CHAPTER SEVEN

COSMOGONY OF THE ANCIENT MIDDLE EAST
During the last two centuries, innumerable studies on the *Bible* have been carried out by numerous scholars focusing on its various aspects like literature, mythology, religion, theology and anthropology and many are still going on. The studies, particularly in the field of mythology, revealed the striking resemblances of the culture of Hebrews with that of the Babylon, Egypt, Canaan etc. As their history shows, these people were brought into contact mutually with the surrounding cultures and so each must be well acquainted with others’ myths and beliefs which provided colourful as well as fanciful images to them. The Jews, in spite of being monotheistic in belief, showed a strong affinity towards the polytheistic as well as pagan religions throughout their history for which the Prophetic works of the *Bible* supply ample evidence. Such an atmosphere definitely led to the process of incorporation of suitable elements into their systems, which otherwise is known as syncretism.\(^1\) As far as cosmogony is considered, this syncretism to a certain extent is much evident. The compilers of the religious scriptures were very much concerned in defending their monotheistic religion. The fact that the gods and myths of the infidels always attracted the Israelites is undisputed. A view, anyhow, on the popular creation myths prevalent amongst the people of surrounding regions of Israel is essential before reaching at any conclusion. In the following portion, an inquiry into the cosmogonic conceptions of Israel’s neighboring cultures with due consideration to ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and Canaan is carried out.

The ancient Middle East or the Western Asia was a vast region divided among so many kingdoms which actually served as a cradle of wide range of cultural integration. The Hebrews who settled down in Canaan and from

\(^1\) The word ‘syncretism’ is being used to describe the blending of two or more different cults. See, W. David Stacey, *Groundwork of Biblical Studies*, p.233.
whom the Israel or Jewish religion descended actually belonged to the Semitic race of the Middle East. The actual history of Hebrew religion itself begins with Abraham’s (c. 2000 BCE) emigration from Ur to Canaan as instructed by god. Ur of Chaldeans was recorded in the Bible as the original home of Abraham. Throughout the history of the Hebrews, they came into frequent contact with very many cultures which must have had considerable impact on their beliefs and customs. Usually every culture preserves some sort of mythologies forming a part of their religious as well as ritual culture. The Hebrews are usually depicted as poor in imagination and mythology because of their semi-nomadic character.  

Abraham’s descendants who migrated to Egypt seeking rescue from the severe drought became slaves of Pharaoh and had to lead a life in slavery for many years. Even after the exodus from Egypt and settlement in Canaan in c.12th century BCE most of their lives was in exile. Their Kingdom under Solomon (c. 1000 BCE) was ruined by Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BCE) and the Israelites were led to Babylonia. In fact, it is in the post-exilic period the actual organization of their monotheistic religion took place.

I. The Cosmogonic Beliefs of Mesopotamia

Ancient Mesopotamia which corresponds to modern Iraq pervaded the region between the two great rivers Tigris and Euphrates and was rightly known as “the land between the rivers.” The three prominent cultural centers of Ancient Mesopotamia were Sumer, Babylon and Assyria. Among these, Sumer is one among the places with which the historians attach the beginnings of civilization. The Sumerians are generally considered as the

---

2 W. David Stacey, Op.cit., p.230; David M. Kay, The Semitic Religions, T.& T Clark International, Edinburgh, 1923, p.15. The Hebrews were lacking skills in art and architecture also. 1 Kings, 7.13.ff, says that it was Hiram, the king of Tyre who built Solomon’s temple.
originators of city-states and historical evidences support the existence of this mode of inhabitation centered around well established and inhabited city-states in Sumer by third millennium BCE itself. As far as the religion is concerned these people were polytheistic. Of the deities among the Sumerians, An (the sky god) was considered as the supreme deity. Enlil (storm god), Enki (god of earth as well as wisdom and identical with the Akkadian Ea) were other major deities. The mother goddesses named Ninhursaga and Ki (earth) also belonged to Sumerian pantheon among which the latter was conceived as the consort of An.

The Sumerian culture gradually declined by the rise of Semites by c. 2300 BCE and gradually during the reign of Hammurabi (c. 1750 BCE) there emerged the Babylonian supremacy. It was in this period that Marduk was exalted to the supreme position above other deities. Like Marduk of the Babylonia, Ashur was the chief god in Assyria. Though each city had their own distinctive local gods and beliefs in particular, the deities of the Sumerians were widely accepted and incorporated into each cultic pantheon.

**Enuma Elish: The Cosmogonic Hymn**

The poem *Enuma Elish* actually is the part of Assyrian, Babylonian and Sumerian cosmogony alike and is believed to be recited on the festival of the...
New Year known as Akitu. In the belief of ancient people, creation was something to be renewed at the beginning of every year and this renewal has some special ritual connotations with their beliefs. The whole myth is reproduced by the scholars from seven major tablets in which the creation story is inscribed in a successive form and from some fragmentary portions. Some of the fragments discovered constitute the portions of the original seven tablets while a few records other versions. The dating of the whole hymn is however debated and the process of inscription of the seven tablets is generally ascribed to the reign of Ashur-bani-apal, the king of Assyria, (668-626 BCE), from whose library they were excavated while some of the fragments belong to a later period of Neo-Babylonians and Persians. Nothing can be concluded with certainty as such issues in dating the ancient documents are common. Nonetheless, there will not be anything wrong in assuming the existence of the central concept of the hymn since a much earlier age. The usual period suggested by the scholars for the possible emergence of the narrative is the early part of the second millennium BCE or some centuries earlier to this which is otherwise known as the Old-Babylonian Period. Though the scholars variously assign the hymn to different periods, it is generally ascribed to the period of Hammurabi also.

