

# Sustenance of the Indo-Egypt relation: Dynamics Significance, and Future prospects

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## Abstract

*Indian contacts, and ties with the west, dates back to ancient times. Relationships which evolved from Trade, and gradually led to the development of cultural relationships, brought out by the migration of people. There is irrefutable proof of India's contact with the ancient western civilizations, substantiated by multiple archaeological evidences. It is common knowledge among historians that India and Egypt traded by land and sea since the dawn of the Roman era. This knowledge comes from texts, which have intricate details of the commercial exchange in the form of luxury goods, which included: fabrics, spices and wine. The following report, aims to portray the Indo-Egyptian ties, since the dawn of these two civilisations spanning over a millennia, and recognizing the impact of this relationship on the culture and political beliefs of these nations.*

**Key Words:** civilisation, relationship, culture, economics, tradition

## 1. Introduction

Egyptian-Indian relations are based on the historic roots [1], and can be traced back to a time when both the nations were battling against imperialism, as evident from the joint correspondence between two of the country's motivational pioneers of the time: Saad Zaghloul and Mahatma Gandhi, and their joint venture in getting rid of the colonisation by the British empire in order to protect the nations solidarity and territorial integrity. The growing mutual interest between Indian and the Egyptian liberation movements, allowed for a cultural exchange at the time along with political interests among the people of the two nations. This was brought about when the Problems of the Egyptian's, in specific nature to the British colonial rule was highlighted in the Indian national newspapers and was responded to by the same by the Egyptian nationalist press. The ties deepened at the time of an existential crisis and in the year 1919, the *Wafd* party from Egypt, visited the congress.

In the year 1927, Jawaharlal Nehru interacted with nationalist leaders of Egypt in light of the freedom struggle, and was commended upon by the nationalists on India's struggle against the colonial empire. Also, In Nehru's first broadcast to the nation in the year 1946, he expressed his desire for the possibility of a close relationship between the two nations, and later on, Egypt became one of the first countries to form diplomatic relations with Independent India.

The relations reached a new phase, with the signing of a friendship treaty between both states in 1955, under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser and Jawaharlal Nehru. Furthermore, the two aforementioned leaders played a Major role in forming the Non-aligned Movement in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955, which was a natural concomitant of the Indo-Egyptian ties. Around the same time foreign policies were adopted on the grounds of Non-alignment which strengthened the ties even further.

Comprised of a long history of contacts and cooperation [2], on regional bilateral and global issues, India and Egypt have developed a close political understanding of each other. With visits from India to Egypt since the 1980's by the Indian prime ministers including Rajiv andhi(1985), P.V.Naraswimha rao(1995) etc. and likewise visits from the President of Egypt,

Hosni Mubarak(1982,1983,2008), have allowed for high level exchange in various issues, ranging from trade deals, counter terrorism, regional issues etc.

Nationalist discourse in India and Egypt comprises a unique theoretical framework, allowing for analysis of nationalist ideologies founded on the basis of distinct critiques by theorists including Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith and Eric Hobsbawm.

## 2. Literary Survey

The Indus Valley Civilization and the Mesopotamian civilisations were among the earliest known civilizations of the world, developing parallel to the Egyptian civilisation, making India and Egypt part of the world's oldest civilizations, and have since developed a close association and a common history since ancient times. It is interesting to note the remarkable analogous relations, which go back to the second millennium BC, which was discerned from the ancient texts of the Indian and Egyptians.

The cultural and religious similarities are almost uncanny. Today, there is a great potential for increasing cooperation between Egypt and India across a number of vital domains. Politically, India and Egypt share a common understanding on many issues and seek to closely coordinate efforts at regional and international fora to address them. The past 5 years, have shown a significant 60% increase in bilateral in spite of a global economic slowdown and regional instability. India is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest trade partner of Egypt, and the India-Egypt Bilateral Trade Agreement enforced in March 1978, is still being enforced to this date.

