

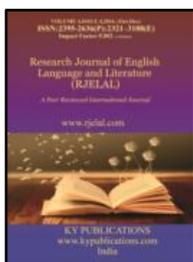


THE RISE OF NEW GENERATION RHAPSODY: JOURNEY FROM MUSIC TO MUSE IN THE SELECTED POEMS OF BOB DYLAN

GOURI. V¹, Dr.BEENA S. NAIR²

¹PG student, Department of English, Amrita school of Arts and Sciences
Amritapuri, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amrita University, India

²Assistant Professor (Sr. Grade), Department of English, Amrita School of Arts and Sciences,
Amritapuri, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amrita University, India



ABSTRACT

Bob Dylan is an American singer, writer and artist and is regarded as the master of the counter culture, he made a new genre in literature by turning his music to poetry by making it a part of the oral tradition. He changed the concept of what poetry can be and how it can work and in recognition for this the Swedish Academy honored him with the Nobel prize for literature on 13 October 2017. The poetic songs of Bob Dylan was mainly concerned about the humanity in crisis, and he was called as the 'voice of the generation' since he protested against social injustice, war and racism. His songs tackled all the social issues in a serious manner and he unified people to protest against the issues.

Keywords- Protest, Blowin in the wind, The Times they are A-Changin', Civil war, Spokes person of generation, Humanity in crisis.

Bob Dylan, a great singer and song writer of America has a deep impact on popular music and American culture. His powerful faculty both as a singer and lyricist, made people doubt on his choice whether he is more of a poet or a singer. Well, all these speculations about his capabilities and talent were put to rest on 13 October 2016. That day created quite a buzz in the literary history, marking the dawn of a new era in literature, when he was bestowed with the greatest honor, the Nobel Prize in Literature for the year 2016. Literature always produced giants to carry forward her legacy and the Swedish Academy never refused to compromise this year too, instead it surprised everyone by going a bit unconventional in its way by recognizing a counter culture by accepting Bob Dylan for '*having created new poetic expression within the great American song tradition*' (Sara Danius). This marked the debut of Bob Dylan as a man of literature.

Bob Dylan's rise to stardom trekked a long way from his humble beginnings as Robert Allen Zimmerman from the hamlet of Duluth, Minnesota. Dylan was musically gifted from a very young age which he developed further and as time passed he became recognized as a singer, writer and artist and for he has been reigning the pop culture and music for the past fifty years. His recording career spanning about fifty years, has explored the gamut of song traditions, from American folk, blues, country to gospel, rock and roll, rockabilly to English, Scottish, and Irish folk music, jazz and the Great American Songbook

The Nobel Prize became a golden feather in his crown of achievements which is already adorned with 11 Grammys, an Academy Award, a Pulitzer citation and a Presidential Medal for Freedom. His faculty both as a recording artist and performer has

been central to his career, but song writing is considered as his greatest triumph.

When the Academy took a radical stance recognising Dylan as a poet, this was never convincing, it fuelled additional doubts and speculations on his real talent, arousing a major question 'Are his songs truly Literature, deserving the award of a Nobel Prize' The Academy brought Homer and Sappho into lime light to cement the literary status of Bob Dylan. In the words of Nobel permanent secretary Sara Danius, "*We still read Homer and Sappho whose centuries old poems were accompanied by music and we enjoy the same thing with Bob Dylan. He can be read, and should be read, as and is a great poet in the grand English poetic tradition*". Horace Engdahl, a member of the Nobel Committee, related Dylan's place in literary history to further reaffirm the argument many critics have compared Bob Dylan to the masters of Classical poetry like Ovid and Greek bards and in the hands of Dylan the poetry was moulded into a new form by making it a part of oral tradition.

