Chapter Four

Garnering Existential Spirituality:

Theocentric, Anthrocentric, and Cosmocentric Dimensions

in The Book of Job

“We do not know what kind of world we live in. The novel wants to show it to us”.

- M.M. Bakhtin, “Toward a Stylistics of the Novel”.

The Joban dialogue, in accordance with the purpose and objective of the book, teaches that a person may serve God faithfully despite the circumstances – bleak or promising – he/she lives in because he has the assurance that God is for him, seeking his / her ultimate good. Accordingly, a person is advised to triumph over suffering through faith in God. But, today, in the context of agnostic or atheistic postmodernism and hermeneutical poststructuralism, mere theodicy-focused readings as remedies are being challenged and problematized. They are also deconstructed to address issues related to postmodernist angsts. Postmodernism has created and caused ruptures of varied kinds. New knowledge societies that have emerged and are emerging cry for new answers in terms of identity politics and postmodernist ethos. Art and literature are seized of the concerns such as how to cope with, how to negotiate with postmodernism as a theory. Contemporary theologians are agitated about these concerns and as they muse on, they see the challenges hegemonic fixity and the traditional morality of literary language pose. The ruptures caused by
postmodernism are so complex that no one discipline within the precincts of its exclusivity can have a monopoly of knowledge assertions. Cultures and contexts are as diverse as civilizations are, and therefore ‘hegemonic metanarratives’ that purport to offer universal theories which construct reality from a “God’s eye point of view are being dismantled harbouring ‘a revolutionary impulse to do things differently’. Bakhtinian topology of critical idioms and the textual cruxes of *The Book of Job* will not have quarrels with the dismantling happening though both may caution against drifting into ‘indeterminacy ad infinitum’, to be reminded of Derrida.

“Postmodernity”, as Kevin J. Vanhoozer remarks, “allows for no absolutes and essence. Yet, theology is concerned with the absolute, the essential”. Theologians have responded to questions such as whether theology can intersect with postmodernism, whether there can be a postmodern theology, and whether theology should bother about the postmodern ruptures at all. As Kevin comments further, there is no denial that

Postmodernity is upsetting, intentionally so. Postmodern thinkers have overturned the tables of the knowledge-changers in the university, the temple of modernity, and have driven out the foundationalists..... Postmoderns have resisted their harsh modern taskmasters together with their requirement to make epistemological bricks out of the straw of logical propositions and the mud of universal human experience. Postmodernity is perhaps best construed as an ‘exodus’ from the constraints of modernity, as a plea to release the other, as a demand to let the particulars be themselves rather than having to conform to the structures and strictures of the prevailing ideological or political system. Whether this exodus from modernity leads to genuine
liberation or to a new bondage remains, of course, a matter of dispute. (xiii – xiv).

Regrading sifting God-world metaphors in the era of postmodernism, as Philip Clayton notes in his essay on “God and World”, “wo/man does not live by assertion alone; various genres point in complimentary ways toward the inexpressible” (208). Literary theories and hermeneutics promote new ways of thinking and interpreting. They cherish multilocality and multivocality as precious values. They look for diachronic-synchronic ways of meaning-making. Therefore, it would be simplistic and naïve to conclude that The Book of Job has spoken the ultimate word on the problem of evil and human suffering. The existential context of spiritual angsts human beings face every day needs to be related to not only theocentric but also to anthrocentric and cosmocentric dimensions.

In his book, The Everlasting Man, G.K. Chesterton writes:

Indeed, The Book of Job avowedly only answers mystery with mystery. Job is comforted with riddles; but he is comforted. Herein is, indeed, a type, in the sense of a prophecy, of things speaking with authority. For, when he who doubts can only say, ‘I do not understand,’ it is true that he who knows can only reply or repeat: ‘You do not understand.’ And under that rebuke there is always a sudden hope in the heart; and the sense of something that would be worth understanding”. (https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/The_Everlasting_Man)

What Soren Kierkegaard states in his Repetition, may also be relevant here:

In the whole Old Testament there is not one figure one approaches with so much confidence and frank-heartedness and trustfulness as Job, just because
everything about him is so human, because he lies upon the confines of poetry.