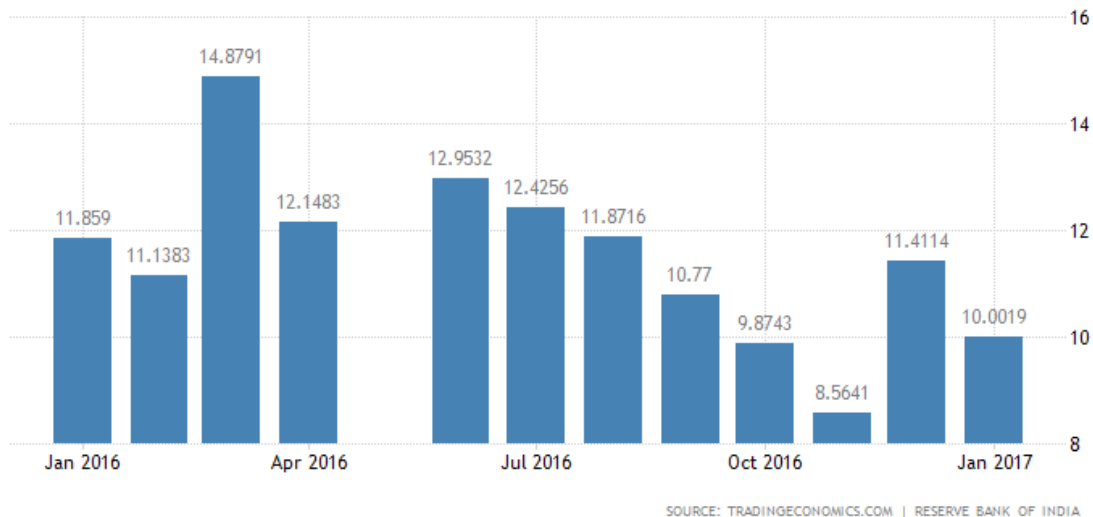
## 3. Economy and trade

Facts from Historians, and records dating back to the third century, have established a solid proof of the existence of trade relationship between India and Egypt. The trade system was established via a sea route, and then consisted of exchange of Indian spices, cotton textiles, handicrafts, scriptures, wine etc [3].

During the reign of the pharaohs, Indian sailors transported perfumes, spices, pearls and brocades. Egypt in return traded India coral, rose water, gold and saffron. In the 15 century B.C, under the rule of Queen Hat-Shep-sut envoys were dispatched to India, marking the initiation of mutual diplomatic relations. Likewise, approximately 2200 years ago, Emperor Ashoka's missionaries relayed the message of the Buddha to Egypt, which led to the establishment of an Indian settlement in Alexandria [6].

Developing on the same relation since the time of the Roman era, both countries have cooperated to capitalise in various fields such as agriculture, education and health. With the recent meeting of the Joint Trade Committee and the Egyptian-Indian Business Council in Cairo (March 2016), approximately 50 Indian companies, have reinforced their investments in Egypt. High profile companies, such as "The Sanmar group", the biggest Indian investor in Egypt have increased its investment capital by USD 300 million summing up the total investment of the company to USD 1.5 billion. Currently, Indian investments in Egypt gross more than USD 3 billion. The amount of trade exchange between the two countries, hit a snag in 2015, due to the decline in Egyptian oil and natural gas exports to India.

Joint ventures and projects have been called into play in fields of information Technology, Medicine, Automobiles etc. With cooperation protocols in play and Egypt's interest in India's experience in developing SMEs and the IT sector, and projects like the Suez canal project (a 6 billion pound project), a global investment opportunity has opened up for both Indian and Egyptian investors alike. With the current scenario in play, Egypt is more likely to engage in a more vibrant foreign policy, once it is unhitched from its energy dependency crisis. Being a dominant player in the politics of the African continent, and among the Arabian nations, allows for a wider opportunity for establishment of a strong political foundation to establish and promote economic stability.



#### 4. Cultural Relations

Political and economic relations are very much important to establish a foundation for trust, but the interactions of cultures, allows for the understanding among the people of the countries.

After the Abbasid period, literary interactions waned, providing very to no literary records [1]. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Al-Nahda: a cultural renaissance led to the resurrection of Arabic translations, where Arabian literature was converted into Indian languages and Indian books into Arabic. Works by personalities such as Rabindranath Tagore and Allama Muhammad Iqbal were translated by Egyptian scholars.

The Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (MACIC) set up in 1992 in Cairo, aimed to promote cultural exchange and cooperation between the two nations. With the effectuation of the Cultural exchange programme (CEP), Indian culture was popularised among the masses of Egypt through dance classes, seminars, meditation classes, exhibitions and various other cultural festivals.

Another major cultural festival, “India by The Nile” showcased the ethnicity of the Indian traditions [7], by organizing craft exhibitions, Bollywood musicals Indian fusion music, film screening and numerous other events were organized on the standards of public-private partnership.

Other various cultural events such as the Samaa International Festival for Chanting and Spiritual Music, International Festival for Drums and Traditional Arts, International Festival for Art and Culture etc. were organised, in which Ethnic groups from India participated, demonstrating and promoting the Indian culture in the country. The strong ties have been evident from affection of Egyptian nationals, who have named streets after Indian leaders: Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Zakir Hussein. The Indian embassy reciprocated the feelings of the nation, holding Egyptian artistic exhibitions, including visits by Egyptian troupes to a number of Indian cities and states, celebrating the World Arabic Language Day etc.

