CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSION

Indo-Egyptian relations started through indirect contacts with Iraq as a middle way between India and Egypt. By the fifth century B.C, direct contacts by sea were established. Later trade between Egypt and India flourished and the rulers of Egypt encouraged it. During the medieval times, parts of India and Egypt became a part of the Islamic world where free trade and travel were guaranteed. The civilization heritage of the two nations was absorbed in a kind of universal civilization that Islam and Arab culture shaped its frame but not its content. During this period, the flow of ideas and teachers, learners faced no barriers. Inside Egypt, the momentum of trade created a class of merchants who traded with India. They became powerful. Trade flourished until the Portuguese appeared in the Indian Ocean in 1498. A military alliance between Egypt and the rulers of Gujarat and Kerala failed to neutralize the Portuguese threat. The new threat turned to be fatal with its ambitions crossing the economic motivation and targeting the political independence of India and Egypt.

The competition among European powers to dominate India ended up with the British taking over India in 1857 and Egypt in 1882 to secure their way to India and to cut the French ambitions in India. The Egyptian revolution of 1919 against British occupation took place under the leadership of Saad Zaghlul Pasha. These developments inspired Mahatma Gandhi. Soon, both Egyptian and Indian national movements exchanged support and sympathy in their common struggle against the British. The struggle achieved its goal by securing gradually the political independence of Egypt nominally in 1922, then in 1936, and finally in 1952 while India achieved its independence in 1947. In the post-colonial era, the struggle continued to preserve the hard-won political independence; to secure the economic independence and to catch the train of modernization. The Cold war politics was an obstacle, which both tried to overcome by adhering to the non-aligned policy. This policy turned into a movement and even an ideology for the third world countries. It was within the logic of this movement
that both cooperated in different fields and fought together against the several imperial plans and policies in Asia and Africa. Both exchanged mutual support in facing different crises. India stood by Egypt during its struggle to protect the rights of Palestinian people in the “Israeli-Arab conflict”. Egypt also stood by India on Goa, Diu and Daman. It also supported India during the invasion by China in 1962. Moreover, it prevented some Arab states from condemning India during its war with Pakistan in 1965 and encouraged Arabs to play a positive role in ending the hostilities.

The 1952 Egyptian revolution paved the way for major shift in the history of Indo-Egyptian relations. Two case studies of Kashmir and Suez reflected this shift and showed how Indo-Egyptian relations were conducted on ground. The case of Kashmir gave an example of the challenges that faced the efforts of Egypt and India in building their relations and showed how each country tried to assert and protect its own interests without sacrificing the friendship of the other. It also reflects the sensitivity with which Egyptian diplomacy dealt with the most emotional question for India in post-1947. It is to be noted that Egyptian neutrality vis-à-vis Kashmir was “pro-India” for two reasons: “neutrality” was what India asked Egypt; and the second Islam [theoretically], had a place in the Egyptian foreign policy. King Farouk considered himself Caliph and came to support Islamic causes. In post-1952 revolution, Nasser considered the Islamic world as one of the circles in his foreign policy.

