

POWER OF LOVE IN NISSIM EZEKIEL'S "NIGHT OF THE SCORPION"

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Abstract: Nissim Ezekiel is one of the front-runners in early modern Indian poetry and was the first Indian poet to express modern Indian sensibility in the modern idiom. He has been influential on the course of succeeding Indian English poetry. The poem is apparently a simple narration but dramatically making us understand that the poet reminisces the night when his mother was stung by a scorpion. A scorpion has been forced by persistent rain to seek shelter inside, under a sack of rice and ends up stinging the mother of the family, which brings people flocking to her side wanting to express their sympathy. The poem also reveals the most striking and interesting contrast in the approach of the people towards the suffering mother and the rationalistic attitude of the father who eventually tries every scientific method to assuage the wife's pain. The role of a husband trying to save his wife is beautifully described in the lines "trying every curse and blessing, powder, mixture, herb, and hybrid". He even attempts to pour a little paraffin on the bitten toe as a last resort to protect his wife from suffering.

Keywords: front-runners, modern idiom, Indian English poetry, Indian sensibility .etc.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the front-runners in early modern Indian poetry and was the first Indian poet to express modern Indian sensibility in the modern idiom. He has been influential on the course of succeeding Indian English poetry.

Ezekiel's poetic output include: Time to Change (1952), Sixty Poems (1953), The Third (1959), The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exact Name (1965), Snakeskin and Other Poems (1974), Hymns in Darkness (1976), Latter-Day Psalms (1982), and Collected Poems 1952-88 (1989).

"Night of the Scorpion" is a strong, yet simple Poem on the power of love. It has been taken from his volume of poems entitled "The Exact Name" and is considered as one of the finest poems for its admirable depiction of common Indian situation, vivid imagery, ironic contrasts and warmth of human love and affection.

The poem is apparently a simple narration but dramatically making us understand that the poet reminisces the night when his mother was stung by a scorpion. A scorpion has been forced by persistent rain to seek shelter inside, under a sack of rice and ends up stinging the mother of the family, which brings people flocking to her side wanting to express their sympathy. It also shows the love and concern of the peasants in the neighbourhood pouring in like 'swarms of flies' to help alleviate the mother's pain not only through their relentless endeavour of searching for the scorpion but also strongly hoping that the scorpion would not move. The lines "With candles and with lanterns throwing giant scorpion shadows on the mud-baked walls they searched for him" highlight the positive side of the people. The people buzzing the name of God a hundred times, sitting on the floor around the mother and consoling her captures the simplicity and brim of warmth. The repetition of the word 'May and chanting of prayers is perceived as the peasant's concern for the suffering mother.

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Religion also plays its role with the holy man performing his rites to tame the poison with an incantation, but the irony is that all the three prove to be futile and vain. The poet draws our attention to the power of love in all their efforts to bring relief to the suffering mother despite the fact that the pain subsides naturally.

The Poem also creates a profound impact on the reader with an interplay of images relating to good and evil, light and darkness. The scorpion is regarded as the evil one" and acquires a certain character and personality, reminding us of the evil in the world. It is considered an evil force bringing pain, hardships and even death.

2. DISCUSSION& ANALYSIS: Interpretation

The poem "The Night of the Scorpion" can be interpreted in two different ways. First, the poet describes how, on a rainy day, the narrator's mother is bitten by a scorpion and what are the chain reactions to it. Second, the poem depicts the Indian ethos, superstitions and cultural richness through a simple incident and symbolizes the typical Indian motherhood which depicts her sacrifice and affection for her children. The poet narrates the poem by remembering his childhood when his mother was bitten by a scorpion. He says that the continuous rainfall for ten hours had driven the scorpion into the house where it crawled beneath a sack of rice. When his mother entered the dark room, the scorpion parted the poison into her toe and disappeared. The news spread throughout the village and the peasants gathered in the poet's house in large numbers like 'the swarms of flies' and buzzed God's name about a hundred times, praying to stop the movements of the scorpion. They believed that every movement of the scorpion would be troublesome to the mother, the poison would move in the mother's blood. So the villagers searched their house with the candles and lanterns to paralyze the evil scorpion, but he disappeared in the dark. As a number of villagers gathered in the house, the shadows they formed on the wall too appeared as a scorpion to the poet. . They sat around the mother who was groaning in pain. . The condition was becoming very critical as many neighbours were entering the house. The poet's father was a sceptic and rationalist person who tried powders, mixtures and herbs to cure the mother. However, he also tried prayers and blessings as it was a very taxing situation. He poured some paraffin upon the bitten toe and burnt it. The priest, who also came to the spot, was also performing his religious rites to tame the poison. Finally, after twenty hours, the sting was lost. The mother, after getting cured, thanked god that the scorpion had chosen her and spared her children. Critical Interpretation Nissim Ezekiel's 'Night of the Scorpion' is the poet's personal account of his memory of his childhood. Once his mother was stung by a scorpion, he was helpless and just became a spectator. . He uses the phrase 'diabolic tail' to depict the evil and compared the scorpion to the devil. The scorpion disappeared from the spot; after hearing the news of the deadly sting, villagers came to the spot. Ezekiel uses the simile 'like swarms of flies' to describe their number and behaviour of the people They refer to the past and future lives, absolution of sins, the lessening of evil and the hope that the poison will 'purify' the woman's flesh and spirit. Ezekiel describes how they surrounded his mother; he saw 'the peace of understanding' in their facial expressions. In the lines thirty-two and thirty-three, Ezekiel repeats the word 'More' for four times and describes the arrival of

'More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours, more insects' as the rain continued to fall. In the line thirty-four, he makes the first direct reference to his mother's suffering, telling us that she 'twisted through and through' and was groaning in pain. Ezekiel describes in detail that his father actually set alight to the toe that had been bitten by the scorpion. The poison lost its sting the following night and after twenty hours of suffering, the mother had a sigh of relief. The first forty-five lines form one continuous stanza relating the event from start to finish, concludes with a short three-line stanza in which the poet recalls his mother's reaction to her scary and painful experience. She spoke of it only briefly, thanking God and saying how glad she was that the scorpion had chosen to sting her and spared her children. This was the boundless, selfless love of a mother who had great affection and love for her children. Ezekiel never forgot these words throughout his life. In this poem it is interesting to know that the poet narrates this incident as an observer's point of view. He was not involved in the situation as the other adults who were in any action. This allows him to relate the actions and words of the peasants and his father whilst being detached from them. It is an insight into the behaviour of a small community in rural India where everyone becomes involved in one family or a mother's suffering, and all gather to witness the event and contribute a prayer, give justifications, suggestions, etc. It must have seemed though to the poet as a child as there was a huge gathering of people, and the night must have been everlasting. His comparison of the peasants to 'swarms of flies' suggests that they would rather have left the family in peace and comfort.

Structure of the poem: The structure of the poem is very free, with lines of varying lengths and no rhyme scheme.

Imagery: Nissim Ezekiel describes a childhood experience through this poem. The poet conveys through some imageries which can be understood by our senses. The poet creates an image to stimulate these senses, this is called imagery.

3. CONCLUSION :

The mother suffers from pain for twenty long hours and at the end of it thanks God for sparing her children. The selfless love of a mother is beautifully described by the poet in the last three lines which says, "Thank God the scorpion picked on me and spared my children".

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