Human disaster in Ogawa Yoko’s Hisoyakana Kesshō

Rima Devi*

1Japanese Department, Faculty Humanities Universitas Andalas 25163 Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia

Abstract. Disasters that occur naturally or are man-made are discussed in various aspects so that preventive actions can be taken for disaster mitigation. Depictions of disasters are also depicted in literary works such as the novel Hisoyakana Kesshō by Ogawa Yoko, which tells of the rulers of an island bringing disaster by erasing the memory of the inhabitants’ minds through the destruction of objects and concepts. This study discusses how the actions of the authorities that erase the memory of the inhabitant can bring disaster to the country, which is reflected in Japanese society, namely the abolition of the IE system from the Japanese Constitution so that Japanese society no longer has a solid foundation in forming a family. This study uses a literary sociology approach with qualitative methods. The research results show that the erasure of community memory in the novel reflects the elimination of the traditional family system in Japanese society. The gradual extermination of humans by the rulers depicted in the novel Hisoyakana Kesshō is also seen in today’s Japanese society, whose population has decreased from year to year until today it has decreased drastically. Erasing memory or culture from society without alternative substitutes will destroy the country.

1 Introduction

Disasters are damages that occur on Earth due to natural phenomena such as erupting volcanoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis, as well as damage caused by human activities such as industrial accidents and acts of terrorism [1]. Disasters on Earth are recorded through historical records or in the archives of one country by a team of experts. In addition, some people keep records of disaster events such as mass media, diaries, and literary works. Related to literary works, not a few authors perpetuate one event in their work. Maybe the characters in the work are fictional, but the events depicted usually refer to events that happened or facts.

Literary works are used to record catastrophic events, such as the famous work of Albert Camus, which tells of the pestilence that occurred in 1346-1353. Pestilence is a novel by Albert Camus, published in 1947, entitled La Peste in French, which means pestilence. Baron Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s novel entitled The Last Day of Pompeii, published in 1834, describes the destruction of the city of Pompeii due to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. Pompeii, a city in the Ancient Roman Era, experienced a tremendous disaster from a volcanic eruption; the explosion of dust from the mountain drowned the city of Pompeii and its contents. Hafalan Sholat Delisa by Tere Liye; (2018) describes the Tsunami in Aceh in 2004, and the novel Drama dari Krakatau by Kwee Tek Hoay presents a realist concept by showing a description of the eruption of Mount Krakatau in 1883.

A literary work, Hisoyakana Kesshō, written by Ogawa Yoko in 1994 [2,3] also describes the disaster on an island. The disaster described in this novel is that the islanders were isolated by the authorities and ordered to erase the memory of objects or concepts such as removing and destroying inanimate objects such as hats, perfume, novels, and living things such as roses, birds, and even humans. Rulers chase and hunt inhabitants who still have objects that have been destroyed and erase their memories. Those who disobey will be arrested and returned to their families dead. This novel was later translated into English and published in 2020, entitled Memory Police. This title follows its contents in which it is these police officers who search the houses of residents who are suspected of storing memorabilia.

If the condition of Japanese society is reflected in the novel, which describes the erasing of the people's memory, then in actual life, the Japanese government has also abolished the family system confirmed in the Japanese Constitution in the Meiji era, namely the IE System. In the novel, it is described that erasing the memory of the people brings disaster to the people, and in Japanese society, eliminating the IE system also brings disaster to the people of Japan. The issue in this paper is how the disaster depicted in the novel Hisoyakana Kesshō is reflected in Japanese society.

Research related to the novel Hisoyakana Kesshō which translates to Memory Police has been carried out, such as by Akmalie and Aminah [4], who discuss shaping the collective memory depicted in the work, Devi [5], who discuss how interdependent families are reflected in the work, and Soon and Gheeta [6] who discuss dystopian space related to memory and trauma.

* Corresponding author: rimadevi@hum.unand.ac.id

© The Authors, published by EDP Sciences. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).
2 Method

The method used in this study is a qualitative method with a literary sociology approach. Ian Watt states that literary works reflect the society in which the work was born. The author, consciously or not, will describe the society in which he is in his literary work. The description of society in literary works may be apparent and often hidden in the meaning of the words and sentences composed by the author. The reflection of society in literary works may not be the same as the actual society. However, in researching literary works using a literary sociology approach, the emphasis is on the structure depicted in the work, which is reflected in the actual society. Based on this, the reflection of society in literature and society is homologous [7,8].

