Brazil, India and the Future of Civilization

The Practice of Mutual Aid on a Planetary Scale

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**"We are striving to flourish
tomorrow as a new civilization,
mestizo and tropical, proud of herself."**
(Darcy Ribeiro)

Political scientist Samuel Huntington proposes that the future will be shaped by the interactions among some major civilizations: Western, Confucian (China), Japanese, Islamic, Hindu (India), Slavic-Orthodox (Russia), Latin American and African. **[1]** Bilateral relations between them are in some cases conflictive and in other cases less conflictive, as shown in Figure 1.

In his view, Latin American civilization has strong relationships with the Western civilization of the North Atlantic (North America and Europe) and has no significant links with the other ones. In this scheme, Brazil is not visible and is perceived as part of the Latin American civilization.

Figure 1- World civilization politics: emerging alignments
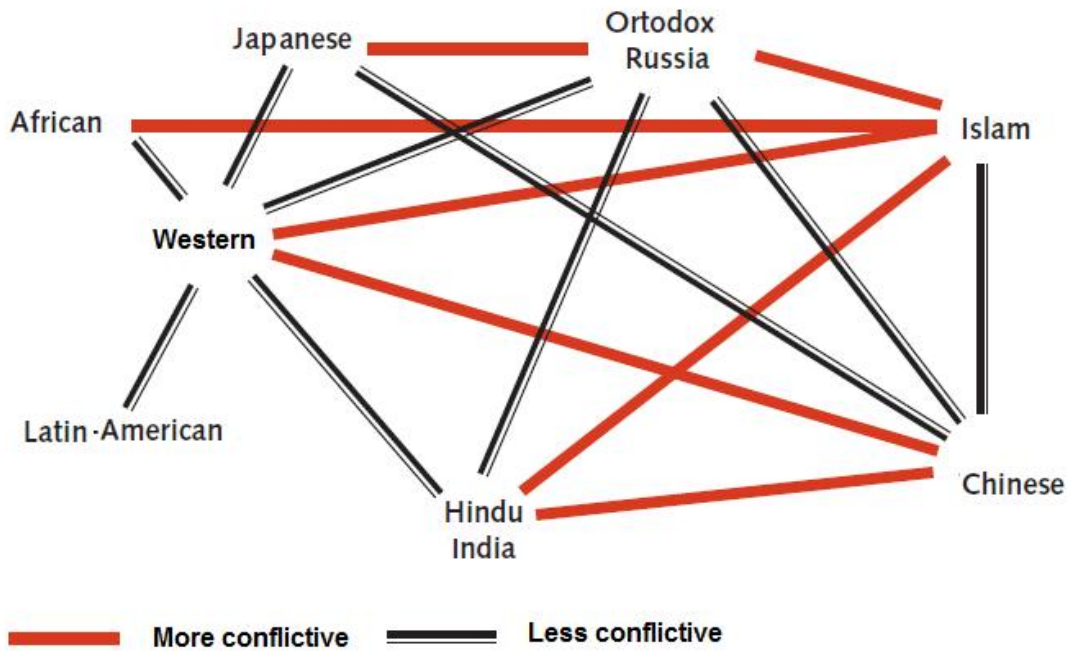
In Figure 2 we include the Brazilian civilization. It has peculiarities and its own identity. It can be seen as a differentiated culture in Latin America and can be virtually considered as one of world civilizations in flourishment. Brazil has strong potentialities for future development and evolution.

Brazilian civilization has no conflicting relationships with any of the others. Being a melting pot, with a strong miscegenation, Brazil has the freedom and the inclination to relate positively and cooperatively with every other civilization.

