Chapter Two
CHAPTER TWO

2. THE THEME OF SUFFERING IN THE BOOK OF JOB

"In times of humiliation be patient. For gold is tested in the fire." Sirach 2:4 – 5

2.1 Introduction

The Book of Job is one of the masterpieces of world literature. It teaches the most significant and unchanging truths about suffering. Does the Joban writer "justify the ways of God to man" in the Book of Job as he probes into the mystery of the suffering of the innocent? By his rejection of the retributive theory, he does convey this message. Suffering is woven into the fabric of life. Individuals, communities and nations suffer day by day in different forms and in different categories "for men may come and men may go", but suffering goes on forever. Since the Fall of Man, man has not ceased to suffer. In the study of the suffering of Job the reader can learn about the causes of suffering, the responses, attitudes of Job, the unkind judgements of unsympathetic friends, the significance of suffering in his life and the revelation of God in his pain. As wisdom literature, Book of Job teaches about the meaning of life, and the sting of pain and its necessity in life. Similar characters from literary texts and parallel literature are compared and contrasted with Job, to bring out his sterling character.
2.1.1 The Painful Cry of Mankind

The anguished cry of the suffering people has echoed down the ages. C.S. Lewis observes, "when souls become wicked, they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another; and this perhaps accounts for four-fifths of the suffering of the men. It is men, not God, who have produced the racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets and bombs. It is by human avarice or human stupidity, not by the churlishness of nature, that we have poverty and over work. But there remains, nonetheless, much suffering which can not be traced to ourselves."³

A large portion of man's suffering originates from his own self; however external forces (Satan) is also considered to be the origin of pain. The mystery of the suffering of the innocent is partially solved in the course of the study of the Book of Job. Evil, injustice, poverty, diseases, suffering and death are inescapable. The chorus in Murder in the Cathedral expresses thus:

"We know of oppression and torture
We know of extortion and violence
Destitution, disease...." ⁴

For millennia, millions of sufferers had shed tears, groaned and died; some had understood and many not knowing the reason for their tribulation, died in pain.

2.1.2 Suffering and Death

Suffering and death are introduced into the world by sin. The Bible clearly states the predicament of mankind,

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin,
and so death passed upon all men; for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12).

Milton also refers to the disobedience of the first parents, and of the ensuing punishment in *Paradise Lost* Book IX

"Disloyal on the part of man, revolt,
And disobedience: on the part of heav’n,
Now alienated, distance and distaste,
Anger and just rebuke, and judgement giv’n,
That brought into the world, a world of woe,
Sin and her shadow death, and misery
Death’s harbinger".  

Death is an enemy of mankind and most often suffering and pain precede it. People often have the tendency to explain suffering in cause and effect, connecting the sins of the past with the consequences of suffering in the present. Human suffering is more than a system of rewards and punishment. When tragedy strikes people, either they blame God and consciously or unconsciously relate them to existing or imaginary flaws in people. Responses or reactions to tribulations are also more or less of a mixed nature.

Some people accept suffering with patient resignation and others with a fatalistic attitude. In *Mayor of Caster Bridge* Elizabeth Jane reflects this attitude. She is a modest and stoical woman “who, exposed to tragedy and the ironies of fate, realizes that life is fundamentally painful and that happiness is but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain”. In many cases people turn bitter and rebellious in tragic circumstance and deny God. Satan the archenemy of mankind ambitiously aspired to be equal with God and for this vain attempt, he was hurled into the bottomless pit by the Almighty. With his
pride and eternal hatred Satan discovered his dismay and confusion which Milton describes in *Paradise Lost,*

“... He throws his baleful eyes,
that witness’d huge affliction and dismay”. 7

Satan devised plans of revenge and declared:

“To do aught good never will be our task,
but ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being the contrary to his high will
whom we resist”. 8

Job’s reaction to tribulation was entirely different. Initially he accepted pain in an attitude of worship and gratitude (Ch. 1:21). Later, his attitudes changed due to the harsh and unsympathetic behaviour of his three friends which made him impatient. He dared to question God’s dealings in his life.

### 2.2 Reasons for Suffering

#### 2.2.1 Personal Sin

When human beings violate moral laws, laws of nature or laws of the government, they experience suffering. For example, youngsters who mess up their lives with drugs and alcoholism have to suffer dearly for their misdemeanour. Those who break laws of health suffer from diseases of the body and of the mind, Broken relationships or amoral relationships cause heartache and pain. Samson Agonistes is a good example who suffered for his wrong relationship with Delilah. He was a mighty and renowned judge of Israel. He had to suffer indignities for his forbidden relationship with Delilah. As a consequence of his folly, Samson lost his eyesight and was made an
object of mockery and scorn by his enemies, the Philistines. His glorious life had to end up shamefully which he sadly acknowledges as a just punishment for his ignoble deed of committing “his most sacred trust of secrecy”.  

