

MY MOTHER AT SIXTY-SIX

IMPORTANT STANZAS FOR COMPREHENSION

Read the stanzas given below and answer the questions that follow each:

1. Driving from my parents 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

Questions

(a) Where was the poet driving to? Who was sitting beside her?

(b) What did the poet notice about her mother?

(c) Why was her mother's face looked like that of a corpse?

(d) Find words from the passage which mean :

(i) sleep lightly (ii) dead body (iii) felt.

Answers:

(a) The poet was driving from her parent's home to the Cochin airport. Her mother was sitting beside her.

(b) She noticed that her mother was dozing with her mouth open.

(c) Her mother's face looked pale, faded and lifeless like a dead body because she had grown old.

(d) (i) doze (ii) corpse (iii) realised.

2......She

looked but soon put that thought away, and

looked out at Young

Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling out of their homes,

Questions

(a) What did the poet realise? How did she feel

(b) What did she do then?

(c) What did she notice in the world outside?

(d) Find words from the passage which mean: (i) running fast (ii) happy (iii) moving out.

Answers:

(a) Her mother was lost somewhere else in thoughts. It pained her.

(b) The poet withdrew her thoughts from her mother and looked outside.

(c) The young trees growing outside went past as if they were sprinting. Happy children were coming out of their houses.

(d) (i) sprinting (ii) merry (iii) spilling.

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 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

Questions

(a) What did the poet do after the security check?

(b) Why did the poet compare her mother's face to a late winter's moon?

(c) What is her childhood fear ?

(d) How do the parting words of the poet and her smile present a contrast to her real feelings?

Answers:

- (a) After the security check, the poet stood a few yards away from her mother and looked at her face again.
- (b) The late winter moon lacks brightness as well as strength. The pale and colourless face of the mother resembles the late winter moon.
- (c) The fear of ageing and ultimate death/separation.
- (d) The poet's parting words of assurance and her smiles present a stark contrast to the old familiar ache or childhood fear. Her words and smiles are a deliberate attempt to hide what is going on inside.

QUESTIONS FROM TEXTBOOK SOLVED

Q1. What is the kind of pain and ache that the poet feels?

Ans: When the poet sees the pale and corpse-like face of her mother, her old familiar pain or the ache returns. Perhaps she has entertained this fear since her childhood. Ageing is a natural process. Time and ageing spare none. Time and ageing have not spared the poet's mother and may not spare her as well. With this ageing, separation and death become inevitable.

Q2. Why are the young trees described as 'sprinting'?

Ans: The poet is driving to the Cochin airport. When she looks outside, the young trees seem to be walking past them. With the speed of the car they seem to be running fast or sprinting. The poet presents a contrast—her 'dozing' old mother and the 'sprinting' young trees.

Q3. Why has the poet brought in the image of the merry children 'spilling out of their homes'?

Ans: The poet has brought in the image of merry children 'spilling out of their homes' to present a contrast. The merry children coming out of their homes in large numbers present an image of happiness and spontaneous overflow of life. This image is in stark contrast to the 'dozing' old mother, whose 'ashen' face looks lifeless and pale like a corpse. She is an image of ageing, decay and passivity. The contrast of the two images enhances the poetic effect.

Q4. Why has the mother been compared to the 'late winter's moon'?

Ans: The poet's mother is sixty-six years old. Her shrunken 'ashen' face resembles a corpse. She has lost her shine and strength of youth. Similarly the late winter's moon looks hazy and obscure. It too lacks shine and strength. The comparison is quite natural and appropriate. The simile used here is apt as well as effective.

Q5. What do the parting words of the poet and her smile signify?

Ans: The poet's parting words of assurance and her smiles provide a stark contrast to the old familiar ache or fear of the childhood. Her words and smiles are a deliberate attempt to hide her real feelings. The parting words: "See you soon, Amma" give an assurance to the old lady whose 'ashen face' looks like a corpse. Similarly, her continuous smiles are an attempt to overcome the ache and fear inside her heart.

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS (Word Limit: 30-40 words)

Q1. Where was the poet going and who was with her?

Ans: The poet was driving from her parent's home to the Cochin airport. The poet's mother had come to see her off. She was sitting beside her. She was dozing with her mouth open. The words 'driving' and 'doze' provide a contrast between images of dynamic activity and static passivity respectively.

Q2. What was the poet's childhood fear?

Ans: The child is always in fear of being separated from his parents. In the same way, the poet's fear as a child was that of losing her mother or her company.

