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Step-by-step solutions for the 2026-27 NCERT (Latest Edition)

Chapter 7: Flamingo Poetry: My Mother at Sixty-Six

About this Chapter

Kamala Das's free-verse poem captures a brief drive to Cochin airport, where the speaker notices her mother's ageing face: dozing, pale, mouth open. The thought of impending loss is held back by a cheerful goodbye. The poem turns on a single **simile** (*ashen like that of a corpse*), an **image of contrast** (sprinting young trees, merry children) and a quiet **juxtaposition** of age against vitality. By the end you should be able to read the poem as one long unspoken thought, identify each device, and explain how distance and **filial love** work together inside it.

Topics covered: Free verse • Simile • Imagery • Juxtaposition • Confessional voice • Filial love and mortality

Poet: Kamala Das (1934-2009)

Form: Free verse, one sentence, 14 lines

Setting: Drive to Cochin airport

Central simile:

her face ashen like that of a corpse

Closing line:

see you soon, Amma

Theme: Ageing, mortality, the pain of parting

Also see for this chapter: [Revision Notes](#)

Think it out

This page solves every NCERT **Think it out** question for *class 12 english ncert solutions chapter 7 Flamingo Poetry: My Mother at Sixty-Six* by Kamala Das. Each answer quotes the relevant lines from the poem, names the device at work, and explains it in the plain register of a Class 12 reader.

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 and realised with pain that she was as old as she looked but soon put that thought away, and looked out at Young Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling out of their homes, 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 and felt that old familiar ache, my childhood's fear, but all I said was, see you soon, Amma, all I said was, see you soon, Amma, all I said was, see you soon, Amma.

Q7.1 What is the kind of pain and ache that the poet feels?

SOLUTION

The poem hinges on a sudden, unwanted recognition: the speaker, sitting next to her dozing mother in a car, looks at her face and realises how old she has become. The **pain** here is not physical. It is the emotional ache a child feels at the thought of one day losing a parent: in literary terms it is the **fear of separation through mortality**, sharpened by the fact that the speaker is herself about to fly away.

📖 Reading hint

When Kamala Das uses the word *pain*, look for what triggers it in the lines immediately before. Here the trigger is the *ashen-corpse* simile: the pain is a response to her mother looking, for a moment, already gone.

- **Locate the trigger.** The pain begins the instant she turns to look at her mother:

*doze, open mouthed, her face
ashen like that
of a corpse and realised with
pain
that she was as old as she
looked. . .*

The simile *ashen like that of a corpse* is what produces the pain. The mother is alive but, in that half-light of sleep, looks dead.

- **Name the feeling precisely.** The poet feels the **pain of inevitable separation**: she sees, in her mother's pale sleeping face, a preview of the day her mother will no longer be there. It is the universal child's dread of a parent's death.
- **Track how the ache deepens later.** The ache returns with greater force at the airport security check, when she looks back at her mother:

*. . . wan, pale
as a late winter's moon and felt that old
familiar ache, my childhood's fear. . .*

The phrase *old familiar ache* tells us this is a recurring grief, and *my childhood's fear* tells us its root: a small child's terror of losing her mother, never fully outgrown.

- **Connect the two.** The pain in the car and the ache at the airport are the same emotion at two intensities. The sleeping face plants the seed; the parting moment makes it bloom.

Final Answer: The pain is the daughter's anguish at noticing how aged and death-like her mother looks; the *old familiar ache* is the lifelong, recurring fear, dating back to childhood, of one day losing her.

Exam Tip

For a 3-mark question, two short paragraphs are enough: one on the *ashen-corpse* pain in the car, one on the *late winter's moon* ache at the airport. Quote one phrase from each location.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : Ananya Banerjee, M.A. English Literature, Jadavpur University

Confessional reading. Kamala Das writes in the **confessional** tradition: the poem's *I* is the poet herself, not a persona. So the pain is autobiographical and very specific. It is the daughter-poet's terror of her mother becoming a corpse: a fear inseparable from the fact that she is, right then, about to leave her behind to board a flight.

The poem stages this fear in two camera angles:

- The car: closeup of the mother's face. The simile *ashen like that of a corpse* forces the reader to see a living parent and a dead body in the same image.
- The airport: a long shot, *standing a few yards away*. Distance turns the mother into a *late winter's moon*: cold, washed out, far. The ache that surfaces here is not new; it is the *old familiar* childhood fear of abandonment, returned with adult force.
- The pain in stanza one is **somatic dread**: a physical jolt of recognition that her mother's body is failing. The poet uses the bare word *pain* without modifiers because the simile carries the load.
- The ache in stanza two is **remembered dread**: the same childhood fear of losing the mother, now triggered by the imminence of parting at the airport.
- Both are forms of **anticipatory grief**: grieving a loss before it has happened. This is what makes the poem haunting: nothing has actually been lost yet.

