

MY MOTHER AT SIXTY SIX by Kamala Das

Reference to context.

1. *"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. What worried the poet when she looked at her mother?
- b. Why was there pain in her realisation?
- c. Why did she put that thought away?
- d. Identify the figure of speech in these lines.

2. *"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?
- b. What was the poet's childhood fear?
- c. What do the first two lines tell us about the poet's feeling?
- d. What does the repeated use of the word 'smile' mean?

Short answer Questions. 30-40 words.

1. Where is the poet going and why? Why is the mother accompanying her?
2. What did the poet realise? Why was it painful?
3. Why has the poet brought in the image of sprinting trees and merry children?
4. Was the poet successful in diverting her mind?
5. Why has the poet's mother been compared to the late winter moon?
6. What do the parting words and smile of the poet signify?

ANSWER KEY

Reference to context.

1.
 - a. When the poet saw that her mother was getting old as her face was ashen like that of a corpse, the fear of separation struck her.
 - b. It was painful to think that she would be left alone. There were obvious signs that the mother would pass away and the poet couldn't reconcile herself to the thought of losing her.
 - c. It was an unpleasant thought. She felt uneasy and disturbed but was unable to do anything about it. In resignation, she put that thought away.
 - d. Ashen like that of a corpse- simile; Ashen- metaphor
2.
 - a. The phrase 'familiar ache' means the painful realisation of her mother being so old that she would die soon.
 - b. The poet's childhood fear was that her mother would leave and never come back.
 - c. The poet loved her mother. She was hurt at seeing the mother growing old and was afraid of losing her.
 - d. The repetition of the word 'smile' signifies the reassurance the poet gives to herself. She falsely reaffirms her belief that things will be alright while she hides her thoughts from her mother.

Short answers.

1. The poet is going home from Cochin. Her mother is accompanying her to see her off at the airport.
2. The poet realised that her mother was so old that she already looked like a corpse and soon she would be separated from her mother. This realisation was painful as she couldn't reconcile herself with the loss of separation.
3. The poet brought in the image of sprinting trees and merry children to divert her mind from the painful realisation of the impending loss of her mother.
4. No, she wasn't successful as soon after the airport security check when she looked at her mother again, she realised that her mother might not survive until the next visit.
5. The mother was pale, grey and dull. She seemed to be in the final stage of her life, similar to the dull winter's moon that is pale, grey and shrouded with impending finality.

6. The parting words of the poet, "See you soon, Amma", were more for herself than for the mother. She was trying to reassure herself that she would be able to see her mother again even though she knew that might not be the case.