

Flamingo Poem-1

My Mother at Sixty Six(Summary)

By: Kamla Das



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.

Once the poet went to visit her mother. She was on her way back to the the airport to return to Cochin. She looked at her mother who was seated beside her in the car. Her mother had dozed off to sleep and her ageing face - was smoky in colour like ash. Her mouth was open and she resembled a dead body. The poet realized that her mother was old. She felt pain and sympathy for her. Her mother needed love, affection and care.

In order to come out of the gloom, the poet shifted her glance and looked out of the car's window. There she saw young trees pass by. Little children were running out of their houses into the playgrounds. These things were contrary to the ageing face of her mother. They symbolised energy, life and happiness.



As they reached the airport and the poet was about to leave for the aeroplane, she glanced at her mother one more time. Her mother appeared weak and pale just like the moon in the winter season which seems to have lost all its strength. The poet felt the pain and fear of losing her mother. She was reminded of her childhood when she used to fear losing her mother. As a child she could not bear to be separated from her mother even for a few moments. Now the loss would be permanent as her mother was about to die and she would lose her forever.

The poet did not express her feelings. She smiled and said "see you soon, Amma" because she wanted that her mother should live and they could meet again.

Read the stanzas given below and answer the questions that follow each:

1. Driving from my parents home to Cochin last Friday morning, I saw my mother, beside me, doze, open mouthed, her face ashen like that of a corpse and realised with pain that she was as old as she looked but soon

Questions

(a) Where was the poet driving to? Who was sitting beside her?

(b) What did the poet notice about her mother?

(c) Why was her mother's face looked like that of a corpse?

(d) Find words from the passage which mean :

(i) sleep lightly (ii) dead body (iii) felt.

Answers:

(a) The poet was driving from her parent's home to the Cochin airport. Her mother was sitting beside her.

(b) She noticed that her mother was dozing with her mouth open.

(c) Her mother's face looked pale, faded and lifeless like a dead body because she had grown old.

(d) (i) doze (ii) corpse (iii) realised.

2.....She

looked but soon

put that thought away, and

looked out at Young

Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling

out of their homes,

Questions

(a) What did the poet realise? How did she feel

(b) What did she do then?

(c) What did she notice in the world outside?

(d) Find words from the passage which mean: (i) running fast (ii) happy (iii) moving out.

Answers:

(a) Her mother was lost somewhere else in thoughts. It pained her.

(b) The poet withdrew her thoughts from her mother and looked outside.

(c) The young trees growing outside went past as if they were sprinting. Happy children were coming out of their houses.

(d) (i) sprinting (ii) merry (iii) spilling.

3.....but after the airport's

security check, standing a few yards away, 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

Questions

(a) What did the poet do after the security check?

(b) Why did the poet compare her mother's face to a late winter's moon?

(c) What is her childhood fear ?

(d) How do the parting words of the poet and her smile present a contrast to her real feelings?

Answers:

(a) After the security check, the poet stood a few yards away from her mother and looked at her face

again.

(b) The late winter moon lacks brightness as well as strength. The pale and colourless face of the mother resembles the late winter moon.

(c) The fear of ageing and ultimate death/separation.

(d) The poet's parting words of assurance and her smiles present a stark contrast to the old familiar ache or childhood fear. Her words and smiles are a deliberate attempt to hide what is going on inside.

QUESTIONS FROM TEXTBOOK

Q1. What is the kind of pain and ache that the poet feels?

Ans: When the poet sees the pale and corpse-like face of her mother, her old familiar pain or the ache returns. Perhaps she has entertained this fear since her childhood. Ageing is a natural process. Time and ageing have not spared the poet's mother and may not spare her as well. With this ageing, separation and death become inevitable.

Q2. 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. 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.

Q3. 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.

Q4. Why has the mother been compared to the 'late winter's moon' ?

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

Q5. What do the parting words of the poet and her smile signify?

Ans: The poet's parting words of assurance and her smiles provide a stark contrast to the old familiar ache or fear of the childhood. Her words and smiles are 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. Similarly, her continuous smiles are an attempt to overcome the ache and fear inside her heart.