

WHEN you sip your next dose of Coca Cola, pause to think about what it is that you are ingesting. Think about it not simply as a concoction of carbonated water flavoured with artificial preservatives, sugar and colouring, but in terms of the layers of representations it contains. For Coca Cola is not just a drink. It is perhaps the most widely recognised cultural icon of western civilization in general, and a statement of the dominance in the late twentieth century of the USA in global economic and also political relations in particular.

Where lies the power of this beverage? How has it come to pervade the lives of people around the world irrespective of ethnicity, nationality, language, religion and age? There is a burgeoning literature and boisterous debate on the role played by transnational corporations such as the Coca Cola company in the third world, a role which, supported by an asymmetric system of relations in global financial and trade institutions, has helped to facilitate neo-mercantile colonization of the South. But domination is not achieved simply by developing and capturing markets. It depends upon the complex interplay in different layers of representation, of which the political and economic are just two such layers. What I would like to do here is not to focus on this 'political economy of Coca Cola', so to speak, (for this has already been well articulated elsewhere), but to focus on the essentially non-economic features of influence and appeal through which this drink has asserted itself in Bangladesh and throughout the rest of the globe. This discussion therefore will focus on Coca Cola as a vector of culture, power and domination.

It would be inconceivable to imagine Americans drinking lassi in a bar in Baltimore, or borhani at wedding receptions in Phoenix. Why is this? Why has Bangladesh not been able to project elements of its own ways of life onto global markets? Clearly geopolitical, historical, economic and cultural reasons go hand in hand. These mutually reinforcing factors determine the direction of flow of products, hence the one way traffic in soft drinks from the USA to Bangladesh: Bangladeshis drink Coca Cola; Americans have never even heard of lassi.

Unlike neighbouring India, where there has been an ongoing and vicious fight between American cola multinationals and local versions of the same type of drink, Bangladesh has no alternative comparable product with which to dispute market space. Subjugation of

COLA COLONIALISM!

It's the Real Thing

by Abdul Hannan

the locals has therefore been relatively straight forward in this country. But once markets have been created and access is achieved, what then?

This is where Coca Cola-as-cultural metaphor interplays most effectively with Coca Cola-as-market conqueror. In its marketing, Coca Cola is an ideal type. It represents all that is considered desirable (and that desirability is something that the marketing of the drink itself also establishes). We are informed through song and dance that "Coca Cola is The One." We observe people, usually between the ages of sixteen and twentyfour, an important target market, cavorting about bearing Coca Cola like some fabled elixir vitae. These young people are, invariably, impossibly and uniformly beautiful. Nobody in a Coca Cola advertisement is allowed to have a spot on their nose or a trace of greasy hair or anything other than pearly white teeth. These forms of representation are identical wherever you are in the world, only the colours of the faces differ.

The uniform underlying message refers to a lifestyle that is essentially youthful, and of a way of life that is western, in which the presence of this drink is constructed as a necessary precondition. Often, this way of life is transparently one of mythical America, embodying America's self image as the home of freedom, harmonious multiculturalism and everlasting youthfulness. It is a sanitized vision, with no reference to political strife, communalism, race hatred or economic exploitation. Coca Cola is the metaphor for escapism based on what media critics refer to as 'the reality gap'. In conjunction with exerting economic, political or direct military muscle, this reality gap, based on the American self-myth, in turn contributes to the process of Americanization, to the acculturation of non-America into the fold. It is at this juncture that cultural metaphors become instruments of domination.

Of course the process does exhibit a certain flexibility, reflecting an albeit highly asymmetric and therefore weak dialectic. Superficial ground, therefore, is given to local values in advertising in order to broaden the appeal of Coca Cola in Bangladesh. Hence we have advertising that also taps the ideal-typical Asian family unit as an object of marketing, as opposed to the conventional youth constituency. One recent advertisement on BTV showed an entire family from father and mother to young child entering a fridge with the purposeful reverence and serene contentment that one displays on entering a temple, to avail of the bottle of Coke, which itself stands erect like a haloed image awaiting worship.

But this is an incidental deviation from the standard, and more or less standardized, representation of the drink as a symbol of the western way. The most recent advertisement for Coca Cola does not even rely on human images, depending on a multicoloured collage flickering around the central image of a Coca Cola bottle cap. An androgynous voice 'sings' the following lines, which open the jingle:

Wherever there's a pool there's always a flirt,
Whenever there is school there'll always be homework.

