

SECTION : C: LITERATURE READER

Flamingo

POEM 1: My Mother at Sixty Six : Kamala Das

Gist of the poem:

- The poet is driving from her parents home to Cochin by car, her mother by her side— sleeping –open mouthed very pale, colorless and frail-like a dead body indicating that her end was near.
- The poet looks at her and feels intense pain and agony to realize that soon death will cast her mother from her.
- Tries to divert her mind, looks outside at the young trees and happy children bursting out of their homes in a playful mood (a contrasting image)
- After the security check at the airport looked again at her mother’s face—pale and cold.
- “Familiar ache-My childhood fear” –the poet has always had a very intimate and close relationship with her mother and she has always felt the fear of being separated from her mother hence it is familiar.
- The poet reassures her mother that they will meet again

Answer the following briefly

1. What do the parting words of the poet to her mother signify?

The poet's parting words are expressive of the dilemma and confusion that the poet carries in her mind while her elongated smile is hollow, superficial and expresses her helplessness, fear and guilty feeling. At the same time, both the parting words and the smile are a supportive hope and comfort to the old woman to survive longer to meet again.

2. What are the kind of pain and fear that the poet feels?

The poet feels the pain of separation from her mother, helplessly unable to take good care of her even at her old age. The fear is the familiar haunting one she moves through since her childhood that she is going to lose her mother being subjected to her declining health and age.

3. Why are the young trees described 'sprinting' and the 'merry children spilling'?

They are the symbols of life, energy vitality, movement and joyousness. It is to contrastingly intensify the, sad, inactive, spiritless, dying, pathetic condition of the poet's mother and thereby effectively express the aggravating dilemma, fear and ache of the poet. Both the images are pertinent for the understanding of the process of ageing and decay.

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

It is to convey the idea of the mother's ageing and decay, taking analogy from seasonal changes.

The late winter's moon appears pale and its brightness dimmed in fog and mist. Likewise, the old mother in declining health appears pale, grey, inactive, energy less ageing and decaying to death.

5. What does the poet notice about her mother while travelling in the car?

The poet notices that her aged, ill, decaying mother is dozing off leaning against her body comforted by her presence. There is an expression of pain on her pale face due to her worries and anxieties. The pathetic plight of her mother triggers off the poet's fear about losing her mother soon.

6. What thought does Kamala Das put away while travelling with her mother in a car? Why do you think she puts them away?

The pale, decaying plight of the mother drives the biting ache, pain and guilty feeling in the poet that the poet could not care her mother and she would die soon. She forcibly pushes the thought away as she is helpless to overcome the reality which is sickening and dreadful.

Now try these questions:

1. What does Kamala Das see looking out of the car window?
2. How does the poet describe the old age of her mother?
3. What do the 'sprinting tree' and 'merry children spilling' stand for? How are these images significant in the poem?
4. What childhood fear is the poet talking about? Why is it called a childhood fear?
5. How does the childhood fear affect the poet throughout her life?
6. How does Kamala Das bid farewell to her mother? What does that show about her mental state?
7. What thoughts, do you think disturbed Kamala Das at the airport?
8. Why could not the poet express her sincere thoughts to her mother at the airport?
9. What is the theme of the poem?
10. The fear and anxiety of the poet is universal than personal. Do you think so? Why?
11. This poem is unpunctuated and in one loosely held sentence. What does it suggest about the meaning of the poem?
12. What does the title 'My Mother at Sixty Six' signify?

Read the stanza and answer the following briefly

Practice

*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
and all I did was smile and smile and smile....."*

- a) Who looked pale and wan and why? (1)
- b) What was the speaker's familiar ache? (1)
- c) Explain "as a late winter's moon". (1)
- d) Name the poem and the poet. (1)

*2... but after the airport's
security check, standing a few yards
away, I looked again at her, wan pale
as a late winter's moon..."*

- a. Comment on the significance of 'again'. (1)
- b. Who is 'her' and how does 'her' appear now? (1)
- c. Identify the figure of speech in the above stanza and explain. (2)

3. And felt that old
familiar ache, my childhood fear,
but all I said was, see you soon, Amma,
and all I did was smile and smile and smile..."

- a). Why is the word 'smile' repeated in the above lines? (1)
- b). How is the 'ache' become familiar to her? (1)
- c). Explain the dilemma the speaker is facing here. (2)