INTRODUCTION

The collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and East Europe has brought the world to a blind alley. The former socialist countries are facing serious economic, political and ethnic problems. They are suffering from initial disorders arising out of the introduction of capitalist methods of development. Their share in the global economy and impact on the process of history seems marginal. This state of affairs is not likely to change in the near future. The United States of America and the Western countries appear to have filled the vacuum created after the disintegration of the socialist countries, as demonstrated in the Gulf War of 1991. However, the civil war in Yugoslavia has underlined the limits of the role of the USA and her allies.

Leftist thought everywhere is in crisis. The values and objectives which inspired millions of people beyond the confines of Europe, in the countries of the developing world, seem to have lost their charm. The intellectual elite and the politicians of the developing countries are trying to meet the new challenges identifying their place in the new unipolar world. They are also obliged to reconsider their policies and strategies.
In the process, they have to learn the lessons of the history of their national movements and modernization in the post-colonial era. Such reconsideration or reevaluation based on a comparative approach would be crucial for the major regional powers such as India in South Asia and Egypt in African and West Asian region.

Egypt, the most populous country of the Arab World, has been the focus of attention for almost half a century. It is strategically located, it has rich historical and cultural heritage; and its national economy is relatively developed in the African and West Asian region. Above all, it has played a key role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Indeed its recent history is an inextricable part of this perennial crisis.

Largely on account of its geopolitical and economic position, Egypt has played in numerous ways a distinctive role in the Arab World since the beginning of the Nahda (renaissance) in the Nineteenth century. Attempts to erode her importance or to excommunicate her from the Arab community have not proved successful. Even her total alienation from the majority of the Arab countries after the 1978-79 Camp David Accords did not last for more than a decade. By the end of the 1980s,
Egypt's membership of almost all inter-Arab bodies had been restored and anti-Egypt rhetoric had dwindled considerably.

The Arab World has been suffering from numerous contradictions and problems of the postcolonial era. National liberation struggles in the Arab countries have resulted in political sovereignty but their national economies have remained partly, if not wholly, dependent on the capitalist market. Revolutionary experiments in some countries seem to have suffered serious setbacks. Oil-rich monarchies are facing tensions emanating from the dichotomy between their enormous financial revenues and pre-capitalist socio-economic structures. Despite the transformation in the external environment since the early seventies which witnessed rise in American influence and decline in the Soviet role, the Arab-Israeli crisis continues unresolved, without any durable or just settlement. Rather, the region has witnessed much turbulence in the past decade as evidenced in the Iran-Iraq war followed by the Gulf War between Iraq and the US-led coalition forces. Arab unity seems to have lost its meaning and substance. Pan-Islamism has not been successful in filling the vacuum either. In several Arab countries,
social contradictions have surfaced and religious resurgence has struck root. But neither religious nor secular ideologies have been pre-eminent in this context.

In Egypt, a group of army officers known as the Free Officers, led by Lt. Col. Gamal Abdel Nasser carried out a coup d'état on 23 July 1952. The coup d'état proved to be epoch-making in the history of Egypt and the Arab World. In the following decades, the revolutionary government embarked on a programme for socio-economic modernization in accordance with its ideological perspective. The revolutionaries were able to introduce far-reaching changes in Egypt's domestic and foreign policies and in the economic and cultural fields. The political ideas and methods adopted by the revolutionaries came to be identified as Nasserism, after the name of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the driving spirit of the July revolution.

The impact of Nasser and Nasserism on the events in Egypt and Arab countries like Syria, Iraq and Yemen was quite marked for two decades. Nasser earned great prestige in the Non-aligned movement of which he was one of the founder members. Nehru, himself a great leader of the non-aligned movement, described
Nasser as a "wise leader" and "the most prominent symbol of Arab nationalism".