“All these indignities, for such they are

From thine, these evils I deserve and more,

Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me

Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon”.  

In Shakespeare’s **King Lear**, the King loved Cordelia very much and intended to spend his last days in her tender care. Cordelia loved him much but spoke ‘nothing’. Her silence was misunderstood that Lear sent her away to France penniless, dividing the portion of the Kingdom among his two “pelican daughters”\(^{11}\), Goneril and Regan. They abused him and ill-treated him. **King Lear** who rashly disinherit and discarded Cordelia, was exposed to terrible suffering at the hands of his ungrateful daughters. In the storm scene, Lear promised to be the model of patience, but soon after making this resolution he moaned:

“I am a man more sinned against than sinning”\(^ {12}\)

**King Lear**’s judgement caused great misery and pain.

In **Lady Windermere’s Fan**, Mrs. Erlyne eloped with her lover, abandoning her husband and baby daughter. She was ostracized from society and branded as a ‘woman with a past.’ Her suffering was aggravated by the knowledge of her daughter’s designs to repeat her mistake which she wisely averted and saved the marriage of her child. Mrs. Erlyne’s suffering was initiated by her personal conduct.

Even in the play **Richard II**, Richard II wasted his life and ruined the state by discarding royal dignity and power, in the company of base flatterers.
Boling Broke, his cousin dethrones him, and in the prison Richard II sadly remembers the past and the theme of his sorrow:

"I wasted time and now doth Time waste me:
For now hath Time made me his numb'ring clock;
My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar,
Their watches on unto my eyes...".15

In life people suffer for their personal actions. This question for justice in suffering is vividly portrayed in all literary works, which serves for our instruction and edification.

2.2.2 Suffering Inflicted by Others

Secondly people inflict pain upon others by their bad behaviour. A child is born blind, an innocent victim to a parent with venereal disease. An alcoholic parent is a source of physical, emotional and mental torture to his family members. A drunken driver can ruin lives by killing others or maiming them for the rest of their lives. Newspapers are flooded with reports of child abuse, women abuse and elder abuse depicting the miseries of various categories of sufferers. A dedicated doctor serving among lepers is burnt to death. Victims of war, refugees, starving humanity, the lonely and the destitute are only part of an endless list of sufferers.

A few examples from literature clearly illustrate how people and other external forces can inflict pain upon others. In Paradise Lost Book IV, Milton portrays Satan as the source of suffering for Adam and Eve. Satan was envious of the bliss of the first parents and schemed to ruin it by tempting them to taste of the forbidden fruit.

"O fair foundation laid where on to build
Their ruin! Hence I will excite their minds
With more desire to know, and to reject
envious commands..."\textsuperscript{14}

In King Lear, Edmond, the illegitimate son of Earl of Gloucester was responsible for Gloucester's misery and for Edgar, his credulous brother's pain. Earl of Gloucester was blinded and driven out of his castle, and in his bitterness, he realized his mistake in believing Edmond's lies.

"I have no way, and therefore want no eyes
I stumbled when I saw..."\textsuperscript{15}

Later he was saved from suicide and nursed by his wronged son Edgar.

\textbf{2.2.3 The Suffering of the Innocent}

Why do good people suffer? Why are they exposed to privations and dangers in life? Good people who regularly observe health laws are also afflicted with health problems. Dr. Damien's noble life of sacrifice among the lepers proves that the virtuous are never spared. The question of undeserved suffering goes unanswered. Tennyson exhorts his readers to exercise faith in God, and to believe in the higher purposes of God.

"Doubt no longer, that the Highest is the
wisest and the best,
Let not all that saddens. Nature blight thy
hope or break thy rest,
Quail not at the fiery mountain, at the
ship wreck, or the rolling
Thunder, or the rending earth quake or
the famine or the pest!"\textsuperscript{16}
Literature reflects life, which abounds with suffering individuals. Examples of innocent sufferers are cited to illustrate the nature of Job’s affliction.

Joan of Arc won back her country from the English invaders. She claimed to be the ambassador of God. Her religious enemies feared that she would break up the unity of the church and thereby destroy its power in Europe. Her secular enemies were afraid that she would destroy their power by encouraging nationalism. She was burned to death in the market place of Rouen as Cauchon declared in St. Joan: “the church militant sent this woman to the fire; but even as she burned, the flames whitened into the radiance of the church Triumphant”. She went to the stake without a stain on her character (except her presumption).

