

**A.B.M. College, Golmuri**

**English Core**

**I.A. & I.Com.**

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# **My Mother at Sixty-six**

**-By Kamala Das**

## **About the Poet**

The poet, Kamala Das also wrote by her pen-name of 'Madhavikutty'. She was born in Kerala and is one of India's first poets. Her subject - matter is basically related to her personality- beautiful, sensitive, bold and tormented. External factors do not reflect in her writings, her writings bring out her true inner feelings. Her favorite poem is 'composition'.

In the poem 'My mother at sixty-six', she talks about her mother. This poem is based on mother-daughter relation and the poet shares her feelings for her mother.

## **Central Idea**

Aging is an important phase of human life. A person enters his childhood, experiences youth when he is full of energy and dreams to have luxury of life. Finally, he approaches his old age and encounters death. Relationship between people

becomes stronger at every aspect of life and they can't bear separation due to aging. This is a touching poem written by Indian poet Kamla Das who wrote under the pen name of 'Madhavikutty'. In this poem, she describes her feeling of love and attachment towards her ageing mother

In this poem, the poet relates a personal experience. She brings out a common paradox of human relationships and portrays a sensational separation of a mother and a daughter. She has been able to capture almost all the emotions which a daughter is filled with, on bidding farewell to her beloved mother. Sometimes we do feel deep sympathy for someone but we fail to express it in a proper manner.

### **Summary**

One last Friday morning, the poetess was driving from her parents' home to the Cochin airport. Her mother was sitting beside her in the car. She suddenly had a look at her mother. She found that her mother was dozing with her open mouth. Her face was as pale as that of a corpse. The poet painfully realized that her mother is not going to live long. This painful thought haunted her. But soon she tried to put it off by looking out of the car window. She saw the young trees running past them. She looked at the merry children coming out of their homes. As she saw life and vitality in the outside world, the painful thought passed away from her mind.

After reaching the airport, she went through the security check. Her mother was standing outside a few yards away. After the security check, she looked at her mother again. Her face was pale white like a late winter's moon. She felt the old familiar ache of childhood in her heart which is usually felt by a child due to the fear of separation from his/ her mother. But she contained herself and kept on smiling in order to conceal her emotions. She spoke no word to her mother. All that she said was, "See you soon, Amma" and bade good bye to her mother with a hope to see her again.

## **Explanation**

Firstly, when the poet is on her way to the cochin airport with her old mother sitting beside her, she looks at her closely and presents before us her image.

She compares her with a corpse. (simile is a figure of speech to show comparison between her mother's face and a corpse.) As she looks at her mother's pale and pallid face, she is struck with the horror and pain of losing her. The mother with the dozing face and open mouth is compared to a corpse. Here, the poet shows the typical love and affection which is present in a mother-daughter relation.

The poet is pained and shifts her attention outside the car in order to drive out the negative feelings. She changes her sad mood. The scene outside the window is of growing life and energy. The rapidly sprinting trees alongside the merrily playing children symbolize life, youth and vitality. The poet here is reminded of her own childhood when her mother had been young whereas now she is encircled with the fear of losing her and that has made her insecure.

She is at the airport to take a flight. It indicates departure and separation which creates melancholy. As she bids goodbye to her mother, the image of the old, wan, worn out mother in the twilight of years strikes her again. Here again a simile is used to compare her mother with a late winter's moon whose light is obstacle by fog and mist as she looks old now, her personality is affected by it.

The poet is feeling the pain of separation, leaving her mother and going. Also, her childhood fear of losing her mother which she feels that earlier was temporary but now, could be forever as she could die of old age, is haunting her. She is so pained that it is

natural for her to cry but keeping a brave front she hides her tears and smiles.

She bids farewell to her mother and keeping her hope of seeing her again alive, says "see you soon, Amma". She hides her sorrow as she does not want to create a painful environment for her mother and conveys her that as she is enjoying her life similarly her mother should also be happy and enjoy her life.