These two citations hint at the continued relevance of *The Book of Job* even today, the implications the book has in terms of promoting humane and compassionate understanding in a world of arrogation of power, abstractions of knowledge, and multiple manifestations of indifference towards the plight of the marginalized, those who suffer, experience and endure human neglect and loneliness, and hint at why we need to continue to read the book. For, the humanness the book is wrought within the matrices of existential angsts provides clues for questing for synergic solutions to problem-solving and conflict-managements. What is needed to day is that our thirst and quest for righteousness, our quest for right meanings in life, our perennial quest for answers to problems we face, especially the problem of human suffering, ought to be accommodative enough to embrace a synergic approach consisting of what this researcher terms, ‘theocentric, anthropocentric, and cosmocentric’ dimensions. These dimensions derived from the textual analyses done in the light of Bakhtinian topology of chronotopic concepts and tools connote, stand for, and provide a temporal, heterochromatic, dialectically dialogic, and compassionately humanizing relationship in the dialogic journey towards finding an answer to the problem of human suffering.

As noted in Chapters Two and Three, the book’s theme, language, mixture of genres and style, and the sense of meaning it conveys are quite complex. Mere theodicy-centred canonical readings of the book have their limitations in making a therapeutic impact upon the human psyche against human suffering. By extension, the crisis endured by Job may be viewed as a perennial predicament of humanity, endured from the time when sin exhibited its venom, when the fall of man occurred,
and when Cain began to ask with a brazen response to God, "Am I the keeper of my brother?" (Genesis 4:8-10). Even today, such crises are evident everywhere across civilizations, causing enormous human suffering. A sense of existential angst in the form of despondency and helplessness accompanies the reality of human suffering everywhere across continents and civilizations. Yet, despite helplessness, most cultures believe that attempts at alleviating suffering are indispensable. The enormity and complexity of the problem demands multidimensional focus, beyond binaries, towards resolution. From this perspective, *The Book of Job* is an open-ended literary text. In the light of such a perspective, as Bakhtin puts it, "the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future, and will always be in the future" (*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 166).

Systematic theology and theodicy-wise speaking, readers may be more or less familiar with the positions taken by varied Churches and Church-community interpreters of Christian faith regarding garnering a sense of existential spirituality in the light of reading the Joban dialogue. As noted earlier, the Catholic teachings revolve around Aquinas’ legacies of interpreting the book as an agency of showcasing the truth of Divine Providence, considered and cherished as a source of grace, unconditionally available and accessible to mankind through acts of faith and concrete acts of compassion and justice.

Calvinism subscribes to the idea of God as One who ‘is completely sovereign or in control of EVERYTHING that happens’. Basing their belief in the literal interpretations of certain biblical texts such as Isaiah 46: 9-10 and Romans 9:10-23, believers in Calvinism aver that, as Roderick Edwards explains, ‘God doesn’t just “allow” things to happen, but He actually DECREES, WILLS, or DECLARES them
to happen...yes even the things we consider bad or evil’ (1). In other words, as Hee Sung Lee observes, “the Calvinist model of God’s providence maintains that everything is determined by God and divinely ordained” (160). Though critics have pointed out how Calvinism has contributed to the doctrine of predestination, Calvin was of the view that the issue of predestination was ‘a pastoral one’. As quoted in an online essay on “Calvin’s Exposition of The Book of Job”, “Predestination”, as Calvin understood it, “is neither a church steeple from which to view the human landscape, nor a pillow to sleep on. It is rather a stronghold in times of temptation and trials and a confession of praise to God's grace and to His glory” (http://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/20140053%20-20Thomas%20D%20-%20Calvin's%20exposition%20of%20the%20book%20Job.pdf).

