

MY MOTHER  
AT SIXTY-SIX

—Kamala Das

## Chapter Analysis

Question Type & Marks	Year					
	2016		2017		2018	
	D	OD	D	OD	D	OD
SA	1	1	-	-	-	-
LA	-	-	2	2	1	1

## Introduction :

In this poem, the poetess is commenting on the relationship between a mother and a daughter when they cannot afford to be together for long. The poetess is going to catch the plane at Cochin. Her old mother, pale and sick is also accompanying her to the airport. The mother looks colourless like a dead body.

She is unlikely to live for long. The poetess doubts if she will be able to meet her again. She looks out of the car and finds young trees racing past. She also notices happy children running out of their houses. They stand for a healthy and hopeful life. The old mother is nearing her end. The poetess becomes shaky. But she tries to cheer up the old woman. With a smiling face, she promises to see her mother again.

## Summary :

The poetess was on her way back to Cochin, the previous Friday morning to catch a flight. Her mother was seated beside her in the car. The old woman started feeling drowsy. She had her mouth open. Her face looked pale and ash-coloured as that of a dead body. The poetess became panicky. She thought that her mother would not live long. She was deeply pained.

She tried to overcome her fear. She looked out of the window. The young trees appeared to be running back at full speed. She also saw cheerful children coming out of their homes. They were in sharp contrast to her own aged mother.

They reached the airport and passed through the formal security check. From the distance of a few yards, the poetess looked at her mother again. The mother was weak and pale like the moon in a late winter night. The sight of her revived the narrator's old childhood fear of being away from her mother. There was no hope of improvement in her condition.

But before bidding her farewell, the poetess just smiled and expressed hope to see her again.

## 1. Driving from .....

.....

.....

..... though away.

While driving to Cochin from her parent's home, the poetess' mother accompanied her in the car to see her off. She sat beside the poetess. At one moment when the poetess turned and looked at her mother, she noticed that her mother was dozing and her mouth was open. Her face had turned ashen *i.e.*, it seemed as if it had lost the vitality of life and her face looked like that of a corpse (dead body). The poetess was frightened as the reality seized her that her mother had grown old. She was not ready to accept it as old age is followed by death. So she tried to put the thought away.

**Simile** → Ashen like that of a corpse.

## 2. .... and

.....

..... Smile .....

She started looking out in order to take away the frightening thought from her mind. She noticed the trees sprinting in contrast to her mother who looked lifeless while sitting beside her. She also noticed children coming out of their home happily. The happy children are the representatives of youth and power. Probably they were reminding her

of the time when the poetess was a child and her mother was young. Then they reached the airport. After the security check at the airport, she again looked at her mother who was standing a few yards away. She again felt that old familiar ache of losing her mother who looked like a late winter's moon which loses its beauty in the fog. She felt that her mother had also lost her youth, vitality and had become inactive. She had a childhood fear of permanent separation from her mother. But she did not show it to her mother. She kept on smiling and smiling and said 'see you soon, Amma. These were the words of reassurance that they would meet again and she smiled in an attempt to hid her feelings.

**Imagery** → Trees sprinting

**Simile** → As a late winter's moon

**Alliteration** → See you soon

**Repetition** → Smile and smile

## Extracts for Comprehension

[4 marks each]

**Q. 1.** Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow :

"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."

[Outside Delhi Set-I, II & III, 2013]

(a) Name the poetess and the poem ?

**Ans.** The poem is 'My Mother at Sixty-Six' composed by Kamala Das. 1

(b) Where was she driving to ?

**Ans.** She was driving to the Cochin Airport. 1

(c) How did her mother look like?

[Outside Delhi Set-I, II & III, 2013]

**Ans.** Her mother looked sick and drowsy. 1

(d) What thought did she put away ?

**Ans.** She tried to put away the thought and her fear that her mother would not live long. 1

**Q. 2.** Read the lines given below and answer the questions that follow. [Outside Delhi Set I, 2016]

..... I saw my mother,  
beside me,  
doze, open mouthed, her face  
ashen like that  
of a corpse and realised with  
pain .....

