



Collegedunia NCERT Notes

Class 12 English Notes Chapter 7 Flamingo Poetry: My Mother at Sixty-Six

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

by Kamala Das

CBSE Class 12th English Core, Flamingo Reader, Poetry Section

Aligned to CBSE syllabus 2026-27

Also see for this chapter: [NCERT Solutions](#)

This revision guide unpacks Kamala Das's confessional free-verse poem My Mother at Sixty-Six for Class 12th Flamingo readers. Inside: the full poem text, a stanza-by-stanza explication, the central themes, the dominant literary devices, key quotations parsed for board examiners, a compact biography of Kamala Das, the CBSE exam-pattern question types you should expect, and a quick-revision summary you can read the night before the paper.

Contents

1 Introduction to the Poem and Its Poet	1
1.1 Why Class 12 Students Read This Poem	2
1.2 Quick Facts You Should Know	2
2 The Poem Text (Verbatim, with Attribution)	3
2.1 Full Text	3
2.2 How the Text Is Laid Out on the Page	3
3 Stanza-by-Stanza Summary and Explication	4
3.1 Unit 1: The Drive Begins (lines 1-4)	4
3.2 Unit 2: The Ashen-Corpse Realisation (lines 5-8)	5

3.3	Unit 3: Looking Away to the Young Trees and Children (lines 8-13) . . .	5
3.4	Unit 4: The Smile and the Threefold Goodbye (lines 13-end)	6
3.5	One-Paragraph Summary for Revision	6
4	Central Themes	7
4.1	Theme 1: The Ageing of a Parent and Filial Anxiety	7
4.2	Theme 2: The Mother-Daughter Bond	7
4.3	Theme 3: Denial vs Acceptance	7
4.4	Theme 4: The Transient versus the Enduring	8
4.5	Theme 5: The Private Wound Behind the Public Smile	8
5	Literary Devices in the Poem	9
5.1	Simile	9
5.2	Imagery	9
5.3	Juxtaposition (the Central Device)	9
5.4	Single-Sentence Form (Syntactic Device)	10
5.5	Repetition	10
5.6	Enjambment	11
5.7	Symbolism	11
5.8	Personification	11
6	Key Quotations Parsed for Board-Paper Use	11
6.1	Quotation 1: The Drive Opens	11
6.2	Quotation 2: The Ashen-Corpse Simile	12
6.3	Quotation 3: “with / pain”	12
6.4	Quotation 4: Young Trees Sprinting	12
6.5	Quotation 5: Pale as a Late Winter’s Moon	12
6.6	Quotation 6: That Old Familiar Ache	12
6.7	Quotation 7: The Threefold Goodbye	13
7	Background and Context: Kamala Das	13
7.1	Who Was Kamala Das?	13
7.2	Kamala Das as a Confessional-Poetry Pioneer	14
7.3	Indian English Poetry: A Bigger Picture	14
7.4	Why This Particular Poem	15

8 Board-Exam Pattern Points	15
8.1 Where the Poem Appears in the Paper	15
8.2 Typical Question Stems	15
8.3 Model Answer Skeleton: Short Answer (3 marks)	16
8.4 Model Answer Skeleton: Long Answer (5-6 marks)	16
8.5 Comparison Questions	16
9 Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them	17
9.1 Mistake 1: Treating the Poem as Pure Mourning	17
9.2 Mistake 2: Listing Devices Without Effect	17
9.3 Mistake 3: Missing the Single-Sentence Form	18
9.4 Mistake 4: Misquoting “Amma”	18
9.5 Mistake 5: Forgetting the Speaker Is Driving	18
10 Quick Revision Summary	18
10.1 The Poem in One Line	18
10.2 Spinal Facts	19
10.3 Themes in One Sentence Each	19
10.4 Devices in One Sentence Each	19
10.5 Last-Minute Triad to Memorise	19

1 Introduction to the Poem and Its Poet

My Mother at Sixty-Six is a short, twelve-line confessional poem by the Indian English poet Kamala Das, anthologised as the opening poem of the Poetry section of the Class 12 NCERT *Flamingo* textbook. Although the poem runs as a single grammatical sentence and contains no full stop until the very end, it carries the emotional weight of an entire psychological journey: a daughter, driving her ageing mother to the airport in Cochin, suddenly notices the woman’s faded, almost corpse-like face, looks away to shake off her dread, forces a smile at parting, and drives off with the ache of separation still humming inside her. The poem became a staple of Indian school syllabi because it dramatises something every adolescent will face, the slow ageing of a parent, in language that is plain, urgent and quietly heartbreaking.

1.1 Why Class 12 Students Read This Poem

The CBSE Class 12 English (Core) syllabus uses the Poetry section of *Flamingo* to introduce students to a spread of voices: Kamala Das (India), Stephen Spender (England), Pablo Neruda (Chile), Adrienne Rich (USA), Keki N. Daruwalla and John Keats. Kamala Das is positioned first because her poem is short, accessible at the surface, and yet opens up a deep emotional register that the board paper rewards students for analysing. For a board exam point of view, the poem appears in the Reading-comprehension extract section, in the Short Answer Type questions, and occasionally as part of a thematic Long Answer Type question on relationships, love or loss.

