

**Flamingo**  
**Poetry Section**  
**Poem: My mother at sixty-six**

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*Note: All the work must be done in English Notebook\*.*

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**About the Poet:**

The poet, **Kamala Das** also wrote by her pen-name of 'Madhavikutty'. She was born in Kerala and is one of India's first poets. Her subject – matter is basically related to her personality- beautiful, sensitive, bold and tormented. External factors do not reflect in her writings, her writings bring out her true inner feelings. Her favorite poem is 'composition'.

In the poem 'My mother at sixty six', she talks about her mother. This poem is based on mother-daughter relation and the poet shares her feelings for her mother.

**Theme:**

This poem revolves around the theme of advancing age and the fear of loss and separation. The poet looks at her old feeble mother and the finality of death looms large on her mind. Looking at her old mother, she is pained and worried as she realizes that the mother may not live long.

**Summary:**

Once the poet went to visit her mother. She was on her way back to the airport to return to Cochin. She looked at her mother who was seated beside her in the car. Her mother had dozed off to sleep and her ageing face - was smoky in colour like ash. Her mouth was open and she resembled a dead body. The poet realized that her mother was old. She felt pain and sympathy for her. Her mother needed love, affection and care.

In order to come out of the gloom, the poet shifted her glance and looked out of the car's window. There she saw young trees pass by. Little children were

running out of their houses into the playgrounds. These things were contrary to the ageing face of her mother. They symbolised energy, life and happiness.

As they reached the airport and the poet was about to leave for the aeroplane, she glanced at her mother one more time. Her mother appeared weak and pale just like the moon in the winter season which seems to have lost all its strength. The poet felt the pain and fear of losing her mother. She was reminded of her childhood when she used to fear losing her mother. As a child she could not bear to be separated from her mother even for a few moments. Now the loss would be permanent as her mother was about to die and she would lose her forever.

The poet did not express her feelings. She smiled and said “see you soon, Amma” because she wanted that her mother should live and they could meet again.

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### **Word/Phrases & their Contextual Meanings:**

**Beside:** next to

**Corpse:** a dead body, especially of a human being

**Spilling out of their homes:** coming out of their homes

**Late winter's moon:** relating to old age or death

**doze:** a short, light sleep

**ashen:** very pale, like ash.

**sprinting:** here, shooting out of the ground/running fast

**wan:** unnaturally pale, as from physical or emotional distress.

### **POETIC DEVICES:**

The poetic devices used are simile, repetition and personification:

1. **Simile** — face ashen like a corpse, as a late winter's moon.
2. **Personification** — trees sprinting
3. **Repetition** — smile and smile and smile

## **TEXTUAL QUESTIONS:**

### **Think it Out:**

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

Whenever the poet looks at the colourless and pale face of her mother, her old familiar pain surfaces realising that her mother was ageing and would die soon.

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

The poet, in order to distract her mind from the painful sight, looks out of the window. The young trees have been personified. When looked at from the poet's moving car, they seem to be running past. The poet found it to be strikingly opposite to her mother who looked as still as a dead body.

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

The poet draws a comparison between what is travelling with her and what she can see outside. It's a comparison between life and death. Her mother is sleeping, with mouth open, like a dead body, while outside she can see children who are full of life, energy and enthusiasm.

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

Just as the late winter's moon is dull and lacks luster, so is her mother at the end stage of her life. Also, as the late winter moon gets overshadowed by the fog and mist in the sky similarly her mother can get overshadowed by death at any time. Both of them are nearing an end- one of season and the other of life.

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

The parting words of the poet show her positive attitude.

She smiles to conceal her fear and pain of separation from her mother and assures herself and her mother that they would meet again. She is being very brave which is indicated by the use of repetition in the poem:

“smile and smile and smile.....”

## DO-IT-YOURSELF EXERCISES

### Reference-to-context:

Read the extracts given and answer the questions that follow:

**1. Driving from...realized with pain...**

- Where was the poet? Where was she going?
- What colour, according to the poet, describes the colour of a corpse?
- Name the poetic device: "*her face ashen like that of a corpse*".
- Seeing her mother beside her, brought home to the poet a painful

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**2. ...that she thought away...out their homes,...**

- What thoughts did she put away?
- How did she try to overcome his pain?
- What did she see outside?
- What is the poetic device used: "*trees sprinting*"?

**3. ...I looked again at her wan, pale as a...smile and smile and smile.**

- What does the poet compare her mother's pale face to? Mention the poetic device.
- What is meant by "*familiar ache*"?
- What were her parting words to her mother?
- Why did she smile?
- What is the fear of the poet?