(a) Who is 'I' ?

**Ans.** Value Points : poet / Kamala Das / poetess / narrator / daughter.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2016] 1

**Detailed Answer :** 'I' here is Kamala Das, the poetess.

(b) What did 'I' realise with pain ?

**Ans.** Realised with pain that mother nearing old age / mom's death / separation from mother.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2016] 1

**Detailed Answer :** She realised with pain that her mother had grown old.

(c) Why was the realisation painful ?

**Ans.** Value Points:

– The mother's approaching death was a hard fact for her to accept

– thoughts of separation from her mother made the poet sad. [CBSE Marking Scheme, 2016] 1

**Detailed Answer :** The realisation was painful because she might not live for a very long time.

(d) Identify and name the figure of speech used in these lines.

**Ans.** Value Points:

– simile

– e.g. 'ashen like that of a corpse'

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2016] 1

**Detailed Answer :** The figure of speech used is Simile. e.g. 'ashen like that of a corpse'.

**Q. 3.** Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow :

..... but soon,

Put that thought away and

Looked out at young

Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling

Out of their homes, .....

[Comptt., Delhi & Outside Delhi, Set-2014]

(a) What thought did the poet drive away from her mind ?

**Ans.** The poet put the thought of her impending death. [CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

(b) What did she see when she looked out of the car ?

**Ans.** She saw sprinting trees, happy children coming out of their homes to enjoy themselves.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

(c) How do you know that the joyful scene didn't help her drive away the painful thought from her mind ?

**Ans.** The poet looked again at her mother's face and experienced the old familiar ache.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

(d) What does the phrase 'trees sprinting' signify ?

**Ans.** The phrase 'trees sprinting' signifies time, which has passed at a fast pace. 1

**Q. 4.** Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow. [CBSE, SQP 2014-15]

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  
and all I did was smile and smile and smile... ..

(a) Who looked pale and wan ?

**Ans.** The poet's mother looked pale and wan  
[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

(b) What was the speaker's familiar ache ?

**Ans.** The speaker's ache was fear of being separated from her mother due to her growing age and death.  
[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

(c) Explain 'as a late winter's moon'.

**Ans.** Mother has lost her brightness and strength due to her old age just as the winter moon is hazy and obscure.  
[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

(d) Name the poem and the poet.

**Ans.** Poem is 'My Mother at Sixty-Six' and the poet is Kamala Das.  
[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

OR

(a) What was the poet's childhood fear ?

[Comptt., Delhi/Outside Delhi 2018]

**Ans.** The fear was separation from her mother / loss of her mother / mother's death.

[CBSE Marking Scheme 2018] 1

(b) Why is the mother compared to a late winter's moon ?

**Ans.** To refer to her pale and wan appearance / to emphasize the paleness of the mother's face.

[CBSE Marking Scheme 2018] 1

(c) What were the poet's parting words ?

**Ans.** They were "See you soon, Amma."  
[CBSE Marking Scheme 2018] 1

(d) What does her smile signify ?

**Ans.** Signifies her attempt to hide her fear from her mother / attempt to reassure her mother.

[CBSE Marking Scheme 2018] 1

Q.5. Read the lines given below and answer the questions that follow. [Delhi Set I, 2016]

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 does the phrase, 'familiar ache' mean ?

**Ans. Value Points :** Pain / fear / pain that mother was growing old / fear of separation.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2016] 1

**Detailed Answer :** It means that the sight of her mother revived the poet's old, childhood fear.

(b) What was the poet's childhood fear ?

**Ans. Value Points :** Her mother would get old / die / final separation from mother.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2016] 1

**Detailed Answer :** Her childhood fear was of being separated from her mother.

(c) What do the first two lines tell us about the poet's feelings for her mother ?

**Ans. Value Points :** Loved her / pained at seeing the mother growing old / fear of losing her mother.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2016] 1

**Detailed Answer :** The first two lines tell us that she wanted to console herself.

(d) Which word has been repeated in the poem?