As generally admitted, Enuma Elish as a whole is composed as an exaltation to Marduk describing the story of his enthronement as the highest god in the pantheon. Thus as Barbara C. Sproul says, “...the account of creation is used as a background to the real story of divine struggles and the

---

quoted in this study are taken from L. W. King (Ed.), The Seven Tablets of Creation, Luzac and Co., London, 1902.

establishment of Marduk's supremacy."\(^9\) As mentioned earlier, Marduk, who was previously the son of Ea and one among the many gods, is said to have become the chief god among Babylonian pantheon in the period of Hammurabi. When, the importance of a deity ascends, naturally many stories with mythic nature take origin and become popular among the worshippers.

It speaks about two primordial cosmic principles which stand at the beginning of all things viz. Apsu and Tiamat. This duality of the first principles deviates from the usual cosmogonic conception of the existence of ‘one’ in the beginning. Apsu is the fresh water chaos and Tiamat represents the primordial salt-water ocean and is generally conceived as the symbol of a feminine principle. She is a terrible goddess and is pictured as a horrible serpent. It is to be noted that these two first principles together signify a chaotic state which the Babylonians thought as existed in the beginning. But these are not two opposite principles which work together to create the universe. It happens later only as a result of the cosmic combat between Tiamat and Marduk who was the hero of the hymn as well as of Babylonian of pantheon.\(^10\) Thus, at first, gods are said to have taken birth from Apsu and Tiamat who in turn beget other gods. The first few lines of the first tablet contain the story of the birth of the gods.

"When in the height heaven was not named,  
And the earth beneath did not yet bear a name,  
And the primaeval Apsu, who begat them,  
And chaos, Tiamat, the mother of them both,-  
Their waters were mingled together,  
And no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen;  
When of the gods none had been called into being,  
And none bore a name, and no destinies [were ordained];  
Then were created the gods in the midst of [heaven],  
Lahmu and Lahamu were called into being [ . . .]

Ages increased, […]
Then Anshar and Kishar were created, and over them […]
Long were the days, then there came forth […]
Anu, their son, […]
Anshar and Anu […]
And the god Anu […]
Nudimmud, whom his fathers [his] begetters […]
Abounding in all wisdom, […]
He was exceeding strong […]
He had no rival […]
(Thus) were established and [were … the great gods(?)]…11

Among the gods, it was Lahmu and Lahamu who were born first. Then
Anshar and Kishar were created. After a long time, Anu, Ea (Nudimmud) and
Bel (Enlil or Illil) followed these gods. Anu was the god of the Sky whose
consort was supposed to be Anatu. Ea, the god of the deep is identical in
Babylonian pantheon with Enki the god of the earth. Ea with his wife
Damkina or Gashan-ki “lady of earth” gave birth to Bel.

Slowly, when the born gods took over the control of the universe and
tried to make the chaos into an ordered one there arouse a rivalry among both
groups. This finally resulted in the slaying of Apsu and the imprisonment of
Mummu- his son as well as counselor- by god Ea. When the death of Apsu is
caused by the gods, Tiamat gets angry and creates eleven terrible monsters in
order to attack the gods. With the assistance of these monsters and Kingu, she
prepares for a battle to establish her throne.

As the gods came to know about the preparations of Tiamat, Marduk
was assigned by the gods as their warrior who in turn demanded his
supremacy among them. The gods have admitted his supremacy and thus
Marduk was exalted to the position of the sovereign of the universe. They
together with Marduk started the preparations for the great war. A weapon
was given to Marduk by the gods. A lightening was created to go before him

and a net was made by him or was presented by Anu to capture his enemies. And seven winds also were created by Marduk. With his weapons, Marduk went forth for the war in his chariot followed by other gods. These arrangements are delineated with much significance in *Enuma Elish*.

Then the cosmic war takes place between Tiamat and Marduk. Although endowed with that much courage and mighty weapons, Marduk seemed to have some fear on seeing Tiamat. But that was for a moment and then he enclosed Tiamat using the net and made the evil winds enter into her mouth. Being filled with the strong winds, Tiamat was overpowered by Marduk who eventually cut her body into pieces and placed himself on her corpse. Then Marduk split apart the body of Tiamat like a shell fish into two halves and with these parts, he made the heaven, earth, and so on. He fixed the stars, ordained the year and appointed the moon god and sun god. The whole processes of the world were ordained by him.\(^{12}\) When the process was complete, Ea formed mankind out of the blood of Kingu to serve the gods.\(^{13}\) The whole details of the conflict between Tiamat and Marduk are enumerated in *Enuma Elish* as follows:

"To the fight they came on, to the battle they drew nigh.  
The lord spread out his net and caught her,  
And the evil wind that was behind (him) he let loose in her face.  
As Tiamat opened her mouth to its full extent,  
He drove it the evil wind, while as yet she had not shut her lips.  
The terrible winds filled her belly,  
And her courage was taken from her, and her mouth she opened wide.  
He seized the spear and burst her belly,  
He severed her inward parts, he pierced (her) heart.  
He overcame her and cut off her life;  
He cast down her body and stood upon it . . .  
And unto Tiamat, whom he had conquered, he returned."

\(^{12}\) These creative acts are depicted in the *Tablet V* in detail while the creation of man appears in *Tablet VI*.

\(^{13}\) There are contradictions in the opinions among scholars about the creation of man. Some argue that it was Marduk not Kingu who was killed for blood while for others it was using the blood of Tiamat man was created. See L.W. King (Ed.), *Op.cit.*, p.LV ff. for more discussion.
And the lord stood upon Tiamat’s hinder parts,
And with his merciless club he smashed her skull.
He cut through the channels of her blood,
And he made the North wind bear it away into secret place . . .
Then the lord rested, gazing upon her dead body, . . .
While he divided the flesh of the . . . and devised a cunning plan.
He split her up like a flat fish into two halves;
One half of her he established as a covering for heaven.‘
He fixed a bolt, he stationed a watchman,
And bade them not to let her waters come forth.
He passed through the heavens, he surveyed the regions (thereof),
And over against the Deep he set the dwelling of Nudimmud.
And the lord measured the structure of the Deep,
And he founded Eshara, a mansion like unto it.
The mansion Eshara which he created as heaven,
He caused Anu, Bel, and Ea in their districts to inhabit....”