The decision to keep these feelings inside one continuous unspoken thought (the poem is a single sentence) is what gives them their weight: the poet never lets us pause for breath.

Final Answer: The pain is the daughter's somatic shock at her mother's death-like face; the ache is the same fear, recalled from childhood, of losing her at the moment of parting.

Q7.2 Why are the young trees described as 'sprinting'?

SOLUTION

Personification is a figure of speech in which a non-human thing (an object, an animal, an idea) is given human qualities. **Visual imagery** is the picture a poem draws in the reader's mind through words. Kamala Das uses both together to set up a **contrast** between the still, ageing mother inside the car and the world rushing past outside.

- **Quote the line.** The phrase comes immediately after the speaker has noticed her mother's ashen face. To push that thought away she looks out of the window and sees:

... looked out at Young
Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling
out of their homes...

- **Whose movement is it really?** The trees are not actually running. The speaker is moving inside a fast car. From her seat, the roadside trees appear to streak past, as if they were sprinting backward. The verb *sprinting* belongs to a runner; the trees borrow it. That is personification.
- **What does the image add to the poem?** *Sprinting* carries youth, speed and energy. The trees are described as *Young*, with a capital Y, so the picture is of vigour: tall young plants racing past. This is the exact opposite of the dozing, pale, ageing mother sitting beside the poet.
- **Read the contrast.** Pair the image with the next one, *merry children spilling out of their homes*. Outside the car: youth, speed, joy. Inside the car: age, stillness, the threat of death. By describing the trees as sprinting, Kamala Das makes that contrast sharp without ever stating it directly.

📖 How to write this in the exam

A 3-mark answer should name the device (*personification*), explain the optical reason (poet's car is moving, trees seem to run) and state the contrast (sprinting youth outside vs ageing mother inside).

Final Answer: The trees are called *sprinting* because, from the moving car, they appear to race backwards past the window. The verb also personifies them as energetic young runners, contrasting their youth with the speaker's ageing mother dozing inside.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : Vivaan Iyer, M.A. English, University of Delhi

Picture-first. Read *Young Trees sprinting* as a single moving image: a young runner. The line works on three levels at once, and a good answer points to all three.

- **Optical level:** the trees are stationary; it is the observer who moves. Calling them *sprinting* catches the daughter's relative motion in a single verb.

- **Figurative level:** the verb personifies the trees as runners. Their capitalised name *Young Trees* is the cue that they are characters in their own right inside the poem.
- **Symbolic level:** sprinting young trees represent the rushing, energetic life outside, against which the ageing mother becomes more visibly old.
- Identify the device first: *personification*, with *visual imagery* doing the picture-work.
- Pin it to the camera: the speaker is in a moving car. From that frame the trees appear to run, the children appear to spill. The verbs are kinetic because the camera is kinetic.
- Read the device against the poem's emotional arc. The sprinting trees and merry children are what the poet looks at to *put that thought away*. They are her attempted cure for the corpse-image; their youthful movement is meant to drown out her mother's stillness.
- Note the failure of the cure. By the airport the ache comes back stronger: the world outside cannot, in the end, cancel the world inside the car.

Final Answer: *Sprinting* personifies the young trees as runners, captures the speaker's view from a moving car, and sets the energetic outside world against the ageing mother inside.

Q 7.3 Why has the poet brought in the image of the merry children spilling out of their homes?

SOLUTION

Juxtaposition is a literary device in which two contrasting images are placed side by side so that each makes the other stronger. Kamala Das puts the picture of *merry children spilling out of their homes* right next to the picture of her dozing, corpse-pale mother. The two images, set against each other, do all the emotional work the poem needs.

- **Quote the cluster.** The image appears in the same breath as the sprinting trees:

... looked out at Young
Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling
out of their homes. . .

It is part of what the poet looks at to break away from her thought of her mother as a corpse.

- **Identify the contrast.** The children are *merry* (happy), they *spill* (move out of confinement, in numbers, with energy), and they come from *their homes* (the place of childhood, safety, the start of life). All three words point to vitality and beginnings. The mother, by contrast, is silent, still, ashen, near the end of her life.

- **Read the symbolism.** Children stand for the **morning of life**; the ageing mother stands for its **evening**. Placing them next to each other reminds the reader (and the poet) that life moves from one to the other. The bright, noisy children make the silent mother look even quieter.
- **Connect with the speaker's mood.** The poet looks at the children because she wants to escape the pain of seeing her mother age. She tries to swap one picture for another. But because she has been thinking about death, the children do not just look happy: they also look like a reminder of the youth her mother no longer has.

✗ Common Mistake

Do not say the children are a symbol of the poet's own childhood. The poem does not say that. They are a symbol of *youthful energy in general*, set against the mother's age.

