Chapter Six
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6. THE BOOK OF JOB AND ITS CONTRIBUTION

"... the compassion of the Lord is for all living beings." Sirach 18:13

6.1 Introduction

The Book of Job is an ancient book, which explores the significance of suffering with great depth of feeling. It teaches clearly about the need for patience, faith and humility in tragic situations. Suffering is universal and the experience of Job becomes global, as it deals with the problem of innocent suffering. The greatness of a book lies in its message, its presentation of characters and its appeal to any age and clime. The Book of Job is never out-dated as it speaks to the modern man about the necessity of faith in God. In the pursuit of knowledge, he has forgotten the source of wisdom (God). The Book of Job highlights the essence of human wisdom, which is to fear God and to shun evil (Ch. 28:28). Human wisdom is essential to handle the matters of every day affairs. The book also enlightens the reader about moral and spiritual values and inspires them with faith and courage to face crises in life from Job’s exemplary life. This chapter deals with the contribution of the Book of Job to individuals, society and to literature.

As Bacon observes, "studies serve for delight, for ornament and for ability". The study of the Book of Job does not prove a delightful reading but certainly it furnishes the reader, with the knowledge of the nature of suffering, the cause of suffering and the reactions and response to pain.
Clarence Edward Macartney in *Trials of Great Men of the Bible* pays a glorious tribute to the Book of Job when he remarks, “every man ought to read at least one great book before he dies. If you have read the Book of Job, you have read the greatest of books. Here is a vastness and sublimity like that of the ocean, sometimes raging and mounting up to heaven, sometimes sleeping in infinite peace and resignation. Here we have intense sorrow and suffering, soul-searching interrogation, infinitely tender appeal, sublime faith in God and Christ like trust and submission”.2

As Macartney points out this didactic narrative presents the sublime subject of the trial of Job, causes of suffering and his endurance. The book has manifold instruction on suffering, moral behaviour and spiritual truths, and let us considers about the priceless truths about suffering.

6.2 *The Book of Job and its Insight on Suffering*

As Alexander Mac Laren comments, “the book of Job wrestles with the problem of the meaning of the mystery of sorrow”.3

The Book of Job deals with the intense suffering of Job due to his loss of wealth, property, children, health and reputation. Disease, suffering, loss and death are part of life. The story of his suffering has a message for humanity. In his affliction he felt grief, loneliness, bitterness, alienation and despair but inspite of the tragedies, he trusted in God. Even in sorrow, he worshipped God:

“Naked came I out of my mother’s womb and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Ch. 1:21).
Job was not hesitant to receive evil from the hand of God (Ch. 2: 10). In
the prologue, his reaction to sorrow was rare and remarkable. But as the story
developed, he showed signs of rebellion and anger in his speeches, which were
caused by the adverse criticism of his three friends. Job never bore his grief in
silence like Viola in Twelfth Night does, “smiling at grief”. 4 His complaints,
groans and angry outbursts were triggered by his friends’ censure. His
arguments could not convince his friends of his innocence that he complained
to God for vindication (Ch. 23:4 – 5).

Job never wavered in faith, due to his inability to understand God’s
purpose in his inscrutable pain. He could not fathom the designs and plans of
God, for he was unaware of Satan’s challenge to God about Job’s sincerity; but
he trusted in God’s sovereignty in his life and firmly believed that he would
“come forth as gold” after his trial (Ch. 23:10). Job was sincere in his devotion
and his loyalty to God was commendable (Ch. 13:15). In his ordeal of patience
and faith, Job only turned to God for consolation and comfort. He was aware of
God’s witness for his integrity. “Also now, behold my witness is in heaven,
and my record is on high” (Ch. 16:19). Job’s friends failed to show sympathy
and concern. The Book of Job teaches the necessity, and the significance of
friendship in suffering. As William Sanford Laser observes, “Job also teaches
the importance of friendship in suffering, and especially the danger of
simplistic advice, naive counsel, or false comfort. In a sense the greatest
tragedy of the book is that of failed friendship, made worse by sensible
theology badly applied”. 5

Though his friends proved “miserable comforters” and did not alleviate
his pain, Job displayed moral courage and fortitude and ultimately
triumphed gloriously. Job was not conscious of any known sin in his
life. In utter confusion at the turn of events, Job questioned God’s just dealings in his life. God who spoke so highly of his servant, came to vindicate the name of Job and exposed his ignorance about the moral government of the universe. Job realized his insignificance in the presence of the Almighty God (Ch. 42:3) and confessed his offence of irreverent talk (Ch. 42:3). He repented in dust and ashes. Job’s loss of fellowship with God, his Maker, had been restored and his suffering ceased.

R.K. Harrison is of the opinion that “even a righteous man can utilize such an experience as that through which the hero passed to attain to new heights of emotional and spiritual maturity”.6 As R.K. Harrison points out every reader can gain knowledge and spiritual maturity from Job’s experiences.

6.3 Lessons from Job’s Suffering

Job faced grief. The tragic experiences of Job reveal that suffering is personal which has to be borne with courage and fortitude. Faith is essential to surmount the tragedies of life. Attitudes and responses differ due to ethnic background and culture. Job was neither a stoic; nor a believer in fatalism. He firmly placed his implicit trust in God and held the opinion that God was responsible for his affliction (Ch. 16:11 – 12). He clung to God in faith for vindication of his honour. He was not passive but poured out his grief in laments and complaints. In his sorrow, he was more sensitive to the suffering humanity and his perspectives were broadened (Ch. 24). Finally, in his suffering, he acquired a personal knowledge of God and revelation of the truth that God is with the suffering individual. He attained a face to face encounter
with the divine who though immortal, invisible and wise became a friend of Job.