*Enuma Elish* is not the one and only creation myth that prevailed in ancient Mesopotamia. Numerous variants of the story had been in vogue.15 Before the rise of Marduk to the supreme position, Anu or the other prominent gods held main roles in the creative process.16 One story depicts Anu as the creator of heaven and Ea as the builder of Apsu and the other minor gods. Ea created mankind also to do services to gods.17 Ea also was thought to be the creator and lord of life. His name Nudimmud itself possesses the meaning of creator. As mentioned earlier, Ea was thought to be the god of the deep or waters. In connection with his creative power it was believed that the waters also possessed creative power.18 Similarly, wind or air was also thought to be the source of life.19 In the primitive myths there is a usual tendency to depict the body fluids of the god as creative principle. Following this line, the tears, saliva etc. of Ea are mentioned in the ancient

---

15 Another god named Nergal, the god of Cutha, also is portrayed in some variants as the slayer of Tiamat. But it is not a creation legend at all, as the myth itself proves that even before the slaying of Tiamat by Nergal, the earth was existing there as inhabited. W. Muss-Arnolt, *Op.cit.*, p.27. See also, L.W. King (Ed.), *Op.cit.*, p. LXIX, 140 ff. Another version of the slaying of dragon is available in p.117 ff. of the same book.
17 Barbara C. Sproul, p.106 ff.
poems as having potential to create. Another Assyrian narrative views creation as a successive act starting from Anu.

Elsewhere, after the creation of heavens and earth, Anu, Enlil, Ea and Shamash together with the Anunnaki gods (the sky gods) create mankind to establish the order of the world for ever from the blood of Lamga gods. Another narrative makes the gods Anu, Enlil and Enki the creators of sun and moon. In another place creation is not ascribed to a particular god but to the gods in general. In some other Babylonian and Assyrian versions, the creator of man (Lullu) is a mother goddess Ninhursag or Nintu (goddess of earth) who created man out of clay and animated him with blood. Another goddess who has a role in creation is Aruru. This narrative states that in the beginning, there was only primordial waters and a movement in the face of the waters generated the cities and Temples of Babylonia. Then Marduk formed a frame of reed upon the sea. By pouring dust into it he caused the solid earth to generate. He created Anunnaki gods and then with the goddess Aruru created the seed of mankind.

What can be concluded here is that these narratives provide clear and satisfactory evidences to the possible existence of a number of mythical stories as an explanation of the origin of the world including man. As each city possessed its own local deity, in consequence naturally there originated variants of these myths the hero being the local deity of the respective city.

---

20 Ibid., p.46.
21 After Anu had created the heaven,
(And) the heaven had created the earth,
(And) the earth had created the rivers,
(And) the rivers had created the canals. Ibid., p.107 ff.
23 Ibid., p.123ff.
24 The Old Babylonian Versions are traced back to the period 1750-1500 BCE. while Assyrian version to 100 BCE. For a full narration of the myths, See Barbara C. Sproul, Op.cit., pp.104-106.
25 Ibid., p.131 ff. In the Epic of Gilgamesh also, Aruru appears as the creator of Enkidu, the rival of Gilgamesh. It is said there that Aruru made Enkidu using clay. See Epic of Gilgamesh, Table I.i.30 ff in James B. Pritchard, Op.cit., pp.41-42.
That is why several narratives keep silence on the dragon and the role of Marduk. But the myth of creation of the world by the slaying of dragon was one of the central mythological themes widespread in ancient Mesopotamia. L. W. King says “Dragon-Myth existed in more than one form in Babylonian mythology, and it is not improbable that. Many of the great cities of Babylonia possessed local versions of the legend in each of which the city-god figured as the hero.” Thus the popularity of the dragon story throughout the whole region cannot be underestimated as it has been one of the popular myths met with in the ancient cosmogonies.

The Flood Myth

In *Genesis*, there can be seen a story of a decisive flood caused by Yahweh. The Biblical version of the flood story is present in the chapters 6-9 of *Genesis*. As the *Bible* says, due to increased wickedness of humankind, god decided to ruin his creations by means of a great flood. But Noah who was a righteous man was informed by god about the forthcoming flood. Under god’s instruction, Noah builds a huge arc and he along with his wife and sons entered into it so as to escape from the flood. As insisted by god, he took two i.e. male and female from every living being also along with him. According to Biblical story, the deluge continued for forty days and nights. Thus this great flood wiped out all creations from the world except Noah and his family along with the living creatures selected by him under the command of god. Then, the new generation begins.

The myth of a huge deluge was popular among the people of Mesopotamia and it is preserved in various versions. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*

---

and some other Sumerian narratives portray a huge deluge made by the gods. The hero of the myth appears in various names viz. Ziusudra, Atrahasis or Utnapishtim. In these stories, the gods planned to cause the deluge to overcome the troubles caused by overpopulation but this secret plan was revealed to the hero by god Enki or Ea (the lord of water). According to the wise advice of the god he builds a huge boat and escapes from the flood which continued for seven days and nights (for six days and nights in some versions) along with all kinds of animals. Peripherally, the flood myth cannot be considered as having connection with the group of creation stories. Rather, it deals with the destruction of creations. But, Barry B. Powell analyses this myth in the context of Mesopotamian cosmogonic myth of Enuma Elish. It has already been seen that Tiamat and Apsu existed in the beginning together forming a watery chaos. Powell extends this analysis to the Biblical version also. He opines that “...the universal flood is a return to the watery conditions before the creation.” A similar observation is made by Joseph Blenkinsopp also. According to him, the deluge signifies un-creation.

