



A probe into post-traumatic stress disorder with reference to the characters in the select novels by Karen Kingsbury

1 Joy Christy L., 2 Dr. Angeline M.

1 Research Scholar (FT), 2 Assistant Professor., Department of English, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, Coimbatore

1 E-mail :21phdeh001@psgrkcw.in. Ph:9944645780

Abstract : The inability to recover after witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event is referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD can develop as a result of a single traumatic event or from repeated exposure to trauma, such as sexual abuse as a child. Karen Kingsbury is an American author whose novels, particularly the *Redemption series*, deal extensively with trauma and its consequences. As trauma theory has grown in popularity, novelists now have new ways to conceptualize trauma and the focus has shifted from the question of what is remembered from the past to the question of how and why it is remembered. This article will look at the characters in Kingsbury who have PTSD. The majority of the characters have suffered from some form of abuse and have been left to live a life devoid of hopes and dreams. This paper aims to study the causes and effects of trauma that Kingsbury's characters experience in their lives. Flawed parenting, extra-marital affairs, and abortions are some of the traumatic experiences taken into consideration in the study. However, as a Christian, the author has tried to emphasize the message that faith in God can result in redemption.

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Kingsbury's depiction of the Baxters' lives in the novel *Remember* is at crossroads. They sincerely seek fulfillment, but life's complexities threaten them. Kingsbury explores and captures her characters' feelings like a vivid photograph with every memory, every moment of joy, every moment of bitterness and sadness. She gives her characters the opportunity to confront their desires and problems in order to regain control of the situation. Kingsbury's motivation for doing so is to allow her characters to experience freedom while healing. Kingsbury also investigates life's realist portraiture. She gives her characters the ability to perceive life's difficulties. By virtue of her character, she expresses her opinions and observations on human behavior. Kingsbury allows her characters in her novel *Remember* to reflect on the past. Memories of hurt, frustration, sadness, and grief accumulate in the mind, and as Kingsbury writes in the final pages, of a letter to her readers, "the Lord gave us our ability to remember." He gave us the ability to record scenes and save them in a vault to be retrieved and played back when the occasion called for it" (*Remember*, 402). Kingsbury allows her characters to record and reflect on their memories.

In terms of painful memories, "trauma" (whether abuse or loss) "has a tendency to distort the internal working model" (Goldberg et. al. 237). The Baxter siblings' 'internal working model' is a collection of positive experiences based on strong moral values such as love and faithfulness. However, when 'traumatic' incidents occurred, the siblings temporarily rejected the collective experiences of positive 'feedback' and dwelt on bitter experiences. This calmed positive 'feedback,' and until breakthroughs occurred, the siblings surrendered to the hope of healing. Investigating specific events in Kingsbury's novel *Remember*, each adult Baxter sibling harbors resentment; for Ellen, it is her husband's refusal to be with her; for Jane, it is the rape incident; for Megan, it is her relationship with a Muslim drug dealer; for Amy, the quiet one, it is her resentment as the family's youngest girl child; and for Aaron, the only son, it is his girlfriend's abortion. Kingsbury's keen insight into the five Baxter siblings are silent nuance of understanding their 'internal working model,' and he also analyzes a father's clear preference for a specific child. When discussing favoritism, it can damage the other sibling's relationship with a parent. The analysis of each Baxter sibling reveals specific attachment patterns. Jane's father had not saved her from the stranger, so she could not mourn her father's death: " 'Why should I cry, Troy? My father did not adore me. Why should I act as if I'm in pain now that he's gone?'... 'How do you know he didn't love you?' He, of course, did. I witnessed how he treated you.' "He loved us like he loved Ellen" (*Remember*, 85).