Figure 2- Brazil's potentialities in the world civilization politics and new lines for cooperation
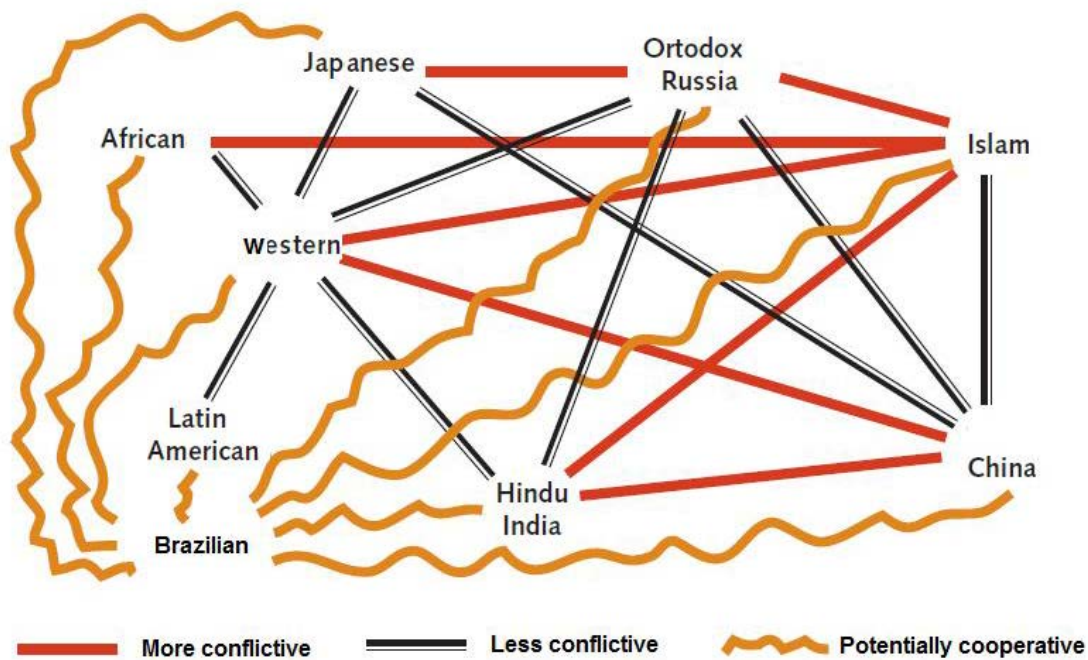
Brazil is rich in renewable natural resources and vast spaces; it is tolerant with cultural, ethnic and social diversity. It has a willingness to become a holistic culture devoted to peace, and it has no violent conflicts with neighboring countries. These qualities can be valuable in Brazil, seen as a cradle for a distinct tropical civilization in Latin America, and also for the building of a new kind of civilization for the Third Millennium.

In the context of the relationships among different civilizations, what is the role of such an emerging Brazilian civilization?

There are multiple possibilities for cooperation between it and the others. Some main relationships currently happen. MERCOSUR (Common Market in the South) is one of the forms of coordination and integration with the neighboring countries of Latin America. Migrations from China, Japan, and Korea have happened since the nineteenth century, and trade relations with Asia have intensified since 20th century. In addition to historical ties, cooperation and aid to African nations has also strengthened in recent decades. In multilateral conferences and meetings, Brazil has played a role as a conflict mediator and promoter of cooperation, especially on issues of global concern such as climate change and ecological crisis. The country can play an important role in providing alternatives during a planetary change, in the context of the worsening economic and financial crisis.

Indigenous cultures and ancient societies are sources of human values and wisdom for that environmentally and socially sustainable civilization of the future that must replace the current unsustainable model. From the ancient Indian civilization, which has been able to absorb the impact of European colonization and other invasions, Brazil can absorb valuable treasures in the form of teachings and wisdom. It is necessary to strengthen the connection between the two largest countries of the tropical world; India, with more than 1 billion people, and Brazil, with almost 200 million people.

Brazilian and Indian cultures can be mutually reinforcing. From Brazilian culture, India can absorb the vitality of a young nation. Both Brazil and India are highly open to receive foreign influences and to build them into their cultures. (In Brazil, this ability was called anthropophagic by Modernist literature in the 1920s; India had a great ability to influence the colonizers, due to the strength of its human values and wisdom).

Planet Earth is on the outskirts of the Milky Way, our galaxy. Brazil and India are on the periphery of the global political and economic system.

We are, therefore, in the periphery of the periphery. This situation brings the need for investments in infrastructure, transport and communication, in order to create a centripetal force and connect these peripheries.

To Indianize Brazil and to Brazilianize India

A greater exchange and a closer relationship between India and Brazil can bring mutual benefits. Brazil is a country in search of sustainability. It can benefit from the wisdom and knowledge produced and transmitted over thousands of years at that ancient civilization, that has been a fertile cradle for the human values and that has a valuable treasury in the form of cultural heritage, both immaterial and material.

In Brazil, the influence of Western Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions is still dominant. Strengthening relations with India will help Brazilians to counterbalance the strength of its relations with Europe and North America. Indian civilization bears valuable cultural treasures which lead to a sustainable society.

