

My Mother at Sixty-six



Kamala Das

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6. writes in a matter-of-fact tone
7. expresses her thoughts with honesty and boldness
8. Area of her works: poems, short stories, memoirs, novels, autobiographies in English and Malayalam
9. Won Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985
10. 'The Times' had called her the Mother of Modern Indian English Poetry.

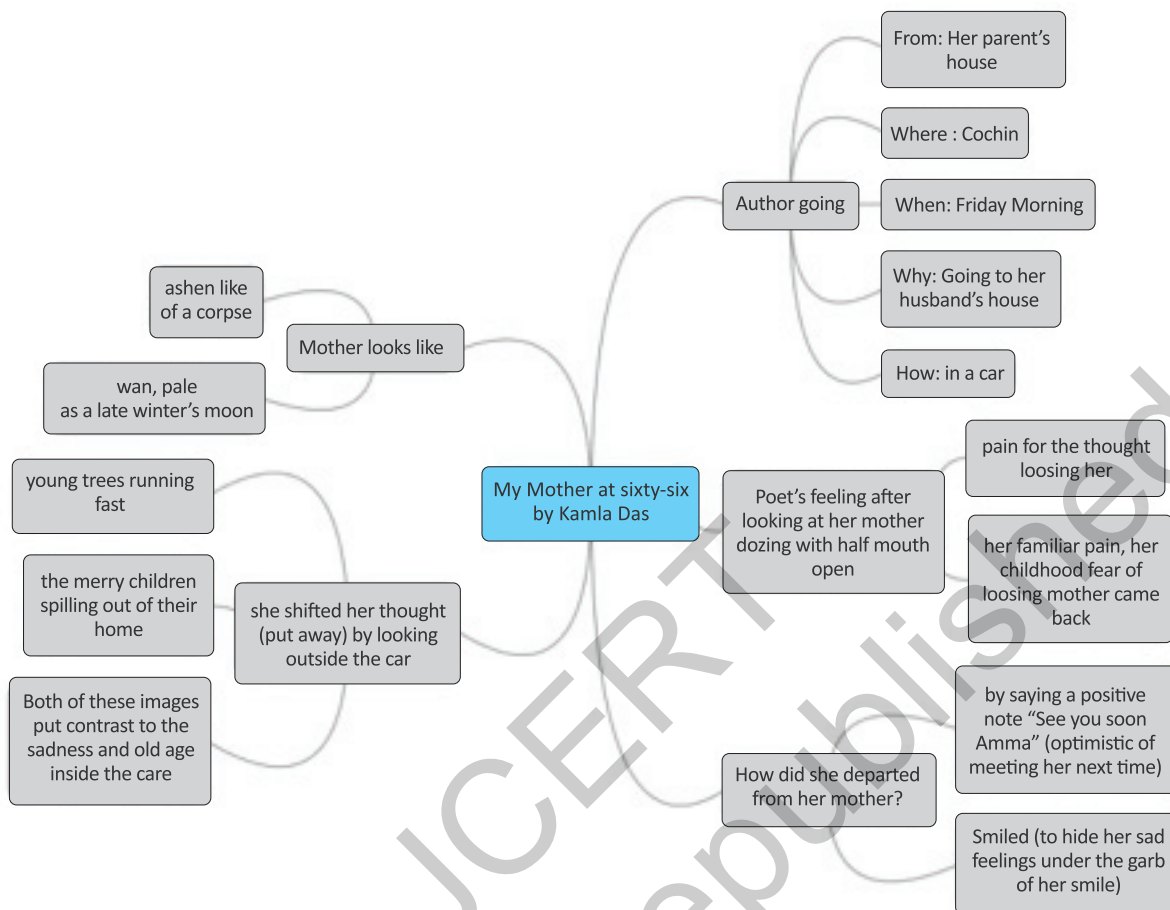
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

1. Name: Kamala Das
(31 March, 1934 – 31 May, 2009)
2. Pen-name: Madhavikutty
3. an Indian writer in English, Born in Thrissur, Kerala
4. wrote lots of confessional poems
5. her popular works: 'An Introduction', 'A Hot Noon in Malabar,' 'My Grandmother's House', 'My Story'

INTRODUCTION

'My mother at sixty-six' revolves around the relationship between a girl and her aging mother in her sixties. It shows how beautiful and refined a bond a mother and a daughter can share. It also depicts the complications of relationships between human beings. The poet wants to escape this harsh reality keeping a fake smile on her face to meet her again. The poem is a short verse without a full stop containing a lot of similes and personification, imagery and repetition excluding any kind of rhyme scene.