Cordelia in King Lear is yet another example of an innocent victim. She is the most beloved of Shakespeare’s heroines. In her gallant attempt to reclaim her father’s Kingdom, she falls a prey to the villainy of Edmond, and is killed.

“What upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia

The Gods themselves throw incense...”

Even God would appreciate such a great sacrifice.

2.2.4 The Suffering Servant of Yahweh

In the attempt to resolve the mystery of suffering one cannot but think of Lord Jesus Christ, the innocent sufferer and the mystery of his suffering. Interpreters of his passion speak of Jesus’ turbulence, agitation, loneliness, his anguish and horror before death. In the words of John DesRochers, “In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus deeply accepted his suffering and renewed his commit-meanest to God’s will and to his messianic mission of being the true Israel and servant of His father”.19
The physical and mental suffering of Lord Jesus Christ began in the garden of Gethsemane. He was arrested and brought before Caiphas the high priest where he was mocked and taunted by his enemies. They spat on his face; He was stripped and scourged (Mark 9:12). Exhausted, and in pain he fell down, bearing the cross. He was nailed to the cross and was crucified. In his suffering and death on the cross, he manifested his humility and identified himself with the suffering humanity, to redeem it from pain (Is.53). Job is a precursor of Lord Jesus Christ.

2.3 God's Testimony of Job's Goodness; Satan's Challenge; God's Response and the Affliction of Job

Job was even commended by God as his servant and claimed that Job was perfect and upright (Ch. 1:8). As Spinoza observes, "The love of God is man's highest happiness and blessedness and the final aim of all human actions". According to Spinoza's observation, the love of God was Job's priority which provoked Satan's jealousy. He acknowledged his piety but he questioned Job's sincerity in his religion. In his opinion Job served God only for the material benefits (Ch. 3:9-10). Satan had challenged God that he would prove Job a hypocrite. In response to his claim, God permitted Satan to afflict His servant.
2.3.1 Job's Trials

Job lost all his earthly possession. The Sabeans fell upon the oxen and the asses and took them away. In another instance, fire fell from heaven and devoured the sheep and the servants. Job accepted his tragedy very bravely.

In the second calamity he lost all his sons and daughters. His children who were feasting in his eldest son's house died as the house collapsed in a whirlwind. Job's reaction to his great loss was rare. He arose and rent his mantle, shaved his head and worshipped God in humility and with unflinching faith in God he uttered:

"... Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither, the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Ch. 1:21).

Job bore the loss of his children without complaining.

Satan who predicted Job's denial of faith was disappointed; nevertheless, he secured divine consent to afflict the body of Job. "Behold, he is in thine hand but save his life". (Ch. 2:6).

Job was smitten with a horrible disease of sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his head. Job sat down among the ashes and scraped himself with a potsherd. Job lost his wealth, children and health and was confused by the terrible misfortunes in his life. His wife mocked him for his integrity and prompted him to forsake God and die. Job boldly resisted this suggestion and rebuked her (Ch. 2:10). With the loss of his health, he experienced physical pain.
2.3.2 Job's Three Friends

Job’s three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar came with good intentions to mourn with him. They sat in silence for seven days. Job was disappointed in his three friends, as they offered no words of consolation. He cursed the day of his birth (Ch. 3). Job’s friends had assumed that his suffering was penal which caused immense mental agony to Job.

2.3.3 The Three Cycles of Speeches

Eliphaz the theologian argued that people did not suffer without a cause. Job's affliction was a just punishment for his sin. He made light of his suffering (Ch. 4:8). In the second speech, Eliphaz charged Job with folly and impiety. He further accused Job of harbouring a secret sin, which hindered the operation of God's comforts. He reiterated his doctrine that suffering of the wicked was endless. In the third speech, Eliphaz accused him of oppression and injustice. He misunderstood Job and he concluded his speech with a plea for Job’s repentance (Ch. 22:2).

Bildad, the traditionalist was harsh in his criticism and openly declared that Job’s children had died as a punishment for their sins. Bildad justified God’s dealings in Job’s life by affirming that He never perverted judgement. Job was exhorted to repent and avoid further ruin.

