Chapter Three

Joban Dialogue on Human Suffering:

Honest Indignations and Moral Contestations

“Truth is not born nor is found inside the head of an individual person; it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction”.

M.M. Bakhtin in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics

An attempt to read The Book of Job in the light of its dialogic and thematic focus on human suffering and in the light of Bakhtinian critical idioms propels this researcher to look at the book as a multivocal dialogic text that is based on the principle that people seeking truth come together in their searches and make conclusions by having a good healthy dialogue. It means that the presences of other consciousnesses which have ‘equal rights and equal responsibilities’ are acknowledged, respected, and appreciated. This is how truth is born as a shared value.

The dialogicity ingrained in The Book of Job is a fine illustration of a Bakhtinian carnival wherein everyone is an active participant communing in the carnival act, moving beyond monologist closures, closures which are dead to other responses and viewpoints and which pretend to be ‘the ultimate word’ as if its word were ‘the decisive force’. The dialogic context of the book implies that there is neither a first nor last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context. As Bakhtin avers in his essay on "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences", a dialogic
context ‘extends into the boundless past and the boundless future’ with immense scope for ‘recalling and reinvigorating boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings’. As he notes further, ‘a whole spectrum of possible relationships, co-existing simultaneously, comes to light with transitions between various nuances on this spectrum’. The prevalence of the carnival spirit and consciousness ‘frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities’ affirming ‘a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices’ among ‘a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness’ as in the case of Dostoevsky’s novels. In other words, according to Bakhtin, ‘truth is born collectively when people are co-building it in their process of social interaction’.

Joban dialogues are a pointer towards such a carnivalesque genuine polyphony. Every portion, including the prose prologue, which introduces the problem of human suffering without any solution, and the epilogue which provides a sense of open-ended closure, in The Book of Job, contributes to the dialogic contextual temporality wherein the speeches of Job and his friends, consisting of three cycles, are projected as ‘semiotic expressions of psychic experience of inner lives’ curved in ‘relational encounters’. Such an interpretation is in tune with “a growing movement in the human sciences and humanities and is known as social constructionism” (John Shotter 1). It is in tune with a paradigm-shift towards relational striving that also embodies creative use of language. Joban dialogues happen in an ambience of dialogism, honest indignations, and moral contestations with connotations larger than the particular problem they address. When viewed in and through such relational striving, the structure of the Joban dialogues points to a
central theme, beyond Job’s suffering, namely “the human struggle to maintain integrity and faith” (Andrew E. Steinmann 89).

Exploring the dialogic journey in relation to human suffering, Kushner asks: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” This is the title of an acclaimed book written (1986) by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, addressing the question of innocent suffering in relation to the plight of Job in the Old Testament of the Bible. The problem is not only why bad things happen to good people but also why the wicked thrive, why God permits them to thrive, and why He does not listen to the cry of the innocent. Among several other questions being asked, one of the mind-boggling ones the book raises and attempts to answer is whether human affairs are governed by divine providence. Though Thomas Aquinas’s Literal Exposition on Job answers the question in the affirmative, Gilbert Murray’s comment in his essay on The Book of Job, titled “Beyond Good and Evil” that “the course of thought in Job, though often sublime, is not on the whole lucid” (195) justifies the preoccupations of commentators and interpreters for more than two millennia.

By virtue of the complexity involved in decoding the texture of the poetic dialogues which form the core and crux of the book, it is important to keep in mind how Job’s honest indignations and the overall moral contestations on righteous suffering are intertwined within the matrices of Joban dialogue. In this chapter the focus is more on these matrices which may be briefly stated as follows:

First of all, Joban dialogue collective, as A.S.Dasan elucidates, ‘embraces and addresses God-man relationship in multifaceted dimensions which are theocentric in the sense of God’s providence outreaching to mankind unconditionally, anthrocentric in the sense of man/woman retaining his/her relationship with God through co-
creaturely wisdom and freedom, ethicality and morality of human action, and interpersonal relationships as no man lives in an islanded consciousness, and cosmocentric in the sense of God’s wisdom and grandeur available across the created universe with God’s governance over the world of nature rich with mines and minerals, the treasures of the sea including sea-monsters, the world of animals and birds, and the vast and wide horizons of the firmament of the sky. The author of The Book of Job is keen to demonstrate this truth through a number of imagery and references as evident in Chapter 28 of the book. As discussed earlier in the study, the ending connotation of the Wisdom dialogue in that chapter is an artistic and poetic way of stating that wisdom to be acquired by mankind is by dialogism and relational striving only. This relational striving can be routed through the abovementioned threefold aspects and dimensions.

Secondly, Joban dialogue focuses on the most perplexing problem of mankind, namely human suffering, that too unmerited suffering, because the protagonist as a human individual suffers. The enormity of pain and pathos he endures undeservingly, as the protagonist himself claims because of his righteousness and uprightness, as the author of the book acknowledges in the beginning of the prologue, is wrought into the texture more as an instance of an archetypal suffering than as a particular individual suffering. From this perspective, the protagonist’s suffering becomes an arena of cultural construct and discourse on the cosmic dimension of the dramatic dialogic voice-nexus happening in the narrative. The voice-nexus integrated appears to be ordinary but in effect it is extraordinary pointing to cosmic dimensions. In this connection, in his essay, “A Fresh Reading of The Book of Job”, Philip Yancey comments:
An ordinary person in the seen world, Job was called upon to endure a trial with cosmic consequences. He had no glimmer of light to guide him, no hint that the unseen world cared about him, or even existed. Yet like a laboratory test animal, he was handpicked to settle one of the most urgent issues of humanity and to determine a small piece of the history of the universe. (145)

But in the Joban dialogue, as he notes further, Job’s friends seem to see something ‘absurd in believing that one human being, a tiny dot on a tiny planet, can make a difference in the history of the universe’. Elihu, the last of his comforters, asks:

If you sin, how does that affect him? If your sins are many, what does that do to him? If you are righteous, what do you give to him, or what does he receive from your hand? Your wickedness only affects humans like yourself, and your righteousness only other people. (Job: 35: 6-8)

As the dialogic narrative progresses towards the ending chapters, readers realize it is Elihu who is proved wrong. For, God is greatly affected by the response of one man and by the fact that cosmic issues are at stake. This is why Job remains as one of God’s favourites, privileged so along with two others – Daniel and Noah – as He would later communicate in a message to Ezekiel.

