

My Mother at Sixty Six | Summary and Analysis

My Mother at Sixty-Six is a poignant poem by Kamala Das which deals with the themes of aging, a person's love for her mother, separation, uncertainty and death. A sensory and deeply sensitive poem, My Mother at Sixty-Six is a first person confessional poem that captures the reader's attention and provides a glimpse of the subtle intricacies of a mother-daughter relationship. The poem captures the speaker's train of thought and the entire poem is written in a single sentence. The poem makes use of a natural unaffected rhythm, striking imagery and a sense of movement to convey the insecurities and apprehensions of the poet-persona about her rapidly ageing mother and the inevitable separation that must follow.

Because this poem follows a single line of thought and switches between the physical and emotional realms with great fluidity, it is neither necessary nor desirable to differentiate the poem in separate segments. However for the sake of understanding we will divide the analysis into two parts while dealing with the poem. The first part of the analysis will deal with the sensory and emotional experience of the poet-persona while travelling in the car and the second will deal with her experience at the airport before separating from her mother.

LINE 1-14

This **confessional poem** is as intense in its feeling as it is subtle in its approach. The poem engages with a plethora of mingled emotions ranging from love, pain, nostalgia, sadness and despair. Furthermore, **action and emotion are beautifully intertwined** in this poem.

The **idea of movement** is central to understanding the poem: the physical movement to the airport, the emotional journey of the poet and the movement of her mother towards old age are all intermingled in this poem about love, longing and separation. Notice the very first word of the poem is a verb for movement in the present continuous tense: ***Driving*** from my parent's home...

LINE 15-25

When the speaker looks at her mother standing a few yards from her at the airport security check, the mother's face is described by the **simile** "*wan, pale as late winter's moon*". A brilliant imagery of the winter moon is used in this part of the poem. "Winter" is used to evoke a sense of an ending (like the ageing mother), a certain frigid, inert state (like that of a corpse) and the inevitable darkness (death) that is to follow. Also, moon has stereotypically received a feminine treatment and

the **simile** “as a pale moon” is quite apt to describe the round, pale face of the aged mother. On seeing her mother, the poet persona experiences “that familiar old ache, my childhood fear”. Though she doesn’t specifically state what it actually is, we can safely infer that it is the fear of losing her mother.

LINE 26-28

Despite being deeply thoughtful of her mother’s present and future, the speaker can neither stop herself from going away from her mother nor can she stop her mother from going away from her forever. All she can do is part with the hope of seeing her mother again. The parting is made all the more poignant by the fact that though she hopes to see her mother, she fears that she might not. This intermingling of emotions of love, hope, longing, nostalgia, fear and a sense of helplessness at the face of the inevitable seems to find its way in the repetition of the final words of the poem: *all I did was smile and smile and smile...*

IMPORTANT POINTS:

- The sprinting of the trees symbolizes the fast-passing years of human life from childhood to old age. This image, which shows movement and power, is in contrast to that of her old and frail mother
- Children spilling out represent liveliness, vigor, fitness, beauty, and joy. This image contrasts dramatically with that of her mother, who is nearing her death and has grown frail, withdrawn, poor, and withered.
- The poet uses her mother's resemblance to 'the late winter moon' to suggest her imminent death. Winter, being the last season of the year, is synonymous with dormancy and lifelessness. With old age, the mother of the poet has started to lose all its strength and radiance
- The parting words of the poet, "see you soon, Amma," signify her farewell to her mother and an attempt to leave her optimistically and cheerfully.
- The face of poet's mother was pale coloured, ashen - weak, painful, extremely aged. Her mother was too much fragile due to age - factor. Being too old, her signs of agedness could be seen over her wrinkled face. Poetess compared her mother's face with a corpse (dead body) as no signs of action can be seen over the face of a corpse similarly poet's mother face was pale coloured, still and weak.