"With Ellen and their father spending so much time together talking about football, both in person and over the phone, Aaron felt as if he had ceased to exist in his father's eyes," Jane said (*Redemption*, 161). Aaron believes that being the Baxter family's only son has disadvantages. When the sisters played pranks on Aaron, he suffers from the 'mental' agony of putting up with his father. As a result, he despised them. The following lines show signs of depression and rage: "I always got in trouble for things they did!..." 'Do you know what it was like growing up in this family and being the only son?' Aaron yelled... 'I despise all of you!' he yelled" (*Redemption*, 154). His rage reveals the extent to which he harbored resentment over the years. Negative 'feedback' accumulated, resulting in a distorted 'internal working model.' However, as his relationship with his father evolved, so did his attitude toward his sisters.

Aaron's 'internal working model' absorbed the image of the prospect of reconciliation with his sisters. Although the reward or expectation of healing occurs at the end of the novel, it presents the analysis that adequate time is required for completing the original version, i.e. the childhood experiences of the existing 'internal working model,' without which 'trauma' can reorganize his personality and change him entirely; where the original personality of Aaron or any other character would be lost. In the event of a final verdict, it would take another set of years to complete the expected and desired outcome of the personality or 'internal working model.' Favoritism by parents causes havoc and distress in the family; children will never feel cherished as they grow up, which can hinder successful personality development. "They are mostly silent, inaccessible, and difficult to understand: often they hide behind a childish or banal mask, and their temperament is inclined to melancholy," Jung says of women who become "introverted." They don't shine or reveal themselves" (qtd. in Ryckman 94). Jane, a married woman in her late twenties, suffers from rejection because her father treated her sister far better than he did her. This prompted her to pass judgment on her younger sister. Ellen Baxter laments her father's death while driving to her hometown of Petoskey. Her professional success stemmed from the inspiration and motivation her father had put into words, encouraging her to hone her writing skills. Her return rekindles the sibling rivalry she's had with her sister Jane in recent years. When siblings compare and compete with one another, they become discouraged because there can only be one winner. Though the word "hate" is a strong word that should not be used, a sibling can grow up disgusted by a parent's constant approval of a rival sibling.

While the 'jealous' sibling becomes frustrated, the 'rival' sibling appears to receive parental praise. Because he seems to have favored the talented child, the situation may become complicated for the parent. The 'rival' sibling will be aware that her sister is the favorite and may harbor resentment toward her. Jane became biased and treated Ellen with contempt, and she explains to her husband Troy the intense sibling rivalry' she felt

toward her sibling sister. The 'feedback mechanisms' continue until she recovers from her personal injury. Jane had never revealed her melancholy feelings to her sister, and her suppressed feelings shed light on the bitterness she has harbored over the years. Jane's hurt and rejection had gathered around her heart over the years, and "as time passed, Jane built her world around Troy." She willingly became a stranger to her family in the process" (Rejoice, 67). Her father's death caused her pain and 'jealousy.' However, the patriarch's death elicited positive emotions, and she recalled times when her father had spent time with her children. Her soul was soothed by the memory of her father's love for her children. Her father had loved her children with all his heart, as a grandfather should. "Brothers and sisters who share a childhood and grow up together have the potential for one of the most long-lasting and close relationships of their lives with each other" (1). This thread of love binds the siblings together. Despite the fact that negative emotions and external forces 'threaten' their 'internal working model,' they have feelings for each other; "their feelings for each other in childhood and over the years will probably have included a mixture of love, hate, jealousy, rivalry, like and dislike" (Lord 1), but by expressing and confessing their 'likes' and 'dislikes,' they openly give way to positive manifestations. At the patriarch's funeral, he expresses his love for his father and is overcome with emotion. He sobs like a child and spells out the words he had not thought of confessing, "I do love." "I adore my sisters" (Rejoice, 374). Following his father's funeral, his concern for his family, particularly for his sibling sister Jane, is expressed when she informs the family that she has been raped: " 'Who was it?' Aaron insisted. 'Do you remember what his name was, Jane? He should be imprisoned'" (Rejoice, 383). If Aaron had a problem with his sisters, it vanished after they exchanged words of comfort and love.

