

Poetry as Trauma Healing: A Closer Look Into Poetry Collection *Arigatou no Shi* and *Tsunami Aceh 10 Tahun*

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Abstract. Indonesia and Japan are the countries that often experience earthquakes. On December 26, 2004, an enormous earthquake followed by a tsunami occurred in Aceh, Indonesia. In the eastern part of Japan, the Tohoku region, there was also a big earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, which caused the tragic loss of many Japanese who lived near the seashore. Because of some similarities in the area and the natural phenomenon that had happened in both countries, it assumes that citizens of both countries have some strategies to heal and balance their life with nature. This assumption matches well with a concept in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the 12th point regarding awareness in enhancing life with nature. To heal oneself from trauma and improve one's understanding of nature, several ways may be possible to carry out, and one of them is through poetry. This article discusses the Japanese poetry collection *Arigatou no Shi* made from a project after the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Indonesian poetry collection *Tsunami Aceh 10 Tahun* by Taufiq Ismail to understand the strategies of citizens in creating harmony with nature. Moreover, this article also discusses how those works heal and encourage citizens in Aceh and Tohoku Region, Japan.

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1 Introduction

Indonesia is a country that often experiences earthquakes because Indonesia is in between the three plate tectonics, namely Indo-Australian Plate, Eurasian Plate, and Pacific Plate. On December 26, 2004, an enormous earthquake with M 9.1 followed by a tsunami occurred in Aceh Province on the West side of Indonesia. As a result, more than two hundred thousand people passed away. At the same time, Japan is also a country that often experiences earthquakes. On March 11, 2011, an enormous earthquake with M 9 followed by a tsunami occurred in the Tohoku region on the East side of Japan. As a result, more than twenty thousand people passed away. This disaster is known worldwide as Great East Japan Earthquake.

Aceh Province in Indonesia and the Tohoku region in Japan are separate. However, these two areas have several similarities. Both Aceh and Tohoku are on the seashore of each country. Both areas also experienced enormous earthquakes and tsunamis. Therefore, it assumes that citizens of both areas have some strategies to heal and balance their life with nature. This assumption matches well with one of the concepts in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the 12th point. The 12th point regards production and consumption with responsibility, especially the awareness of developmental and maintaining one's lifestyle in balance with nature.

In Tohoku, after rescuing people from the disaster and providing food and shelter, several volunteers started to look for debris or *gareki* in Japanese. The debris not only refers to the buildings but also to small decorations in one's house. In Japan, there is a concept of *omoide* or memory. A volunteer team from Minami Sanriku, a seaside town in Miyagi Prefecture which was devastated by the earthquake and tsunami, made a memory search team or *omoide sagashi-tai* to connect the debris with its owner [1]. *Omoide sagashi* or memory search is an activity that Japanese people usually do to find little things that lost after the disaster [1]. Moreover, there is also an activity called *omoide kaeshi*, or returning the memory, to return memories lost after the disaster.

Based on those activities related to memory, this paper is trying to analyze the significance of literature in returning lost memories from the disaster. To understand the significance of literature; and how literature, especially poetry, can heal and encourage people, this paper will take a closer look into the poetry collection *Arigatou no Shi* published in 2012 by the Tohoku citizens who survived the Great East Japan Earthquake and Indonesian poetry collection entitled *Tsunami Aceh 10 Tahun* by Taufiq Ismail which was written in 2014 to commemorate a decade of the earthquake and tsunami in Aceh. Moreover, this paper will also investigate

the strategies of Aceh and Tohoku's citizens living in the seaside town to create a balanced life with nature.

Despite the earthquake and tsunami in Aceh that happened nineteen years ago and the Great East Japan Earthquake that happened twelve years ago, this research is still valuable and significant as Bestor [2] stated that disaster always lives in memory and remembered according to the local way. As an archipelago has the potential for disaster, Indonesia and Japan must be aware and cautious to live in balance with nature, as disaster can happen every time.

2 Result and Discussion

In the case of personal victimization such as rape, shooting, and traffic accident, someone would be affected by those traumatic events, and their life would change. They can not feel a connection between themselves and their surroundings. For example, they can not keep up with their work, abusive behavior in their family and relatives, etc. If the victims received help from their families and neighborhood, they could rebuild their strength and position. Moreover, there is violence or traumatic events where a person or a community they belong to is traumatic. It is usually called social trauma, collective trauma, or mass trauma. The consequences of collective trauma are as long as individual trauma. Those communities would feel some loss, such as losing family, occupation, home, relatives, and friends. However, one thing that differentiates individual trauma and collective trauma is inside their community; each individual would feel safe, accepted, and welcomed, and can lean on each other. Then, at one time, when they finally come back to their usual life after surviving the trauma, they may rebuild a better and more stable future [3].