The literary work discussed is the novel Hisoyakana Kesshō, written by Ogawa Yoko and published in 1994. The concept used to collect data from literary works in words and sentences relates to human disasters starting from the perpetrator, the form of the action, the object destroyed, and the consequences of catastrophic destruction. The collected data is interpreted and reflected by the actual Japanese society. The thing that is in the spotlight is the removal of objects and concepts by the authorities that bring disaster and are depicted in the novel and the elimination of objects and concepts that exist in Japanese society, which also bring disaster.

3 Finding

3.1 The elimination concept and object in the novel

Hisoyakana Kesshō's novel tells about the rulers of an island eliminating objects and concepts in the area. The novel does not explain how the objects and concepts were erased from the beginning and why they were erased from the memory of the inhabitant. Concepts and objects erased from the inhabitant's memory were inanimate objects such as perfumes, hats, books, calendars, ferries, photographs, and living things such as birds, roses, and human limbs. The erasure of the human body left the voice, which also finally disappeared. Erasing the memory of the population is carried out by the authorities.

Removing objects and concepts carried out by the memory police first gives an announcement. The memory police will announce the object or concept to be written off to the inhabitant. On the appointed day, the memory police will come and collect the objects to be destroyed. Inhabitants are asked to collect objects to be removed and then destroy them. Objects are destroyed by burning, burying, throwing them into the river, or ignoring them. After the objects and concepts were destroyed, the population gradually began to forget the objects and concepts. The memory of the object fades until it is completely lost. Inhabitants gradually lost their understanding of these objects and how to use them. When memory is lost, some inhabitants will feel a loss of emotion and meaning associated with those objects and concepts. It can cause confusion, sadness, or fear until the inhabitant eventually accepts that these objects and concepts are gone. Inhabitants learn to live without these objects and turn their attention elsewhere. This memory-erasing process takes place repeatedly with various objects and concepts.

Not all inhabitants comply with the authorities' orders to destroy considered forbidden objects. Not all inhabitant can forget their memory. Some can still store memories that must be destroyed, like the character in the novel, Watashi's mother, a sculptor. She kept damaged objects in the statues she made. However, the government did not approve of this happening. Inhabitants who still kept prohibited items or who could still remember objects that had been destroyed were arrested and killed. It happened to Watashi's mother, who was arrested by the memory police and taken to their office. Watashi's mother was returned by the officers already lifeless. The memory police are always looking for and hunting down inhabitants suspected of having memories of destroyed objects. The police have the right to search every house of an inhabitant suspected of storing prohibited items or still having memories of prohibited items. They are called the memory police.

The order to destroy the various memory items persists until the island forgets the objects and the season when winter does not end, and the calendar is banned. Watashi, who works as a novelist, also experiences memory loss about novels, so she looks for another job to get a salary to support herself and Ojisan, who once served her, and her editor named R, who is hidden in her house because he has memory.

Missing objects continued until one leg; and one hand was missing. The inhabitant got used to being without legs and arms, and they strangely got used to it until their bodies disappeared, and the last thing that remained was their voices which also eventually disappeared. The island's inhabitants were destroyed except for an inhabitant who still had memories and managed to hide from the memory police pursuit like R.

3.2 The elimination concept in Japanese society

The elimination of concepts by the authorities in Japanese society is the IE system which was abolished when Japan lost the Second World War. The IE system is [9] a traditional family system in the form of an extended family with a family head called a kachō. IE consists of family members who have blood relations, and kinship ties and do not have blood relations or kinship but also serve the IE. Kachō, or the head of the family, is fully responsible for every family member, whether the member has died, is still alive, or is about to be born.

With the abolition of this IE system, the family order became unclear. In general, kinship in Japan after the dissolution of the IE system refers to an ideology that tends to imitate the West, namely, being a nuclear family. The formation of this nuclear family is supported by industrial developments that demand a nuclear family that can support technology and industry [10]. So the role of the family is that the father works in the factory, and the mother takes care of the house and children. Urban cities
were formed where families lived. Traditional families are
starting to be abandoned and switched to modern families.

