Chapter FIVE:

Summation:

Contemporary Relevance of ‘Voice Ideas’ on Human Suffering

“Bakhtin’s ultimate value—full acknowledgements of and participation in a great dialogue—is thus not to be addressed as just one more piece of “literary criticism;” even less is it a study of fictional technique or form (in our usual sense of form). It is a philosophical inquiry into our limited ways of mirroring—and improving—our lives”.


It stands to reason to state that the present study has made a modest attempt to examine why and how The Book of Job is a complex text focused on the mystery and phenomenon of human suffering, particularly the suffering of the righteous. The Bakhtinian topology was a great aid serving as an agency of discerning the chronotopic ingredients of the dialogic content of the book and interpreting the same from the perspectives of intertextual, heteroglossic, and polyphonic voice-ideas. The study has projected and argued with a broad spectrum of substantiated readings through primary and secondary sources and defended the assertion of voice-ideas, instead of monologic fixed notions and worldviews, surrounding and guiding the way we look at the mystery of human suffering consort. The research findings reconfirm and reiterate that Bakhtin is an avid champion of dialogism that could dismantle hegemonic propositions, and initiate, expand and defend the rationale behind opting
for the socio-temporal categories of chronotopic hermeneutics. This research study has found that the Bakhtinian approach to the reading of *The Book of Job*, especially the Joban dialogue, can be, nay was, an illuminating exercise and endeavour towards affirming the existential triumph of the human spirit.

The Chapter divisions were planned and pursued accordingly as noted in the table of contents. The abstract added in the beginning of this dissertation gives an overview of the thesis statement, arguments, and research findings. Moreover, Chapter has done a brief elaboration and examination of the same in the light of a comprehensive review of literature. The review of literature was an eye-opener to the need to bring in Bakhtinian topology as a tool. With the structural cruxes having been identified and examined in Chapter Two, and the ingredients of Joban dialogue analysed and critically considered with critical substantiation and instantiation from both primary and secondary sources in Chapter Three, this researcher was able to focus on research findings in relation to the need for garnering existential spirituality as a viable and tenable option towards coping with the trauma of human suffering without rancour, anger, and confrontation, but in an ambience of dialogic relationship that could accommodate the three dimensional values, namely theocentric that foregrounds God-man relationship, anthrocentric that cherishes interpersonal relationships in the midst of accommodating and consorting with differences, and cosmocentric that embraces the diverse symphony of Nature, the created universe as beautifully, succinctly, and connotatively put forth in Chapter 28 of *The Book of Job*. In the view of the researcher, this chapter is the finest illustration of Nature’s discourse on dialogism as instantiated and enunciated by God, the dialogic Other so as to correct and sublimate the intricacies and effects of Joban dialogism ingrained in
the three cycles of speeches by Job and his friends. The study concludes, as indicated in this Chapter, Chapter Five, the last chapter, that Bakhtinian dialogism that has chronotopic aspects and dimensions, is the most telling and convincing way of interpreting The Book of Job that stands for a number of voice-ideas hovering around the triumph of the human spirit. In parenthesis, Bakhtin as a theory was so fascinating that this research should provoke, as the main guide of the study suggested, another reading focusing on the quest for ‘the Indian Bakhtin’ with reference to the Indic traditions of dhvani, vakrokti and Panini grammar in the course of reading The Book of Job.

The aesthetics of the texture of the book in the development of plot and characterization is embedded in ‘so much of irony that it reverberates and increases the density and intensity of the whole’ (David Robertson 446) sensitizing readers to discern the paradoxical dimensions of both the semiotics and semantics of the book. As Robert Sutherland examines and discusses, the juridical metaphor ingrained in the text presents the plight of Job in a trail format and facilitates readers to understand why and how Job justifies his claim of innocence and his indictment of God for social injustice and divine inaction. The complex juridical metaphor employed "makes fundamental statements about moral agency, statements that readers are called upon to affirm or deny" (Stuart Lasine 187). The meaning of the book has been the focus of a number of commentators for a little more than two millennia from the point of perspectives ranging from stereological, semiotic, and semantic. By virtue of the integration of the genres of prose and poetry and interpolations of moral contestations, the book continues to be an interpretative challenge. Scriptural and canonical readings till date have acknowledged the complexities associated with the
plight of the innocent sufferer, his response to the crisis, and the lessons to be learnt. Today, in an age of rationalism and postmodernism, mere exegetical or theological readings of suffering are being problematized as they do not lead to satisfactory solutions. Moreover, agnosticism makes one say that the idea of Satan taking part in causing affliction to Job and the idea of God becoming the ultimate Saviour are all problematic. The premises on which the history of interpretations of *The Book of Job* stands need to be deconstructed so as to ensure a yield of fresh meanings relevant to contemporary times with which the present generations grapple.

