

Let Us Not Forget

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On **December 20**, 1951, at 1:50 pm, the Experimental Breeder Reactor I (EBR-I) located in a desert about 29 kms southeast of Arco in Idaho, USA, became the world's first electricity-generating nuclear power plant when it produced just sufficient electricity to illuminate four 200-watt light bulbs. In 2014, the World generated 2410 terra watts of electricity from nuclear power plants, one terra watt being equal to a sustained power of 114 megawatts for one year. Compared to this, the achievement of four times 200 watts of electricity generated from the power of nucleus no less than six years after the Little Boy and the Fat Man had terminated nearly 170,000 human lives in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was indeed modest. To put this little feat in proper perspective, this story attempts to recapture the horrors of that fateful day the Little Boy was dropped over Hiroshima 70 years ago, hoping that the World never will have occasion to replay it.

It was 8-00 in the morning on August 6, 1945. As the temple city of Hiroshima was slowly waking to life, a siren sounded an air-raid warning. Already three years into the war since Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbour on December 7 1942, sound of sirens was nothing new to the people of Hiroshima, although no bomb had so far been dropped upon this city, giving a kind of vague self-assurance to its inhabitants. They had been accustomed to seeing hordes of bombers and fighter planes passing across the Hiroshima sky, but today the few who had ventured out and looked skyward for the usual spectacle of dozens of bombers passing across the sky playing all sorts of acrobatics, it was a disappointment - there were only two B-29 bombers, one followed at same distance by the other. They must have strayed away from the main squadron, some people had thought.

Tamiki Hara had just got up at the sound of the siren. The previous evening also there were two air-raid warnings. But suddenly he received a terrible blow on his head and everything was instantly enveloped in darkness. In the obscurity, he could discern a sound like the roar of a furious storm. An agonizing cry came out of his voice he could barely recognize as his own. When the darkness cleared, it was as if the world had come to an end. Piles of debris were strewn all around, little flames were shooting out on all sides and billowing clouds of smoke were rising from the ruins of houses. It was a scene of vast catastrophe. The past was wiped out completely – it was dead. The present too was being smashed to smithereens and was on its way to death.

¹ The author is a commentator. Opinions are personal.

Ten thousand feet above the ground, William Tibets, the pilot of 'Enole Gay', the first B-29 bomber which had released the bomb codenamed 'The Little Boy' over Hiroshima only a few seconds before at 8-16 A.M., opened his eyes for an instant. He was instructed to fly up immediately so as to avoid the blast of the explosion from the 4-Ton bomb and not to open his eyes as he could be blinded otherwise from the intense glow of a thousand suns. He had not been told what bomb he was carrying. Now as he opened his eyes and looked at the giant and sinister mushroom cloud rising from below, he shrieked— "My God, what have we done!"

Down below, as Tamiki Hara started running his way across the piles of debris to get away from the unbearable heat of the flames, from behind the vast mushroom clouds of dust and debris which had completely blotted out sunlight, a single patch of blue had appeared, followed by more and more. As he and other people ran towards the Sakai Bridge near the Izumi Palace, the cataclysm and magnitude of the destruction revealed itself. Nearly every tree had been decapitated, every building demolished and fires were springing up all over more fiercely than ever. The ground was turned into glass by the heat in many places.

In the sky above the river, there was suddenly a mass of air of extraordinary transparency sweeping upstream. Someone had barely shouted "A tornado" when a terrifying hot wind was upon them. The bushes and trees which were still standing began to shake violently; some were uprooted and tossed into the air from where they shot down like arrows upon the grim chaos below. It was a raging, fearful inferno all over.

A moment after the whirlwind had swept past, a kind of ghostly twilight had descended upon the sky. Then there was a short drizzle, the drops the size of marbles and black in colour, as blackened by this horrendous crime of man against entire mankind. Tamiki met his elder brother, his face covered with a film of gray paint-like thing, his back revealing a huge wound through the torn shirt resembling a sunburn. As they ran searching for a boat, they saw mutilated and disfigured bodies lying everywhere along the river, their shadows silhouetted against water, their faces so puffed up that it was difficult to distinguish men from women. And there were more men and women dying, their eyes mere slits, lips monstrously swollen and their bodies stripped of all clothes which had burnt out completely. Everywhere there were cries for water, dying men and women were crying for a little help. Naked bodies, swollen nearly to double their sizes, were scattered all over the narrow quay beside the river. A soldier remarked, "We'd be better off dead", in an uncontrollable rage at the senselessness of what lay around.

Darkness was falling. Somewhere a siren that had escaped damage began to scream. Downstream, the flickering glow of the flames showed where the city was burning. Two schoolgirls who had come to Hiroshima the previous day to help with the harvest had collapsed under what had been a cherry tree, their faces all scorched and blackened. They now started begging for water. Everywhere people were calling for water. People were dying one after another beneath a leaden sky with no one to remove the corpses. The faces of all the dead wore identical masks of horror and pain. Piles of concrete and cables and countless fragments of poles were strewn around, among the mangled bodies, all twisted and tangled. Nothing of the city that was left was recognizable. The few who were still living wandered among the piles of hideously swollen dead- bodies. It was a veritable hell.

Over yonder, the distant summits glinted in the twilight. Sounds of prayers were rising from every corner-people were crying for mercy. Indeed death was a mercy now. And amidst the sound of prayers and cries of men and women dying in terrible agony, the last Hiroshima sun was setting.

*The two schoolgirls mentioned in the story died the next morning. Tamiki Hara, a poet who had lost his wife in 1944, committed suicide in 1951, unable to bear the pain caused by the radiation released by the bomb, but not before documenting the atrocities of atomic bombings in details in his books *Natsu no Hana (Summer Flowers)*, *Haikyou kara (From the Ruins)*, *Kaimetsu no joukyoku (Prelude to Annihilation)* and *Chinkonka (Requiem)*. He committed suicide by throwing himself before a train when the Korean War had broken out, confirming his premonition of a dark future for mankind.*

An estimated 90,000 people had died immediately in the aftermath of the explosion, or within a few days. 80,000 more were to die three days later at Nagasaki. A much greater number of people were to suffer throughout their lives, and eventually die, from the radioactive radiations unleashed by the bomb. And not simply they, but their children and their children are still suffering from the long-term effects of radiation.

Hara's epitaph fittingly has a poem: "Engraved in stone long ago,/Lost in the shifting sand,/ In the midst of a crumbling world,/The vision of one flower." The world now seems to be crumbling again in the midst of all the violence and suffering we are witnessing all around. The vision of flower is what we have to try very hard to reclaim.