



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS OF THE PEOPLE IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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Abstract

Ancient Egyptians lived a civilized life. They patronized their own rules and norms for their daily and religious matters. The woman does not have equal rights as to man. The man was considered superior and the woman as servant of man. The marriage of brothers and sister was in vogue in Egyptian society and it was also practiced in royal families. There was divergence among the people in society like superior and inferior segments. The royal and elite people enjoyed many rights and preferences in the society. The common man was dealt as the servant of the royal families. This approach produced a big distance among the people in Egyptian society. They worshiped many gods. This paper took a review of their religious matters in detail. It was also discussed that how Egyptians made their new gods. The background of monotheistic and polytheistic



approaches with respect of ancient Egypt were also highlighted. Egyptians daily life was influenced by their religion.

Key words: Ancient Egypt, Social Conditions, Recreational activities, Rights of Women, Marriages, Religious Conditions, Oneness of God

Introduction

The oldest nation in Egypt was the Coptic. The Israelites came to Egypt four generations before Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) and settled there. Allama Ibn Khaldun, regarding the opinions of various historians, has a wealth of information about the race of the Coptic nation:

“The popular saying is that these people are attributed to Ham bin Noah. But Masudi describes them as a descendant of "Bansir bin Ham".

However, there is no mention of Bansar bin Ham in the Torah. However, "Egypt", Cush, Canaan and Qob have been mentioned. Allama Sohaili says that the Copts are descendants of Canaan bin Ham. Because the Copts are attributed to Egypt and Egypt was the son of "Nabit" or "Kabit bin Nabit". And Nabit is one of the descendants of Kush bin Canaan bin Ham. Describes everything. Coptic Copts are considered to be descendants of Laiq ibn Misr and the Israelis believe that they are descendants of Qom ibn Ham and according to some historians they are descendants of Confucius ibn Coptain and Coptic means "Coptic".(Aabadi,2009)

The Coptic people are the old residents of ancient Egypt. Israelites migrated with Hazrat Yousef (PBUH) and lived there for few hundred years. They left Egypt with Moses after a long period when they had been oppressed by the Pharos.

Social classes

The caste system was prevalent among the ancient Egyptians in the same way as it has been practiced in the Hindu nationalities of India since time immemorial. Telling this Syed Siraj writes:

“The Egyptians were divided into many classes. The highest being was Pharaoh. The second class was the priests. Whose greatness and power were in no way inferior to that of the king. In religious matters he was superior to the king. And the king obeyed their advice. The third class



was government officials and princes. The princes had vast estates and high houses and they lived a life of luxury. After the feudal era, the power of government officials exceeded that of emperors. And after Pharaoh and the priests, they were considered to be the same. The fourth category was merchants and artisans. The fifth class consisted of peasants, small artisans and free laborers. The lowest class was the slaves. Slaves were mostly prisoners of war. Or people who couldn't pay their debts. The number of slaves was in the millions. It can be estimated from this. That Ramesses III had destined 113,000 slaves as offerings. "(Siraj,1959)

A study of the social classes of Egypt reveals that their classes bear a resemblance to the ancient caste system of the Hindus. And there is a strong possibility that the people of ancient India came from Egypt and settled here or that they had close ties with the people here.

Recreational activities in ancient Egypt

In ancient Egypt, the wealthy maintained their social status and made proper arrangements for sports and entertainment, they took full advantage of that. But the weak and the poor were not allowed to do so. And their hobbies were nothing short of a modern-day. JA Ray writes:

The Egyptians were very lively and cheerful. Because of this he was fond of sports. But farmers and slaves did not get a chance to have fun. The Egyptians were very fond of singing. It must be understood that the song was lying in his lap. There were men and women servants of every group and every profession (Raey,2014).

And JA Ray writes more:

The people of Egypt were in no way inferior to the contemporary people in their hobbies and possessions in blood, games, society and cultural arts who are so proud of their cultural development. It is also clear that there has been no significant difference in human nature over such a long period of time. Man is the same as he was then (Raey, 2014).

It is clear from the above passage that in ancient times people were interested in blood and games. They were increasingly involved in sports. But over time, that is likely to change. Thus, in modern times, the style of sports and entertainment has been changed.

