

## **Egyptian Mythology and its Naturalistic Approach**

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### **Abstract**

All the ancient mythologies are evidently nature-oriented. Among all Egyptian mythology is deeply naturalistic in its conduct. All the mythologies have a specific tendency apart from being nature-oriented in general. The strong impetus of nature surpassed everything including the immortal concept of the divine. The dominance of beasts and birds and their inseparable connection with the divine are stark. Nature even merges with the individual divine characters in Egyptian myths. Focus on mortality, sexuality and the cycle of conservation consumption is in the core of the manner.

### **Keywords**

Egyptian mythology, Egyptian myths, Egyptian religion, Egyptian culture.

Egyptian mythology and religion lasted for a length of 3500 years. The uniqueness in Egyptian mythology was its naturalistic approach. The approach of the ancient Egyptian religion was so much nature oriented that the myths seemed to be as if stories of normal human beings. This mythology was localized with different gods and cosmogonies. The features of naturalism carve out the chief ideology of Egyptian mythology. There are more than a hundred of gods in the said mythology. These gods are categorized according to generation. The attitude of naturalism is the philosophical belief that every existence and every single thing arises from natural phenomenon with one or more natural causes, and any supernatural or spiritual explanations behind it are denied. As naturalism took its plight from realism, thus it is framed quite realistically. If we look deep into the framing of the mythology we can observe the tendency of the same that is directed towards nature. The gods and goddesses, their conflict, the priorities all are suggestive of a nature-oriented culture. In-depth study of Egyptian mythology established the importance of nature in the lives of the people of Egypt and their dependence on the same.

Before going deep into the Egyptian mythology the features of naturalism that are prevalent in the said legends are to be analyzed closely. This ancient culture was strongly nature bound. The human and the divine activities and reactions divulged their naturalistic manner. The chief feature of naturalism is that it is nature oriented. The mythology and culture of Egypt is nature-centric.

Similarly the Egyptian culture was completely nature-based. The Egyptian Gods were more like humans and represented natural elements. Naturalism is chiefly based on the theory of survival of the fittest. Thus we find conflict among the Gods and the fittest among them excels. For instance, in the myth of Osiris, we find Osiris and his cunning brother Set is always at a conflict. Benevolent Osiris is even killed by Set, and his son Horus and wife Isis brings him back to life. Set is evil, he undertakes many an unfair means and in the conflict of the two brothers, Osiris excels and achieves the divine seat. Most significant part in this is the subtle naturalistic approach of the setting. Osiris is considered as the God of nature and vegetation whose rightly paired wife is Isis, the Goddess of fertility and motherhood and the brother of Osiris; Set who stands as a counter to him is the God of desert, violence and storm. If we observe the pattern, the positions of the Gods and their area of divinity is rightly matched with each other. Nature and vegetation is in union with fertility to which storm, violence and desert stands as a sharp opposition. This framing and placing of divine identities is strikingly proportionate. This proves the deep inclination of the Egyptians towards the aspects of nature. Their culture centered round nature.

Another very important aspect of naturalism is the theory of evolution. Being the most naturalistic culture by temperament, we find the idea of evolution amidst the mythology too. The most important deified natural element of Egyptian mythology is 'sun'. The three forms of

sun appear to be Khepri, Ra and Atum. All the three are Sun Gods. The difference is Khepri is the morning sun, Ra is midday sun and Atum is the god of Evening Sun. It was believed that Ra was swallowed up by Nut every evening, travelled through the world of death whole night and was reborn in the morning. Observed very carefully, we find the theory of evolution in the three forms of sun. Sun god was the most important deity and was named with various names depending on places and time. Ra was the most powerful of all the Gods and outshined all others. Khepri was associated with rebirth, renewal and resurrection. Sun God appears in almost all the generations of Gods. Ra is worshipped even after the conversion of the entire Egypt into Christianity. There he was considered as God the Father a part of Holy Trinity. The predominance of Sun god over all other Gods proves the strong dependence of the primitive Egyptian culture on Nature, considering sun is the source of life.

The Egyptian culture was so much nature-centric that they believed in mortality deeply. The concept of mortality is more dominant than immortality in Egyptian mythology. Mortality and transience was so deeply ingrained in their psyche that it reflected in their myth creation. Gods are not immortal in Egyptian myths. The concept of mortal gods is common in Egyptian culture. One of the chief gods, Osiris, god of death and immortality was one of the instances of the same. He was the brother of Seth, Isis and Nephthys. He was the benevolent god and Seth was the malevolent god of storm and natural calamity. Osiris was

murdered by his step-brother Seth. He possessed human form and lived upon earth. Osiris, after his death is said to have rose to the sky and is placed in the Seat of Judgement. The death of a god is suggestive of their belief in mortality and as Osiris was enthroned as the god of death after his death, we can make out the idea of transience which is bestowed on the spirit. The gods die as we find in the myths, and they merge with other gods too. This again reveals the deep naturalism ingrained in the core of the culture. This is exceptional in Egyptian mythology to portray the divine as mortal. Gods of Egypt are treated as Kings too.