6.4 The Religious Concepts of the Book of Job

1. The Book of Job teaches the eternal truth about the inscrutable ways of God in the lives of his people.

2. It is vain to strive against the creator, for he does not give an account of his action (Ch. 33:13).

3. God is great and we can not know Him or understand him or his ways (Ch. 36:26). It is not possible with human mind and words to explain God and His action (Ch. 42:3).

4. God is sovereign over nature man, devil, and history (Ch. 38 - 41, 42:2).

5. God is the source of wisdom (Ch. 12:13). The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding (Ch. 28:28).

6. The suffering of Job was not penal, but a test of his character. Job's friends argued that he was responsible for his suffering. The traditional retributive theory is refuted by the Joban writer to show that Job's affliction was intended to prove his loyalty and integrity.

As Fleming James remarks In the Personalities of the Old Testament, "... in ancient Israel the many who believe in God go through life fairly well with the old retribution dogma. But to the few who do not know, the writer of the Book of Job still offers a philosophy which can at length bring release and healing". 7.
7. In his encounter with God, Job realized his folly of irreverent talk; and he is furnished with the knowledge of God’s sovereignty in the world. (Ch. 42). Job acknowledged God's sovereignty and his concern for him. David F. Hinson observes, “God’s care is shown in the fact that He has revealed Himself to Job. That is all that matters”.

8. The Book of Job throws light on the significant truths about the relationship between man and God, i.e. Job’s integrity, test of his loyalty and God’s vindication.

9. In the depiction of Job as a hero of faith, the Joban writer lays stress on the necessary qualification of implicit trust in God under all circumstances. Job’s unparalleled sufferings were effected by Satan’s challenge to God about Job’s integrity. In Job’s great triumph of faith, he won the argument of God.

10. The author expresses his belief in the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body (Ch. 19: 25 – 26).

6.5 The Valuable Lessons from Job’s Character

6.5.1 Job’s Generosity

Job’s prosperity was not a hindrance to his purity. His substance was seven thousand sheep, four thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she asses, and a very great household. Job took no pride in his possession. He was not allured by the vices of riches; but he cheerfully shared his riches with the needy.

“If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of widow to fail; or have eaten of my morsels myself alone; and the
fatherless hath not eaten there of. If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor with out covering”. (Ch. 31:16 – 17, 19).

As Joseph Byrnes observes in The Psychology of Religion, “charity is a kind of loving awareness of fellow creatures. It arises from the turning of emotions towards positive and harmonious affections.” His wealth added a lustre to his piety that he served his God with his abundant wealth.

6.5.2 Job’s Humility

Job enjoyed position, power and pelf but he remained humble and harmless. Pomp and fame did not corrupt him. He was a prince, a magistrate and a man of authority. Every one stood in awe of him. “I chose out their way, and sat chief; and dwelt as a king in the army, as one that comforteth the mourners.” (Ch. 29:25). With the tragic reversal of his fortune, Job became the object of mockery and derision. He was condemned as a hypocrite; and was humiliated by the children of the basemen (Ch. 30:9 – 10). He was an honoured man of wealth and status, reduced to be a mere pauper and an outcast. He drained the cup of suffering to its very dregs. Later in the story, in his encounter with God, he humbly confessed his limited knowledge and repented of his folly in dust and ashes, which won back for him the divine favour.

6.5.3 Job - The Darling of Society

Job held the high esteem of the people and of his country. He was a champion of the downtrodden, and a benefactor of society. “My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch, my glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand (Ch. 30:19 – 20). Job
valued himself only by the service that he rendered to society. He served his fellow men to his heart’s content.

6.5.4 Job’s Sound Judgement and Love of Justice and Tenderness

Job was an oracle of law and justice. He was consulted as an oracle and his dictates were readily agreed upon. “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me, my judgement was as a robe and a diadem. And I broke the jaws of the wicked and plucked the spoil out of his teeth (Ch. 29:14, 17). With wisdom and love of justice, he earned well-merited respect in the conduct of his office. He was firm in his dealings and tender in his affection. He was endowed with compassion to comfort the needy and to console the distressed. He was a source of strength and comfort to the oppressed (Ch. 4:3 – 4). His compassion for the downtrodden reflects his love for God and his obedience of His law.

6.5.5 Job’s Right Speech in His Affliction

Job’s arguments about his innocence, did not convince his friends that he was guiltless. They were harsh in their unjust and unkind criticism. They condemned him as a hypocrite and argued that he deserved his punishment. They were professors of religion, and to a man in the abyss of despair and self-pity, they offered only religion and no comfort. Job argued that God afflicted both the righteous and the wicked (Ch. 21). He blamed his friends for misunderstanding and misinterpreting God’s ways. “Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him? Will ye accept his person? Will ye contend for God?” (Ch. 13:7 – 8).

Job obviously possessed a deeper knowledge of God (Ch. 9); and he was honest with God. The three friends accused Job of oppression and
wickedness to justify God's ways in punishing him. Job did not consider his suffering as a punishment for his sin. In the last chapter of the Book of Job, the Lord commended Job for speaking the right things of God (Ch. 42:7) and He was angry with Eliphaz and his two friends for their wrong interpretation.

