

1

My Mother at Sixty-six

Fastrack Revision

Master Card

- ▶ The poet is travelling back in a car from her parent's place to Cochin.
- ▶ Her old mother also accompanying to see her off at the airport.
- ▶ The poet notices that she was dozing with her mouth open.
- ▶ Her face has a dull, colourless appearance and reminds her of a corpse.
- ▶ Thought is very painful; realises she is now an old woman and could be nearing death.
- ▶ Turns to look at the racing green trees outside, sees happy children running out of their homes.
- ▶ A welcome change from the gloomy thoughts that grip her.
- ▶ Reaches the airport, after the security check looks at the mother again.
- ▶ Sees her pale and ageing face; is reminded of the winter moon with all the vitality and brightness gone.
- ▶ Feels pained at being reminded of a childhood fear—has always been scared of losing her mother one day, (as she lost her father when she was a child).
- ▶ Does not want to show her agony and fear to her mother now.
- ▶ Tells her that she would see her soon and bids her good bye with a bright smile on her face.

Theme

- ▶ The poem highlights the complexities of human relationships. The poet *Kamala Das* explores the pain and agony of her aged mother. She is forced by circumstance to leave her sick mother alone, though she is deeply pained at the moment. This is the irony of human relationships. The poem also brings to light the fact that ageing is an

inevitable process. No one can escape ageing, decay and ultimate end.

Literacy Devices Used

- ▶ **Simile:** A simile is the comparison between two different objects by using the word 'like' or 'as'.
Examples: her face ashen like that of a corpse
wan, pale as a late winter's moon
- ▶ **Repetition:** When a single word, phrase, line or sometimes even the whole stanza is repeated to create a musical effect or to emphasise a point to attract the reader's attention or to impart unity to a piece.
Example: smile and smile and smile
The repeated use of the word 'smile' indicates the long artificial, fake smile of the poet. She uses to hide her inner pain.
- ▶ **Personification:** When an inanimate thing or object is personified, it is called personification.
Example: young trees sprinting
- ▶ **Metaphor:** A metaphor is an implied simile *i.e.*, when two things are compared without using 'like' or 'as'.
Example: merry children spilling out of their homes.
- ▶ **Images and Symbols:** Words are used in such a way as to form an image of the scene.
Example: doze, open mouthed
Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling out of their homes are symbols of youth, vitality, life and growth.
Late winter's moon—symbolises lack of energy and death.
- ▶ **Special Feature of the Poem:** The entire poem is composed in a single sentence, punctuated only by commas which indicates that a single thought runs from the beginning to the end.



Practice Exercise



Extract Based Questions

Directions: Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow:

1. ...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.....

(CBSE SQP 2023-24)

- (a) What is the speaker's emotional state when looking at her mother?
 - (i) Confused and disoriented
 - (ii) Nostalgic and longing
 - (iii) Empathetic and understanding
 - (iv) Fearful and apprehensive

(b) What does the use of the word 'but' at the beginning of the line, "but all I said...", suggest?

(c) Select the word that WILL NOT complete the sentence appropriately.

The description of the mother as "wan, pale/as a late winter's moon" creates a vivid image of

- (i) vulnerability (ii) sensitivity
(iii) frailty (iv) mortality

(d) State whether the given statement is True or False.

The poetic device used in the line, 'pale as a winter's moon' is the same as the one used in the line, 'the winter wind wistfully wailed at night'.

(e) What message do these lines highlight, in the context of familial relationships, and the speaker's sense of anxiety and fear at the prospect of losing her mother?

(f) Complete the sentence appropriately.

The repetition of the word, 'smile' suggests that

Answers

- (a) (iv) Fearful and apprehensive
(b) The use of the word 'but' at the beginning of the line, 'but all I said.....', suggests a contrast between the speaker's internal emotional response and her outward behaviour.
(c) (ii) sensitivity
(d) False
(e) These lines highlight the importance of cherishing and appreciating the people we love.
(f) despite the pain the speaker feels at parting from her mother, the speaker is trying to hold back her emotions and remain composed.

2. but after 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.....

(CBSE 2023)

(a) Choose the correct option:

In the above extract the narrator feels:

- (i) satisfied (ii) fearful
(iii) nostalgic (iv) regretful

(b) Identify the word in the extract that means 'colourless'.

(c) Complete the following analogy correctly:

She sang like a bird: Simile

All I did was smile and smile and smile:

(d) Read the following statement and choose the correct option:

(I) The poet had gone through the security check.

(II) She did not want to look at her mother.

(i) (I) is true, but (II) is false.

(ii) (I) is false, but (II) is true.

(iii) Both (I) and (II) are true.

(iv) Both (I) and (II) are false.

(e) What childhood fear is the poet referring to?

