

# My Mother At Sixty Six

by

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# NCERT Content 2020-21

Driving from my parent's home to Cochin last Friday morning, I saw my mother, beside me, doze, open mouthed, her face ashen<sup>1</sup> like that of a corpse<sup>2</sup> and realised with pain that she was as old as she looked but soon put that thought away, and looked out at Young Trees sprinting<sup>3</sup>, the merry children spilling<sup>4</sup> out of their homes, but after the airport's security check, standing a few yards away, I looked again at her, wan<sup>5</sup>, pale as a late winter's moon and felt that old familiar ache<sup>6</sup>, my childhood's fear, but all I said was, see you soon, Amma, all I did was smile and smile and smile ....

<sup>1</sup>very pale

<sup>2</sup>a dead body, especially of a human being

<sup>3</sup>short fast race, running

<sup>4</sup>moving

<sup>5</sup>colourless

<sup>6</sup>a continuous or prolonged dull pain

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## Poetic device/Figure of speech

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### **Simile**

“...face ashen like that of a corpse”

“...pale as a late winter’s moon”

**Metaphor** — “merry children spilling out”

**Tautology** — “I looked again at her, wan, pale”

**Personification** — “...young trees sprinting”

### **Irony**

“Young Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling out of their homes while the mother like a corpse”

### **Repetition**

“smile and smile and smile...”

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**What two images does Kamala Das use to describe her mother's face? What is common between them?**

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Two Images to describe mother's face are '**Corpse**' and '**Late winter's moon**'. The common between the two images are — paleness, weakness, lifeless.

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*The words 'driving' and 'doze' provide a good contrast giving images of dynamic activity and passivity.*

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The poem is a portrayal of a daughter's feelings and concern for her old mother.

Time and ageing spare none. With this ageing, separation/death becomes unavoidable. The poet looks at her old mother and the finality of death looms large on her mind. Looking at her old mother, she is pained and worried as she realises that the mother may not live long. She is sad and anxious at the thought of losing her mother. Thus, the poem portrays an agonizing experience.

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# SYNOPSIS

The poet, Kamala Das is driving from her parent's home to the airport at Cochin. Her mother, sitting beside her, is dozing with her mouth open.

Her mother is very old. She is inactive, cold and lifeless at the age of sixty six. The poet feels the pain and ache of losing her mother, i.e., the fear of separation/death. The thought of her mother's impending death came to her mind. She realised that her mother might not live for too long since she had lost her brightness and looked pale and weak. So, the poet is pained because of her mother's ageing and nearing to death.

The poet distracted herself from her mother to withdraw the painful thought of the ultimate death/ separation. She did not look at her mother's old, ashen face but looked out of the car window and saw the young trees and merry children. The poet describes the young trees as 'sprinting' to distract her mind from unhappy thoughts of her mother's old age. Secondly, she contrasts between the young trees and her mother. The young trees symbolise the freshness of life while the old mother symbolises passive life, ageing and death.

Children are running out of their homes to enjoy themselves. They are young. On the contrary, the mother is inactive, cold and lifeless at the age of sixty-six. The poet has brought in the image of happy children running out of



their homes to contrast the happy and active life of children with the sad and inactive life of her old mother.

However, the joyful scene did not help her drive away the painful thought from her mind. After the airport's security check, standing a few yards away, the poet turned her gaze again to her mother's colourless, dull face. She had lost her brightness and looked pale and weak as she was old. The poet experienced the old familiar ache, her childhood's fear of losing her mother. The thought of her impending death came to her mind again.

The mother has been compared to the 'late winter's moon' because she has lost her shining skin and strength, and is like the hazy, obscure winter moon. The poet

emphasizes the colourless, lifeless, inactive and cold life of her mother. The fear of her ageing and ultimate death/separation brings pain/ache to the poet.

To hide her feelings, she said, **“See you soon, Amma”**. These parting words of the poet signify the parting on a positive note and a hope of meeting her mother again. But, indeed, it is a faint hope. She leaves a smiling face behind for her mother. But actually, She is hiding her pain, her guilt of leaving her mother. She tries to comfort herself as well as mother and thereby dispels the constant fear of separation and death.