Thirdly, Joban dialogue embraces another aspect and dimension, namely God intervening as the dialogic Other, an extraordinary gesture of divine providence and goodness outreaching for the sake of mankind bringing in face to face encounter between the Provident God whose credentials are, in a way, doubted because He is seen to have permitted evil to thrive and suffering to haunt the psyche of Job. A Bakhtinian and postcolonial reading would look at God coming as the dialogic Other to the rescue of Job as a powerful mode of redefining the identity of Job and of
constructing another and alternate vision of reality. It may also be interpreted as a way of prefiguring the arrival of God in human form in the person of Jesus Christ as Christians believe in accordance with the Four Gospels of the New Testament of the Bible, meaning that the redemption wrought by Christ is more powerful than the sin of Adam and Eve, the Original sin. For, God as the Dialogic Other erases contradictions, hegemonic and condescending propositions and stances, and above all, stands by the marginalized, by the side of the victims, the sufferer in this case. Such an encounter with God and intervention by God is a unique phenomenon that resonates well with the incarnational theology that has a special preference and option for the marginalized.

Fourthly, as Bakhtin interprets, Joban dialogue celebrates, without explicitly stating so, cross-referential intertextuality as a way of dialogism that, in a way, challenges the long-held interpretative assumption that The Book of Job is ‘a unified utterance’. As Carol Newsom remarks, Historical Criticism and New Criticism have facilitated the emergence of differential readings including readings on the lines of intertextuality. In this context, readers may be reminded of the indirect references to the Babylonian theodicy of which probably the author of The Book of Job was aware of. As Newsom briefs, the Babylonian Theodicy, composed between 1400 and 800 B.C.E., remained quite popular then. Though there may not be any direct contact between the Babylonian theodicy and Joban dialogic theodicy, “the pattern of similarities and differences suggest some knowledge of a common genre” (81) to quote Zuckerman.

Striking similarities and differences exist between the Babylonian theodicy and Job 3-27. It is the righteous sufferer who initiates a dialogue with a friend or
friends. Thematically, ‘the enigma of unjustified suffering dominates’, wringing in reflective musings with questionings and scepticism over the existence and availability of God as He is not immediately coming to the defence of the innocent sufferer. Questions are raised over the existence or non-existence of a moral order in the cosmos, over the ethical distortions of the social order because of the prevalence of evil that dares God’s sovereignty and provident governance. In both the cases, ‘friends urge the sufferer to avail himself of the traditional practices of piety, contrasting the passing nature of misfortune with what is lasting, and arguing that the wicked will eventually receive punishment’. Stylistically, both reflect a high degree of literary sophistication, though developed through different techniques. Joban dialogue is arranged on the lines of three cycles of alternating speeches by Job and his friends, although the third cycle breaks this pattern for no reason whereas the Babylonian theodicy is structured around a complex acrostic with ‘the initial syllables of the lines of each stanza identifying the author of the compositions’ and ‘each eleven line stanza consisting of couplets with the single isolated line that bears special emphasis’. The Book of Job is replete with exquisite poetry and erudite diction.

Rhetorically, dialogism is continued in both the texts with a steady pattern: Initial speech is followed by each speaker responding to the wisdom of the preceding speaker and often making critical comments on the cogency of the preceding reasoning. As Newsome notes, in the Babylonian Theodicy ‘the parties to the dialogue are remarkably polite, where as in Job, the opening remarks become increasingly hostile and insulting’. Concerns such as the prosperity of the wicked, the sudden demise of the wicked, the ultimate reward of the righteous, the failure to
demonstrate divine retribution, the remoteness of divine reason from human understanding, and so forth become the bone of contention for dialogic reckoning. At the end, at the exhaustion of dialogic options, the Babylonian theodicy opts for compromise hinting at the inexhaustibility of dialogue while the dialogue in *Job* represents an extraordinary development of the dialogic possibilities embodied in polyphonic voice ideas.

Besides God directly addressing Job, instead of being spoken about as in the case of the Babylonian theodicy, intervening in favour of Job, there are certain other unique arenas Joban dialogue consists of. Subgenres, parodies, figural representations, emotional intensities, dynamic development of dialogism with multiple meaning making possibilities reflecting cosmic dimensions may be counted as part of the unique features of Joban dialogue. Though both the texts are related to personalities, the argumentation in *The Book of Job* revolves around participative and value or attitude based moral contestations wherein the clustering of the form and the content blends and fuses together through two kinds or codes of the use of language, namely ‘language and message codes’, to use the phrase of Gerrard Genette. Moreover, the complexity of *The Book of Job* is such that interpretative communities across ages and cultures have had recourse to a number of other texts of the Bible so as to explore and discern the plausible meaning of the book. Other books of the Old Testament such as *The Book of Psalms, The Book of Proverbs, The book of Ecclesiasticus*, and The Book of Isaiah and some of the books of the New Testament such the four Gospels, the Epistles of St. Paul and St. James, and *The Book of Revelation* have provided referential support services in the course of interpreting
certain contexts and contentions in The Book of Job. Such recourses are tenable and necessary, and they serve the cause of Bakhtinian chronotopic dialogism.

Fifthly, Joban dialogue provides space for radically opposing views, even for diabolical suggestions reflecting affinities with the intent of Satan who’s only and ceaseless aim is to rupture the cordial relationships God maintains with his creatures, particularly mankind. The ‘turmoil’ caused to Job is the game plan of Satan. Chapters 1 and 2 refer to the turmoil endured by Job. The intensity of his experience of the turmoil is so acute that even his wife comes in, as a dialogic force with a diabolical suggestion asking Job ‘to curse God and die’, a dangerous trend-setting that would be pleasing to Satan, the wager of war and promoter of sinning and sinful ways:

“Then his (Job) wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!’ But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?’ In all of this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:9-10). One is reminded of the suggestion of the fourth tempter, the most venomous among the four, in T.S. Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral. Job had his priorities straight. ‘It’s God first’. He didn’t side with his wife because her remark was a blatant blasphemy. Job’s psyche, his mental state mapped within a complex temporality that includes his firm stances against his friends’ view points and his wife’s, makes him use emotive and evocative language that converts his moods into ‘a wholesome experience’ that is capable of taking him or moving him away from the turmoil endured and towards a mood of tranquillity. This is how Job is redeemed and reconciled with God.

