Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam:

Relevance of India’s Ancient Thinking to Contemporary Strategic Reality

VIF Seminar organized in collaboration with ICCR and ICPR
at VIF, New Delhi
16-17 January 2019
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The adoption of 21st June as International Day of Yoga by the United Nations General Assembly in 2014, in response to an India-led resolution with a record high number of co-sponsors, was a landmark event. Taking the cue from the Honorable Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, it was felt that it is important to mobilise our ancient ideas and use them practically and strategically to build an Indian narrative. Prime Minister Modi has highlighted ancient Indian aphorisms such as ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, ‘Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya’ and others on different forums. In his speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in early 2018, he pointed out how gems of Indian wisdom such as ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ with its underlying philosophy of oneness continues to be relevant and effective in alleviating global conflicts in the present age. This aphorism clearly indicates that our destinies are linked together. In other speeches too, he pointed out that ancient India has given much to the world in terms of ideals—for example, how to be in harmony with nature. Prime Minister Modi further said that each country’s approach to the rest of the world is determined by its civilisational and philosophical heritage. It is because of ideals like ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ that India looks upon the whole world as a family. The international aid that India provides to other countries promptly in times of natural calamities is proof of her belief in ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’.

Apart from its philosophical dimensions, what are the strategic implications of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, especially in today’s world order? How do we reconcile it with the pragmatic imperatives required in instances such as rising conflicts based on identity or illegal migration across borders? What are its ethical implications in an individual’s life or on society? How relevant is the dictum at the national and international levels today? These were some of the questions that led to the idea of holding a seminar on ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’.

The objective was to highlight Indian civilisational resources that could be adopted in India’s foreign policy and strategic thinking, and also to think of ways to deepen India’s existing cultural footprints worldwide. The aphorism ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ is a symbol around which this quest for the Indian narrative could be rallied. It was envisaged that the seminar would be an ideal meeting ground for academics and scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds like philosophy, history, political thought, international relations, as well as strategists, diplomats and policymakers.
‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ is a Vedantic dictum that appears in the *Maha Upanishad* (VI.71-73), a minor Upanishad belonging to the so-called group of Vishnu Upanishads (Upanishads mostly of later provenance that extol Lord Vishnu or Narayana as the Supreme Being). The concerned verses declare that it is only the small-minded who discriminate between kin and stranger; while for the magnanimous, the entire world is a family. The context of this verse is a discussion on the state of *jivanmukti* (embodied liberation) and *brahmisthiti* (state of being established in *brahman*). It enjoins that magnanimity, which is a direct result of non-attachment, is also one of the pre-requisite qualities for the same.

On the one hand, ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, which expresses the ultimate philosophy of oneness, is of great significance to our spiritual and moral life; while on the other, it has implications for our nation’s strategic culture. The purpose of this seminar was to explore this ancient saying in all its dimensions and implications, with a special focus on India’s strategic thought and cultural diplomacy. For instance, how is the universality of Vedanta philosophy revealed through UN Charter principles? How can this dictum help in international peace-building and conflict resolution? How can it help in our efforts at saving the environment? What strategic dilemmas would we face if we were to apply this principle to international politics?

Centering on the dictum ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, the proposed seminar deliberated on themes like its philosophical basis; other Indic religions’ position vis-à-vis the dictum; ethics; application in education; implications for strategic thought and dilemmas in strategic affairs; saving the environment through this approach; peace-building, conflict avoidance and conflict resolution; security (national and international); international relations; non-use of force; and international cooperation in culture. It also deliberated on the application of ancient Indian thought for enhancing India’s soft power and cultural diplomacy.
Day 1 (16th January 2019, Wednesday)

0930 – 1000 hrs  Registration & Tea

1000 – 1100hrs  Inaugural Session

Invocation

Welcome Address: Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director, VIF