The problem with modern families is that they are free
to choose because of equality between men and women.
Previously, women only worked at home and did not
receive a salary. However, because of the demands of
industry, which started during the world war era when
men went to war and women became factory workers after
the war ended, women workers were still needed in the
industrial world.

Women who are already established because they
work end up delaying marriage because, after marriage,
they cannot work anymore because they have to become
housewives taking care of their husbands and children.
However, various family problems arise, such as domestic
violence, pregnancy out of wedlock, and other issues that
result in high divorce rates and single-parent families.
Marriage is felt as a burden, and caring for children is a
burden for women because they have to take care of
dependents and work too. In the end, many young Japanese
people who initially postponed marriage did not get
married. It is also challenging to find an equal partner.
Many firstborns have to live in the village and find it
difficult to get a wife. Many women do not want to be the
wife of their first son because they will be bound to work
at their husband's houses and live in a traditional family.

There is no longer the authority of the kachō to take
care of and marry off family members. Now everyone is
free to choose whether to marry or not. No more
prolonged family rules bind them to feel they must pass
on to the next generation because all young people think
individually. The abolition of the family system indirectly
destroys the next generation because they do not want to
produce children. Various problems in Japanese society
caused its population to decline drastically. The data for
2023 shows that the birth rate will be 800,000 per year,
even though this figure is not expected this year but in the
next 40 years.

As reported by various media in Japan recently, the
speed of Japan's depopulation affected all prefectures last
year apart from Tokyo and has outpaced official
projections. In 2022, newborns dipped below 800,000 for
the first time since surveys began in 1899. The
government previously had expected fewer than 815,000

4 Discussion

In the novel, it is said that the authorities are cruel to
implement the rules. The government also prepares the
police to arrest and execute inhabitants who do not comply with the rules. Without hesitation, the police
searched the houses of inhabitants suspected of still
holding memory objects or memories. Here we can see
how the ruler is mighty over his territory and the people
living on the island. The inhabitant had no choice but to
obey. However, those who disobeyed were arrested. The
government made the inhabitants forget about the ferry
that previously could be used to cross to the next island.
So that inhabitants cannot go anywhere and are confined
to the island.

When this ruler's action is related to the Japanese state,
it can be said that Japan is an archipelagic country, so the
islands referred to in the novel can be interpreted as the
Japanese state. The Japanese government removed from
its people the abolition of the Meiji constitution, namely
the traditional family system known as the IE system. In
the IE system, kachō's power is so strong that he can
manage his IE members in life, starting from meeting their
needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Even kachō is
obliged to find a life partner for IE members so they can
continue the offspring that will become their IE
successors.

Erasing the memory depicted in the novel and erasing
the IE system in Japanese society after losing the Second
World War show the same result. In the novel, the
inhabitants are described as being destroyed. Meanwhile,
in Japanese society, with the abolition of the IE system,
family members have individual rights to determine their
way of life. They refuse to marry for various reasons and
even refuse to have children. As a result of these trends,
the population of Japan has decreased drastically.

The erasure of the people's memory depicted in the
novel Hisoyakana Kessho destroys the community.
Ogawa Yoko, a Japanese writer and author, certainly
describes the society in which she is located, namely
Japanese society. Ogawa Yoko said that through literary
works, she can convey her ideas and thoughts and the
impacts and benefits that can be drawn from these ideas
[12]. The concept of the island's destruction because the
authorities erased the memory of its people can be
reflected in the elimination of the IE system. Indeed, the
abolition of this system does not necessarily destroy
Japanese society. However, due to the dissolution of this
system, Japanese society no longer has a transparent
family system for carrying out life. People who tend to be
individualistic will choose a way of life according to their
desires and comforts and do not think about maintaining
the continuity of the family as their ancestors have
guarded for hundreds of years.

5 Conclusion

A ruler or government is an institution with the authority
to regulate its territory following the country's goals.
However, in managing the country, wise thoughts and
decisions are needed in making every decision. If a
decision is taken without considering the impact, it can
destroy the country. The country's destruction can occur
due to shortages or even population loss. This shortage
and loss of population can be called a human disaster. The
authorities' elimination of objects and concepts can harm
the country if not accompanied by providing replacements
as appropriate alternatives.

References

4. Akmalie, Raisa, and S Aminah, E J of Hum and SocialSciences, 3 (3), (2023)
6. Soon Seng, Foong, and Gheeta Chandran, 57 (1), (2020)