#### 5. Bilateral relations

Bilateral relations in the fields of consular and humanitarian cooperation have been established, and have grown steadily over the years. In one scenario, during the Libyan crisis in 2011, Egypt assisted India in evacuating 3000 Indian citizens from Libya, and India cooperated in evacuating nearly 50 Egyptian citizens from Yemen, during the same [2]

In the latest Foreign office consultation between the two nations, aspects concerning bilateral relations, such as political, economic, trade, cultural and consular relations and matters of regional issues of mutual interest were discussed. With several high-level visits such as the visit from the Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el Sissi, the bilateral ties have strengthened significantly. The Indian Minister of State for Parliamentary and Minority Affairs, India's Minister of External Affairs visited Egypt to strengthen the bilateral relations. India was also represented by its Minister of Shipping, Road Transport and Highways in the inauguration ceremony of the New Suez Canal Project. The regular high-level visits between both nations, have led to the creation of several joint treaties and MOUs in the political, economic, cultural and social fields.

Table 1: Important Bilateral treaties and agreements

Sl.no	Treaties and Agreements	Year
1.	Treaty of Friendship	1955
2.	Trade Agreement	1978
3.	Agreement on the establishment of Joint Commission	1983
4.	Agreement on combating international terrorism and transnational and organized Crimes	1955
5.	Agreement of Tourism Cooperation	1997
6.	The Partnership Agreement	2006
7.	Extradition Treaty	2008
8.	MoU on Trade and Technical Cooperation	2008
9.	MoU on Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space for peaceful purposes	2008
10.	MoU on Cooperation in the field of Health and Medicine	2008
11.	MoU on Renewable Energy Cooperation	2011
12.	MoU on Cooperation in the field of Environmental Protection	2012
13.	MoU on Cooperation in the field of Electoral Management and Administration	2012
14.	MoU on Cooperation in Information and Communication Technology	2013
15.	MoU on Cooperation in Cyber Security	2013
16.	MoU on establishment of a Centre for Excellence in IT	2013
17.	MoU on Cooperation in the field of Micro and Small Enterprises	2013
18.	MoU on Cooperation in the field of Protection, Preservation and Management of Cultural Heritage	2013
19.	MoU on Up-gradation of a vocational Training Centre in Cairo	2013
20.	Letter of Intent on Cooperation in the field of Solar Energy	2013
21.	Letter of Intent concerning launch services for Egyptian Nano Satellite on board Indian PSLV	2013
22.	MoU between GOL and Government of Arab Republic of Egypt for Air Transport Arrangements	2014
23.	Executive Programme on Science & Technology cooperation for period of 2015 -2018	2014
24.	MoU on scientific cooperation between National Research Centre, Egypt (NRC) and Council for Scientific &	2015

	Industrial Research (CSIR)	
25.	MoU on Tourism cooperation	2015
26.	MoU on cooperation between Secretaries of National Security Councils of India & Egypt	2015
27.	MoU between Bureau of Indian Standard(BIS) and Egyptian Organization for Standardization and Quality(EOS)	2016
28.	Agreement on Maritime Transport	2016
29.	MoU between General Authority for Investment and Free Zones (Egypt) and Invest India (India)	2018

## 6. Future Prospects

India and Egypt have maintained a strategic partnership throughout the many years, and has shown a considerable potential in regards to the expansion of mutual understanding, between the two nations developed through history spanning for centuries.

Egypt is a \$286-billion economy, comprising of 89 million consumers around the world, making it the second largest economy in the world after Africa. This makes it a very strong potential economic partner in the years to come

The India-Egypt ties have survived through many conflicts, which has further strengthened the ties between the two. India supported Egypt during the Suez crisis (1956), which honoured the non-aligned foreign policy. During the “Arab cold war” (1973), the Arab nations divided into conservatives and revolutionaries, during which India remained loyal to Egypt and stayed by Egypt, who led the radical camp: opposing the west and its allies. During the Indo-Pak war (1965), Egypt sided with India as a result of the cordial relations maintained and due to the similar ideologies of global politics shared by the Leaders Nasser and Nehru.

This shows that the deliberations weren't just fixed and limited to trade and cultural exchange, but in peace initiatives and mediation affairs of both the countries with other countries. Revitalising the ancient relation and the renewing the relation formed by the NAM and through the post-Cold war era, should be the primary motive, while advancing and strengthening the relationship between the two nations.

## 7. Conclusion

India's partnership with Egypt, on cultural, social and economic fronts, has presented an opportunity for the two nations to forge new ties and build on the historical ties of the two nations which were establish since the time of the Indus civilization. The involvement of the two nations, may not be the headlines of everyday news, but nevertheless holds a great amount of significance, and has united the two nations on multiple fronts (such as challenges of energy security, terrorism and climate change).

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