(f) Fill the blank with appropriate words with reference to the extract:

Pale as a winter's moon suggests

Answers

- (a) (ii) fearful
(b) Wan
(c) Repetition
(d) (i) (I) is true, but (II) is false.
(e) The poet had lost her father in her childhood. She has a fear of losing her mother too. The poet is referring to this childhood fear.
(f) Pale as a winter's moon suggests that the mother looks pale and weak. She has lost her shine and energy.

3. 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 realised with pain that she was as old as she looked but soon put that thought away,

(a) Where was the poet coming from?

(b) Where was the poet's mother?

(i) At Cochin airport

(ii) In Madras

(iii) In the car

(iv) At her home

(c) How does the poet describe her mother?

(i) She was young and smart

(ii) She was beautiful

(iii) She looked old and sick

(iv) All of the above

(d) State whether the given statement is True or False.

'She' refers to the poet's mother in the second last line of the stanza.

(e) What does 'corpse' mean?

(f) They are in and going to

Answers

- (a) The poet was coming from her parent's home.
(b) (iii) In the car
(c) (iii) She looked old and sick
(d) True
(e) 'Corpse' means a dead body, especially of a human.
(f) a car; Cochin

4. looked but soon

put that thought away,

and looked out at Young

Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling

out of their homes,

(a) What was the poet 'looking' and what did she notice?

- (i) Her mother was talking to herself
- (ii) Her mother was reading a book
- (iii) Her mother was dozing off
- (iv) All of the above

(b) What thought did the poet try to drive away?

- (i) The thought of having a fight with her mother
- (ii) The thought of her children
- (iii) The thought of losing her mother
- (iv) None of the above

(c) Why did the poet start 'looking out'?

(d) What did the poet see from the window of the car?

(e) State whether the given statement is True or False.

The poet is going to see her mother off.

(f) A word similar in meaning to 'sprinting' is

Answers

- (a) (iii) Her mother was dozing off
- (b) (iii) The thought of losing her mother
- (c) The poet started 'looking out' because she wanted to divert her mind.
- (d) The poet saw running trees and merry children from the window of the car.
- (e) False
- (f) scampering or racing.



Short Answer Type Questions

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

Ans. The poet's mother is at sixty-six. She is sick. She has lost her energy and colour. The poet feels the pain and ache of insecurity of parting from her ageing mother.

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

Ans. This question has also a symbolic meaning. The young trees have energy and lively life. They seem running fast. The other meaning is while the poet's car speeds ahead, the young trees seem running back.

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

Ans. The merry children 'spilling out of their homes' present an image of happiness, energy and lively life. They are enjoying the golden period of their

life in contrast of the poet's mother who is sitting beside her in the car. She looks lifeless and pale like a corpse. She presents an image of ageing, decay and passivity.

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

Ans. The mother has turned sixty-six. She looks pale and weak. She has lost her shine and energy of life. The late winter's moon looks pale and weak. It also loses its shine in the haze and mist of winter. Hence, the mother has been compared to the late winter's moon.

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

Ans. The poet's parting words—see you soon, Amma—give assurance and hope to her old mother that she will come very soon to see her mother. The word 'smile' has been repeated thrice. It expresses poet's intense feeling of love and affection for the broken heart of her mother.

Q 6. Poet's mother was at sixty-six. Why did she go to Cochin airport with her?

Ans. Mother's love is indefinable. Though the poet was grown up, the link of maternal love dragged her to Cochin airport. She got satisfaction to bid the poet farewell.

Q 7. How does the poet describe her mother who is sitting beside her?

Ans. Poet's mother was dozing. Her mouth was open. Her face had no shine. She was pale like a corpse.

Q 8. Why did the poet look out of the car?

Ans. The poet realised the pain suffered by her mother due to her old age and weakness. She looked out of the car to divert her mind and see young and energetic life presented by the young trees and merry children.

Q 9. Why did the poet look at her mother after the airport's security check?

Ans. After the airport's security check the poet looked at her mother because she was worried about her life. She was rather weak and broken in health. The poet hardly expected to see her again in life.

Q 10. Which figures of speech have been used by the poet in the poem 'My Mother at Sixty-six'? Give examples.

Ans. The poet has used the following figures of speech in her poem:
(i) Simile—her face ashen like that of a corpse.
(ii) Personification—young trees sprinting.
(iii) Simile—wan, pale as a late winter's moon.
(iv) Repetition—all I did was smile and smile and smile.....

Q 11. Why has the poem 'My Mother at Sixty-six' been written in a single sentence punctuated by commas?

Ans. The whole poem is written in a single sentence, punctuated by commas, because it indicates a single

thread of thought interspread with observation of the real world around and the way these are connected to the main idea.

Q 12. What thoughts does Kamala Das put away while travelling with her mother in the car? Why do you think she puts them away?

