

- [My Mother at Sixty-Six Summary](#)

My Mother at Sixty-Six Summary

"My Mother at Sixty-Six" is a poignant poem by Kamala Das that expresses a daughter's deep feelings of fear and sadness as she observes her mother's ageing. The poem captures the emotional complexity of human relationships, especially the bond between a mother and daughter. The poetess notices her mother dozing beside her during a car ride, her face pale and ashen like a corpse, which painfully reminds her of her mother's advancing age and mortality. This realization brings a flood of emotions, including fear of losing her mother and the inevitability of death.

The poem contrasts the stillness and frailty of the ageing mother with the lively, youthful world outside the car window, where trees seem to sprint and children spill out of their homes. This contrast highlights the natural cycle of life and the passage of time. At the airport, the poetess sees her mother again, describing her face as "wan, pale as a late winter's moon," evoking the coldness and finality of old age and death. Despite her inner turmoil, the poetess hides her true feelings behind repeated smiles, symbolizing the human tendency to mask pain and fear.

Key Elements

- **Theme:** The poem explores themes of ageing, fear of loss, separation, love, and the inevitability of death. It reflects the universal experience of realizing that parents grow old and the emotional impact of this realization.
- **Message:** Ageing is an unavoidable phase of life, and the poem urges readers to cherish their loved ones while they can. It also highlights the contrast between life's fleeting joys and the permanence of loss.

- **Title Significance:** The title aptly reflects the poem's focus on the poetess's mother at the age of sixty-six, symbolizing the onset of old age and the associated fears.
- **Form and Style:** The poem is a free verse, first-person confessional monologue with a conversational tone. It uses similes, repetition, personification, and contrast to convey emotions and imagery.

Textual Evidence

- "Doze, open mouthed, her face ashen like that of a corpse" – simile highlighting the mother's frailty.
- "Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling out of their homes" – personification and chremamorphism contrasting youth and old age.
- "Wan, pale as a late winter's moon" – simile evoking coldness and the inevitability of death.
- "All I did was smile and smile and smile" – repetition emphasizing the poetess's attempt to hide her true feelings.

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- Who is the speaker in the poem "My Mother at Sixty-Six"?
- What does the poet compare her mother's face to when she is dozing?
- What is the main emotion expressed by the poetess in the poem?

Level 2 – Moderate

- Explain the significance of the contrast between the mother and the outside world in the poem.
- What literary devices does Kamala Das use to describe her mother's ageing?
- Why does the poetess repeat the word "smile" at the end of the poem?

Level 3 – Challenging

- Analyze how the theme of fear of loss is developed through imagery in the poem.
- Discuss the role of movement in the poem and how it relates to the emotional journey of the poetess.
- How does the poem reflect universal human experiences related to ageing and separation?

Answer Key

Level 1 – Easy

- The speaker is the poetess herself, a daughter observing her mother.
- She compares her mother's face to that of a corpse, indicating frailty and approaching death.
- The main emotion is fear and sadness over her mother's ageing and the possibility of losing her.

Level 2 – Moderate

- The contrast highlights the difference between the vitality of youth and the frailty of old age, emphasizing the passage of time and the inevitability of ageing.
- Kamala Das uses similes (e.g., corpse, winter moon), personification (trees sprinting), and repetition (smile) to convey the mother's ageing and the poetess's emotions.
- The repetition of "smile" shows the poetess's effort to hide her pain and maintain composure despite her inner fear.

Level 3 – Challenging

- The imagery of the pale face, the corpse, and the winter moon evoke the fear of death and loss, making the theme vivid and relatable.
- Movement is both physical (car ride, airport) and emotional (acceptance, fear), symbolizing the journey towards separation and the passage of time.
- The poem reflects universal experiences by portraying the natural process of ageing, the emotional bond between parent and child, and the fear of inevitable separation.

Quick Reference

- **Theme:** Ageing, fear of loss, love, separation.
- **Form:** Free verse, first-person monologue.
- **Literary Devices:** Simile, personification, repetition, contrast.
- **Message:** Cherish loved ones; accept ageing and loss as part of life.

Glossary

- **Nostalgia:** A sentimental longing for the past.
- **Sensory:** Related to the senses.
- **Dozing off:** Falling asleep lightly or briefly.
- **Frigid:** Emotionally cold or unfeeling.

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