Q3. What does the poet's mother look like? What kind of images has the poet used to signify her ageing decay?

Ans: The poet's mother is sixty-six years old. She is sitting beside the poet and dozing with her mouth open. This is a sign of old age. Usually old people keep their mouth open to overcome breathing problems. Her face looked pale and faded like ash. Actually, she is an image of death as her 'ashen' face looks like that of a corpse.

Q4. What does the poet realise with pain? Why does the poet 'put that thought away' and look outside?

Ans: The lifeless and faded face of the poet's mother pains her heart. She looks lifeless like a corpse. She provides an image of passivity, decay and death. The old lady seems to be lost in her thoughts. The poet needs a distraction, a change. She puts that thought away and looks outside. There she gets a picture of life, happiness and activity.

Q5. Describe the world inside the car and compare it to the activities taking place outside?

Ans: The pale and faded face of the poet's mother looks lifeless like a corpse. Her dozing with mouth wide open suggests passivity, decay and death. Outside the car, the poet watches young trees speeding past them. They seem to be running fast or sprinting. Happy children are moving out of their homes cheerfully. They present an image of life, dynamism and activity.

Q6. Why does the poet look outside? What does she see happening outside?

Ans: The thought of the ageing mother at sixty-six and her pale and ashen face looking like a corpse becomes too heavy for the poet to bear. She needs a distraction, a diversion and therefore she looks outside. She watches young trees. These trees speed past them and appear to be sprinting. Then she sees happy children moving out of their houses and making merry.

Q7. How has the poet contrasted the scene inside the car with the activities going on outside?

Ans: The poet has used beautiful images to highlight the stark contrast between the scene inside the car and the activities going on outside. The 'ashen' face of the poet's mother is pale and lifeless. It looks like that of a corpse. She is dozing and lost to herself. The image of the 'dozing' mother is contrasted with the 'spilling' of children. The 'ashen' and 'corpselike' face is contrasted with the young trees sprinting outside.

Q8. What does the poet do after the security check-up? What does she notice?

Ans: They have to pass through a security check-up at the airport. After it, the poet stands a few yards away. Before saying parting words to her mother, she looks at her mother again. Her face looks pale and colourless like the late winter's moon. She presents a picture of ageing and decay.

Q9. Why is the poet's mother compared to the late winter's moon?

Ans: The poet's mother has been compared to the late winter's moon to bring out the similarity of ageing and decay. The late winter moon looks hazy and obscure. It lacks shine and strength. The poet's mother has an 'ashen' face resembling a corpse. She has lost her shine and strength of youth. The comparison reinforces the impact.

Q10. What is the poet's familiar ache and why does it return?

Ans: The poet is pained at the ageing and decaying of her mother. The fear is that with ageing comes decay and death. The sight of her old mother's 'ashen' and corpse-like face arouses "that old familiar ache" in her heart. Her childhood fear returns. She is also pained and frightened by the idea that she may have to face all these things herself.

Q11. How does Kamala Das try to put away the thoughts of her ageing mother?

Ans: Kamala Das was in much trouble after seeing the lifeless and faded face of her mother. The old lady seemed to be lost in her own thoughts. The poetess turned away her attention from her mother and looked outside. The outside world was full of life and activity. The young trees seemed to be running fast. The children looked happy while moving out of their homes.

Q12. Why does the poet smile and what does she say while bidding good bye to her mother ?

OR
With fear and ache inside her heart and words of assurance on lips and smile on the face, the poet presents two opposite and contrasting experiences.

Why does the poet put on a smile?

Ans: The 'wan', 'pale', face of the poet's mother at sixty-six brings an image of decay and death. It brings that old familiar fear of separation back. She fears the ultimate fate of human beings. But she has to put on a brave face. She regains self-control. She composes herself and tries to look normal. She utters the words of assurance that they will meet again soon. She tries to hide her ache and fear by smiling continuously.

Q13. What poetic devices have been used by Kamala Das in 'My Mother at Sixty-six'?

Ans: The poem 'My Mother at Sixty-six' is rich in imagery. Kamala Das uses the devices of comparison and contrast. The use of simile is very effective. The face of the poet's old mother is described as 'ashen'. This ashen face is 'like that of a corpse'. The poet uses another simile. The "wan, pale" face of the mother is compared to 'a late winter's moon'.

The poem excels in contrasts. The old 'dozing' lady inside is contrasted with the young trees "sprinting" and merry children "spilling" out of their homes.