This pastoral concern, namely to submit to God's sovereignty rather than question it, or even comprehend it, is evident in Calvin's 159 sermons on The Book of Job. Giving the key to unlock the disputation in the book, Calvin made a contrasting comparison between the arguments of Job and his friends. According to him, while Job maintained a good case but handled it poorly by virtue of his self-righteousness -- because he was “justifying himself when he should have been justifying God” (32:2), his friends had an bad case but presented it well. In his sermons, he made it clear that he was in agreement with Job with regard to the stance that divine punishment or righteous suffering cannot be the measure of sin. But, he also maintained that Job was not sinless by virtue of the fact that he was born human. From Calvin’s point of view, it was ultimately God’s supremacy and good providence that saved Job when he submitted himself to God with all humility acknowledging God’s sovereignty. His reading of the book suggests and implies that in God’s universe, it is tenable that God
permits evil and suffering, even the activity of Satan, all according to His sovereign plan. This is how God, who is not the author of evil, relates Himself to evil. Satan is the instrument through which necessary evil occurs in the universe created by Him. Evil and suffering happen in the universe where creaturely freedom is a privilege, where everything happens in time, whereas God is independent of the universe and time. He self-exists and at the same time upholds the universe by His outreaching concern and care because the whole creation is dependent on Him. Here lies the pastoral dimension of divine providence. Calvin’s stance that all aspects of God’s sovereignty and good providence cannot be fathomed because they remain as incomprehensible mystery propelled him to insist on the need for human beings to maintain humility, modesty, and sobriety. The views of Calvin have been problematized on account of their ambivalence regarding predestination, fatalism, and sinful human nature. Though Calvinists do not admit or state that God is the author of sin, critics like Evan have also objected to Calvinism on the grounds that Calvinism views God almost as a beast because He does not treat all His people equally, with some He behaves nefariously, He is a manipulator, and the ‘give-and-take relationship’ He maintains with human beings is faulty and flawed. The main difference between the Catholic teachings and those of Calvinism lies in the emphasis put on faith plus or faith minus. While the former would insist on salvation or redemption by the unconditional and outreaching grace of God, like a great mother who never retires in caring (Is. 49:14), and promote faith and good works going together, as the Epistle of St. James notes in 2:14-26 referring to the necessity of faith and deeds going together and 5:11 referring to ‘the proverbial patience of Job’ as ways of ensuring salvation, the latter would state that faith alone is sufficient as God does the rest.
The present study cautions that mere theodicy-centred canonical readings of the book have their limitations in making a therapeutic impact upon the human psyche against human suffering. A historiography of the review of literature shows that several scholarly approaches such as exegetical, theological, phenomenological, existential, psychological, and logo-therapeutic have been pursued to discover the meaning of the book which continues to be an enigma eluding human comprehension. More than the historical veracity of the story of Job, what haunts the human mind is the enormity of the problem it deals with. Complexities associated with the book call for a diachronic-synchronic reading of the text with an openness towards a dialogic journey in relation to hermeneutics lest readers, particularly those who experience and endure suffering unfairly to a great extent, should get stuck up with understanding suffering as a lonely world of trauma. This pedagogical intent of *The Book of Job* and the therapeutic effect the reading of the book can have upon the human psyche are of prime importance when we think of the plight and redemption of Job, the central character in the book.

When righteous people suffer unjustly, when bad things happen to good people, and when suffering is not a sign of retribution, not the result of evil, the sufferer has her/his honest indignations. The physical, mental, and spiritual agony he/she endures is enormous. It is all the more painful when the suffering is stigmatized by society. Even though God may tolerate her/his honest questionings, the world attributes varied and different reasons for her/his suffering constraining the sufferer to endure, as Maxwell S. Sucharov (2007) states, ‘an isolated world of trauma freezing her/him to a non-dialogic space shattering her/his capacity to generate meaning’ (1) for her/his life. As Dr. Fred Johnson, a practising counselling
psychologist, observes and comments in his essay, “A Phenomenological Existential Analysis to The Book of Job” (2005), when one tries to dissect the responses Job’s friends make, one gets a clue to the variegated approaches the book yields. These approaches mean that, in the backdrop of the difficulties faced in the course of reading and trying to arrive at a plausible sense of the book, there could be a dialogic journey while attempting meaning-making on the problem of unfair human suffering as it is seen to be in the case of Job. It is against such a backdrop that the author of The Book of Job wrings in a complex narrative framework, highly poetic and metaphorical, ushering in ‘a meaning-generating dialogic process’ through the lens of ‘polyphonic dialogism’ with ‘a nexus of voices’, to use the phrase of Bakhtin.