Gustavo Gutierrez remarks, "any one who has known times of rebellion against God and against the lives, He has providentially brought to us, can only marvel and gratefully rejoice over the miracle that is Job – the man who argued with God and men – who is called "my servant" who has spoken right concerning God."

In the trials of life, people are tempted to speak unwisely, or criticise God’s ways and make false judgements. Job’s speech serves as a model, to utter the right things of God in our trials.

6.5.6 Job as a Hero of Faith and Patience

In his affliction, Job exhibited an almost incredible faith in God. His initial despair and self-pity were overcome by his total trust in God (Ch. 23:10 – 11). His patience and perseverance acted as guardians of his faith (Ch. 13:15).

6.5.7 Job’s Right Priorities

Job was sincere in his religion and upright in his dealings with God and man. The fear of the Lord was the guiding principle of his life. He was ever conscious of pleasing Him by his sacrifices and rituals and dreaded the thought of incurring his displeasure. God was Job’s first priority. In his grief, he felt abandoned by God (Ch. 19:6, 9). He longed for the restoration of God’s favour
and friendship. In his personal encounter, with humble submission, he acknowledged his fault and admitted God’s sovereignty in his life and knew the joy of his salvation and God’s fellowship (Ch. 42:4 – 5). In the words of Jessie Penn-Lewis, “the story of Job teaches us that the inner most knowledge of God is given when the soul has been stripped of all that may, even unknowingly, dim its inner vision, and keep it preoccupied even with the blessings instead of with God ...”¹⁰ Job attained personal knowledge of God by a total surrender to God's will. He was blessed with a right perspective of God, and of his own self (Ch. 40:4).

Job’s second priority was his family. He was a loving father to his children and a kind husband to his wife. He rebuked her gently (Ch. 2:10). He did not blame her like Adam did blame his wife in the Garden of Eden. (Gen. 3:12). The large family had enjoyed harmony and affection. On festive days Job offered burnt offerings and sanctified them (Ch. 1:5). He acted as a priest for his family. Job’s godliness was reflected in the way he reared his large family; for they lived in harmony (Ch. 1:13). Many responsible fathers in our modern society sacrifice their comforts to provide their children good education and secure other joys in life for them; but only a few of them instill in them, the fear of the Lord, in a materialistic and highly competitive world.

6.5.8 Job’s Moral Excellence

Job’s moral standards were high and noble. He guarded himself against the desires of the flesh and the world and never turned away from the path of the just. He kept himself pure both in body and mind. “Doth not he see my ways and count all my steps? If I have walked with vanity or if my foot hath hasted to deceit.” (Ch. 31:4 – 5). Job solemnly asserted that he was not guilty of adultery or insincerity or love of gold or worship of the heavenly bodies (Ch.
He kept his vision pure (Ch. 31:1). He did not sin with his lips (Ch. 2:10) or cursed an enemy (Ch. 31:30). As Donald Southeard comments, “his (the author’s) own moral teaching reaches to noblest heights in the Old Testament. The sins repudiated in (Ch. 31) far out pass the requirements of the moral codes of the day. Here not only are the universally recognized offence condemned – deceit, fraud, theft, adultery etc – but the ‘secret sins’ of pride, covetousness, hypocrisy and impurity of thought. In his ethical understanding the writer comes very near to the spirit of the sermon on the mount (Cf. also 22:6, 7, 9, 24, 2 - 4, 9 - 10, 14 – 15”).

6.5.9 Job’s Social Conscience

Job was a paragon of virtues. As a man of ethical excellence he is unparalleled. His acts of charity and service are described in chapter twenty-nine and thirty one. With his 'social conscience' Job served the needy.

Book of Job enlightens us on ‘social conscience’. There are good examples in our society who served their fellow beings with tenderness and concern like Job did for his contemporaries.

Like Job, Mother Teresa was also a woman with social conscience. She dedicated her life to the service of the poor and destitutes. The recognition of her great service will be echoed down the ages. Mother Teresa was known as, “the Lady of the slums, the champion of the poor ... the apostle of the unwanted ... the Angel of mercy ... Saint of the gutters ... the gentle Mother!”

Like the man of Uz (Job) who was a father to the poor people of his society (Ch. 29:16) Mother Teresa served the suffering community of Calcutta.
In a similar manner Vinoba Bhave dedicated his life for the landless poor of his country. This saintly man renounced his wealth for the service of mankind. He championed the cause of the poor. With his Bhoodan movement, he collected millions of acres of land as free gifts from the landlords and distributed them to the landless poor. Job was an emblem of altruism. Similarly Vinoba Bhave served the poor and diminished their misery. The Book of Job is not an outdated book. It still speaks to the modern saints to assume their moral and social responsibilities and benefit the global society.

In a ‘healthy community’ the widow, the poor and the stranger can enjoy true justice, loyalty and compassion (Zech. 7:9 – 10). Job’s genuine religion and sincere devotion to God, endowed him with high moral standards. With the golden law in his heart, he served God and his neighbour. His good deeds, and noble service to the stranger, the widow and the orphan (Ch. 29:12 – 15, 17, 31:16 – 18 gently remind the global society to build up a healthy community, free from prejudice and hatred.

6.5.10 Job an Extrovert

Job was a great extrovert. In the words of Robert M. Goldenson, “individuals with strong extroversive tendencies are outgoing, sociable, energetic and more interested in action and practical realities than in abstract ideas. They tend to be emotionally responsive self-confident and express their feelings freely and naturally ...”.