This drive, mindbogglingly crass and aesthetically weightless, nevertheless carries important extraneous lifestyle messages wrapped up in more familiar references. This was brought home to me when a friend of mine, a first class first Masters degree holder and now at the Foreign Ministry, asked me to translate

the first line to him in comprehensible English. This to me was a measure of how alien the lifestyle reference was to him, and I assume, to many people in Bangladesh. Young or old, we all know what homework is. But 'pools' and 'flirting' have not really entered our cultural lexicon, though I'm not denying that Bangladesh is not without its swimming pools and flirts! It is the configuration that is alien, that does not even have a cultural point of reference through which people in Bangladesh can construct an approximate meaning. The image, the idiom, is western. And Coca Cola is bringing it to us. The act of consuming this drink, therefore, is not simply physiological, it dominates us through various layers of representation: the economic, the political and the cultural.

Clearly as one sits at home or in a restaurant with a bottle of this brown, sugary liquid, one is not consciously appraising the role of Coca Cola in global cultural dynamics. But cultural domination is not achieved by direct attack of marketing and lobbying alone. A further layer of representation of Coca Cola is more subliminal, more subconscious.

The economic might of the Coca Cola company and the geopolitical preeminence of the United States permit the product to be virtually ubiquitous in markets, no matter how remote, throughout the globe. This ubiquity of image and physical volume is curiously at variance with the product itself, or rather I should say, with the consumption of the product, which is a transient, sometimes even

ephemeral experience. This balance between the ubiquitous and the ephemeral make Coca Cola, and all soft drinks of its ilk, at once irresistible and inconsequential.

It is this which makes Coca Cola such a powerful cultural icon and resistance against it so difficult. Direct political domination, as in during the years of 'classical' colonialism in South Asia, gave you a target to channel your efforts against: usually the white face of a colonial administrator who was physically represented in your physical space. With the switch from direct and physical colonial to cultural (and, of course economic) representations, it is much more difficult to rally against. The articulation of resistance needs to match the manner of domination, which has changed.

Asymmetry in international cultural relations, biased as they are towards the North and against the South, mirror asymmetries in economic and political spheres. It is clear also that the texts of such relations are interlocked. However, cola colonialism is not inevitable. Unilateral actions against penetration by foreign transnational is also highly improbable in the case of Bangladesh (made more so by the recently concluded Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). Cultural domination likewise cannot be resisted by the growth of one-dimensional cultural chauvinism, no matter how indigenous it claims to be. No, the first necessary accomplishment is cultural rediscovery, articulating and establishing the cultural (and, critically, economic) value of local options.

Well, the next time you have a delicious glass of lassi, you can judge for yourself what is, a real thing.

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ASTRIDE the weak wings of the mosquitoes, the Mayor of Dhaka City has reached the tongue of all Dhakaites who have since been badly mauled and mangled by the uncanny bite of this tiny monster. With one thumping after another to kill or contain this insect, the city dwellers complain that their nights are long and noisy and mosquitoes have hardly any overture for love. As a strategy the mosquitoes now attack us during daytime also. Singer Haralal Roy in a *Bhauhatya* song perhaps erroneously claimed that a mosquito entered into his net with an offer of love.

We may however ignore this melodic monologue based on bilateral deal having doubtful amorous intent. Let the singer reap the benefit if there is any. A similar feeling was expressed by Poet Iswar Gupta who claimed that a bug crawled into his bed to woo the poet. The result is unknown.

In a lively debate on the mosquito menace in our Parliament sometimes back, the members however exonerated the mosquitoes of having party affiliation or racist attitude in biting. Some members ruled out suggestions about teaching family planning to the mosquitoes on the ground that organizers of human family planning could not reach slum areas where rate of fertility exceeds the capacity to feed, how could they reach thousands of drains and dykes in and around the city? But Mayor Hanif claims that he is going to the swamps first. We hope he could swim ashore.

