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# Unit VII: Indian and English Literature

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1. Nissim Ezekiel’s Night of the Scorpion

Nissim Ezekiel

Life:
- Nissim Ezekiel was born on 24 Dec, 1924 in Bombay.
- He died on 9 Jan, 2004 in Bombay.
- His family belongs to Judaism religion.
- He belongs to Jewish community called Bane Isral.
- He father was Botany professor in Wilson College.
- He studied in Wilson College Bombay and Birbeck College London.

Career:
- Nissim Ezekiel was Poet, Playwright, Art critic.
- He was Editor in Quest, Imprint, Poetry India.
- He was Associate editor in Indian PEN.
- He was Poetry editor in Illustrated weekly of India
- He was Art critic in Times of India
- He was called as “Fathers Modern Indian English poetry.
- He was called “Father of post Independence Indian English verse”.
- He was called as Poet of city or Poet of urban.
- The film about him was “Jane Swamy”.
- His poem were published in the magazines

  - The Encounter
  - The illustrated weekly of India.
  - The London magazine
  - The Spectator
  - The span

Works:

Poetry:
- The bad day (First collection)
- Time to change (1952)
- Sixty poems (1953)
- The discovery of India (1956)
The third (1959)
The Unfinished man (1960)
The exact name (1965)
Hymns in darkness (1976)
Latter day psalms (1982)

Poems:
- Night of the scorpion
- Enterprise
- In India
- In the theatre
- The Professor
- Marriage
- The Couple
- A Time to Change
- Background casually (Autobiography)

Drama:
- Don’t Call it Suicide

He has written 5 plays and he has translated Marathi poems into English.

His theme is alienation.

Quotes:
- “I regarded myself as an Indian poet writing in English” - Nissim Ezekiel.
- “Nissim Ezekiel was the first Indian poet to express a modern Indian Sensibility in modern Idiom” - K.N. Daruwalla.
- “You can’t write poetry in a language, this is not alive” - Nissim Ezekiel

Awards:
- He was awarded “Sahitya Academy Award in 1983 for his poetry “Latter Day Psalms” (1982).
- He was awarded “Padma Shri award” in 1983 for his contribution to the literature.
Night of the Scorpion

Text

I remember the night my mother
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.

Parting with his poison - flash
of diabolic tail in the dark room -
he risked the rain again.

The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times
to paralyse the Evil One.

With candles and with lanterns
throwing giant scorpion shadows
on the mud-baked walls
they searched for him: he was not found.
They clicked their tongues.
With every movement that the scorpion made his poison moved in Mother's blood,
they said.

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
against the sum of good
become diminished by your pain.
May the poison purify your flesh

of desire, and your spirit of ambition,
they said, and they sat around
on the floor with my mother in the centre,
the peace of understanding on each face.
More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours,
more insects, and the endless rain.
My mother twisted through and through,
groaning on a mat.
My father, sceptic, rationalist,
trying every curse and blessing,
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.
He even poured a little paraffin
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.
I watched the flame feeding on my mother.
I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the poison with an incantation.
After twenty hours
it lost its sting.

My mother only said
Thank God the scorpion picked on me
And spared my children.

Summary:
- The poet remembers the night on which his mother was stung by a scorpion.
- Ten hours of steady rain had driven the scorpion with his poison flash of diabolic tail in the dark room.
- Then the scorpion disappeared into the rainy night.
The peasants came like swarms of flies and buzzed the name of God a hundred times to reduce the Evil one namely scorpion.

The candles and lanterns threw the shadows of peasants like giant scorpions on the mud-baked walls.

They searched for the scorpion but could not find it.

They clicked their tongues in disappointment.

The peasants said that every movement that the scorpion made, his poison moved in mother’s blood.

They said that the scorpion might sit still.

They said that the sins of mother’s previous birth might be burned away that night.

They said that the mother’s suffering might decrease the misfortunes of her next birth.