(The poem revolves around the theme of advancing age and the fear that adheres to its loss and separation. It is a sentimental account of the mother's approaching end through the eyes of the daughter. The seemingly short poem touches upon the theme of the filial bond between the mother and daughter smeared in the backdrop of nostalgia and fear. Nostalgia of the past (the time spent with the mother) and fear of the future without her.)

It is a short poem, without a full stop, the poem is like a long sentence, over flowing thought process. The poet uses the device of comparison and contrast, simile and repetition.

### **Main points**

- Poetess travelling to Cochin airport with her mother in a car.
- Looks at the wan, pale face of her dozing mother.
- Old fear of losing her mother returns.
- Sprinting trees and merry children provide the contrast and relief.
- After the security check the old familiar ache returns.
- Tries to hide her emotions by smiling.
- Bids good bye to her mother with a hope to see her again.

# Question and Answer

1. What is the kind of pain and ache that the poet feels?

Answer - The emotional pain and ache that the poet feels is due to the realization that her mother has gone old and has become frail and pale like a corpse. She is dependent on her children. The ache also refers to the old familiar ache of the childhood that revisits the poet due to the mother's old age and her approaching end.

2. Why are the young trees described as 'sprinting'?

Answer - The young trees are personified in the poem. They seem to be running in the opposite direction when seen through the window of the moving car. The movement is juxtaposed with the expressing on the mother's face i.e. ashen like a corpse. The movement of the children and the trees is in stark contrast with the stillness associated with the mother.

3. Why has the poet brought in the image of the merry children 'spilling out of their homes'?

Answer - The poet draws a comparison between what is travelling with her and what she can see outside. It's a comparison between life and death. Her mother is sleeping, with mouth open, like a dead body, while outside she can see children who are full of life, energy and enthusiasm.

4. Why has the mother been compared to the 'late winter's moon'?

Answer - Just as the late winter's moon is dull and lacks luster, so is her mother at the end stage of her life. Also, as the late winter moon gets overshadowed by the fog and mist in the sky similarly her mother can get overshadowed by death at any time. Both of them are nearing an end- one of season and the other of life.

5. What do the parting words of the poet and her smile signify?

Answer- The parting words of the poet show her positive attitude. She overcomes her pain and fear, assures herself and her mother that they would meet again. She is being very brave which is indicated by the use of repetition in the poem:

"smile and smile and smile....."

**Question.6. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.**

I looked again at her, wan, pale  
as a late winter's moon and felt that old  
familiar ache, my childhood's fear,  
but all I said was see you soon, Amma,  
all I did was smile and smile and smile

- (a) What was the poet's childhood fear?
- (b) What were the poet's parting words?
- (c) What is the poetic device used in these lines?
- (d) Why did the poet smile and smile?

Answer. (a) In her childhood, the poet was insecure about losing her mother, just as all young children often are.

(b) The poet's parting words were, "See you soon, Amma", which are suggestive of the hope that they will meet again.

(c) The poetic device used in these lines is simile, where the mother's dull and lifeless face is compared to a late winter's moon.

(d) The poet smiled and smiled (meaning that she smiled continuously) because she was trying to hide her real feelings. She feared the fact that she might not see her mother again, which left her almost in tears.

.....but soon  
put that thought away and  
looked out at young  
trees sprinting, the merry children spilling  
out of their homes.....

- (a) What thought did the poet drive away from her mind?
- (b) What did she see when she looked out of the car?
- (c) How do you know that the joyful scene didn't help her drive away the painful thought from her mind?
- (d) What are the merry children symbolic of?

(a) The poet drove away the painful thought of the distressing reality that her mother was getting old and she might die anytime.

(b) When she looked out of the car, she saw young trees on the roadside, which appeared to be moving. She also saw a group of children, merrily rushing out of their homes to play.

(c) As the poet passed through security check at the airport and happened to look at her mother, she was again haunted by the same fear of losing her to death. This shows that the joyful scene earlier didn't help drive away the painful thought from her mind.

(d) The merry children are symbolic of the exuberance of youth. The energetic and lively children present a contrast to the poet's mother who has grown old and pale.