Why This Poem Matters in Class 12

- It is a **confessional poem**, that is, a poem rooted in the poet's own life and feelings. Kamala Das pioneered this mode in Indian English poetry.
- It is written in **free verse**, breaking the line wherever the breath of feeling demands, with no rhyme scheme and no fixed meter.
- It is built as a **single sentence**, mirroring the uninterrupted rush of the speaker's thoughts during a car ride.
- It pairs two contrasting outdoor images, sprinting young trees and merry children, with the still, pale face of the dozing mother inside the car, generating its central emotional tension.

1.2 Quick Facts You Should Know

Before reading the poem, lock in these facts. The board paper often opens an extract-based question with one of them.

Poet Kamala Das (1934-2009)	Poem My Mother at Sixty-Six	Form Free verse, single sentence, 12 lines
Setting Car ride to Cochin airport	Central image Mother's ashen, corpse-like face	Tone Tender, anxious, quietly accepting

Board-Paper Hook

If an extract-based question opens with "*Driving from my parent's home to Cochin last Friday morning...*", identify (a) the poet, (b) the title, (c) the source textbook (*Flamingo*), and (d) the speaker's destination (Cochin airport). Most 1-mark openings are testing exactly these four facts.

2 The Poem Text (Verbatim, with Attribution)

This section reproduces the poem in the exact line-break sequence used in the NCERT *Flamingo* reader so that you can lift quotations directly into board-paper answers without losing the original cadence. The poem is reproduced for educational purposes; the work is by Kamala Das, originally published in her 1965 collection *Summer in Calcutta* and anthologised in the NCERT Class 12 English Core textbook *Flamingo* (Reprint 2026-27).

2.1 Full Text

Poem: My Mother at Sixty-Six, by Kamala Das

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.

2.2 How the Text Is Laid Out on the Page

Notice five textual choices Kamala Das makes that the board paper loves to ask about.

- **No full stops in the body of the poem.** The first sentence-ending punctuation is at the very end, after the third “Amma”.
- **Line breaks fall mid-phrase.** “my parent's / home” and “with / pain” both split across a line. The pause forces the reader's breath to hesitate, exactly like the speaker hesitating to let the painful thought settle.
- **Capital letters** on “Young Trees”. Treating the trees almost as a proper noun

lifts them into a symbol, not just scenery.

- **Repetition** of the last line three times. The threefold “all I said was, see you soon, Amma” both ends the poem and prolongs the parting.
- **The word “Amma”**, the Malayalam word for mother, is the poem’s only non-English word. It marks the speaker as South Indian and makes the final line intimate, not formal.

Do Not Mistitle the Poem

The correct spelling is *My Mother at Sixty-Six* (hyphenated). Some students write “Sixty Six” or “66”. The board paper marks the hyphenated form as the canonical title.

3 Stanza-by-Stanza Summary and Explication

The poem is not divided into formal stanzas; it is a single twelve-line verse-paragraph. For analysis it splits naturally into four emotional units. This section walks each unit, explaining what is literally happening, what the speaker is feeling, and which line-level details carry the meaning.

3.1 Unit 1: The Drive Begins (lines 1-4)

Lines: *Driving from my parent’s / home to Cochin last Friday / morning, I saw my mother, / beside me,*

The opening situates the poem in a precise time and place: a Friday morning, after a visit home, in a car heading to Cochin (Kochi), Kerala. The speaker is the driver; her mother is in the passenger seat. “Parent’s” (singular possessive) suggests that the speaker’s father is no longer alive, or that the home is, in the speaker’s memory, primarily her mother’s. The mood is ordinary, almost mundane, until the speaker turns her head.

Unit 1 Explication: The Setting

What is happening: The poet-speaker has visited her mother and is driving her back to Cochin airport.

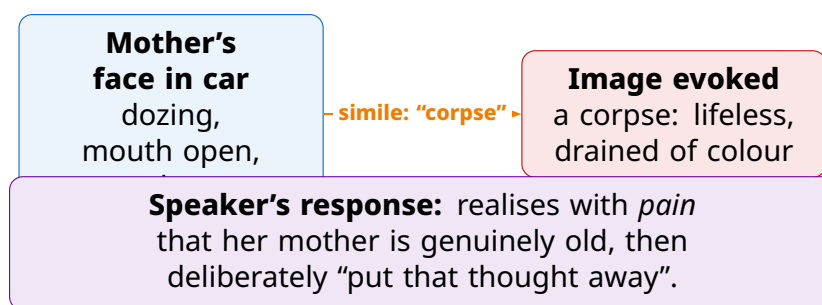
What we learn about the speaker: She is an adult daughter who can drive, who lives away from her parental home, and who has just spent a short visit with her mother.

Why the location matters: “Cochin” anchors the poem in South India. The mother will board a flight; the daughter will not. Geographic distance about to widen is built into the very first lines.

