



REHABILITATION AND ACCEPTANCE IN KENZABURO OE'S *A HEALING FAMILY*

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ABSTRACT

Disability is an illness that makes it difficult for someone to do the things that other people do. Disabled people undergo so many traumas and they find so hard to survive along with normal people. Most of the time, they are mocked and they are voiceless. Oe projects the pain of a father who is finding hard to accept a disabled child. Oe's son is affected by brain Hernia. The major cause for his illness is due to the catastrophic effect of atomic war. The birth of the monstrous baby is a result of the atomic war that has left Japan with the effect of radioactive rays affecting the health of the people, resulting in abnormal as well as still births. Oe goes for further treatment to save his child from death. It is not easy to face such a situation, but he strives hard and remembers his responsibility of being the head of the family. He started visiting so many disabled people and also comes across reviews and statements from the doctors, editors, and films. All these gradually transformed him and made him accept the situation. He makes up his mind to face all consequences and tries to live his life with his disabled son. He believes that everyone has to face the world by themselves. He is to make a choice and have determination to face the universe before stumbling upon death.

Rehabilitation means the physical and social training that aims at restoring a sick or disabled person to their normal life. It is not easy to train someone who is disabled. One has to understand them and should find their field of interest and should guide them in the right path. To grow up a normal child it is a herculean task in today's world. It involves a lot of sacrifice from the parents. Giving birth to a disabled child and teaching it to mingle with the normal people in the society is entirely difficult. Especially, society and family members should make up their mind to accept the disability. Disabled people are exposed to mockeries

and humiliation in the society. They are ill-treated and are called by different terms relating to their disability. It makes the disabled to lose their confidence and they undergo mental conflicts. They try to disconnect from the society and form a small circle and live within it. Disabled people are caught by the fear of getting ridiculed, which in turn effects their confidence to overcome the disability to lead a normal life. Japan is a country which is highly affected by atomic radiation and till today there are so many who are disabled. People with disabilities of different types are large in number when compared to the normal people. Japan is a country fighting

hard to eradicate disability from their land. Normal people motivate and they help the disabled in their needs. There are people who even undergo training in taking care of the disabled. These people help the disabled and train them and build confidence in them to make them feel at home.

Acceptance means agree to receive or do something offered. It is not so easy to accept a disabled child. Everyone hesitates at the first. Now – a – days, people are not willing to accept their own child who is born physically fit. They feel that they should earn so much and they have to spend for their life. In such a situation, accepting a disabled child is a heavier one because they should spend so much for the medical treatment, they should adapt to the situation. They are forced to learn so many things on the disability. They should sacrifice their time. Being patience is a vital part in taking care of them. Likewise, Oe at first ignores his son who is disabled injured due to brain hernia. Being a writer, he tries to escape. But something urges him to take care of his child. He visits so many people who are injured due to Hiroshima and he is invited to talk on certain disability topics, he even hears the experience shared by so many people. On hearing this, he tries to accept his child, Hikari and devotes his life for his disabled child. His family also welcomes the disabled child and they try to live a normal and happy life along with Hikari's disability. Through acceptance and courage, he is completely transformed as a responsible father. This paper tries to render a picture of how 'courage' is explicitly brought out through the characters in *A Healing Family* by Kenzaburo Oe.

Key words – Acceptance, Disability, Rehabilitation, Mental Conflict, Positivity, Courage

This present paper entitled Rehabilitation and Acceptance in Kenzaburo Oe's *A Healing Family* concentrates on the pain of the family whose child is affected by brain hernia. It also projects the traumas and the way they overcome the disability through their courage and will power.

The term 'Disability' means 'inability' or absence of competent physical, intellectual, or moral power. Disability studies focuses on how disability is defined and represented in the society.

It includes a diverse group of people such as blind, deaf, those having chronic pain and so on. Disability studies deal with the way the disabled are approached and treated by the society where normal people live. Literature helps the reader to understand the pain and grievances that the abnormal undergo.