In his second speech Bildad, vividly described the consequence of evil and pointed out to Job of his vain and haughty speeches. Quoting from tradition, he made a reference to the misery of the wicked (Ch.18:5). In the final speech, Bildad magnified God’s exalted position. He remarked about Job’s wickedness (Ch. 25:4).
Zophar the moralist boldly condemned Job for his boldness in his assertion of innocence. Job was accused of being garrulous and opinionated. In his second speech, Zophar angrily reiterated his former charges and warned Job that his sin would cause his ruin (Ch. 20:4 – 5). Zophar did not offer his comments in the third cycle of speeches.

2.3.4 Job’s Sufferings: Physical Trauma

First of all Job experienced physical suffering due to the terrible disease (Ch. 2:7). His suffering is explicit in his anguished cry.

“...My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; My skin is broken, and become loathsome”. (Ch. 7:5).

His body was full of boils (a loathsome disease). Satan was responsible for his suffering but Job had no knowledge of it. “So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the soles of his foot unto his crown”. (Ch. 2:7).

Job experienced immense pain and his pathetic cries reveal it. “Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow”. (Ch. 17:1).

“My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest. By the great force of my disease is my garment changed...”. (Ch. 30:17 – 18). His torrent of words did not relieve his pain (Ch. 16:6). He was disfigured by sorrow (Ch. 16:6) and his grief was heavier than the “sand of the sea”. (Ch. 6:3).
2.3.5 Emotional Pain

With the loss of his children, wealth and health, Job’s stress was intense. As Ernest Hilgard remarks, “... intense emotions involve profound changes through out the body, which are regulated in a complex way...”. There are many references to his emotional strain.

“My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death”. (Ch.16:16).

“Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow”. (Ch. 17:7).

“For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters”. (Ch. 3:24).

By a sudden turn of events Job lost his wealth, children, and health. His intense emotions involved profound changes through out his body. In the words of Ernest R. Hilgard, “Men prefer to have pleasurable states endure and do things to make them recur. Men also prefer to have unpleasant, painful or annoying states end promptly and do what they can to avoid them”.

Job could do nothing to end or avoid unpleasant or painful states, because he had almost lost every thing; he could not resolve his conflict. He longed for sympathy. His willingness to seek help (consolation) revealed his emotional maturity: when the three friends failed to offer “social support”, he nearly broke down. Sidney Cobb has defined social support, “as information that leads someone to believe that he or she is cared for, loved, respected and part of a network of communication and mutual obligation”.

The three friends did not share his grief or communicate their sympathy. Their aggressive arguments provoked Job to be rebellious and bitter.
5). In despair and loneliness, he expressed his death wish (Ch. 3). The unkind treatment of the three friends made Job more oppressed and miserable.

2.3.6 Mental Agony of Job

Like Edgar in King Lear, Job knows the sting of suffering and he had to bear it all by himself.

"Who alone suffers, suffers most i’th’mind,
Leaving free things and happy shows behind".24

Job’s three friends did not share his grief but aggravated it by their platitudes and plausible arguments, which had a ring of insincerity. His pain crescendoed into the unbearable. God is presented by them as an inexorable enemy who permitted tragedy. Job described his pain, which was, “heavier than the sand of the sea....” (Ch. 6:14 – 15). “His yearning for pity and longing for companionship are expressive of his mental anguish”. (Ch. 6:14 – 15).

Job’s friends had failed to fulfil their intended mission in alleviating his pain with their healing words. He rebuked them angrily in pointing invective as “physicians of no value”. (Ch. 13:4 – 5).

2.3.7 Piercing of the Soul

The initial reaction of Job to the tragedies of his life illustrate that he was not unduly distressed by them (Ch. 1:21). He accepted these tragic situations with humility and gratitude (Ch. 2:10). Though he smarted with pain, (no doubt with the loss of his children), he patiently endured pain. With the arrival of the three friends, his attitudes differed. According to James A. Schellenberg, “... the presence of other persons does commonly exert something of a
stimulating effect upon an individual. We have only to add that under certain conditions, the stimulating effects of the presence of others is greater than under other conditions ...”.

According to the definition of Schellenberg, Job’s reactions were normal. The three friends sat in silence (Ch. 2:13), and their silence spoke volumes to Job. He was sensitive to their lack of sympathy and concern. Job shared the same religious beliefs of his friends, and he could easily discern their thoughts and their wrong judgement, which triggered off his anguished cry. They openly condemned him as a hypocrite and a sinner. They exasperated him with their traditional knowledge of piety. Job’s agony was aggravated by the unjust censure of his three friends. In his frustration and loneliness, he complained bitterly against the “miserable comforters” (Ch. 6:15 - 16). Job’s forceful language arouses pity and sympathy for him. “My friends scorn me; but mine eye poured out tears unto God ... when a few years are come then I shall go the way whence I shall not return”. (Ch. 16:20, 22). Job’s mental depression became more unbearable and he felt alienated. As a social outcast, he experienced mental torture.

