

India-Brazil Ties: Before the BRICS and Onwards

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It can be stated with little doubt that two significant moments in world history, one in 1498 and another in 1500, changed the world forever. European colonial expansion took a head start with the discovery of India and Brazil and reshaped global trade and commerce.

When Pedro Álvares Cabral left Portugal for India, the most coveted part of the world at the time, he barely had any idea that he would land in what would later be known as the “lungs of the planet.” Even after he discovered Brazil, he remained unaware that he had come across a land three times the size of India and much more diverse in terms of nature and resources. While the Portuguese, abiding by the Treaty of Tordesillas, remained limited to the Amazon regions, leaving the Spaniards to govern other parts of Latin America, in the Indian subcontinent, they did attempt to expand. Brazil gained its independence during the event known as **Grito de Ipiranga** on September 7, 1822. Since then, Brazil began exploring ways to strengthen ties with the Western world and establish a global footprint. On the other hand, as the first Europeans in India, the Portuguese were also the last to leave. India gained its independence in 1947, but the Portuguese continued to hold on to Goa. Brazil was the first Latin American country to recognize the independence of India, and both nations established diplomatic relations in 1948.

In 1961, when India sought to liberate Goa, Brazil had already carved its own foreign policy, independent of Portuguese influence. As a former colony of Portugal, Brazil took a neutral stance in the Goa crisis. Brazil's foreign policy sought cooperation with Western powers, and therefore, Brazil remained neutral in international forums. In the United Nations, Brazil did not approve of India's military intervention in Goa. However, Brazil also ensured that it did not endorse Portuguese territorial claims to Goa. This strong neutrality earned Brazil considerable praise.

Brazil continued fostering meaningful relations with India. Both nations became some of the strongest members of the Non-Aligned Movement. They kept carving their foreign policies, steering clear of aligning with either of the two Cold War powers. At the same time, both India's and Brazil's ties with Britain and Portugal remained intact. India opened its economy in 1992, and her liberalization programme opened doors for other economies to venture into the immensely large Indian market. Brazil, too, began making significant economic gains from 1992 onwards, and it also implemented policies to liberalize its economy. The two countries, with their state-led economic programmes, began progressing in their respective hemispheres. Trade and cultural relations gradually strengthened as the two countries grew as economic powerhouses. High-level visits from dignitaries on both sides paved the way for cooperation not only in trade but also in culture and education.

In 2001, economist Jim O'Neill, working at Goldman Sachs, first introduced the concept of BRIC. Later, it became clear that Brazil, India, China, and Russia were indeed countries continuously contributing to global GDP. The idea of a common forum for these emerging countries was formalized in 2009 when the bloc held its first official summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, under the name BRIC, with South Africa joining later to make it BRICS. There has been no looking back since. Though one cannot ignore the fact that tense and rather unstable ties between China and India might be seen as an

impediment to intense mutually beneficial activities among the member nations, both China and India have done well to sustain and grow BRICS as an organization. Brazil, with its strong trade and cultural ties, has managed to balance relations with both China and India, without meddling in their affairs. BRICS has grown considerably in impact and strength over the last few years, with many countries showing interest in joining the organization.

The importance of Brazil and India within BRICS can be plainly understood by the fact that Russia has proposed both India and Brazil as key countries to mediate in the ongoing conflict with Ukraine. Though neither Brazil nor India has directly intervened in the matter, they have strongly advocated for peace and dialogue. Both countries have resisted pressure from Western nations to align their policies with Western interests in the conflict.

Recently, Brazil called for a joint currency, similar to the Euro, for BRICS countries. While India's current focus is on conducting more trade in the national currencies of BRICS nations, there is a strong possibility that, if such a currency project is pursued, India might join, which would elevate ties between the two countries to a new level.

Brazil, undoubtedly positioning itself to be one of the world's superpowers both economically and politically, cannot be ignored in global affairs. While India leads the world in terms of trade and commerce as one of the fastest-growing major economies, Brazil's contributions to the world in the fields of agriculture and environmental conservation are indisputable. It is clear that as Brazil and India continue to grow and expand economically and politically, their paths will keep crossing. A cordial and mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries will lead to a better and more stable world in the future, as both nations are bound to be future global leaders. Both Brazil and India have sought permanent seats on the UN Security Council but have never opposed each other's candidature. Both nations have acted responsibly and actively pushed for reforms in the UN.

The vast geographical distance between the two countries has played a major role in limiting connections. Trade and movement of people have always been difficult due to the geographical barriers that separate them. However, India's growing passion for global sports like football has made it easier for ordinary Indians to identify Brazil on the world map. In many cities across India today, one can easily find people wearing Brazilian national football T-shirts. Likewise, Indian religion and culture, and Mahatma Gandhi's message of peace, have been warmly received in Brazil, as they have in many former European colonies. Hindu temples and yoga schools have sprung up in major cities of Brazil, and the general Brazilian population today is relatively aware of India's ancient health systems.

As both Brazil and India continue to rise on the global stage, the ties between the two countries will play an increasingly important role in shaping a more balanced and stable world order. Their shared history, mutual respect, and common goals in global forums like BRICS and the UN will ensure that their relationship continues to flourish. As they both strive to become future global leaders, their cooperation will not only benefit their respective economies but also contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

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