As a naturalistic culture, Egyptian mythology celebrates sexuality to greater extent. Sexuality is such a biological characteristic of life that is deeply linked with nature. Spiritual or philosophical aspect is very less in the said mythology. While reading through the Egyptian myths, we find the excess of instincts, sexual issues more. The concept of revival of sexuality even after death, the inclination towards creation and child birth are enough to support this point. One of the very important Gods of the Egyptians is Amun or the Sun-god. He received immense importance among the Egyptians which was somewhat of monotheistic level. He was the symbol of creative potency and considered as the father and protector of the Pharaohs. He was often portrayed with his erected penis. Another myth related to Osiris highlights the same idea. Osiris was killed by Set and it is said Isis revived him aided by Nephthys and was conceived a son by him. Set managed

to find out the chest that contained the corpse of Osiris and cut it into fourteen pieces and threw it in the sea. Isis managed to collect all the thirteen pieces excepting the genitals. This focus on the sexual organ clearly states the deep rooted idea of sexuality which definitely supports the perspective that Egyptian mythology was deeply nature-oriented. Noteworthy is the belief that life can be restored and even the person can father a child though not alive. This idea of eternal sexuality focuses on the dominance of nature. Another aspect closely related to the same is the idea of Fertility. If we read Egyptian mythology keenly, we have a long list of gods and goddesses who are treated as the fertility deities.

| <b>Name of the Deity</b> | <b>Domain</b>           |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Amun                     | Sun god                 |
| Bastet                   | Protector               |
| Heqet/Heket              | Childbirth/Resurrection |
| Heryshaaf                | Riverbanks              |
| Isis                     | Motherhood & magic      |
| Mesenet                  | Childbirth              |
| Min                      | Reproduction            |
| Osiris                   | Nile/ Vegetation        |
| Sobek                    | River/ Warfare          |
| Sopdet                   | Soil                    |
| Tawaret                  | Childbirth              |
| Tefnut                   | Water/Fertility         |

The long list of fertility deities overtly elucidate that fertility was of great importance for the Egyptians. This idea of fertility is solely connected to naturalism and it

definitely confirms that Egyptian culture was deeply naturalistic in nature.

Like many other ancient mythologies Egyptian mythology has a deep connection with bestial representation. Animals and birds receive immense importance in Egyptian mythology. The dominance of Nature is well understood by the inseparable link between the legends, deities on one hand and nature and beastly manifestations on the other. To elucidate this aspect, I have prepared a chart below demonstrating the list of gods, their domain and their representation as animal or bird form. This chart tells us about the tremendous nature orientation among the Egyptians and the strong belief on the aspects of nature.

| <b>Name of the Deity</b>       | <b>Domain</b>                                | <b>Bestial form connected with</b> |
|--------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Bastet                         | Protector Goddess                            | Cat                                |
| Hathor; Isis; Nut; Mehet-Weret |  | Cattle                             |
| Renenutet                      | Protector of the Pharaoh's children          | Cobra                              |
| Horus                          | Solar God, Protector of Royal powers         | Falcon, Hawk                       |
| Anubis                         | God of Death                                 | Jackal                             |
| Shu & Tefnut                   | God of dry air and moist air                 | Lion                               |
| Set & Tawaret                  | God of Chaos and storm; Goddess of Fertility | Hippopotamus                       |
| Thoth ; Khonsu                 | God of Writing ; Moon God                    | Baboon                             |

|                                 |   |                                       |
|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Maat                            | Order   | Ostrich (feather in the crown)        |
| Set                             | Chaos , storm, calamity                       | Pig (disguise while fight with Horus) |
| Khnum                           | God of pottery                                | Ram                                   |
| Khepri                          | Solar God                                     | Beetle                                |
| Serqet                          | Savior Goddess (from insect bites and poison) | Scorpion                              |
| Nekhbet                         | Mother Goddess (eternal protector)            | Vulture                               |
| Naunet; Amaunet; Hauhet; Kauket | Water, invisibility, infinity, darkness       | Snake                                 |
| Heqet                           | Goddess of Childbirth                         | Frog                                  |

Many other ancient mythologies have strong natural association too; like Greek, Hindu, Norse and others. Definitely this is because all these are pantheistic in nature; but noteworthy is the dominance of nature, specially animals and birds in Egyptian culture. In all other culture it is the elements of nature that dominates, the animals are given importance but not as much as in Egyptian myths. In Hindu mythology, animals are associated to different gods and goddesses, but they are not mingled with the beasts. In Egyptian mythology the connection between the Gods and Goddesses are intricately connected. The concept of gods' images in Egyptian culture is seen to be half-man half beast. This is suggestive of the extreme interdependence of human and animals.

Every mythology sets a unique culture. Like all other mythology, Egyptian mythology has a different and



exceptional trait. That is undoubtedly its naturalistic approach and disposition. The lifestyle of the ancient people in Egypt were much nature-centric and also because they could not resist the natural disasters, the dependence and the fear both gave birth to a naturalistic culture.

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