Children are gift of God. When a family receives a new born entire family welcomes it and celebrate. Gradually, mother and father come across so many dreams in bringing up their child. They take it as a responsibility in their life. They feel that their child is a blessing. They are filled with real happiness and curiosity plays its own role. In the life of Oe, it differs. He expects for something good to happen but misfortune leads his way. Hikari is born on June, 1963. The day in which Oe's dreams are shattered. When he hears about his child's birth, he refuses to look at the child first because doctors interpret that the baby looks like a monster. At first, doctors are surprised to look at the child first. They illustrated it as a monster. Kid with a cat's head and the body is completely swollen. They have not seen any delivery like this before. When Oe hears it, he feels ashamed of being the child's father. The Doctors said that the appearance of the child is entirely different from the normal child. For instance, "There appear to be two heads!" (9) They conclude their speech by telling Oe that the child is affected by brain hernia.

Oe tries to escape, he feels that he should get rid of the situation. This is the world, where people really wish to escape when they are trapped. When they undergo shock, they neglect to accept it and move on. They try to run away from the situation. It remains the same in Oe's life. He says, "I'd deserve whatever I got I guess I'd be able to take the responsibility" (162). When he tries to take responsibility, he transforms his life towards positivity. He wishes to be a responsible parent to Hikari.

Before Hikari began his life, he underwent an operation for removing a lump on his head and the doctors covered the hole with a plastic plate. Nobuo Moriyasu is the doctor who operated Hikari and he continues to treat him. He belongs to neurosurgery department at Nihon university

hospital. Oe states that Hikari is not the only one to be benefited from the care and healing offered by the doctor. Moriyasu is the healer for entire Oe's family.

Born as a disabled, Hikari is treated carefully. His growth is not the same as the growth of the normal child. His physical appearance grows faster but on the other hand, his brain development is slow when compared to it. He never talks much. He is reserved and observes everything. His first interest started on music. Oe's wife finds it and she inform Oe. Oe's family can recognise Hikari's emotions only through his music. Oe's wife recognises Hikari's sensitivity of music from the time of his infancy. She accepts the disability of her eldest son Hikari. He started growing up and it is clear that his mental development is slower than the normal children. At the age of 3, he recognises the piece of music of the great musicians 'Beethoven' and 'Chopin'. He constantly played their music from his nursery. Oe notices that Hikari is more responsive towards the birdsong. So, he decided to get a number of collections of birds call and played it frequently to him. He started identifying the birds voice. On hearing it he exclaims "That's water rail" (10). This short sentence was his first intelligible use of language to communicate with them. This project the parent involvement in growing up their children. It is difficult to identify his interest but their patience on observing him and motivating him in the right path shows the reflection of parent effort.

Hikari started growing up. He attended his first elementary school and later, middle school followed by a school for the handicapped. His interest on Birds song continued. His music started elaborating through Mozart and Bach, along with his first loves, Beethoven and Chopin, they are his constant companions. He calls them as Bebe – Beethoven, Unapa – Chopin who are considered to be the greatest musicians in modern era. Hikari started learning piano with Kumiko Tamura. He started getting a chance of composing music on his own. But his handicapped affected his physical disability but Mrs. Tamura did not force him on his fingering exercises. She patiently helped him in teaching to pick out chords and to construct melodies. This reveals that there are special teachers

who really care for the disabled children. Disabled are more talented and they have so many different talents in which they can exhibit. Even, Helen Keller is born with disability but she is highly talented and till today entire world recognises her. She is also supported by her teacher. But in the life of Hikari his parents also help him.

Hikari's parents collected all his first composition of music and presented it with a page covered like bean sprouts. This shows the positive mindset of parents. They accepted their child's disability and started finding his own interest and they started working on it. They give him special care and they are not hesitated in helping him. It even boosts up Hikari for composing more music. This states that parental care is a must and necessary for every kid for their growth and development. Parents support and encouragement plays a vital role in bringing up their children. There are so many parents who never take care of their disabled children. Their emotions and feelings are less valued. But, Oe's family started working on it. They even become a role model for every handicapped children's parents. This shows the difference. It can happen only when a person is ready to accept the disability. Oe tries to rehabilitate his son with all possibilities.

