

My Mother at Sixty-Six

--Kamala Das

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About the Poet

□ Kamala Das also known as Kamala Surayya was born on 31 March 1934 in Malabar, Kerala. She was an Indian English poet and littérateur and at the same time a leading Malayalam author. Her popularity in Kerala is based chiefly on her short stories and autobiography written under name Madhavikutty, while her oeuvre in English, written under the name Kamala Das, is noted for the poems and explicit autobiography.

□ Some of her works in English include the novel Alphabet of Lust (1977), a collection of short stories Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories (1992), in addition to five books of poetry. She is a sensitive writer who captures the complex subtleties of human relationships in lyrical idiom, My Mother at Sixty-six is an example.

- ❑ Kamala Das has received many awards for her literary contribution, including: (few of them are)
 1. Nominated and shortlisted for Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984
 2. Award of Asian PEN anthology – 1964
 3. Kerala Sahitya Academy Award – 1969
 4. Sahitya Academy Award – 1985
 5. Honorary D.Litt by University of Calicut – 2006

- ❑ On 31 May 2009, aged 75, she died at a hospital in Pune.



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.

❑ 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.

Poem 📢

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

*doze, open mouthed, her face
ashen like that
of a corpse and realized with pain
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, 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.....*

Summary

- ❑ In this poem, Kamala Das explores the theme of ageing and death and isolation through a narration involving her mother.
- ❑ While driving from her parent's home to Cochin, she notices her mother sitting beside her dozing, her face pale like a dead body and her thoughts far away. This reminds her painfully that her mother is old and could pass away leaving her alone.

■ Putting that thought aside she looked out at the young trees speeding by and children running out of their homes happily to play. These remind her probably of youth and life, her own younger days and her mother when she was young.

■ But after the security check at the airport, looking back at her mother standing a few yards away, she finds her looking pale like the winter moon. She feels that familiar pain and childhood fear of the thought of losing her mother and of being lonely just as she had been when she was young because she was different from other children. She could only keep smiling and tell her 'see you soon' knowing full well that she might not see her.

Key Points

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

Vocabulary

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1. Wan – colorless, pallid
2. Late winter's moon – Dim moon shrouded by clouds
3. Spilling – Run out
4. Ashen – Grey (old age)
5. Ache – Pain
6. Sprinting – Short fast race, running

Poetic Devices

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1. Simile:

- 1) wan, pale *as a* late winter's moon
- 2) her face ashen *like that of* a corpse

2. Metaphor:

- 1) the *merry children spilling* out of their homes

3. Personification:

- 1) young trees *sprinting*

4. Repetition:

- 1) I did was smile and smile and smile.....

Thank You

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