The Dhakaites, once noted for their cute sense of humour, have cracked a joke on mosquitoes as well. Almost similar to display of defence equipment on national day parade, the Dhakaites brought out a mosquito net in the vanguard of a procession. The net was their only defence equip-

Distant Drum

M N Mustafa

ment against marauding hordes of the tiny insect. With mosquito net on the street and the mayor or his man inside, it is likely to compare our helplessness with our meekness before the howling wolves here and there. Holy words never resound musically before the barking dogs... Nails respond only to the hammer to get driven in.

During Russo-Chinese border trouble, the Chinese soldiers, as reported by *Time*, used to haul down their trousers to show man's identity marks to the Russians. In defence or retaliation the Russian brought out a portrait of Mao Tse Tung to view the bareness of his soldiers. This caused the trousers to go up.

Despite the relentless biting of the mosquito and the resultant itching sensation, the Mayor of Dhaka City was almost prophetic to advise us to bear with patience and fortitude the biting of the mosquitoes. He was perhaps aware of their might or the spiritual blessings the mosquitoes enjoy.

The Dhakaites now being battered relentlessly by the mosquitoes may perhaps like to know the character and antecedents of this tiny monster. They have a heroic legacy and stood against the forces of a mighty king — Namrud or Nimrod as Bible named him. Dhaka Mayor should think thrice before annoying them. Mayor's Press conference, sometime back, is suggestive of mortal fear which gripped him. There is no sense in participating in a war like the cook of the Englishman. To please his master, the cook went out in search of a sepyo involved in the mutiny of 1857. He returned with the severed leg of the sepyo. The English master asked him why he did

not cut him by the throat. The cook replied that some traitor had cut it already.

Namrud, like Moses or Krishna or even Oedipus, was ordained in a divine oracle to go against their mentors — Moses against the Pharaoh, Krishna against his uncle King Kangsha, Oedipus against his father, King of Thebes.

Namrud was prophesied to be the killer of his father and marry his own mother. The stories surrounding his life have not verified by historical evidences but are based on legends and stray references. In the holy Quran there is no direct reference except that "alam tara ilallaji hajja Ibrahim fi rabbhi aan atahullahul mulka" — hast thou not turned thy vision to one who disputed with Abraham? (Quran: Surah Bqara: 258). It was the same Namrud who wanted to burn Abraham alive.

Namrud's father, Kaana Aan Ibne Kush, dreamt that his own son would kill him. The day Namrud was born, a snake entered into Kaana's nostril, an event considered ominous. The new born was ugly, black and had a flat nose. The father decided to kill the young son, but the mother, Sulka, secretly offered the boy to a shepherd. With the appearance of Namrud at the shepherd's home, the flock of lambs ran amok and the shepherd's wife reacted at this strange incident. She threw the boy into the river, but the waves carried him to a shore. Here a tigress, called namra in Arabic gave him suck to grow. Some claim that from the word namra he came to be known as Namrud later. He was however very ferocious as a boy and became a leader of dacoits in youth. He attacked Kaana, his

father's establishment, killed him and married his own mother unknowingly. He became a powerful king subsequently. Azar, Hazrat Ibrahim's father, built a beautiful palace for Namrud. In this palace water, milk and honey flowed and mechanical birds used to sing.

But trouble started when Azar's son, Hazrat Ibrahim, challenged Namrud's heresy. In an endless debate with Hazrat Ibrahim, Namrud finally decided to kill Allah, the source of power of Hazrat Ibrahim. He made a platform with four eagles at four corners to carry it towards heaven. Allah's reply was modest and He sent a swarm of mosquitoes against Namrud who aimed an arrow towards the sky. The arrow returned with stains of blood, signifying a hit on the target. At the very sight of the arrow stained with blood, Namrud's hair instantly grew white and he became old. A mosquito meanwhile entered his nostril, finally reaching the brain zone. Its biting caused him pain so severely that some one had to hit his head with a hammer to give relief. This attack by the mosquito lasted for four hundred years and Namrud, Allah's enemy, succumbed to the attack by a mere mosquito. A very mighty king was killed by a mere mosquito.

Mosquitoes are conscious of their prowess and courage. Once a mosquito couple sat on an elephant and were gossiping leisurely. The elephant was just moving to and fro restively. Realizing the restlessness of the elephant the considerate and kind-hearted mosquito couple politely told the elephant that if he considered their weight too heavy to bear, they would go to a nearby tree.

Are the Dhaka mosquitoes too heavy to bear for the Mayor? Mayor Mohammad Hanif may ponder over the issue.