SUMMARY SKETCH



POEM AND ITS MEANING

"Driving from my parent's home To Cochin last Friday morning, I saw my mother, beside me,"



The poetess explains that once when she visited her parent's house in Cochin. It was a Friday when she was driving back to the airport, her mother was sitting beside her at the back of the car. The poet looked at her mother.

कवयित्री बताती है कि एक बार जब वह कोचीन में अपने माता-पिता के घर गई थी। शुक्रवार का दिन था जब वह हवाई अड्डे पर वापस जा रही थी, उसकी माँ कार में उसके पास बैठी थी। कवि ने अपनी माँ की ओर देखा।

“doze, open mouthed, her face ashen like that of a corpse and realised with pain”

She saw that her mother was sleeping and her mouth was open. She further explained that the colour of her mother’s face was like that of ash. She looked like a dead body.

उसने देखा कि उसकी माँ सो रही है और उसका मुँह खुला हुआ है। उन्होंने आगे बताया कि उनकी माँ के चेहरे का रंग राख जैसा था। वह एक मृत शरीर की तरह लग रही थी।

“that she was as old as she looked but soon put that thought away, and looked out at Young

Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling out of their homes,”



The poetess realized that her mother had grown old. She felt pain for her. But soon she tried to get rid of this sad thought by diverting her thoughts towards the trees outside. The young trees, although stationary

(स्थिर), seemed to be running very fast as though they were sprinting. She also saw children running out of their houses, into the playground. All these things were full of life and energy, contrary to her mother who sat next to her.

कवयित्री को एहसास हुआ कि उसकी माँ बूढ़ी हो गई है। उसने अपने लिए दर्द महसूस किया। लेकिन जल्द ही उसने अपने विचारों को बाहर के पेड़ों की ओर मोड़कर इस दुखद विचार से छुटकारा पाने की कोशिश की। युवा पेड़, हालांकि स्थिर थे, ऐसा लग रहा था कि वे बहुत तेजी से दौड़ रहे हैं। उसने बच्चों को अपने घरों से बाहर खेल के मैदान में भागते हुए भी देखा। ये सभी चीजें जीवन और ऊर्जा से भरपूर थीं, उनकी बगल में बैठी उनकी माँ के विपरीत।

“but after the airport’s security check, standing a few yards away, I looked again at her, wan, pale”



The poet continues that when she reached the airport, she finished with the security check and stood a few

yards away from her mother. She noticed her mother's aging face which looked so dull, weak and pale.

कवयित्री आगे कहती है कि जब वह हवाई अड्डे पर पहुँची, तो उसने सुरक्षा जाँच पूरी की और अपनी माँ से कुछ गज की दूरी पर खड़ी रही। उसने अपनी माँ के बूढ़े होते चेहरे पर ध्यान दिया जो इतना सुस्त, कमजोर और पीला लग रहा था।

“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.....”



The poet compares her mother to a late winter's moon as the moon in winters is not shiny and even her mother's face had also lost her youth and shine. As her mother was getting older and weak. The poet feels the fear of separation just as she used to feel during her childhood. As a child, she could not bear the pain of separating from her mother. But now as her mother

has grown old and is about to die, the poet feels that maybe this is the last time that she is seeing her mother. She tries to hide her fear by smiling and smiling. She then says that she would soon see her mother again. She says so because she doesn't want to lose her mother.