Nasserite thought and its practice were for long a regular issue in the theoretical discussions especially in the national liberation and leftist movements. Ways and means adopted by Nasser were generally regarded as one possible model of post-colonial development. However, Nasserism as such, does not constitute a relevant politico-ideological factor in the Arab World today. Nevertheless, the history of the region calls for an objective and dispassionate assessment of the Nasserite experiment. Such an assessment would contribute in a modest way to a comprehensive study of modernization experiments in the Twentieth century.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the colonial and semi-colonial periods preceding the Revolution of 1952 with special reference to Egypt's economic and social conditions and its class structure. The second chapter surveys the ideological trends and religious and political movements providing a source of inspiration to Nasserism. In the next three chapters,
the thesis focuses on the Nasser era to unfold its ideology and practice and the interrelation between vision and reality on the basis of three main ideas: the idea of national independence, the idea of economic and social modernization and ideology of political power. Here, the ideas of Arab nationalism and Arab Socialism have been highlighted. Also an attempt has been made to identify the political goals of the era and enunciate the economic and social transformation with its limits and inconsistencies. The sixth chapter examines the circumstances, internal and external, under which Nasserism lost its power and influence in and outside Egypt. Finally, in the seventh chapter certain questions of more general character, in terms of lessons and conclusions, have been raised. They relate to the period under study as well as to the recent history of the developing countries.

The approach of the thesis essentially derives from the idea of the "critique of ideology". This should not be taken to imply a criticism of Nasserite ideology, merely on account of the fact that it did not fit into the historical reality or was inconsistent with practice. The "critique" in the thesis has been
rather used to examine the extent to which the particular ideology is meaningful. In other words, are the divergencies between the ideology and practice conscious, based on vital political interests. Secondly, was the ideology suitable for the role attributed to it by G. Lukacs, i.e., to help the masses to fight out their social conflicts. Therefore, the analysis has to be comprehensive; it cannot be limited to a "history of ideas", a kind of narrative, but must undertake a counterposing of the vision with reality to show how much of the principles, programmes, promises were actually implemented. Furthermore, the approach has to be critical as well, because the ideology under study is particularly ambiguous, partly because of the gradual evolution of Nasser's perceptions and partly because of the utopian elements in social concept and socio-spiritual background of the ruling groups.

The "Critique of ideology" as an approach and form signifies that the thesis would not narrate the history of the period. This has already been done by a number of writers. Individual facts, data or events will be referred to only when necessary to support certain hypotheses. Thus, the historical method will be adopted mainly in the first, second and sixth chapters to trace the origins of Nasserite thought and its practice and
the causes of its decline. The analytical method will be used mainly in the third, fourth and fifth chapters to establish the interrelation between theory and practice, vision and reality. The "critique of ideology" would also necessitate substantial quotations from primary sources and would require to recollect various discussions about Nasser and Nasserism in articles, interviews and other studies in the contemporary press.

It would be worthwhile to look at some aspects of the subject from a different angle. Such aspects as the specific features of semi-colonial dependence, relation between Arab nationalist movements and Islam, role of the Army and Nasser's charisma, have been studied here from a different perspective. In particular, the role of Islam as an organic part and pre-eminent reality of the Arab World has been discussed in some detail. After all, it is Islam to which every political force and movement in the Arab World turns for inspiration and legitimacy.

Historical and political literature on Nasser and his era is voluminous. Secondary sources are especially numerous but most of them are descriptive.
They include numerous biographies of Nasser, mostly written by Western authors. There are also valuable memoirs of prominent Egyptian personalities of the era like A. Saʿdat, M.H. Heikal and General M. Shazli. Western writers have published a number of studies on the history and socio-political role of Islam in general and its Egyptian features in particular. There are also Soviet publications, quite candidly presented. These reflect, with a few exceptions, the familiar illusions about the prospects of socialism and national movements in the Third World. This certainly does not mean an underestimation of the valuable researches of some Soviet scholars. Arab sources are also quite in abundance on the subject. They include some interesting studies on the historical sociology of Egyptian ruling classes published in the 1980s.

This attractive galaxy of writers and their works notwithstanding, the present thesis, hopefully, would contribute in its modest way something new to the available literature on the subject.