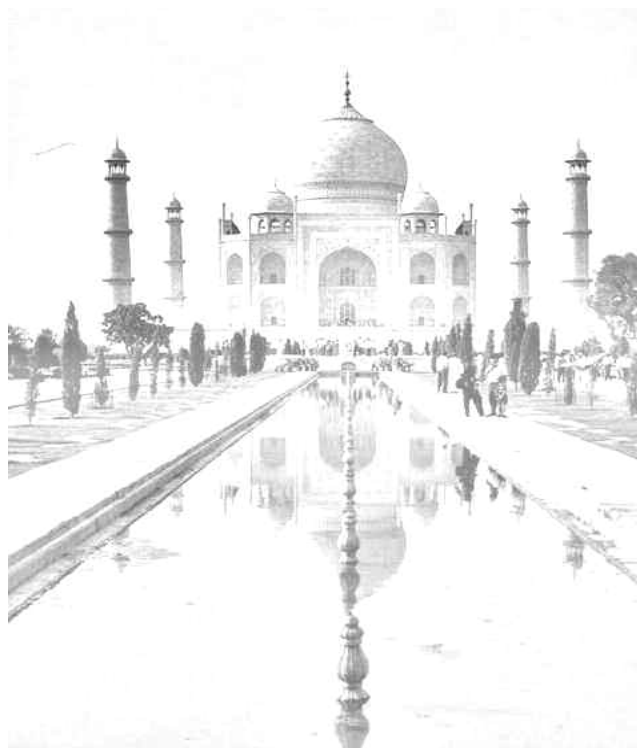


# Mexico and India: Slowly Approaching Each Other from Afar

Bernadette Vega\*

India, “the elephant that became a tiger,”<sup>1</sup> is not as far as it seems, and Mexico has finally started to shorten the distance. This results from Mexico’s reconfiguring its foreign policy to diversify its relations and boost its multilateral activism. As a member of G-5 (China, Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa), Mexico has plenty of room to spread its wings and exert its potential as a medium-sized power, emerging economy and regional leader, but only if it assumes the role and responsibilities that this entails. To this end, forging a profound, strong relationship with the rest of the members of this particular group is crucial, urgent and internationally favorable, in the sense that the stronger the constructive engagement among these “Outreach Five” (O-5) and the powerful countries, the louder will be the demand to deal with the problems their populations face.<sup>2</sup>

The G-5 is the appropriate framework for analyzing a bilateral relationship between India and Mexico that can no longer be disregarded. By no means is this group totally harmonious or sensitive to each of its fellow members. While South Africa is struggling to show it belongs to the group, India and China have been competing for the label of “next super-power,” and Brazil and Mexico are immersed in their own discrete wrestling match for regional leadership — a race that Brazil is comfortably leading. It should be recognized that China and Brazil have made the most of their international status as bridges and leaders. However, there is important evidence demonstrating that Mexico is not performing as expected or even as possible: “Mexico is near the bottom of the political hierarchy of the O-5 countries and might fear that speaking out on global issues would highlight this fact to the world, potentially jeopardizing its membership in the club.”<sup>3</sup>



## AN OVERLOOKED RELATIONSHIP?

Mexico and India are historically bonded and tied together through multilateralism. Actually, Mexico was one of the first countries to recognize India’s independence (the first in Latin America) and establish diplomatic relations; in multilateral forums, they have had coinciding points of view during the North-South dialogue, in the non-alignment movement and in the G-77. Even after the end of the Cold War, Mexico and India have continued to cooperate within multilateral spaces such as the G-5, G-8, G-15, G-20, the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, finding common ground on energy security, education, financing for development and, especially, on the agenda for development during the Doha Round negotiations. Conversely, the divergence is evident around some fundamental issues like the reform of the United Nations Security Council and Indian nuclear policy. In these areas, India has resonated with Brazil and the U.S., respectively, leading to the strengthening of those bilater-

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\* Research Assistant at CISAN.



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al relations to a level of privileged partnership, as Condoleezza Rice described it.

Indian and Mexican diplomats have agreed that the bilateral relationship has been relatively neglected in recent years. Before Felipe Calderón, the last Mexican president to visit India was Miguel de la Madrid in January 1985, and the last Indian prime minister to come to Mexico was Rajiv Gandhi in 1986: 20 years of neglect and delay. Among Mexico's regional foreign policy priorities, China and Japan have been at the top of the list when planning its involvement in the Asian bloc. Just as happened with Japan, the terms of the relationship with India require modernizing: the international context is not the same one that allowed cooperation during the Cold War within the non-aligned movement, and certainly, Mexico and India do not share the same leverage and responsibilities in the current international order that they did 20 years ago.