II. Egyptian Myths of Creation

The cosmogonic thoughts of the Egyptians as it has come down belong to three major versions called Heliopolis, Memphis, and Hermopolis. These are in fact three cities where the temple of the creator deity located and seems that the myths are named after the place of the temple. These different thoughts are preserved in certain texts namely the *Pyramid Texts* (Old Kingdom Period c. 2613-2345 BCE, Dynasties 4-5), the *Coffin Texts* (Middle Kingdom Period, c.1991-1786 BCE, Dynasty 12), the *Book of the Dead* (New Kingdom Period, c.1750-1220 BCE, Dynasty 19) and the *Shabhaka Stone* (Old

---

Kingdom Period, c.2494-2345 BCE, Dynasty 5). The Egyptians had a wide range of cosmogonic myths and creation was ascribed to various gods. Creation was conceived by them as a cyclical process which is re-enacted every day or every year. Ra or Re, the sun god, will appear to proceed with the creation of all other things.

**Heliopolitan cosmogony**

In the Heliopolitan cosmogony, the creator god was Atum who did arise from the primaeval watery chaos. He is titled in the stories as the lord of totality as well as the father of gods which are rather self explanatory about his role in the creation. The waters were personified by the Egyptians as a god in the name of Nu or Nun and it is in this water that the god Atum caused his origin as a self-development. The following lines will of help to the understanding of the whole process of Atum’s development.

"I am the Waters, unique, without second.
That is where I developed,
on the great occasion of my floating that happened to me.
I am the one who had developed Circlet, who is in his egg.
I am the one who began therein, (in) the waters.
See, the Flood is subtracted from me:
See, I am the remainder.
It was through my effectiveness that I brought about my body
I am the one who made me.
It was as I wished, according to my heart, that I built myself."  

What these lines exactly try to depict is hard to decipher. It is relevant here to make a glance to the observations put forward by James P. Allen in this regard. He suggests that Atum floated over the waters as a seed of undeveloped matter and the process of creation itself is nothing but the

---

30 Atum is usually identified with the sun-god Ra. See, Barbara C. Sproul, Op.cit., p.73.
31 Egyptians have possessed a belief that the world is going back to the watery chaos. Amun himself, in the *Book of the Dead*, utters such words. See Gerhard F. Hasel, 'The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology', *Evangelical Quarterly*, Paternoster Press, Vol.46, No.2, 1974, p. 84.
separation of the same from the surrounding primaeval waters.\textsuperscript{33} Whatever be the meaning, throughout the texts, Atum is verily addressed as the creator of gods, the self-developing god, and the lord of all that exists. Atum is praised as a scarab also.\textsuperscript{34} In Egyptian mythology there is general tendency to picturise the creator in the form of scarab which signifies sun. Besides Atum, many other gods like Ra, Khepera are found identified with the scarab.\textsuperscript{35}

Coming back to the story, it could be seen that Atum existed alone and there was neither sky, nor earth or anything else. Then he created the male and female deities Shu and Tefnut (atmosphere and moisture or life and order in their respect). Particularly significant however is the way he gave birth to these two deities. Having situated in the primordial hill Heliopolis, which also arose from Nun, he is said to have fertilized himself through masturbation\textsuperscript{36} and then sneezed Shu and spat Tefnut.\textsuperscript{37} Uniting together, they gave birth to Geb and Nut (earth and sky)\textsuperscript{38} who in turn produced Osiris, Set or Seth, Isis and Nephthys. This group of nine deities is known together as Ennead which bears considerable significance in Egyptian mythology.\textsuperscript{39} Besides the Ennead, Atum begets the mankind, the animals and plants also. From his tears the human beings take birth. One of the significant moments in this creation

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p.14.
\textsuperscript{34} Pyramid Texts, 1587.a-d, and Book of the Dead 79. Quoted in Ibid., p.10.
\textsuperscript{36} "Atum is the one who developed growing ithyphallic, Heliopolis
He put his penis in his grasp
That he might make orgasm with it,
And the two siblings were born-Shu and Tefnut." Pyramid Texts, 527, quoted in Ibid., p.13.
\textsuperscript{37} "Atum Scarab:
When you became high, as the high ground-
When you rose as the benben, in the Phoenix Enclosure, in Heliopolis-
You sneezed Shu,
You spat Tefnut." Pyramid Texts, 600, quoted in Ibid., pp.13-14.
\textsuperscript{38} Unlike usual mythologies, Egyptian mythology portrays sky as female and earth as male.
\textsuperscript{39} The word Ennead literally means ‘the group of nine’ and is used to denote the above mentioned nine gods. The number sometimes varies as Horus the son of Osiris or Isis is also sometimes included in the list as the tenth one. The word also is used to refer to the gods in general. For more discussions on this term, see Ibid., p.8.
narrative is the holding apart of Geb and Nut by Shu after they were generated. The separation of these originally united couples (earth and sky) in the beginning of creation is a common notion found in many mythologies.\textsuperscript{40}

**Memphite Cosmogony**

This particular cosmogony was formed after the union of upper and lower regions of Egypt into a single country, at about 3000 BCE. Memphis being the capital of this kingdom, its god Ptah became superior and was raised above the older Heliopolitan gods. The new cosmogony incorporated considerable elements from the cosmogony of Heliopolis like the concept of Ennead, but made some considerable differences. One of the chief distinctions of this from the older cosmogony is the role assigned to the thought and word of the creator. It is illustrated throughout the myths that Ptah produced everything through the thought of the heart and command of the tongue. In the words of James P. Allen, this god functions as “... the bridge between intellectual principle of creation and its material realization in the substance of the created world.”\textsuperscript{41} The chief source of Memphite myths is the *Shabaka Stone* which demonstrates the creative process in full detail. The nature of its narration may be understood from the following lines.