Ans. Kamala Das feels the pain of guilt for not being able to take care of her mother at this stage of hers. When she sees her mother's face which has turned lifeless, she is struck by fear of never meeting her again. These are the thoughts that she tries to drive away because these thoughts were dreadful to her.

Q 13. How does the poet describe the old age of her mother?

Ans. The poet describes her mother's age as a late winter's moon. Her mother who was passing through the last phase of her life, has lost all glow and brightness just as the winter's moon seems pale and without brightness.

Q 14. What is the significance of the images 'sprinting trees' and 'merry children spilling out of their homes' in the poem 'My Mother at Sixty-six'?

Ans. Both these images 'sprinting trees' and 'merry children' indicate happiness and youth. These images present a sharp contrast to the mother's pain, sickness and old age. These represent youth, energy and joy whereas the mother inside the car is old, decaying and sad.

Q 15. What childhood fear do you think Kamala Das speaks of?

Or

Kamala Das speaks of 'an old familiar ache...'. What do you think is the reason for this feeling?

(CBSE SQP 2020)

Ans. As, Kamala Das had lost her father in her childhood, she has a fear of losing her mother too. She will be separated from her. Now that her mother is sixty-six years old and has been deteriorating in health, the poet's fear returns.

Q 16. How does Kamala Das bid farewell to her mother?

Ans. Although, Kamala Das is apprehensive about the decaying health of her mother, she doesn't allow herself to let her mother know about her real feelings towards her. She manages somehow to hide these feelings from her mother and bids her farewell with a happy note saying 'see you soon, Amma' with a lot of smiles on her face.

Q 17. What thoughts do you think Kamala Das had at the airport?

Ans. After Kamala Das crossed the security check, she was full of worry about her mother's poor health and old age. She even had the fear that she would not be able to see her face again in life. She was also agonised at

the thought that her old mother was neglected and could not stay on with her due to her busy schedule.

Q 18. What is the significance of the word 'but' in 'but all I said was see you soon, Amma'? *(CBSE 2023)*

Ans. The significance of the word 'but' in the given line is that it suggests a contrast between the poet's internal emotional response and her outward behaviour. It suggests that she is trying to hold back her emotions and thoughts.

Q 19. What are the feelings of the poet about her aged mother with reference to the poem 'My Mother at Sixty-six'? *(CBSE 2023)*

Ans. The poet, Kamala Das, loves her mother very much. She uses the phrases like 'ashen like that of a corpse' and 'a late winter's moon' in the poem which expresses her feelings that her mother's health is deteriorating and she is struck by fear of never meeting her again. She tries to divert her mind by looking out. At the airport, she is apprehensive and fearful about the decaying health of her mother. But her smile hides her pain and fear.



Long Answer Type Questions ↘

Q 1. Why could Kamala Das not express her thoughts for her mother at the airport?

Ans. Though Kamala Das was very sad, she could not express her thoughts for her mother because she was overwhelmed with worry and emotional poem at the thought of losing her for ever. Moreover, any such expression would have aggravated her mother's condition. So, she just said 'see you soon, Amma' with smile.

Q 2. Bring out the significance of the title 'My Mother at Sixty-six'?

Ans. The title is perfectly apt for the poem as it deals with the poet's aged and frail mother. My Mother at once established the context in which Kamala Das is writing the mother's unexpressed pain and the poet's worry about her mother's deteriorating health and old age and perhaps the imminent death. The title prepares us for the frail old mother and her daughter's concern for her.

Q 3. Give a brief description of the poem 'My Mother at Sixty-six'.

Ans. On one Friday morning the poet was going to Cochin airport from her parental home. Her aged mother was sitting beside her in the car. Her face had lost the glory and colour. The poet felt sad on seeing her mother's ageing condition. But outside world as still full of life and activity. She looked again towards her mother who was like a late winter's moon. Her childhood's fear revived, nevertheless she bade goodbye to her aged mother with a smile wishing to meet her again after a span of time.



Chapter Test

Extract Based Question

- Q 1.** 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.....
- (a) What 'familiar ache' does the poet feel?
(b) What could've been the poet's childhood fear?
 (i) Loss of her childhood toys
 (ii) Loss of her old friends
 (iii) Loss of her mother
 (iv) Loss of her books
(c) Why didn't the poet share her thoughts with her mother?
 (i) She didn't want to share her secret
 (ii) She had no faith in her mother

- (iii) She didn't want to hurt her mother
(iv) None of the above

- (d) State whether the given statement is True or False.

The figure of speech in the last line is personification.

- (e) The poet bids good bye to
(f) Give a synonym of 'ache'.

Short Answer Type Question

- Q 2.** What is the childhood fear of Kamala Das?

Long Answer Type Question

- Q 3.** Is the title 'My Mother at Sixty-six' apt?