A diplomatic crisis emerged between Egypt and India during 1950-1951 because of growing Pakistani-Egyptian relations due to Pakistan’s efforts to form an anti-India Islamic front with West Asian countries over the conflict on Kashmir. India’s ambassador initiated the crisis when he protested active Pakistani propaganda in Egypt; Al Azhar support to Pakistan on Kashmiri dispute and the controversial statements apparently made by Abdel Wahab Azzam. Indian aim was to keep Egypt away from getting closer to Pakistan. However, the Egyptian diplomacy succeeded in containing the crisis without abandoning its policy in maintaining good relations with both. India failed to achieve its strategic aim during the crisis while securing a tactical victory in asserting the neutrality of Egypt in Kashmir. Egyptian diplomacy was successful in handling the crisis by adopting dual strategy, which stressed Egypt's adherence to strict neutrality in Kashmir while emphasizing its commitment to strong relations with both. The Egyptian revolution (1952) gave relations a new
and rich momentum that revolutionized both bilateral relations and its regional and international dimensions. This development was a clear shift from the conservative nature of relations between the two governments during the years from 1947 to 1952. Soon it came to be reflected in India’s support to Egypt’s position during Suez crisis. This and other developments changed Egypt’s attitude towards Indian causes to be portrayed as pro-India. However, Egypt’s sympathy with India and declaring this sympathy or acting upon it was not going in the parallel. Sometimes, Egypt was able to declare its position and act upon it. This was best exemplified on the Egyptian decision to block Suez Canal for the Portuguese warships in order to prevent any aggression against India. In other cases, Egypt could not declare its sympathy with India publicly because it could harm either Egyptian interests or Indian interests out of the complexity of the issue or the situation. Egypt’s attitude towards Kashmir question since 1957 is an example where open support for India would damage its image among Muslim countries and gave an opportunity for the Baghdad pact members to attack Egypt. In 1957, Pakistan was encouraged by Britain to raise the question of Kashmir at the UN. Egypt was aware that the Western powers wanted to take revenge for their defeat in Suez. They wanted to restore their lost prestige through political aggression directed at India. As India championed the pro-Egypt camp during Suez crisis, a setback for India in Kashmir could be seen as a victory for Western powers. It was in this context Pakistan’s move was seen as an attack not only against India but also against non-aligned countries, especially Egypt. At this stage, it became clear that Western powers were exploiting the Kashmir issue to achieve their own colonial ends. They were not serious to solve the Kashmir problem. Sustaining the problem alive gifted the West as a tool to exploit both India and Pakistan. On 24 January 1957, UNSC adopted a draft resolution which referred to the principle embodied in the earlier resolutions of the Council and to the evaluation of UNCIP of 13th August, 1948 and 5th January 1954 that a final disposition of the state of Jammu and Kashmir would be decided in accordance with the will of Kashmiri people, be expressed through democratic means of a free and impartial referendum, to be conducted under the auspices of the UN. Egypt was not need asked to declare its position, which probably would have angered both India and Pakistan. With the issue decided by the Security Council, Egypt did not have to declare its position but it blocked Iraq from raising the issue of Kashmir at the Arab League session of 1958.
and succeeded to convince Arab states at Casablanca summit of 1965 to take a moderate stand and help India and Pakistan to end their war.

It was in this context India extended its support to Egypt during the different phases of Suez crisis. The case of Suez reflects the strong bonds that tied Cairo with New Delhi in post-1952. It shows how the two leaderships were closely consulting each other and coordinating their moves. However, Nehru came under heavy pressure from different quarters. India’s initial reluctance to support Egypt’s decision to nationalize the Suez Canal was the outcome of several factors, which were interrelated and interdependent at the same time. One of these factors is the fact that the genesis of India’s foreign policy, despite its public idealism, was to protect its national interest before everything else; to avoid international conflicts and any political risks and its adherence to neutrality in dealing with international problems. Indian diplomats initially tried hard to avoid taking anti-British positions. Some Indian officials thought, under the influence of British propaganda, that it is dangerous for India that Suez Canal could be controlled by an Islamic state because 80% of India’s trade passed through the Canal, and Pakistan may influence Egypt to obstruct the passage of Indian trade in the Suez Canal, or at least raise the fees for Indian ships, which would have affected negatively on the Indian economy.