Job who was the darling of the society was reduced to mockery by the same society. He was denied warmth of the family circle by the death of his children, bruised by his disease, and forsaken by his friends; his social isolation shattered him. His degradation caused him great suffering and he cried. “And now am I their song, Yea, I am their by word. They abhor me, and spare not to spit in my face”. (Ch. 30. 9 - 10).

2.3.7.1 Dereliction

In the crucial test of his faith, Job felt abandoned by God; he was perplexed by the tragic circumstances of his life and he pathetically cried to God for
proving his innocence (Ch. 10 – 7). Job was tormented by the loss of divine favour. "Know now that God hath overthrown me and hath compassed me with his net. He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head ". (Ch. 19:6, 9).

Even in the darkest hour of the soul, Job never denied his God, but he boldly asserted his implicit faith in Him.

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; but I will maintain my own way before him”. (Ch. 13:15).

In the darkest hour of his life all other props had fallen away; even his wife offered no moral support. Job was not aware of any known sin; his friends had condemned him as a sinner, but he could not convince them of his innocence, Job firmly believed in God's cognizance of his innocence (Ch 10:7). He shifted his focus from God to himself and therefore his lamentation increased. From this he graduated into accepting God as the stern judge. Job suffered in his mind with the notion that God was his enemy and his bitter complaints revealed the agony (Ch. 19: 6 – 7).

Job's agony disappeared only when God personally intervened to vindicate his innocence.

2.3.8 Job as a Social Outcast - an Object of Derision

As a magistrate Job had enjoyed honour, power and social status. In his grief, children of the base men did not show sympathy but treated him cruelly with scorn and mockery causing him immense pain (Ch. 30:9).
2.3.9 Elihu - An Advocate of God

In every society despite its harsh and ruthless norms, there is a streak of understanding and sympathy. This fortune is brought out in the character of Elihu. Job’s pathway of suffering was enlightened by gentle Elihu who like an oracle of God gently reminded Job that his sufferings were not penal but a divine call to uprightness. The scope of his discourse was to reconcile Job to his affliction and pacify his spirit under them. He appealed to Job to submit to God, and not to strive with the Almighty.

2.3.10 The Gain and the End of Pain

God addressed Job from the whirlwind to disclose his wrong attitudes, after which God cleared him from the unjust aspersions cast upon him by his friends. Job was charged with ignorance and presumption in what he had said, Job acknowledged his lack of understanding (Ch. 40:3) and made confession of his wrong attitudes in challenging God’s justice in afflicting an innocent man. Job’s personal knowledge of God in his suffering led to the self-realization of his folly. His total surrender to God’s designs in his life paved the way for his release from suffering. He prayed for his three friends, and God restored him to his former glory. Job gained God's favour, which ended his pain.

2.4 The Three Stages of Suffering

In her book Yet Will I Trust Him, Peg Rankin aptly remarks about the three stages of suffering. “Emotions at the time of crisis seem to evolve
through several stages. First there is rebellion, then resignation, and finally release to victory.  

2.4.1 Resignation

In the case of Job, his immediate reaction to grief was astonishingly different. He was passive; and he adored God in total submission to God’s sovereignty (Ch. 1:21). His response was rare and admirable. He did not curse God or blame him for his misfortune. His faith was undoubtedly deep rooted. He patiently accepted his sorrow.

2.4.2 Rebellion

In the second stage of his suffering, there was rebellion and resentment, provoked by his judgemental friends. He was no stoic. His three friends who had come with good intentions to mourn with him sat in silence for seven long days. Disappointed in his friends, Job began his mournful complaints. He wished for death and cursed the day of his birth. He had dreaded the loss of God’s favour and he had it in full measure, he was unaware of the fact that Satan was the source of his pain but wrongly attributed it to God. He spoke passionately about God’s dealings in his life. His outburst of sorrow was initiated by the lack of sympathy and compassion denied to him by his friends. They rebuked him strongly. Eliphaz termed him a wicked man (Ch. 4:8 - 9).

Bildad was equally blunt in his reproach. He came to the false conclusion that Job’s children had died suddenly as a punishment for their wickedness. He asserted that God would not forsake an innocent man. He was unwise and uncharitable in his reference to the death of his children that they deserved it by their sin.
“If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression”. (Ch. 8:4)

Zophar, the third friend, had no compassion in his attitude or speech. He blamed Job for his calamity. Job was wicked and his misfortune was his just portion and heritage (Ch. 20:27 – 29).