**Ans. Value Points :** Hides her feelings from her mother / reassures herself that mother will be fine.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2016] 1

**Detailed Answer :** Smile

Q. 6. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow : [Foreign, 2014]

..... my childhood's fear

but all I said was, see you soon,

Amma,

all I did was smile and

smile .....

(a) What was 'my childhood's fear' ?

**Ans.** Her childhood fear was being separated from her mother.  
[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

(b) Who is 'I' ?

**Ans.** 'I' is the poetess, Kamala Das.  
[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

OR

What were the poet's parting words ?

**Ans.** 'See you soon, Amma'.  
[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

(c) Why did the narrator smile repeatedly ?

**Ans.** The narrator smiled repeatedly to hide her fear of losing her mom. 1

(d) What is the poetic device used in these lines ?

**Ans.** Repetition/Simile.  
[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 1

## Short Answer Type Questions

[2 marks each]

(Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words each.)

Q.1. Why does the poet's smile in the poem, 'My Mother at Sixty-Six' show ?

[Delhi/Outside Delhi 2018]

**Ans.** — Reassuring herself and her mother and

— Masking/hiding/covering her fear of separation, fear of mother's death, hiding her fear of not

— Masking/hiding/covering her fear of separation, fear of mother's death, hiding her fear of not being able to see her mother alive again, hiding her guilt/sorrow at leaving her mother at that critical juncture. 2

[CBSE Marking Scheme 2018]

**Detailed Answer :** The poet's smile in the poem shows that she is trying to mask her feelings. She

is feeling guilty for leaving her mother at that critical fracture. She smiles to reassure herself and there mother that they would meet soon.

**Q. 2. How did Kamala Das's mother look during the drive to Cochin ?**

[Comptt., Outside Delhi Set-I, 2013]

**Ans.** Kamala Das' mother looked pale and wan, like a corpse during the drive to Cochin. 2

**Q. 3. How does Kamala Das try to put away the thoughts of her ageing mother ? [Delhi Set-I, 2014]**

OR

**How did Kamala Das put away the thought of her mother's old age ?**

[CBSE, SQP I, 2012, Comptt. Delhi, 2010]

**Ans. Value Points :** Looks out of the car window at young trees sprinting/the merry children running out of their homes/by not looking at her mother's old, ashen face/by distracting herself.

(Any two) [CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 2

**Detailed Answer :** Kamala Das tries to put away the thoughts of her ageing mother by looking out of the window of her car. She saw young and healthy trees, cheerful children both representing happy life. She feels the vigour and vitality in them and for sometime, she forgets about her ageing mother.

**Q. 4. How are the young trees described as 'sprinting' ?**

[HOTS]

[Delhi Set-I, II & III, 2012]

OR

**Why are the young trees described as sprinting?**

[Delhi Set-II, 2017]

(NCERT)

OR

**Why are the young trees described as 'sprinting' in the poem 'My Mother at Sixty-Six' ?**

[Comptt., Delhi Set-II, 2017]

**Ans. Value Points :**

- Image of youthfulness
- energy
- vitality
- full of life
- contrast to mother's pale/old face.

(Any two) [CBSE Marking Scheme, 2017] 2

**Detailed Answer :** The young trees running spiritedly in the opposite direction stand in sharp contrast to the poetess' aged and pale-looking mother. The trees symbolize youth and life, whereas the old mother represents old age and is moving towards the grave. They symbolise the quick passage of time that has brought old age to her.

**Q. 5. What were the poet's feelings as she drove to Kochi Airport ?**

[Comptt., 2015]

OR

**What were the poetess's feelings at the airport ? How did she hide them ?**

[Outside Delhi Set-I, II & III, 2012]

**Ans. Value Points :** Fear of separation/worried about her ageing mother/fear of losing her mother/anxiety. [CBSE Marking Scheme, 2012] 2

**Detailed Answer :** The poetess' feelings at the airport were of fear because she was afraid that her mother was going to die because she was looking very weak and she was not sure whether she would be able to meet her mother again. She hides her fear by smiling and assures her mother that they would meet again.