Oe and his wife plans to publish a collection of Hikari's music composition. He wishes to quote before publishing the works because they wish the world to know the pain of the handicapped child and his achievement in composing music with his disability. "Hikari was born with brain abnormality" (9). He was reborn again. Parent wanted the entire world to recognise the disability. They even show the positive side. This helps the family who suffers with the disability child to overcome their barrier.

Oe listens to piano and does his own reading. He feels the best of Hikari's character finding lively and fluent expression. Whenever he listens to his work and performance he feels awe and richness in his inner life. Oe never believes in faith instead he thinks there is 'grace' beyond 'faith'. On hearing Hikari's music he says beyond experience there is a full meaning of word for appreciation, "not only "gracefulness" and "virtue" but "a prayer of

thanks"" (11). This reveals the satisfaction of Oe regarding his gifted son.

Hikari's six pieces of music works conjure up a certain scene from their family life. Oe and his wife remember the time of Hikari's birth and from the time of holding their breath. Those moments of calm, frenzy is recaptured through his music. Some of his music marks the specific events. For instance, graduation refers to the ceremony to commemorate Hikari's completion of special course at his elementary school while "Bluebird March" (12) was written for a student festival. It is later called Bluebird school for the handicapped. This incident happens in summer which indicates as a whole season in life.

There is an incident which shows Oe's entire family accepts Hikari. For instance, Oe's children run every day, and they keep race. Often, Hikari wins the race. They all laugh and enjoy their daily routine it shows the togetherness of family. It happened in summer that Hikari reached a peak in his physical development. He gained a good deal of weight and started suffering from epileptic. Thus, the season has changed from summer to autumn where Oe's family started undergoing painful, inevitable, and an ever nearer period they all have to endure. It is not easy to take care of the disabled child. They get sick often and parents should take the responsibility in taking care of the child.

Oe purchases medicine for Hikari every month. He goes to the pharmacy at the university hospital in Itabashi to collect his anti-seizure medication. It is their routine work and they purchase it for so many years from his birth. Whomever, in the family goes by that side they purchase medicine. It is a busy place where people have to stand in a large queue. They submit their prescription and has to wait for a long time for the pharmacist to call their name. Oe is visiting the hospital for nearly past twenty years. So, he knows every place at hospital. He goes to cafeteria and recollects his past remembrance. He remembers the day Hikari is born and the three doctors who conversed with Oe. Their discussion regarding the surgery on a patient who has a deformity of the brain. They informed Oe that surgery can be

pointless because the surgery may be successful. But, the doctors have no hope, the patient may not function as a normal member of society. Oe meets one autistic child who is lying on the floor and doctor is offering words of comfort and encouragement. He remembers the way those doctors treated him. This projects that the usage of words is more necessary in a conversation. Collection of words is a must, it should not hurt the receiver.

Meanwhile, Oe remembered a hospital which is situated in Nagoya where they treat only for the disabled children. He finds the possible ways in making the child to stay alive. He remembers the past and compares it with the present situation. He analyses that the moment he accepted his child's disability he is able to live a happy life. Even his family is normal with their own routine.

There are families who leave the children as such during their illness. It can cause severe problem to the child. For instance, there is a mother who works in the hotel. It is a winter season where the mother left the child near a desk and started doing her routine work. She never bothered the fog but the child could not bear the cold and she gets heavy fever and she is hospitalised and the doctors reveal that she is attacked by pneumonia and she becomes deaf. This shows the irresponsibility of parent.

In Deafening, a character being a mother, she even avoids looking after her child after knowing that she is deaf. She is left in orphanage. The child longs for love, care, and affection. In the current scenario, this is more common. The number of orphanages is more whereas the real parental care is less. Real meaning of life relies on proper love and care. One should accept the reality and must know to tolerate and to overcome the pain. Oe's family does it and they set a best example for the people who suffer due to disability. They create a positive impact.

