

# Song of Agony

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POETRY (20 MARKS)

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**Read the following poem and then answer the questions that follow.**

I put on a clean shirt

And go to work

Which of us

Which of us will come back?

Four and twenty moons

Not seeing women

Not seeing my hand

Which of us

Which of us will die?

I put on a clean shirt

And go to work my contract

To work far away

I go beyond the mountain

Into the bush

Where the roads end

And the rivers run dry

Which of us

Which of us will come back?

Which of us

Which of us will die?

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## Questions

- a) Who is the persona in the poem? Explain. (2 marks)
- b) Briefly discuss the subject matter in this poem. (3 marks)
- c) Identify two stylistic devices in the poem and show their effectiveness. (4 marks)
- d) Show how the persona and the others suffer in the poem. Illustrate your answer. (4 marks)
- e) What is the dominant mood in the poem? (2 marks)
- f) Is the title of this poem suitable? Explain (3 marks)
- g) Identify and explain one economic activity practiced by the persona's community.

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## Answers

- a) The persona is a worker (Give 2)
- b) Desperation is the subject matter in this poem. The persona and others are desperate in that when they go for contract work (in the diaspora) there is no hope of coming back. They might die never to see their people and property again. This is shown in ‘which of us will die?’
- c)
- ✓ Rhetorical questions-‘which of us will come back?’ ‘which of us will die?’  
Effect-Help to show the state in which the persona is .He fears of never returning home.  
Involve the audience to feel the situation the persona is in. Draws sympathy from the audience.
  - ✓ Repetition: ‘which of us’ which of us will come back?  
Effect: Emphasizes the subject matter, i e. the desperation and the fear in the persona. Helps in building the mood. Helps to reflect the attitude of the speaker towards contract work.
  - ✓ Alliteration: ‘ Rivers run’  
Effect: Helps to show far away and difficult the contract workers used to go and work (4 marks)
- d) Show how the persona and the others suffer in the poem. Illustrate your answer. (4 mks)
- ✓ Mental suffering-they keep wondering whether they will ever go back home to see their loved ones and property.
  - ✓ Fear-go to work but fear they might never return home alive.\
  - ✓ Isolation-they are cut out from their families for prolonged periods. (6 marks)
- e) Pessimistic-persona doesn’t see any future in his life if he’s to go for the contract work. He is not sure of ever coming back.  
Nostalgic- there’s the longing to come back after they go for contract work to see his wife and property.  
Sad-the mood is saddening that the workers are likely to die or never come back. Might be many had died or never came back.
- f) Is the title of this poem suitable? Explain (3 mks)
- ✓ Yes. It sums up the mental agony that persona is undergoing. They go for the contract work far away and stay for long or never come back.
- g) Identify and explain one economic activity practiced by the persona’s community. (2 mks)
- ✓ Cattle keeping or working  
Line 7 ‘Not being my ox’ (cattle keeping)  
The persona is going to work (working)