Despite this, Egypt succeeded in convincing Nehru of its genuine cause. Egyptian diplomacy and leadership had been active to remove the fears of India and to win its support. Credit should go to Mustafa Kamel, the Egyptian ambassador in New Delhi, in convincing the Indian officials that it was in the interest of India to support Egypt. Nasser’s correspondences with Nehru contributed to shift in Indian position from hesitation in supporting the Egyptian decision to nationalize the Canal to publicly supporting it and even coordinating with the Egyptian leadership about steps Egypt could follow to defuse the crisis. At this point, the Suez crisis became the main concern for Nehru and his favourite issue to talk about in every meeting and include it in his speeches. Soon, India realized that both Britain and France are insisting on toppling the Nasser regime, which they considered not only dangerous to their interests in WANA but also dangerous to their status as big countries. They also succeeded in convincing USA of their views.
This fact enforced Nehru to extend support to Egypt. India’s support for Egypt’s position helped to a fair extent in lightening the severity of the crisis as well as being considered a diplomatic victory for Egypt against Britain. Moreover, India’s position influenced morally the position of USA towards the crisis. India’s goal was to find “a middle way” solution. During the First London Conference, the Indian delegation under the leadership of Krishna Menon defended Egyptian interests and prevented the western powers from using the event to take resolutions against Egypt. Dulles failed to break off the Indian support to Egypt and the conference ended up with forwarding the American proposal to Egypt in the hope that it may look into it. The conference was a diplomatic success to Egypt and its supporters under the leadership of India and USSR. Internationally, India’s position in the conference was generally welcomed. India continued supporting Egypt and offered its advice to Nasser on how to get through the crisis. The political flexibility of Egypt and its regular consultations with India and other friends made it clear to Nehru that the Western powers had aggressive intentions against Egypt. This pushed India to further its political and diplomatic support to Egypt. In its quest to mobilize world public opinion to support Egypt, New Delhi became the centre to coordinate the positions of Asian countries. Another goal of this mobilization was to denounce any military action against Egypt. India influenced many Asian countries by declaring its support to Egypt. As a result, many Asian countries followed India’s position. Among them were Indonesia, Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia and North Vietnam. India’s support to Egypt and its endeavours to enlist the support of other Asian countries was natural in light of India’s understanding of the real picture of the crisis. This picture became dominant among the decision-making centres in New Delhi and India understood the plan and what beyond it. It also estimated that the success of the West in its plan would harm both Egypt and India. This made Nehru put his political weight behind Egypt. Nehru mobilized the Indian people and convinced them that the problem is going to directly affect India politically and economically. He went to the extent expressing fear to his people that the evolution of the crisis could threaten India by a famine.

The growing political relations and intimacy between Cairo and New Delhi in post-1952 gave a strong push for their cultural relations. Historically, trade and political relations were the carriers of cultural contacts. However, political relations often were interrupted but trade and culture continued to flow between the two countries due to
their own dynamics. This continued till the Western powers came to dominate both states. The Western powers used military might to cut Indo-Egyptian trade ties. Soon, British colonialism took over India and Egypt and created barriers between them as a way to implement the imperial policy of "Divide and Rule". This undermined the political and economic relations between the two nations. As a result, their cultural ties were affected negatively. However, there were few attempts from both sides to break down these barriers and the British resisted those.

The end of colonial period saw the revival of political and cultural relations. During the period of study, India, on one the hand, succeeded in achieving its cultural goals in Egypt through influencing how Egyptian elite and masses looked upon India. Egyptians sympathized with India on the issue of its partition on the eve of its independence. They saw India as an Asian giant that played a very positive role in serving the interests of the Third world countries. Although, Egypt did not have any specific cultural policy in India, it earned the image of non-aligned and secular country, which is a friend of India.

Egyptian students, scholars and teachers, spent long years in India, and became Ambassadors of Indian culture. They taught at the universities, authored books and wrote in the newspapers. They acted as a middle point where Indian culture met and interacted with Egyptian culture. Egyptians contributed extensively to the spread of Indian culture in Egypt and in the wider Arab world. The same impact was not seen in the case of Indian students who had been to Egypt as most of them studied Arabic and taught it back in India where their audience circles were only the learners of Arabic and religious knowledge. Another reason is the fact that India is a vast country and relatively the small number of Indians who studied in Egypt. Al Azhar and ICCR played a very important role in cementing cultural ties between India and Egypt. The Indian and Egyptian diplomats/scholars shared a common desire to develop the cultural bonds that linked the two countries.