In Japan, one of the concepts related to The Great East Japan Earthquake in Tohoku is *kizuna* or bond, connectivity, which has the philosophy we could get through this together. At the end of 2011, *kizuna* (絆) was selected as the Kanji of the Year 2011 as it matches well with the Japanese people's spirit to rise after the disaster in March. Moreover, another concept that was popular in Japan at that time was "*Ganbarou, Tohoku*" or "Let's fight, Tohoku" [2]. These concepts of *kizuna* and "*Ganbarou, Tohoku*" were applied by Japanese people during the recovery after a disaster. Not only the survivor of the disaster but all of the Japanese people were also affected psychologically by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Therefore, they were raised together and fought over the collective trauma.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake, many people and the volunteer team from numerous Non-Profit Organizations supported Japan; even Japan's Emperor paid his visit to three shelters in the Tohoku region after the disaster. They gave support in all forms, such as food, clothes,

blankets, and medicine, helped the survivor to search for their lost family, and even helped them to search for their lost belongings through the *omoide sagashi-tai*. The support also came from outside Japan; sixty-three countries sent their help to Japan right after the disaster.

After receiving help from the volunteers, the survivor wanted to express their gratitude. However, they could not express their gratitude since the address of the volunteers was undisclosed. One of the ways to express their gratitude is the project of collecting poetry and compiling it into the poetry collection *Arigatou no Shi*, starting from Miyagi Prefecture to Tohoku and reaching all the areas in Japan. More than four hundred pieces of poetry came in; fifty were selected and compiled into a poetry collection.

The theme of the poetry collection *Arigatou no Shi* is gratitude which formed in many ways. Behind their loss, they had endless gratitude that needed to be said to the people who helped them. For example, the feelings of gratitude after their lost family and belongings find, the feeling of gratitude to the volunteers who helped and worked in the shelter, the feeling of gratitude to their hometown, etc.

Ano san'gatsu juuichi nichi ni (Di tanggal 11 Maret itu)

Hacchan mo (Hacchan)

Kiyomi chan mo (juga Kiyomi)

Ootsunami de yutteshimatta (Mati karena tsunami yang besar)

Arigatou mo ienakatta (Aku tak sempat mengucapkan terima kasih)

Sayonara mo ienakatta (Tak sempat mengucapkan selamat tinggal) [4]

The poem “Hacchan” was written by Kawashima Kinayo as an expression of her sadness after her older sister passed away during the disaster. The sibling had promised to grow old together, but death separated them, and Kawashima could not bid farewell to her sister. Kawashima wrote this poetry to keep the memories of her older sister, Hacchan.

Ano hi ookina nami ni oware (Di hari itu, ketika dikejar gelombang tinggi)

Onaka no naka no chiisana kimi wa (Dirimu yang kecil dalam perut ibu)

Ippai ippai yureta yo ne (Pasti sangat terguncang, kan?)

Hashitte kureta kimi no mama mo (Ibumu yang berlari begitu hebat)

Amari no sugosa ni obieteita kamoshirenai ne (Mungkin juga merasa ketakutan) [4]

The poem “Arigatou” tte Itsuka Iou ne” (One Day, Let’s Say Thank You) was by Suzuki Shinobu. During the disaster, she had lunch with her husband, and her daughter was not with them. Her pregnant

daughter was choosing a music CD for her baby and had to evacuate herself. After being separated for several days, Suzuki's daughter was found safely at the third shelter. Suzuki wrote this poetry to remind her grandchild to be grateful for their life.

Saigo ni (Yang terakhir)

Ojiichan wo mitsukete kurete arigatou (Terima kasih telah menemukan kakekku)

Sayonara suru koto ga dekimashita (Hingga aku bisa mengucapkan selamat tinggal kepadanya) [4]

The poem "Arigatou" (Thank You) was by an eleven years old boy, Kikuta Shin. At first, he thanked the little things around him, such as stationary, a fan in his classroom, shoes, textbooks, etc. His poem ended with the part quoted above, where he thanked police officers for finding his lost grandfather two months after the disaster. His grandfather already passed away. Despite his sadness, Shin still wanted to express gratitude as his late grandfather found. Then he could bid farewell to his beloved grandfather.

