

“My Mother at Sixty-six” by Kamala Das

TEXTUAL QUESTION ANSWERS

(From Flamingo Textbook)

Think it Out

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

Answer: The poet feels the pain of separation and the ache of seeing her mother age. She realizes that her mother is nearing the end of life, and this brings a deep, emotional fear of losing her.

2. Why are the young trees described as ‘sprinting’?

Answer: The young trees are described as ‘sprinting’ to create a contrast with the mother’s stillness and aging. As the car moves forward, the trees appear to run backward, symbolizing life, energy, and the fast pace of youth.

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

Answer: The merry children symbolize youth, life, and vitality. They contrast with the poet’s aged mother, who is pale and silent. This contrast heightens the poet’s sense of loss and the passage of time.

4. Why has the mother been compared to the ‘late winter’s moon’?

Answer: The ‘late winter’s moon’ is dim, faded, and nearing the end of its cycle. The poet uses this simile to emphasize her mother’s pale, weak, and aging face, symbolizing the twilight of life.

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

Answer: The poet’s smile, though forced, is an attempt to hide her sorrow. Her parting words are an effort to appear strong and positive, even though she feels deep emotional pain and fear of losing her mother.



ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS (SHORT & LONG ANSWERS)

◆ Short Answer Questions (30–50 words)

1. What is the central theme of the poem “My Mother at Sixty-six”?

Answer: The central theme is the fear of losing a loved one, particularly the aging of a parent. It reflects the emotional pain of separation, the cycle of life and death, and the enduring bond between mother and daughter.

2. How does the poet describe her mother’s face in the poem?

Answer: The poet describes her mother’s face as “ashen like that of a corpse,” pale, lifeless, and withering. This imagery emphasizes old age and the nearness of death.

3. What contrast does the poet draw in the poem?

Answer: The poet contrasts the still, aged image of her mother with the lively, energetic scenes outside the car—sprinting trees and happy children—to highlight the difference between youth and old age.

4. How does the poet try to hide her feelings at the end of the poem?

Answer: The poet tries to hide her fear and sorrow by smiling and saying “See you soon, Amma,” even though she is deeply distressed by her mother’s frailty and the thought of losing her.

5. What do the ‘young trees sprinting’ symbolize?

Answer: The ‘young trees sprinting’ symbolize vitality, youth, and the fast pace of life. They create a contrast with the poet’s aging mother, who represents stillness and decay.

6. What is the significance of the phrase “ashen like that of a corpse”?

Answer: It signifies the lifelessness and extreme old age of the poet’s mother. It also foreshadows death, intensifying the poet’s fear of her mother’s approaching end.

7. What is the tone of the poem?

Answer: The tone is reflective, melancholic, and emotional. It expresses the poet's inner conflict—her love, fear, and helplessness in the face of her mother's aging.

8. Why does the poet look at her mother again before boarding the flight?

Answer: The poet looks at her mother again to take a lasting image of her in case they don't meet again. It's an emotional moment filled with fear and love.

9. What does the poet mean by "wan, pale as a late winter's moon"?

Answer: The poet compares her mother's pale, tired face to a late winter's moon to emphasize her fading vitality and impending old age.

10. How is the poem a personal reflection?

Answer: The poem reflects Kamala Das's personal feelings about her aging mother. It reveals her emotional vulnerability, love, and fear of separation.

◆ Long Answer Questions (120–150 words)

11. Discuss the poetic devices used in "My Mother at Sixty-six."

Answer: The poem uses several poetic devices:

- **Simile:** "Her face ashen like that of a corpse" and "wan, pale as a late winter's moon" evoke vivid imagery of aging and death.
- **Contrast:** Between the mother's aging stillness and the vitality of sprinting trees and merry children.
- **Symbolism:** The winter moon symbolizes decay and aging; children and trees symbolize youth and life.

- **Repetition:** The word “smile” at the end emphasizes the poet’s attempt to mask her grief.

These devices highlight the central theme of aging and emotional pain.

12. How does Kamala Das express the pain of separation in the poem?

Answer: Kamala Das expresses her pain through subtle observations—her mother’s pale face, the contrast with youthful scenes outside, and her emotional struggle to say goodbye. She hides her fear with a smile, but her heart is filled with anxiety. Her description of her mother being “like a corpse” shows her inner turmoil and the realization that their time together is limited. The parting moment is gentle yet filled with emotional depth.

13. Explain the significance of the title “My Mother at Sixty-six.”

Answer: The title directly refers to the poet’s realization of her mother’s aging. At sixty-six, the mother is at a stage of life close to death. The poem captures this painful realization. The title is personal and specific, underscoring the emotional connection and the universal fear of losing a parent.

14. What images does the poet use to show the contrast between life and death?

Answer: Kamala Das contrasts her mother’s pale, lifeless face with vibrant images: trees sprinting, children spilling out of homes. These lively images highlight the mother’s frailty and create a stark difference between youth (life) and old age (death).

15. Describe the emotional journey of the poet in the poem.

Answer: The poem begins with the poet noticing her mother’s aging. As they drive, she tries to distract herself but is overwhelmed by fear. When she bids goodbye at the airport, she feels deep sorrow and anxiety. Despite this, she hides her pain with a smile and hopeful

words, making it an emotional journey from observation to suppressed grief.

16. Why is the poet's smile described as "smile and smile and smile"?

Answer: The repetition emphasizes the effort the poet makes to mask her emotions. It is a forced smile, trying to conceal her pain and fear of separation. The smile is a way to stay strong for her mother.

17. How is the poem a portrayal of the universal fear of losing a parent?

Answer: The poem speaks of a daughter's emotional response to seeing her aging mother. It reflects the universal experience of children fearing the loss of their parents. The emotions—love, helplessness, fear—are ones everyone can relate to.

18. What makes the poem deeply personal and universal at the same time?

Answer: The poem is deeply personal because it's about Kamala Das and her mother. But the emotions it expresses—worry, fear, love—are universal. Everyone who has seen their parents grow old can connect with the feelings described.

19. How does Kamala Das use contrast to enhance the emotional impact of the poem?

Answer: She uses contrasting images—her frail mother vs. sprinting trees and happy children—to heighten the emotional tension. This technique emphasizes the vitality of life outside and the quiet decay of her mother's aging, making the pain more poignant.

20. What message does the poem convey?

Answer: The poem conveys the inevitable reality of aging and the emotional pain of separation from loved ones. It reminds us to value our time with parents and loved ones, as life is uncertain and short.