Oe's positivity projects that life is a mixture of happiness and sorrows. They both intermingle in life cycle. Family support is a backbone of every children to come up in their life. Family is the real cause for the achievement and success in life. Family bound society is necessary. Only parents can guide their children in the right path. They know their

child's efficiency. So, it is easier for every parent to help their child to attain their goal of success in life. Proper guidance can take away so many misfortunes in life. The major cause of disability is Hiroshima attack. Due to heavy radiation people suffer. They started having a quest in their life.

Hiroshima first assumed as a central place in Oe's work. He started thinking his means to be human. So, he started writing Hiroshima notes. Oe states that,

It seems to me no exaggeration to suggest that what the citizens of those two cities experienced in the nuclear attack was the greatest misery suffered by human beings suffered in the twentieth century. Moreover, though it is now nearly half a century since the "authority" of nuclear weapons assumed a central position in world affairs, the reality of this suffering can be seen this day in the cataract – clouded eyes of the now elderly victims, in the deformities and handicaps suffered by their children, in elevated levels of cancer throughout the region, and in the other lingering effects of radiation. (22)

This shows Japan's condition due to nuclear weapon. It is clear that till today they suffer because of the radiation. Nuclear weapons are more hazardous and countries should avoid it during their attack on the other countries. Normal people suffer a lot due to such activity. Thus, Japan is rebuilt but they cannot overcome the radiation effect.

There is no way ever to undo this disaster. Immediately after the bombs were dropped, began trying to relief to the victims, many started helping, putting effort, and working on it. Oe started observing the places as well as people who suffered because of this bomb. He come across an incident which made him to realise about the human mentality. For instance,

I met an elderly woman, who as a new bride of seventeen with a husband away at the war, became a victim of the bomb at Hiroshima. She managed to survive both the excruciating pain of her burns and, later, rejection by her husband's family, having brought up her

children to be decent human beings, has now taken on the role of the "voice of Hiroshima," traveling the country to bring word of the horrors she experienced to a younger generation. (22 –23)

The painful incident in her life. She has seen first-hand in both the authority of the weapons and the misery it inflicts in her life. The loss, fear and pain combined together in her life with a fateful damage in the summer 1945.

After the Hiroshima Oe as a writer is forced to analyse and write on a topic of atomic bombs. He is welcomed to talk on many conferences too. He completely hesitates because he is a father of deformed child. His child's sickness has brought him so many guilty in his life. He tries to avoid so many occasions. Oe's first meeting with Dr. Shigeto was in August 1963. After two months of Hikari's birth. Oe as a young writer has no idea on what to write about the World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. On that particular year, conference took a serious position because it is about a dispute concerning whether Soviet Russia's nuclear armaments should be recognised as a means of justifiable defences or the instrument of peace.

Oe has the intense feeling towards the illness of his child. So, he is unable to concentrate more on the specific area. Meanwhile, he meets a young magazine editor who became Oe's close friend later. He is the head of the Iwanami publishing company. He is hesitated to accept Oe's writings on Hiroshima notes first then young writer writing about his sick child. He never reports at the beginning; the reason is there is a feeling connected with the fact. Because the man himself still mourning the loss of his child. This shows the readers how painful that tragic event has affected the life of people in Japan.

During the first few hours of mysterious bomb blast there is no real treatment for the injury. No one could anything only they were able to dress the burns with the oils. Only that comforted them.

There happened an incident a soldier saluting the doctor. Doctor asked the reason and he replied that it is the way of thanking the civilian

doctor for helping the victims of the war. This shows the kind and tender heart of the soldier even in the war time. Doctors were really exhausted after a month of the bomb blast. Thus, Dr. Shigeto crossed his middle age in 1945.