Soshite sukoshi zutsu demo kono machi ga (Kemudian sedikit demi sedikit kota ini)

Kimi no youna egao to (Seperti senyummu)

Arigatou no kotoba de (Menjadi kota)

Afureru machi ni nareba ii (Yang dipenuhi ucapan terima kasih)

Kimi to miorosu kono machi no (Kota ini yang kulihat bersamamu)

Tomoru hikari ga fueru tabi ni (Setiap kali cahayanya bersinar)

Dareka ga dareka ni (Seseorang)

Arigatou wo kaeshiteiru (Sedang mengucapkan terima kasih kepada yang lainnya)

Dareka to dareka ga (Seseorang)

Arigatou wo kaeshiteiru (Sedang mengucapkan terima kasih kepada yang lainnya)

Sonna machi ni nareba ii (Betapa menyenangkannya jika menjadi kota yang seperti itu)

Sonna machi ni tomo ni kimi to (Kota yang seperti itu, bersamamu)

Sonna machi ni zutto kimi to (Kota yang seperti itu, selalu bersamamu) [4]

The poem "Tomo ni Kimi to" (With You) was by Yagi Tomoko. Yagi lost her house because of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Despite her sadness, she could still express her gratitude to the people who helped and gave her the strength to live in her hometown. Yagi never hated her

hometown, even though losing her house. She still thanked her hometown for giving her warmth. Through the poetry, Yagi hoped all survivors in her hometown could rise and live normally.

The next poetry is “Baca Puisi di Masjid Baiturrahman” by Taufiq Ismail, compiled in a poetry collection *Tsunami Aceh 10 Tahun*. This poetry collection was published in 2014 to commemorate ten years after Aceh Earthquake and Tsunami on Sunday, December 26, 2004. This M 9.1 earthquake is called by the United Nations as one of the biggest human tragedies that ever happened. The process of reconstruction happened more than five years after the disaster. During that time, the survivor and the volunteer rebuilt the house and public facilities. The process went well, with support from all areas in Indonesia and the international world. Nineteen years after the disaster, the Aceh people still commemorate the tragedy by reciting prayers to their late family and relatives at the public graveyard in Aceh Besar. The government also commemorates it by ringing the alarm for a minute at 8.00 AM.

Saya bacakan sembilan puisi saya

Tentang tak mampunya kita membaca tanda-tanda

Bisakah kita siap bila sewaktu-waktu dipanggil-Nya

Betapa sukarnya bagi saya menyampaikannya

Pada saudara-saudara saya yang jauh lebih menghayatinya

Di bahu mereka tak terbilang bobot beban derita

Masing-masing kehilangan tiga, sepuluh, dua puluh anggota keluarga

Rumah remuk, ijazah lenyap, simpanan binasa, hari depan di mana

Mereka sangat tenang menyimak, terasa pada sinar mata

Seusai baris terakhir, turun mimbar, berdatanganlah mereka

Mengerubungi, menyalami, merangkuli saya

Ada orang berlima yang terisak-isak susah berhentinya

Bergantian di bahu menyandarkan kepala

Dan meneteskan air mata

“Tolong pak, tolong carikan anak saya...”

The poetry showed the feeling of despair because many people lost their house, belongings, and especially their beloved families. Taufiq Ismail also implied that human must be prepared for the possibility of disaster and lessen the loss as Indonesia is located in the Ring of Fire and often experience an earthquake.

Lastly, the most visible difference between the disaster in Aceh and Tohoku, Japan, is the earthquake and tsunami in Aceh could ignite

harmony between the Indonesian Army and Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) or Free Aceh Movement. There was a conflict between GAM and Army as it was well known and disturbed the relationship with the central government and even disturbed the reconstruction in the damaged area. However, since the disaster, Aceh has been in the spotlight internationally, so disaster diplomacy and reconstruction went well. Moreover, Disaster Management Law has lessened the loss because of disasters.

3 Conclusion

This article compares two poetry collections, the Japanese poetry collection *Arigatou no Shi* and the Indonesian poetry collection *Tsunami Aceh 10 Tahun*. Those poetry collections were published to commemorate earthquakes and tsunamis in each country. For Japanese people, there is strength in the word thank you (*Arigatou*) that they want to express to others. Despite not knowing each other, the bond (*kizuna*) and the will to lean on each other because of one specific collective trauma had united them. Through poetry, they could express gratitude, connectivity, memories of their loved ones, and spirit to rise strong. The Japanese people could rise and fight over the collective trauma by supporting each other. Meanwhile, Indonesian people rely on God. Through poetry, they let the world know their sorrow and, at the same time, recite prayers to God; to protect their loved ones and hope for a better future.

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