A Bakhtinian reading of The Book of Job keeps hopes alive against impediments, propels the sufferer to keep questing for answers instead of falling into the pitfalls of nihilism and despair, and depression. The enormity of human suffering, that too when the sufferer is viewed, or when he/she is constrained to behave as if he/she were a condemned miserable wretch rejected by human cruelty and apparent indifference of God, as in the case of Job, because he/she is seen as one who has sinned against God under the influence of Satan, the author of sin, becomes quite complex and difficult to comprehend. It is against this awareness that the application of the Bakhtinian concepts such as chronotope, dialogism, and heteroglossia contributes to context-sensitive meaning-making that is plural, contemporary, contextual, and existential. To those who are attuned to quests towards existential spirituality, this way of reading The Book of Job is a great help. It helps them see how, as Francis I. Andersen remarks, “the desolate cry of Job mediated via dolorosa” – “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”, meaning “My God, my God, why hast though
forsaken me?” (Mathew 27:46-47), a cry that indicates the pathetic helplessness of Job, pathetic all the more because even his ‘well-meaning’ friends add to his pain and anguish by their presumptuousness, can also “become the road to God” because “the innocent sufferer has the privilege of standing nearest to God” (187) in the midst of his temporality that means a terrible predicament. God’s ultimate intervention in the life of Job is a way of asserting the value of compassionate understanding of the sufferer rather than mere advice provided to him/her. God’s intervention inspires readers to see and discern the blending of theology and humanness ingrained within the complex structural cruxes and matrices of The Book of Job.

Recent scholarship done on The Book of Job on the application of Bakhtinian elements of criticism and philosophy, courtesy the efforts put in by critics like Walter L. Reed (1992), Carol A. Newsom (2003), T. Stordalen (2006), Bernhard Lang (2007), Seong Whan Timothy Hyun (2013), has focused on aspects such as ‘double-voiced dialogical quality’ and ‘non-hierarchical representation of characters’ (characters as ideas) in the book. Comments have been made on ‘the non-narrative dimension’ of the book, on ‘the nature of voices in the book, and on the author's way of interrelating them. These studies hint at, as Stordalen adds, how The Book of Job points to the fact that “the Hebrew sapiential thinking did inherit a certain dialogical quality, which renders it sensible to apply Bakhtin to Job” (18). Bakhtin rejected the idea of ‘totalizing’ preferring a dialogic approach to truth. The fact that The Book of Job has a number of disjunctions, genres, character-based and character-related voices projected as ideas, means that totalizing would be a difficult proposition and problematizing the unity of the narrative structure of the book is inevitable, entailing deconstructive readings of the text. As Carol Newsom points out, the dialogues in the book are ‘internally endless’. Taking clues from these studies, let me add and posit
that the enormous scope the book provides in terms of dimensions of dialogue can also accommodate a subaltern perspective from the point of view of the victim of human suffering, paving the way for the view that the book with reference to the problem it dwells upon is an ‘unfinalizable’ text to quote Hyun.

In the light of these critical positionalities and averments, this researcher’s submission is that *The Book of Job* addresses the problem of suffering also from a victim’s point of view, from a perspective of self-psycho-analytic complexity. It elucidates how the Joban figure is placed as the matrix of the human predicament within a pedagogical and therapeutic framework wherein God, if not friends, as Sucharov notes, stands for ‘the authentic presence of a dialogic Other’ opening a window for negotiation of meaning in the midst of a nexus of voices. To be more specific and relevant to the thematic focus of the Conference, if postcoloniality were to refer to a predicament like the one W. B. Yeats comments on, ‘we cannot know the truth but we can live it’, and if postcolonial theorizing revolves around polyphonic dialogicity from the subaltern point of view, from the point of view of the wisdom of the victim, from the point of view of human condition and concern rather than God’s requirements, then *The Book of Job* stands out as one of the finest and complex texts focusing on a subaltern of different kind, and the subaltern of that different kind can be anybody, you or I irrespective of one’s status, as there is no escape from suffering, suffering one kind or the other.

