

Job as a tragic hero - His character and sufferings.

The Bible is the most majestic and deeply moving human document. The Book of Job forms a part of the Section of the Old Testament known as Wisdom literature. The Book of Job is not merely a sacred document but also a great work of art. For its intense emotion, profound idealism and thought, deep feeling for nature and sublime expression, it has been classed with the great tragedies like Lucretius' 'On Nature', Dante's Divine Comedy, Milton's Paradise Lost and Goethe's 'Faust'. Job is the central character in the Book and it has rightly been named after him. Certainly, he is 'dis' hero. We do not agree with the critics that 'as Satan is the hero of the Paradise Lost, Jehovah ^{may} be the hero of the Book of Job.' Let us see it in a brief.

The whole of the Book is concerned with the drama of Job's life. That is his fall from the prosperity, his agonised sufferings and, finally, his restoration to peace and tranquility. Job is a prosperous inhabitant of the land of Uz. He has been blessed with a large establishment and live stock, seven pious sons and three ^{beautiful} daughters. He was the richest of all the men of the east. But, more than his prosperity it is his piety that is remarkable. He is a man of perfect and upright character, for he fears God and eschews evil. Even God is proud of Job when He says to Satan:-

"Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil."

But, Job's piety is put to a very severe test by the Almighty. Satan says that Job's devotion to God is because of the fact that God has favoured him. He says:-

But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face:-

Satan, with the permission of God, deprives Job of all his wealth and comfort. Even his sons are killed. But, Job says:-

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of God."

But, Job is cursed with unbearable physical torture with most detestful diseases. Thus, Job's suffering is undeserved. He does not remain an individual. He becomes a symbol of the suffering and innocence. Job raises the problem of the heart, rendering suffering of a deeply religious man. It is an example of a crisis in human soul. Here, we are reminded of Aeschylus's Prometheus who suffers more for his virtues than for his wickedness.

Job is a pious and just man who has committed a sin neither in action nor in thought. He takes oath that his children also committed no sin. His faith in God is not shaken after his tragic losses of his children and invaluable riches. He accepts his sufferings with humility, and says:-

Naked came I from my mother's womb

Naked shall I return thither."

His strong faith in God defeats the intrigues of Satan. Even after the Satan touches his skin and body with boils and sores, he speaks nothing against God. He only curses the day when he was born. He refuses to accept the suggestion of his wife. He says to his wife:-

"Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we

we not receive evil?"

Job's suffering has rightly become proverbial. But Job's intense spiritual suffering bursts out vehemently, when his friends suggest that his present suffering is the consequence of sins committed by him earlier. He is highly touched and such a suggestion is quite intolerable for him. He asserts that he is as pure as a lamb. He is extremely agitated and fails to understand why God makes a righteous man like him to suffer. He goes to think that God has done injustice to him. For instance he charges God with punishing indiscriminately both the good and the wicked:

"This is one thing, therefore, I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked."

However, this is not the expression of deep seated impiety. No doubt, Job is full of despair, yet he strikes the note of hope and faith:-

"And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

God expresses his wrath against the three friends and Elihu, who wrongly interpret God's ways to man. The Almighty speaks through a whirlwind: Man is too small a creature to understand the mystery of the world. It is beyond his limited power to know the ways of God to man. Job realises his mistakes and accepts his grief in an humble submission.

"But now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

It is now that he learns the lesson of humility and resignation to the will of God. There is the realisation that the problem of evil is too complicated for the human mind to solve. God redoubles his previous prosperity. The Almighty

often tests His devoted servants and it is thus that He rewards them if they pass the test.

Thus, we see that the Book of Job presents a tragic vision of Job's life. Job's reconciliation is described in an effective manner within the framework of a religious text. It makes us recall Lord Buddha and King Lear. Really, Job is a great tragic figure, by virtue of his suffering, though the Book does have a tragic end.