And sixthly, the human face of the Joban dialogue culminating in the direct encounter between the sufferer and God is a unique feature and dimension that has a
terrific value in Christian theology by virtue of the Christophany, to use the phrase of Raymond Panikkar, which defined itself on the Cross at Mount Calvary. The Word incarnate emptying itself fully on the Cross after an eventful journey on earth. From this perspective, *The Book of Job* prefigures the suffering of Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus of history and time, who ultimately emerged victorious over death, making the stings of evil powerless.

In the light of these matrices which serve as beacon light to appreciate the richness and depth of Joban dialogue, this study proceeds further on doing a textual analysis of some of the select and relevant verses from different chapters of *The Book of Job* restricting the analysis and the discussion to dialogic aspects and dimensions only and focusing on the main characters and the issues concerning righteous suffering:

Reading the state of mind of Job, the author of *The Book of Job* places Job’s mental state in a mode of internal dialogic journey. Job’s personality-traits and mental warp are crystal clear and they serve as the matrix for the Joban dialogue. Job from the land Uz is blameless and upright. He fears God and turns away from evil (*Job* 1: 1). Yet, when suffering strikes at the instigation of Satan, the ceaseless wager of war against God and humanity, human emotion gets into him to the extent of cursing the day of his birth. Pain and pathos constrict him and force him to express his honest indignations against God. He asks God:

> “Does it please you [God] to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?” (*Job* 10:3)

He goes on:
“Surely, O God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household”. (*Job* 16:7)

He rants further:

“He [God] throws me into the mud, and I am reduced to dust and ashes. I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me”. (*Job* 30:19-20)

He cries:

“Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defence – let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing”. (*Job* 31:35)

He bursts out:

“As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made me taste bitterness of soul”. (*Job* 27:1)

Though he is willing to acknowledge the sovereignty of God, he strongly feels that

“God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. Though I cry, ‘I’ve been wronged!’ I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice”. (*Job* 19:6-7)

His mind becomes a site for internal voice ideas which have their own dialogic cope:

He knows that with God as source of wisdom, he can experience saving grace, and therefore he states:

“Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God?”

(*Job* 9:2)
“With God are wisdom and might; He has counsel and understanding”. (Job 12:13)

He avers that:

“As long as my breath is in me, and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit”. (Job 27:3-4)

With regard to the issues raised in terms of moral contestations, Wayne Jackson reformulates certain penetrating questions within the framework of the Joban dialogue collective, which in turn usher in certain other voice ideas:

1. ‘Does or should man serve God for nothing?’

Though such a question comes from Satan, readers have grounds to think that the Satan’s question has a sarcastic overtone as Satan subtly contends that God is not worthy of any human service and man does it more as a bribing act to receive favours from God. At the normal human level of thinking, that too in these days of money-worship, it is possible to think that man may not always have a noble intention to serve God alone, that too for His own glory. The author of Job seems to be aware of this human angle just as T.S.Eliot was in his depiction of the fourth tempter. The teachings of the Catholic Church also speak of this sin, the sin of self-glorification, as a cardinal sin.
2. ‘Why do the righteous suffer?’

As blows after blows hit Job with losses and loathsome diseases, one tends to ask why God is harsh on innocent people. Again at the human level, it is also possible to ask whether one is willing to acknowledge the goodness of God in good times but not in bad times. An Epicurean view of God may constrain one to have skewed ideas about God or about one’s own self-righteousness and prompt him/her to ask such questions. As Jackson points out, the Epicurean idea that suffering is incompatible with goodness is a mistaken notion. ‘The example of Jesus of Nazareth is a dynamic rebuttal to the assertion that divine goodness and human suffering are mutually exclusive propositions. Christ was absolutely pure; he did not sin at all’ as indicated in Jn. 8:29, 46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15, and 1 Pet. 1:18-19. And yet, ‘God allowed him to suffer’ (Heb. 5:8). The narratology in The Book of Job is clear enough to suggest that man has choices to live with, to pursue good or evil ways. This is how right conduct becomes the basis for blessings. God grants the freedom of choice and it means that man by virtue of his limited wisdom or folly can commit wrong or indulge in evil and cause suffering. But, yet, there is no reason to think that the innocent cannot and will not suffer. The world we live in and live with has chaotic situations all around, which bring in enormous suffering not only to the actual victims of specific situations but also to all of us, innocent or not, by ripple effects or by what Mulk Raj Anand christens in the context of Bakha’s suffering on account of his marginalization and social exclusion, “secondary humiliations” (Apology for Heroism 38).

3. ‘How can God allow the righteous to suffer?’
Suffering on account of wickedness, human frailties, vagaries of Nature (cause and effect governed by Natural Law), and accidents in life, physical aging, and many such other counts is understandable. Systematic theologians may cite the legacy-effect of the original sin – sin of Adam and Eve – (Rom. 5:12), meaning that the whole creation was affected by human transgression (Rom. 8:18-20) as the cause of human suffering. But, the implication of the question here is whether God can prevent it, whether God is privileged and obliged to prevent it, an obligation as Creator of the universe, as the Guardian of man / woman, the crown of creation, why He is not doing it in spite of his sovereignty. This is the toughest question left unanswered to the satisfaction of the reader in The Book of Job. Though this researcher intends to come to this question again the contemporary existential context in Chapter Four of the study, she is aware of the challenges associated with the question and the Himalayan difficulties coming in the way of finding an answer to this question.

4. ‘Who is man to judge God?’, or ‘Can man judge God?’