Against this backdrop, the Fourth Chapter foregrounds certain ways of garnering existential spirituality so to face the reality of human suffering. The research-findings which may contribute to new ways of thinking, musing, and garnering spirituality indicated here below usher in and call for the need for
multiperspectival solutions to the crisis of human suffering. These findings, besides partly answering some of the research questions framed in Chapter One, also provoke cross-disciplinary thinking, learning across disciplines, and relational striving through diachronic-synchrony so as to arrive at polyphonic ways of arriving at truth. These findings may briefly be discussed here:

- Complexities associated with the book call for a diachronic-synchronic reading of the text with an openness towards a dialogic journey on hermeneutics lest readers, particularly those who experience and endure suffering unfairly to a great extent, should get stuck up with understanding suffering as a lonely world of trauma. This pedagogical intent of *The Book of Job* and the therapeutic effect the reading of the book can have upon the human psyche are of prime importance when we think of the plight and redemption of Job, the central character in the book. This explains the rationale behind the polyphonic composition of the book.

- Whether *The Book of Job* presents a common and unified theme is a moot point. Heterogeneity in the narratives, variety of genres used, ironic devices wrought in, and symbolism and imagery integrated either as conceits and objective correlatives do convey varied angles and aspects of the problem of human suffering discussed and varied voices heard and listened to. But, theme-wise, the presentation does hinge around Job’s predicament which can be any man’s or everyman’s. More than the historical job, if at all there was one, the archetypal Job and the mythopoeic language and the diachronic-synchronic embraces surrounding him converge towards a wholesome sense-making that is relational rather than monological.
'Relational striving' is projected as the natural and spontaneous outcome of dialogic reasoning the book promotes through multi-generic narratives and a number of lively literary devices which irony, paradoxes, symbolism, and imagery. These devices are the hallmarks of the texture of the book which make the task of interpreting the book a complex but fascinating one beyond epochs, milieus, and period, and within contemporaneous contexts of human predicaments. Relational striving eliminates arrogation of knowledge and wisdom as represented by the three friends of Job, reasons out violation of moral and ethical norms on the basis of ground realities rather than on the basis of stigmatization or dogmatic norms, and sees prevailing and perpetuated individual and social iniquities as real ground-realities which contribute enormously to human suffering. Mere stigmatization attributing guilt to the individual who endures suffering is a non-value that often reduces him/her to depression. Relational striving is a way forward towards seeing the complexities involved and appreciating the challenges involved in finding solutions. This is where Bakhtin’s linguistic semiotics and social semantics gain indispensable value and significance by virtue of their reference, as Michael Holquist puts it in his ‘Foreword’ to Bakhtin’s book-length essay, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, to ‘the naked immediacy of experience’ that has ‘an odour of the specific and the local’, by virtue of their potentiality to think and move beyond the dry abstractions of Kantianism, Kantian ‘ethical imperatives’ that foreground ‘the universality of the ought’ by ‘invoking the authority of an unproblematic God’ (ix-x) which has been problematized in the era of post-Enlightenment. This is how Joban dialogues become purposeful and meaningful, shaping Job, the central figure of *The Book of Job*. 
as an archetypal, mythopoeic, and metaphoric figure participating in moral contestations and ‘de-transcendalizing’ the abstract formulations of ethical imperatives. Bakhtinian ethical imperatives, different from Kantian ‘universality of the ought’, takes into account ‘the immediacy of experience’ in a specific context without yielding to ‘unbridled relativism’.

- Bakhtinian approaches to the reading of *The Book of Job* mean that monological interpretations, hegemonic bases and superstructures, and even almighty-God-centred theodicies and abstract and dry exegetical hermeneutics of the texture of the book or the themes connoted within the texture have to be tamed by dialogic imagination and relational and reciprocal striving with an embracing and therapeutic attitude towards the plight of the victims of human suffering, towards resolving the pain and the anguish associated with suffering, all the more unmerited suffering.