They said that the sun of evil which was reduced by the mother’s pain.

They said that the poison might purify the mother’s pain.

They said that the poison might purify the mother’s flesh of desire and her spirit of ambition.

They sat around her with the peace of understanding on their faces.

More neighbours with many candles and lanterns and more insects came on the night.

The rain was endless.

My mother twisted her body in pain and groaned on a mat.

His father who was a skeptic and rationalist tried every curse and blessing to reduce his wife’s suffering.

He used medicinal power, mixture, herb and hybrid to remove the pain of his wife.

He poured a little paraffin upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.

The poet watched the holy man who performed his rites to tame the poison with an incantation.

After twenty hours the pain of sting disappeared.

The poet’s mother only said that she thanked god because the scorpion had chosen to sting her and spared her children.

The poem has Indian rural setting, rural beliefs and Indian’s mother’s selfless love.

It has irony and simile.
1. Nissim Ezekiel’s Night of the Scorpion

1. Nissim Ezekiel belongs to __________
   a) Jewish community   b) Christianity
   c) Buddhism           d) Hinduism

2. Nissim Ezekiel was an Associate Editor in __________
   a) Times of India     b) The Hindu
   c) Indian Pen         d) Indian Express

3. The film about Nissim Ezekiel was __________
   a) Jane swamy         b) Swamy
   c) The Hero of Bombay d) relented man

4. Which of the following poetry was not written by Nizzim Ezekil __________
   a) The Unfinished man b) Later Day Psalms
   c) The Exact name    d) Rough Passage

5. Which of the following work is Autobiography of Nissim Ezekiel __________
   a) Enterprise         b) Night of the scorpion
   c) Background casually d) The professor

6. Which of the following work of Nissim Ezekiel got Sahitya Academy Award in 1983_______
   a) Hymns in darkness  b) Night of the scorpion
   c) In the theatre     d) Latter Day Psalms

7. Nissim Ezekiel was awarded Padma Shri Award in __________
   a) 1982              b) 1983
   c) 1984              d) 1986
8. “The peasants came like swarm of flies; And buzzed the name of God a hundred times”.
These lines are occurred in ________
   a) Our Casuarina Tree    b) A River
   c) Night of the Scorpion  d) The Soul’s Prayer

9. The scorpion stung the mother on the ______
   a) Leg    b) Toe
   c) Chest  d) Arm

10. The tail of the scorpion is described as __________
    a) Angelic       b) Diabolic
       c) Heavenly    d) Dangerous

11. The scorpion hid itself underneath a sack of __________
    a) Flour       b) Sugar
       c) Rice      d) Vegetables

12. The peasants came with __________
    a) Medical Capsules b) Candles and lanterns
       c) Food       d) Stick on their hand

13. The peasants buzzed the name of God a __________ times.
    a) Hundred   b) Thousand
       c) Ten      d) Twenty

14. The mother was groaning and lying on a __________
    a) Sofa       b) Chair
       c) Mat      d) Floor

15. The mother’s pain subsided in its natural course after __________ hours.
    a) Ten        b) Twenty
       c) Thirty   d) Hundred
16. The mother thanked ____________ for the scorpion had picked on her.
   a) God                                      b) The devil
   c) The holy man                             d) The villagers

17. Scorpion is an ____________-legged creature.
   a) 4                                        b) 6
   c) 8                                        d) 10

18. How long hours the rain poured steadily __________
   a) 4                                        b) 6
   c) 8                                        d) 10

19. Who has been labeled as the “Poet of the city”?
   a) Saojinj Naidu                            b) Toru Dutt
   c) Nissim Ezekiel                          d) A.K.Ramanujam

20. In the poem “Night of the Scorpion” night and scorpion symbolize __________
    a) evil and darkness                       b) darkness and superstitious faith
    c) darkness and evil                      d) the Third
1. Nissim Ezekiel’s Night of the Scorpion

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