It is again a difficult question posed in The Book of Job. Theists may have recourse to God’s supremacy and outreaching divine providence to answer this question. Atheists may quote George Bernard Shaw and negate the existence of God quipping that there is enough suffering everywhere as ‘it was so on a London street on any given day at the time when Shaw wrote’. But those who languish in real situations of actual suffering, who know the impact of the blows they endure, the loneliness and stigmatization they are constrained to confront, would not hesitate to tell their Creator why they are angry and the Creator, as the author of Job hints at, would understand their honest indignations. The author of The Book of Job does
provide scope for such honest indignations. What Job pleads for is a meeting point for an encounter with God, not to challenge Him as Faustus does, or to judge God, but to ask Him why He leaves the innocent in the lurch. But, wittingly or unwittingly, he is so keenly conscious of his self-righteousness that he, perhaps, oversteps his limit, all the more in his desperation, to justify himself. As he braces for a trail of himself in the Supreme Court of God, God too prepares Himself for cross-examination (Job 38 to 41). Here, rightly perhaps, it is God who speaks more with a number of interstitial voice-ideas on the grandeur of creation, the beauty and variety of the universe, and asks Job whether He needed Job’s permission to create the universe. The Almighty did not consult Job in creating the beautiful universe.

In an ambience of a magnificent and vivid depiction of the cosmos in a fine poetic, though somewhat disconnected, format (Chs. 38-41), a barrage of questions flow from God who talks to Job out of the whirlwind:

"Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding". (Job 38:4)

"Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it?" (Job 38:5)

"Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the corner stone thereof?". (Job 38:6)

God goes on asking many more questions – about how wild creatures survive in vast wilderness, about the mysterious temperament differential between certain
animals of the same general family, about how the design of the curious ostrich captures and confounds the imagination of men, and about the amazing flying patterns of varied birds in the firmament of the sky -- which stun the man from the land of Uz into silence mode. Such profoundly poetic, thoughtfully evocative, and cogently argumentative cross-examination can happen in relation to God-man encounters and relationships only, and no one grudges about the apparent absence of equality among partners in this subgenre of dialogism. Because, it is God whose rhetorical skills stand par excellence through the artistry of the author of Job, who is concerned about Job’s well being. What God does is, as Jackson comments, to ‘conduct a crash course to Job in the ignorance of humanity versus the knowledge and wisdom of the Almighty’. The irony is that Job, ‘the daring theological rebel’, commits the same blunder, ‘lack of understanding’ despite his wise stance on his righteousness, for which he critiques his friends. Calling them ‘miserable comforters’ (Job 16:1-2), he chides them:

“Doubtless you are the only people who matter, and wisdom will die with you! But, I have understanding”. (Job 12:2)

And later as he prays, he states that:

“My spirit is broken, and my days are cut. They make night into day”. (Job 17:12)

“You have closed their minds to understanding; therefore you will not let them triumph”. (Job 17:4).
In His next cycle of speech, God openly rebukes and confronts Job for his ‘lack of understanding’, cautioning him not to play with God’s comprehensive human development plan (40:6) that includes the plausibility and possibility of saving grace available to Job too. God’s control over even the monstrous creatures such as behemoth (40:15-24) and leviathan (41:1-34) connote that wisdom and power are companion attributes ceaselessly conspiring with God who has the supremacy that stands in dramatic contrast to human limitations in overpowering such creatures. As God demands a response from Job, Job remains stunned and somewhat muted by the awesome speech of God. Job’s problem is that he questions the God of Abraham who, he knows, would do the right only as proclaimed in The Book of Genesis 18:25. But, Job’s problem is how God can treat the perfect and the wicked in the same measure. He knows very well that his power is equal to that of God but yet his existential predicament keeps him in the dark. Though Job humbles himself in his initial response to God, God, hinting, if not hitting, at Job’s deficiency, perhaps his sin, asks:

“Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?” (Job 40:8)

This is from King James Bible Version.

English Standard Version puts it this way:

“Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?”

New American Standard Bible translates as follows:
"Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?"

**Holman Christian Standard Bible** does it this way:

“Would you really challenge My justice? Would you declare Me guilty to justify yourself?”

Though connotations are more or less the same, intonations, accents and stresses vary and are polyphonic.

Though Job can see but the tiny fringe of God’s purposes, his faith burns low in the course of facing a life-death crisis. He trusts God even as he doubts God’s ways. God leads him through ‘the sea’, the storm in the metaphorical sense. The epilogue narrates how God restores Job’s losses, how God comes to him as “the God of the victims” (Rene Girard 145) asserting that no man will annul His judgment, His sense of justice. God ensures that even Satan and hell will be consigned to the lake of fire as and when He reveals His power, wisdom, glory, and righteousness. The essential affirmation of *The Book of Job*, as Yancey adds, lies more “in the affirmation of the rectitude of God” than “in the affirmation of the power and wisdom of God” (171). As Job sees that God’s wisdom and power are faultless and His rectitude cannot be doubted, he humbly acknowledges his deficiency, his lack of trust in God. The ultimate lesson man has to learn, as the author of *The Book of Job* seems to imply, is to learn to trust in God and dare not being judgmental about God’s silence. Job’s acknowledgment of his submission to the plan of God comes in the form of his confessional statement:
“I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You….Therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (42:2, 5-6)

Attempting a phenomenological approach to the reading of the Joban dialogue, Espen Dhal, in his recent article, “Job and the Problem of Physical Pain: A Phenomenological Reading” (2016), observes that “it seems more promising to read the book not as a rationalization of evil and suffering, but perhaps rather as an immensely rich poetic articulation of innocent suffering” (45). He avers that the framework that The Book of Job takes for granted how Job’s friends insist on retributive justice: the just will in the end be rewarded, and the unjust will be punished. It is obvious that Job’s protest and lamentation is desperate because it clings to the legal framework: ‘How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin’ (13:23), or, with clear reference to a trial: ‘Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me! O that I had the indictment written by my adversary’ (31:35). But at the same time, Job’s exceptional suffering has led him to realize the breakdown of any just moral order – there are cases that do not fit into the wheel of justice: ‘he destroys both the blameless and the wicked’ (9:22). However, according to the phenomenology of pain, there might be another reason why the justness of the Law appears to be inadequate. He concludes his analysis in the following words:

The speech of justice, according to which wicked are punished and good are rewarded, is still an order of the world where the exceptional has no place. Thus, it is not that Job does not know the Law, God or the world to which his friends appeal; it is just that they no longer apply to the situation in which
pain has brought him. The bodily presence of acute pain puts the world, normal community and communication – and therefore also the Law – in brackets. When God finally deems Job’s speech right, and the friends’ wrong, it is precisely not by reference to the Law (42:7), for the Law hardly plays any role in God’s speech at all. Taken as a whole, *The Book of Job* questions the adequacy of the Law and the moral cosmos it outlines when it comes to human suffering. In particular, the experience of pain appears to remove the sufferer from the order of the Laws – the excess of Job’s pain attests to a certain lawlessness. (51)

Readers familiar with the standard approach to *The Book of Job* may be aware of the fact that one of the strong messages cast in the texture of the book is a discussion on theodicy, i.e. how can a just God allow a righteous person to suffer? But, what bothers critics is that God, as a significant eloquent voice-character in the book, who is as important as Job is, as Henry McKeating notes, ‘never mentions Job’s suffering, not even once in the whole of the book, or never even suggests that He is concerned about job’s suffering, or hints at why He justifies His decision to allow Job to suffer’. In their respective essays, titled “The Central Issue of *The Book of Job*” (1971) and “The Structure of *The Book of Job*: A Form-Critical Analysis” (1981), both Henry McKeating and Claus Westermann observe and raise this issue and problematize the standard approach to the book. The fact that God appears only in i 6-12, ii 1-6, and xxxviii 1-xxii 6, though He is the subject of nearly every conversation, complicates the issue.

Against this awareness, the present study looks at other tenable readings conducive to Bakhtinian topology of voice-ideas amenable to heteroglossia and
carnivalesque celebrations. One another question that could be asked may be stated thus: Can pain be a privilege in the lives of those who suffer despite their righteous living? Such a question may look odd when "we know", as Rabbi Harold S. Kushner observes, "bad things happen to good people" (1). That's the enigma that cries for resolution. This research study subscribe to the view that the notions of 'logos and mythos' as a blended mode of capturing the ingredients of truth in relation to the suffering of the innocent accommodate the plausibility that pain can be a privilege in an ambience of the sublime. The structure and the texture of the book revolve around two known Greek ways of arriving at truth, namely 'logos and mythos', logos standing for the rational approach and mythos for the poetic. The logos and the mythos ingrained in it deal with a number of 'moral contestations' on the question of the innocent, suffering. Within their own respective spheres of competency and without contradicting each other, both logos and mythos reconcile the dialogic and polyphonic voices accommodated in the book in the course of resolving a human crisis. The mythopoeic language of The Book of Job has its own artistic way of blending the logistics of logos (reason/rational assimilation of meaning) and the therapeutic efficacy of mythos (transmogrification of reality) in the course of resolving the problem of human suffering. This artistic blending serves as a springboard for readers to move beyond the realms of theological hermeneutics of looking at Satan challenging God and inflicting evil upon humanity, or God approving the plan so as to test the loyalty of Job, or discerning the power of the Almighty God as the ultimate source of the saving grace of those who suffer, and facilitates readers to look at the book as a source of inspiring those who suffer the consequences of evil to cultivate, harvest and garner an interior therapeutic attitude which can propel them to view pain as privilege as pain need not always be the
wages of individual sinning. It helps them see the iniquitousness pervasive everywhere.

This researcher contends that such a value-perception views the relationship between God and human suffering in a saintly light and values the power of God within in the midst of existential angst. The mythopoeic language complementing the 'logotherapy', to use the phrase coined by Viktor E. Frankl, permeates the polemics of the book and serves as an agency of inspiring those who suffer to discover the inner source of strength, the God within, a unique experience of self-awakening that helps them cope with the impact of suffering with calm and serenity. The God within emblematizes hope and confidence and manifests both divinity and humanity as co-existing, facilitating the triumph of the human spirit to which God is an active witness. Job, the central figure in the book, is an archetypal illustration of this truth, and this truth makes no pretentious claims to historical accuracy, or puts no full-stops with judgmental value on the ethicality or morality of human action.

Mixing the mundane with the sublime, The Book of Job consists of a number of debate cycles, part of the logotherapy, involving God, Satan, and Job and his friends with reference to the losses he endures, the struggle he faces, and the stigmatic humiliations he suffers. It provides no perfect comforts or complete answers. The matrix of the twofold fronts in the book resembles that of the biblical book on the whole, in terms of plot, form, and content, within which it perceives the dynamics of good and evil at play in the world and God's raison d'être in using evil in the world. The blend of logos and mythos can be noticed in the philosophical analysis of the book as a “myth building on myth with a number of truth claims that describe the human condition” (Robert Sutherland 15). If myth is a fictional account
of the origin of certain ideas illustrating certain truths about the human condition, then *The Book of Job* can also be read as a polyphonic myth revealing certain truth claims and values about the divine and the human in the backdrop of innocent suffering. On both the fronts, the author's arguments are as engaging and impressive as those of a defense lawyer. The genre of these arguments, which are in tune with the Speculative Wisdom Literature of the Ancient Near East, used in the book, is intensely practical and empirical contemplating on the perplexities of existence.