The book’s narratology which seems to be ‘dramatic’ in construction which has a few of the ingredients of Aristotelian tragedy, and its aesthetics, ethics, and hermeneutics demonstrate that it is important to be aware of the fact that human wisdom about human suffering is limited. Instead of turning Job’s suffering into an intellectual problem or discourse of theodicy or mere exegetical study, it is important to know that a definite and permanent solution to the problem of suffering may not be available on earth – in time and history – but a feeling that a solution ought to be found would keep the quest ceaseless, reasoning dialogic, voices polyphonic. This is where Bakhtin as a theory espousing the cause of dialogism and *The Book of Job* as an agency of promoting dialogic hermeneutics in terms of interconnectedness that has a social relevance become perennially significant, purposeful, and meaningful.

The blend of logos and mythos in the book focuses on God-man relationship and the problem of human suffering within a matrix of twofold fronts – one, a familiar front, portraying the 'divine drama' wherein the battle line is drawn between Satan and God on the question of man's loyalty to God, of which Job and his friends have no idea, and the other, a rational front in contrast to the familiar theological
front, contemplating ‘God in the dock’ or as Carl Gustav Jung (1952) puts it, a 'critique of God' (the 'evil face of God'), that too in an age where such criticisms were an anathema sit, for permitting evil to thrive at the cost of the innocent, suffering. On the divine / theological front, the book defends God against Satanic game-plan wherein Satan questions God: "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (Job 1: 9-11) insinuating that God has put a hedge around Job and his household. On the human/rational front, the friends of Job accuse him of the folly of human audacity to revolt against God, and from the point of view of this front, The Book of Job, as Lev Shestov, a Russian existentialist philosopher, comments, focuses on Job as “the embodiment of the battle between reason and faith” (120). The predicament of Job is situated in between and in the midst of these two fronts as one marked by ambivalence: Though he is aware of the fact that suffering is universal, he struggles with a haunting question, namely 'why should the righteous suffer?' He believes that his suffering is more due to the fact that he is being sinned rather than he is accused of sinning. His protest revolves around a mood of ambivalence -- somewhere between vehement protest and placid resignation with, of course, he 'refusing to sin against God with his lips'.

The prologue of the book hovers around the sublime with a theological thrust wherein God reigns supreme with regard to man's redemption: The plot and the character of the hero are projected in a saintly light. God is challenged by Satan with Satan asking: "Does Job fear God for nothing?" The hero is a God-fearing magnet with outstanding righteousness but afflicted with successive misfortunes. The Epistle of James sees 'Job's endurance of pain as the finest example of patience' and the Catholic doctrine goes to the extent of seeing a prefiguration of Jesus Christ, his
The epilogue states how and why God rewards Job at the end for passing the test that comes in the form of a challenge from Satan. Here, God wins, and man is a recipient of God's power and blessings. The story of Job presented in the prologue and the epilogue is majestic and sublime in tune with the conventional wisdom of the Biblical literature. Like the story of Abraham, the story of Job is another comparable type. A reference to Judy Klitsner's essay in *The Torah* comparing Job and the story of Akedat propels this researcher to suggest that future researchers and interested readers may read on *The Book of Job*'s paradoxical relationship with the story of Akedat Yitzhak in *The Book of Genesis* -- chapter 22 that stands as a testimony to Abraham's unflinching loyalty to God. It is up to human beings, left to their choice, to respond to God's incomprehensible justice either with submission or defiance.

