

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 1: MY MOTHER AT SIXTY-SIX



MY MOTHER AT SIXTY-SIX

~Summary~

-by Kamala Das

Stanza- 1

"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"

Explanation: The poet had gone to visit her parents' home near Cochin. On Friday morning, she was returning. On her way to the airport, she noticed her mother sleeping beside her in the car. Her mouth was open. Her face was pale and lifeless, just like a dead body. It perhaps expressed the pain she felt because of separation from her daughter.

Stanza- 2

"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"

Explanation: The poet was alarmed by the sudden realization that old age had crept upon her mother. It was a reality she found hard to accept. The poet was pained to see her mother's colorless pale face. To take her attention away from the disturbing thought, she looked outside the car.

Because the car was moving, the young green trees appeared to be running in the opposite direction. She also saw a group of children rushing out of their homes to play.

All this probably reminded her of her childhood when her mother was young. The young sprinting trees represented how fast time had flown by. The children represented youth, which was full of life and energy. Both the young trees and the children presented a sharp contrast to the mother sitting beside her who was old and suffering from ill-health.

Stanza- 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"

Explanation: The young children and trees were able to divert her thoughts away. But after reaching the airport and passing through security check, the poet again looked at her mother, who was standing a few yards away from her. Her mother looked lifeless and dull like a late winter's moon, which cannot be seen clearly because of mist and fog.

Stanza- 4

"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 ..."

Explanation: Once again, she was pained to see her mother in this condition. As she was going away and leaving her mother, her old familiar pain, her childhood fear that she would lose her mother, suddenly came back to her. So she tried to hide her emotions behind her smile. She did not want to reveal her feelings to her old mother and bade her farewell with a smile. She gave hope to her mother and herself by saying that they would meet again and kept on smiling.

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NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 91)

(Think It Out)

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

Answer: When the poet sees the corpse-like and pale face of her mother, her ache or the old familiar pain returns. Perhaps this fear was entertained by her since her childhood. Ageing is a process which occurs naturally. Ageing and time spare none. Ageing and time have not spared the mother of the poet and may not spare her as well. By ageing, death and separation becomes inevitable.

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

Answer: While driving to the Cochin airport, she observes outside the young trees which seemed to be walking across them. They seem to be sprinting or running fast with the speed of the car. The poet provides a contrast – the 'sprinting' young trees and her 'dozing' old mother.

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

Answer: To present a contrast, the poet brought in the image of the merry children 'spilling out of their homes'. The merry children who are coming out from their houses in huge numbers explain the spontaneous overflow and happiness of life. It is different from the old mother 'dozing', whose 'ashen' face looks pale and lifeless, similar to a corpse. The description of the poet's mother highly indicates passivity, decay and ageing in the poem. The contrast between these two images strengthens the effect of the poem.

Question 4. Why has the mother been compared to the 'late winter's moon'?

Answer: The mother of the poet is sixty-six years old. Her 'ashen' face which is shrunken is similar to that of a corpse. She has lost the strength of youth and her shine. The late moon in the winter looks obscure and hazy. It also lacks strength and shine. This comparison is appropriate and quite natural. The simile which is used here is effective and apt.

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

Answer: The parting words of the poet such as her smiles and assurance present a sharp contrast to the fear of childhood or the old familiar ache. Her smiles and words are a conscious attempt to hide her feelings. The parting words – "See you soon, Amma" provides an assurance

to the old woman whose 'ashen face' is similar to a corpse. In the same way, her continuous smile is an attempt to overcome the fear and ache which is present in her heart.

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