From a very young age Bob Dylan overcome by social changes that surrounded him expressed his feelings through music which in turn affected the society. This article will analyse Bob Dylan as a poet of protest against the social injustices from the selected poetic songs of Bob Dylan. The songs were never given a specific classification based on themes, once he was asked by an interviewer "what his songs were about" he simply replied "some of them are about three minutes and some are about five minutes". Even so, it is an indispensable fact that Bob Dylan wrote the most influential protest songs of the age, because it chronicled the social and political changes of America since the 1960's. His songs captured a spirit of rebellion, demur and freedom. Dylan always insisted that "*politics was an integral element of his songs' lyrics, and those social issues 'are more important than music*".

The years 1963 and 1964 marked a major turning point in the life of Bob Dylan, because of the controversial performance at the Newport Folk Festival. The festival was intended for the performances of folks, blues, country music, etc. But Dylan went on record by becoming 'electric' which was ill-received by the people. He was deemed

hostile and, many of his fans called him Judas, because he betrayed folk music. This was also the time his music was turning from folk to protest, bringing in another paradigm shift. He was roundly criticized for abandoning the folk orthodox. He then went completely electric with his guitar and harmonica, which gave birth to a new genre: folk-rock

It was a high point of time that citizens of the country were desperately in need of a man, who could lend his voice for the common man against the corrupt and sick government as well as make people aware of the changes happening around them. Dylan stood his ground to attack and fight against heavy odds and, assumed the duties of a soldier armed with a guitar and harmonica and became electric. Thus began his battle with voice through songs.

America of the 1960's was marked by relentless social unrest, as it reflected the stark pessimists of the Civil Rights Movement and protesters of the Vietnam war. Dylan made his "finger pointed" lyrics featuring the contemporary social tensions. His songs, '*Blowin' in the Wind*' (1962) and '*The Times They Are A-Changin'*' (1964) became classic anthems for the U.S anti-war and civil rights movement of the 1960's. Political events of the 1960's strongly influenced Bob Dylan to pen down the most influential protest songs of his career. The civil rights movement constitutes a series of political movements in the US, which was meant for equality before law to end racial discrimination and it was focused mainly on African Americans. All this did not break out in a single day, it had many factors which accelerated the growth of the movement

Dylan was much concerned of the discrimination of Blacks; on the September of 1962 there occurred a major event in the history of civil rights movement, James Meredith, a student got registered in the University of Mississippi which is an all-White University and this act of the student became a violation of the Supreme Court Rule of 1954 "separate but equal" and this topped the news charts at the time. This found expression under the pen of Bob Dylan in recognition of which he wrote, "Oxford Town" on December 6, 1962 for the

'Broadside' magazine. But the song neither mentioned the student's nor the university's name. Taking the words of Bob Dylan "It deals with the Meredith case, but then again it doesn't... I wrote that when it happened, and I could have written that yesterday. It's still the same. 'Why doesn't somebody investigate soon' that's a verse in the song"(Dylan). The discrimination based on skin colour is evident in these lines:

Oxford Town around the bend

He come in to the door, he couldn't get in

All because of the color of his skin (Dylan)

The blacks being a victim of the White man's power brutality, is further emphasized in the song '*Only a pawn in their game*'(1964) which was released on 1964 in the album '*The Times They Are A-Changin*'(1964) and is about the murder of the Civil Rights activist Medgar Wiley Evers, a leader of the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)*, who worked for social justice and voting rights. This is the only song that suggests the fate of the pitiable white men who are just victimized as the blacks. The mediocre whites are encouraged to blame blacks and are made to believe that the blacks live at the liberty of these white men. The song portrays manipulation of facts by the elite whites and thereby they bring the poor whites under their will. Medger is a victim and along with him, his killer too becomes a victim because, '*he's only a pawn in their game*' (*only a pawn in their game, 1964*). In the song, Dylan express his disapproval against the system which teaches the '*hate*' amongst individuals.