The fundamental reason for such a slow and delayed rapprochement is mutual ignorance. We do not know each other. For a large part of India's urban population, Mexico is still another star in the American flag; it just does not appear on the Indian world map; and Octavio Paz, Mexico's ambassador to India in the 1960s, as the only reference to Mexico is not enough. On the other hand, in Mexico there is no clear idea about Indian-ness and its multiple realities. The geographical distance looks shorter if we compare it to the huge lack of mutual cultural understanding that increases the East-West sensibility gap. To what extent do we understand the coexistence of different and conflictive religious views? Is there a remote attempt to understand the complexity of the subcontinent's domestic dynamics? How widespread are Gandhism, Amartya Sen's approach to development or the literature and poetry by Rabindranath Tagore and Anita Desai? As the two top destinations for remittances from the U.S., have we tried to understand and compare the trends of Mexican and Indian migration there? Can the Mexican Foreign Ministry make room for India in Mexico's calculations, monopolized by bilateral relations with the U.S. and the trade and investment possibilities with China?

#### SLOWLY APPROACHING EACH OTHER FROM AFAR

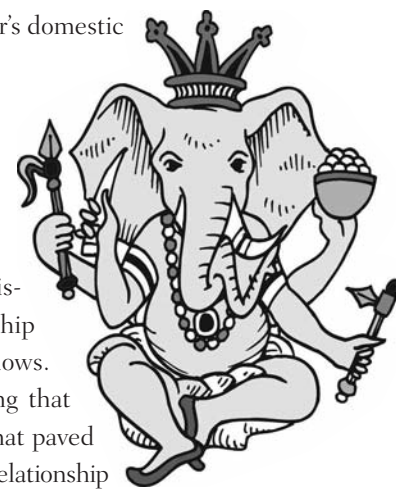
The animal fable of the elephant becoming a tiger that Shashi Tharoor, former United Nations under-secretary-general of public communications and information, created in the shape of a twenty-first-century Panchatantra,<sup>4</sup> helps us understand India's evolution and —I would call it— attraction. This metaphor comparing the miracle of the Asian tigers and the reemergence of the Indian giant as a leader and competitive neighbor fully explains why Mexico needs to understand the primary importance of a stronger relationship with India. The reasons range from the superlatives of India's economic trends and political system to lesser used arguments such as the political, cultural and developmental similarities. But the fact is that Mexico and India have a greater potential for finding bilateral opportunities than has been acknowledged.

India is "one of the world's fastest growing economies," the second to be precise: gross domestic product (GDP) growth during the Tenth Plan period (2002-2007) averaged 7.6 percent, with the growth rate accelerating to 9 percent in 2005-2006 and 9.4 percent in 2006-2007. Its economy is the twelfth-largest in the world measured in nominal U.S. dollars, but rises to fourth-largest when measured in purchasing power at parity exchange rates. It continues to be a favored FDI destination and is ranked second in capital market inflows.

For Mexico it is not only a matter of convenience, but of inevitability, as Roberto Jaguaribe, vice minister of political affairs at Brazil's Foreign Ministry, described the need to build a special relationship with India. First, because of the global responsibilities both countries share as emerging economies and regional leaders, and secondly, because the two countries represent attractive markets for each other and find resonance in each other's domestic and geostrategic realities.

#### SWAAGAT MEXICO! WELCOME BACK

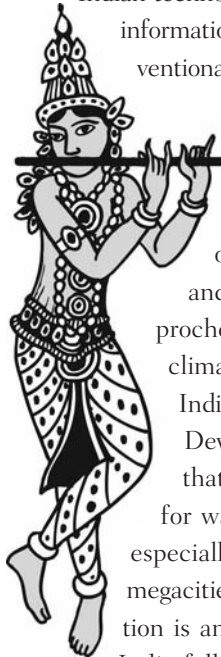
Recently, the Calderón administration has boosted a relationship that had been kept in the shadows. However, it is worth mentioning that there was a set of instruments that paved the way for a stronger bilateral relationship



such as the mechanism for bilateral consultation: the Mexico-India Permanent Bilateral Commission, which actually did not meet for 10 years until October 2005. In addition, in 2007 Mexico's Ministry of the Economy proposed the creation of a "High-Level Bilateral Group" to explore the possible synergies of both economies, a kind of consultative group that is only maintained with China, Japan, the United States, Canada and Korea. Some of the greatest steps forward favoring a closer economic relationship are the celebration of an Agreement for Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investment, signed on May 21, 2007, and the Agreement to Prevent Double Taxation. Nonetheless, these instruments are not enough for the potential of this kind of bilateral relationship regarding their national economies' leverage worldwide and the opportunities for mutual learning and experience sharing. In the area of investment and trade, several sectors have been identified in which the two countries could work together, such as pharmaceuticals, the automotive industry, information technologies, biotechnology, energy and the environment. In fact, in recent years, trade between Mexico and India has increased by 400 percent (the trade balance in 2007 was US\$2.2 billion). This is noteworthy, but still mediocre, *vis-à-vis* the possibilities and if compared to the US\$31 billion in total trade between Mexico and China. India's infrastructure needs, estimated at between US\$1 trillion and US\$1.5 trillion over the next five years, can be a profitable destination for Mexico's construction industry.