Keynote Address: Prof. Kapil Kapoor, Chairperson, IIAS

Vote of Thanks

1100 – 1115hrs  Tea/Coffee Break & Group Photo

1115 – 1315hrs  Session I: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ is a Vedantic dictum that appears in the Maha Upanisad (VI.71-73). The concerned verses declare that it is only the small-minded who discriminate between kin and a stranger; while for the magnanimous, the entire world is a family. The context of this verse is a discussion on the state of jivanmukti (embodied liberation) and brahmisthiti (state of being established in brahman). It enjoins that magnanimity, which is a direct result of non-attachment, is also one of the pre-requisite qualities for the same. In order to understand the true meaning and implications of the aphorism, it is important to understand it in its context. The first session of the seminar addressed the philosophical basis and implications of the dictum. Furthermore, it lent a historical dimension to the question by discussing how much of vasudha was actually known to ancient Indians. The session also dealt with the Buddhist and Jain concepts that are similar to ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’.

Chair: Prof. S.R. Bhatt, Chairman, ICPR

Panelists:

- ‘The Concept of “Other”: “I-Thou” versus “I-We” Approach’ by Prof. S.R. Bhatt, Chairman, ICPR
‘A Historical Framework: How Much of Vasudha did Ancient India Know?’ by Prof. Dilip K. Chakrabarti, Professor Emeritus, University of Cambridge

‘Vedanta, the Philosophical Basis of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ by Swami Shuddhidananda, Ramakrishna Mission

‘The Spiritual Basis of Universal Unity’ by Prof. Dayanand Bhargava, Professor Emeritus, Jain Vishva Bharati University

‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ by Dr. Jyotindra Dave, Director, Swaminarayan Shodh Sansthan

‘Buddhist and Jain Perspective on Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ by Prof. K.T.S. Sarao, University of Delhi

Interactive Session

1315 – 1415hrs  Lunch

1415 – 1615hrs  Session II: CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF ANCIENT INDIAN THOUGHT

Each country’s approach towards the rest of the world is determined by its civilisational and philosophical heritage. In view of the need to develop an Indian narrative in every domain, it is important now to mobilise our ancient ideas and bring them to practical and strategic use. The aphorism ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ is a symbol around which this quest for the Indian narrative could be rallied. Eventually, it would be useful to look at other concepts as well for policymaking related to internal development and for deepening India’s already-existing cultural footprints worldwide.

Chair: Prof. Dayanand Bhargava, Professor Emeritus, Jain Vishva Bharati University

Panelists:

• ‘Relevance of Yoga Psychology in Modern Times’ by Prof. Ram Nath Jha, Jawaharlal Nehru University
•  ‘Re-thinking Education in India in the Light of Indian Philosophical Heritage’ by Kumari Nivedita Bhide, Vice-President, Vivekananda Kendra

•  ‘Saving the Environment in the Light of Ancient Indian Thought’ by Dr. Nanditha Krishna, President, C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation

•  ‘The Indian Concept of “Dana” and Its Scope of Application Today’ by Prof. Balaganapathi Devarakonda, University of Delhi

•  ‘Relevance of Kautilya’s Arthasastra in Contemporary Strategic Thought’ by Col. Pradeep K. Gautam, IDSA

•  ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and an Indian Framework of Ethics’ by Dr. Arpita Mitra, Associate Fellow, VIF

**Interactive Session**
Day 2 (17th January 2019, Thursday)

0930 – 1000 hrs  Tea/Coffee

1000 – 1100 hrs  Keynote Address: Sh. S. Gurumurthy, Chairman, VIF

Chair: Dr. Arvind Gupta

Release of VIF series History of Ancient India volumes edited by Professor Dilip K. Chakrabarti

1100 – 1145 hrs  Session III: VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Apart from its philosophical dimensions, what are the strategic implications of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, especially in today’s world order? Can we think of an alternative international relations theory based on Advaita (non-dualism), the underlying philosophy of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’? How do we reconcile this approach with pragmatic imperatives required in the face of instances such as rising conflicts based on identity or illegal migration across borders? What strategic dilemmas would we face if we were to apply this principle to international politics? This session aimed at addressing some of these issues.