Job served his fellow men with his generous nature. His great acts of charity pleased both men and God.

The writer has a message in the depiction of this perfect man. Job was a righteous man; his noble character was even attested by God. No doubt he was
the object of Satan's envy. In the portrayal of Job, the Joban writer conveys the message that man can serve God with out any motive. God revealed His sovereignty to men. God has concern for his creation. The suffering of the innocent is caused by the malicious devil (Ch. 1:10 – 11). But the virtuous will ultimately triumph in their test of faith (Ch. 42:10).

6.5 Psychological Truths in the Book of Job

Even in the days of prosperity Job was not without anxiety. He was afraid for his children that in their festivity they might offend God, and hurried on to sanctify them and offered burnt offerings for them. As a rich man, he would have harboured secret fears of losing his wealth, health and children. He might have entertained anxious thoughts about the loss of his reputation. He had the fear of the unknown, and the future. As William B. Oglesby Jr. remarks, "... fear is that of the unknown or the awesome, the terror arising from the prospect of dealing with the unfamiliar".15 Job’s fears were not imaginary; they became real (Ch. 3:25). But some Bible Scholars believe that Job feared only the loss of his reputation. "Losing his reputation as a godly person was a severe blow to his religious ego, for no longer would he be regarded as a saint or esteemed as on oracle of God."16 Job’s experience teaches that it is wise to avoid negative thoughts. Robert M. Goldenson in his book brings out the difference between clinical psychology and counselling psychology. "The aim of clinical psychology is to change the client's reaction pattern while the aim of counselling psychology is to enable the client to make more effective use of his present resources".17
The three friends failed to counsel Job properly. They proved to be miserable comforters. They were judgemental; and condemned him with out understanding the nature of his crisis. Understanding and compassion are essential to console a person in grief. Instead of leading him to a path self-discovery and self-realization, they took Job to the brink of despair and self-pity. He lost their friendship in the most crucial period of his crises. They shattered his image and magnified themselves. To those who are smarting with pain, prodigality of words is unnecessary. Even their silent presence can yield solace. Understanding, genuine pity or compassion and concern are essential to comfort and console the suffering individual. Job’s friends lacked sympathy due to their inhumanity and pride. The Book of Job teaches that gentle behaviour and kind speech serve as ‘balm of Gilead’ to the broken-hearted. In a world of materialism more Elihus are needed to present God to the grief-stricken souls. “Pleasant words are as an honey comb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones”. (Prov 16:24). It is better to say nothing than to speak the wrong thing to people who are in agony.

6.6 Book of Job and Creation of the World

Provoked by the unjust condemnation of his three friends, Job even questioned God’s dealings in his life. Job was over confident of his self-righteousness; but even his right deeds and right behaviour could not furnish him with the perfect knowledge of God. God answered his plea for vindication in person. In his magnificent address from the whirlwind, God questioned Job about his designs and methods in the management of the universe. God began with creation (Ch. 38: 4 – 11). God exposed Job’s ignorance regarding the
earth, and the sea. God challenged Job to answer about the springs of the morning, of the springs of the sea, of the gates of death and the breadth of the earth, of the place and the way of light and darkness, of the treasures of the snow and hail. (Ch. 38:22 – 30). God continued to disclose Job’s ignorance about stars, constellation, clouds and rains (Ch. 38:31 – 38]. In his wisdom and power God remains high above the sphere of man and the rest of his creation. His provision and protection for the animal kingdom was also disclosed to Job (Ch. 38:39, 39:1 – 30). Nature is a clear proof of God’s power and majesty.

God’s omniscience, omnipotence and dominion can never be challenged by any one, and none can fathom the mysterious ways of God. He is the Lord of nature and of history. In the words of wheeler Robinson, “the speeches of God are, the greatest and the most comprehensive account of natural phenomena which the Old Testament affords”.18 The Book of Job throws light on the creation of the world and on God’s moral government of the universe. The greatness and the strength of the book lies in the fact that the omnipotent God made his appearance to vindicate the honour of his servant, and in the process made a revelation of his concern for his creation, and for his servant.

6.8 Job’s Knowledge of Nature

Men of God believe in the creation of God, and acknowledge his rule in nature and in the affairs of men. In the twelfth century Hugo Victor expressed his view in a telling manner, “for the whole visible world is a book written by the finger of God, that is created by divine power .... But he who is spiritual and can judge all things, while he considers outwardly the beauty of the work, inwardly conceives how marvelous is the wisdom of the creator”.19 Job’s
knowledge and love of God enabled him to appreciate the marvels of God's creation. He acknowledged God's rule in nature (Ch. 9:7 – 10). Job's vast knowledge of nature is clearly displayed in many of his discourses, and the most impressive observation is found in Chapter 26:7. "He strecheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing." Verse 10 teaches that one part of the globe is in light while the other part is in darkness.

6.9 Book of Job and its Wisdom

The new Bible Dictionary defines wisdom Literature as "a family of literary genres, common in the ancient Near East in which instructions for successful living are given as the perplexities of human existence are contemplated." The Book of Job is part of the wisdom literature. There are two types of wisdom. Of the two types, Proverbial wisdom comprises of short, pithy sayings which express rules for personal happiness and well being. Examples could be found in the Book of Proverbs. Speculative wisdom attempts to probe problems of life such as suffering, sin and death, meaning of life, and man's relationship with God. Monologues in Ecclesiastes and the dialogues in the Book of Job abound with speculative wisdom. The ancients were also baffled by the suffering of the innocent. Does life have any meaning or purpose? Why do the righteous suffer while the wicked go unpunished? The ancient wisdom writings of Mesopotamia and Egypt dealt with such questions.

