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**SCIENTIFIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND SUPERSTITION IN THE NISSIM  
EZEKIEL'S POEM "NIGHT OF THE SCORPION"**

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**Abstract**

Still in India, and not only in India, but also in the less developed countries of the world, the villagers mostly live in with their own past memory, past culture and prejudices which have dominated their society since time immemorial. They are less aware of the scientific developments outside their surroundings, today, except for using the latest technologies, like; mobile phones, televisions, and internet. No doubt, these modern equipments have developed their scientific thoughts; but, in fact, they are not enough for them. Even today, they are under the veil of bygone days. On the one hand, the world in these days is talking about the lives on another planet or sub-planet, like; the Mars or the Moon, and on the other hand a folk of a village talks of myths and superstitions, as Nissim Ezekiel has put these things in his great poem, "Night of the Scorpion." The poem has multiple meanings, such as a deep love of a mother for her offspring, the life and culture of an Indian village

in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It also talks of the scientific approach to the villagers with their old school of superstitions and prejudices. The present paper, "Scientific Consciousness and Superstition in Nissim Ezekiel's Poem "Night of the Scorpion" shades light on the villagers' scientific conscious mind and superstition which are even today breathing around them including an outline of science and technology, culture, and evils.

**Keywords:** Society, Science, Scientific consciousness, modern technology, culture, superstition, evils.

**Introduction**

A society is a group of individuals involved in persistent social interaction, or a large social group sharing the same spatial or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. Societies are characterized by patterns of relationships (social relations) between individuals who share a distinctive culture and institutions; a

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given society may be described as the sum total of such relationships among its constituent of members. (Wikipedia). From the definition given above, one thing does overtly become clear that the abode of a pure and perfect society resides in a remote area, within a community which is quite separate from the noisy towns and the cities. In the poem, which will be dealt later separately in details, the example of a perfect and pure society is obvious.

As for the scientific thought in the society is concerned, it is not inappropriate to say that there is a deep rift between the thought of a village and that of a city. When a village life is considered, many things which are really wonderful come into the fore. Even today, a village to a great extent which is true from all angles is under the curtain of the past conventions and prejudices where a scientific mind is struggling to survive. It is also not inappropriate to say that without being a scientific person, as is mostly found in a big city since it is highly educated, a scientific mind or consciousness cannot exist at all. This scientific thought resides where there is the importance of science. As science is a systematic enterprise that builds and organizes knowledge in the form of testable explanations and predictions about the universe.(Wilson, 71). This lack of idea in a village is found which obstacles a villager's scientific and rationalistic notions.

It is true that even in a far remote or rural areas, modern technologies, like; T.V., Mobile phones, Internet etc. have acquired their place. They have become an essential part of their daily life, yet the impacts of these technologies over the unconscious mind of the folks towards the rationalistic thinking have not done any miracle to changing their entirely biased mind. They are pleased with the resources what they have. They are happy with the culture which they have for centuries. The culture is an umbrella term which encompasses the social behavior and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these group.(Edward). Ezekiel through this poem, "Night of the Scorpion" has very precisely portrayed the culture of the rural India of those days.

Nissim Ezekiel (16 Dec 1924-9 January 2004) was an Indian Jewish poet, actor, playwright, editor and art critic. He was a foundational figure in post colonial India's literary history, specifically for Indian poetry in English. (Wikipedia). He had a vigilant eye to watch the social life of a villager or a village. He knew the evils and the superstitions governing a rural India due to the insufficiency of a good education there. Superstition which is any belief or behavior based upon one's trust in luck or other irrational, unscientific, or supernatural forces (Merriam-Webster),

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and also which is commonly applied to beliefs and practices surrounding luck, prophecy, and certain spiritual beings, particularly the belief that the future events can be foretold by specific (apparently) unrelated prior events (Stuart A., 19-22) begets evils in the society.