The songs, '*Blowin in the wind*' (1962) and '*The Times they are A-Changin*' (1964) turned anthems for various civil rights campaigns. In the song '*Blowin in the wind*'(1962) we can observe Bob Dylan as a social and political critique questioning the injustice by putting forward rhetorical questions, in response to which, he says the answer is, '*blowing in the wind*'. This song was composed in 1962 at the Vietnam war, the time when the act of violence was by the government and he expresses his feeling that freedom should be granted to everyone irrespective of race, gender, religion etc. He pours out his heart against these odds in the song '*Blowin in the wind*' (1962). The yearning for

peace is symbolized by the bird dove. Additional emphasis is made on freedom and slavery: "*Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannonballs fly/ before they're forever banned?*" (Dylan)

There is also a reference to basic Human Rights (Women, Blacks, Gay, Native Americans, Latin Americans and others). Bob Dylan is all free in this song that he questions the negligence from the part of American Government towards the sorrowful plight of the marginalized Blacks. He wanted people to implore the cruelties and speak up: '*Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head/ Pretending he just doesn't see?*' (Dylan)

Throughout the song we can see Bob Dylan as the spokesperson of social change. Even though The American Declaration of Independence (1776) proclaims that "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, which among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*". From the song we can figure out that whatever is written in the constitution can be considered merely as a fine piece of literature, encompassed with great thought and faculty and that too is blowing in the wind and Dylan meditates upon the inhuman nature of humanity.

The 1960's were rampant with several political upheavals and Dylan speaks out that citizens have to take on the problems by gathering around together to exhibit their unity. Dylan suggests a need for change: '*it is better to start swimming or else you will sink like a stone*'. Dylan openly challenges the senators and congressmen, who are pledged to represent the citizens (common folks), making them realize the call for change and, advises them: '*Don't stand in the doorway/ Don't block up the hall*' (Dylan)

Bob Dylan gave musical response to wars, and thus his folk songs turned to protest songs. The wars threatened him because 1960's was a period in which the U.S.-Soviet Union Cold war raged actively and, US was under the threat of nuclear attack by the USSR. Material success encompassed America along with consumerism. U.S holds the unsolicited status of leader for sale of arms and ammunition in the global market and, also credited as producer of the first nuclear weapon in the free world at the

time of World War II. There was also the 'nuclear arms race', a raging race for supremacy in nuclear warfare between the States and the Soviet Union, and their respective allies, during the Cold War. But America is never concerned at the loss of human life with these deadly weapons and we never know: 'Yes, how many deaths will it take till he knows That too many people have died?' (Dylan).

And now it is no longer a 'government of the people by the people and for the people' (Gettysburg Address, 1863)

Bob Dylan always showered his concern for humanity and wrote about freedom, peace and equality. The motif of freedom is emphasized in "Subterranean Homesick Blues" (1965). In this song, Dylan links America to a totalitarian police state with no liberty and no opportunity He carries forward the idea throughout the lyrics. Dylan gives his advice to the youth of America, telling them to think for themselves in the line "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows." (Dylan)

We can examine the concern for freedom in these lines: "Yes, how many years can some people exist/ Before they're allowed to be free?" (Dylan). In the song, "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" (1964) Dylan examines the hypocrisy and degradation of America's biased justice system. This song is very much concerned on exposing the inequality in American society, both in terms of race and economic class. He recounts partially, the true story of a maid who is an African-American, she was prompted to death by the actions of an aristocratic white man, because she was taking too long to get him his drink, for which he received only six-months in jail for his horrific deed. The words: "William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll/ With a cane that he twirled around his diamond ring finger" (Dylan).Dylan gives an authentic account of the occurrence of her death and remarks upon the widespread racism of the '60s.

