

Chapter-18

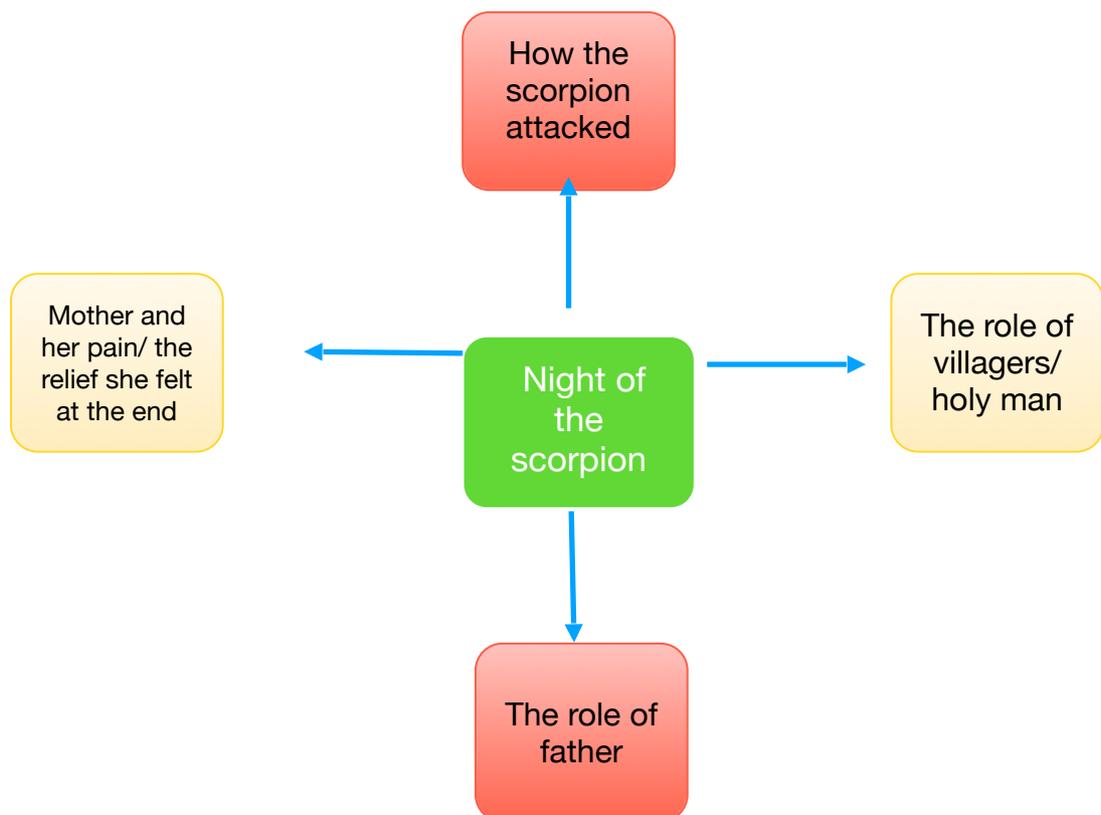
The Night of the Scorpion

Summary

In "Night of the scorpion," the poet describes how the narrator's mother was bitten by a scorpion on a rainy day. The poem depicts typical Indian motherhood, which includes sacrifice and devotion. The villagers' peasant-folk rushed in like swarms of insects to express their sympathies.

They believed that the poison would move in mother's blood with every movement of the scorpion. So, loaded with lit candles and lanterns, they set out to find him, but in vain. In pain, Mother twisted and groaned. Her skeptic and rationalist husband tried every curse and blessing; powder, herb, and hybrid. As a final option, he poured a little paraffin on the bitten part and lit a match to it.

To try to contain the poison, the holy man performed his rites and used an incantation. The sting of the poison had gone off after twenty hours, and the mother was happy that the poison had spared her children.



Important points from the text:

- *The Night of the Scorpion* shows the selfless love of a mother who is stung by a scorpion. The poem begins with the poet recalling his childhood and how his mother was stung by a scorpion one night. The scorpion had taken refuge behind a sack of rice after ten hours of nonstop rain. The scorpion inflicted horrific pain on the mother with a flash of its diabolic tail before returning to the rain.
- The surrounding peasants arrived in great numbers, singing and carrying torches and lamps. They sang God's name in order to paralyse the evil one and stop the scorpion from moving. They believed that the poison would move in mother's blood with every movement of the scorpion. They wanted to kill it, but they couldn't find it.
- They opened the bundle of their superstitions to console the mother. And assured her mother that her previous birth's sins would be burned away by her agony and pain. In anguish, Mother twisted and groaned.
- The villagers were superstitious, but her husband was a rationalist, and his beliefs were founded on logic and reason. He tried every powder, mixture, and herb before finally pouring a little paraffin on the bitten toe and lighting a match to it. The poet observed the flame consuming his mother, as well as the holy man conducting his rites in an attempt to counteract the effects of poison with words, prayers, and magic.
- The sting was gone after twenty hours, the poison was significantly weakened, and the mother recovered. She had forgotten all of her sufferings. She thanked God for showing mercy, and was grateful that the scorpion had spared her children.

Important words from the text:

- Diabolical – evil/poisonous
- Buzzed – making a noise similar to the flies.
- Paralyzed – make something static or unable to move.
- Flesh – The body.
- Sceptic – one who does not believe something by its appearance only.
- Swarms – Group
- Rationalist – non believer/ free thinker
- Herb – a plant having medicinal qualities.
- Hybrid – a mixture of two things or an advanced form of something.
- Paraffin – wax
- Flame feeding – the flame of fire burning the toe of the mother and thus causing extra pain.
- Rites – holy acts.
- Tame – reduce the effect of poison.
- Incantation – saying a hymn.

Evaluate yourself:

1. How was the poet's mother bitten by the scorpion?
2. How did the peasants view the stinging in a positive manner?
3. Why did the peasants want the scorpion sit still?
4. Did the father compromise with the beliefs of the villagers? What type of man was the father? how did he treat his wife?
5. How was the mother finally cured? Do you think it was the result of prayers and incantations? Explain.

Do you know?

Nissim Ezekiel was an Indian Jewish poet, actor, playwright, editor and art-critic. Ezekiel enriched and established Indian English language poetry through his modernist innovations and techniques. He included enlarged Indian English literature, moving it beyond purely spiritual and oriental's themes. He included a wider range of concerns and interests, like mundane familial events, individual angst and skeptical societal introspection.

Extend your horizon.

Lets discuss some figure of speeches in the poem:

Definitions	A metaphor makes a comparison between two unrelated things by stating one thing <i>is</i> the other thing. This is usually done by highlighting or suggesting a shared quality or characteristic between the two distinct elements.	Personification is a special type of metaphor where human actions or feelings are ascribed to a non-human thing. When we talk about something that isn't human as if it was, then we are personifying it - that is, making it into a person.	Similes make comparisons between two seemingly unrelated elements by using 'like' or 'as' to highlight a common quality or characteristic both things share. Similes make a comparison by suggesting a similarity between two things
Example from the poem	Example of the simile from the poem: 1) Scorpion is the evil one	Examples of personification from the poem: 1) Paralyze the evil one 2) Flash of Diabolic Tail in the dark room 3) He risked the rain again	Example of the simile from the poem: 1) The villagers came like Swarms of flies