From the point of view of logos and mythos and multiple meanings, the poetic chapters of the book, forty-two in number, which have been placed in between the prologue and the epilogue, contribute significantly to, as Ethan Dor-Shav points out in his essay titled, "Job's Path to Enlightenment" (2008), "man's painstaking ascendance from a normative religious life to a deeply spiritual one" (1). These chapters hovering around Job’s dialogues with his three friends, followed by the oration of Elihu, and Job's redemption and God's revelation, which cannot be discarded as digressions have their logotherapeutic and mythopoeic significance in relation to the biblical approach to the cosmic order, the nature of man, and, above all, heavenly redemption through the light of wisdom. Ethan expounds further: "Interpreted this way, *The Book of Job* deals with a very different question than the one we have likely been taught: not “why do bad things happen to good people?” but how a man’s honest response to worldly suffering serves as the basis for his awakening and enlightenment" (2). In this light, the notion of pain as privilege sounds reasonable and convincing. This is a poetic and therapeutic way of seeing and reading human predicaments and realizing that 'man is not the measure of all things'.
The case of outreaching of the three friends of Job -- Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar -- and the other friend of Job, Elihu, who appears later (Chapters 32-37) and whose response is different from the other three men, to assist him in his wearisome nights of the mental agony he endures may be referred here as an instance of the Bakhtinian topology of dialogism. As a brief analysis on their ideological positions has already been done in Chapter Two of the study, the researcher wishes to straightaway focus certain other aspects and dimensions regarding the cycles of speeches of Job’s friends here. As each one of them is trying to connect with Job through each one’s perspective and argument as if Job were at fault, as if Job’s emotional disturbance and mental agony had something to do with his attitude, behaviour and conduct, and as if Job had no knowledge of God, Job thinks of them, particularly the first three friends, as “miserable comforters”, prompting him to state that he could speak as they do if their “soul were to be in his soul’s stead” (16: 4). Though the friends’ responses may look like expressions of ‘reductionist justice’, the dialogic oppositional stances Job’s friends sustain throughout their haranguing have a positive impact too. As Fred Johnson sees, “the phenomenological psychotherapeutic impact’ (397) they have upon Job contributes to the healing touches Job experiences at the end of the emplotment as he is made to see the catastrophe in his life in better light as he feels empowered to deal with his life’s predicament moving away from the mood and realm of self-destruction. It makes him realize where he is, see the dangers of groaning in isolation, and see the relevance of God in his life. This kind of approach which is in tune with Freudian psychology and which resonates with Edmund Williamson’s psychotherapeutic approach is another way of reading, reading beyond the known theological, exegetical, and dogmatic readings of the dialogues in *The Book of Job*. 
It is true that the three friends of Job are vituperatively argumentative. Eliphaz, for instance, employs sarcasm that is too harsh in his argument:

"Can mortals be righteous before God?" (4:17)

"Should the wise answer in windy knowledge and fill themselves with the east wind? Should they argue in unprofitable talk" (Job 15:1)

Eliphaz' doubts about the tenability of Job’s stance and his contrasting viewpoint constitutes a challenge making an impact upon Job’s psyche regarding his own stance on God and retributive justice. Bildad’s exclamation, "How then can a mortal be righteous with God?" (25:4), is but an echo of Eliphaz' revelation already stated and repeated in chapter 15:14-16 and in chapter 22:2. Bildad describes Job’s speeches as a great wind:

“How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind?” (Job 8:2)

Eliphaz describes them as ‘windy knowledge’:

“Should the wise answer with windy knowledge, and fill themselves with the east wind?” (Job 15:2).

And Job describes the speeches of all his friends as ‘windy words’:

“Have windy words no limit? Or what provokes you that you keep on talking?” (Job 16:3)

They go round and round discoursing on the issue of evil in the world and they wear each other out. Job’s three friends exhibit fluency in the language of justice. Claiming revelations in the night and portending dread, Eliphaz rhetorically asks: “Who that was innocent ever perished?” / “Where were the upright cut off?”
As Newsom points out, ‘the tone of irony contrasted with the dogmatic sincerity which impels the dialogue in Job creates a hostile dichotomy between narrator and Eliphaz, between deity and dogma, between divine affirmation and purported revelation. Throughout this confrontation, Eliphaz clings to his revelation story as the proof of Job’s guilt’. Bildad demands: “Does God pervert justice?” / “Does the Almighty pervert the right?” (8:3). Zophar says that people are either contrite worshippers of God or arrogant sinners and he sees little possibility that Job might be upright, free from wrong. He adds that God punishes him for only part of his wrong doing. Even Elihu from among the audience butts in saying: “Far be it from God that he should do wickedness. For according to the work of men, He will requite him” (34: 10-11). All the speeches of Job and his friends are highly stylized poetry and they make extended arguments. The three cycles of speeches constitute a whirlwind of righteous indignation. The author of Job speaks with special poignancy by highlighting the hostility of viewpoints prevailing among job and his friends. The tenability of the discordant notes ingrained in the viewpoints is comprehensible as a realistic portrayal of humanity and of human nature. This is one level of language, the language of justice, the legal parlance. The other level of language, in terms of a transcendent standard of right and wrong flows in the moment God comes into the dialogic discourse, correcting the false judgements being passed by Job’s friends. The Book of Job points to the plausibility that ‘the ultimate human integrity and the inscrutability of divine justice are revealed when human beings transcend the outrage of personal and social injustice, when an individual answers betrayal with compassion, and treachery with forgiveness’. This is the communitarian dimension that is a prerequisite for both individual and collective redemption of the community / society.
The multi-voiced quality of the dialogues in the book converging towards diachronic-synchronism becomes all the more visible as and when all the major characters talking to or dialoguing with Job make a ‘sideward glancing’ towards the conspicuous presence of God who acts as ‘the dialogic Other’ defending Job and taming and humanizing the incommensurable polyphonic voices in the book. Though the intervention God makes could be construed as a way of privileging ‘tradition’, and by extension, ‘God’s ultimate authority and power’ in this case and context, a subaltern reading of and approach to the book can make readers see it as a manifestation of the poetic, by extension, divine, justice coming to the rescue of job, redeeming him from stigmatized perceptions, polemical contestations, and condescendingly critiquing voices. The subalternity-position God takes in support of Job, different from the positions Job’s friends take, may be viewed as an instance of extraordinary empathetic outreach God and divine-touch-propelled Man Fridays are capable of. This is another dimension of relational striving within the topology of the dialogic journey textured in *The Book of Job*.

The idea of God testing Job, that too without his knowledge and as a challenge against Satan of which Job has no idea at all, may sound too dogmatic today. Theologically speaking, it may sound well to argue that God is beyond good and evil and He has no obligation to give reasons why evil persists in the world, or why He puts the Innocent Job on trial, or why the innocent should suffer, that too with His knowledge, if not His approval. But, humanly speaking, the bewilderment and mental anguish experienced by Job, caused by loss of his possessions and aggravated by the desertion of his loved ones, is something terrible. It outweighs the dialectic of classic and traditional theodicy which has dominated the Job scholarship till recently. It is against this backdrop that the author/s recourse to the use of
mythopoeic language in the main divisions of *The Book of Job*, wrapped in poetry, has a special purpose with regard to God-man-relationship and divine-human response to human suffering. It enables him/them to tackle the crisis in hand from a multi-perspective point of view which inspires and facilitates readers to explore through the complexities of the plot-structure and the texture of the narratology of the book.

