



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Class: IX	QUESTION BANK (2026-2027)	SUBJECT: ENGLISH
	TOPIC: I CANNOT REMEMBER MY MOTHER	

ABOUT THE POET

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was one of India’s most celebrated poets, writers, philosophers and thinkers. He wrote primarily in Bengali and translated many of his works into English. His writings are known for their lyrical beauty, spiritual depth, love of nature and exploration of human emotions. He became the first Asian recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for *Gitanjali*. His literary works include poetry, short stories, novels, plays and essays.

The poem “I Cannot Remember My Mother” is a deeply moving poem that explores the tender bond between a child and his mother. The speaker cannot clearly remember his mother, but fragments of memory return through music, fragrance and the vast blue sky. The poem is translated from Tagore's Bengali work and beautifully conveys the idea that a mother's love continues to live in a child's heart even when direct memories fade.

SUMMARY

The poem “I Cannot Remember My Mother” is a poignant reflection on a child's fading memories of his mother. Although the speaker cannot clearly remember his mother, certain sights, sounds and smells unexpectedly bring back a sense of her loving presence.

In the first stanza, the child says that he cannot remember his mother, but sometimes, while playing with his toys, he seems to hear a familiar tune hovering around his playthings. It reminds him of the song his mother used to hum while rocking his cradle. The tune therefore becomes a precious link between the child and his lost mother.

In the second stanza, the memory of the mother is awakened by the scent of shiuli flowers and the fragrance associated with the morning service at the temple. The flowers and temple atmosphere create an association with his mother and bring back her presence through his sense of smell.

In the third stanza, the child looks towards the distant blue sky from his bedroom. The vastness and stillness of the sky make him feel that his mother's loving gaze is spread across it. Although she is physically absent, he imagines her presence surrounding and watching over him.

Thus, the poem shows that memory does not always depend on clearly remembering a person's face or voice. Love can survive through small sensory experiences. The mother's presence lives on through music, flowers, fragrance, nature and the child's emotions.

THEME

The central theme of the poem is a child's enduring love for his mother and the power of memory. The child cannot consciously remember his mother, yet her presence continues to exist in his emotional world.

A major secondary theme is the eternal nature of maternal love. The mother's love transcends physical absence and becomes connected with the world around the child. A familiar tune reminds him of her care, the scent of shiuli flowers evokes her presence, and the vast blue sky seems to carry her loving gaze.

The poem also explores nature as a carrier of memory. Music, flowers, temple fragrance and the sky act as reminders of the mother. Through these sensory experiences, Tagore suggests that love can remain alive even when memories become faint.

The poem therefore conveys a deeply touching message: a mother's presence may disappear physically, but her love remains permanently imprinted on the heart of her child.

LITERARY DEVICES

Repetition —

The line “I cannot remember my mother” is repeated at the beginning of the stanzas. This repetition emphasises the child's inability to recall his mother clearly while also expressing his longing for her.

Anaphora —

The repeated opening of the stanzas with “I cannot remember my mother” creates emphasis and gives the poem a unified emotional structure.

Imagery —

The poet uses vivid sensory images to make the child's memories come alive:

- **Auditory imagery:** the tune of the song his mother used to hum.
- **Olfactory imagery:** the scent of the shiuli flowers and the fragrance associated with the temple.
- **Visual imagery:** the distant blue sky and the mother's gaze.

Personification —

The tune is described as seeming to “hover” over the playthings, giving an abstract sound a living quality. Similarly, the mother's gaze is imagined as spreading across the sky.

Metaphor —

The idea that the mother's gaze has spread all over the sky metaphorically represents the vastness and permanence of her love. The sky becomes a symbol of her ever-present affection and protection.

Symbolism —

- The tune/lullaby symbolises the mother's care and affection.
- Shiuli flowers symbolise tender memories and the mother's presence.

- The vast blue sky symbolises the infinite and eternal nature of maternal love.

Alliteration —

The repetition of consonant sounds in phrases such as “midst of my play” and “my mother's” adds musicality and softness to the poem.

Sensory Appeal —

The poem appeals strongly to the three senses of hearing, smell and sight. This technique shows how memories can be triggered by ordinary sensory experiences.

Free Verse —

The poem does not follow a strict rhyme scheme or a fixed pattern of line length. Its natural rhythm allows the poet to express the child's thoughts and emotions freely.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The title “I Cannot Remember My Mother” immediately establishes a sense of loss. What does the title primarily suggest about the speaker?

- A. He has deliberately forgotten his mother because of anger
- B. He has only a vague memory of his mother, but her presence continues to influence him
- C. He never had a close relationship with his mother
- D. He is unable to remember anything about his childhood

Ans: B

2. The poet describes a tune that seems to hover around the child's playthings. What does this tune most likely represent?

