India and Brazil:
Deep roots and growing power

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To discuss India in a few lines is an inconceivable task. The country is the sum of political, anthropological, sociological, and religious contrasts and is a continuum of theses and antitheses that render any synthesis impossible. That is why it is so fascinating to seek to understand what one sees, although the reality perceived immediately raises new complexities. The task becomes less impracticable if we restrict ourselves to the analysis of diplomatic activity that may have advanced or hindered progress over the years.

India and Brazil established diplomatic relations in 1948, only a few months after India's independence on August 15, 1947, although the first real contact was not made until 1968, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Brazil during the Costa e Silva administration. The visit did not have concrete results, but it was an opportunity for the Indian leadership to get acquainted with Brazil, which was reminiscent of the visitors' home country in terms of geographical dimension but distant and different in all other aspects. Under military governments, Brazil had reverted on its "independent foreign policy" stance and developed misgivings about the nonaligned movement, of which Gandhi's father, Nehru, had been a leader. Yet, it should not be forgotten that UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, created in early 1964, and the Group of 77 are both the results of the coordinated efforts of the Brazilian and Indian delegations in Geneva.

Presence

My first contact with the country was in 1970, early in my career, when I was in charge of Brazilian foreign affairs in the field of nuclear energy. I took part in the first Brazilian nuclear mission, led by Professor Hervásio de Carvalho, then Chairman of the National Committee for Nuclear Energy, which was commissioned with identifying projects on which to cooperate with its Indian counterpart. Brazil and India held similar positions,

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which made us natural partners at the International Atomic Energy Agency and in the negotiations for the Non-Proliferation Treaty. On that first trip we visited various Indian cities, then still deeply traditional and characterized by a heavy nationalism that rejected, among other things, the presence of international companies, and demonstrating substantial contrasts between the extreme poverty of a large portion of the population and the unbelievable riches of the maharajas. Modernity could only be perceived when we entered the already at that time extremely advanced nuclear and space research installations. The 1971 Indo-Pakistani conflict paralyzed those attempts at cooperation, and the 1974 nuclear explosion discouraged renewal of the agreement. Since then, visits of Indian officials to Brazil have been dedicated to agricultural as much as scientific areas.

In 1984 I welcomed the invitation extended by Ambassador Sérgio Paulo Rouanet to head the new Foreign Affairs division dedicated to relations with continental Asia, a project that lasted two years. This unit directed its main efforts to relations with China, a country taking its first steps into modernization under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping and seeking to find in Brazil a model for public policies they intended to create. India was going through turbulent times, including a Sikh uprising in the Punjab, the repression of which was at the root of the murder of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Brazilian Foreign Minister Olavo Setúbal's attempt to come closer to India did not succeed because at the time Indian economic policy was characterized by aspirations of autonomous development.

In 1996 I reestablished my professional contact with New Delhi when I was assigned to the Foreign Ministry Asia and Pacific Department. India was being transformed by the forces of globalization, despite its resistance to the process. Indian citizens had been emigrating in significant numbers, particularly to the US. The Gulf War (1991), in addition to lessening foreign demand for its products, caused a crisis in India's balance of payments when emigrant remittances were interrupted. As a result the economic model based on autarchic development underwent a careful review under the leadership of the then-Economy Minister, and current Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh.

Relations between Brazil and India had already been consolidated in international forums, particularly in the partnership created to defend similar interests in the WTO's Uruguay Round (1986–1994). Professor Ignacy Sachs argued that Brazil and India were both "whale countries:" both possessed extremely large territories, were slow in reacting to crises and opportunities, but were still capable of provoking large waves and moving assertively in the waters of foreign affairs. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso paid a visit to India as a guest of honor on Indias's Independence Day.

Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1948, although the very first contact was only made by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1968.