- The researcher has grounds and reasons to arrive at another finding, namely ‘garnering existential spirituality’ may be posited as one of the prime values to be cherished in life. As indicated and argued in Chapter Two and further reiterated in Chapter Four of the study, inconsistencies in the narrative are resolved towards emphasizing the threefold dimensions of existential spirituality, namely theocentric, anthrocentric and cosmocentric, through manifold literary devices. From this point of view, suffering may be viewed as a compliment to one’s spirituality, one’s holistic understanding of human nature. It is these threefold dimensions that signify the triumph of the human spirit, the transcendent, the poetic, and the sublime in the midst of temporalities.
The human face of God that consorts with theocentric, anthrocentric, and cosmocentric dimensions within the semiotic and semantic framework of The Book of Job, ushers in the poetic and real plausibility of God becoming ‘the dialogic Other’ within a framework of a nexus of voices, who ultimately stands with the victim of human suffering. It is the human face of God that prevents Job from the denouement of pessimism, fatalism, and nihilism, that chides Job’s friends, particularly the first three, for their self-righteous stances and ‘holier-than-thou-attitudes’, that asserts that God is indeed caring and outreaching for mankind without conditionality, asserting that the Divine Providence is capable of outreaching gratuitously in all fairness and compassion like a good and great mother who never retires from caring. This is what God did by sending Jesus Christ to the world. John Ashcroft said: ‘Christianity is a faith in which God sends his son to die for you’. The Book of Job prefigures Christophany through the dialogic Other.

The presence of God as the dialogic Other in The Book of Job is a pointer to mankind on how to embrace theocentric, anthrocentric, and cosmocentric dimensions in a holistic and synergic way in the course of garnering existential spirituality. God as the dialogic Other is not only God of justice, goodness, and abundant divine providence and grace but also God of reconciliation with an extraordinary outreach of compassion and understanding. Chapters 28, and 38-41 are fine connotative illustrations of this fact. The idea of reconciliation is reinforced by the dialogic Other who is particular to insist that Job first forgives his friends for their misrepresentation and misunderstanding before he reconciles with God. Thus, the dialogic Other maintains the decorum of mutual respect, encourages interpersonal
relationships to be sustained so that the temporal harmony (this is anthrocentric) would reflect Job’s and the community’s harmony with God. Anthrocentric dimension is a prerequisite for cosmocentric dimension and both anthrocentric and cosmocentric usher in the theocentric dimension. This is how the three dimensional dialogic communion -- theocentric, anthrocentric, and cosmocentric -- results in. All the three are concomitant and inter-related. The Bakhtinian chronotopic reading of the Wisdom dialogue intertwined in The Book of Job facilitates readers to understand and appreciate the concomitant relationship that is valued, foregrounded, and celebrated here.

In the light of these findings, or rather, musings originating from the study, As Charles R. Swindoll urges, the heroic endurance of Job, predicted already in 1:13-22, provokes readers to think of The Book of Job “as a mystery play” (11) by virtue of the number of complexities the book reflects. Painful suffering throws a floodlight upon his human frailty. It sharpens his awareness of the real value of life just as it goads him to think of cursing the day of his birth. Its impact is so deep that it provokes him to have honest indignations against God’s ways of treating the innocent and the wicked alike. It makes him ask a haunting question why God cannot intervene. He is confused and struggles to cope with an embattled situation wherein he tries to harmonize God’s benevolence with his tolerance of human pain and anguish. It is clear in the case of Job that suffering brings forth certain moral and social qualities he is capable of. He believes that God would restore him his bliss and happiness. But, it is his human frailty that makes him behave like a sceptic, to strike him dead. He behaves like any and every man daring or pleading with God to strike
the wicked dead and the righteous as though if that were not happening, god could not be trusted, meaning that He cannot be the real God. Job’s impatience is a reminder that it is not possible to exhaust the patience of God the way humans in today’s world would wish. Chapter 28 of The Book of Job stands as a juxtaposed parallel reminding readers to be aware of the complexities involved in understanding the problem of suffering. Just as it is hard and difficult for humans to seek and acquire Wisdom because it lives fully with God alone but yet reasoning minds go on seeking it, it is also hard and difficult to understand the depth and complexity of human suffering but yet heroic endurance just as Job tried is possible.