The evils which are something harmful or undesirable and profound immorality and wickedness, especially when regarded as a super natural force. (Lexico). And also from the other definition the evil, in a general sense, is the opposite or absence of good. It can be an extremely broad concept, although in everyday uses is often used more narrowly to talk about profound wickedness. It is generally seen as taking multiple possible forms, such as the form of personnel moral evil commonly associated with the word, or impersonal natural evil (as in the case of natural disaster or illness), and in religious though, the form of the demonic or supernatural/eternal.(David Ray, 31). The definition given above for the evil, however, is slightly different in the context of the poem. Actually, the evil in the poem is the consequence of the false beliefs in treating the diseases based on the superstitions. This treatment based on the bygone beliefs or superstitions is often found in most of the Indian or even the villages of less developed countries. Nissim Ezekiel in the poem, “Night of the Scorpion” has woven every characteristic of a village

life. Not only has he described a village life and its culture, but also he has talked of a deep love of a mother for her children. This is the main content of the poem, it seems at its first look, but, in fact, it has another theme, too, which draws an outline between the scientific thought or consciousness and the superstition dominating in 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian rural areas. Here in this paper, “Night of the Scorpion” has been scrutinized in the perspective of scientific consciousness and superstition in a vast area of the Indian rural land where these two are quite an opposite term among the countryside men.

**Night of Scorpion**

The most celebrated poem among the other ones by Ezekiel “Night of the Scorpion” draws an explicit picture of a village life and its all activities: its mutual love, reciprocal brotherhood, and its alacrity to help each other. Even if there is a great lack of a methodical thought among the people of a village, there appears an immense zeal for helping out each other in any perils, as in this poem has been very distinctively sketched out.

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.

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“Night of the Scorpion” basically is a narrative of a mother’s deep love for her children, who is stung by a dangerous scorpion in a heavy rain, and is happy at last to know that her children have been spared by him, for this she thanks the God, as the following lines assert;

After twenty hours it lost its sting. My mother only said Thank God the scorpion picked on me And spared my children.

This is the greatness of a mother for her children. It is a universal truth that a mother cannot tolerate the pain and suffering of her children. In the context of the poem this is not exceptional because the poet’s mother expresses her concern for her children just after the relief from the intense pain which conveys an underlying gesture of unconditional motherly love.(Wikipedia).

Yet, it has multiple meanings among them are a villager’s scientific thought and superstition which are even today playing a major role in the rural areas of the country that unveil the systems and the customs of a village. Here the poet Ezekiel through this poem brings out the science and superstition together in a parallel way by showing the poet’s father a rationalistic approach to anything, and most of the villagers’ superstitious mind and consideration. In

the poem, there appears a clash between the rationalistic and a superstitious mind:

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.

The superstitious beliefs in the above lines are in their full conviviality. The kindness of the villagers is reflected in the above excerpts. As far as the scientific consciousness is concerned, the followings extract reveals the logical concept of the villagers where his (poet’s) father goes for a practical treatment for curing his mother’s bitter pain.

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 on it. This activity of using the practical treatment by the poet’s father evidences the slow process of the growing scientific consciousness in a village community.

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Conclusion

Nissim Ezekiel, with his lucid and simple language throughout the poem “Night of the Scorpion” has outstandingly outlined the every aspect of a village life. Reciprocal relationship between the villagers without any pride and prejudices, cast and religion is disclosed throughout this marvelous poem. This becomes clear when the villagers run out of their homes even in a torrential rain to help the poet’s mother who is suffering from a deep pain due to the sting of the scorpion, and they all use their own minds to get rid of the pang from which his mother was going through for hours. This is the quality of a village which throws the supremacy of the humanity setting aside the communal confictions which are explicit, today.

With an incomparable love of a mother for her children, and a perfect and pure society of a village, Nissim Ezekiel excellently brought into the fore a clear distinction between the rationalistic mind of the villagers and the superstitious thought of the folks. These notions which are still inhaling among the villagers are, of course, a bitter satire on the development of the country.

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