Ancient Egyptian Women



In ancient Egypt, women lived freely. Unlike the royal women who had freedom in a limited circle, and they were not as free as ordinary women. Charlotte Booth is wealthy, stating:

“Royal women had very little freedom, were used as political pawns, and were locked away from the world in the harem. Ordinary women were much luckier. They had more freedom than most women in other contemporary societies.” (Booth, 2011)

Egyptian women always take care of their adornment. Archaeological excavations in Egypt have provided clear evidence of this. Mentioning the accessories that women used to beautify and show off in ancient Egyptian times. AR David writes:

“The women of Kahun used a range of cosmetics and beauty aids which reflect the elegance of their lifestyle even in this remote town.” (David, 1996)

Royal or aristocratic women were not allowed to participate in ordinary women's recreational activities. Women's emancipation was conditional on a specific purpose. Charlotte Booth writes:

“The general belief is that it was unbecoming for an elite woman to perform in public. Although women sang, danced, or played instruments in private, engaging in any of these activities in public was taboo. In fact, the only time an elite woman was permitted to perform in public was if she was in the priesthood, participating in religious ceremonies and processions.” (Booth, 2011)

Such freedom of women is absolutely against the freedom of women in modern days. In modern days elite women have fullest freedom.

Sibling marriage

In ancient Egypt, it was customary for siblings to marry each other. And royal princesses were not allowed to marry except their families. That is why we find in the history of ancient Egypt that princesses married their brothers, fathers and grandfathers. Mentioning this, Charlotte Booth writes:

“Unmarried princesses were dangerous because ambitious men could corrupt them. However, princesses were unable to marry outside the royal family without express permission from the king, which was rarely given. These restrictions meant that often, princesses married their brothers, fathers, and even grandfathers. Sometimes these arrangements



were marriages in the true sense of the word and produced children.”
(Booth, 2011)

Similarly, in those days, the wife was given equal rights with the husband. And she was an equal sharer in property, inheritance and all property. A.R. David's statement is:

“The literary evidence from Deir el-Medina also illustrates the situation regarding domestic law—marriage, divorce, inheritance and ownership of property. The wife was equal to her husband under the law and retained full control of her own property, whether she acquired it by inheritance before or after her marriage. Her rights to a share of the marital property were also assured.”(David,1996)

It was rare in ancient Egypt, where the women had equal rights to husbands.

Occupations and construction of the ancient Egyptians

In ancient Egypt, princes and rulers had numerous occupations. Of these, hunting was one of the most important recreational activities. And they were very fond of hunting wild animals and fish. J. R. Ray writes:

"Authorities and princes used to hunt Oz. Or they used to have fun by catching fish. The king also hunted. The inscriptions show that the famous Farmanbro and the conqueror of Miss Som killed 120 elephants and Aman Hatp Som killed 102 fierce lions and 96 savages. "(Raey, 2014)

The ancient Egyptian period has been ideal for architecture. The biggest example of this is the "Pyramids of Egypt", which will be mentioned in detail in the following pages. Simple houses were built in villages rather than in urban areas. Charlotte Booth writes:

“Houses in Egyptian villages were generally very basic. Although some were larger than others (depending on the wealth and status of the owner), the average house at Deir el Medina, Gurob, and Amarna consisted of four rooms.”(Booth,2011)

remnants of ancient Egypt testified that that the Egyptian were the greatest in terms of construction and innovation.

Egyptian Laborer and Slave



In ancient Egyptian times, laborers and slaves were deprived of basic rights. Workers and slaves were subjected to great oppression. They were severely tortured as punishment. Syed Siraj writes:

"The condition of the animals was much better than theirs. In fact, in the past, these slaves were considered property and their duty was only to serve the master by fulfilling his wishes. Sometimes these slaves were also offered sacrifices. Apart from these slaves, the condition of the laborers and peasants was also not good, and they were living in extreme misery and distress. Egyptian slaves were forced to work hard and were mostly used for construction work. Bob Brier, Hoyt Hobbs writes:

"That Hebrew were enslaved by Egypt and forced to work constructing cities, including the one the Bible calls "Rameses," is entirely consistent with the Exodus story." (Brier and Hobs,2008)

The above passage refers to the Israelites when they were enslaved during the reigns of King Ramesses and Mernptah. And then they perpetrated all kinds of oppression on the children of Israel and forced them to work hard.