As John S. Zelie points out, the skilful use of figurative elements, used by Job and his friends in their dialogues and by the author/s in their narratology, using figures from the world of Nature, conveys or connotes how they are all “preoccupied with human life, its brevity and struggle in the backdrop of the prosperity of the wicked and Job's and his friends' notions of God dealing with human suffering” (369). Marking the differences in their debate-filled argumentation, the protagonist and his friends sum up their own stances on their perceptions of God's relationship with mankind and the consequences of human suffering. The dialogical imagination embellished by irony, interrogation, treatment of Natural phenomena and animal world makes readers see 'things as they are in life, to view life as it is, or as it flows forth'.

Readers are inclined to see and appreciate the author/s' breadth and depth of the vision of life engraved through these figures. The mythopoeic style ensures that the protagonist and other characters represent ideas and viewpoints which are the fruits of creative imagination and power. The figural realism ingrained in the passages enriches the content of the dialogical debates on human suffering and intensifies human thought, rather than anger, towards resolution. Beyond theodicy, the book is a fine source of inspiration and caution as well towards drawing lessons
on how to communicate with sufferers. It provides valuable insights to both sufferers and others trying to comfort sufferers. That literature is capable of containing and diffusing therapeutic value is subtly and laconically stated within the texture of the book.

Critics like Newsom, Reed, and a few others have pointed out that within the narrative, ‘time is not a uniform succession of equivalent moments, nor are events of uniform significance’: Newsom writes:

Movements and events acquire meaning in relation to the logic of employment. Events and movements that belong to the beginning or middle of the narrative are, necessarily, transcended by the continuation of the plot and integrated into a meaning that emerges with the completion of the narrative. By placing Job’s present moment of crisis in the middle of a yet uncompleted story, Eliphaz treats it as something that can be integrated and endowed with meaning, a direct response of Job’s experience of it as simply and irreducibly “turmoil”. (102)

Specifically, As Newsom comments again, Job contests their representation of time. Eliphaz and Bildad configure time as open and ample. The future, which is always beckoning, is the space within which new things may happen, events that then confer meaning on what has come before. There is no paucity of time in their narratives. Indeed, the friends' narratives define the shape of time in relation to the plots necessitated by the tropes embedded in them (e.g., transformation, survival and renewal). But, Job, however, represents time ‘qualitatively and quantitatively’. One
can notice this most clearly in the series of metaphors and images that opens chapter 7, which provides a kind of phenomenology of time:

"Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling?"

As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work: So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me.

When I lie down, I say, when shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day". (7: 1- 4)

Though initially Job's energies are geared towards resisting the inherited language his friends speak effortlessly, he gradually picks up a new language using words hitherto left unused, words which exploratory prosperities and propensities, connoting a paradigm-shift towards an alternative rhetoric that is hermeneutically oriented towards demanding fairness and justice. The lamenting type of language noticed in The Book of Psalms and other Wisdom books of the Old Testament gradually gives way to a kind of subversive linguistic sabotaging hanging on generative grammar and metaphorically connotative articulations.

Contravening the body-related language used by his friends, Job “uses images of the wounded and invaded body not only to render problematic the chronological time of narrative but also to show the destruction of the qualitative time of subjectivity -- that sense of the present in which a person is "present to" himself.” (Newsom ). In Job's religious vocabulary, two kinds of pain --- physical and
psychic, signs of the turmoil (rogez) he undergoes – are visualized and imaged connoting the incessant, invasive presence of God (7:12-21). “Characteristically, Job uses the body as the ultimate measure of the minimal unit of a subject's time, the time to swallow one's spit (7:19), as he uses the bed, the metonymic image of the body asleep, to measure the minimal space of privacy (7:13-14)” (Newsom). Job’s mixing of varied social discourses, marking cultural, linguistic, and stylistic differences, is a reflection of what Bakhtin calls, ‘the dialogization of discourses’ in accordance with the demands of the occasion.

Making a comparison of the attitudinal differences between Job and his comforter-accusers, Reed observes and comments that Job’s sense of justice is “deeper and inward” while theirs is “shallow and external”. While personal integrity and experience of pain guide Job in his averments, the conservative reasoning of his accusers emanates from “received wisdom and circumstantial evidence” (180). To what extent Elihu’s speech is relevant is again a moot point. His inexperience as a young by-stander makes him a superficial and superfluous contributor to the dialogic relationship. As Mary, K.T. notes, Elihu, as ‘a schlemiel, seems to be comic relief’.

A perusal of Dirk Geeraerts’ paper on “Caught in a Web of Irony: Job and his Embarrassed God” (2003), helps this researcher to comment on the presence of a number of instances of irony and humour analogous to the position of Job vis-à-vis God’s behaviour pointing to the difficulties involved in arriving at a satisfactory interpretation of certain sections of the Joban dialogue. Dirk’s observations are quite relevant here:

Postmodern criticism is very much concerned with two related characteristics of texts that feature prominently in The Book of Job: on the one hand, the
absence of a definitive interpretation (what is, ultimately, the significance of human suffering?), and on the other, the presence of incongruities and discrepancies (why, for instance, does God answer Job by basically repeating a number of the things that Job himself has already said?) In *Job* scholarship, these two characteristics seem to lie at the basis of two different strategies of interpretation, one somewhat less extreme than the other. Whereas a more moderate approach shows how the tensions in the text contribute to meaning rather than subverting it, the more radical form of postmodern interpretation takes its starting-point in the absence of a definitive interpretation, and dialectically turns this absence into the very message of the text: the impossibility of arriving at an ultimate meaning *is* the meaning of the text.