Hiroshima

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things — making 59 items in total — all of which reflect the memories of explosion and wish for peace for the mankind. Thousands of pigeons are roaming or flying around in the park, as a symbol

of peace, for all the time. The self-expressive 'Atomic Bomb Dome' is situated just by the side of the Peace Park. This is the ruined structure of former Industrial Promotion Hall, constructed in 1915. When the bomb exploded

Experience of a Surviving Victim

On the morning of August 6, 1945, I was working as a mobilised student at a post office near Hiroshima Station (1.7 kilometres from the hypocentre). When the blast occurred three of my classmates and I had just reached a water pump outside the office building. My body was exposed to a heat ray from the left side and I lost consciousness after being thrown by the blast. The burn extended to the neck, the face, the left arm, and both thighs, covering more than a half of my body.

I recovered consciousness to find it was pitch-dark. I could not see anything, nor could I make out what had happened. After a while, I became able to see a dim light. Without being aware of my own serious burns, I was frightened to look at a friend of mine. The skin of her arms, having peeled off, was hanging like those of a ghost. Another friend was calling for help buried under a broken bulletin board.

A teacher in charge of mobilised students came out of the building and told us to take a refuge in the mountain. Having stayed in the building, she was unharmed.

My skin was also hanging like rags. I fled frantically trailing my skin, without any idea of tearing it off.

I slept in the open air for a week without any treatments. I was carried to the Post and Communication Hospital on August 13, when all of my wounds were infested with maggots. My father found at last after several days of searching in the city. When we could meet again, I was too glad for words.

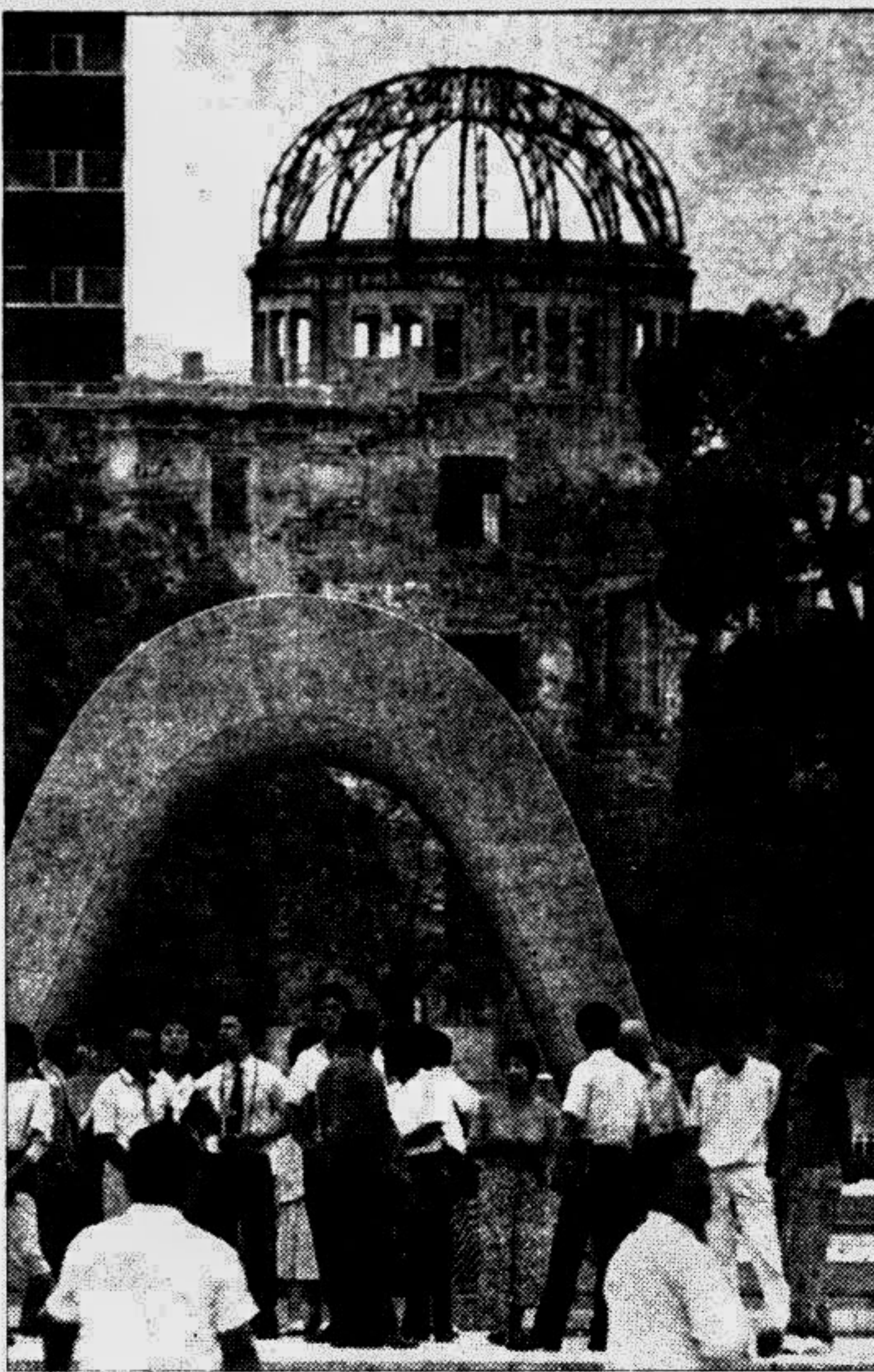
My father, unharmed and well enough, strained at taking care of me. One day, he suddenly lost sight and vomited blood. He died feeling anxious about me on September 9. Many survivors died one after another without any knowledge of the hidden effects of atomic bombing, because no information was made known at that time. I moved to the country, where none of the villagers said that I would recover. All of my hair fell out and I suffered bloody excrement; I struggled with the fear of death. It took me more than one year to be able to stand by myself. Because of the obvious burn, people discriminated against me saying that they had better stay away from me so as not to be infected with the disease. They called me "bald head" and "ghost". I had to endure the bitterness of my life. Mentally and physically suffering, I often thought that I would rather die. I felt resentment at the A-bombing and cursed my ill fate.