In the Book of Job, the sufferer faces God (his divine enemy) and accepts his plight; God takes the responsibility to relieve him of his misfortune. The self-discovery of Job and the revelation of God in his suffering remain the heart of the matter. According to E.J. Bicknell, "the Book of Job stands apart.
It belongs in the truest sense to the wisdom literature. Its purpose is to discuss the problem of life and in particular to refute the popular idea that suffering is the proof of sin and great suffering is the proof of great sin. The story itself is a saga, as old as the folk tales that underlie the early narratives of Genesis”.

A hymn to wisdom (Ch. 28) deals with human and divine wisdom. The writer clearly illustrates his appreciation and admiration for science, technology and mining industry, which demonstrate human wisdom; but true wisdom does not depend on theoretical knowledge. True wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Job was endowed with human wisdom. Job clearly distinguished between knowledge of God and all other knowledge. He was aware of the futility of human wisdom. “No doubt, but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you.” (Ch. 12:2). Job also possessed knowledge of the truth that God is the source of wisdom. “With him is strength and wisdom.” (Ch. 12:13). In the hymn to wisdom, Job placed great emphasis on the need for finding out hidden wisdom. “But where shall wisdom be found. And where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof, neither is it found in the land of the living (Ch. 28:13). God alone is the source of true wisdom. No one can claim to possess it (Eve was tempted by the serpent with a lie to become wise and she paid for it dearly).

As W.G. Lambert remarks, “... Wisdom is the order given to the world by God a mystery that humans can not reach”. But God endows man with wisdom and understanding to handle their life situations. Wisdom is found only in the principle and practice of true religion. The essence of wisdom lies in the fear of the Lord and in the avoidance of evil (Ch. 28:28). A wise man also acknowledges God’s rule in the universe and his activities are governed by this truth.
Human beings face adversity in the path of life. Some face it boldly, many try to flee from it; and to those who tread the path of suffering and endeavour to endure it with patience and fortitude Book of Job is a great source of solace and comfort. As JoPetty observes, “those who have suffered much are like those who know many languages, they have learned to understand all and to be understood by all”.\(^{23}\) Suffering humanity can certainly receive moral courage from this book. The Book of Job serves as a healing angel to many readers of the book. Many suffering individuals bear witness to this truth. As D. Guthrie remarks, “the Book of Job is a universal book, because it speaks to a universal need – the agony of the human heart when wracked by the heart ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. The testimony of a woman dying of cancer, that the Book of Job spoke to her need as no other book in the Bible is sufficient evidence”.\(^{24}\)

Joni Ereckson is an invalid who bears witness to the strengthening influence of the book. Joni became an invalid in a diving accident at the age of seventeen. The Book of Job had brought comfort and courage to her in the fiery trial of her life and enabled her to enjoy an intimate relationship with God. She says, “God became – incredibly close to me. I guess every Christian with an experience similar to mine goes back to the Book of Job for answers. Here was a righteous man who suffered more than I could imagine. Every thing was taken away from him ... strangely the Book of Job does not answer any questions about why God let the tragedies happen. But Job clung to God .... May be God’s gift to me is my dependence on Him”.\(^{25}\) Thus the Book of Job brings consolation to the suffering individuals in the global society.
6.11  *Book of Job and Science*

The nature of the Almighty God is beyond human comprehension. The first discourse of God revealed the wisdom of the creator, and the second discourse disclosed his power over his creation. These speeches describe his dominion and moral government. God ironically questioned Job of his knowledge of God's designs and purposes in the universe. Job acknowledged his ignorance. Even the scientists admit their ignorance to explain about the mysteries of the universe. William Kelly in his journal, 'The Bible Treasury', mentions about a German scientist who was unable to answer the hard question of God. William Kelly observes, "... about matters of science on this earth they (Germans) have had some very able men of late years, and nobody perhaps was a greater oracle in science and knowledge than the famous Baron Alexander Humboldt, and these words of Jehovah astonished him; and he acknowledged that what Job could not answer, the men of science can not answer yet. It is over whelming to them; because although men of science are very clever about secondary causes, they are always stopped by primary causes. They never can arrive at the great cause and they do not want the great cause". 

6.11.1 First World War and The Book of Job

In the First World War, Britain was on the verge of defeat at the hands of the Germans. The British Government, sought the help of Dr. Chaim Weizmann, a professor of chemistry in the Manchester University. By his intense research, Dr. Weizmann produced a poisonous gas known as T.N.T Gas.
Job Gnana Prakasam quotes the following lines in his Tamil book, 'Yesu Christuvin Irandam Varugai' (Second Coming of Lord Jesus Christ), "others say that during the First World War, the British war industry ran short of a certain chemical called 'acetone' required in the production of vital munitions which were necessary to the successful prosecution of the war. Officials in the British government approached Dr. Chaim Weizmann, a brilliant Jewish chemist, and explained their difficulties to him. He accepted the challenge and soon discovered a solution for the problem."27 The T.N.T. Gas was sent to the war fronts, but due to the climatic conditions, the gas was spoilt. The British Government informed the chemist about it for its rectification. While meditating on the Book of Job Dr. Weizmann was enlightened by the verse "hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? Or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble against the day of battle and war?" (Ch. 38:22–23). The scientist continued to research vigorously on the utility of the hail stones in the transportation of the gas. To his surprise and great relief the hail stones preserved the gas from spoiling, and the British Government successfully implemented it in the war and won the battle. The Book of Job had saved a nation from its enemy with its scientific truths.