In most of his protest songs, Dylan exhibited a great contempt for war and he can be viewed as a paranoid narrator; there are mixed feelings and emotions of both anticipation and fear. In the song "A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall," he describes the agitation, anticipation, worry and dread of the

citizens. The America depicted in the Hard Rain is a bleak and desolate one filled with 'crooked highways', 'sad forests', and 'dead oceans'. It is suggestive of a future society of sans innocence and values, which the poets foresee. Human beings are suffering but the majority is indifferent to the sufferings that when people extend their hand for help, they are left for the worse. The pain of one man becomes a butt of joke for the other; there is no concern for the fellow beings on the basis of humanitarian ground. Throughout the song, America is portrayed as an biased country where 'the executioner's face is always well hidden' (Dylan). What we see in the poem is an anticipation of a future society, which would become fatal for human existence. These can be the implications that the world is nearing to end. 'I heard the sound of a thunder, it roared out a warnin'/ Heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world' (Dylan).

Taking the words of Dylan 'the rain was not literal fallout rain, but some sort of end that's just gotta happen'. The song gives a clear implication that the boat will sink soon. "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall," has been credited as his reaction against the Cuban Missile Crisis

Bob Dylan is a great practitioner of peace and hence he had a great hatred for war at heart, which is evident in his anti-war poems. Even though the poems talk about the Cold war in general and Vietnam War in particular, is about all wars in general. In the song, "Masters of war" he points his fingers at the authorities who leave the young men to die under the pretext of patriotism so that the higher-paid officials can do business, Though America holds the unenviable title of greatest seller of arms and ammunition across the free world, there is no profit made in the business because the sole purpose of the weapon is to take life. It is a sort of deceiving own men and in the song he remarks, 'like Judas of old, you lie and deceive...you fasten the triggers for the others to fire, then you sit back and watch when the death count gets higher' (Dylan).

"John Brown" (1962) is yet other anti-war song which reveals the true effect of the deception of war upon the individuals. In the song, John Brown, a young man is sent off to war for the country and his mother holds great pride and honor

in that, His mother urges him to bring home medals and she boasts of her son with the uniform and gun as an old time soldier. However, when her son arrives home, she could no longer recognize his face because of the shattering the war has caused. *'His face was all shot up and his hand was all blown off / And he wore a metal brace around his waist'* (Dylan). John Brown in the battlefield perceived that he was just a puppet, yet another pawn in the game of power and it is same with his enemy as well that the enemy soldier had his own reflection.

Yet another accepted anti war song is *"With God on our side"* (1963), in the song Dylan mentions various historical events, the wars which the United Nation have been through, such as 'the Spanish-American war', 'the American Civil War', 'World Wars I and II', 'the Holocaust', 'the Cold War' and the 'betrayal of Jesus Christ by Iscariot'. It also includes the execution of Native Americans in the nineteenth century, the lyrics address the tendency of nations to presume that God will invariably side them and dismiss those with whom they disagree, thus leaving unquestioned the morality of wars fought and atrocities committed by their country.

Music critic Tim Riley commented that the song: *"With God on Our Side" (1964)* manages to voice *political savvy* as it draws the line for those born long enough after World War I to find its issues blurry *'the reasons for fighting I never did get and who view the forgiveness of the World War II Germans as a farce.'* ("Hard Rain: A Dylan Commentary", 1992)

The antiwar songs of Bob Dylan expresses his hatred towards the war, and voices his concern for the victims, what we can observe from the songs are that he is in a dilemma of whether the wars bring laurels or loss to the country. The winning side do not count the death on their sides instead they accept with pride that their men sacrificed life *'for the country'* and to those who are alive with the sense of guilt are told they killed *'for the country'*. Dylan expressed a fact that he never understood the necessity of a war, the life of people should not be uglified in any way. But what is the necessity to take pride in a war when the civilians are not left to enjoy the victory.