In one way, Kingsbury's novels are unique in that they highlight Christian perspectives such as love, faith, forgiveness, hope, and second chances; for example, loving your neighbor as yourself, bearing each other's burdens, and praying together. Jane's child Kala inquires about her grandfather in the event of John Baxter's death. "Oh, honey," Amy said to the child, "he's in heaven now." But he's very happy there, and you know he still loves you, don't you?" (Reunion,134). Kingsbury's preference for faith-based themes comforts her characters, who, like real people, are bereaved. The experience of 'loss' is tragic and devastating. However, Kingsbury's consolation is soothing and helps readers understand that there is consolation and comfort in seeking God in times of loss and separation. This faith inspires me to write divine inspirational fiction. Jane reconciles with the personal pain she had accumulated in the family after her father's death. The attachment pattern will be discussed shortly, but she must reflect on her attachment patterns. In the novel *Where Remember*, Kingsbury inspires the character Jane to realize that her father's love was impartial, and that even though her father had died, it was not too late to seek reconciliation with the truth; that her father had loved her. She felt "close to him" after accepting the truth (Remember, 121). The father-daughter bond had come to life, and she prayed for divine intervention because she was missing it. Unlike Ellen, she had no relationship with her father. The following lines express her remorse: "She ran a hand through her short-cropped blond hair and silently asked God to help her get through the coming week" never revealed to her father" (Remember, 121). This realization is critical to comprehending Jane's feelings toward her sister. Her demeanor was sarcastic, devoid of the affection she had shared with her sister when she was younger.

Kingsbury also recounts memories of familial attachments to the character John Baxter in order to shed light on her character's feelings toward a family member. It brought to light hidden memories and rekindled the ability to comprehend one's perception of a parent. Ellen's thoughts are expressed briefly in a conversation with her mother: "Her father was gone, and she hadn't gotten to say goodbye." Aaron, her only brother, would be devastated. The others as well. He's in heaven now. He's still alive and well, just happier now" (Remember, 22). Kingsbury captures the aspect of contemplating feelings while also being sensitive to capturing the reader's feelings. Apart from the unique portrayal of Kingsbury's characters, and the portrayal of significant characteristics pertaining to parenthood, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, there are fallacies that make them significant. Kingsbury's tenacity to depict life faithfully leads him to sketch certain features that are not worthy of portrayal; for example, John Baxter causes his daughter Jane to feel embarrassed. His remarks encouraged his daughters to harbor resentment. Kingsbury portrays her characters

more sympathetically, allowing them to be humane. She determines the amount of human frailty her characters are destined to carry as their creator.

Only in Kingsbury's attempt to establish her characters with principles and values, such as living with morality, through testing in typical adverse situations, does she justify their existence. She places them in the refiner's furnace to put their patience to the test and to revisit memories. Kingsbury permits Jane to recall another memory. Jane recalls another instance in which her father made her feel embarrassed. It happened right before she started high school. Her mother and she had gone shopping for new clothes. She "staged a fashion show for her father" at the end of the day (Rejoice 87). She had assumed that her father was pleased with the clothes she had purchased, but what he said next shocked her. When parents push each other into each other's territory, children may become resentful" (Kent 1). John Baxter had assigned each sibling child a specific space; the unequal spaces had truly cost his daughter Jane an inadequate 'internal working model.' She exhibits the 'anxious preoccupied attachment pattern' in her relationship with her father, forcing her to seek love and friendship elsewhere. He had been encroaching on Jane's territory. Kent goes on to say that "sibling rivalry" (Kent 3) happens regardless of how hard parents try to prevent it because it is a natural part of growing up with brothers and sisters. Parents can help by not drawing attention to differences between siblings..." (3).