- A. A song sung by his friends while playing
- B. A meaningless sound that distracts the child
- C. A faint but precious reminder of his mother's presence and affection
- D. A religious song heard at the temple

Ans: C

3. The reference to the mother humming a song while rocking the child's cradle helps the reader understand that—

- A. the mother used music mainly to entertain herself

- B. music was an expression of the mother's tenderness and care for her child
- C. the child disliked being rocked in the cradle
- D. the mother wanted the child to become a musician

Ans: B

4. The poet refers to the shiuli flowers and their fragrance. Why is this sensory detail significant in the poem?
- A. It describes the beauty of flowers in the poet's garden
 - B. It shows that the child enjoys collecting flowers
 - C. It suggests that familiar smells can awaken emotional memories of a loved one
 - D. It establishes that the poem is mainly about nature

Ans: C

5. The poem uses different sensory experiences to recall the mother. Which combination best represents these experiences?
- A. Taste, touch and sight
 - B. Sound, smell and sight
 - C. Touch, taste and sound
 - D. Smell, taste and touch

Ans: B

6. The speaker cannot clearly remember his mother, yet he continues to feel her presence. What central idea is conveyed through this contrast?
- A. Memories become stronger when people are physically distant
 - B. A person's physical absence can coexist with a lasting emotional presence
 - C. Childhood memories are always unreliable and meaningless
 - D. Nature is more important than human relationships

Ans: B

7. Towards the end of the poem, the child looks at the distant blue sky and imagines his mother's gaze. What does the sky symbolically suggest?
- A. The mother's anger and disappointment

B. The child's fear of the unknown

C. The vast and enduring nature of the mother's love and presence

D. The loneliness of the natural world

Ans: C

8. The repeated statement “I cannot remember my mother” has an important structural and emotional effect. What does it achieve?

A. It creates humour by repeating the same idea

B. It emphasises the speaker's inability to recall his mother clearly while deepening the sense of longing

C. It shows that the speaker is uninterested in his mother

D. It changes the poem into a narrative about childhood games

Ans: B

9. Which literary device is most evident in the repeated opening idea “I cannot remember my mother”?

A. Simile

B. Anaphora

C. Hyperbole

D. Onomatopoeia

Ans: B

10. The poem connects the mother's memory with a tune, the fragrance of flowers and the blue sky. What does this treatment of nature reveal?

A. Nature acts as a bridge between the child's present life and his memories of his mother

B. Nature is presented as a dangerous force

C. The child prefers nature to his family

D. The poet is primarily interested in describing the seasons

Ans: A

11. If the mother cannot be remembered through a clear image or direct recollection, how does the child experience her presence?

- A. Through stories told by his friends
- B. Through sensory impressions and emotional associations
- C. Through photographs kept in his room
- D. Through conversations with his father

Ans: B

12. A reader analyses the poem's tone and imagery. Which description best captures the overall mood of "I Cannot Remember My Mother"?

- A. Humorous, playful and energetic
- B. Angry, rebellious and argumentative
- C. Tender, nostalgic and melancholic
- D. Mysterious, frightening and suspenseful

Ans: C

ASSERTION – REASON QUESTIONS

Instructions:

- (A) Both Assertion and Reason are true, and Reason is the correct explanation of Assertion.
- (B) Both Assertion and Reason are true, but Reason is not the correct explanation of Assertion.
- (C) Assertion is true, but Reason is false.
- (D) Assertion is false, but Reason is true.

1. Assertion: The poet says, "I cannot remember my mother" at the beginning of the poem.

Reason: The speaker remembers the fragrance of shiuli flowers associated with his mother.

Ans: B

2. Assertion: The tune that seems to hover around the child's playthings reminds him of his mother.

Reason: His mother used to hum a song while rocking his cradle.

Ans: A

3. **Assertion:** The poet uses the image of the shiuli flowers to evoke the memory of his mother.

Reason: The fragrance of the shiuli flowers reminds the child of his mother's presence and the morning worship.

Ans: A

4. **Assertion:** The poem presents nature as completely separate from the child's memories of his mother.

Reason: The poet uses flowers, fragrance, music and the blue sky to connect the child's surroundings with his mother's memory.

Ans: D

5. **Assertion:** The repeated idea "I cannot remember my mother" creates a sense of longing and emotional loss.

Reason: The repetition draws attention to the speaker's inability to recall his mother clearly despite his deep emotional connection with her.

Ans: A

6. **Assertion:** The speaker's direct memories of his mother have faded.

Reason: The speaker clearly remembers spending many years with his mother.

Ans: C

FILL IN THE BLANKS / COMPLETION QUESTIONS

7. The mother used to _____ a song while rocking the child's cradle.

Ans: hum

8. The fragrance of the _____ flowers reminds the child of his mother.

Ans: shiuli

9. The child imagines his mother's gaze spreading across the distant _____ sky.

Ans: blue

10. The poem mainly explores the themes of _____, memory and the enduring bond between a mother and her child.

Ans: love / loss

11. The tune hovering around the child's playthings is associated with his mother's _____.

Ans: lullaby / song

12. The poem shows that sensory experiences such as sound, fragrance and _____ can awaken memories of loved ones.

Ans: sight

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS (30–40 words each)

1. Why does the poet say, “I cannot remember my mother”? What does this statement reveal about the speaker?

Ans. The speaker was too young to retain clear memories of his mother. His statement reveals a deep sense of loss, but also shows that although her image has faded from his memory, her loving presence continues to influence his emotions.