In their struggle to cement their cultural ties, Egypt and India deployed different tools like signing cultural treaties and executive programmes; holding cultural exhibitions; exchanging dance troupes, movies and books; and encouraging publicity about India in Egypt and vice versa. India also encouraged Arab studies at different Indian universities and Urdu departments were established at Egyptian universities. Similar
historical developments and circumstances of both nations produced ideas and wide exchange of them among the Egyptian and Indian thinkers and reformers. This similarity stands true even in the realm of cinema, music and art.

This study attempts to test few hypotheses that were suggested by previous studies to prove it correct or invalid. (Chapter II). This study asserts the following hypotheses as valid:

- A complex of simultaneously linked struggles between India and China, Arabs and Israelis, inter-Arab rivalries, Soviet-American rivalries in South and West Asia, conditioned interaction between India and Egypt.

- Indo-Egyptian relations developed based on mutuality of interests and similarity of actions and reactions to a variety of challenges both faced since the Second World War.

For example, both Egypt and India saw Western military pacts as back door for imperialism to take over former colonies. The answer for this challenge was non-aligned policy that safeguards the sovereignty of the newly independent states and meets its development needs by accepting unconditional development aid. Another example was their opposition to the partition of both India and Palestine on religious lines.

- The personality factor (the close personal friendship between Nehru and Nasser) helped in bringing the two countries close to each other and the lack of personal rapprochement between the leaders of the two countries reduced the momentum of cooperation between the two nations. A comparison of the conditions of Indo-Egyptian relations before 1970 and post-1970 will prove the importance of the personal rapprochement.

This study suggests that these hypotheses, which were suggested by previous studies, are invalid:

- India has all along been sensitive to Western feelings even at the risk of Egyptian good will or interest. The case of India’s policy vis-à-vis Suez crisis proved that this hypothesis is wrong.
The Indian sympathy and friendship for the Egyptians found expression in vague and general phrases but not in any concrete and/or substantial measures and actions. In spite of the lack of any significant support to the Egyptians, India has always demanded the support from Egypt in her own hour of crisis. This is an incorrect hypothesis.

"India supported Egypt and its causes all along; but in return, India did not receive any substantial/enough support from Egypt". The first part of this hypothesis is correct and the second part stands untrue. The Egyptian support for India during the liberation of Goa and the Egyptian role in mediating between India and China in 1962 are few examples of Egypt’s support for Indian causes.

The historical analysis of this study based on archival data suggests that India’s policy towards Egypt was determined mainly by two main factors: Non-alignment and Kashmir. The common adoption of both India and Egypt for non-aligned policy produced similar political reactions towards different political issues. For example, both opposed Western military pacts, and considered them threat to peace and security in Asia and the world. Both opposed colonialism and supported the national liberation movements in Asia and Africa. India supported the Palestinian and Algerian struggle for freedom. Egypt was sponsoring and defending these two causes and accordingly India’s support was appreciated by Egypt. Nasser was seen by India as the symbol of Arab nationalism as Nehru was a symbol of Indian nationalism. For both Nehru and Nasser, the nationalism was a cry that goes beyond religion and cross the sad memories of the partition, on religious lines, of India and Palestine.

Egyptian policy on Kashmir and Indo-Pakistani conflict was the second determinant of the nature of Indo-Egyptian relations. India’s strategy was to prevent Pakistan building up an Arab/Islamic front, which may support it on Kashmir. To achieve this goal, India supported Arab causes, especially Palestinian question, in order to neutralize the Arab factor in the Indo-Pakistani conflict as also on ideological ground of being anti-imperialism.