3.2 Unit 2: The Ashen-Corpse Realisation (lines 5-8)

Lines: *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*

The mother is dozing with her mouth open, the pose of someone whose muscles have lost their daytime tension. The speaker compares her mother's face to a corpse: "ashen" (grey, drained of colour) "like that of a corpse." The simile is shocking because it is the speaker's own mother, and because she has clearly not registered the ageing until this moment. The line break "with / pain" isolates the word *pain* on a line of its own, the typographic equivalent of a stab. "Realised with pain that she was as old as she looked" is the poem's hinge: the speaker has been carrying a younger image of her mother in her head, and the real, present face has just collided with that memory.



The Ashen-Corpse Simile

A *simile* is a comparison using "like" or "as." Here Kamala Das writes "her face / ashen like that / of a corpse." The comparison brings death into the very same sentence as the living mother. The shock of the comparison is doing the emotional work; the words themselves are plain.

3.3 Unit 3: Looking Away to the Young Trees and Children (lines 8-13)

Lines: *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,*

The speaker tries to escape the painful thought by turning her gaze out of the car window. What she sees is the visual opposite of her dozing mother: *Young Trees sprinting* (as the car moves, the trees appear to race past) and *merry children spilling out of their homes*. Trees that "sprint" and children who "spill" are both verbs of motion, energy and youth, juxtaposed against the still, silent, ageing mother inside the car. The juxtaposition is the poem's central technique. The denial doesn't last: after the airport security check, when the speaker is standing on the public-area side and her mother is on the boarding side, she "looked again at her."

Unit 3 Explication: The Juxtaposition

Inside the car: the mother, still, ashen, ageing, silent.

Outside the car: young trees sprinting, children spilling out of homes, motion, noise, life.

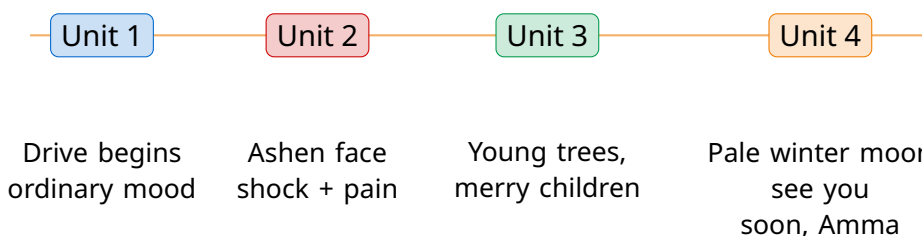
Effect on the reader: The contrast is so direct that the mother's stillness feels heavier. Youth is what the mother is losing; that loss is happening even as the car passes through scenes of abundant youth.

3.4 Unit 4: The Smile and the Threefold Goodbye (lines 13-end)

Lines: *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.*

After security, the speaker sees her mother again: now *wan* and *pale as a late winter's moon*. A late-winter moon is faint, washed-out, almost lost in the morning sky, the visual equivalent of a woman whose vitality is fading. The speaker names her feeling directly: "that old familiar ache, my childhood's fear." The "childhood's fear" is the fear every child has of losing a parent, the fear of separation. But the speaker does not say any of this aloud. "All I said was, see you soon, Amma." She offers a smile and a casual goodbye. The line is then repeated three times, suggesting that the smile is forced, that the words have to be said over and over to hold back tears, and that the parting is being prolonged in the speaker's head even as the mother walks away.

Emotional Arc of the Poem



The Three-Image Triad

Remember the poem through three visual snapshots, in order:

- 1. Ashen face** (the mother dozing, corpse-like)
- 2. Sprinting trees** (children spilling, the youth outside)
- 3. Final smile** (*see you soon, Amma*, repeated three times)

If you can describe these three images in order, you have the whole poem.

3.5 One-Paragraph Summary for Revision

The poet-speaker is driving her sixty-six-year-old mother from her parental home to Cochin airport on a Friday morning. As she glances across, she sees her mother dozing, mouth open, with a face as pale and grey as a corpse, and a wave of pain

hits her: her mother really is old. To push the thought away, she looks out of the window at sprinting young trees and merry children. At the airport, after security check, she looks once more at her mother, who now appears wan and pale as a late winter's moon. The old fear of childhood, of losing her mother, returns. But she says only one thing, three times over: *see you soon, Amma*. The poem is a private goodbye made public.

4 Central Themes

This section unpacks the five major themes the CBSE board paper most often tests on *My Mother at Sixty-Six*. For Long Answer questions, your introduction should name the theme and your body paragraphs should anchor it to specific lines.

4.1 Theme 1: The Ageing of a Parent and Filial Anxiety

The first and most obvious theme is the ageing of the speaker's mother. The speaker is not new to her mother's face; what is new is that she now *registers* the ageing. The mother is sixty-six, the daughter is a working adult, and the moment of recognition is also a moment of dread, because ageing pulls a parent closer to death. "Filial" simply means "of a son or a daughter"; filial anxiety is the daughter's fear for her mother. The fear is named explicitly as "my childhood's fear", the same fear she has carried since she was small.