The world is a fixed scenario for 'positive' development and support for Joey in Kingsbury's *Reunion*. As a four-year-old, he is familiar with his family, school, and friends, as well as his pet dog, and closely associates with them; anything strange or unfamiliar from his 'internal working model' 'threatens' him. As a child, he is unable to resolve the issue of traveling to meet his biological parents, whom he does not know. His 'internal working model' adapts silently to the change of abandoning his usual thoughts and routines. It personalizes itself by seeking a familiar environment - his pet dog and toys. Joey is surrounded by imaginative companions. They are his pals. The inanimate toys provide him with a sense of security. There is no room for 'threat,' and there is no reason to succumb to 'fear.' Bowlby believed that "separation anxiety occurs in infants and children when a situation activates both escape and attachment behavior, but an attachment figure is not available" (Goldberg et. al. 55).

The Baxter family's five siblings have been together through the difficult circumstances of their interpersonal relationships. The toughest battle, however, is taking place in the depths of their minds, where the 'internal working model' has been subjected to intense and fierce meditations. The brief periods of disruption result in a systemic attachment to a specific 'caregiver,' where a substitute attachment pattern predominates over the recurring trend of attachment. The lack of positive enrichment allows the 'internal working model' to consider feelings of baseness, and Kingsbury's characters, like Tyler's, are faithful reminders of people who, like real people, are tested beyond the limits of adversity. Ellen's story is one of hair-pulling romance and unfaithfulness; her unstable relationship with her siblings influenced an unsteady and 'insecure' relationship with Jake, but as she matured into a person seeking faithfulness, she discovered her relationship with her parents to be a valuable asset. This enabled her to recognize the importance of healthy ethical relationships.

This exemplifies her 'internal working model'; having been raised with good values, she did not wait, or, to put it another way, she did not create distractions for her 'internal working model.' She gained valuable experience from her father's knowledge of sports and decided on a career right away. She sought out a man with godly values to fulfill her 'emotional' need once her 'internal working model' was stabilized. Once this personal need was met, she sought a healthy relationship with her sibling sister, who had been her best friend as a child. Jane's story is one of love and a dark secret - rape. Kingsbury anticipates the need to expand on this area by stringing extra strings on Jane's personality; strings of bitterness, contempt, jealousy, and rage. According to Finzi-Dottan and Cohen, "the favored sibling is likely to feel guilt toward or contempt for the disfavored brother or sister, who is likely to feel anger, resentment, and jealousy toward the favored sibling"

(4-5). Kingsbury chooses to create a situation in which Jane must confront her emotions. It would be difficult to enjoy the blessings of life, such as peace and happiness, without confrontation and understanding of 'what went wrong.'

A plausible explanation for Timothy's suicide would be 'psychological' torture. His death effectively ends his futile relationship with Elizabeth. *Unlocked*, a novel by Karen Kingsbury delves into the feelings of single children who commit suicide. Michael Schwartz endured the agony of separation from one of his attachment figures and bullying at school as a result of his father's abandonment and second marriage. Kingsbury delves deeply into Michael's feelings of remorse, bitterness, and hope. Oppression, which causes confusion and frustration, is what drives a child or person to commit suicide. Like "the separated child," who "responds to his parent's absence with feelings of rage and destructiveness" (Holmes 87).

When the 'internal working model' is put to the test, it has a powerful effect on the individual. In clinical trials conducted by psychologists and psychoanalysts, a 'negative' effect, such as 'abuse' or rape, results in 'Borderline Personality Disorders' (Holmes 224). Tyler's and Kingsbury's characters have been affected by negative pressures, which have unlocked destructive behavioral patterns such as bitterness, rage, jealousy, and rivalry, which has significantly harmed their relationships with their family members, particularly their siblings. When the characters confront the situation by bringing out their true selves through their 'internal working model,' they discover their true selves (their state of goodness); they identify their incorrect behavioral pattern and change their path. In the midst of chaos, God helps people. Adult siblings and children have their own set of concerns, anxieties, and frustrations, and they seek deliverance from the tangle of problems such as maternal deprivation, sibling rivalry, death, rage, bitterness, and jealousy.

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