कवि अपनी माँ की तुलना सर्दियों में देर से आने वाले चाँद से करता है क्योंकि सर्दियों में चाँद चमकीला नहीं होता और यहाँ तक कि उसकी माँ के चेहरे ने भी अपनी जवानी और चमक खो दी थी। जैसे-जैसे उसकी माँ बूढ़ी और कमजोर होती जा रही थी, कवयित्री अलग होने के डर को वैसे ही महसूस करती है जैसे वह बचपन में महसूस करती थी। एक बच्चे के रूप में, वह अपनी माँ से अलग होने का दर्द सहन नहीं कर सकी। लेकिन अब जब उसकी माँ बूढ़ी हो गई है और मरने वाली है, तो कवि को लगता है कि शायद यह आखिरी बार है जब वह अपनी माँ को देख रही है। वह मुस्कुराते और मुस्कुराते हुए अपने डर को छिपाने की कोशिश करती है। वह फिर कहती है कि वह जल्द ही अपनी माँ को फिर से देखेगी। वह ऐसा इसलिए कहती है क्योंकि वह अपनी माँ को खोना नहीं चाहती।

WORD MEANING

Beside: next to (बगल में)

Doze: nap (झपकी लेना)

Ashen: pale (भस्मवर्ण, फीका, राख जैसा)

Corpse: dead body (लाश)

Put away: remove (हटाना)

Sprinting: Moving fast, short fast race, running (दौड़ लगाते)

Spilling: let out (फैलने)

Yard: a unit of linear measure equal to 3 feet (गज)

Wan: dim, weak (बे-रंग)

Pale: dull, colorless (फीका)

Familiar: already known (परिचित)

Ache: pain (दर्द)

Amma: mother (often used as a familiar form of address). (अम्मा)

LITERARY DEVICES

1. Assonance: Use of vowel sound 'o','a' ("parent's home to Cochin last Friday morning"; "doze, open-mouthed, her face ashen like that of a corpse")
2. Simile: The colour of the mother's face has been compared to that of a corpse – ashen. use of 'like' ("her face ashen like that of a corpse"); Again, mother's face is compared to the late winter's moon – both are dull and lifeless. use of 'as' ("as a late winter's moon").
3. Consonance: use of the sound 's' and 't' ("Trees sprinting")
4. Imagery: when the poet says, trees sprinting, merry children spilling
5. Repetition: Repeated use of 'looked', 'smile'

6. Rhyme scheme – The poem does not follow any rhyme or rhythm. It has been written in free verse.

OBJECTIVE SHORT QUESTIONS

- Q1. What does the narrative single sentence style of the poem highlight?

- (a) Poet's feelings
- (b) Poet's insecurities
- (c) poet's thoughts
- (d) poet's intertwining thoughts

Ans: (d) poet's intertwining thoughts

- Q2. What does the expression smile, smile and smile signify?

- (a) poet was going home and was elated
- (b) poet was happy
- (c) poet was hopeless
- (d) poet's desperate efforts to hide her fears

Ans: (d) poet's desperate efforts to hide her fears

- Q3. Whose house the poet was leaving?

- (a) her friend's house
- (b) in-law's house
- (c) her husband's house

(d) her parents' house

Ans: (d) her parents' house

Q4. What were the words she used while parting from her mother?

- (a) See you soon Ba
- (b) See you soon beeji
- (c) See you soon mata ji
- (d) See you soon, amma

Ans: (d) See you soon, amma

Q5. Kamala Das was a

- (a) Bengali
- (b) Punjabi
- (c) Keralite
- (d) Gujarati

Ans: (c) Keralite

Q6. The person in the car, beside the poetess, was,

- (a) her aunt
- (b) her niece
- (c) her uncle
- (d) her mother

Ans: (d) her mother

Q7. The poetess says her mother looked pale like a

- (a) corpse
- (b) ghost
- (c) malnourished child
- (d) anemic person

Ans: (a) corpse

Q8. 'Trees sprinting' is a poetic device. It is

- (a) personification
- (b) alliteration
- (c) repetition
- (d) simile

Ans: (a) personification

Q9. 'Children spilling out' is an

- (a) simile
- (b) metaphor
- (c) personification
- (d) transferred epithet

Ans: (b) metaphor

Q10. Smile and smile and smile is

- (a) alliteration
- (b) repetition
- (c) simile
- (d) metaphor

Ans: (b) repetition

Q11. The narrator is only using her smile to

- (a) cover up her pain
- (b) make herself happy
- (c) to make her mother happy
- (d) to make her father happy

