

An Analysis of Nissim Ezekiel's 'Night of the Scorpion' =

Nissim Ezekiel himself states that he is truly and basically an Indian poet as "India is simply my environment. A man can do something for and in environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India". He is a good observer and his observation is quick analytical and satirical. Taking such accounts, 'Night of the Scorpion' from the point of poetic expression, observation, Indian perception and experience is a brilliant poem.

'Night of the Scorpion' is a poem based on Indian scenario of superstition and poet's Indian feeling. It represents an incident in the past when the poet's mother was stung by a scorpion. It was a rainy night. The incessant ten hours rains have driven a scorpion to creep beneath a sack of rice to keep itself dry. The scorpion after stinging at the toe of poet's mother with its poisonous tale left the place quickly and went again into the pouring rain. At the cries of his mother on that rainy night the neighboring peasants flocked to the poet's house like a swarm of bees with lanterns and candles. They started to find out the scorpion but in vain. They felt deep concern for the old lady suffering from the scorpion bite. They now clicked their tongues and prayed to God to make the scorpion paralyzed. It was the belief that every movement made by the scorpion will lead the progress of the poison in the body and the pain will be more acute. The superstitious peasants believed that the previous activities of sin is to be burnt away by the sufferings of the peasants or the present suffering will free one to feel no pain the next birth. The pain is the equalizer of the hope in this temporal world. So the ignorant peasants wished that the poison must purify the poet's mother's body and soul. They wished that her body should be free from all material desires and should be placed above all ambitions. The poet's father believed in reason and logic. He applied his commonsense to relieve his wife's pain. He poured some paraffin upon the bitten toe and put a flash of match-stick to it. Even a holy man was called to chant 'mantras' but everything is in vain; nothing happens or likes to be happened. After twenty hours the old lady got relief from the pain and she thanked God that the scorpion did not sting her children.

'Night of the Scorpion' is not a poem of a simple incident in the life of poet's mother, rather a poem of Indian culture, belief, philosophy and superstition. In this short poem he has presented some Indian pictures with graphic truth. He presents vividly the inner relationship between individual families to the neighboring community. Superstitious they may be but their fellow feeling is noticeable – "More candles more lanterns, more neighbors". The neighbors came forward for help nowhere one can find such strong social relationship.

Indian culture is not without its superstition. The superstitions are static and they sent their roots finding the ignorant fertile soil of the peasants. They prayed to God but thought of a doctor. Their philosophy is filled with their superstitions. They wanted to paralyze the scorpion to stop the pain of the poet's mother but at the same time they philosophically believed that the present pain is the outcome of past evil or this pain is a visa for entering into the life of happiness in next birth. What a contradictory philosophy this can be, where the pain is the symbol of happiness, the symbol of purgation. The poet's father was skeptic and rationalist amidst the ignorant peasants he singlehandedly tried to soothe his wife by using his little knowledge of science – "Trying very curse and blessing/ power, mixture, herb and hyaloid". Side by side, an orthodox holy man is called to perform his rites "To tame the poison with an incantation".

What is most sweet in the poem is the affectionate concern of a mother for her children. It is universally acknowledged that a mother is ready to suffer all types of pain and tortures with a smiling face, but she will not bear any pain imposed on her children.

“My mother only said

Thank God the scorpion picked on me

And spend my children”

Throughout the poem Ezekiel has used simple, common language in exact place. Within the poem he uses parallelism and antithesis. Not only that the poet very consciously uses the sound effect of the word and for this he discards the traditional prosody and creates new rhymes for expressing a new mood. It is he who says in his “Poet, lover and Bird Watcher”, “The Best Poets wait for the words” remaining always alert because “Eternal vigil is the price for the gift of poetry”.