A PHOTOGRAPH

– Shirley Toulson

Nostalgically recollecting fond memories, the poet looks at a very old photograph of her mother who has been dead for nearly twelve years. The poet is consumed with grief but is left with no words to express the loss.

The poem begins with the poet looking at a very old photograph of her mother at twelve years of age. The photograph, on a cardboard frame, shows the poet’s mother, with her two girl cousins each holding one of her hand. She was eldest of the three and had a ‘sweet face’. In the snapshot, all the three girls stand still, smiling with their hair falling on their faces, to get clicked by the camera of their uncle, on an occasion when they went paddling. The sea, which has apparently undergone no change, washed their ‘transient’ feet. This image of transience provides a sharp contrast to the eternal sea.

Some twenty or thirty years later, the poet’s mother laughed at the picture pointing how she, Betty and Dolly (the two cousins) were made to dress for the beach holiday. That sea holiday was a thing of past for her mother at that time, while her mother’s laughter is the poet’s past now. Both signify their respective losses and the pain involved in recollecting the past.

Her mother is dead for nearly twelve years now. And for the present ‘circumstance’ the poet has nothing left to say. She is absorbed in the memories of her dead mother. The painful ‘silence’ of the situation leaves the poet silent, with no words to express her grief. Thus, the ‘silence silences’ her.