Chair: Ambassador Asoke Mukerji, Distinguished Fellow, VIF

Panelists:

- ‘Advaita and the Possibility of a Post-Western IR Theory’ by Dr. Deepshikha Shahi, University of Delhi
- ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and International Politics’ by Prof. Sujit Dutta, Senior Fellow, VIF

Interactive Session
1145 – 1250 hrs  **Session IV: VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM AND INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL DIPLOMACY**

The purpose of this seminar was to explore the ancient saying in all its dimensions and implications, with special focus on India’s strategic thought and cultural diplomacy. For instance, how is the universality of Vedanta philosophy revealed through UN Charter principles? How can this dictum help in international peace-building, conflict avoidance and conflict resolution? How can it be adopted for international cooperation in culture? The objective of this session was to highlight Indian civilisational resources that could be actively adopted in India’s foreign policy, strategic thinking and international diplomacy.

**Chair:** Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director, VIF

**Panelists:**

- ‘*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and India’s Soft Power’ by Param Pujya Swami Paramatmananda Saraswati, Secretary General & Coordinator of Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha
- ‘Application of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* in India’s Cultural Diplomacy’ by Ambassador Asoke Mukerji, Distinguished Fellow, VIF
- ‘*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*: A Transformative Vision of Intercultural Peace’ by Professor Priyankar Upadhyaya, Banaras Hindu University

**Interactive Session**

1250 – 1350 hrs  **Round Table: SCOPE OF APPLICATION OF ANCIENT INDIAN IDEAS IN ENHANCING INDIA’S SOFT POWER**

The round table aimed at discussing the scope of application of ancient Indian thought for enhancing India’s soft power and cultural diplomacy. What are the prospects? What are the dilemmas and stumbling blocks in implementation? Senior diplomats and government officials shared their experiences and put forward ideas and suggestions.

**Chair:** Ambassador Veena Sikri

**Panelists:**
• Dr. Suresh K. Goel, Former DG, ICCR
• Shri Ashok Pradhan, Director, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan
• Ambassador Ashok Sajjanhar
• Ms. Namrata S. Kumar, DDG, ICCR

1350 – 1400 hrs  **Concluding Remarks**: Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director, VIF

1400 hrs  **Lunch**
LIST OF PARTNERS & PARTICIPANTS

List of partners:

1. Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi
2. Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi

List of participants:

1. Professor Kapil Kapoor, Chairperson, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla
2. Shri S. Gurumurthy, Chairman, Vivekananda International Foundation
3. Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director, Vivekananda International Foundation
4. Professor S. R. Bhatt, Chairman, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi
5. Professor Dilip K. Chakrabarti, Professor Emeritus of South Asian Archaeology, University of Cambridge
6. Swami Shuddhidananda, Ramakrishna Mission (Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata Branch)
7. Professor Dayanand Bhargava, Professor Emeritus, Jain Vishva Bharati University
8. Dr. J. M. Dave, Director, Swaminarayan Shodh Sansthan, New Delhi
9. Professor K.T.S. Sarao, Head, Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi
10. Professor Ram Nath Jha, School of Sanskrit & Indic Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University
11. Kumari Nivedita Bhide, All-India Vice-President, Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari
12. Dr. Nanditha Krishna, President, C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, Chennai
13. Professor Balaganapathi Devarakonda, Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Delhi
14. Colonel (Retired) Pradeep K. Gautam, Consultant, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi
15. Dr. Arpita Mitra, Associate Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation
15. Professor Sujit Dutta, Senior Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation
16. Dr. Deepshikha Shahi, Assistant Professor, University of Delhi
17. Swami Paramatmananda Saraswati, Secretary General & Coordinator, Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha
18. Ambassador Asoke Mukerji, Distinguished Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation
19. Professor Priyankar Upadhyaya, UNESCO Chair Professor for Peace and Intercultural Understanding & Head, Malaviya Centre for Peace Research, Banaras Hindu University
20. Ambassador Veena Sikri, India’s Former High Commissioner to Bangladesh
21. Dr. Suresh Goel, Former Director General, Indian Council for Cultural Relations
22. Shri Ashok Pradhan, Director, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan
23. Ambassador Ashok Sajjanhar, President, Institute of Global Studies & Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation
24. Ms. Namrata Kumar, Deputy Director General, Indian Council for Cultural Relations
VIF organised an important seminar ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: Relevance of India’s Ancient Thinking to Contemporary Strategic Reality’ in collaboration with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR) at VIF premises on January 16 and 17, 2019. The adoption of June 21 as International Day of Yoga by the United Nations General Assembly in 2014 in response to an India-led resolution with a record high number of co-sponsors was a landmark event. It is important now to mobilise our ancient ideas for practical and strategic use to build an Indian narrative. Each country’s approach towards the rest of the world is determined by its civilisational and philosophical heritage. The objective of the seminar was to highlight Indian civilisational resources that could be actively adopted in India’s foreign policy and strategic thinking, and to think of ways to deepen India’s already-existing cultural footprints worldwide. The concept of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ is a symbol around which this quest for an Indian narrative can be rallied.