The honest indignations and the moral contestations in The Book of Job revolve around why the innocent should suffer and whether God-protected hedge over them against suffering is efficacious enough. A cursory reading of the book makes one ask another question, 'whether human affairs are really ruled by divine providence when the wicked thrive'. The dilemma of Job, a man of remarkable character, signifies the predicament of all those who are innocent but suffering. A careful survey of Job’s life, his character, his conduct, his integrity and his loyalty to God shows that he can never be a logical candidate for disaster. Yet, he faces enormous suffering. God allows evil to strike him with series of assaults. In his sorrow, Job laments that “God does not hear me” (Job 13:3), “God is punishing me” (Job 6:4), and “God allows the wicked to prosper” (Job 21:7). In the midst of his friends accusing him, and his wife calling upon him to ‘curse God and die’, Job, cursing the day of his birth (3: 11-19), is constrained to ponder over the problem of suffering (3: 20-26) in the midst of defending himself even to the extent of becoming
guilty of self-righteousness. Humanly speaking, one tends to appreciate the depths of Job's complaint.

By extension, the crisis endured by Job may be viewed as a perennial predicament of humanity, endured from the time when sin exhibited its venom, when the fall of man occurred, and when Cain began to ask with the brazen response to God, "Am I the keeper of my brother?" (Genesis 4:8-10). Even today, such crises are evident everywhere across civilizations, causing enormous human suffering. A sense of existential angst in the form of despondency and helplessness accompanies the reality of human suffering. Yet, despite helplessness, most cultures believe that attempts at alleviating suffering are indispensable. The enormity and complexity of the problem demands multidimensional focus, beyond binaries, relational striving, and reasoning in dialogue towards resolution.

*The Book of Job* provides enormous scope for moral contestations in terms of mythopoetic language which gives birth to figural realism with multiple meanings. The figural realistic connotations the book evokes mean that one must be willing to go beyond the simplistic meaning the prosaic opening of the book presents. As Carol A. Newsom observes, the elusive nature and complexity of the book not only lends itself to a number of “hermeneutical assumptions” but also allows readers to see “perspectives congenial to the tenor of their own age” (3). St. Jerome's comparison of *The Book of Job* to 'the squeezing of an eel' hints at the dynamics ingrained in the narration of the text and the need for a dialogic reading of the text. The dialogical dynamics of the book resists the subordinate process of 'monopolization' bordering on conventional theological wisdom, the coercive privilege of a single perspective as definitive, and resist finalization. The variety of perspectives the book ushers in
revolves around the book’s own moral seriousness with which meanings are constructed with dimensions of dialogism on claims of truth without yielding to relativism or nihilism.

This way of looking at *The Book of Job* deconstructs the idea of God as almighty and powerful enough to confront evil. Here, the heroism connoted is not that of God but that of Job as a transfigured type who emblematizes the relevance and importance of enduring, if not overcoming or standing up against, injustices, sinfulness, and shortcomings. The real trail is not for God to showcase his heroism. There is no need for God to prove his heroism. It is mankind who is caught in the quagmire of moral corruption and depravity. The jewel of freedom man enjoys within God’s plan of creation and salvation is both his strength and weakness. When the arena of strength shines forth, God's grandeur and goodness, as G.M. Hopkins suggests in his poems, is vindicated, and man's privilege of being the crown of creation is validated, but when the arena of weakness wags its tail, man's culpability and moral corruption get exposed with inevitable consequences meaning suffering. Culpability may fix who is sinful but the consequences of sinning percolate beyond the sinful affecting even the just and the innocent. This is the cosmic and ubiquitous dimension of sin and suffering. Thus, *The Book of Job* interpreted this way ushers in a humane understanding of the crisis haunting Job. Such an understanding in no way precludes the Christianized perception of Job prefiguring the incarnated or human face of God made fully visible in the person of Christ who felt abandoned on the cross but who eventually triumphed over sin and death.

Though there is no direct hint or suggestion that the author of *The Book of Job* prefigured the idea of ‘resurrection’ in the Christian sense of the term, interpretative
community sees some glimmer of ‘hope of spiritual life in heaven’ in the statement of Job: “Yet in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:26). Even in an era of post-enlightenment and post-modernism, people have not lost their belief in an unseen world. It is a crucial dividing line of faith today. Cosmic dimension of The Book of Job is a constant reminder that human history is far more than the rising and falling of nations; as Yancey comments, it is a staging ground for the battle of the universe.