Theme 1: Ageing and Filial Anxiety

Where it appears: Lines 5-8 (the corpse simile), and lines 13-15 ("wan, pale / as a late winter's moon...that old / familiar ache, my childhood's fear").

Key insight: Ageing is not new; the daughter's *awareness* of ageing is what the poem dramatises. The same mother she has seen for years suddenly looks her actual age.

4.2 Theme 2: The Mother-Daughter Bond

Below the ageing is the unbroken bond between the daughter and her mother. The speaker uses the Malayalam word *Amma*, not a distancing English "mother." She drives her own mother to the airport, an intimate, caregiving act. The ache she feels is private, not performative. The bond is not declared; it is shown through the fact that the speaker is the one driving, the one looking, the one saying goodbye three times.

4.3 Theme 3: Denial vs Acceptance

The poem moves through a brief but visible psychological sequence: recognition ("her face / ashen like that / of a corpse"), denial ("put that thought away"), distraction ("Young Trees sprinting"), and finally acceptance ("that old / familiar ache, my

childhood's fear"). The speaker does not deny her mother's ageing forever; she returns to it, names her ache, and then, instead of weeping or grieving, smiles and says the casual "see you soon." The acceptance is wry, not bitter: she keeps going. This nuance is critical for the Common Mistake below.

The Single Biggest Misreading

The poem is **not** a purely mournful elegy for a dying mother. The mother is not dying in the poem; she is sixty-six, dozing in a car, getting on a flight. The poem captures a moment of *seeing* the ageing, not the ageing itself. The closing tone is one of **wry, contained acceptance**: the daughter masks her pain behind a casual smile and a three-times-repeated "see you soon, Amma." Calling the poem "purely sad" or "a poem about death" will cost you marks; the tone has both ache and acceptance.

4.4 Theme 4: The Transient versus the Enduring

The poem is built around the tension between things that change and things that do not. The mother's body is transient: she is ageing, fading, becoming corpse-like in the speaker's anxious imagination. The young trees and merry children are also transient, but in the opposite direction: they will keep growing, keep replacing the generation before. Set against both is the speaker's love for her mother, which is enduring, and her childhood's fear, which has lasted into adulthood. The poem says, in effect, bodies pass through stages, but a daughter's fear of losing her mother stays still.

4.5 Theme 5: The Private Wound Behind the Public Smile

A theme the senior board often spots: there is a wide gap between what the speaker feels and what she says aloud. Inside, she carries "that old / familiar ache, my childhood's fear"; outside, "all I said was, see you soon, Amma." This gap, between private interior life and public surface composure, is a common life experience for adult women in particular, who are often expected to hold things together at airports, hospitals and other partings. The poem validates that gap; it lets the reader inside the silent ache while the world only hears the cheerful goodbye.

Why This Poem Speaks to Indian Readers

In Indian English literature, family farewells at airports are an ordinary, recurring scene: parents seeing children off to college or abroad, adult children sending elderly parents back home after a visit. Kamala Das was one of the first Indian English poets to put this entirely domestic, entirely female experience into a serious poem and treat it as worthy of the same craft as Tennyson or Eliot. This is part of why she is read in Class 12.

5 Literary Devices in the Poem

The CBSE Class 12 paper repeatedly asks students to identify and explain literary devices. *My Mother at Sixty-Six* packs a lot of devices into twelve lines. This section names every device the poem uses, anchors it to the exact words in the poem, and explains the effect it produces.

5.1 Simile

A simile is an explicit comparison between two unlike things using *like* or *as*. The poem contains two crucial similes.

The Two Similes

Simile 1: “her face / ashen like that / of a corpse”

Effect: brings death into the same line as the living mother. Shocks the speaker (and the reader) into registering the mother’s mortality.

Simile 2: “wan, pale / as a late winter’s moon”

Effect: the late-winter moon is faint, washed-out, on the way out of the sky. Comparing the mother to such a moon makes her seem like something that is gently disappearing.

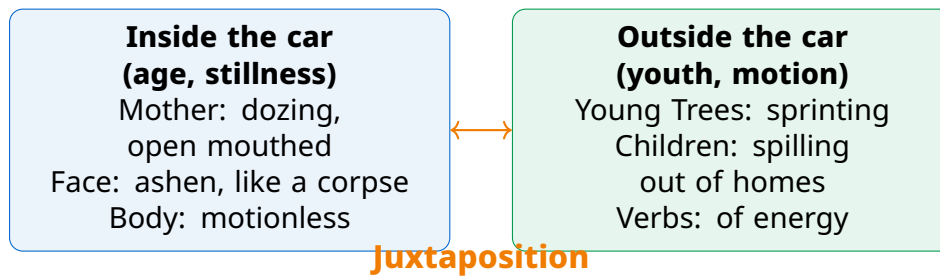
5.2 Imagery

Imagery is the poem’s use of sense-based detail, things the reader can see, hear, feel. *My Mother at Sixty-Six* is built almost entirely from visual images.