6.12 The Portrayal of Cultural Behaviour in the Book of Job

The Book of Job deals with a real historical situation and events, connected with it. Job was a historical person. He was mentioned along with Noah and Daniel as a righteous man (Ezek. 14:14). Job lived in the land of Uz (Northern Mesopotamia) or the Hauran. As Guillaume points out, "Job may
have been the paramount chief of the great North Arabian tribe. The Edomite origin of Job's friends suggest that like certain sub tribes of the Anaza, his seat was near Teuma ...". The Book of Job deals with the problem of innocent suffering and hence the book abounds with speeches and monologues with minimal references to traditional behaviour.

The first reference was the ritual of mourning mentioned in Ch. 1:20. When Job came to know of the loss of his children he rose silently and rent his mantle and shaved his head. "Then Job rose, and rent his mantle and shaved his head..." (Ch. 1:20). The three friends who came to mourn with Job also observed the traditional rites of mourning. They humbled themselves and sat in the ashes - 'mazbala' out side the town. Job in his oath of innocence declared that he was not guilty of the worship of the moon or the heavenly bodies which was practised everywhere around them, "from the valley of the Nile to the plains of Mesopotamia". The Jerome Bible commentary elaborates on the legal procedure of ancient Israel known as the oath of innocence. "The oath of innocence denying an accusation was important in the legal proceedings of Israel." (Ch. 31:1 - 40). It supplemented testimony or could supply for it. In default of clear evidence, it was accepted as settling a case i.e. .... it transferred the decision to God himself, who, if the defendant had sworn falsely would bring down on his head the curses he had expressly invited in the oath. Thus the swearing was a solemn religious act, submitting the case to the obvious verdict .

In the ancient Hebrew patriarchal systems, only the elders were permitted to express their opinions. In allowing Elihu the younger man to utter his thoughts, the Joban writer had deviated from the traditional way. R.K. Harrison observes, "another important criticism of ancient Hebrew life and thought as furnished by Job seems to the present writer to be related to the
ancient patriarchal organizational concepts .... Job followed the usual courtesies in permitting the elders to speak first on the issues before them, but there upon departed completely from tradition by allowing a young man who in any event ought to have had no particular opinion of his own ... to express views ...”.32

Job followed the ancient custom of allowing the elders to speak first and later did not consider it wrong to allow Elihu the younger man to offer his comments.

6.12.1 Hebrew Concept of Iniquity

In the speech of Eliphaz (Ch. 4:8) iniquity meant noughtiness or nothing; which described the ethical concept of the Hebrews. As Guillaume observes, “one of the ethical conceptions of the Hebrews was that of sin being nothingness, something which could bring men to nought (Amos 5:5) ....”33

Eliphaz considered Job as a man of iniquity, and presumed that this iniquity would ultimately bring him to nothing.

6.12 Book of Job and its Literary Forms

The Book of Job falls into five divisions
1. A prologue in prose (Ch. 1:1 – 2:13).
2. Poetic discussion among Job and his three friends (Ch. 3:1 – 31:40).
3. Advice by Elihu in poetic form (Ch. 32:1 – 37:24).
4. God’s challenge and questions and Job’s answer in poetic form (Ch. 38:1 – 42:6).
5. An epilogue in prose (Ch. 42:7 – 17).

The three cycles of speeches, advice of Elihu, and challenge of God constitute the bulk of the book. (Ch. 3:1 – 42:6). The discussions belong to the wisdom type of literature and deal with a single theme – the theme of suffering.

6.13.1 The Literary Forms

I The prose narrative sets the scene for subsequent events – Job’s piety, prosperity and God’s test of his integrity.

II Job’s lament (Ch. 3, 10:18). Job curses the day of his birth and wishes for death. It expresses Job’s mental anguish.

III. The Hymns: The hymns glorify God’s acts and His attributes (Ch. 9:4 – 10) Ch. 12:13 – 25, Ch. 26:5 – 14, Ch. 36:24, Ch. 37:13). The hymns describe God’s majesty. Job and his friends use the hymns to speak of God’s greatness. For example:

"With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding (Ch. 12:13). Remember that thou magnify his work, which men behold." (Ch. 36:24).

Chapter twenty-eight is a poem on wisdom.

Apart from the dialogues of the three friends, there are three monologues – Job’s, (Ch 29 – 31, Elihu’s Ch.32 – 37, God’s Ch.38 – 41). Lyric Poetry: (Ch.3 : 11 – 19, Ch. 7 : 2 – 8, Ch.12 – 21,Ch. 9 : 25 — 31.) The Book of Job contains grand epic proportions with its sublime theme of man, God and the universe. It deals with the universal theme of suffering
with an appeal to people of any clime and time. Job possessed all the virtues of a hero. Sir Richard Blackmore terms him a proper hero for an epic poem. In his view, "Job appeared brave in distress, valiant in affliction and maintained his virtue and character under the most exasperating provocation that the malice of hell could invent; Job was the most noble example of passive fortitude and no inferior to that of an active hero".34

The Book of Job can be called a tragi-comedy. As in a drama it develops the working of strong passions of Job, in its depiction of human mind with its alternation of faith and despair, depression and strong confidence. It verges on the border of a tragedy with Job's loss of wealth, children, health and reputation. Job enjoyed a reversal of his fortunes with the awesome intervention of God, which transformed his dark despair into jubilant confidence providing a happy ending to the narrative. Thus it can be called a tragi-comedy.