Job was devastated by their waspish criticism. In his failure to prove his innocence to them, he appealed to God for his mercy.

“I will say unto God, do not condemn me; show me wherefore thou contendst with me”. (Ch. 10:2).

At the same time, he began to question God’s designs in his life not realizing God’s purpose in his suffering. Job was in utter confusion, for he was unable to understand God’s punishment in his suffering. His faith would triumph inspite of its faltering moments (Ch. 13:15). He believed in his integrity and claimed to hold onto it till his death (Ch. 27:6).

Job knew that only God could vindicate him and demanded a conference with God. His moral courage impelled him to order his “cause before him”. (Ch. 23:5). Job did not remain in his rebellion forever. He regained confidence in spite of his bleak circumstances. (Ch. 19:25).

Thomas Boston is of the opinion that, “humility is a part of the image of God” 27. Job humbly listened to Elihu the younger man and his message, which prepared him for God’s revelation in his pain.

2.4.3 Release from Self

In the third stage of suffering, Job came to enjoy the release from pain. Elihu, the oracle of God, disclosed the problem of Job with his candid speech.
His approach was gentle and mild. As a mother would correct her child, he pointed out to Job’s wrong notions of his self-righteousness.

“I am clean without transgression; I am innocent, neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, in this thou art not just. I will answer thee, that God is greater than man.” (Ch. 33:9,12)

Job had true knowledge about God’s power over man, over nature and over him (Ch. 9:1 – 12). But his attitudes towards God became different in his journey of pain. He questioned God’s designs in his life. With his encounter with God, in the awesome majesty of His presence, he humbled himself. God’s power and wisdom overwhelmed him which exposed his ignorance. He acknowledged promptly that man could not fathom the ways of God with his limited knowledge.

Job attained knowledge of God by his personal encounter with Him. He gained peace with God, with himself which led to the release from self. Though he did not get any divine explanation about the mystery of pain, he was satisfied with God’s presence in his pain.

2.4.4 The End of Job’s Suffering

In total surrender, Job accepted his affliction. The heart of the matter is that in suffering the presence of God will be felt by those (virtuous) who unreservedly submit to His will.

2.5 Comparable Literature

Book of Job is part of wisdom literature. It deals with the problem of suffering. Since the ancient wisdom writings resemble Book of Job with its
form (if not always in content), some of these writings are cited to enhance the richness of the theme. The ancient wisdom writings of Mesopotamia and Egypt dealt with question like, 'Does life have any real purpose? Why do the wicked go unpunished?'

2.5.1 *I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom*

As Norman C. Habel points out, “From the Kassite period to Mesopotamia comes a monologue of a sufferer who feels that all of life has turned in on him, a text named from its opening lines *Ludlul Be! Ne meqi*” (I will praise the Lord of wisdom”, Morduk, chief God of Babylon). The original poem seems to have been four to five hundred lines long, preserved in three tablets and possibly a fourth, whose material may or may not have been related to the original”.28 “The narrator complained of Divine rejection:

My God has forsaken me and disappeared,
My Goddess has failed me and keeps at a distance
The benevolent angel who (walked) beside (me) has departed...”29

The narrator had to face the indifference and enmity of his friends (like Job). The sufferer was plagued by physical ailments. Neither the ritual, nor the magic cure could relieve him. He moaned:

“As for me, the exhausted one, a tempest is driving me!
debilitating disease is let loose upon me ...”30

The narrative ends with a series of dreams which changed the sufferer’s tragic situation and God of wisdom – Morduk’s anger had been appeased. This work has been called the Babylonian Job.
In the Babylonian Job the author does not deal with the suffering of the righteous. In the Book of Job, Job faced his divine enemy and accepted his suffering, and God took the responsibility to relieve Job of his misfortune.