The poetry behind the dialogues in these chapters contain a scintillating polyphony of voices implying varied perspectives through logos and mythos. The collective and complementary meanings are connoted by implication as it is done by *dhvani*, the Indic mode of poetic communication. The existential awakening on the part of Job in terms of his intellectual, moral and spiritual transformation in the backdrop of injustices and misfortunes stands out as a unique experience illumined by the poetic sublime. This awakening is in sharp contrast to the extraneous intentions of conveying conventional wisdom and justifying the ways of God in the redemption of man. It enables Job to move, as Ethan interprets, from 'ignorance to wisdom, from shortcomings to perfection, from egoism to morality, and from alienation from God to personal relationship with him'. It makes Job an enlightened figure who now knows that the world is not always run by the writ of God as the
wicked do thrive and the innocent do suffer in this world. It has made him realize that the presence and the pressure of cosmic injustice, moral apathy, and so-called rational stigmatization. This awakening transmogrifies pain as privilege and the transmogrification gives him the strength to face the predicament of his life in the quiet presence of God who is more a witness to all that happens than being the Almighty.

The final chapter of the poetic portion of the book wherein the deficiencies of rationalism and stigmatization are refuted and Joban integrity is vindicated and defended demonstrates that the book is a perennial witness not only to the fact that God's love for mankind is unconditional like that of a mother who never retires from loving but also to the plausibility that the suffering of the innocent can be a springboard to showcase the triumph of the human spirit via human integrity. What ultimately matters is not just patience but human capacity to endure the existential angst caused by human suffering. Here lies the contemporaneous relevance of the book. *The Book of Job* may remind us of *Aeschylus*, *Shakespeare* and *Milton*, *Marlowe*, *Melville*, *Dostoevsky*, *Kafka*, *Camus* and a few more who all have written about 'the tragedy of alienation in which there is a sense of separation from a once known, normative, and loved deity or cosmic order or principle of conduct'. But, the uniqueness of this book lies, as UT Dallas webinar file comments, in its 'emphasizing the dilemma, choice, wretchedness of soul from divine-human angle and 'spiritualizing human response to suffering in a dramatic context embracing a range of moods -- from pessimism and despair to bitterness, defiance, and exalted insight -- and stressing the inner dynamics of man's response to destiny' (http://www.123HelpMe.com/view.asp?id=8685).
The responses voiced from varied angles which interpolate religion, tradition, orthodoxy, rationalism, and law-suit-like argumentation ultimately vindicate “Joban integrity”, which, as Lael O. Caesar notes, stands, by extension, for “human integrity” in all humility in the witnessing presence of “divine vindication” (447). These responses tell us, by implication, how limited human insights, represented by Job and his friends in the course of tackling the most haunting human problem, namely the problem of the righteous suffering, can be. Even Eliphaz, one of the friends of Job, bows down to the chiding by God when he is made to realize the incongruity in his stances. Theodicy may be the focal point in the prologue and the epilogue but the major concern in the main section of the book is on emphasizing 'the paradox of anguish' on the part of Job and strengthening the idea of pain as privilege so as to facilitate mankind not to be overwhelmed by the intensity of pain, anguish and anger but to face it -- the human side of suffering -- with courage, hope and wisdom. This is done without radically undermining or dismantling the justice-system of God which continues to be a perennial mystery. The virtue and beauty of The Book of Job lies in the polyphonic moral contestations connoting 'an ethical struggle' that interplays between the known and the unknown, the divine and the human, 'tradition and truth', and 'human integrity and rhetoric' with a wide scope for further explorations into overlooked viewpoints and fresh insights. Indeed, The Book of Job is a reminder to all of us that human suffering, innocent suffering all the more, is so complex that it ceaselessly cries for new paths of enlightenment, for roads not yet taken, and for wisdom not yet discerned in the course of seeking real answers/solutions.
Within a multivocal framework of moral imaginations and contestations, the dialogic journey the book projects is more focused on the task of “the contrasting ways in which claims about any matter are articulated” rather than on “distinguishing truth from falsity” (Newsom 267). This is so in the beginning and the middle of the texture of the book until God comes as the dialogic Other voicing his stance that turns to be an apology for the heroism of Job in the midst of his terrible sense of loss of all his possessions, reputations, family members, and peace of mind. The Bakhtinian topology of dialogism ingrained in *The Book of Job* (especially in Chapters 4 to 31), connotes a multitude of voices actively involved in ‘mutual addressivity, engagement, and commitment to the context of real-life situations’.

