



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2022-23)

**QUESTION BANK- A PHOTOGRAPH**

Class: XI

Sub: ENGLISH

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**Introduction**

The poet describes her feelings about the photograph of her mother taken when she was twelve years old. She realises that human life is ever changing and short lived. A human being grows old and dies. The memories of the past make her nostalgic and sad. The poet shares her mother's joys but in the event of her mother's death, there is only silence.

**I. SUMMARY**

The poem is a tribute to the poet's mother. She is looking at an old photograph of her mother which has a frame of cardboard. The picture has three girls in which the middle one is the oldest and tallest. It is her mother when she was twelve years old or so. Beside her, on both sides are her two cousins, Betty and Dolly, who are holding her hands and are younger than her. They went for paddling on a beach holiday. Her uncle took the photograph then. The poet could not help but notice her mother's sweet face. The sea touched her terribly transient feet which depicted that she changed over the years and the sea remained the same.

After twenty-three years, her mother would laugh at the photograph. She would make the poet look at the photograph and tell her how their parents would dress them up for the beach holiday. The beach holiday was her mother's favourite past memories while her laugh was the poet's favourite memory. Both of them lost something which they cherished a lot and yet cannot live that moment again. Those sweet moments were memories now.

Now, the poet's mother had been dead for the past twelve years, which is the same number as of her age when the photograph was taken back then. She cannot express the grief that she has from her mother's absence and the silence is all that remains.

The theme of the poem 'A Photograph' is how transient and mortal human life is, it reflects the pain of separation and how people after death are vividly present in the memories of their loved ones.

**II. POETIC DEVICES**

- **Allusion:** the 'cardboard's' lack of durability hints at the lack of permanence of human life.
- **Transferred Epithet:** 'Terribly transient feet'. Human life itself is temporary not the feet. When the adjective for one noun like life is transferred to another noun like feet, it is called transferred epithet.

- **Alliteration:** ‘terribly transient feet’. It is also alliteration due to the repetition of the ‘t’ sound. ‘stood still to smile’ ‘Its silence silences.’ (sound of s has been repeated).
- **Oxymoron:** Laboured ease of loss. The coming together of two opposite ideas to describe the same entity. ‘Laboured’ and ‘easy’ are opposite words describing the same entity ‘loss’.
- **Personification:** ‘Its silence silences’. The situation has been given the human quality.

### III.TEXTUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

#### **1. What does the word ‘cardboard’ denote in the poem? Why has this word been used?**

**Ans:** In the poem, the word ‘cardboard’ denotes the photograph pasted on a hard thick paper (a frame which supports the photograph). It is being used in the poem because the picture is very old and the cardboard was used as a photo frame to hold it.

#### **2. What has the camera captured?**

**Ans:** The camera has captured the poet’s mother and her two cousins, Betty and Dolly, on the beach. They went paddling where her mother’s uncle captured the photo. Her mother was around twelve years old and was in the middle. She was holding the hands of her cousins who were on either side of her. It was her mother’s favourite past memory.

#### **3. What has not changed over the years? Does this suggest something to you?**

**Ans:** The lines ‘*And the sea, which appears to have changed less*’ depicts that the sea which touched her mother’s feet is the one which has not changed over the years. Whereas, her mother and her cousins grew older. The sea symbolises eternity and immortality. Human being has a life span and has to die one day. Human life is not permanent.

#### **4. The poet’s mother laughed at the snapshot. What did this laugh indicate?**

**Ans:** The poet’s mother laughed at the snapshot recalling her favourite past memories. She looked back at the photograph and remembered how their parents would dress them up for the beach holiday. Her laugh indicated her remembering the innocent days and the nostalgia feeling. This ‘laugh’ indicated her joy at remembering an incident connected with her past life when she was quite young. Behind the laugh is also a feeling of pain that those days won’t come back.

#### **5. What is the meaning of the line “Both wry with the laboured ease of loss.”**

**Ans:** The sea holiday and the laughter of the poet’s mother are incidents of the past. There is a sense of loss associated with them. The above lines mean that the poet’s mother felt pain whenever she saw the old photograph because the innocent childhood days would never be back. Those are just the memories. While the poet has lost her mother twelve years ago and she misses her a lot and recalls her laughing and pointing out the outfits they used to wear at the beach holidays. Both of them lost something. This sense of loss is quite painful to bear.

#### **6. What does “this circumstance” refer to?**

**Ans:** This circumstance refers to the death of the poet's mother. The words 'this circumstance' refers to the present situation of the poet which is the painful memories of her mother who had been deceased twelve years ago. While looking at the old photograph of her mother's childhood makes her miss her. She remembers her laughing and how the photograph was her favourite past memory.