“There came into being as the heart and there came into being as the tongue (something) in the form of Atum. The mighty Great One is Ptah, who transmitted [life to all gods], as well as (to) their ka’s, through this heart, by which Horus became Ptah, and through this tongue, by which Thoth became Ptah. (Thus) it happened that the heart and tongue gained control over [every] (other) member of the body, by teaching that he [i.e., Ptah] is in every body and in every mouth of all gods, all men, [all] cattle, all creeping things, and (everything) that lives, by thinking and commanding everything that he wishes.

\textsuperscript{40} Generally, in the ancient mythologies, heaven is conceived as male and earth as female. But Egyptian mythology portrays earth as male and heaven as female. Barry B. Powel, *Op.cit.*, p.85.  
\textsuperscript{41} *Ibid.*, p.45.
His Ennead is before him in (the form of) teeth and lips. That is (the equivalent of) the semen and hands of Atum. Whereas the Ennead of Atum came into being by his semen and his fingers, the Ennead (of Ptah), however, is the teeth and lips in this mouth, which pronounced the name of everything, from which Shu and Tefnut came forth, and which was the fashioner of the Ennead.....Thus all the gods were formed and his Ennead was completed. Indeed, all the divine order really came into being through what the heart, thought and the tongue commanded." 

The creation of mankind in Memphite cosmogony is assigned to the ram-headed god Khnum. He fashions the humans as well as animals on his potter's wheel using the clay from Nile as the material. Thus this god was generally conceived as a potter. References proclaiming him as the creator and fashioner of all that does exist also are available. As Ptah also was originally a potter or builder, it may not be wrong to conclude that the Egyptian mythology at least in some phases of its development showed a tendency to identify the creator as a craftsman.

**Hermopolitan Cosmogony**

This cosmogony formed in the city of Hermopolis is highly complex both in its sources and narratives. It generally is centered on the conceptions like Ogdoad, the primaeval hill, and the sun god, etc. but each version follows distinct way to narrate the story. The Ogdoad of the Hermopolis represents four cosmic conditions personified by eight gods in their male and female forms. Nun and Naunet in their male and female forms are the personified primaeval waters. Likewise, Heh and Hauhet stand for eternity, Kek and Kauket for darkness and Amun and Amaunet for invisibility. What is to be

---

42 Ibid., p.72.
44 Ibid. p.137.
46 The fourth group is sometimes replaced by Tenem and Tenemet or Gereh and Gerehet or Niu and Niut.
noticed here is that all of these four groups of entities are representative of the primaeval watery expanse. All are depicted as having human body but the male gods of the Ogdoad are frog-headed while the female divinities bear the face of snake. Among the desperate accounts, some versions suggest their birth happened in the primordial ocean while in some other stories the latter itself is the creation of the Ogdoad. As a result of the interaction of these four pairs of deities the primordial hill happened to come forth from the primaeval ocean in which the sun-god Ra who created the whole world, was originated. Just as the Heliopolitan myth, here also, the origin of humankind happens from the tears of Ra.

The descriptions on the birth of Ra is however not unanimous. At one place, Ra is portrayed as the child of the lotus floating on the waters (Nun). After his birth in the lotus, he opened his eyes and this act resulted in the separation of day and night. The other gods were produced from his mouth while the birth of mankind is traced to his tears. Some other versions picturises his first appearance in the lotus or in the primordial hill which emerges out of the pre-existing water in the form of a scarab beetle which then took the form of a child also is met with in some narratives. Elsewhere, he took birth from an egg laid down in the primordial hill by a heavenly goose known as ‘Great Cackler’ which is identified with the god Amun or by an Ibis which is sometimes identical with Thoth. In a different version, the semen of the male gods fertilizes the egg produced by the female deities from where a lotus springs. From this lotus rooted in the primordial hill, Ra comes forth

---

47 Elsewhere, Memphite god Ptah is also mentioned as the creator of these eight gods. Here, the fourth pair of Amun and Amunet is substituted with Niu and Niut. See Barbara C. Sproul, Op.cit., pp.79-80.
50 Donald A. Mackenzie, Egyptian Myth and Legend, Op.cit., p.xlvii, 75. Sometimes the egg is thought to be made by Ptah or Khnum. See Ibid.,p.xlvii.
in the form of a child. Like Tiamat of the Babylonians, the Egyptians also had a personification of the chaotic dragon or snake in the name of Aphophis whom Ra repulses during his everyday’s journey through the Duat (skies below/underworld).  

The controversies found in the narratives are not finished here. In some narratives, the creation of the gods and the world is ascribed to Thoth who fulfills the act by the power of word came from his mouth. The observation of A. H. Sayce that Thoth was the god of Hermopolis is notable in this context. Thus it is probable that the creation stories ascribed to Thoth represent a major phase of Hermopolitan cosmogony. Similarly, Amun also appears as the sole creator in the creation stories associated with the place Theban. Thus he is placed above the other gods and they are conceived as his images. Emerging from the waters, he is said to have produced Ennead including Atum from his mouth. Sun is identified with his face and his body is made identical with Ptah. Though Atum is often found mentioned in the earlier narratives, his creatorship is established in the period of the New Kingdom. Along with these prominent creators, other gods viz. Osiris, Khonsu, and Ah also were worshipped by the Egyptians as the begetters of life. One of the major concepts of Egyptian mythology in connection with the origin of life is the life-giving wind or air. Khnum, the potter god bears another name Knef which meant wind, spirit, breath, air of life etc.  