Civil rights of free Egyptians

In ancient Egyptian civic life, men and women had two basic rights, and they were free to enter contracts and travel within their jurisdiction. Bob Brier, Hoyt Hobbs write:

"Free Egyptian citizens—both male and female—possessed two defining rights: they were free to travel and free to enter into contractual agreements." (Brier and Hobs, 2008)

Men had the right to divorce as well as remarry. In the case of divorce, no formal written documents were written. Informal methods such as marriage are often adopted, provided there are no financial matters. Charlotte Booth writes:

"A man or a woman could divorce a spouse by simply stating 'I divorce you'. The woman typically then moved back to her family home. Divorcees, both male and female, could remarry, although women over 30 did not often remarry. This was either because the women were financially self-sufficient or past their child-bearing years and thus not considered good marriage material" (Booth, 2011).

In modern society this approach has been changed. Women can marry after thirty years when they are divorced.



Status of religion in ancient Egypt

Their religious values played a major role in the daily life of the ancient Egyptians. The Egyptians worshiped deities. In this regard, Kathleen Kuiper writes:

“Religion played an important role in ancient Egypt. The polytheistic Egyptians worshipped a wide array of gods and goddesses. Over the course of 3,000 years, new deities appeared, and many old ones faded in importance. Yet Egyptian religion remained remarkably stable over that time and pervaded daily life” (Kuiper, 2011).

The Egyptians carved their gods out of clay and stone with great skill. And these deities were placed on heights where their religious ceremonies were performed, and sacrifices were offered. SM Shahid writes:

“Before Moses, stones and pillars were considered respectable. Religious ceremonies and sacrifices were performed on the axis of stones and pillars. They were made into human shields and mounted on heights. They were also afraid of them because they believed that spirits lived in them”(Abdullah, 2019).

The practice of worshiping deities and offering sacrifices to them has been passed down from generation to generation among the Egyptians.

The concept of gods in ancient Egypt

The ancient Egyptians were primarily idolaters and believed in many gods. Each city, village and family had a different deity they worshiped. When one of the Egyptians left their area and went to a new place, they would also leave their local deity here. And then they started worshiping a new deity in a new place. Khawaja Hassan Nizami writes:

“The Egyptians were idolaters. - Many gods were worshiped. The deity of each city and village was different. And only he was worshiped there. He was considered the savior of the population. When a man left his village or city. You would even leave your god. And began to worship the god of the new place. Because he thought that now he has come under the control of another deity. And that is what God can do. So the god of Memphis was Victory. Hello was the atom of the police (Ain Shams). Thu Thu was the blood of Tahad. And the peace of Thaps ”(Hassan, 2016).



The Egyptians had a great deal of devotion to their gods telling this Bob Brier & Hoyt Hobbs writes:

“They saw the universe as inhabited by a panoply of gods—spirits that controlled every natural phenomenon and left an Egyptian feeling powerless, dependent on prayers and offerings to entice gods to accomplish what he could not do on his own”(Brier and Hobbs, 2008).

The Egyptians acted like helpless pets to gain the pleasure and intimacy of their gods. Which shows their valiant devotion. The lord provided anything for the gods.

The concept of unity in the ancient Egyptians

“The traditional Theban god, Amun, became very important. He merged with Heliopolis’s sun god Re, becoming Amun-Re. The Theban kings provided financial support and rich gifts to Amun-Re’s priesthood and temples” (Chirstensen, 2009).

Such a concept of monotheism innovated the beliefs and ideologies of the Egyptians and they gradually became attracted to the worship of their chosen and assimilated deity. In this regard, J.A.Raey statement is:

“Ra was the greatest deity in the spirit of tradition. Which he considered to be the eternal self and the creator of the earth and the universe. His power was hidden in his being. Of which no one knew. But within the universe, his hidden name was revealed. Although there were some such people among them. Who believed in the worship of one God? Where he believed in the eternal and eternal Creator. The god was a nitr or nathr in the Egyptian language. But such meanings are attributed to it in the books of teachings and advice. As they go for "Allah" in Arabic. Says an Egyptian sage. “Then sit on the two arms of the true God. So surrender yourself to God. He can bring you peace, that is, another world. Wherever you can be safe with it,” writes another sage. "Who knows the secret of God. We get our daily bread from Him. The disobedient God loves and the disobedient hates." (Raey, 2014)

From the above verses the ancient Egyptians worshiped many gods in the beginning. With the passage of time, the beliefs of the Egyptians regarding their gods and deities also changed. And so, they continued to be attracted to monotheism, even though their concept of monotheism was very different from the one given by Islam.