**7. The three stanzas depict three different phases. What are they?**

**Ans:** 1. **Girlhood of the poet's mother** – The phase before the poet's birth.

2. **Middle age of the poet's mother** – The phase during the poet's childhood.

3. **Death of the poet's mother** – The phase after the death of the poet's mother.

The first stanza depicts her mother's childhood days when she was twelve years old or so. It talks about a photograph of her with her two cousins on a beach holiday. Her uncle took the photograph. Her mother changed over the years as she grew older. While the sea which touched their feet during that beach holiday hadn't changed over the years.

In the second stanza, the poet talks about her childhood days when her mother used to look at the photograph with laughter and recalls everything mentioned in the first stanza.

In the last stanza, the poet shares that her mother is dead as many years ago as was her age in the photograph. She died twelve years ago. The poet is recalling her mother's old memories while looking at the photograph. She is in pain and misses her deceased mother. She has no words to describe her grief.

**EXTRA QUESTIONS**

**IV. Read the extracts and answer the questions that follow.**

1. *'Now she's been dead nearly as many years  
As that girl lived. And of this circumstance  
There is nothing to say at all.  
Its silence silences.'*

**1. How long has the poet's mother been dead?**

The poet's mother has been dead for about twelve years.

**2. Why is there nothing to say at all?**

There is nothing to say at all because the poet has lost her mother and her beautiful smile forever.

**3. What silences the silence?**

The silence of death silences the silence.

2. *'All three stood still to smile through their hair  
At the uncle with the camera. A sweet face,  
My mother's, that was before I was born.'*

*And the sea, which appears to have changed less,  
Washed their terribly transient feet.'*

**1. What are the three of them doing in the photograph?**

- (a) playing in the sand
- (b) standing beside house
- © holding garlands in their hands
- (d) holding hands together**

**2. What has not changed over a period of time?**

- (a) The photo
- (b) The cardboard
- (c) The girls
- (d) The sea**

**3. Find a word from the extract which means “lasting only for a short time”?**

- (a) Still
- (b) Transient**
- (c) Changed
- (d) Less

**V. Short Answer Type Questions:**

**1. Describe the three girls as they pose for the photograph?**

Answer: The three girls went to the sea beach and is photographed by their Uncle. The younger cousins were holding hands of the elder cousin (the poet’s mother). They smiled through their hair as they stood still for the photograph.

**2. The sea ‘appears to have changed less’ in comparison to the three girls who enjoyed the sea holiday. Comment.**

Answer: The poet compares the mortal nature of human beings with the eternal nature of the sea or natural objects. With the passage of time, the poet’s mother died but the vast sea has remained as it was since the photograph was taken.

**3. Why does the poet feel nostalgic?**

Answer: The poet sees an old photograph of her mother in which she was standing on the beach with her two cousins — Dolly and Betty. They were enjoying themselves. The photograph captured her mother’s sweet and smiling face. At that time, she was around twelve years old. The poet remembers how her mother used to laugh whenever she looked at that old photograph. But time has passed and now the poet has been left only with the memories of her mother. Thus, she feels nostalgic

#### **4. Comment on the tone of the poem.**

Answer: The tone of the poem is that of sadness. Shirley Toulson looks at an old photograph of her mother and is sadly reminded of her mother who is no more. She mentions about death of her mother indirectly only but this photograph has made her speechless and silent.

### **VI. Long answer type questions-**

#### **1. Justify the title of the poem, 'A Photograph'**

The poem, 'A Photograph' is composed in blank verse. (A blank verse is a poem with no rhyme, most frequently used in English dramatic, epic, and reflective verse.) The title of the poem is very appropriate as it reminds the poet of her mother. A photograph is something that captures a certain moment of someone's life. The person might change in course of time but the memories attached with the photograph are eternal. In this poem, the poet's mother is no more but the photograph makes her memories come alive. The mother's sweet face or her cousins dressed up for the beach have all changed with time but the moment captured in the photograph still gives happiness to the poet's mother when she views it twenty to thirty years later. The poet recalls her mother's old memories while looking at the photograph after the mother is no more.

#### **2. What impression do you form of the poetess and the poetess's mother after reading the poem 'A Photograph'?**

**Ans.** The poem presents the poet as a sensitive person who is quite affectionate towards her mother and is deeply attached to her. She loves 'her 'sweet' face and notes the changes in it as she advances in age. She remembers all the incidents connected with her life including her laughter on looking at the photograph. She finds it hard to bear her death. The pangs of separation stun her to speechlessness.

The poetess's mother appears as a physically well-formed person with sweet face and beautiful smile. She has a friendly temperament and free mixing nature. She has great affection (or her two girl cousins and goes with them for a sea-holiday where they put on quaint dresses. She poses with them smilingly for a snap. Her laughter on seeing the dresses in the snap shows her fine temperament and good humour.