

# My Mother at Sixty-Six

- Kamala Das ( Flamingo / Poetry )

## Poem - Verbatim (Part I)

" Driving from my parent's

home to Cochin last Friday

morning, I saw my mother,

beside me,

doze, open mouthed, her face

<- simile : ashen

ashen like that

<- like that of a corpse

of a corpse and realised, with

pain

that she was as old as she

looked but soon

put that thought away, and

<- imagery : trees

looked out at Young

<- sprint = mother slows

Trees sprinting, the merry children

spilling

Setting : drive to Cochin airport on a ~~Sun~~ Friday

Speaker : the daughter (poet), aged adult.

Form : free verse, one long sentence,

no rhyme, no fixed metre - flows like thought.

Punctuation does most of the ~~rythm~~ work.

## Poem - Verbatim (Part II)

out of their homes, but after the  
airport's

security check, standing a few yards

away, I looked again at her, wan, <- shift : car ->

pale

<- airport (parting)

as a late winter's moon and felt that simile : wan, pale

old

<- as a winter's moon

familiar ache, my childhood's fear,

but all I said was, see you soon,

Amma,

all I did was smile and smile and <- repetition -

smile ..... "

<- smile x 3

## Summary ( in one breath )

The poet drives her ageing mother to Cochin

airport. Mother dozes beside her - face pale,

ashen, like a corpse. With a pang the poet

feels her mother's old age & nearness of death.

To shut out the thought she turns to the world

outside - young trees, merry children :

symbols of youth & life. At the parting she

looks once more, feels the old ache, but only

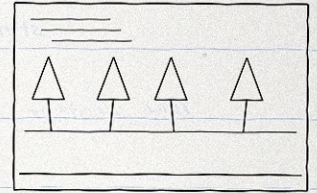
smiles - hiding her fear behind a smile.

## Themes

\*

### ① Mortality & fear of loss -

The mother's ashen face wakes the poet to the fact that her mother is mortal. The pain is not new - it is her ~~old~~ childhood's fear.



car window : trees sprint

### ② Mother - daughter bond -

Silent, deep, unsaid. Few words but heavy feeling. The drive itself is a metaphor for their shared journey through life.

### ③ Ageing - the cruel arithmetic of time

"old as she looked" - the poet has been absent; absence makes the change visible.

Outside the car : young trees, merry kids

- youth juxtaposed with mother's decay.

### ④ Denial vs Acceptance

Poet 'puts that thought away' - denial.

But the ache returns at parting - there is no escape. The triple smile is brave

acceptance + a mask to spare the mother: smile = shield

# Literary Devices

## (1) Simile

" her face ashen like that of a corpse "

Death is named directly - shocking, raw.

" wan, pale as a late winter's moon " - pallor

+ coldness + end-of-season = dying light.

## (2) Imagery + Juxtaposition

Inside car : ' doze ' , ' open mouthed ' ,

' ashen ' , ' wan, pale ' - fading mother.

Outside : ' sprinting ' trees , ' merry '

kids ' spilling out ' - bright, racing life.

The contrast is the poem's beating heart.

## (3) Personification

Trees ' sprint ' - given a human action

(running). It is really the car that moves ;

the device shows the poet's restless mind.

## (4) Repetition

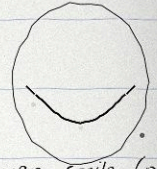
" all I did was ~~smile~~ smile and smile and smile

Triple ' smile ' - excess hides emotion ;

the smile is heavier than tears would have been.

## (5) Single-sentence Free Verse

The poem is ONE long sentence - no full stop till the end - mimics the unstoppable rush of memory + the highway drive. No rhyme, no fixed metre - pure inner voice.



wan smile (parting)

### Key Quotations (learn 3-4 \*)

"doze, open mouthed"

"her face ashen like that  
of a corpse"

<- use for theme : mortality

"Young Trees sprinting"

"merry children spilling out"

<- use for : juxtaposition

"wan, pale as a late winter's moon"

"my childhood's fear"

"see you soon, Amma"

<- use for : bond + mask

"all I did was smile and smile  
and smile"

\*

Tip : always cite the line ~~only~~ and the device used.

### Kamala Das (1934 - 2009)

Pen-name Madhavikutty (in Malayalam).

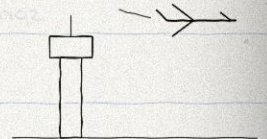
Pioneer of Indian English confessional poetry -

wrote frankly of love, the female body, faith,

loneliness. Won Sahitya Akademi Award (1985).

Major works : ' An Introduction ' , ' My Story ' (autobiography) , ' The Old Playhouse ' . Wrote in English + Malayalam. Voice : honest, raw, intimate - trademarks of confessional verse.

## \* Exam-pattern Points



Cochin airport

### Short Answer ( 30 - 40 words )

Q. Why does the poet look outside the car ?

A. To shake off the painful thought of her mother's nearness to death - the young trees & merry children stand for life, in contrast to her ageing mother.

### Long Answer ( 100 - 120 words )

Q. Comment on the use of similes in the poem.

Hints : ( i ) ashen / corpse - shocks the reader, names the fear plainly ;

( ii ) wan, pale, late winter's moon - coldness + end-of-cycle , a softer image ;

( iii ) both work together - prepare us for the brave triple smile at parting:

## Quick Revision

Poet : Kamala Das ( Madhavikutty ) ,  
confessional, Indian English poetry.

Form : Free verse - ONE sentence -  
no rhyme, no fixed metre.

Setting : drive to Cochin airport ,  
Friday morning + parting at gate.

Tone : tender , aching , restrained.

Mood : sad but brave - ends in a smile.

Theme(s) : mortality , ageing , bond ,  
denial vs acceptance.

Devices : simile , imagery , juxtaposition ,  
personification , repetition.

Symbols : trees / children = youth & life ;  
winter's moon = fading life.

Message : love your parents while they are  
with you - time is unkind.

\*

\*

S - M - J - P - R

mnemonic for the 5 main devices :  
Simile , Metaphor\* , Juxtaposition ,  
Personification , Repetition.

Remember : ' sixty-six ' - the age is the punch.