2.5.2 The Protest of the Eloquent Peasant

John E. Hartley observes that some Egyptian texts can be compared to the Book of Job. For example, The Protest of the Eloquent Peasant, a text datable to the 21st century B.C, is similar in format to the Book of Job. "It consists of nine semi-poetic speeches, set between a prose prologue and epilogue. This Egyptian text recounts the story of a peasant who is robbed of his goods on the way to market and then his complaint denied by local authorities. The peasant appeals for redress to the chief steward of that district. After nine long tirades the chief steward who has sided with the peasant from the beginning but who has been toying with him to keep him speaking, settles his complaint by awarding the property of the one who wronged him. The greatest point of contact between these two works is their use of long speeches in the mouth of an offended party to discuss the issue of true justice. In contrast to the peasant, Job becomes more confident as his case drags on. Further more Job's cries of injustice are aimed at God, not at a local official".31

2.5.3 The Admonition of Ipu-Wer

The Admonition of Ipu-Wer, an Egyptian text can be compared with the Book of Job. The sage Ipu-Wer makes protest against the upheaval in society and he mourns over the decline of morality. “The desire of the Egyptian sage though is more for a stable social order than for moral justice.”32
2.5.4 The Dispute Over Suicide

J.H. Eaton in Job mentions about The Dispute Over Suicide which can be compared with the Book of Job. It describes a man’s dialogue with his soul. “In the central section his speech runs without interruption through four symmetrical poems. The subject is his desire to commit suicide, burning himself like a sacrifice.” The man is sickened by this earthly life and he is attracted by life after death which might be a higher life with the Gods. He pleads to the Gods to judge him and defend him. His cautious soul warns him that he should not look for relief before his proper time. “The soul’s prudence provokes the man into his four passionate poems. The theme of the first is My name will reek through you, – i.e., “You disgust me. The theme of the second is ‘To whom can I speak today?’ – the wicked flourish, the gentle have perished; there is no friendship and the sin that treads the earth has no end. The theme of the third is, Death is in my sight today as ... – as all that is lovely, like healing, like cool air, like secret scent of myrrh or lotus blossom, like coming home from captivity. The theme of the fourth is surely, He who is yonder will be ...’ – a living God, traveling in the barque of the sun, a sage who can commune with the great God. This eloquence affects the soul who ceases to object and promises to make his home with the man after the death”.

Job expressed his longing for death (Ch. 3) but he overcame his despair by his implicit trust in God (Ch. 13, 15). In the words of Eaton, “Job’s affirmation of innocence is sometimes compared with the Egyptian mortuary texts collected by modern scholars into a Book of the Dead (Prichard 34 – 36). In this material, the dead person is posthumously affirming before a court of Gods his innocence of various sins, including adultery, lying, stealing, murder, fraud, mistreatment of animals and blasphemy. Sometimes there are positive claims, ‘I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked,
and a boat to the one who was marooned. These texts witness to a long ethical tradition, but are not especially close in form and topic to Job’s affirmation.” 35

2.5.5 A Sumerian Poem

In his article called Parallel Literature of the Ancient Near East, Hartley gives more details about innocent sufferers like Job. Mesopotamian texts also treat the theme of innocent suffering. He observes, "A Sumerian Poem from the early second millennium B.C., addresses the issue of suffering by looking at the experience of a wise upright man who is afflicted by a severe illness. The victim laments his plight and longs that members of his family might join him in lamenting. He pleads to his personal God for relief. Then without offering any complaint that he has been treated unjustly, he confesses that he has sinned. The god answers his prayers and restores the man’s health by driving away the sickness demon. In contrast to Job, the Sumerian sufferer never raises the question of divine justice, for his view is that all people, being sinners, deserve whatever misfortune befalls him".36

2.5.6 The Acrostic Dialogue or Babylonian Theodicy

R.K. Harrison draws our attention to The Acrostic Dialogue or Babylonian Theodicy, “an acrostic poem of twenty seven strophes containing eleven lines each, representing two participants as speaking to one another in alternate stanzas. The first of these men had experienced unrelieved calamity in life and on this basis he rejected unequivocally the existence of divine justice. The second was a pious individual who believed in complete submission to the will of the Gods and in punctilious attention to the requirements of the cults. After prolonged effort the pious believer converted the skeptic by showing how mistaken his view of life actually was".37
2.5.7 The Story of Harichandra

The story of Harichandra is also compared to the Book of Job. Harichandra was a wealthy ruler, "who was tested of a result of a wager between the gods Vasishtha and Shiva. Harichandra suffered all sorts of trials, but endured and was resorted to his former estate”. 38

The greatness of the book is evident for its comparisons with various works of other lands. The Book of Job reveals that the author may have been influenced by the wisdom literature of the ancient Near East, more in form than in its content.

2.6 Character Revelation in His Suffering

2.6.1 Job's Faith

The Joban writer has portrayed Job as an example of an innocent sufferer and as a model of patience and faith in his suffering. His trials proved the mettle of his character. As gold is refined by fire, Job's character was not only purified but developed under the pressing circumstances of life in which he did not cast away his faith and confidence in God (Ch. 42:2).