- **Visual imagery (mother):** dozing, open-mouthed, ashen face, wan and pale, like a corpse, like a late winter’s moon.
- **Visual imagery (outside):** Young Trees sprinting, merry children spilling out of their homes, the airport security check, the speaker standing a few yards away.
- **Auditory imagery (implied):** the silence of the car, the speaker’s own goodbye repeated three times.

5.3 Juxtaposition (the Central Device)

Juxtaposition is the placing of two contrasting images side by side so that each makes the other more vivid. This is the engine of the poem.

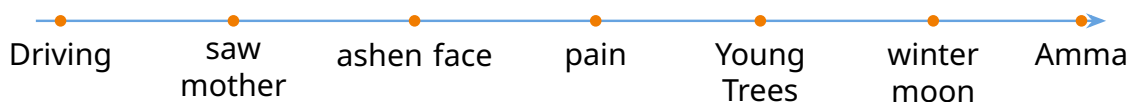


5.4 Single-Sentence Form (Syntactic Device)

The whole poem is one sentence. There are commas, line breaks, even a section break implied by the airport security check, but the sentence does not stop. This is a syntactic choice; “syntax” means the way the sentence is built.

No full stop until the very last word. Commas only. Line breaks fall mid-phrase.

One unbroken sentence: from “Driving” to the third “Amma.”



Effect of the Single-Sentence Form

A single sentence with no full stop has three effects:

1. **Mirrors the rush of thought.** The speaker’s mind is in continuous motion during the drive; the poem refuses to break rhythm.
2. **Refuses closure.** Without a full stop, the emotion is not packaged, not concluded. The ache stays open even after the poem ends.
3. **Compresses time.** The drive, the airport, the goodbye, all happen inside one breath.

5.5 Repetition

The final line is repeated three times: “all I said was, see you soon, Amma.” Repetition in poetry can do many things; here it does three at once.

- It **stretches the parting**, making the goodbye last longer than it would in a single saying.
- It **insists on a contrast**: *all* she said was this casual line, when so much more was going on inside.
- It **rings like a heartbeat**, a steady pulse holding the reader, like the speaker, from breaking down.

5.6 Enjambment

Enjambment is the running-on of a sentence past a line break without punctuation. Almost every line of the poem is enjambed. The most famous example is the isolation of the word *pain* on its own line: “realised with / pain”. The line break drops the reader straight onto the word that holds the poem’s central feeling.

5.7 Symbolism

A symbol is an image that stands in for an idea larger than itself.

Three Symbols in the Poem

1. **Late winter’s moon** = the ageing mother, faint, fading, near the edge of disappearing.
2. **Young Trees sprinting** = the energy of youth, contrasted with the still mother.
3. **Airport security check** = the literal point of separation, and the physical line beyond which the speaker cannot go.

5.8 Personification

Personification is the attribution of human qualities to non-human things. The Young Trees *sprint*, a verb of human running, and the children *spill*, a verb usually used of liquids. Both lift the outside world into a state of bursting, restless motion.

Naming Devices in the Board Paper

When a 1- or 2-mark question asks you to identify a device, give the **name** of the device, the **exact words** that contain it, and the **effect**. A three-step answer wins full marks even in 1 mark questions: *Device + Quote + Effect*.

6 Key Quotations Parsed for Board-Paper Use

This section gives you a working bank of quotations from the poem, each one paired with the question it can answer, the device it illustrates, and a one-line gloss. Treat this as your last-minute revision toolkit.

6.1 Quotation 1: The Drive Opens

Quotation: “Driving from my parent’s / home to Cochin last Friday / morning, I saw my mother, / beside me”

Use it to answer: setting questions, opening-line questions, “Where is the speaker?” type prompts.

Device: narrative opening; the use of singular “parent’s” hints that the father is

absent.

Gloss: The drive is from the parental home to Cochin airport; the mother is in the passenger seat.

6.2 Quotation 2: The Ashen-Corpse Simile

Quotation: “her face / ashen like that / of a corpse”

Use it to answer: questions on similes, on the speaker’s shock, on imagery of death, on the central image of the poem.

Device: simile (“like that of a corpse”).

Gloss: The dozing mother’s face is so drained of colour that the speaker compares it to a dead body. The shock of this comparison is the poem’s emotional hinge.

6.3 Quotation 3: “with / pain”

Quotation: “realised with / pain / that she was as old as she / looked”

Use it to answer: enjambment questions, questions on the speaker’s emotion, questions on the moment of realisation.

Device: enjambment isolating the word *pain*.

Gloss: The line break drops the reader on the single word that holds the speaker’s feeling. The realisation is that the mother really is her age.

6.4 Quotation 4: Young Trees Sprinting

Quotation: “looked out at Young / Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling / out of their homes”

Use it to answer: juxtaposition, personification, imagery of youth, why the speaker looks out of the window.

