Langston Hughes’s poem *Harlem*

**Questions & answers: Prepared by**

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**Question 1.** Give a critical appreciation of Langston Hughes’s poem Harlem. (10 Marks)

Or

Discuss the theme of Racism in Langston Hughes’s poem Harlem.

Or

Discuss how the poem Harlem written by Langston Hughes brings forth the frustration.

Or

What is the dream that according to Langston Hughes has been deferred?

**Answer:**

Langston Hughes’ poem Harlem written in 1951, deals with one of his most prominent issues that commonly appears in his verse—the frustrations of the African Americans over the great American Dream. The unidentified speaker of the poem wonders what happens to a deferred dream, that is to say when a much awaited dream remains unfulfilled. He wonders if it dries up like a raisin in the sun, or if it oozes like a wound and then runs. He further says that it might smell like rotten meat and develop a sugary crust. Finally he says that it might just sag like a heavy load, or it might explode in the end.

The situation depicted through various images, the poet talks about the frustration of the black people in America in the 1950s when they began to feel that their dream for attaining equal status in the society remained a mere dream that would never come true. In the early 1950s the African Americans were still segregated in various fields. They were saddled with the legacy of slavery, which essentially rendered them second class citizens in the eyes of law, especially in the South. Hughes uses the title Harlem in connection with the dream brought forth by the Harlem Renaissance of the 1910s 1920s the great revolution of Black music, literature and art which founded the Black rising in America.

The speaker doesn’t speak much about the dream or the Renaissance, but reflects the physical and psychological condition of the American Blacks when their dream remained unfulfilled after decades of their struggle. The question that the poet brings through various images is very important from the point of view of black identity crisis; reveal the decaying physical and mental state of the people. Without referring to any particular dream, the poet means to say that in an environment surrounded by oppression and segregation, the African
Americans have lost even the power of dream. Even if they dare to dream, it will fester so long that they end up rotting or even exploding. Thus in the poem Hughes reveals the frustration of the African Americans in his most widely read poem Harlem.

**Question No. 2.** What are the images used by Langston Hughes in the poem Harlem to bring out the frustration and conditions of the Blacks at their dream ‘deferred’. (5 Marks)

Or

What, according to Langston Hughes, happen when a dream deferred?

Answer:

Langston Hughes’ poem Harlem written in 1951, deals with one of his most prominent issues that commonly appears in his verse—the frustrations of the African Americans over the great American Dream. The unidentified speaker of the poem wonders what happens to a deferred dream, that is to say when a much awaited dream remains unfulfilled. He wonders if it dries up like a raisin in the sun, or if it oozes like a wound and then runs. He further says that it might smell like rotten meat and develop a sugary crust. Finally he says that it might just sag like a heavy load, or it might explode in the end. All the images of the poem such as ‘raisin in the sun’, ‘a festering sore’, ‘rotten meat’, ‘syrupy sweet’ and ‘an explosive bomb’ reveal the decaying mental state of the Blacks in America.

The speaker doesn’t speak much about the dream or the Renaissance, but reflects the physical and psychological condition of the American Blacks when their dream remained unfulfilled even after decades of their struggle. The question that the poet brings in through various images is very important from the point of view of black identity crisis; and they reveal the decaying physical and mental state of the people. Without referring to any particular dream, the poet means to say that in an environment surrounded by oppression and segregation, the African Americans have lost even the power of dream. Even if they dare to dream, it will fester so long that they end up rotting or even exploding. Thus in the poem Hughes reveals the frustration of the African Americans in his most widely read poem Harlem.