

Study material. Class X Eng. Appreciation

Blowin' in the Wind

-Bob Dylan-

'Blowin' in the Wind' is a song written by the American lyricist, poet and singer Bob Dylan. It was written in 1962 and was included in his album 'The Freewheelin Dylan'. Written in a time of rising Black Movement and Civil Rights Movements, it is generally considered as a protest song. It is composed in the form of a series of rhetorical questions punctuated by an ambiguous refrain. The rhetorical questions allow both literal and figurative reading. The refrain also suggests at least two contrastive significances.

The first question is: 'how many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?' This 'ultimate question' is followed by a sequence of other questions: how many seas must a white dove sail, how many times must the cannon balls fly, how many years can a mountain exist, how many years will it take for people to be free, how many times can a man pretend not seeing, how many times must a man try to see the sky, how many ears must one have to hear the cries around and how many deaths are needed for man to realize people are dying? After each set of questions, there is a refrain: 'the answer is blowin' in the wind'.

If the questions are interpreted literally, the poem expresses a desperate urge for answers to questions which are existential. The refrain then reads the inscrutability of their answers. The answer is evasively hidden in the wind. If the questions are taken in their figurative sense, the song assertively expresses protest and anger against oppression, marginalization and segregation. The second interpretation of the refrain gives a unified sense with this meaning. The answer is obvious and everyone knows. Thus the poem strikes a subtle ambivalence involving two significations which are almost contrastive.

The song is composed in three stanzas, each of which is separated by two lined refrain. Just as the song is a series of questions, it is a series of metaphors. Roads, white doves, cannon balls and mountain are used in their conventional suggestions.

Thus, Blowin' in the Wind artly expresses earnest protest and deep disillusionment. The mood of the poem is reinforced by the use of rhythm, suggestive imagery and a regularity of stanza structure.