Device: juxtaposition (with the dozing mother) and personification (trees sprinting, children spilling).

Gloss: The speaker turns her gaze outward to escape the painful inside-the-car thought; what she sees is the visual opposite of her mother.

6.5 Quotation 5: Pale as a Late Winter’s Moon

Quotation: “wan, pale / as a late winter’s moon”

Use it to answer: simile questions, symbolism questions, final-image questions.

Device: simile + symbol (late winter’s moon = fading life).

Gloss: A late-winter moon is faint and on the way out of the sky; the speaker is hinting, gently, that her mother is in the later season of her life.

6.6 Quotation 6: That Old Familiar Ache

Quotation: “felt that old / familiar ache, my childhood’s fear”

Use it to answer: theme questions on filial love, on childhood fear, on emotional continuity.

Device: reference to interior emotion; the word *old* + *familiar* signals that this fear has lived inside her for years.

Gloss: The fear of losing her mother is the same fear she had as a child; it has never gone away.

6.7 Quotation 7: The Threefold Goodbye

Quotation: “all I said was, see you soon, Amma, / all I said was, see you soon, Amma, / all I said was, see you soon, Amma.”

Use it to answer: questions on repetition, on the gap between feeling and speech, on tone, on the use of the word *Amma*.

Device: threefold repetition; code-switching to Malayalam.

Gloss: The casual goodbye masks an intense interior ache. The repetition prolongs the parting and turns a simple sentence into the poem’s emotional climax.

Quotation Memorisation Trick

Memorise these seven quotations in order. They map exactly onto the seven points of any well-structured Long Answer essay on this poem.

Cheat-sheet of devices in this poem

Device	Quotation	Effect
Simile	<i>ashen like that of a corpse</i>	shock of mortality
Simile	<i>pale as a late winter’s moon</i>	fading life
Juxtaposition	dozing mother vs sprinting trees	age vs youth
Enjambment	<i>realised with / pain</i>	isolates the feeling
Repetition	<i>see you soon, Amma</i> ×3	prolongs goodbye
Personification	<i>trees sprinting, children spilling</i>	motion outside
Symbol	<i>late winter’s moon</i>	ageing mother

7 Background and Context: Kamala Das

A board-paper question on the poem will often ask about Kamala Das or about the literary tradition she belongs to. This section gives you the biographical and literary background, the bare facts you can drop into a question on the poet, and the broader context of Indian English poetry.

7.1 Who Was Kamala Das?

Kamala Das (1934-2009) was one of the most important Indian English poets of the twentieth century. She was born Madhavikutty in Punnayurkulam, in present-day Kerala, and wrote in both English (as Kamala Das) and Malayalam (as Mad-

havigutty). She published her first collection of poems in English, *Summer in Calcutta*, in 1965, and *My Mother at Sixty-Six* comes out of that early body of work. In 1999 she converted to Islam and took the name Kamala Surayya. She died in 2009.

Quick Bio: Kamala Das

- **Born:** 31 March 1934, Punnayurkulam, Kerala.
- **Died:** 31 May 2009, Pune.
- **Languages:** English (poetry) and Malayalam (prose).
- **Pen name in Malayalam:** Madhavigutty.
- **First English collection:** *Summer in Calcutta* (1965).
- **Other major works:** *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), and the autobiography *My Story* (1976).
- **Honours:** PEN Asian Poetry Prize, Sahitya Akademi Award, Kent Award for English Writing from Asian Countries.

7.2 Kamala Das as a Confessional-Poetry Pioneer

The confessional school of poetry began in mid-twentieth-century America with poets like Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Confessional poetry treats the poet's own life, body, family and private emotion as legitimate poetic material. Kamala Das was the first Indian English poet to write in this mode at sustained book length. She wrote about womanhood, marriage, desire, motherhood, loss and ageing in plain, unguarded language at a time when Indian poetry in English was still largely formal and impersonal.

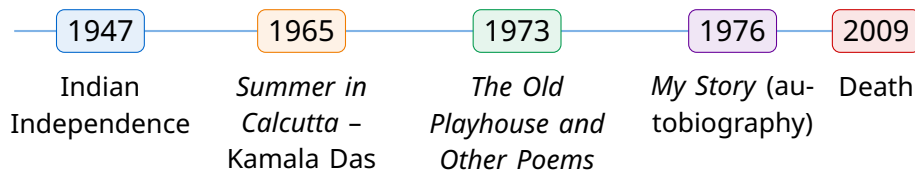
Why Confessional Poetry Was a Big Deal in India

Before Kamala Das, Indian English poetry tended to imitate English Victorian or modernist verse, with formal diction and impersonal subject matter. By writing openly about her own marriage, body and feelings, she opened the way for later Indian poets to write about private life in a serious literary register. *My Mother at Sixty-Six* is a quieter, family-focused example of the same confessional voice she made famous in love poems.