---

52 A. H. Sayce ascribes the doctrine of creation by word to the Hermopolitan cosmogony. He adds it was from Hermopolis that this concept was transferred to other parts of Egypt. See, A. H. Sayce, *Op.cit.*, p.131.  
57 *Ibid.*, Ch.300, verse 5 quoted in *Idem*.  
59 *Ibid.*, p.188. It is sometimes believed that Ptah originated from an egg which was brought forth from the mouth of Knef. *Ibid.*, p.303.
another god namely Her-shef was thought to have breathed the north wind from his nostril which gave life to every living being in the world.\(^{60}\)

Egyptians conceive the first being in the form of goddess also. As it is mentioned previously, Egyptian mythology conceives sky as feminine in the name Nut. One of ancient chants praises her as the begetter of life from her own body.\(^{61}\) Another goddess named Neith is said to have arisen in Nun in the beginning. From the thirty names announced by her, thirty gods originated, who in turn transformed into the Hermopolitan Ogdoad. Then, taking an excrescence from her body and having united it with an egg, she manages to create Ra or Amun from it. The gods originate from his saliva and the creation of mankind happens from the tears as usual.\(^{62}\) The concept of divine law, to which all the gods were subordinated was prominent in Egypt. Like the Vedic ṛṣta, this law was thought as governing the whole universe. Goddess Maat was conceived as the personification of this divine law and was thought to be the controller of the whole world.\(^{63}\) Another prominent female divinity is Isis who was variously praised as the earth goddess, goddess of flood\(^{64}\) etc. This goddess was sometimes identified with Neith and was conceived as self originated.\(^{65}\)

Thus a perusal of the three major cosmogonic trends of Egyptian mythology leads to a reasonable conclusion that there were mutual influences and incorporations among the cosmogonies of these three centres of culture.

It was the priests who developed these cosmogonic stories as a part of rising

\(^{60}\) Khnosu, Shu etc. are some of the other gods connected with the conception of air of life. For more details on the topic, see Ibid., pp.189, 200, 308, 332.

\(^{61}\) "Thy mother Nut cometh to thee in peace; She hath built up life from her own body." Ibid., p.xxxv.

\(^{62}\) See Idem for the chants addressed to her.


\(^{64}\) It was believed in ancient Egypt that the tears of Isis caused the river Nile to increase in volume. Donald A. Mackenzie, Egyptian Myth and Legend, Op.cit., p.25.

\(^{65}\) Donald A. Mackenzie, Egyptian Myth and Legend, Op.cit., pp. 24-25; 39. In the myths, she is portrayed as a winged goddess. In some stories, the wind or air from the wings of Isis enters the nostrils of dead Osiris and thus he becomes alive. Ibid., p.23.
up their god into the throne of the supreme god. This was undoubtedly a theological or rather political act. It is possible that the other cities also have possessed their own versions of cosmogony centered on their local gods. Almost all mythological motifs like primaeval chaos, cosmic-egg and the bird, primaeval hill and the dragon can be met with in them also. As a cyclical process, they tend to attach a cosmic meaning to the rising of sun every day or the Nile's annual retreat\textsuperscript{66} and wanted their cities also to be a part of the whole process.

III. Canaanite Cosmogony

Although Baal appears to be the prominent god in the Canaanite pantheon, his father, El is designated as the creator from ancient times. He, together with his wife Ahirat or Asherah, is responsible for the whole creation including the world, the gods as well as humans. The epithets like 'father of gods',\textsuperscript{67} 'creator of all creatures', 'creator of earth', creator of man' etc. are found repeatedly assigned to El while his consort Asherah is addressed as 'creatress of gods.' As the supreme god, he is also conceived as eternal as well as ancient.\textsuperscript{68} A myth depicts the story of conceiving of El's wives by sexual intercourse which resulted in the birth of Dawn and Dusk.\textsuperscript{69}

Gradually El was overpowered by Baal, the son of Dagan. Baal is the prominent god worshipped in Canaan for the \textit{Old Testament} itself certifies it.\textsuperscript{70} He appears in the myths as a god of fertility and also as a warrior god. There

\textsuperscript{67} Sometimes, Heaven and Earth are pictured as El's father and mother respectively. David Adams Leeming, \textit{Creation Myths of the World: An Encyclopedia}, p.77.
\textsuperscript{68} To see various epithets associated with El, refer to Frank Moore Cross, \textit{Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic}, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1971, p.15.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Judges}, 3:7, 8:33; 1 \textit{Kings}, 16:31-33, 18:17 ff; \textit{Numbers}, 25:3; \textit{Jeremiah}, 19:5. etc.
are more than one myth about his heroic battles, the opponents being Yamm, Mot, Lotan, and Tannin.

When a threat was raised by Yamm, the Prince Sea,71 against Baal’s sovereignty, a combat between the two takes place, seemingly with the consent of Yamm’s father El. With the aid of a pair of clubs provided by the divine artisan Kotar he manages to defeat Yamm in the war. Then a temple was built for Baal in the mount Sapon. The battle between Baal and Mot (the god of Death and son of El) is also narrated in the same paradigm of Baal-Yamm conflict. Baal was made slave in the underworld but his wife Anath slays Mot by a sword and rescues him.72 The battle of Baal and Anath against Lotan, the serpent or dragon is also found narrated in the myths.73

The value of this myth in the cosmogonic context is a matter of debate among the mythologists. Undoubtedly these myths echo the Marduk-Tiamat conflict of the Mesopotamian tradition. But there the story explicitly reveals the nature of a cosmogonic myth by picturing the creation of heavens and earth by the corpse of the dead dragon. But here, the myth does not provide such clues. Nothing is ‘created’ from the body of the defeated dragon. And so, there are strong oppositions in placing the Canaanite war myths in a cosmogonic realm.74 However, Mirre Eliade has made a considerable observation in this regard who says;