Figure 3 - Brazil and India in the World

"Ecologization" is not the same as "greening". It is the application of ecological principles and ethics, and it takes into considerations the necessary diversity of ecological sciences. The following qualities of Indian civilization are helpful in shaping the <u>ecologization</u> of Brazil, and also for the ecologization of the world:

1. India has developed tolerance for diversity. It has received immigrants and descendants of Aryans and Dravidians, Muslims and Greeks, Europeans from Portugal, from France, and England. It received influences from many invasions and returned many influences to the world. There is a unity of principles within this country with high ethnic diversity and population density. India has a great diversity of languages and cultures, and it presents extreme social and economic inequalities. It is the country with more social diversity. India experiences the extremes of grandeur and misery of the human condition. Radical individual behaviors, which would be considered mad elsewhere, are socially tolerated as signs of freedom of search for connection with the sacred. The *sadhus*, walking naked through the streets; the *fakirs*, who mortify their bodies; and *sannyasins*, who renounce material comforts, are examples of the diversity of personal paths socially accepted and valued. Indian society nurtures those who leave material world to engage in this search.

2. India conceived and applied the principle of nonviolence (ahimsa). Originally taught in the Vedas, this principle has been updated by Buddhism and applied to relations with nature. In India, non violence towards nature is applied with extreme sophistication. Applying *ahimsa* and the principle of experimenting with truth (*satyagraha*), Mahatma Gandhi had success in the struggle for independence. *Ahimsa* is valuable for Brazilian society in order to reduce violence prevailing in everyday life, especially the violence against other natural species and against the most vulnerable: children, the Indigenous people, the poor, the sick, and the elderly.

3. Independent India has been able to gradually narrow the gap between rich and poor and improved the opportunities for social mobility, thus contributing to the reduction of violence. The notion of trusteeship, for example, considers the land-owners as guardians or caretakers of a collective heritage. Their wealth has a social purpose of collective interest; it is not meant to provide them self-satisfaction only. In Brazil, the great social mobility and intense migration flows lead to a rapid change of positions of individuals in society but it is still one of the world's most socially unequal countries.

4. Buddhist and Gandhian principles, taught and applied in India, are keys to a sustainable and environmentally correct development. Simplicity in lifestyle and non-consumerism are pillars of the Buddhist ecological economics. Hindu tradition sacralized plants and animals and treated them as gods (the elephant Ganesh; Hanuman the monkey etc.).

5. India has accumulated a vast knowledge of how to deal with sustainability, a concept which lies at the root of the word dharma. The term "Dharma" has multiple meanings. It comes from the Sanskrit dhr, which means "to sustain". The idea of Dharma helps to explain how that civilization has been sustainable for thousands of years and did not collapse. The Indian concept of dharma - which emphasizes the responsibility and the fulfillment of the role of each individual in his life, has good effects on the ethical education. A dharmacratic government is defined as suitable for Asia by Sri Aurobindo:

"It has been said that democracy is based on the rights of man; it has been replied that it should rather take its stand on the duties of man; but both rights and duties are European ideas. Dharma is the Indian conception in which rights and duties lose the artificial antagonism created by a view of the world which makes selfishness the root of action, and regain their deep and eternal unity. Dharma is the basis of democracy which Asia must recognize, for in this lies the distinction between the soul of Asia and the soul of Europe". **[2]**

6. India has accumulated a wealth of knowledge useful for a world in search of sustainability. In India, major advances in fully understanding consciousness were made by masters such as the Buddha, the ancient sages who formulated and coded the Yoga Vedanta. This conceptual wealth continued in the modern world with gurus or masters like Ramana Maharishi, Vivekananda, Krishnamurti, the Theosophists, the Brahma Kumaris, Sri Swami Dayananda and Sri Aurobindo, among others. This subject is approached in a comprehensive vision that goes beyond the limited branches of Psychology and science which don't admit the existence of higher levels of consciousness.