2. How does the tune around the child’s playthings remind him of his mother?

Ans. The tune seems to hover around the child’s playthings and reminds him of the song his mother used to hum while rocking his cradle. The music therefore becomes a tender link between the child and his absent mother.

3. What is the significance of the shiuli flowers in the poem? How do they evoke the memory of the mother?

Ans. The fragrance of the shiuli flowers reminds the child of his mother and the familiar atmosphere of morning worship. The flowers awaken an emotional memory, showing how ordinary sights and smells can preserve the presence of a loved one.

4. How does Tagore use nature to express the child’s feelings for his mother?

Ans. Tagore connects the child’s memory of his mother with music, flowers, fragrance and the blue sky. Nature becomes a medium through which the child experiences her presence, suggesting that a mother’s love can remain alive in the world around her child.

5. What does the image of the “distant blue sky” suggest about the mother’s presence in the child’s life?

Ans. The distant blue sky suggests the vastness and permanence of the mother’s love. Though the child cannot remember her clearly, he imagines her loving gaze extending across the sky, making her feel emotionally present and protective.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. “I Cannot Remember My Mother” is more than a poem about a child’s inability to remember his mother—it is a celebration of the enduring power of maternal love. Discuss with reference to the poem.

Ans. Rabindranath Tagore’s poem presents the tender relationship between a child and his mother through the theme of memory and loss. The speaker admits that he cannot clearly remember his mother, probably because he was very young when he lost her. However, her emotional presence remains deeply rooted in his heart.

The child is reminded of his mother through ordinary sensory experiences. A familiar tune hovering around his playthings recalls the song she used to hum while rocking his cradle. The fragrance of shiuli flowers also brings back associations with her presence. These memories show that love can survive even when specific details of a person’s appearance or voice have faded.

The image of the distant blue sky further strengthens this idea. The child imagines his mother’s loving gaze spread across the sky, suggesting that her love has become infinite and ever-present.

Thus, the poem transforms personal loss into a universal reflection on maternal love. Tagore beautifully conveys that a mother may be physically absent, but her affection can remain permanently alive in a child’s heart.

2. How does Rabindranath Tagore use sensory imagery, symbolism and repetition to create an emotionally powerful poem?

Ans. Tagore uses several poetic devices to express the child’s longing for his mother. Sensory imagery is particularly important because memories are awakened through different senses. The tune of the mother’s song creates auditory imagery, the fragrance of shiuli flowers creates olfactory imagery, and the distant blue sky creates visual imagery.

The poet also uses symbolism effectively. The tune symbolises the mother’s tenderness and care, while the shiuli flowers represent memories associated with her presence. The blue sky symbolises the vast and enduring nature of maternal love.

The repeated idea “I cannot remember my mother” emphasises the painful gap between the child’s fading memory and his continuing emotional attachment. The repetition gives the poem a reflective and melancholic quality.

Together, these devices transform simple childhood experiences into powerful reminders of the mother. Tagore demonstrates that memory does not depend only on seeing or remembering a face; sounds, smells and sights can preserve the emotional presence of someone we have lost.

3. “Nature acts as a bridge between memory and emotion in the poem.” Elaborate this statement with textual evidence from “I Cannot Remember My Mother”.

Ans. In “I Cannot Remember My Mother”, Tagore uses elements of nature and the child’s surroundings to connect the present with memories of his mother. Although the child cannot clearly recall her, different sensory experiences bring back an emotional sense of her presence.

The tune associated with his playthings reminds him of the song his mother used to hum while rocking his cradle. Similarly, the fragrance of shiuli flowers evokes memories connected with his mother and the familiar morning atmosphere. These details demonstrate how the natural world can preserve memories that the conscious mind cannot fully recall.

The most striking image is that of the distant blue sky. The child imagines his mother's gaze extending across it. The sky therefore becomes a symbol of her limitless love and continuing presence.

Thus, nature is not merely decorative in the poem. It becomes an emotional bridge connecting the child to his lost mother. Through music, fragrance, flowers and the sky, Tagore shows that memories may fade, but love continues to find ways to express itself.

4. How does the poet portray the contrast between physical absence and emotional presence in "I Cannot Remember My Mother"? Use textual references to support your answer.

Ans. The central emotional contrast in the poem is between the mother's physical absence and her continuing emotional presence in the child's life. The speaker openly states that he cannot remember his mother, suggesting that his direct memories of her have faded.

Yet, throughout the poem, reminders of her appear unexpectedly. The tune around his playthings recalls the song she used to hum while rocking his cradle. The fragrance of shiuli flowers also evokes her memory. These experiences show that although the child cannot consciously recall his mother, her love remains deeply embedded in his emotional world.

The final image of the blue sky intensifies this contrast. The child imagines his mother's gaze spread across the distant sky, transforming her from an absent physical figure into an almost limitless emotional presence.

Therefore, Tagore suggests that physical absence does not necessarily mean emotional disappearance. A loved person can continue to live through memories, sensations and feelings. The poem ultimately celebrates the enduring nature of a mother's love and its ability to transcend time and separation.