Distinguished delegates participated in the seminar on India’s soft power projection around Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and other allied themes. The seminar was an ideal meeting ground for academics and scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds like philosophy, history, political thought, international relations as well as strategists, diplomats and policymakers. This one-and-a-half-day seminar was attended by diplomats, policy-makers, researchers, students and Indian culture enthusiasts. Proceedings of the seminar are presently being prepared for publication.
In his welcome address, Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director, VIF, said it is time for us to think what Indian thought has to offer to a modern world torn apart by conflicts based on linguistic, religious and ethnic identities, climate change, environmental degradation and so on. He said any narrow understanding of such issues cannot promote peace. In this context of duality between self and the other, how does a narrative that emphasises oneness, cosmic unity, morality and ethics become relevant? International relations based on the idea that the strong should make the norm and the weak should follow has to change. The Chinese are mobilising ancient Chinese concepts. Can the Indian concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam provide an alternative in the form of an ideal of harmony in diversity? If one says this ideal is impractical from the point of view of international politics, then what other alternative do we have to ensure long-standing peace?

The keynote address was given by distinguished scholar of Indian Studies, Professor Kapil Kapoor. He said that Indian civilisation has always stood for the upholding of dharma. He further noted that Indian culture has been a human-centered culture, unlike Hebraic culture, which has been God-centered and follows the Ten Commandments. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is an ideal that speaks of a person who bears and forbears. It points towards an interdependent, supportive, mutually inclusive system. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is the ideal of that person who is udaracharita—one who is large-hearted and generous in nature; in other
words, one who realises the interconnectedness of the world. The Bhagavad Gita clearly states the ideal as being able to see everyone in oneself and oneself in everyone. It is only in a state of brahmisthiti that one can feel oneness. Professor Kapoor further pointed out that instincts that lead man astray come naturally to him—one doesn’t have to teach anyone to tell a lie, but we have to teach people to tell the truth. So, the moment we have to contend with real human nature, difficulties arise. In some cultures, regulations are like laws, accompanied by concepts like profit, reward or punishment. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is not a regulatory law in that sense. It can be considered as a maxim in the category of mahavakya. Its purpose is not imposition, but to enable understanding. When human consciousness evolves, one no longer needs impositions, because right conduct then comes naturally. The speaker pointed out another difference in approach: Our Constitution today gives a prominent place to Fundamental Rights, while relegating duties to the status of Directive Principles, whereas Indian culture has always been duty-centric. Rights are conflictual, duty is harmonising. Therefore, our modern education system, in a way, goes against our own culture.