7. Hindu Vedanta Civilization valued and cultivated meditative and contemplative states of consciousness. Modern society increasingly recognizes the beneficial effects of meditation on individual health. The science and art of meditation makes you realize and prevent pain, prevents cardiovascular diseases and strengthens resistance to the appeals of drugs. The meditative state clears the mind of unnecessary thoughts, reduces anxiety and stress, increases concentration, creativity, strengthens intuition and inspiration. Meditation leads the practitioner to a state of emotional balance and inner harmony, in which the amount of oxygen used by the metabolism and the production of carbon dioxide while breathing are both reduced. A basic attitude of meditation is to focus attention on breathing. When observing the movement of air into and out of the lungs, one ceases to think about the past or

the future and directs attention to the present moment. When the mind is silent, it keeps free from fears and sorrows. You can reduce the compulsive demands of material goods through meditation and contemplation. Consumerism is a major driving force for environmental devastation. Meditation is a way to deal with the ecological and environmental crisis by reducing the incidence of "shopping therapy", a custom induced by psychological, mental or emotional frustrations. A minimalist lifestyle preserves nature from the damages of uncontrolled consumption. A minimalist approach means more satisfaction, happiness, and joy, with less objects.

Reducing the use of natural resources and of consumer items, such as food, clothing, energy and reaching the pure contemplation and observation of Life and Nature is an ambitious goal. Meditation reduces the degrading effects of wrong action on moral values and on the environment. An attitude of detachment and contemplation helps develop a relationship with the outside world without feelings of ownership over it. In India, one of the cultural ideals is to live a contemplative life.

8. Yoga is an ancient source of wisdom. The word *Yoga* comes from the root word yuj, which means "to combine, to merge, to join". Yoga is reconnection with the whole. It is the science and art of helping the individual to live in his non-individualized wholeness. The ancient yogis developed breathing exercises as a form of concentration. This tradition has developed techniques of breath control and ways of inhaling and exhaling the energy that sustain life and which is present throughout nature, known as prana. The practice of yoga uses various postures (*asanas*) and breathing exercises (*pranayama*) to enhance the use of the body.

In Indian tradition, the universe itself is created and terminated in accordance with the rhythm of the breath of the god Brahma, who, at the expiration or inspiration, regulates the universal rhythms. In its various aspects and especially in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo ("All life is yoga") there is a systematized knowledge that enhances self-awareness and awareness of the environment and reduces the possibility of being manipulated by external agents (people, drugs, herbs etc. .)

Yoga considers every experience as a learning opportunity. The spirituality of Indian culture is anchored in matter, seen as a manifestation or embodiment of the spirit. It values both the physical and bodily aspects, as the mental and emotional ones. The material foundations of spirituality were tested in thousands of years of history and gave attention to the awareness regarding elementary acts like breathing, moving, eating.

India is a secular society that accepts all religions. It partly dreams and lives in mythology, in a universe without limits. In part, there is in India a pragmatic spiritualism and an experimental practice: seeing is believing. The head and spirit of the society are in the clouds: to turn the eyes to heaven is needed because climate phenomena such as the monsoon rains determine the results of agriculture, the basis of the economy of the Indian subcontinent. But the feet are on earth which is a symbol for material reality.

9. Ecodesign - India has contradictory features regarding ecology and environment. On one hand, being free from the British colonization since 1947, the country has not been able to meet the deficits of infrastructure inherited from centuries of colonial exploitation. Thus, there

is much dirt and lack of sanitation. On the other hand, Indian society has an incredible ability to develop ways of meeting material needs with minimal pressure on the environment. Many indians adopted vegetarianism. This is a diet with less impact on the environment and climate than other dietary habits because the amount of water, the amount of agricultural inputs and land area needed to feed vegetarians is much lower than those needed to feed meat-eaters.

Ecology studies show the superiority of vegetable foods over foods of animal origin. Vegetarianism is based on the principle of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, extended to the animal world.

The following examples show how the individual and family lifestyles help to avoid overuse of natural resources.

Clothing: the classical models of *saris* are not subject to variations of fashion. For men, the *dothi* is a rectangle of fabric wrapped around the body. The lack of sophisticated and complex "modeling" maximizes the use of fabrics, and clothing is generally well suited to the tropical climate. The use of proper footwear coupled with the tradition of walking barefoot while at home also greatly reduces the need to use cleaning materials, and facilitate daily human work.

Furniture and home objects: People learn to sit on the floor and do not use chairs or furniture. The home furnishings is therefore reduced. Neither are needed objects such as silverware, dishes and other utensils, because the use of the body meets the requirements. The right hand, for example, is used to carry food to the mouth, eliminating the need for cutlery, while the left hand is used in personal hygiene. These habits, followed by hundreds of millions of people, significantly reduce consumption of natural resources.