I was in a harsh living condition. As it was all I could do to support myself, I could not afford to take treatment in the hospital. I was forced to live silently, unrecognised by anyone. I kept on struggling against the fear of death, watching unwounded survivors die one after another.

We survivors had demanded that we get national compensation, until the Survivors' Medical Law was enacted in 1957. We had long waited for the day to come. We became able to get medical treatment without any worries about money.

It is you doctors who know the fact that A-bombs are so dreadful and that they can cause annihilation of human beings and destruction of the earth. Therefore, it is my hope that all the scientists appeal to the world with great emphasis that no country should use nuclear weapons to repeat the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I want you to deliver our message to the people in every part of the world. Though I can't tell how long I will be able to survive, I am ready to cry for peace and disarmament as a witness of the devastation.

— Mitsuko Yoneda



Peace Memorial Park: The Cenotaph, containing the names of the victims, is visited by a continuous stream of people from home and abroad. In the background stands the A-Bomb Dome.

above Hiroshima, almost all of the buildings in the central part of the city were reduced to rubble. However, this Hall stood almost directly under the hypocentre and received the force of the blast from overhead, but did not collapse and the metal frame of its dome and some walls still remain as they were. With a torn, burnt, blackish and gloomy look reminding all the visitors of the most barbarous act done on that day. All the tourists and visitors become much filled with a sense of deep sorrow and agony whenever they appear before and look at the dome. Many of them even tend to touch its dark dusty wall probably to get closer to the souls of the victims and attain the strength, morality and desire for a world free from nuclear weapons — no more Hiroshima.

Every year on 6 August, people meet in peace park, just at 8:15 in the morning, and the whole Japan stands still in silence to remember and pay respect to the dead as well as the survivors. Many of the 'hibakusha' are having treatment at government cost since 1957 in five big hospitals and 40 clinics in Japan. Some of them are readily available in Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital. Hiroshima has been turned into a rich international centre for research and study on cancerous diseases and other effects of nuclear radiations.

I also had an opportunity to meet some of the survivors in a forum of hibakusha and physicians organised for the visiting physicians in the ball room of

A Doctor's Experience of Treating Victims

The night before August 6, 1945, the members of No. 513 naval construction party, at which I was stationed, drunk sake rationed after a long interval and went to bed. We were located about 100 kilometres from Hiroshima.

