

The Book of Job: A Philosophical drama = drama of ideas

'The Book of Job' is a part of the section of the Old Testament known as the wisdom literature. It is rightly interpreted as a philosophical drama or the drama of ideas. There is no dramatic action but only 'waiting for God'. In fact, drama does not merely present but also conveys and suggests. Actions are also mental and psychological, conveyed through questions and language. The style is also narrative rather than dramatic. Further more, drama does not merely dispense with narration. The stage direction is just a narration. The narration link in the Book of Job is in the nature of a stage direction or the nature of a prologue or epilogue. The Restoration dramatist ^{have} added prologue while Shaw adds an epilogue to Pygmalion and Saint John. Hence, the claim of the Book of Job as a specimen of incipient drama cannot be dismissed on grounds of narrative intention and absence of external action.

The dramatic genre is for objectivity or self effacement on the part of the dramatist. He must die into himself. He can only demonstrate and not directly intervene. If the comment on situations and characters is undramatic, Shaw is a daring sinner in this line, yet he snatches the title of a dramatist. It goes to the credit of the author of 'the Book of Job' that he remains anonymous. He cultivates anonymity through out the play. He lets all the characters - Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Satan and God - to talk among themselves. Through their agony and wrath, critical point and counter point, sentimental and thought reveal their characters

and philosophy and establish their distinct stamp on the world.

In fact, the author is behind the stage and his characters are on the stage and it is through their interplay that we come to know their career destiny. The three friends of Job take the side of God and dig at him for his possible sins. Yet God is angry with partisans for torturing His real devotee, Job, with mis suggestions quite an irony of fate for them. But the author vents no spleen and preaches no direction. We infer it from the drama of events and the meanings of dialogues. Hence, there is no denying the dramatic nature of 'The Book of Job'.

As a matter of fact, even if we insist upon the theoretical elements of drama, 'The Book of Job' can be divided into a prologue, counter action, complication, climax and denouement. The Prologue informs about the material prosperity of Job and also his glory as an upright man. Then follows the Satanic counter action in two waves - Prosperity and Progeny go at first and then his flesh and bone are touched. Then follow the complication in which the three friends and Elihu make Job react, have infinite power and majesty.

The basic reality about the dramatic nature of the Book of Job is its being a Platonic or Shavian drama of ideas. It is a dialectical drama in which characters and situational agony are built through dialogues. There are eighteen rounds of dialectical battle between Job and three friends. Then

thunder dialogue of God. It is through these dialogues that the inside of a situation or a character is conveyed. When Job chides his wife who wants him to curse God and die, we have an example of noble faith.

"Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?"

But the worst flames out when his honour is touched and when his friends link his sufferings to his sins. The drama then becomes a battle of deserved and undeserved suffering as viewpoints.

The images of wind and chaff, sea and whale, light and darkness, spider's web and fishing hook make it an archetypal drama of God's ways and human suffering that is undeserved. The question is eternal. The sufferer is a righteous man. The riddle of the mystery is never resolved. The ultimate solution is surrendered by the sufferer and the vision granted by God when the questioning principle goes extinct in humility and repentance. God is great and He alone is wise. It is futile on the part of man to unravel the mystery of His ways. God is self-justified. The rest is silence. There is not much against God for inflicting ~~undeserved~~^{deserved} suffering. The climax is the thunder voice of God. It is followed by a vision of birth of humanity and repentance and the ~~re~~ material restoration to Job.

There is characterisation too. The technique is both static and dynamic. Job continues to be devoted to God. This "static stability". Job grows and changes as a dynamic character. When others express a sentiment, we know his character through testimony.

Assessments are critically conflicting. God thinks that Job is upright and escheweth evil. Satan says that he is so because his prosperity and person are untouched. Even the friends say that Job has been a model for others. They ironically pity his fall when they censure God for allowing the wicked to prosper and the righteous to suffer. They become themselves the objects of irony as they come to comfort and remain to increase misery. When Job says, he has made burnt sacrifice for the sins of his sons, we know his piety. When he curses the day and night of his birth and wishes 'had he given up the ghost immediately out of the womb, we know his faith in God. He becomes an existentialistic character of death and wish alienation and suicide.

When God talks of this power in Leviathan terms and Job in fishing-hook terms, we are of flesh and blood in characters and even the situations are changed by miracles or invisible powers. But the fiercest battle of Platonic or Shavian intensity is brought in the dialogues of conflicting view-points. It is rightly called a high philosophical drama in dialogues of archly images and simple utterances. =