on the basis of whether one was a Christian or Hindu. The former was considered as civilised and the latter was condemned as backward.

In his paper titled 'Rugged Hills', 'Dense Forests' and 'Backward People'. *Imagining Landscapes in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Goa* published in the *International Journal for History Culture and Modernity*, José Miguel Ferreira of the University of Lisbon, says that Goa's Portuguese rulers divided the Goans into two categories -- the Old Conquests and the New Conquests. The first were converted to Christianity and the second were designated as Hindus. The Christian converts were recognised as civilised, but the Hindus were regarded as semi-savage and uncivilised.

Ferreira says "Well into the twentieth century both among the colonial administrators and the local elites, most authors were unanimous in describing the population of the New Conquests as backward, semi-savage and alienated from the values of modernity."

While in the Goan Christian establishment, some were willing to declare all Goans as belonging to the same race, Goan Catholics tended to emphasise the difference between the Old and New. They said the

New Conquests were “semi savage people who lived in these rugged hills criss-crossed by deep gorges and ravines, shadowed by dense forests, and were physically morally superior to the Catholic elites of the Old Conquests”.

Ferreira sums up how, even as late as 1961, this view prevailed in the abstract of his essay. He says: “The former Portuguese colony of Goa is best known nowadays as a tourist hotspot. To many, its iconic landscape is one of sandy beaches and whitewashed churches nestling among the paddy fields and coconut trees. But beyond this postcard image there is another lesser known landscape, epitomised by the rugged mountains and forests of the Sahyadri Range.”

During the Portuguese colonial period, which lasted until 1961, this was the ‘other landscape’ of Goa, frequently portrayed as ‘wild’, ‘backward’ and inherently hostile to colonial rule.

The message is clear. If you convert you become civilised. If you don't you are savage and uncivilised.

What a contrast! The people of the plains, forests and the hills regard the Sahyadri hills and forests as sacred, while Western colonisers label it as backward and uncivilised. This brings out the paradigm difference between the two perspectives on not only forests and hills, but also about the people of forests and hills.

### **Bharatavarsh Concept: Integration of all people of Bharat – Unparalleled in the World**

The story of the millennial civilisational commonality of the foresters and plainsmen will be incomplete without the narrative of the millennial cultural and civilisational unity and integrity of Bharat. The history and geography as the world knows starting from the Greco-Roman times have been narration of wars, empires and conquests. All ancient

history before the Greco-Romans are surmises based on archaeological excavations and epigraphy. The history of the even the Greco-Roman and later empires was not the history of a nation-state. It was a history of capturing territories and ruling over them and not of establishing a nation-state which meant an alignment between the people and the geography on which they lived with a commonalty. Henry Kissinger's treatise "Diplomacy" which traces the development of the idea of nation captures the absence of nation-states till the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. According to Eric Hobsbawm, the contemporary idea of a nation-state integrating geography with a people and a state, or a ruler, is a development of 18-19 century Europe. National movements and Intermediary Structures in Europe (NISE) and the University of East London (UEL) conventionally say, "Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century".

But the idea of a nation, or *Rashtra*, nation *Rajya* and *Jana* or subjects existed in Rig Vedic times, pointing to the existence of the idea of a nation-state. The Krishna Yajur Veda [in *Bramhanam* 1.8.3] says that the lives of the subjects must conform to the nation [*Rashtra*] and if a conflict arises between the interests of the nation and the interests of its subjects when the latter will have to yield to the former.

But, never before the 18th century has the concept of a nation and as a geographical entity been identified with a specific people, or a way of life, or with a ruler existed anywhere in the West. It is only so in Bharat. For millennia, India, that is Bharat, was known as *Bharatvarsh*. The term Bharat is as old as the Vedas. Iravatham Mahadevan even traces the idea of Bharat in the Indus Seals of 5000 years ago. The term *Bharatvarsh* as a nation of specific people living within geographical limits that match with the Bharat before the Islamic invasion occurs in *Vishnu Purana*, *Vayu Purana*, *Linga Purana*, *Brahmanda Purana*, *Agni Purana*, *Skanda Purana* and the *Markandeya Purana*. Two millennia before, the Puranas described the physical boundaries of *Bharatvarsh*,

the way people lived, and their belief in Karma and rebirth with the goal of attaining Moksha.

The Vayu Purana, regarded as the oldest, and varyingly dated between 350 BCE and 203-300 CE, says “Bharatavarsha is bounded by the Himalayas to the north and by the ocean to the south. Bharatavarsha is divided into nine regions, or *dvipas*. These were *Indradvipa*, *Kaserumana*, *Tamraparni*, *Gabhastimana*, *Navadvipa*, *Soumya*, *Gandharva* and *Varuna*. This adds up to eight. The ninth region is an island that is surrounded by the ocean on all sides, [obviously Sri Lanka] It was not very easy to travel from one region of Bharatavarsha to another because transportation problems were enormous. The southern tip of Bharatavarsha is known as *Kumarika* (Cape Comorin or *Kanyakumari*). Beyond the boundaries of Bharatavarsha live the disbelievers, i.e., those who disbelieve in the Vedas. To the east live the *Kiratas* and to the west live the *Yavanas*. Bharatavarsha proper is populated by *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*.”