7.3 Indian English Poetry: A Bigger Picture

Indian English poetry, the body of poetry written by Indian poets in English, became a serious literary movement in the mid-twentieth century with poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, A. K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra and Keki N. Daruwalla (whose poem *The Trees* appears later in *Flamingo*). These poets wrote in English but anchored their work in Indian places, voices and domestic life. Kamala Das's use of the Malayalam word *Amma* inside an English poem is a small but important example of this anchoring.

Kamala Das: a brief timeline



7.4 Why This Particular Poem

Kamala Das's most famous poems are about love and the body. *My Mother at Sixty-Six* is unusual within her work because it is about the body of someone else, her mother, and because the emotion is filial rather than romantic. Yet it has the same Kamala Das voice: plain, urgent, private, refusing to dress up feeling in formal diction. This is why CBSE chose it for Class 12: short enough to teach in two periods, deep enough to test in many ways, and representative of an important Indian English voice.

8 Board-Exam Pattern Points

This section maps the poem onto the actual structure of the CBSE Class 12 English (Core) board paper so that you know exactly what to expect and how to answer.

8.1 Where the Poem Appears in the Paper

The poem can be tested in any of three sections.

- **Section B (Reading, Literature):** extract-based questions of 1 mark each, drawn from any six lines of the poem. Typical ask: identify poet, identify device, gloss the line, explain a single word.
- **Short Answer Type questions (3-4 marks):** 40-50 word responses on a single aspect, a single device, a single image, the poet's feeling at a particular moment.
- **Long Answer Type questions (5-6 marks):** 120-150 word responses on a theme, comparison with another poem, or the overall structure of the poem.

8.2 Typical Question Stems

The board paper recycles a small set of question patterns. Memorise these stems and you will recognise the question type instantly.

Recurring Question Stems for This Poem

- "What is the kind of pain and ache that the poet feels?"
- "Why has the mother been compared to the late winter's moon?"

- “Why does the poet look at her mother’s face? What does she realise?”
- “What does the parting words of the poet suggest to her mother?”
- “Why does Kamala Das keep repeating the words “see you soon, Amma”? What does the repetition signify?”
- “Identify and explain the literary devices used in the poem.”
- “Bring out the contrast between the mother and the world outside the car.”

8.3 Model Answer Skeleton: Short Answer (3 marks)

Question: Why has the mother been compared to a “late winter’s moon”?

Model answer (40-50 words): A late winter’s moon is dim, pale, lifeless and fading from the sky as morning approaches. The poet compares her sixty-six-year-old mother to such a moon because her mother’s face is wan, drained of vitality, and seems to be in the last phase of her life. The simile gently suggests approaching mortality without being morbid.

8.4 Model Answer Skeleton: Long Answer (5-6 marks)

Question: The poem moves through pain, denial and acceptance. Discuss with reference to the text.

Model answer outline:

1. **Opening (2 sentences):** Name the poem, the poet, the central situation (the drive to Cochin airport). State that the poem traces a brief psychological arc.
2. **Pain (lines 5-8):** The corpse simile, the isolated word *pain*, the realisation that the mother is genuinely old.
3. **Denial (lines 8-13):** The speaker “put that thought away,” looks out at Young Trees sprinting and merry children, a visual escape route.
4. **Acceptance (lines 13-end):** The second look, the late-winter-moon simile, the naming of the old ache, the smile, the threefold “see you soon, Amma.”
5. **Closing (2 sentences):** The acceptance is not joyous; it is wry and quiet. The poem ends with the daughter holding her pain inside while letting her mother go.

8.5 Comparison Questions

The paper sometimes asks students to compare *My Mother at Sixty-Six* with another poem on family, ageing or separation. Plausible comparison anchors: Robert Frost’s *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* (parting, restraint), or, within Flamingo, the classroom poem by Stephen Spender (a different kind of social and emotional gap). For comparison answers, do not just describe both poems separately; pick one shared theme or one shared device, and write paragraph-by-

paragraph in parallel.

Marking-Scheme Notes That Past Years Reveal

CBSE marking schemes for this poem have consistently rewarded students for: (i) naming the device by its correct technical name, (ii) quoting at least one short phrase from the poem, (iii) writing inside the word limit, (iv) using the present tense for analysis (“the speaker realises”, not “the speaker realised”). The mark scheme penalises retelling the story line by line; analysis beats narration.

Word-Limit Discipline

3-mark answers: aim for 40-50 words.

5-mark answers: aim for 120-150 words.

Going over the word limit costs you marks because the answer becomes narration rather than analysis.

[Download the Full NCERT Solutions for Flamingo Chapter 7](#)

9 Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

A short section that names the errors examiners flag most often when they mark answers on this poem.

9.1 Mistake 1: Treating the Poem as Pure Mourning

The single most common mistake, already flagged above. The poem contains pain, but it is not an elegy and the mother is not dying. Read the threefold goodbye as a held, smiled-through ache, not a funeral.

Tone Misreading

Do not write “the poet is grieving for her dead mother.” The mother is alive, dozing, getting on a plane. The poet is anxious about her mother’s ageing, not mourning her death.