“Baal’s victory signifies the triumph of rain over the sea and the subterranean waters; the rhythm of rain, representing the cosmic norm, replaces the chaotic and sterile immensity of the sea and catastrophic floods. Baal’s victory marks the triumph of

---

71 He is portrayed as a seven-headed dragon.
72 In some versions of the Baal-Yamm conflict, Anath is said to have conquered Yamm while Baal was overpowered by the latter. A detailed exposition of the Baal-Yamm conflict is available in Frank Moore Cross, Op.cit., pp.113-118.
73 Ibid., pp.118-119.
confidence in order and in the stability of the seasons.”75 He continues, “The building of a temple-palace after the god’s victory over the Dragon proclaims his advancement to the supreme rank. The gods build the temple-palace in honour of Marduk after the defeat of Tiamat and the creation of the world. But the cosmogonic symbolism is also present in the myth of Baal. The temple-palace being an *imago mundi*, its building corresponds in a certain way to a cosmogony.”76

Thus Mircea Eliade infers that the building of the temple also has some cosmogonic connotations and thus ranks these narrations as creation stories. Another scholar Frank Moore Cross also pointed out this conflict as creation myth.77 A distinction is made by him among the myths of the Canaanite religion into theogony and cosmogony. The cosmogonic myth, according to him, “always delineates ‘primordial’ events, that is, events which constitute cosmos and, hence, are properly timeless or cyclical or “eschatological” in character.78 He says that in the myths associated with El, creation in fact is of a connotation of theogony while it is of cosmogony in the Baal myths.79

The Phoenician picture about origin is somewhat different. It posits the beginning in terms of the principles of dark chaos along with dark mist and wind. These principles existed boundless for a long time and then the Spirit fell in love with its own primary elements. Thus the self love of the first principles plays an active role in this myth. But the chaos itself is unaware of these happenings as it is unintelligent. Anyway, by this special relation, there arose desire which is the creation of all things. Then, from the connection

---

78 *Ibid.*, p.120. Theogony is differentiated by him from cosmogony because of the former’s use of the language of time while the latter may or may not use it.
between the chaos and this desire Mot (the matter)\textsuperscript{80} took birth. All creatures were born from Mot in the form of an egg. Another variant of the formation is also available. From ether and air which existed in the beginning, the egg arose along with Ulomos (eternity) and Chusor (a builder or artisan god). A different story says that from Kronos, Pothos (desire) and Omichle (Mist) there came forth Aer and Aura. These two gave birth to Otos from which further creation started.\textsuperscript{81}

**Possible Similarities with Biblical Cosmogony**

Seeking parallelisms for Biblical cosmogony in the neighbouring mythologies was one of the major areas of interest of the Biblical scholars since the last decades of 19th century CE. The resemblances of the stories ‘revealed by god’ with pagan myths became problematic and this changed the mode of vision towards the Bible. These studies in fact, paved a way to place the Bible out of its religious framework and put it in a cultural realm.

The close resemblance of the Genesis creation story with the myths of the nearby cultures is now generally admitted among the scholarly world and the basic points of resemblances have been well established by various studies. Nonetheless, there are contrary views which discard the very approach itself and consider the Bible as unique and isolated divine book untouched by any outer elements apart from Jewish monotheism. The above discussion of the myths obviously proves the parallelisms among the myths of the region. Analysing the motifs of creation accounts available in the

\textsuperscript{80} Mot is interpreted variously as mud, the god of death, the corruption of watery mixture and the great mother as well.

surrounding ancient cultures relating them with Biblical notions would be of assistance to understand the background of their formation. This however, is crucial in revealing the interrelations among the cultures with which the Christianity shares a common history.

*Genesis* 1 begins the narrative by revealing a picture of a formless void and dark deep existed in the beginning. This notion of a primaevul watery chaos as it is seen was common among the ancient mythologies. In the Babylonian Epic, Apsu and Tiamat together stand for this state and in Egypt, it is personified as Nun. The creator-dragon conflict also should be analyzed with due importance along with the motif of creation from chaos. The world’s origin as a result of the combat between the creator and the terrific serpent or dragon was one of the major myths widely propagated among the infidels and the Marduk-Tiamat war of the Babylonian creation hymn serves as the finest model of such cosmogonic wars. Though the strict monotheistic religious environment of the Israelites was ultimately opposite to such a pagan thought, the remnants of this motif do appear in so many passages of the *Bible*.

The Biblical scholars tend to identify tēhôm, the representative of the primaevul deep of *Genesis* 1.2 with the Babylonian Tiamat. Thus Marduk-Tiamat war-myth becomes identical with Elohim’s/Yahweh’s creative acts narrated in many Books of the *Old Testament*. The slaying of the serpent/dragon-like beings named Rā’hab, Le-vî’a-than etc. by Yahweh is found in the *Bible* at so many contexts like *Isaiah*, 51:9; *Psalm*, 89:10 ff.; 74:14.; 104:26; *Job*, 7:12; *Ezekiel*, 29:3, and *Jeremiah*, 51:34. Sometimes god’s war with them is referred to in connection with creation and in some passages it is not cosmogonic at all. Apart from Marduk, Bal of Canaan and Ra of Egypt also engage in similar wars with some dragon-like water monsters. As Walther Eichrodt observes,
“... the emergence of the earth from the water, the division into the heavenly and the earthly spheres, the importance of light, and the formation of Man in the likeness of the divine nature, are common to both traditions creation.”