Ans: (a) cover up her pain

- Q12. The poem is made up of _____ in the poem.
- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| (a) twenty lines | (a) metaphor |
| (b) a single sentence | (b) simile |
| (c) ten stanzas | (c) alliteration |
| (d) five stanzas | (d) all of these |

Ans: (b) a single sentence

Ans: (d) all of these

- Q13. What does the poem revolve around?
- (a) poet's fears
(b) poet's love for her mother
(c) Theme of old age
(d) All of these

Ans: (d) All of these

- Q17. Which poetic device is used in "Trees sprinting-" ?
- (a) metaphor
(b) simile
(c) alliteration
(d) Personification

Ans: (d) Personification

- Q14. What was the expression of the poet's face while parting from her mother?
- (a) satirical (b) funny
(c) sad (d) smiling

Ans: (d) smiling

- Q18. What does this narrative style of the poem signify?
- (a) differing thoughts
(b) many thoughts
(c) contrasting thoughts
(d) a single thread of thought mixed with harsh realities

Ans: (d) a single thread of thought mixed with harsh realities

- Q15. What was the poet's childhood fear?
- (a) Parting from her husband
(b) Parting from her friends
(c) Parting from her siblings
(d) losing her mother

Ans: (d) losing her mother

- Q19. What did the poet realize with pain?
- (a) her mother's appearance like a corpse
(b) she is inconsiderate

- Q16. Name the poetic devices used

- (c) old age is pleasant
- (d) she has duties

Ans: (a) her mother's appearance like a corpse

Q20. What does 'ashen face' signify?

- (a) colour of face
- (b) face is covered with ash
- (c) Pale and lifeless face of poet's mother
- (d) to show ugly face

Ans: (c) Pale and lifeless face of poet's mother

Q21. What do the parting words "See you soon Amma" signify?

- (a) her carelessness
- (b) Her optimistic farewell full of cheerfulness
- (c) she bids goodbye like this
- (d) she is in a hurry

Ans: (b) Her optimistic farewell full of cheerfulness

Q22. What is the universality of the theme of the poem?

- (a) death is a truth
- (b) Life is a reality
- (c) everyone is happy
- (d) to show old age

Ans: (a) death is a truth

Q23. Why did the poet look at her mother again?

- (a) because she was busy
- (b) because she was going away
- (c) because she wanted to stay back
- (d) because of fear and insecurity

Ans: (d) because of fear and insecurity

Q24. Which Rhyming scheme is used in the poem?

- (a) coupled rhyme
- (b) monorhyme
- (c) Alternate rhyme
- (d) free verse

Ans: (d) free verse

Q25. Why does the poet feel parted, upset and sad?

- (a) because of her fears
- (b) because she was getting late
- (c) fear of missing her flight
- (d) because of her duty towards mother and her own needs

Ans: (d) because of her duty towards mother and her own needs

TEXTUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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

Ans: The poet sees her mother beside her, dozing. She has grown old and weak. Her face is pale like that of a corpse. With ageing, comes death and this fear pains the poet. Actually she is not prepared to think of losing her mother.

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

Ans: The poet is driving to the Cochin airport. When she looks outside, the young trees seem to be walking past them. With the speed of the car they seem to be running fast or sprinting. The poet presents a contrast—her 'dozing' old mother and the 'sprinting' young trees.

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

Ans: The poet has brought in the image of merry children 'spilling out of their homes' to present a contrast. The merry children coming out of their homes in large numbers present an image of happiness

and spontaneous overflow of life. This image is in stark contrast to the 'dozing' old mother, whose 'ashen' face looks lifeless and pale like a corpse. She is an image of ageing, decay and passivity. The contrast of the two images enhances the poetic effect.

4. Why was the mother compared to the 'Late winter's moon'?

Ans: The poet's mother is sixty-six years old. Her 'ashen' face resembles a corpse. She has lost her shine and strength of youth. Similarly, the late winter's moon looks hazy, lacks shine and brightness. So, the comparison is apt.

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

Ans: The poet's parting words of assurance and her smile is a deliberate attempt to hide her real feelings. The parting words: "See you soon, Amma" give an assurance to the old lady whose 'ashen face' looks like a corpse. Though she realises her mother's approaching death, she tries to look positive. Her continuous smiles are an attempt to overcome the real fear and ache inside her heart.