(37)

On instances of irony and humour ingrained in Chapters 38-41 in the book, he notes that the presence of irony in these chapters relating to God’s theophany makes the nature of God’s speech a matter of dialogic debate wherein:

- ‘Linguistic meaning making is not a straightforward reflection of the world, but it is a way of shaping reality, of making sense of the world’. For instance, he notes that the term, ‘wisdom’ is not a priori given. It is a category that derives its experiential content from its relationship with other concepts;

- ‘Meanings may invoke culturally specific background knowledge and assumptions’. Job flaunts a culturally specific pragmatic politeness hierarchy that has its roots in a patriarchal context, and

- ‘Meanings are contextually flexible’. In Joban dialogue, the importance of context becomes more specific in utterances rather in individual categories.
On the humour content in the book, he goes back to the studies already made in this regard by Whedbee, Robertson, and Hoffmann and provides some instances in relation to main characters and emplotment: In the course of Job regularly scorning his friends for their failure to provide an adequate answer to his misery, he 12: 2 “No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you” (12: 2) and “Oh that you would keep silent, and it would be your wisdom!” (13: 5). While God mocking Job’s claims to wisdom, He asks: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding” (38: 4). Sarcasm is ingrained in the verse, “Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendour” (40: 10), Job’s friends may be seen as a caricature of the wise counsellor. There is an overarching structure of a comical repetitions and reversals, moving from a fairly-tale like beginning, lapsing into wretchedness and misery, and gaining back a blissful ending.

Varied interpretations of ironic situations, especially in relation to God’s speech, have been given by different critics. Whether ironies associated with God’s speech contribute a proper answer to Job’s question or not is a moot point. Critics differ in their views. God’s intellectual superiority and overwhelming powers, appearing as if he were an inconsiderate tyrant rather than a merciful ruler, in the face-to-face encounter, is anticipated by Job already in Chapter 9. God behaves almost the same way Job predicts. As Dirk notes, “the inaptness of God’s words with regard to Job’s question turns the text as a whole into an ironic statement. All along, the text seems to work its laborious way towards an answer, but when the answer finally comes, it is way off the mark” (44).
To conclude, the analyses done above on Joban dialogue propel this researcher to state that, as Robert Sutherland argues, *The Book of Job* is, on the one hand, ‘a provocative theodicy, an attempt to justify the ways of God to humankind, framed as a lawsuit drama’. The moral issues of theodicy are easily transferred into a legal framework of rights and duties. It is a most provocative theodicy for it is the story of the most righteous man on earth putting God on trial for crimes against humanity and refusing to acquit him. On the other hand, the moral test that is life is merely transposed into a different key. The test is never ending. Will many more alter-egos of Job continue to demand answers for evil in the world? This is another kind of provocation the ending of Joban dialogue raises, all the more in the face of unjust suffering. If there is theodicy at work, it is found among Job’s friends – which is precisely the outlook that Job invariably rejects, and in the face of God hardly giving any reason for Job’s suffering when He speaks out of the whirlwind.

Diachronic-synchronic synergy-wise, the whole narratology of Joban dialogue, especially the speeches of Job, warped in chronotopic tropes and topes plays crucial critical role communicating, on the one hand, the rationale for Job’s preoccupations with the thriving of the wicked, and on the other, conveying his, what Phillipe Nemo calls, “Heideggerian anxiety / angst” (62) rather than ‘Kierkegaardian spiritual repetition’. As an argumentative text in the Bakhtinian mode of dialogism, *The Book of Job*, as a masterpiece of world literature of the stature Goethe defines, has weathered the test of time standing tall in demanding and provoking judgment, tempting to even false judgment. The greatest part of Joban dialogue, Job’s own speech, directed variously against his friends and God, is informed by a firm demand for justice, for vindication before some of kind of law. The excessive suffering Job
endures, an affront to his stature and personality, is viewed as ‘a legal scandal’ (Reed 179).

Using Bakhtinian topology in his essay, “Dimensions of Dialogue in The Book of Job: A Topology according to Bakhtin” (1992), in order to read into the dimensions of dialogical relationships and their theocentric, anthrocentric and cosmocentric implications, Walter L. Reed has done an interstitial reading with reference to The Book of Job ‘first within its own textual boundaries, then in its relationship to the rest of the Hebrew Bible, and finally in its relations to a much later literary text, Blake's poem "The Tyger"'. He concludes that The Book of Job "stages a struggle between two opposing types of discourse, or two “embattled tendencies” as Bakhtin calls them. The unitary or centripetal type of discourse in Job takes the form of a language of justice, language that would separate the sheep from the goats, as it were, in a monologic manner. The discourse of diversity is a language of providence, a language that envisions, in heterogeneous fashion, the whole mixed flock being led into green pastures” (179).

Reading the book as many times as possible would be an illumining exercise as the book could tell readers who they are by the choices the book forces them to make. More than the redemption Job experiences at the end of the story narrated, more than the perceived non-empathetic stances his friends are seen to have taken, and more than God intervening as the Almighty, all these being seen as possible and plausible things that could happen when bad things happen to good people, what still moves readers across the globe of varied climes, races, and faiths is the potential depth of the book unveiling itself into multiple interpretations beyond the periodicity of the book -- the epoch, the time, the milieu and the moment when it was written.
Blending both the mundane and the sublime through the fusion of logos and mythos, *The Book of Job* posits God-man relationship and interpersonal human relationships within a fine matrix of relational striving governed by a dialogic journey that essays to highlight the paradoxical moments of truth on human suffering, moments hovering around our awareness of ‘God being all powerful but still righteous people suffering’, God being Almighty and yet acknowledging the honest indignations of Job and becoming the dialogic Other defending Job.

St. Jerome’s comment comparing *The book of Job* to ‘the squeezing of an eel’ is a gentle caution against any kind of monopolization in the name of traditional theodicy. It is a fine and gentle reminder that the dynamics – the subtleties and undercurrents -- of the structurality of the book and their interpretations are open to a dialogic journey with a predilection for the human face of God against human suffering. The beauty of the book lies in its reflection of the incarnational theodicy that can co-exist with human redemption-centred dialogism that provides ample space for relational striving. It is such relational striving that makes a lot of sense and makes the reading of the book a therapeutic exercise. The reading of the book inspires readers, especially those who have experiences of suffering, to understand that suffering is a human predicament, an inescapable phenomenon that affects everyone of us on earth, to see that human suffering is not that absurd to warrant endless depression or self-destruction, or to warrant ‘a Nietzschean kind of will to act’ as if even God did not matter. It energizes the sufferer to transcend the world of isolation, to look and opt for relational striving wherein dialogicity towards discovering and assimilating truth is a prime value, and to ‘see the God within’ who
will propel the sufferer to experience the triumph of the human spirit even in the midst of enduring or overcoming suffering.