Thus while going through the motifs distributed throughout the Bible in connection with creation and ordering of the world, one may find these creative acts of god as exactly parallel to Marduk’s deeds.

But the world is not an outcome of the fight between god and opposing forces as Enuma Elish says. There is only one god and not many gods, who is responsible for the creation. The myth of the fight between god and serpent in the Bible has least differences from the Babylonian myth. When the god fights with the serpent, the powerfulness of god than the serpent is projected. The idea that god alone is powerful does not project in such a description. So, the author purposively had modified the myth to affirm the concept of monotheism. The historical evidences suggest that by the exilic or post-exilic period in which the Genesis 1 narrative took its present form, the Babylonian Epic as well as other myths cited above were well preserved and widely known. Naturally, the author of the P document must have been aware of the myths and stories prevailed at his age at the time of his composition of the document. The story was not merely imitated by the writer but he took certain images from it and used them in a particular way that suits his religious ideology. The exclusion of the genealogies of gods and theogony which are familiar in the heathen cosmogonies is undoubtedly suggestive of the religious purpose. Thus, it can be understood that the story underwent specific changes and modifications to suit the belief of the people of Israel.

---

83 See L. W. King (Ed.), *Op.cit.*, p.lxxii ff where the topic is discussed in detail.
Another motif widely met with in relation to creation from chaos is of the cosmic egg. This, however, does not appear in Mesopotamia where the dragon metaphor is more prominent. But in Egypt as well as Phoenicia, the cosmic egg is an inevitable part of the cosmogony. The as it is mentioned, Biblical exegesis often considers the word 른half ʾēlōhīm as suggestive of the strong wind over the face of the waters. This is usually interpreted as the symbol of a cosmic egg and thus god is portrayed like brooding bird over the egg. In connection with this the role of the life-giving wind from the creator also should be analysed. As it is seen, it was a central cosmogonic theme prevalent in ancient Egypt Babylonia. Both the P and J sources have made of use of this notion in distinct ways. In Genesis 1, the picture of the creative wind or air that seeps over the primaenal waters is apparent while in Genesis 2, the air of life is breathed into the nostrils of Adam by Yahweh. Both imply a significant cosmogonic notion prevalent in the ancient times. Creation by word also cannot be taken as an innovation of the Priestly cosmogony for it is met with in the mythologies of the vicinities. Though the power of Marduk’s creative and destructive words is exalted in Enuma Elish, the doctrine seems to be very implicit. The question as to whether this notion was known or not to the Babylonians has been a matter of dispute among scholars.

---

85 “Thy work, O Lord, be greater than that of the (other) gods; To destroy and to create, speak and it shall done. Open thy mouth, and his (perhaps the evil god’s) word shall vanish away. (i. e., be made powerless). Speak then again to him and his word shall be restored.” He (Marduk) spake, and in his mouth (i.e., that of the god who doeth evil) was destroyed his (power of) speech. Again he spake unto him and his speech was restored unto him (literally “created”). When the gods, his fathers, saw the effect of his (Marduk’s) word, They rejoiced greeting him: “Marduk indeed be (our) king!” Enuma Elish, IV.20.ff. W. Muss-Arnolt, ‘Babylonian Account of Creation’, The Biblical World, The University of Chicago Press, Vol.3, No.1, 1894, p.21.

86 Scholars like Herman Gunkel are of strong opinion that the Babylonian and Genesis concept of creation by word is utterly dissimilar. See, Gerhard F. Hasel, Op.cit., p.101, note 124. According to W. H. Schmidt, the Babylonians were unaware of the concept of creation by the word of the deity. But A. H. Sayce believes that this theory was known among the Babylonians and he connects this doctrine with the myth of Marduk. See Ibid., p.90 and A. H. Sayce, Op.cit., p.131.
However, it is fully revealed with the story of Memphite god Ptah who utters divine words which are creative either. The verses of the Bible like “he commanded and they were created” (Psalm, 148.5) and “He spoke, they came to be” (Psalm, 33.9) and the whole creation of Genesis 1 which was established by god’s command undoubtedly remind of the creation done by Ptah. And for the creation of man from mud also, it is not at all difficult to get parallels in Egypt as well as Babylonia. There is Khnum in Egypt and Ea in Babylon responsible for the same using the materials like earth and blood. The pagan concept of blood as the raw material for creation is, however, rejected in the Biblical cosmogony.

The whole composition of the Bible took place in the course of a long time in which the Israelites came into contact with multiple cultures. As it is pointed out, when two or more cultures happen to interact, inevitable is the amalgamation of beliefs, rituals, customs etc. During their long periods of life in Babylonia and Canaan, as well as Egypt, the Hebrews knowingly or unknowingly had incorporated the indigenous myths about cosmogony into their beliefs. To which place which myth actually belonged is a matter of debate. The only thing that can be ascertained sans doubt is the existence of a primaeval chaos, a dragon whose slaying by the creator brings forth creation, cosmic egg and hill along with the lotus, creation of human beings from mud, etc. are the mostly common mythological motifs of the Ancient Middle Eastern region.

It must be however noted that the nature of god in the Bible is purely monotheistic and he is above the cosmic order. He needs no struggle between other forces of chaos to bring the world into existence. The pagan myths present the sun, moon, stars etc. as having divine nature. But by the description of the creation and naming of sun, moon, stars, earth etc., god in
the Bible claims that he is supreme than anything in the universe and everything rest are only his creations. The world and the creations of god are stated as ‘good’. So, the author tries to say that at the time of god’s creation there is only good and no evil forces existed in the beginning. The evil takes its appearance only at the time of man’s fall. So, the world is good and it is completely secure in the hands of god, who is the creator and protector of world is the idea of the Biblical cosmogony as a whole. The implication of stance however is not cosmogonical, but is purely religious.

---