The first session of the seminar dealt with the philosophical foundations of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and historical perspectives related to it. Professor S. R. Bhatt, Chairman, Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR), opened the session by observing how Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam helps us move towards a different conceptualisation of the ‘Other’—from an “I-Thou” approach to an “I-We” approach. Should we talk in terms of a clash of civilisations or a
harmony of civilisations? There can be two possible approaches, namely the individualistic-
 isolationistic-dichotomous approach or the holistic-unitarian-organic approach. Vasudhaiva
 Kutumbakam exemplifies the latter. In the present scenario, what is needed is preserving
differences with mutual respect. Professor Dilip K. Chakrabarti, University of Cambridge,
explored the issue of when the concept of ‘pan-India’ developed historically. How much of
internal and external vasudha did ancient Indians know? Based on the find of two copper
implements in southern India, he traced the concept of pan-India to about 2000 B.C. On the
other hand, by 500 B. C., the whole subcontinent was well within historical light. As far as the
vasudha outside India was concerned, identifiable patterns fall in place in the second half of
the first millennium B.C. Swami Shuddhidananda of the Ramakrishna Mission explained what
is meant by Hindu dharma. He underscored that dharma does not mean religion in the sense of
a belief system. Hinduism itself is not a religion in the sense in which the term is commonly
understood in the world today. A certain kind of understanding of religion that divides the
world into believers and non-believers leads to violence. Dharma, on the other hand, is that
which holds the universe, while eternally co-existing with the universe that is itself birth-less
and death-less. Dharma is a universal principle, and therefore, applicable to all times and
places. It is scientific, because it is verifiable. Sanatana dharma (the original name of what is
known as Hinduism today) can be defined as the truth that it is divinity or pure consciousness
that pervades the universe and manifests itself in various forms. The goal is to realise this
divinity within. Furthermore, since pure consciousness takes many forms, it can be
approached through many paths. It is only dharma that can proclaim the truth of Vasudhaiva
Kutumbakam. The next speaker Professor Dayanand Bhargava delineated ten instances of
apparent differences (e.g. one cause and many effects, prakriti and purusa, inner and outer
world, action and knowledge, and so on) and how these can be resolved through the
ekatmabhava or essential unity as represented by Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Dr. J M Dave of
the Swaminarayan Shodh Sansthan talked about the sheer amount of diversity that is
accommodated within Hinduism. The last speaker of the session, Professor K T S Sarao, Head
of the Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University, discussed the various teachings of
Buddhism and Jainism that are similar to the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. For
instance, the Buddhist idea of “dependent origination” highlights the interconnected nature of
the universe.
The second session of the day focused on the contemporary relevance of ancient Indian thought. Professor Ram Nath Jha of Jawaharlal Nehru University spoke about the relevance of Yoga psychology in modern times. He highlighted how Yoga actually starts from the Upanishads. He explained how the practice of Yoga can ascertain a *sattvika* form of happiness in today’s world torn apart by conflict and violence. Kumari Nivedita Bhide spoke about how India’s philosophical heritage could help us rethink our present education system. She highlighted that oneness is not merely a vision, but a truth of existence that the aphorism ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ proclaims. So, our education has to be such that inculcates a *samskar* of oneness. Acceptance of oneness automatically leads to an acceptance of diversity. Dr. Nanditha Krishna, President, C P Ramaswamy Aiyar Foundation, Chennai, presented ideas related to the sanctity of the environment (sacred plants, animals, waters) and the need to protect the environment, inspired by a vision of oneness, as found in ancient Indian texts such as the Vedas and so on. Professor Balaganapathi Devarakonda, Head of the Department of Philosophy, Delhi University, spoke about the ancient Indian concept of *dana*, which is often wrongly translated as ‘gift’ or ‘charity’. He said that the Western sociological notion of ‘gift’ is loaded with certain meanings, especially pertaining to reciprocity, and that it does not correctly represent the philosophy behind *dana*, which was a shared virtue among Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. Colonel (Retired) Pradeep K Gautam of IDSA spoke on Kautilya’s *Arthasastra* from the point of view of the ‘just war’ tradition. Dr. Arpita Mitra spoke about how Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and its underlying philosophy, Advaita Vedanta, provides a
truly Indian framework of ethics, but, at the same time, how this aspect alone must be seen as an incomplete representation of such ethics. Indian tradition, she said, has always recognised the need for war when it was required for the upholding of *dharma*. The ancient Hindus, she said, never confused weakness for greatness.