Robert Browning points out the value of pain in the life of an individual in Men and Women.

"Why comes temptations, but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his feet,
And so be pedestalled in triumph”. 39

The trials in his life strengthened his faith in God (Ch. 13:15). Job's patience and perseverance acted as guardians of his trust in God. He
confronted the terrible tragedies with great moral courage. His moments of despair were overcome with his confidence in God (Ch. 19:25).

As Alexander Whyte observes, “Like the captain of Salvation himself, Job his forerunner, took up the successful arms against a whole sea of sorrows”.40

In his trail, Job exercised implicit faith in God which is highly commended by M.R. Dehaan in his book called Broken Things Why We Suffer. He remarks, “So Job in the midst of all his deep afflictions, found comfort not in the fact that he knew the reason and the answer for all of God’s dealings with him, but in the truth that God knew what He was doing. “He knoweth the way that I take”, he said confidently; and then his faith leaped over every barrier, and as he looked into the distant future he cried, “when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold”.41

2.6.2 Job’s Patience

Job’s patience was perfected through his sufferings. His initial response to the tragedies of his life was a patient submission to the will of God. His friends’ unjust condemnation exasperated him, and he even dared to question divine justice in his life. The divine encounter exposed his ignorance about God’s moral government of the universe. With humility, Job confessed his limited knowledge and he expressed his sorrow for irreverent talk. His humility had exalted him; his patience won God’s favour and vindication (Ch. 42:7,10).

The patience of Job is described by Robert Browning, in Fra Lippo Lippi.

“And Job, I must have him there past mistake
The man of UZ, and us without the Z
Painters who need his patience”.42
James the apostle also advises us to emulate the example of Job in James 5:11. Both men of literature and men of religion appreciate the exemplary character of Job.

2.7 **Priceless Truths about Job's Suffering from the Book of Job**

Job accepted his grief as part of human existence. He faced the miseries of his life bravely and endured unto the end. His piety was sincere, and his devotion to God was not mercenary. In his adversity, he was reminded of the transience of life. In his poverty, he became increasingly aware of the perishable nature of earthly life (Ch. 9:25). Suffering broadened his perspective. He could sympathise with the oppressed (Ch. 24). His affliction had heightened his sensibility; he was eager to forgive and intercede for his three friends. He was serviceable, and ministered to the needs of his friends by praying for them. His prayer for his friends won the approval of God, which led to his restoration of former glory (Ch. 42).

In the didactic narrative it is also learnt that some suffering is caused by Satan (Ch. 1:2), but God is sovereign and he limits the power of Satan (Ch. 1:2). Suffering is not always penal; the virtuous will be rewarded (Ch. 42:10). God did not rebuke Job for his cries of despair and agony. No human can fathom the mind of the infinite God or claim to know all the reasons for suffering. In times of trial, faith in God is essential to endure to the end (Ch. 13:15). Suffering can cleanse one’s secret faults (Ch. 33:9 - 12). It can also serve as a chastening instrument of God (Ch. 33:27 - 29). Elihu the oracle of God also reminds that God cares for His children (Ch. 33:15). Man therefore should honour and fear Him (Ch. 37:24).
2.8 Reaction to Suffering

Suffering is law of life; it should be borne with patience and trust in God. In distress, resentment and bitterness multiply sorrow and hence these wrong attitudes and wrong notions of God should be avoided.

The suffering individuals need companionship and concern and they should be treated with tenderness and compassion.

2.9 Conclusion

The Book of Job is a great source of consolation to sufferers all over the world. In Nothing is Impossible with God, Patricia Bradley mentions about her father dying of cancer consoling her with Job's assertion of faith, "Nothing in life is easy, he said, his voice shaky with pain... but he also said something else we both need to remember. 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him.'"\(^{43}\) (Ch. 13:15). The Book of Job inspires faith in sufferers to face the ordeals of life with immense patience. It consoles them with its healing message. The table presents a graphic picture of the depiction of pain and the causes of suffering in the life of Job.
## 2.10 Table

### BOOK OF JOB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Name of character</th>
<th>Cause of suffering</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 a</td>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Loss of his children health and property</td>
<td>Emotional/ physical/ mental anguish</td>
<td>Mourning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 b</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wrong censure and condemnation of Job's three friends</td>
<td>Despair</td>
<td>Lament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frustration protests of Job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 c</td>
<td></td>
<td>Job's grief due to loss of God's favour</td>
<td>Loneliness and desolation</td>
<td>God's intervention restores him to former glory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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