The epic dimension of Job reminds that evil can befall upon one’s life like a lightening from heaven (Lk. 10) just as a sinner’s repentance could set of celestial celebration (Lk. 15). Or as The Book of Revelation muses in Chapter 12, ‘a baby’s birth can disturb the entire universe’. Much of that effect may however be hidden from our view -- except for the occasional glimpses granted to us in places like The Book of Revelation, and in Job. This is why though the book may not, in fact, it does not, satisfy the reader fully in terms of finding an answer to Job’s problem, the problem of suffering as a universal experience, it is still worth reading the book for the reasons stated by Bakhtin, G.K. Chesterton, and Kierkegaard, noted in the beginning of this chapter.

‘The ambivalence of our postmodern condition’, to use the phrase of J.F. Lyotard, may make humans think mistakenly presuming technological advances as identity markers for the progress made. This is a confusion. Technological advances cannot be equated with the development of human consciousness, civilized behaviour, disciplined growth, and above all, cultivating good, not erroneous conscience. The prevalence of injustices, inequalities, oppressive social structures, inhuman practices around cannot be eliminated merely by espousing the cause of technological advances alone. Man is not made by bread alone. He has reasoning
powers to see beyond islanded consciousness, beyond binaries, and beyond egoistic pursuits. All these cause human suffering more acutely and intensely than other causes such natural calamities, personal losses, and accidents. This research contends that The Book of Job situates readers in a wider spectrum of chronotopic visioning, potentially heterochromatic and temporally valid and sound ambience of critical considerations enabling them to think holistically, synchronically through polyphonic and diachronic voice-ideas the way Bakhtin pioneered and has taught to critics and readers of varied hues and dispositions, enabling them to have a sideward glancing on the inevitability of co-existence of good and evil by virtue of human potentiality for reasoning, creativity, and destruction as well.

The Book of Job cautions us, cautioning that there is no wisdom is saying that ‘God is dead’, or ‘man is superman’ endowed with self-righteousness, or ‘the will of man alone will prevail’ in the absence of crucifixion of God, done everyday by several forces of evil. There is wisdom in saying, just as Lyotard did, that ‘the technology of nuclear power is not possible without that of nuclear bombs’. It is inevitable that man, being free, has choices to make, choices that would shape his conduct. The ambivalence of our postmodern condition may colour our choices. But, when choices are made without ‘hubris’, those choices are bound to linger long in terms of positive impacts. Therefore, it is better and spiritually healing that the postmodern generation, all of us living now, shed and avoid, as William Schultz remarks, “the postmodernist contemporary hubris” accompanied by the materialist ingredients of “technological advances” in the name of “unending progress” (1). A reading of Benjamin Kerstein’s write up titled, “Epicurus and Job” (2016) inspires this researcher to state that Epicureanism cannot be a solution to the postmodern
man's angst against human suffering. The philosophy of atomism and indifference to human suffering, and the pursuit of pleasure, hedonism, as solution suggested as a way of life, suggested by Epicurus, is not compatible with the language and the message codes of The Book of Job. The reason is that Epicureanism puts the battle as reason vs faith in God and humanity. Yet, there is no denial that the postmodern world we live in, as Kerstein suggests, “appears to live an Epicurean life while constantly turning towards Job” (3).

Against this awareness and understanding, garnering existential spirituality may be viewed as a healing process that takes into account the values of the Middle Path as enunciated by Lord Buddha. It is a way forward towards sense-making in the midst of human suffering, negotiating through intertextualities, listening, in an ambience of tranquillity in the midst of turmoil, to dhvani-intonations implied in great books of inspiration such as the one taken up for study here, and striving through interpersonal relationships that connote the three-dimensional thrusts ingrained in the title of this chapter. This is what ambivalent Job strived for, or rather God, the dialogic Other told him to strive for when He came to him face-to-face in the whirlwind through the clouds. The dialogic Other in the book is a transcendent God who was down-to-earth helping Job stand on his legs with courage, humility, and wisdom he could derive through theocentric, anthropocentric, and cosmocentric relationships. G.K. Chesterton said, ‘art is the signature of man’ but re-reading of The Book of Job takes us one step further to appreciate the fact that ‘Job, representing everyman, is the signature of God’ who would not give up man. This is part of the promises of God in The Book of Job.