The Keynote Speaker on the second day was Shri S. Gurumurthy. He reminded us that Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, in order to be effective in international diplomacy, has to be a reciprocal virtue. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is undoubtedly important and that is why it appears in so many ancient texts. However, a strategic think tank’s approach to the issue will be different from that of a religious or spiritual organisation. There are a few challenges we face when it comes to the use of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam in international relations. Firstly, we have to encounter ideological approaches, which are by nature different from philosophical approaches. Ideologies are exclusive and based on the attitude: “I am right, you are wrong.” The philosophical approach is that of “also”: “I am right, you may also be right.” Secondly, the hard power of nation-states is a big challenge to the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which is based on the principle of self-restraint. India can provide the principle or the software of everlasting peace to the world, but the rest of the world has to accept this principle. If the principle of reciprocity is not kept in mind, then an ideal like Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which is our greatest strength, can turn into our greatest weakness. He gave an example of
reciprocity from Indian history: When the Parsi community was given shelter in India, they decided to stay in this land, just like sugar that is mixed with milk, only adding sweetness in gratitude. Shri Gurumurthy then went on to elaborate the history of war in India. He said that in the ancient texts, there is a mention of three kinds of victory: dharmavijaya, lobhavijaya, asuravijaya. He said that the last kind of victory never happened in India before the thirteenth century. He said Kautilya was criticised because he approved of the second kind of victory. He recalled that Prithviraj Chauhan defeated Mohammad Ghori 18 times, but never killed him, while Ghori got him killed at the first opportunity. This speaks volumes about the Indian attitude in war. However, he said, the fact that we are great does not mean that anybody can do anything to us and go scotfree.

The next session focused on the implications of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam in international relations. In her presentation, Dr. Deepshikha Shahi, explored if Advaita Vedanta or non-dualism, which is the basis of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, could provide an alternative to the current international relations theory, which is based on the Western dualist epistemological approach. Professor Sujit Dutta dealt with the real challenges of implementing Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam in global politics. He pointed out that the political world puts forth a completely different set of challenges such as the scarcity of human resources and the unequal structure of power, and so on, which do not allow the actual practice of many principles. He asked how the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam model can work in a
context like the conflictual notion of power struggle. He said reciprocity must be the basis of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam if it has to succeed as foreign policy.

The next session dealt with Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and its implications for India’s soft power. Swami Paramatmananda ji, Secretary General and Coordinator of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, spoke about the nature of Indian culture. Today, in the name of freedom of expression, Indians demonise their own culture. But Indian culture is such that it declared that the world is not *bhogya* (object of enjoyment), but *pujya* (object of worship). He said that our ‘Namaste’ itself is the best expression of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Marriage in Indian culture is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. It is an institution meant for personal growth. Making a family calls for a lot of acceptance of the other person. Culture is something that addresses the basic needs of every individual and the one common basic need is – “I want to be happy”. In his talk, Ambassador Asoke Mukerji evaluated India’s contribution to international cultural diplomacy in the last hundred years. India was one of the members of the League of Nations and a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles signed in 1919 with the objective of preventing future war. Ambassador Mukerji traced the long history of India’s involvement in international intellectual and cultural cooperation and the role of great Indian stalwarts such as Rabindranath Tagore, Acharya J C Bose, Professor D. N. Banerji and others till our times, when India’s proposal for the adoption of International Day of Yoga came at the crest of several developments. Ambassador Mukerji also proposed that India
could now become a world leader in intellectual cooperation and propose to set up and lead an international committee such as the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation set up in 1922, which later became UNESCO. Professor Priyankar Upadhyaya of the Banaras Hindu University talked about how Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam can provide a framework for an indigenous approach to peace. He highlighted how many ideas that have gained international credence, such as ‘structural violence’, ‘deep ecology’ and so on, are of Indian origin. But these were not only borrowed, but also packaged in a certain way. Professor Upadhyaya said how India had a holistic notion of peace—planetary peace, global peace, and so on. He also said that if we have to make a dent in international diplomacy, we also need to be aware of parallel concepts in other cultures. For example, he spoke about the South African concept of Ubuntu (I am because we are) and said that it is similar to the Indian maxim of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Professor Upadhyaya also spoke about other Indian concepts such as the Jain concept of pluralism, Anekantavada.