Bob Dylan was a man with many voices and he contained multitudes within him. Through his songs he questioned why *'the Northern politicians who speak for equality among the citizens had not yet done something about the African Americans, who were oppressed in the country especially in the south'*. Thus through his poems he wanted to awake his readers

especially the youth to be the rebellion and question against the conformity of mainstream society, he became the spokesperson for the counter cultural movements. He is a bard of the common man and he strengthened the belief that if the people strongly believed enough and stood up for those beliefs "they could build a new world" and he is sowing seeds of the decade no doubt the Times magazine called him a *'master poet, caustic social critic and intrepid, guiding spirit of the counter-culture generation.'*

Bob Dylan always held his eyes and ears open to the society. Dylan himself said, *'I don't think when I write. I just react and put it down on paper...what comes out in my music is a call to action.'* The greatness of Dylan as a song writer lies in the fact that he expresses freely throughout the lines, in these protest songs we can see Bob Dylan not as an iconoclast but just as an ordinary man, one among the Americans who are worried about their society and the angst provoked him to be a rebel. The songs of Dylan seized the political and social disruption of contemporary America. But Dylan did not take much concern in him being called as the *'voice of the generation'*

Bob Dylan made a new genre in literature by turning his music to poetry by making it a part of the oral tradition. He changed the concept of what poetry can be and how it can work. He represents the humanity which is in crisis and his poems are symbolic of offering a solution for this enquiry. His major concerns in poetry are about the contemporary American society and it changes, through his folk music he embarked his nationality as a true American citizen who is concerned with the contemporary social and political upheavals within the society.

Dylan had an immense impact on popular culture, that it influenced masses and this influence

turned out to be inspiration for many he is a spokesperson who bravely pointed out his fingers at the flaws and the infidelity of the government towards their people .His songs spoke the truth of American political, social and cultural lives.

Even though Bob Dylan wrote these songs as a protest in the 1960's we can see that it pretty much matches with the current political situation of America, it is the new president and the country is yet to see the needs of the citizen and the people are not accustomed to the new changes and now there arises a question of whether to accept or protest. And we can say that the songs proved that 'it is not for a particular century but for all centuries', all this draws us to a conclusion that Dylan can be appraised not only as a musician,composer, poet but something much broader a key figure in American culture and history.

Whether against war or against oppression or freedom,for all time his major concern was for the humanity which is held at in crisis. An artist is someone whose eyes and ears reach everywhere and has a responsibility towards society and its changes and they find different way to react to it, thanks to technology today because social media has become a great platform for artist to make it reach to the people. Even without all this Bob Dylan made it reach to the people through his songs which are the output of a mind of powerful skill and faculty. His songs especially of the 1960's are really historical archives because it chronicled the socio-political changes that happened in America.

Recently there is news of the contemporary American poets protesting against the socio-political issues and their political activism is generated through their poetry. There is a tradition of political activism in American poetry by Walt Whitman and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow this political activism is exactly seen in the poetic songs of Bob Dylan and we can say he is a veteran in the field of these political activists because he has revolutionaries the concept of songs be it folks ,blues or rock music and without any doubt it is assured that no other artist could bring the revolution among hundreds or thousands of people in the way Bob Dylan did.

In his book *Chronicles*(2004) he expresses his disapproval for the "spokesman of a generation"

label bestowed upon him. This is a sort of too kind from the part of Bob Dylan because from all the above statements we can clearly credit him as a very spokesperson of the generation and it can be further emphasized by the fact that his songs 'Blowin' in the wind' and 'The Times They Are A-Changin' became anthems of American Civil Rights Movement

He changed the idea of what poetry can be and how it can work. He represents the humanity, which is in crisis and his poems are symbolic of offering a solution for this enquiry.He dedicated himself to 20th century America, and spoke of what happened around him in an elevated style.His major concerns in poetry are about the contemporary American society and it changes, through his folk music he embarked his nationality as a true American citizen who is concerned with the contemporary social and political upheavals within the society.

Whether against war, oppression or freedom, at all times his major concern was for humanity which is held in crisis. An artist is someone whose eyes and ears reach everywhere and has a responsibility towards society and its changes; and the people find different way to respond, thanks to technology today because social media has become a great platform for artists to make it reach the people. Even without all this, Bob Dylan made it reach the people through his songs, the output of a mind of powerful skill and faculty. His songs, especially of the 1960s, are truly historical archives, because they chronicle the socio-political changes that happened in America.

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