**Q. 6. Why has the mother been compared to the 'late winter moon' ?**

[HOTS]

[Delhi Set-I, II & III, 2013]

[Comptt., Delhi Set-I, II & III, 2011] (NCERT)

[Comptt., Outside Delhi Set-I, 2017]

**Ans. Value Points :** Pale wan colour/mother had lost her glow on her face.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2017] 2

**Detailed Answer :** The mother has been compared to the 'late winter moon' because she has become pale like the moon in the winter. She is dull and lifeless.

#### Commonly Made Error

- Most of the students are not able to answer this question.

#### Answering Tips

- Some students are not able to bring out the similarity between the two.

**Q. 7. What was the poet's childhood fear ?**

[Outside Delhi Set-I, 2014]

[Comptt., Outside Delhi Set-II, 2017]

**Ans. Value Points : —** Mother was growing old

— fear of separation / death.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2017] 2

**Detailed Answer :** The poet, Kamala Das, had a childhood fear that she might lose her mother as she was growing old and weak. She always felt sad when she was separated from her and felt scared of losing her.

**Q. 9. What childhood fear did Kamala Das refer to in her poem ? How did she hide it ?**

[Comptt., Delhi, Set-I, II & III, 2012]

**Ans.** The childhood fear that Kamala Das refers to in her poem is that whether she would see her mother alive the next time when she came back. She hid this recurrent, nagging fear in smiles. 2

**Q. 8. What childhood fear does Kamala Das have ? Why ?**

[Comptt., Outside Delhi, Set-I, II & III, 2012]

OR

**What familiar ache and childhood fear did Kamala Das feel ?** [Comptt., Delhi Set-I/III, 2017]

**Ans. Value Points :** Separation from mother / loss of mother. [CBSE Marking Scheme, 2017] 2

**Detailed Answer :** As a child, Kamala Das had a fear of losing her mother. She always felt sad when she

was separated from her mother and was scared that she might not be alive the next time she came back.

**Q. 9. What is the significance of the parting words of the poetess and her smile, in 'My Mother at Sixty-Six'. [CBSE, SQP 2012] [Outside Delhi Set-I, 2010] [HOTS] (NCERT)**

**Ans. Value Points :**

- Optimism
- a hope to see her mother again
- reassuring her mother
- hiding her anxiety and fear
- emotions hidden behind the smile
- true feelings of loss and pain of separation.

(Any three) [CBSE Marking Scheme, 2010] 2

**Detailed Answer :** The poetess' parting words signify hope and a promise of meeting her mother again. She wants to leave a smiling face behind for her mother, so as not to let her mother know about her feelings and emotions towards her *i.e.*, feeling of loss and pain of separation.

#### Commonly Made Error

- Most of the students are not able to answer this question correctly.

#### Answering Tips

- Hope, meeting again and encouraging others are the keywords.

**Q. 10. What kind of pain does Kamala Das feel in 'My Mother at Sixty-Six' ? [Delhi Set-I, 2017]**

**Ans. Value Points : –** Pain of separation

- losing her mother
- childhood fear-mother getting old

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2017] 2

**Detailed Answer :** Kamala Das feels pained at the thought of her mother getting old. She was pained to think that she may lose her mother soon.

**Q. 11. Having looked at her mother, why does Kamala Das look at the young children ?**

[Outside Delhi Set-I, 2017]

**Ans. Value Points : –** To drive away pain

- fear of separation from her mother
- children symbolic of life/energy/dynamism/happiness
- to distract from thoughts of her ageing mother.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2017] 2

**Detailed Answer :** Kamala Das looked at the young children, as they represented youth, which is full of life and energy. She wanted to drive away the fearful and disturbing thought that her mother was getting old and weak and might die soon.

**Q. 12. What did Kamala Das think when she looked at her mother ?**

[Comptt., Outside Delhi Set-III, 2017]

**Ans. Value Points :**

- Dozing like a corpse/ as old as she looked
- fear that may not meet her mother.

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2017] 2

**Detailed Answer :** Kamala Das' mother was dozing as she was sitting in the car. Her face looked pale and like a dead body. Kamala Das thought that her mother would not live long and felt pain that she might not meet her again.

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