The seminar was wound up with a round table where senior diplomats and bureaucrats discussed how to apply ancient Indian ideas for enhancing India’s soft power. This session was chaired by Ambassador Veena Sikri. The other participants were Dr. Suresh Goel, Former Director General, ICCR, Shri Ashok Pradhan, Director, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Ambassador Ashok Sajjanhar, and Ms. Namrata Kumar, Deputy Director General, ICCR. Some of the key points mentioned were that the MEA has to first of all, take soft power seriously as a
component of India’s strategic asset; that Indian Chairs and cultural centres abroad have to be more active in a meaningful way; and since there is little discord over environmental issues, the importance of ancient Indian ideas for safeguarding the environment should be systematically highlighted; and so on.
**Vivekananda International Foundation**

The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent nonpartisan 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 national security issues.

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

Since its inception, VIF has successfully pursued quality research and scholarship and made efforts to highlight issues in governance, and strengthen national security. This is being actualised through numerous activities like seminars, round tables, interactive dialogues, Vimarsh (public discourse), conferences and briefings. The publications of VIF form lasting deliverables of VIF’s aspiration to impact on the prevailing discourse on issues concerning India’s national interest.
Indian Council for Cultural Relations

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first Education Minister of independent India, founded the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) on 9th April 1950.

The objectives of the Council are to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India’s external cultural relations; to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries; to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people; to establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture; and to take such measures as may be required to further these objectives.

The ICCR is about a communion of cultures, a creative dialogue with other nations. To facilitate this interaction with world cultures, the Council strives to articulate and demonstrate the diversity and richness of the cultures of India, both in and with other countries of the world. The Council prides itself on being a pre-eminent institution engaged in cultural diplomacy and the sponsor of intellectual exchanges between India and partner countries. It is the Council's resolve to continue to symbolize India's great cultural and educational efflorescence in the years to come.
Indian Council of Philosophical Research

The Indian Council of Philosophical Research set up by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, was registered as a society in March 1977 under the Societies Act, 1860, but it actually started functioning in July 1981 under the Chairmanship of Professor D.P. Chattopadhyaya.

The Council was set up by the Government of India to achieve the following aims and objectives among others:

• To review the progress of research in Philosophy from time to time;

• To sponsor or assist projects or programmes of research in Philosophy;

• To provide technical assistance or guidance for the formulation of research projects and programmes in Philosophy, by individuals or institutions, and/or organize and support institutional or other arrangements for training in research methodology;

• To co-ordinate research activities in Philosophy and to encourage programme of inter-disciplinary research;

• To organize, sponsor and assist seminars, special courses, study circles, working groups/parties, and conferences for promoting research in Philosophy, and to establish institutes for the same purpose;

• To give grants for publication of digests, journals, periodicals and scholarly works devoted to research in Philosophy and also to undertake their publication;

• To institute and administer fellowships, scholarships and awards for research in Philosophy by students, teachers and others;

• To promote collaboration in research between Indian philosophers and philosophical institutions and those from other countries.
The Council has a broad-based membership comprising distinguished philosophers, social scientists, representatives of the University Grants Commission, Indian Council of Social Science Research, Indian Council of Historical Research, Indian National Science Academy, the Central Government and the Government of Uttar Pradesh.