Factors like the moderate use of material resources to carry out daily activities at home or at work; the moderate use of furniture, objects and implements; vegetarian eating habits; the intensive use of the body and the respectful way of relating to animals, are facts revealing a culture which does more with less, which protects the environment, and avoids wasting resources. These qualities are evident in Indian villages which supply themselves in the surroundings with water, energy, food, building materials etc.

10. "Ecological footprint" is a key indicator to measure sustainability. It shows how many hectares of productive land *per capita* are needed to sustain the lifestyle of an individual, a city or a country.

An average German citizen requires 4.8 hectares, a Brazilian of 2.2 ha; 1.6 ha are needed in China; in the United States, 9.6 ha; in India, 0.7 ha; in Japan, 4.3 ha. The world average is 2.3 hectares.

The largest footprint is that of the U.S. citizen. If the entire population of the planet adopted lifestyles similar to the U.S., we would need four planets equivalent to Earth. India has an ecological footprint fourteen times lighter than the U.S. and three times lighter than the world average.

The light ecological footprint of an Indian individual doesn't come exclusively from poverty and low consumption of material goods.

This light footprint results from frugal daily habits and behavior, and models of family and social organization. It also results from functional architecture and human settlements with decentralized supplies of food, water, energy and materials nearby, with no need for large displacements; proximity of home to work; transportation powered by human or animal; a vegetarian diet and consumption of locally produced food; frugal consumption habits and a low per capita generation of waste. It results from the traditional ecodesign of society, which minimizes the use of natural resources, consumer items, food, clothing, energy and land. Such behavior result from non-utilitarian human values and ideas - such as the sacredness of animals and plants - and a sort of ecological awareness that one learns from the cradle and which is part of the social uses, thus reducing the need for such learning through formal school education.

Frugal habits, associated with an intelligent social design followed by millions of people in India, significantly reduce the consumption of natural resources . This combination of reasons explains the Indian light ecological footprint (0.7 ha / person).

Only a small part of an ecological footprint is due to actual physical or bodily needs. The heavier weight of an ecological footprint is due to demands generated in the mind and emotions and to the non-functional spatial organization where people live. Post-materialistic values stimulate attitudes of material consumption that help sustain environmental health. A light footprint is a valuable quality in a world with limited resources and a growing population, in which it is increasingly necessary to promote energy conservation, to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and to decarbonize the economy, living in peace and with non-violence.

If one sees that the planet can be more socially just and fair, it will be seen also that India can grow her ecological footprint, investing in infrastructure and solving sanitation problems, without significantly pressing the natural resources. Unlike the nations which colonized countries in order to get hold of their resources, India never had to expand and dominate other people.

Some Conclusions

Five centuries after the impetus given to globalization by the great discoveries in the New World, it is necessary to resume the route to India and to intensify the contacts between India and Brazil.

Modern communication technologies facilitate strengthening ties with India. In the early twentieth century, farmers in Uberaba city, in Brazil, went to India for business with cattle. Later in that century, traders, artists and mystics have added strength to this relationship.

In the 21st century, systematic India-Brazil cooperation has intensified in the context of emerging countries, called BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China), as well as under IBSA, (India, Brazil, South Africa). Brazil and India have strengthened relationships at official and academic levels and acted as allies in multilateral forums.

There are many possible ways to increase exchanges between India and Brazil: human exchanges, exchange of information and exchange of goods and commodities. Human

exchanges can be increased by means of scholarships to students, teachers and consultants.

It is important to create cultural, scientific and technical projects. The embassies can help to collect and disseminate information, promote translations, publications, cultural fairs, exchange of technologies, films, journalistic and communication projects. A greater presence of India in Brazilian mass media (and vice versa) would help create the conditions for a better long-term cooperation.

To encourage studies in contemporary India in Brazilian universities and studies about Brazil in Indian universities and the comparative studies on India and Brazil would also be desirable strategies to promote cooperation.

An increasing trade can explore economic complementarities, based on knowledge of the suppliers of those goods, and on cost comparison with other alternatives. Private sector and non-governmental organizations can participate in Indo-Brazilian exchange and cooperation. It is important that governments stimulate the creation of joint ventures between Indian and Brazilian companies.

Governments, companies, social organizations and individuals have important roles to speed up this process and can take better advantage of the benefits of increased cooperation. Increasing relationships between Brazil and India will certainly help develop the globally sustainable civilization that is needed in the 21st century.

NOTES:

[1] See Huntington, Samuel., "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order", p. 310.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, "Complete Works", vol.1, p.759.

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