His years spent caring for the victims of radiation and running the hospital somehow served him to revitalize him physically and emotionally. Preparing him for renewed activity. Erik Erikson calls it as a "mid – life identity crisis." (28) On seeing the disaster of Hiroshima, the doctor is able to overcome his own identity crisis and move on with his life by bringing comfort and hope to countless other people. Oe feels the same pain at the age of twenty - eight after the birth of his son, Hikari. He states it as "identity crisis of my youth." (28) Dr. Shigeto states that it as a perfect timing an immensely important event that occurred at a vital moment in his life.

Many people who lived during Hiroshima are dead. It is rare individual who lived healthy old age. In particular, People who admitted in the Atomic Bomb Hospital, not even a single one was ever able to go back to leading a normal life. For instance, Dr. Shigeto has once told that the foreigners who visited the injured people during their previous visit were not alive during their second visit. "The idea of such a reunion might have been, none was ever possible." (30) This reveal the painful tragic event of Japan during the atomic bomb blast time.

The term 'Rehabilitation' leads the disabled person to a state of acceptance about his disability. It states that acceptance of one's condition in life. Oe recollects his memories and shares his views. They are as follows

Twenty – five years ago, my first son was born with brain damage. This was a blow, to say the least; and yet, as a writer, I must acknowledge the fact that the central theme of my work, throughout much of my career, has been the way my family has managed to live with this handicapped child. Indeed, I would have to admit that the very ideas that I hold about this society and the world at large – my thoughts, even, about whatever

there might be that transcends our limited reality – are based on and learned through living with him. (44)

This projects the family's acceptance of Hikari's disability.

Oe shares his view on writing novels about the handicapped child. The way of accepting the disability completely and comprehensive as possible as concrete and personal. Dr. Ueda has done a development process by which a person who is disabled accepts his disability. He divides the stages as follows:

When a person suffers an accident or illness that results in disability, he initially enters what might be called a "shock phase," characterized by apathy and withdrawal. This is followed by the "denial phase," a psychological defences mechanism in which the illness or injury is simply blocked. Eventually, when the realization is made that the disability is permanent and can never be reserved, the patient enters the "confusion phase," in which anger and resentment are typical, as well as grief and depression. However, the goal is for the disabled person to recognise his personal responsibility for his life and emerge from dependency, a process that is accomplished during the "effort phase," in which a solution is sought. Having passed through each of these stages, the disabled person ultimately reaches the "acceptance phase," in which he has adjusted to the idea of his handicap as a part of his identity and is able to resume his role in his family or society. (45 – 46)

On hearing this, Oe remembers the pain he undergoes for having a disabled child. He says that the entire family has survived the shock, denial, and confusion phase and they learn to live with each of those particular kinds of pain. His family moved beyond this to the more positive adjustment before reaching their own acceptance phase as the family of a handicapped person. Thus, his family started living peacefully.

Life is short. When a person reaches his old age, he recollects his memories. Those recollected memories should bring happiness. In case, those memories bring pain one can easily understand that he has failed in living a beautiful life. Not only must the families, every people give hands for disabled persons. So that, the disabled people can also achieve success and they can live a satisfied life. When they are treated as normal people they explore their inborn nature. It can even make them to reach higher levels. The greatest disability is our inability to accept and respect differences. Stephen Hawkins states that, "However difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at." (web)

Parents are the ultimate role models for children. Every word, movement and action have an effect. No other person or outside force has a greater influence on a child than the parent. A child is like a butterfly in the wind. Some can fly higher than others but each one flies the best it can. Each one is different. Each one is special. Each one is beautiful. It is the responsibility of the parent to accept their child the way they are.

Oe refused to accept his child's disability at first. Later on, when he accepts he finds a real happiness and started leading a peaceful life. Though, he faced so many traumas, his family supported and motivated him. It transformed his pain into happiness. Family plays a vital role in everyone's life. On the whole, Oe's family has set a best example on rehabilitating and accepting which is more necessary for a family to lead a peaceful and satisfied life.

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