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Nuclear tests

Contact between the two countries had good results in many areas, particularly the scientific. Trade in agricultural products was already significant when, in 1997, India refused to adhere to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban and a year later carried out two nuclear tests. In a speech to the Indian Parliament, Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh justified the tests, arguing that India, a responsible power, considered its nuclear capability as an element of dissuasion indispensable to the country's security. He added that the country had not violated international commitments since India was not a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); furthermore, he pledged not to be the first to use a nuclear weapon in case of conflict. Indian President Harayanan, who on the day of the first test started his journey back from São Paulo to Delhi at the end of a state visit to Brazil, insisted that he ignored the project. A few days later, Pakistan also detonated a bomb. The international community, Brazil included, condemned both the tests in all the pertinent international forums. Among the many sanctions applied, foreign investment, high-level visits, and technological projects were frozen.

Just over a year later, I was assigned the Brazilian Embassy in New Delhi. India was still in relative isolation, although some sanctions imposed by the developed countries had been lifted. Negotiations were on course between the alternate US Foreign Secretary, Strobe Talbott, and his Indian counterpart, J. Singh, on the rationale for the tests and on commitments and guarantees to be offered by New Delhi for allow for full reintegration of India into the community of nations. That happened during President Bill Clinton's visit in March 2000.

Academia

In such a complex scenario, I started to work on cultural and academic areas, with the support of professors dedicated to Brazilian issues, such as Sumit Ganguly, Om Gupta, Narayanan, Abdul Nafey, and the Brazilian Professor José Leal Ferreira, a motivating force in the consolidation of this group of "Brazilianists" at Jawaharlal Nehru University. I always had the support of the Director-General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Ambassador Himachal Sorn, who had worked as Secretary to the Indian Embassy in Brazil. Later this group gained force and was broadened with the appointment, at the University of Goa, of Professor Dilip Loundó, who published an anthology of modern Brazilian literature and "Poems Written in India" by the Brazilian writer Cecilia Mairelles. On the Brazilian side, Professor Cândido Mendes de Almeida lent priceless support by traveling to India to take part in the Calcutta Book Fair in 2000, in which Brazil was featured.

The success of Brazil's economic stabilization (Real Plan, 1994), the opening of Brazil to foreign trade, the demand for cheaper drugs to supply

the needs of the National Health Program, Proalcohol's success, the endeavors of Embraer (the Brazilian Aeronautical Corporation) to conquer new markets, the need for India to expand foreign sales of its information technology and to expand exports and acquire technology to overcome electricity shortages — all these were factors that promoted the intensification of bilateral relations. Each party made high-level visits to the other.

Association

At his inauguration President Luiz Inágio Lula da Silva launched the idea of creating a forum of the Southern democracies that are thriving economies around a commitment to international peace and development of their peoples. Both the South African President, Tabo M'becki, and the director of the Latin American Division of India's Foreign Affairs Ministry were present. That was the beginning of IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa), which held its first ministerial-level meeting in June 2003. Today, the forum has grown in importance in coordinating its members' positions on major issues on the international agenda; it has also taken a wide variety of projects, not only within IBSA but also in cooperation with poorer countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Bilaterally, a few months into the Lula administration Foreign Minister Celso Amorim headed the Brazilian delegation to the first ministerial-level meeting of the Brazil-India Joint Commission, which has lent momentum to the understandings and negotiations of the two countries. A timely opportunity considering the deepening of India's trade and finance reforms, President Lula's visit as an honored guest at India's National Day on January 26, 2004, consolidated a solid partnership.

I left New Delhi in September 2004. Since then I have seen, with great satisfaction, the deepening of this extremely beneficial alliance between Brazil and India. I have a profound admiration for India, for a number of reasons, notably its achievement of national unity, which required negotiations with over 200 principalities to join the new State; maintenance of this unity despite the diversity of ethnic groups, cultures, and religions of over one billion inhabitants; their pride in their heritage; the adamant defense of their national interest; the quality of India's diplomacy; and the ability to nurture friendships, of which I am one of the beneficiaries.

Since leaving India, I have followed from a distance its advances, and I am curious to see how the dialectics between modernity and the thousand-year tradition will develop concretely. I can see that Brazil and India, both emerging countries, have leading roles in all forums where global governance and international institutional reforms are debated, in a changing world where we already have, without any doubt, secured increased power.