The most intriguing question that bothers all thinking minds, when we think of *The Book of Job*, is whether human beings can afford to continue to believe in a just God when he turns his back, when iniquities and injustices are inflicted upon the innocent. Is God indeed just and fair? The feeling, ‘Why me, God?’ makes one ask: Should the sufferer bid farewell to God who mutely allows evil to thrive? The reality of pain and suffering is so acute that it shipwrecks one's faith in God and humanity. In the midst of pessimism, it seeks real answers to real problems. As noted in Chapter Four, Epicurus as a theory or as an answer to the problem of human suffering cannot mediate because it hovers around the meaninglessness of life as a starting point of its philosophical discourse. Likewise, Pelagianism haranguing on a stance that original sin – the sin of Adam and Eve – as narrated in the Bible has no taint in contemporary man’s life and therefore, man / woman is free to choose between good and evil and make moral choices without reference to God cannot be the panacea for the postmodern ills or sufferings in the lives of people. Despite denials, the world is
looking for a sense of God governing the affairs of mankind. This is a fact of life across cultures and civilizations.

The double-speak of the world, the hypocrisy of people, the split-personality dichotomy within all of us and the human indulgences and cruelties harming the brilliance and bounty of Nature are root causes affecting all of us causing enormous suffering. The world of ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, political, and economic conflicts that cause marginalization, exclusion, and enormous suffering of varied angsts and anxieties in the era of clash of civilizations, fundamentalist terrorism, and hedonistic ideologies in the midst of the rigours and challenges associated with pursuing globalization calls for and is in need of a synergetic spirituality that could make a carnivalesque of the existential triumph of the human spirit. The refugee crisis happening in Europe due to crises elsewhere, the Kashmiri problem causing enormous human suffering, the African crises born of ethnic clashes, the terrorists of so-called religious fundamentalism causing havoc in the lives of innocent people, and the tyranny of evil forces prowling everywhere with self-aggrandizing pursuits and incriminating tendencies and tentacles of power to misuse everything for the sake egotism --- all these sources and sites of suffering call for urgent dialogues. The ruling elite like the theologian-friends of Job are more part of the problem than solution in the dialogic discourses. The voices of those who suffer need to be heard and listened to. Job spoke and he was heard. *The Book of Job* can serve as an extended metaphor, as a reminder to all of us that we, as part of the entirety of humanity, cannot afford to ask ‘for whom the bell tolls as it tolls for each and every one of us’. No man/woman is an island, can afford to be an island. The perils of such
a venture are too disastrous to do any good to the individual. This is one of the fine lessons *The Book of Job* teaches us.

In terms of more contemporary relevance of the study, the researcher thinks and hopes that this study would inspire and propel all those who would read the dissertation would appreciate the earnest plea in made favour of dialogism as a way of critical thinking, hermeneutical practice, and as a strategy for relational striving towards questing for common goals such as quest for justice, truth, and so many freedoms from all forms of oppression and suffering, and quest for a compassionate worldview, one of the consequential values born of dialogism. Life itself is not a straight jacket. It has its twists, turns, and curves, and hence the relevance of Bakhtinian dialogism that cherishes voice-ideas in relation to complex issues such as human suffering.

To conclude, Bakhtin as theory and *The Book of Job* as a dialogic literary text are as important and significant as heart to the body and soul to the mind. They go together very well in terms of both chronotope, heteroglassia, and carnivalesque foregrounding their perennial contemporary social relevance. The gentle and firm resistance Bakhtin makes against hegemonic meanings imposed at the cost of relational striving and the chronotopic ways by which he deconstructs sense-making demonstrate how deeply he was committed to dialogism. His personal experiences under totalitarian regimes and his reflective musings emanating from his exile experiences made profound impact upon his thinking, theorizing, and social involvements. His approach to Dostoevsky’s novels, analytical discourses, linguistic-structures, and literary narratives makes him a genuine dialogue-promotor at all circumstances, at all levels of life, and literature as well. This is how he found the
books of ‘Wisdom Literature’ of the Bible as living sources of dialogism. To him, as it was to St. Jerome, the book is “like an eel”, for “if you close your hand to hold an eel …..the more you squeeze it the sooner it escapes” (qtd. in Carol A. Newsom, 3). The implication is that the dynamics ingrained in the narration in *The Book of Job* is dialogic, multivocal, and multiperspectival, open to polyphonic interpretations.

