

My Mother at Sixty Six

(By -Kamala Das)

Introduction to the topic and details of the poet Kamala Das

- Kamala Surayya / Suraiyya formerly known as Kamala Das, (also was known as Kamala Madhavikutty, pen name was Madhavikutty)
- Deeply influenced by the writings of uncle Narayan Menon and mother NalapatBalamani Amma
- Kamala Das took to writing at an early age.
- Was a major Indian English poetess and litterateur and at the same time a leading Malayalam author from Kerala, India.
- Noted for the fiery poems and explicit autobiography.
- Kamala Das' writing is characterised by the rebellion against taboos that society imposes on women. Also, she explores the gamut of human relationships from the perspective of a women-a daughter, a wife, mother, and non-conformist feminist, works are known for their originality, versatility, and the indigenous flavour of the soil.

Theme:

- Fear of loss
- Haunting of Nostalgia
- Pain of separation
- Unparalleled Filial bonding between mother and daughter.
- Uncertainty of human life.
- Eulogy of a mother-child relationship
- Physical absence inducing a sense of loss
- Excitement over nostalgia

Characters

i) The Poetess:-Renowned Poetess

- Sahitya Academy Award winner
- celebrating the joy of human relations
- Understands her role and responsibility towards the elders like a mother

ii) Poetess' Mother:-

- Old, haggard, at the age of sixty-six
- Makes the daughter reflective over the past and on her relationship with mother

Putting the gist and the central idea of the poem:

My Mother at Sixty Six by Kamala Das is a moving poem. In this, she laments her mother's ageing and feels extremely sad at the time of her separation from her ageing mother at the airport. In the car, she notices that her mother had grown terribly old and that the two would not probably meet again. She compares her mother with the late winter's moon. She pretends to be happy to make her mother happy and departs with a heavy heart.

Stanza-wise explanation of the poem

Stanza 1

Driving from my parent's home to Cochin,
last Friday morning, I saw my mother beside me
Doze, open mouthed, her face ashen like that of a corpse.

Explanation:

- The poet was going to Cochin Airport with her aged mother.
- The mother was sleeping inside the car with her mouth open. Her face was colourless like that of a dead body. Seeing this appearance of her mother, the poetess was suddenly filled with a fear of separation and loss.
- The poet's mother was aged. At sixty-six it was hard to say how long she would live. Moreover, inside the car she was sleeping, her mouth held open and her skin so colourless like that of a dead body.

Stanza 2

And realized with pain that she was as old as
She looked but soon put that thought away
And looked at young trees sprinting,
The merry children spilling out of their homes.

Explanation:

- The poetess realized with pain that her mother had grown terribly old, a thought that she never had in her mind before.
- The realization, that the mother was approaching death, was painful to the poetess. The poetess was supposed to stay away from her mother for a long duration, far away. They might not even meet again.
- The poetess was thinking about a long separation from her aged mother. She even feared that the mother and daughter would not meet again. Suddenly she noticed that her mother had been reading her mind. In an attempt to disguise her line of thoughts, the poetess looked out of the car and pretended to be cheerful.
- The poetess saw cheerful life outside the car. Young trees were running backward in a lively mood and children playing around their houses which were contradicting to her mother's reality.
- The mother was sleeping inside the car with her mouth open. She was similar to a dead body. She was cheerless and approaching death. But outside the car was life in its freshness and vivacity. Young trees were running cheerfully. Children were playing and running merrily. This was a life-death contrast.

STANZA-3

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...

Explanation:

- The security check-in was completed. The daughter was left with a few seconds to see her aged mother. She turned back at the mother who stood a few feet away.
- The poetess now looks at the mother's aged face. The two words, wan and pale, well describe the mother's appearance.
- The late winter's moon is dim. It is always under the threat of dark clouds of fog and mist. Any moment the moon in the late winter can be hidden by these clouds. Similarly, the poetess's mother is approached by death. Any time she could be swept away by death.

Stanza 4

And felt that 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.

Explanation:

- In childhood, the poetess had to be separated from her mother innumerable times. It was quite painful for the poetess to be separated from her mother those days. She used to fear these occasions as she thought they would never meet again.
- The poetess was attempting to ease the situation by a long smile that meant consolation to her mother. She smiled with the expectation that her mother would translate it that the daughter was not worried about anything and therefore there was no need to worry about their union. They would definitely meet.
- The poetess was overcome by the intense pain of separation. She could not speak many words at that time. Controlling her overwhelming emotions she managed to bid her mother farewell. She had the least hope of meeting her mother again. Yet she struck a note of optimism by saying they that both would meet again soon.

POETIC DEVICES:-

Personification-trees sprinting

Simile- "Like a late winter's moon"

Imager-children spilling, her face ashen like that of a corpse, wan pale as a late winter's Moon.

Juxtaposition- Life outside the car and death inside the car.

Irony-see you soon Amma and her prolonged smile her ironical as they are a sharp contrast to the fear and agony which the poetess experiences.

Symbols-tree sprinting and merry children stand for youth, vigour vitality, life and growth. Winter's moon symbolic of frail health, decay and death

Repetition- "Smile and smile and smile."

Drilling of words

Beside-along with, Doze-nap, Ashen-pale, Corpse-dead body, Wan – pale, pallid, Late winter's moon – Dim moon shrouded by clouds, Ache – Pain, My childhood's fear – Fear of losing mother, Amma – Mother.

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Lesson Contents

- On her way back to Cochin, the poetess look at her mother.
- Finds her weak, lacking in energy and life.
- Her mother's ageing, decaying health and fear of losing her, cause the poetess much pain.

POETESS

Kamala Das

- Noted for the fiery poems and explicit autobiography.

Prominent works:

- Summer In Calcutta
- The Old Playhouse And Other Poems
- Alphabet of Lust

- In order to divert her mind from such negative thoughts, she starts looking outside.
- Finds the trees running, the young children spilling/rushing out of homes.
- The face of poetess' mother symbolises frailty, dullness, and inactivity whereas, merry children and young trees symbolise vigour, energy, zeal, and joy.

- Poetess' mother has lost her youthful look, vitality and charm like a late winter moon.
- At the airport while parting from her mother the poetess smiles and reassures her mother that all is well also she tries to hide her fear of losing/reparation from her mother.