Egypt’s policy towards India was determined mainly by the following factors: the national interests of Egypt; Egypt’s strategy to balance its relations with India and Pakistan; and India’s attitude towards Palestinian cause and Arab nationalism. Egypt appreciated India’s support for the Egyptian national aspirations on different
occasions. India’s support during the Suez crisis was unprecedented and so was the reaction of Egypt in 1961 on Goa. Cairo was a close friend and undeclared ally of India during Nehru era. In spite of that fact, Egypt did not antagonize Pakistan and did not allow for any pressures of a third country to jeopardize its relations with it. The crisis of 1950/1951 in Indo-Egyptian relations is a good example of this exercise. Egypt always, appreciated India’s support for the legitimate rights of Palestinian people and considered as evidence of the true Indo-Arab friendship.

Indo-Egyptian bilateral relations were part of the matrix of the regional and international relations of both India and Egypt. Indo-Egyptian relations influenced the relations of both countries with other regional and international political actors. Indo-Egyptian relations also got influenced by the relationship between India and other regional and international powers on one side and the relationship between Egypt and other regional/ international powers on the other side. It could be called the circles of cause and effect. Few examples will make this picture clearer:

- Strong Indo-Egyptian relations (cause) were a source of tension for Egyptian-Pakistani Relations (effect); for example, Pakistan was angry with Nasser who refused to receive the Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1956; and refused Pakistan’s participation in the UN Peace-keeping forces in Sinai. Pakistan accused Nasser of hating Pakistan and loving India.

- Close Indo-Russian Relations and close Russian-Egyptian relations were a cause for strong Indo-Egyptian relations (effect). On the other side, US was a strategic ally for both Israel and Pakistan. Israel was an enemy for Egypt, and Pakistan was an enemy for India. As the strategic rule states, “the friend of my enemy is my enemy”, US policies in pursuing military pacts that gave a strategic strength for Pakistan and brought cold war to South Asia were seen as a hostile act against India. Egypt also had the same view about Baghdad pact as it neutralized Iraq out of any future conflict with Israel. The Pact even became a tool to protect Israel by trying to undermine the progressive countries like Egypt and Syria. This was obvious when India and Egypt opposed the US policy of military alliances in both West and South West Asia. Interestingly, Baghdad Pact, which supplied Pakistan with, advanced weapons,
which were used later in wars against India. Secretly, Baghdad Pact planned to achieve two dangerous goals in the region; one, to protect Israel and the other to exercise subversion against the progressive Arab countries including Egypt.

An improvement in Egyptian-Pakistani relations or Indo-Israeli relations (cause) was a source of tension for Indo-Egyptian relations (effect). This tension has been resolved by different strategies; India used the strategy of making crises in its relations with the Arab states, which will get closer to Pakistan. The other Indian strategy was to champion Arab causes publicly and at the UN to prevent Arab states of aligning with Pakistan in its conflict with India. Arab states acted according to their own interest i.e. Egypt balanced its position by adopting neutrality vis-à-vis Kashmir in order to win both India and Pakistan in supporting the Egyptian cause of independence and the unity of the valley. Later, when the Arab states had been divided into progressive camp and conservative camp; the progressive countries like Egypt adopted neutral position, while the conservative camp followed the Western policy of supporting Pakistan; serving both their external allies in West and gaining religious legitimacy at home in supporting what had been seen by a portion of the Arab public as Islamic cause.

Indian policy towards Arab-Israeli conflict was observed carefully and permanently by Egypt and was seen as one of the main determinants of Indo-Egyptian relations. Meanwhile, Egypt’s position towards Indo-Pakistani conflict affected India’s policy towards Israeli-Arab conflict and as a result, Indo-Egyptian relations were affected. For example, Arab sympathy with the Nizam of Hyderabad whom Syria presented his case at the UN Security Council, led to Indian recognition of Israel. However, India did not establish diplomatic relations with Israel at this point as such action may anger Arabs and lead to the emergence of Pakistani-Arab front.

Pakistani support for Palestinian cause and its antagonism for Israel was disarming factor in Pakistani-Egyptian relations. Often, Egypt was angry at Pakistan but Pakistan’s general pro-Arab policy prevented Egypt going against Pakistan. For example, in 1954, Pakistan played a facilitator role in mediating between Egypt and Britain over Suez zone and the evacuation of British forces.
from Egypt. Pakistan also supported Egyptian and Palestinian causes at the UN. This cooled down the anger of Egypt on the eve of Pakistan’s support for the Western proposals at the First London Conference, 1956.