6.13 Shakespeare and the Joban Poet Compared

Job did not suffer for any tragic flaw. His suffering was a test of his character; but Shakespearean tragic heroes suffered due to their tragic flaws. As Francis Anderson observes, "Shakespeare's human world is already secular. God is absent, where as in Job, He is all-important. Belief in the goodness of creation, in the justice of God, and in the ever-available possibility of redemption made tragedy impossible with in Biblical thought".35 The Joban writer did not end his narrative with an unhappy note, as vindication of Job's character was essential part of it.
6.14 The Introduction of the Supernatural in Book of Job

The introduction of God or Satan in the narrative is not strange or uncommon in the ancient dramas as elucidated by Allardyce Nicoll. According to him, “it must not be supposed of course that the introduction of a royal hero was the sole method employed by the ancient dramatists to secure universality. There are many others, not mentioned by Aristotle but figuring in plays Greek as well as English. Of these probably the most potent is the direct presentation of some force that is extra human, a force that at once serves as a fairly powerful means of obtaining an atmosphere broader than the mere individual events enacted upon the stage, and of providing some emotion of awe which will be found in one of the prime essentials of tragedy”. 36

In the Book of Job, God commended Job for his integrity. Satan challenged it and questioned Job’s sincerity in his devotion. In his adversity Job clung to God in faith and proved his loyalty and devotion to God (Ch. 23: 10). At the close of the narrative, God rewarded his faithful servant; but Satan was not mentioned in the epilogue – a sly hint at the triumphing of the good over the evil.

6.15 The Book of Job and Hebrew Poetry

The Book of Job is one of the greatest dramatic poems abounding with parallelism. In the words of Merrill F. Unger and Gary N. Larson, “Hebrew poetry unlike occidental verse does not possess metre or rhyme. Its basic
structure is parallelism or thought arrangements rather than word arrangements".  

In Hebrew poetry two lines are required to make a single unit. Hebrew parallelism is a seconding structure for emphasis or heightened effect. The first line and the second line form a couplet and the second line will either restate it or contrast it, completes it or explains it.

6.16.1 Synonymous Parallelism

An example with reiteration:

"Shall moral man be more just than God?"
"Shall a man be more pure than his Maker?" (Ch. 4:17).

6.16.2 Antithetic Parallelism

In the antithetic parallelism the second line presents a contrasting thought to emphasize the first.

“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;
but now mine eye seeth thee” (Ch. 42:5).

6.16.3 Synthetic Parallelism

In synthetic parallelism, the second and succeeding lines add a progressive flow of thought to develop the first (Ch. 4:19 – 20).

“How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?
They are destroyed from morning to evening...” (Ch. 4: 19 - 20).
6.16.4 Repetition and Irony

The Hebrew writers employed the literary technique of repetition in their poetry. As Norman C. Habel points out, "purposeful repetition as a literary technique is typical of Biblical narrative and poetry. This literary technique was used to create 'Intentional association and connection between lines which may be immediately juxtaposed or separated by extended speeches."

Example: the verb see is repeated with a number of synonyms (e.g: watch, look at, gaze upon) to emphasize the fact that God was spying on Job to detect his miseries (Ch. 7:8).

6.16.5 Irony

Job and his three friends very often used verbal irony as a technique to expose the opponents' wrong views. For example, Eliphaz took up the very words of Job, emptiness and torment (Ch. 3) and used them in his speech to portray the anguish of the wicked (Ch. 15:20).

6.16.6 Similies and Metaphors

Similies and metaphors were employed to add depth of meaning, or to intensify feeling and emotion. They were also used to add force to the truth conveyed. Winton Thomas comments on the fondness of the Hebrew mind for word pictures. He observes, "...the Hebrew mind thought in pictures and the language achieved a remarkable vividness by the use of metaphors for which it had a special fondness". The Joban writer had effectively used the metaphors
and similies for the desired effect. He draws his comparison from nature and from human activities.

1. From nature, the poet used the figure of a felled tree (Ch. 14:7 - 12) to express Job's helpless state. A tree has hope of survival but not a man.

2. Job's friends had deserted him and their treachery was compared to a deceitful brook (Ch. 6:15 - 24).

3. The poet compared the trust of people who forget God to a spider's web (Ch. 4:14).

Zophar reminded Job of the fleeting nature of the wicked 'as a dream that flies away.' "He shall fly away as a dream and shall not be found" (Ch. 20:8).

Job described about his enemies coming upon him as "the breaking in of waters" (Ch. 30:14) The Joban writer exhibited his excellent descriptive powers as he compared the eyelids of the morning to the reddish eyes of the crocodile. Guillaume sheds more light on this splendid passage. "The allusion is apparently to the reddish eyes of the crocodile which appear gleaming through the water before the head appeared above the surface". 40 (Ch. 41:18) The Joban poet had exhibited his great erudition, command of language and poetic skills in his great masterpiece.

6.16.7 The Long Sentence Pattern in the Book of Job

In the Book of Job a single sentence runs into a long paragraph. For example:
“Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house and they bemoaned him and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him. Every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.” (Ch. 42:4)

In the New Revised Standard Version, the verse is expressed thus:

“Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters, and all who had known him before and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring” (Ch. 42:11).