Among the ancient Egyptians, Akhenaten was the only Pharaoh who, keeping in view the concept of monotheism, rejected the views of other Pharaohs and, according to his understanding, introduced a god, Aton, and incorporated his worship into religious worship. But Akhenaten's belief did not last long in ancient Egypt. In this regard, Bob Brier & Hoyt Hobbs wrote:

“Akhenaten’s religion is history’s first recorded example of monotheism, and it did not fare well. Although Akhenaten worshiped his one god in Akhetaten, Egyptians elsewhere continued to celebrate all their traditional gods.”(Brier and Hobbs, 2008)

The above-mentioned claim of the latter authors is not conceivable that Akhenaten provided the first example of the worship of a god in Egyptian beliefs. Prior to Akhenaten, in other countries and nations of the world, divine teachings and the concept of worship of the true God were given to mankind through the Prophets. Above all, with the arrival of Prophet Joseph (PBUM) in Egypt, the people of Egypt became acquainted with the concept of monotheism. The preaching teachings of Prophet Yusuf (AS) increased the tendency towards monotheism in Egypt.

Historian Herodotus's observation of the religion of ancient Egypt

In 400 BC, the Greek historian Herodotus traveled to Egypt to study the situation of the Egyptian people and their priests, to observe the local environment, and to gather information from the priests of the time. Charlotte Booth quotes Herodotus as saying:

“The Greek historian Herodotus records that Egyptian priests shaved off all (and yes, I mean all) their body hair to prevent lice. Some priests may even have gone so far as to pluck out their eyebrows and eyelashes just to make sure they were 100 per cent clean. They carried out this hair removal every other day. In the Ptolemaic period, any priest who forgot to shave was fined 1,000 drachmas. Sexual intercourse was banned in the temple (quite right, too!), and priests carried out specific cleansing rituals before entering the temple after sex. In fact, it was expected that a priest about to start his working month in the temple should abstain from any contact with women for several days before entering temple service, just in case he was contaminated with menstrual blood or bodily fluids.”(Booth, 2011)

The Egyptians named their deities by different names. And the names attributed to these deities were used in many other countries as well.



"The names of almost all the gods came to Greece from Egypt. My investigation proves that they were taken from an external source." (Jawad, 2005)

In ancient Egypt, only male animals were slaughtered to offer sacrifices to the gods, and they considered female animals sacred, so they refrained from slaughtering them for sacrifice.

"So pure male cows and calves are used for sacrifice all over Egypt, but female animals are not allowed to be sacrificed because they are sacred to Isis. Its features are like those of a female statue of a goddess, while its horns are like those of a cow." (Jawad, 2005)

Egyptian Traditions and Rituals

When Egypt came under Iranian rule, they preserved ancient Egyptian traditions. Mentioning this, Kathryn A. Bard & Steven Blake write:

"The records of an Aramaic-speaking colony of Jewish mercenaries stationed on the island of Elephantine, at the First Cataract, provide information about the colony, its relations with its Egyptian neighbors and officials of the Persian government. In some ways the Jewish community maintained its separate identity, keeping their Hebrew names, their own religion and marriage laws, but in other ways the community very much resembled its Egyptian neighbors. Legal scholars have discussed why the Egyptian and Jewish systems of land tenure, including land lease, are so similar" (Bard and Blake, 2005).

Most of the religious ideas among the Greeks came from the Egyptians and the Greeks not only learned a lot of religious rituals from the Egyptians but also adopted them in their style and made them part of their ideas. Herodotus writes:

"The Egyptians were the first to introduce holy processions and prayer gatherings to the gods. The Greeks learned to use these things from them" (Jawad, 2005).

An overview of the religious situation of the ancient Egyptians is given. That he had interfered with the practice of religion in his daily life. They worshiped many gods.



Results

- Men and women did not have equal rights.
- Women were married to a brother, father or grandfather in their own family.
- Women were treated like property.
- Elite women had different right from other common women.
- The workers did not have rights.
- The ancient Egyptians worshiped many gods.
- oneness of God flourished under Akhenaten.
- The Greeks also borrowed the names of gods from the Egyptians.
- The ancient Egyptians adored religious buildings

Conclusion

The Egyptians lived a life of simplicity. They enjoyed the different recreational activities as the modern man enjoyed accordingly. The Egyptian society was divided in different segments. The elite women had limited freedom of marriage and publicly activities. The religion was the main concern of ancient Egyptians. They worshiped hundreds of gods. They had divided their gods in different variety. They had assigned for their different purposes.



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