Indian technology has proved its competence in areas like information technology, pharmaceuticals and non-conventional energy, while Mexican competence can be seen in the fields of food processing, energy, high yield crops, and housing.

India represents an opportunity beyond commercial convenience in the areas of democratic consolidation, human development and security. There is a big opportunity for rapprochement in jointly addressing the challenges of climate change through alternative energy sources. India's Minister of Science, Technology and Ocean Development Kail Sabil has publicly recognized that both countries share problems in facilities for water delivery and fighting urban pollution, especially as a consequence of the phenomenon of megacities like New Delhi and Mexico City. Migration is another shared phenomenon. In 2008 alone, India followed by China and then Mexico occupied



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the top three spots as remittance-receiving developing countries, with US\$30 billion, US\$27 billion and US\$23.8 billion, respectively. The agenda of democratic institutional consolidation is also attractive for bilateral dialogue: India may be the biggest democracy on earth, but the truth is that there is an overwhelming demand to make democracy accountable and transparent. Both countries suffer threats that endanger the population's right to live free of fear and to public health, whether because of drug trafficking or fundamentalist terrorism. Not to mince words, India and Mexico were second and third only to Iraq as the three most dangerous places for media professionals, according to the International News Safety Institute.

Indian exploitation of its soft power is attractive learning material for Mexico. India's civilizational ethos has been an immeasurable asset for its international prestige, included its multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy, contentious NGOs, Bollywood movies and Indian literature. The tools used to achieve India's independence (non-violence and Satyagraha)<sup>5</sup> are examples of Indian soft power that have been present since the Gandhian era. It is accurately argued that Indian soft power has to be included in the South-South dialogue because so far it is almost exclusive to the North-South exchange, and it would definitely help to build closer relationships with the "others," such as the unknown Mexico.

Finally I would like to mention that exchange of best practices could be extremely useful in managing higher education, migration and promotion of small and medium-sized companies. Mexico can learn from the Indian experience of building an information economy, since it is the fourth largest scientific talent pool, and in this way, promoting an information-oriented development path, that would undeniably impact trends in migration and development.

#### STRATEGIC PARTNER

India is already considered a privileged partner by the U.S., a strategic ally by Brazil, and certainly a defiant neighbor by

China. While the tiger has to cope with the burden of being labeled the next super-power and balance its course of action outside its borders with its domestic needs, Mexico has to deal with the burden of being an unrealized potential regional leader that belongs fully neither to North America nor to Latin America.

For Mexico, India is beginning to be fertile terrain for a promising partnership arising out of the shared challenges of confirming their leverage in the international order, fighting domestic development problems, consolidating their bridging power between developing and developed countries and designing a coherent, effective foreign policy to pursue their respective national interests. **MM**

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *The Elephant, the Tiger and the Cell Phone. Reflections on India in the Twenty-First Century* (New Delhi: Viking-Penguin Books, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> This term comes from the moves toward “outreach” at the G-8, whereby non-G-8 member states are included in aspects of G-8 summit discussions. The first move came in 2000 when Japan invited a group of leaders from developing countries, including the presidents of South Africa, Nigeria and Algeria, and international institutions to meet G-8 members over dinner. The United Kingdom presidency at Gleneagles in 2005 re-established an informal G-8 dialogue with the “Outreach 5” (“O-5” – Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa), now G-5. The 2007 Germany presidency proposed the establishment of regular, structured and institutionalized cooperation between the G-8 and the O-5, under the heading “Heiligendamm Process” (a dialogue between the member states of the G-8 group of countries and the important emerging economies, dealing with the biggest challenges the global economy is facing today).

<sup>3</sup> T. Myatt, C. Sayao, D. Torney and Z. Zommers, *Outreach 5 Country Objectives Report. 2007 Heiligendamm Summit*, G-8 Research Group-Oxford, June 7, 2007, available on line at <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/oxford/g8rg-ox-objectives2007.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> The Panchatantra is one of India’s most influential contributions to world literature; it consists of five books of animal fables and magic tales that were compiled, in their current form, between the third and fifth centuries AD.

<sup>5</sup> Philosophy and practice of non-violent resistance developed by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.