On the next morning, I heard unusual explosion in the direction of the city at 8:15 A. M. Wondering if a powder arsenal might have blown up, I looked outside the window. From there I saw a mushroom-shaped cloud rising in the sky. Since the party had received some information, we concluded that a special bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. As our party had many trucks, we asked for the commander's permission for relief work in the city, but he said that even if we went to the city, the situation would be too chaotic, and that we had better stay there and be ready to treat the wounded who would be carried into the village. As expected, the wounded arrived at the village carried by carts one after another. Approximately 140 victims including those whose families lived there were carried in. Some had their whole bodies burned. Others vomited blood or discharged it from the bowels. They had such various symptoms that it was like a hell on earth filled with agonising crises. The members of my medical troop actively engaged ourselves in the treatment of the victims. We applied cod-liver oil for the wounded, which was the navy's own way of treatment. It was midsummer. The air was impregnated with filthy odors, and there were flies everywhere. Even young medical corpsmen did not have any appetites, nor did I. I could not eat anything but noodles because the situation made me sick. There, I met a new teacher, whom I married several years later, working for the Second Hiroshima Prefectural Girls' High School. She suffered A-bombing while working for a labor service corps with her students. After having taken care of the wounded students and having handed over each student to her family, she went back to her home in the village with her family. She was carried by a cart there. As she looked strong and healthy, I said to her, "You must be a sportsman." She answered that no she was a sportswoman. In spite of burns on the arms and knees, she looked well enough. We accepted as many victims as possible and treated them day and night. I had worked actively there until I was transferred to a demobilised soldiers' transportation corps. Some vomited or discharged blood, which caused stigmata with a high fever. Others suffered from loss of hair. I suspected that the rupture of blood vessels might have happened. We doctors, struggled hard against difficulties presented by the shortage of medicines. About one fifth of 140 victims were killed. This comparatively low death rate may have been caused by quick exit out of the city. This prevented them from being exposed to the residual radiation that was emitted even long after the explosion.

— Kiichiro Ebe

Vice Director of Health, Doctors' Association, Hiroshima

Mitsui Garden Hotel, very close to the Peace Park in Hiroshima, where survivors expressed their extremely sad experiences following the explosion, subsequent painful recovery and rehabilitation in the last four decades. Their intense wish to convey their heartfelt appeal to all people all over the world to continue relentless efforts to eliminate all nuclear weapons from the earth was very much convincing.

One cenotaph in front of

the City Hall of Nishimomya (another town near Hiroshima) reads: "Blue sky, green land and happy life are the wish of all people who love peace...." This seems to be the morale of the reconstructed city and rebuilt life of Hiroshima, and their every act is directed towards the successful implementation of this idea. And thus the 'wide island' of that day undergoing and overcoming the devastation, has become a beautifully attired 'peace city' today.

Superstitions

by Hubert Francis Sarkar

Superstitions kill a prodigy long before her birth. As a head-strong father, at the instructions of witch-doctors, Outdo Herod and as Mother Earth. Is over-whelmed with grief like a heart-broken mother who anguishes for the lost embryo. Which was from her flesh and blood, her bone-marrow.

Superstitions make the events all life-less feats. Superstitions celebrate totems as divine writs. Then the near-exalted bison overrun our dreamland. And a mantra-reciting tantrist places in the mound of blood his beautiful hands.

Superstitions raise the spirits of long-dead monsters. Who play with the mind tricky games like the brilliant con-masters. While life may reach a grand bazaar full of hub-bub. The caravanners bid farewell to love.

Superstitions make God a tribal king. Who deem his people to be mere playthings. Thus putting on Him the plush trappings. And hiding His creative enthusiasm by ceremonial dances, recitals and clappings.



Resurgence: A panoramic view of the prosperous city today.

Ascension

By Seema Ahmad

Of the greatest gifts He has endowed us, the Great One is patience. Is perseverance. O believers, He summons you to a right path! If you may outlive these. He may make you so strong and hold you. As the trunk holds the branches. And the branches hold the twigs. And the twig holds the leaves, blossoms and berries. And shall make you outlive. All that is possible. Through autumn, summer and spring. And that which is not possible. Through hail, storm and winds. And you shall, one of the favoured ones. Who prostrates. With the trees, and all of nature. In the night of ascension. The night of all nights.