Bharatvarsha, according to the Puranas, is not just a geographic landscape in which specific people resided; it was also a nation-state with a condition. The Vayu Purana says, “He who conquers the whole of Bharata-varsha is celebrated as a *samrat*.” That was why Asoka, who built an empire as vast as Bharatvarsha, including Sri Lanka, was called a *Samrat*. The cultural integration of Bharat and all of its residents, including the forest and hills people is as old as Bharatvarsha itself.

Yet even kings who ruled Bharat chose to go to the forest to meet their *Vanaprastha* responsibilities. The Vayu Purana also says, “This country is known as *Bhāratavarsha* since the times King *Dushyanta* who handed over his kingdom to his son *Bharata* and went into the forests to practice ascetism. This example reveals how even kings moved into the forests in search of their higher purpose in life, which again endorses the Indian fact that the forest is the place for higher knowledge and enlightenment. This again confirms that the Indian paradigm of forest-

plains relation is totally opposite of the Western notion that the forest is backward and the foresters too are backward.

Against this background, is it not ridiculous to apply the Western move to divide and see the people of the forest and the plains people as two different peoples, i.e., the plainsmen as civilised and forest dwellers as backward.

### **Interdisciplinary & Integrated Approach Needed**

It is evident from testimonies from different disciplines – literary, epigraphic, historic, linguistic – and comparative civilisational and historic evidences explained above, that any study, or understanding of this relationships between the people of the plains and the people of the forests in India has to break the silos of individual discipline in which different testimonies is separately confined. Unless the silos are broken and a inter-silo, that is, an inter-disciplinary, study is undertaken an integral and comprehensive view will not emerge. To be comprehend the deeply underlying integration between the Indian plainsman and foresters, a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach is a must. Otherwise getting fuller understanding of the forest and the hills people will be impossible. Unless the knowledge contained and confined in different silos and discipline are studied in an inter disciplinary way, looking at each silo of knowledge of the Indian civilisation in an isolated manner will be six blind people trying to comprehend an elephant, i.e., each one holding one relevant, but dismembered piece of evidence about the elephant, rather than comprehending it as a whole.

A geography with identified people, or even identifying itself as a nation-state for millennia encouraging migrations between the forests and the plains, where even Kings go to the forests in search of enlightenment and knowledge, cannot be seen as, or equated to the Americas, Europe, the Oceanias, or even Africa. Civilisational and

historic integration between the forest and plains in India completely rules out the view that the forest people are or can be “other people”. They are not and cannot be the other people in India.

One can understand what kind of bandwidth of diverse disciplines is needed to study and understand how different is the relation between forests and plains and between their respective peoples’.

## **Conclusion**

In this background, it does not need a seer to say that there is a need for silo-free complete and comprehensive review and reversal of the current approach of the Indian establishment to study the relation between the foresters and plainsmen of India .For undertaking such a review, or considering the need for a reversal of thought and action, the establishment needs a complete psychological shift and makeover.

Here, I would like to recall an incident in the life of Maharishi Aurobindo, who went from Bengal to Pondicherry following the collapse of the revolutionary movement. After the revolutionary movement failed and till the mass political movement took off under Mahatma Gandhi, there was complete darkness in India. Many were looking towards Aurobindo, an intellectual giant, to show the way out of this darkness. But what did Aurobindo do? He was looking for inspiration from a mad-looking mystic Kullachami, on whom Subramania Bharati has written a number of poems. People were left surprised when the illiterate Kullachami revealed the path of enlightenment to Aurobindo by just pouring out tea from a cup onto the ground and showing the empty cup to Aurobindo. When Aurobindo’s friends asked him what that message was, he said that Kullachami had asked him to empty his mind and begin thinking afresh.

That is how the exercise to review and reverse the Western anthropological approach to the forest and hill people of India should begin.



**Swaminathan Gurumurthy** is highly popular as a writer in India. Celebrated for his investigative journalism, he has ceaselessly campaigned against corruption at high places, exposing the bribery in Bofors arms deal and the nexus between corporates and government. A beleaguered government arrested Gurumurthy and persecuted him, but faced humiliation with the entire media standing by him. The issues raised by Gurumurthy became election issues, which led to the defeat of the most powerful government since independence. Hamish McDonald, well-known Australian journalist, wrote in his book 'Polyester Baron', that Gurumurthy's investigative work 'must rank among the most powerful examples of investigative journalism anywhere in the world', adding that Gurumurthy had 'a strong sense of probity'. In his biography on the media baron Ramnath Goenka, BG Verghese, a highly respected editor and writer, described Gurumurthy as a 'brilliant chartered accountant and exceedingly astute amateur lawyer'. Gurumurthy is a Visiting Faculty of IIT Bombay in the domains of Economics, Finance and Management. He is also a Distinguished Professor of Legal Anthropology in Sastra University. A chartered accountant by profession Gurumurthy is also a corporate adviser of high standing. Gurumurthy has been consistently seen by the media as a powerful person from 1990 till now. One of the founders of the Vivekananda International Foundation, Gurumurthy is also the chairman of its board of trustees.

## About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non-partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on issues of national importance.

The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organisation to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelise fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

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