

Class 12 - English (Flamingo)

Poem 1 - My Mother at Sixty Six

By - Kamla Das

About the Poet:



Kamala Das (1934-2009) was born in Malabar, Kerala. She is recognised as one of India's foremost poets. Her works are known for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavour of the soil. She has published many novels and short stories. She wrote under the pen name "Madhavi Kutty". 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.

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.

Text and Explanation:

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

Beside: alongside

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.

Literary Devices:

Assonance: Here we see the use of vowel sound that is 'o'. (To Cochin last Friday morning)
doze, open mouthed, her face ashen like that
of a corpse and realised with pain

Doze: nap

Ashen: pale

Corpse: dead body

She saw that her mother was sleeping and her mouth was open. She further explains that the colour of her mother's face was like that of ash. (This means that there was some smoky appearance on her face). She looked like a dead body.

Literary Devices:

Assonance: Use of vowel sound 'o', 'a', 'e' (doze, open mouthed, her face ashen like that of a corpse)

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)

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,

Spilling: let out

Sprinting: Moving fast

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 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.

Literary Devices:

Consonance: use of the sound 's' and 't'

imagery: when the poet says trees sprinting, merry children spilling

Repetition: Repeated use of 'looked'



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

Wan: dim, weak

Pale: dull, colourless

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 ageing face which looked so dull, weak and 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.....

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 may be this is the last time that she is seeing her mother. She tries to hide her fear. She then says that she would soon see her mother again. She says so because she doesn't want to lose her mother.

Literary Devices:

Repetition: use of 'smile'

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

Simile: 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).

Summary of the Poem:

Ageing is an inescapable phase of every human's life. A person enters their childhood, experiences adolescence when they are energetic and have so many dreams. Finally, every person approaches their old age and then they die. Relationships between people become much stronger in every phase of life. No one can't bear the separation from their loved ones just because of ageing.

Firstly, when the author going to the Cochin airport with her mother she looks at her carefully and presents before us her image. As she looks at her mother's soft and whitish face, she gets stuck with the fear of losing her mother. Her mother with a sleepy face and open mouth is comparable to a corpse. Here, the author shows love and affection in a relationship between a mother and a daughter.

The poet is hurt and sad and shifts her attention outside the car for driving out the undesirable feelings. She changes her bad mood. The scene from the window of the car is of rising life and energy. The fast sprinting green and huge trees alongside the cheerfully playing kids represent life, youth, and vitality. The poet here is remembering about her own childhood. In her childhood, her

mother was young and beautiful. Whereas now her mother is surrounded by the fear of losing her life and that made her insecure and sad.

She reaches the airport to take her flight. It shows departure and parting which makes her sad. As she said goodbye to her mother, the image of the old mother in the dusk of years strikes her. Here again, a simile is comparable with her mother with a late-night moon of the winters. The light of the moon is an obstacle by the fog and haze as she appears older now.

The poet is now feeling the pain of getting separated because of leaving her mother. Her childhood fear of losing her loving mother now became so terrifying. Now her mother could die of old age anytime unexpectedly. She is so sad that she starts crying slowly without control but keeping a brave heart she hides her tears and starts smiling. Thus, she offers her farewell to her old mother and keeps her hope of seeing her mother alive again. She says “see you soon, Amma”. She hides her tears and sorrow as she does not want to make a painful and emotional environment. Moreover, she doesn’t want her mother to cry and shows her that she is enjoying her life. She expects her mother to be happy and enjoy her life just like her.

Conclusion of My Mother at Sixty-six

To conclude, my mother at sixty six poem revolves around the beautiful relationship between the poet and her mother. The summary shows the theme of the advancing age of the mother of the author and the fear of separation. This apparently short poem touches upon the theme of a beautiful bond between the mother and the daughter. It shows how beautiful a relationship a mother and a daughter can have.
