



**CLASS IX**  
**ENGLISH LITERATURE READER**  
**PROSE SECTION**  
**CHAPTER 5**  
**THE TASTE OF AN HILSA**  
**(NONGTHOMBAM KUNJAMOHAN SINGH)**

**NOTES**

**SUMMARY**

*The Taste of an Hilsa* is a story about the helplessness that poverty renders a man and the irony of fate faced by man. It was originally written in *Manipuri* by *Nongthombam Kunjamohan Singh* and later translated into English by *Prof. Th. Ratankumar Singh*.

*The Taste of an Hilsa* depicts the story of *Chaoba* who was a poor fisherman. One day, he got up before everyone else and with his son went to the *River Barak* to catch fish. But he was not lucky and managed to catch only one fish –a big hilsa. In spite of his poverty he did not want to sell the fish because he wanted to treat his pregnant daughter, *Sanarei* to a sumptuous meal. Also, it was a long time that he had tasted a hilsa that he had almost forgotten its taste. But fate was not in his favour. When he returned home, his daughter *Tampha* told him that there was no rice for meal. All the anger of the poverty and not having even rice at home fell on him. In frenzy, he threw a wooden stool to their old dog and went inside his house. There, his bed-ridden wife again told him about the lack of rice. The smoldering fire of the rage in him suddenly flared up and he poured it to his poor wife. He even said things which he did not mean. His wife who had been suffering from a chronic illness can be seen as a symbol of the never ending poverty which *Chaoba* endured. *Chaoba* was compelled to sell his prized possession i.e. the hilsa to *Thaninjao* to meet the immediate need for rice and save his family from starvation. Fate made a cruel joke on him and reminded him that luxury (represented by the hilsa) was not meant for the poor. Also it is heart-wrenching to imagine the little boy, *Mukta* looking helplessly at the fish being taken away. He was in such a happy state that his father caught a big hilsa and that they were going to eat it. The title of the story is apt as it foretells the forthcoming events especially the irony of life which befalls the *Chaoba* family.