9.2 Mistake 2: Listing Devices Without Effect

Many students name the device but forget to explain what it does in this particular poem. “There is a simile” is a 0-mark sentence; “the simile of the late winter’s moon makes the mother feel like something gently disappearing from the sky, which is the poet’s private fear” wins the mark.

9.3 Mistake 3: Missing the Single-Sentence Form

Students often write about the line breaks but forget that the whole poem is one sentence. Naming the syntactic form is a high-value observation in any structure question.

Quote the Single-Sentence Form

When writing about structure, always mention that the poem is built as one unbroken sentence with no full stop until the very end. This is a defining structural feature and is often the key to a 5-mark structure question.

9.4 Mistake 4: Misquoting “Amma”

The word *Amma* is the Malayalam word for mother. Some students translate it (“Mom”, “Mother”) when quoting. Do not. The word itself, kept untranslated inside an English poem, is one of the poem’s most important details, both because it identifies the speaker’s region and because it makes the goodbye intimate.

9.5 Mistake 5: Forgetting the Speaker Is Driving

Some students place the poem at the airport throughout. The first five lines are inside the moving car; the airport scene begins only after the line “after the airport’s / security check.” Setting matters because the speaker’s gaze (mother, then trees, then mother again) is structured by the journey.

Geometry of the Poem

The poem has **two settings**, not one. First the moving car (drive begins, ashen face, looking out at trees). Second the airport, on the public-area side of the security check. Identifying both correctly wins easy marks on setting questions.

10 Quick Revision Summary

The final section is a compact, single-shot recap you can read the night before the paper. Everything here links back to a longer discussion earlier in the document.

10.1 The Poem in One Line

A daughter, driving her sixty-six-year-old mother to Cochin airport, sees the woman’s ashen face, looks away to the young trees and children outside, then says only *see you soon, Amma*, three times, holding her childhood fear of losing her mother inside.

10.2 Spinal Facts

- **Poet:** Kamala Das (1934-2009).
- **Title:** My Mother at Sixty-Six.
- **Form:** free verse; one sentence; 12 lines as printed in *Flamingo*.
- **Setting:** a car ride from the parental home to Cochin airport, then the airport itself.
- **Central image:** the mother's ashen, corpse-like face.
- **Closing image:** the mother as "wan, pale as a late winter's moon"; the three-fold "see you soon, Amma."

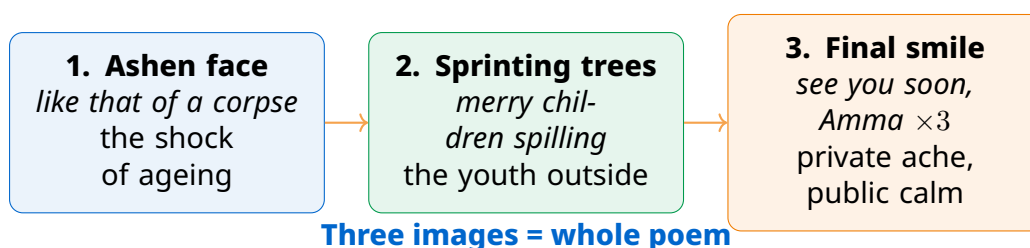
10.3 Themes in One Sentence Each

- **Ageing and filial anxiety:** the daughter registers, for the first time, that her mother is genuinely old.
- **Mother-daughter bond:** the bond is shown through caregiving acts (driving, looking, saying goodbye) and through the intimate Malayalam word *Amma*.
- **Denial vs acceptance:** the speaker tries to push the thought away by looking outside, then returns to it and accepts the ache.
- **Transient vs enduring:** bodies change, fear stays.
- **Private wound, public smile:** interior ache, exterior casual goodbye.

10.4 Devices in One Sentence Each

- **Simile:** "ashen like that of a corpse"; "pale as a late winter's moon."
- **Juxtaposition:** dozing mother inside vs sprinting young trees and merry children outside.
- **Personification:** trees sprinting, children spilling.
- **Enjambment:** the isolated word *pain*.
- **Repetition:** "see you soon, Amma" three times.
- **Symbol:** the late winter's moon as the ageing mother.
- **Single-sentence form:** the whole poem is one unbroken sentence.

10.5 Last-Minute Triad to Memorise



A Final Memory Aid

ASA = Ashen, Sprinting, Amma.

Ashen face → **S**printing trees → **A**mma, see you soon.

Three words, in order, and the whole poem unfolds from them.

Related Collegedunia Resources**Same chapter — other resources:**

- [NCERT Solutions](#)
- [NCERT Book PDF](#)
- [Handwritten Notes](#)

Continue learning:

- [Ch 6: Flamingo Prose: Poets and Pancakes](#)
- [Ch 8: Flamingo Poetry: Keeping Quiet](#)
- [Class 12 English Core — All Chapters](#)

Prepared by Collegedunia for CBSE Class 12 English (Core), Flamingo, Reprint 2026-27. For the full NCERT Solutions, Formula Sheet and Exemplar Solutions for this chapter, follow the cross-links above.