

## The Night of the Scorpion: A Study on the supremacy of Indian Superstition

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the power of Indian superstition. The theme of the poem is an experience of a scorpion bite that was inflicted on the poet's mother. It also shows the stringent satire on the lack of medical and scientific knowledge that plagues the lives of so many people in Indian. The supremacy of superstition is brought out by the people of the village to a great extent. It also highlights the role of superstition in village as well as in cities.

**Keywords:** Superstition, Belief, Rites, Rituals, Evil

### Introduction

A Jewish Indian poet, playwright and critic, Nizzim Ezekiel was born on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1924 in Mumbai. He was regarded as the path finder of the post-colonial Indian English Writing. He was a poet of the mind rather than the heart. He is well known for his poems like *The Night of the Scorpion*, *Poet*, *Lover*, *Bird Watcher*, *Enterprise*, which were published in one of his many anthologies. He got Padmashri award in 1988 and the Sahitya akademi cultural award in 1983. He died on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2004.

It is one of the first poems of Ezekiel and presents a scary picture of the superstition ridden in India where an insect is given monstrous dimensions. It carries Ezekiel's stringiest of satires against the many maladies that affect the Indian society. Superstition in India is considered a widespread social problem. It is the belief in supernatural causality that one event causes another without any natural process linking the two events such as astrology and religion. It is also applied to beliefs and practices surrounding luck, prophecy, and certain spiritual beings particularly the belief that future events can be foretold by specific unrelated prior events.

Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion* is a strong yet simple statement on the power of self – effacing love. It captures a well – detached black and white snapshot of Indian village life with superstitious simplicity. The poet dramatizes a battle of ideas fought at night in lamplight between good and evil, between darkness and light, between rationalism and blind faith. The selfless love of a mother wins all the other contradictions.

The poem opens with the poet's reminiscence of a childhood experience. One night his mother was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours of steady rain had driven the scorpion to hiding beneath a sack of rice. After inflicting unbearable pain upon the mother with a flash of its tail, the scorpion risked the rain again.

The peasant folk of the village came like swarms of flies and expressed their sympathy. They believed that with every movement the scorpion made, the poison would move in mother's blood. Superstition plays a major role here. It has been brought out in the following lines:

“The peasants came like swarms of flies  
 and buzzed the name of God a hundred times  
 to paralyze the Evil one”. (W1 8-10)

To console the mother they opened the bundle of superstitions. They told the mother that the suffering and pain will burn away the sins of her previous birth. “They clicked their tongues. With every movement that the scorpion made his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said (W1 15 -16)”. Further, superstition is highlighted in the following lines:

“May he sit still, they said  
 May the sins of your previous birth  
 be burned away tonight, they said.  
 May your suffering decrease  
 the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.  
 May the sum of all evil  
 Balanced in this unreal world” (W1 17-28)

The mother twisted and groaned in, mortifying pain but her husband was sceptic and rationalist, he tried every curse and blessing like powder, herb and hybrid. As a last resort he even poured a little paraffin on the bitter part and put a match to it. Here a contradiction has been made by the mother's husband and the poet's ideas between rationalism and blind faith has been brought out. Throughout the poem, superstition plays a major role.

“I watched the flame feeding on my mother.  
 I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the  
 poison with an incantation.”(W1 40-41)

The above lines show how the village people especially perform so many rites and rituals to get rid of the evil things from them. This may be missing with the people from the cities as they are busy with their routine work. These people do not have time to think about superstition and its power. Whereas, people from the village think about God, superstition and many other supernatural things. They always believe that there is a strong power that lies in God.

“I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the  
 poison with an incantation.  
 After twenty hours  
 It lost its sting” (W1 41-43)

The father being a sceptic and a rationalist tried hard to remove the poison but his efforts failed. This leads to the performance of the religious ceremony to remove the poison. It was only after twenty hours, the pain stopped. His mother was thankful to God that the scorpion bit her and spared her children.

“My mother only said  
Thank God the scorpion picked on me  
And spared my children. (W1 44-46)

These lines show the love of the mother towards her children. She thanked God that the scorpion has stung her and not her children.

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