In the light of these observations and reflections, the researcher concludes that if there is one book that withstands the periodicity of time and the burden of history and remains as an evergreen beauty that appeals to beholders of varied ages and civilizations, and backgrounds and experiences in terms of crisis-management and existential spirituality, that credit goes to *The Book of Job* for the reasons posited and defended in the present study. In the same way, if there is one theory that remains still as a valuable tool and aid towards reading life-situations and literatures across cultures and civilizations, it is Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism as a chronotopic critical idiom that has a blend of linguistic, literary, aesthetic, social, moral, and ethical connotations. This points to how both Bakhtin and the author/s of *The Book of Job* have significantly contributed to ‘dialogic discourses’ which, in turn, do contribute to new knowledge, crisis-management, and conflict-resolutions. It urges those who may be of the view that *The Book of Job* is ‘too small’ to be taken up for a doctoral research-study ‘to see’ with the third eye --- the seer’s eye, the eye of objective discernment -- the worth and value of pursing an in-depth reading of the book regarding the importance of believing in ‘dialogic discourses’ as a way forward towards conflict-resolutions, and on musing on the existential angst that helps all of us have an objective view of the ground-realities around us.
In the contemporary context of multiple knowledge societies emerging and impacting our ways of thinking and living, it is crucial that we promote dialogic discourses. Bakhtin did promote dialogism as a value, literary and social as well, during the paranoid Stalinist era when and wherein he was compelled to live in personal obscurity, even in the midst of his book on Dostoevsky having been banned. International scholars have recognized the pre-eminence Bakhtin as a literary theory retains even today. Four of his seminal essays put together under one title, The Dialogic Imagination (1981) can make greater impact upon readers today in relation to aesthetics and hermeneutics. Reading and re-reading The Book of Job definitely inspires readers to cultivate the spirit of dialogism, reflect on the contemporary angsts of varied kind, and discern the nitty-gritty of God-man relationship, and human relationships by extension. Job, as an archetype, is a metaphor for dialogism against facing challenges in life and crisis-management. This is how the therapeutic sides of dialogism as reflected in both Bakhtin as a theory and in The Book of Job can work towards mutual understanding and relational striving, towards ‘understanding culture’ rather than ‘abstraction culture’. Finally, the researcher, after having read The Book of Job quite a number of times, confidently states that ‘in the eye of God’s sublime and mysterious storm’, ‘we are all Job’, to quote Judy Klitsner.

Prospects for comparative readings – reading The Book of Job in comparison with certain books of the Bible, such The Book of Psalms, The Book of Revelation, and other books of wisdom, reading the book with reference to postmodernist angsts of the 21st Century, reading the book with other texts in varied genres, such as Malmud’s The Fixer, which has already been done, the Holocaust related texts, some of the Indian literary texts, set of poems focused on human suffering, and contrapuntally relating the book with other visual texts such relevant films could be a
way forward in taking the book into more explorative ventures. Feminist readings of the book could be strengthened by virtue of its embracing a compassionate worldview. Women are better researchers when they are preoccupied with finding solutions to the problem of suffering. Their experiences surpass those of men. Their sense of God endears them towards grasping and capturing the personal God, the God incarnate, the God of unconditional grace and goodness as portrayed in *The Book of Job*. They not only have a better intuition but also a higher capacity to anchor love and forgiveness as soothing, healing, and enduring values. They are effective instruments in fine-tuning with God’s Providence. They never retire in loving and caring just as the God of Abraham and Job.

Knowledge flow today is a cross-disciplinary. Seeking solutions to human problems is also a cross-disciplinary process. *The Book of Job* provides enormous scope for interdisciplinary readings and reflections. It is inevitable that *The Book of Job* with its conduciveness to such flows inspires and provokes future research scholars towards such explorations, paths not yet trodden. This study, the researcher hopes, has provided the impetus towards such ventures in the months and years to come.