Final Answer: The merry children are placed in the poem to juxtapose youth against age. Their energy and joy make the mother's stillness and pallor stand out more sharply, and they hint at the cycle of life moving from childhood to old age.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : Pranav Sharma, M.A. English Literature, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Structural observation. Look at the poem as a single sentence with two visual zones: *inside the car* and *outside the car*. Kamala Das fills the inside with images of decline (doze, ashen, corpse, old) and the outside with images of beginnings (Young Trees, merry children, spilling). The merry children are not decoration: they are the loudest item in the *outside* list.

- The children are noisy and many: *spilling* suggests overflow, more children than the doorways can hold.
- The mother is silent and one: she dozes, alone, mouth open.
- Each makes the other more visible.
- The children stand for **the start of life**: full homes, bursting energy, the future ahead. They are not symbols of any specific child the poet knew.
- The mother stands for **the end of life**: a body already preparing for absence. The corpse-simile has already prepared the reader.
- Juxtaposing them creates **pathos**: the reader feels the speaker's sadness without the poet having to say *I am sad*.
- It also throws light on the speaker's own position: she is the middle generation, standing between the young children of the world and her ageing mother, watching both pass her by.

The image is therefore doing two jobs at once: it deepens the emotional contrast in the present moment, and it folds the poem into a wider statement about the cycle of life.

Final Answer: The merry children embody youthful vitality, sharply juxtaposed with the dozing, pale mother. The contrast deepens the ache of impending loss and folds the poem into a larger youth-versus-age, life-versus-death pattern.

Q 7.4 Why has the mother been compared to the late winter's moon?

SOLUTION

A **simile** is a comparison between two unlike things using *like* or *as*. Kamala Das uses two similes in this poem, and they bookend the central feeling. The first compares the mother's face to *a corpse*; the second compares her to *a late winter's moon*. To answer this question, you have to unpack what each word in *late winter's moon* adds.

- **Quote the line.** The image appears after the airport security check, when the poet looks back at her mother from a few yards away:
*... I looked again at her, wan, pale
as a late winter's moon. . .*
- **Unpack the adjective *wan*.** *Wan* means pale, weak, lacking colour. Applied to the mother, it tells us that her skin has lost its warm tone: age has drained the colour from her face.
- **Unpack a *late winter's moon*.** Each word in the phrase does work:
 - *Moon*: a moon shines by reflected light, not its own; it is not the bright, hot sun. It suggests a faint, borrowed glow.
 - *Winter's*: a winter moon is cold, distant, seen through cold air; the warmth of summer is gone.
 - *Late winter*: the very end of winter. The worst of the cold is over, but the new season has not yet begun. The light is at its weakest.

Stacking the three together gives a face that is pale, cold-looking, faint and at the close of its season.

- **Tie it back to the mother.** The mother is at the **late winter of her life**. Like a late winter's moon she still shines, but her light is faint, cold and nearly spent. The simile gently tells us she is near the end of life without using harsh words.
- **Compare with the earlier simile.** The *ashen-corpse* simile was a sudden shock at close range. The *late winter's moon* simile is a softer, more distant view from across the airport: same feeling, gentler image. Distance has changed the tone but not the truth.

Exam Tip

Always break the simile into its words in this kind of question. Marks are given for explaining *wan*, *moon*, *winter*, and *late* separately, not for a single vague sentence.

Final Answer: The mother is pale, weak and at the end of her life. Like a late winter's moon she still shines but with a faint, cold, borrowed light: the simile says, in soft language, that her life is nearly over.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : Aanya Verma, M.A. English Literature, University of Hyderabad

Quick reading. The *late winter's moon* simile is the poem's most carefully built image. Compare it to the earlier corpse-image and you can see Kamala Das easing the reader from raw shock toward gentle melancholy without softening the truth that her mother is dying.

- Corpse-simile: harsh, direct, daylight, indoor, closeup.
- Moon-simile: cool, oblique, twilight, outdoor, long shot.
- **Colour:** *wan*, *pale* matches a winter moon, which is not the warm yellow of a summer moon but a dim white. The mother's face has the same washed-out look.
- **Distance:** a moon is far. The poet is now *standing a few yards away*, past the security check. Both image and viewpoint have moved away.
- **Season:** *late winter* is the close of a cold season, when nothing is growing yet. The mother, at sixty-six, is in the corresponding stage of life: post-summer, pre-end.
- **Light:** a moon gives borrowed light. Old age, Kamala Das suggests, has the same quality: still present, but no longer the source of its own warmth.

The simile is doing a fourth job too. It universalises the moment. A moon is something every reader has seen. By comparing her mother to it, the poet pulls the reader into the same feeling: this is not just her mother but every ageing parent.