In general, modern Indo-Egyptian relations stayed friendly throughout and their strength fluctuated according to the logic of a given era. During the struggle for independence, Indian and Egyptian nationalists were sympathetic towards each other and believed that they were fighting against one enemy (imperialism/Zionism) and their destinies were tied to each other; defeat or victory for both of them. After the 1952 revolution, Cairo became the headquarters of Arab nationalism in its struggle against colonialism and Zionism. As Krishna Menon, the spokesperson of Nehru’s foreign policy, put it once, the impact of this revolution upon West Asia was similar to the impact of French Revolution upon Europe. Syria, as the heart of Arab nationalism, supported the new Egyptian leadership and they fought together.

India identified itself with the progressive Arab regimes and supported the aspirations of Arab people. Therefore, India accorded high priority to Egypt leadership in the Arab world, in what has often been termed the Cairo-centric approach in India’s West Asia policy. This approach had a negative impact upon India’s relations with regimes such as Iraq before the 1958 coup d’état, as the latter followed a pro-West policy; or like Saudi Arabia’s under King Faisal, but the same approach had a positive impact upon India’s relations with the Arab people and the progressive Arab states such as Syria, the post-1958 Iraq, Saudi Arabia under Saud.

Indian support to an Arab cause that was supported so strongly by Arab peoples and progressive Arab regimes thus was a contribution to improving and strengthening Indo-Arab relations. In this sense, Indo-Arab relations benefited from strong Indo-Egyptian relations. By 1970s, regional and international changes brought a change in India’s West Asia policy. More attention was given to bilateral relations to every country regardless of its size or political importance. Egypt’s Camp David treaty with Israel undermined its position and prestige in the Arab and Islamic world. Its pro-USA policy reduced its role in regional and international politics. All this led to the decline of India’s Cairo-centric West Asia policy. The oil boom and détente between USA and Soviet Union weakened the momentum of non-alignment and its ability to
maneuver politically. This forced India to replace its political and ideological-oriented West Asia policy with an economically oriented policy. The diplomatic failure that India faced during its war with China (1962) and Pakistan (1965 and 1971) in getting support from the bulk of West Asia further convinced it to revise its foreign policy towards West Asia. India started to pay attention to its relations with every individual country in the region. After 1970, Indo-Egyptian relations started cooling off and lost its unique momentum “The Golden Era”. Both countries continued friendly with each other but no more in the same boat. Soon, Egypt became a close friend of USA and India continued its close friendship with the Soviet Union. The post-cold war saw the growth of friendship between India and USA. It also gave a birth to global disorder where the Third world is paying the heaviest price of anarchy, civil wars and even famines. In this context, Indo-Egyptian role in defending Afro-Asian peoples is in much need today. India is the heart of Asia and Egypt is the heart of the Arab world. The people of Asia and Africa have a lot of hope in their vital roles. To achieve this goal, both India and Egypt must restore their historical relations and build upon it new movement of Afro-Asian solidarity that may assert peace in the two continents and bring them prosperity.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the historical consciousness of the Indian and Egyptian leaderships for the different dimensions of Indo-Arab historical relations and common sufferings in the hands of imperialism shaped the emotional and ideological background of Indo-Egyptian friendship during 1950s and 1960s. This period became the “golden era” of modern Indo-Egyptian relations. Accordingly, building up an academic interest in Indo-Egyptian relations is beneficial academic exercise that keeps the debate on the subject and the hope to revive it alive. At this point, the researcher would like to state that this thesis contributes in a modest way to the historical narration of the Indo-Egyptian relations during the period, as the sea of these relations is full of pearls that could not even be accommodated in few theses. For that reason, more research is needed in all aspects of Indo-Egyptian relations.