6.16.8 The Use of Archaic Vocabulary

1. Whence comest thou (Ch. 1:7).
2. Hast thou (Ch. 1:8).
3. Escheweth (Ch. 2:3).
4. Holdeth (Ch. 2:3).
5. Movedst (Ch. 2:3).
6. Thine hand (Ch. 2:6).
7. Dost thou (Ch. 2:9).
8. Speakest (Ch. 2:10).
9. Canst (Ch. 42:2).

The archaic words add lustre and grandeur to the didactic narrative.
6.17 Book of Job and the Greek Play Prometheus Bound

Prometheus was chained to a rock in Caucasus for he had incurred divine displeasure (Zeus) for bringing the gift of fire to the mortals. The nymphs and the spirits of the sea begged him to submit to Zeus. He refused to do so. Prometheus was demanded to reveal his secret (of destroying Zeus); when he disagreed to do so the earth opened up to plunge him into new tortures. He disappeared with the cry "see the injustice of my fate". The play ends with the descent of angry Zeus calling on heaven and earth to witness his sufferings. The Greek play treats with the theme of a righteous sufferer. The friends were sympathetic towards Prometheus but Job was condemned by his friends. In the Greek play, Zeus was pictured as savage and relentless while, in Book of Job, God was the source of power, concern and wisdom. The writer of the Book of Job has shed light on righteous suffering as Aeschylus had in "Prometheus Vinctus".

6.18 The Author of The Book of Job and His Contribution to the World Literature - The Joban Writer Commended

The author of the Book of Job has been hailed as a genius for his creative skills in his work. In the words of Francis I Anderson, "The writer of Job was such a genius – a Homer (for epic quality a Shakespeare for human and dramatic interest), a Pushkin (for mastery of variety of moods), above all a Milton (for the mastery of his treatment of the highest of all themes) – the ways of God with men". 

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J.A. Eaton praises the author for his skillful treatment of the theme. He observes, "the author's theme thus carries him into the heart of religion, into the heart indeed of all human experience which wrestles with the contradictions of hope and despair, light and darkness, creation and chaos. He follows his theme through with rare insight, sensitivity, and originality, yielding a treatment which can scarcely be surpassed". The Joban poet’s work throws light on the insufficiency of man to probe into the ways of God. He instructs his reader to place unquestioning trust in God. With the experience of Job, the Joban poet takes the reader to the heart of religion (communion between God and man) to the mystery of pain and edifies his reader about the necessity of tribulation in a person’s life.

6.19 The Influence of the Book of Job on Other Writers and their Work

The Book of Job is one of the masterpieces of the world literature. Peiffer comments on the unique literary nature of the book. He observes, "as the J document may be classed with the Iliad, so Job may be classed with Greek tragedies, Lucretius’ on Nature, Dante’s Divine Comedy, Milton’s Paradise Lost and Goethe’s Faust: Plato’s discourses may be added if prose works are included. Job is so unique a literary work that its resemblance to these masterpieces are only superficial, what they have in common is chiefly grandiose conceptions, superb style, intense emotion, profound thought, feeling for nature and noble ideals". Alfred Lord Tennyson has hailed it as "The greatest poem of ancient or modern times". Martin Luther has praised it as, "magnificent and sublime as no other book of scripture".
Book of Job has influenced men of letters down the centuries that R.K. Harrison comments, “over the centuries Job has received the consistent approbation of men of letters sometimes in exaggerated term, but despite the latter, there can be no doubt as to the influences that it has exerted in the field of literature, especially upon such compositions as the Divine Comedy, Paradise Lost, Faust and other literary master pieces”.  

Oesterley and Robinson observe, “there are few poems in all literature whose date and historical background are of less importance than they are in the Book of Job ... It is a universal poem and that is one of the features which give it its value and interest for us today”.  

The Book of Job continues to exert its influence on men of letters. In the words of John S. Hartley, “Throughout the centuries, the Book of Job has had a great impact on the western mind, including the great authors. These examples, Milton’s Samson, Dostovesky’s The Brothers, Karanazov and Kafka’s, The Trial testify to its impact on thinkers from widely differing perspectives, times and cultures. Even the Psychologist, C.J. Jung entered the discussion with his answer to Job (1963). Thus the Book of Job continues to speak to the issues of human suffering and theodicy”.  

It is earnestly hoped that even in the new millennium, new writers and research scholars will testify to the greatness of the Book of Job.
1) Oliphant Smeaton (intro.), Francis Bacon’s Essays (J M Dent and Sons Ltd., 1966) 150.


6) Harrison, 1046.


10) Jessie Penn Lewis The Story of Job a Glimpse into the mystery of Suffering (Dorset: The Overcomer Literature Trust, 1902) 138.


13) Donald E. Gowan, Interpretation, "The Case of the Widow, the Orphan and the Sojourner" (1987) 341.


16) The King and the Kingdom (99) 8.

17) Goldenson, 269.
18) Davies, 231.


20) Douglas, 1257.


22) John Day et al. (ed.), Wisdom in Israel (Trumpington: Cambridge University Press, N.Y.) 224.


30) Buttrick, 1121.


32) Harrison, 1044.

33) Guillaume, 319.


38) Habel, 49.

39) Davies, 103-104.
40) Dacies, 153.


42) Anderson, 38.

43) Eaton, 51.

44) Peiffer, 683.


46) Nicholls, 22.

47) Harrison, 1022.

48) Nicholls, 22.

49) Hartley, 11.