There is also a quiet **symbolism of light**. The moon in this poem is the daughter's emblem for her mother: the figure whose light guided her through childhood is now seen as faint and waning. A corpse is what the eye sees in panic; a late winter's moon is what the heart accepts in sorrow. The shift in distance, from *beside me* to *a few yards away*, has trained the speaker's gaze into a softer, sadder image.

Final Answer: *Late winter's moon* captures the mother's pallor, distance, end-of-season life-stage and faint, borrowed light: a gentle, universal way of saying she is near the end.

Q 7.5 What do the parting words of the poet and her smile signify?**SOLUTION**

Irony of action is when a character's outward behaviour says something different from what they feel inside. **Repetition** is the deliberate restating of the same words for emphasis. Kamala Das uses both at the end of the poem: the speaker, full of grief, hides it behind a smile and a repeated goodbye.

- **Quote the closing lines.** The poem ends with three identical lines:

*... but all I said was, see you soon, Amma,
all I said was, see you soon, Amma,
all I said was, see you soon, Amma.*

The smile is the conventional parting smile that an Indian daughter gives at the airport, paired here with the repeated cheerful words.

- **Unpack *see you soon, Amma*.** The words are deliberately ordinary and reassuring. *See you soon* promises return; *Amma*, the affectionate Malayalam word for mother, says *I love you* without using the word *love*. Together they form a cheerful, light-hearted farewell.
- **Read the gap between feeling and speech.** Inside, the speaker is full of the *old familiar ache* and *childhood's fear*. Outside, she gives only a smile and a soft goodbye. The smile and the words signify her **conscious effort** to hide her dread from her mother and to send her off without alarming her.
- **Read the repetition.** The same sentence is said three times. This is not because she actually spoke it three times in real life. It is poetic repetition that signals:
 - how badly she wants the parting to be a happy one;
 - how much she is having to push back the tears behind the words;
 - her **hope** that the goodbye is not the last.
- **State the signification clearly.** The smile and the parting words signify a brave, loving daughter masking her pain. They are also an act of **hope**, an attempt to will another meeting into being against the fear that this could be the last one.

♥ Why This Matters

The ending matters because it shows how love is often expressed through restraint, not declaration. The daughter spares her mother the weight of her grief and lets her board the flight with a smile.

Final Answer: The smile and the words *see you soon, Amma* signify the daughter's loving effort to hide her dread of losing her mother. The triple repetition turns the goodbye into a quiet act of hope, willing another meeting against the fear that this could be the last.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : *Ishita Nair, M.A. English, Christ University Bengaluru*

Strategic angle. The closing three lines work because of *contrast* and *repetition* together. Read them slowly and you can hear the difference between what the speaker felt and what she let her mother hear.

- **Contrast of inner and outer:** the inner state is *ache, fear*; the outer state is a smile and a casual *see you soon*. The gap is the whole point. The smile is a chosen mask, not a real mood.
- **Repetition as restraint:** the same sentence repeated three times signals strong feeling that is being held in. The speaker cannot trust herself with anything more; she falls back on the same safe phrase.
- **The choice of word *Amma*:** an intimate Malayalam term, kept untranslated, anchors the farewell in love. The poet does not say *Mother*; she says *Amma*: the word a small child uses.
- **The word *soon*:** this is a wish, not a certainty. The daughter is asking the future to be kind. The smile is the visible side of that same wish.

Read together with the poem's earlier *put that thought away*, the closing lines complete a pattern. The whole poem is about holding back: the speaker holds back the painful thought in the car, holds back the tears at the airport, holds back the words she would really like to say. The smile and the goodbye are the final, gentle version of that same restraint.

There is one more layer worth naming: **anticipatory grief**. The daughter is grieving a parting that has not yet hardened into loss. Saying *see you soon* three times gives that grief a shape she can carry through the flight: a promise to the future, a small ritual against fear. The poem opens with an image the daughter could not say out loud and closes with words she lets herself say in its place.

Final Answer: The smile and the parting words signify love expressed through restraint: the daughter masks her ache, repeats a cheerful goodbye three times to keep herself steady, and turns the farewell into a quiet act of hope for another meeting.

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Key Takeaways

- The poem is one long unspoken thought: a single 14-line sentence that mirrors the rush of a daughter's grief on a short drive to the airport.
- Kamala Das uses two key similes: *ashen like that of a corpse* (sudden, close-up shock) and *pale as a late winter's moon* (gentle, distant melancholy).

- *Young Trees sprinting* and *merry children spilling* personify the outside world to juxtapose its youthful vitality against the ageing mother inside the car.
- The closing repetition of *see you soon, Amma* signifies love expressed as restraint: a smile and a cheerful farewell hide the daughter's deep ache of impending loss.
- Read the poem in the **confessional** tradition: the speaker is the poet, the feelings are autobiographical, and the small parting becomes a meditation on filial love and mortality.

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End of Think it out