

History 2



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Hiroshima and After: Nakazawa's Barefoot Gen Little Boy, the first atomic bomb dropped on a living Hiroshima, took a toll of 80, 000 lives. The after effects of the bomb killed 200, 000 more people. Keiji Nakazawa, who was a boy of seven when the bomb was dropped, has portrayed the aftermath of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima incisively in the graphic book Barefoot Gen, vol 1 and vol. 2. This Japanese manga series which is a semi autobiographical work of the author, is comparable to Maus by Spiegelman , in the way it depicts the horrors of war The volumes convey graphically the message that war is an evil thing which all nations should avoid at all costs. . The protagonist Gen is a small boy whose family lives in Hiroshima during the 1940's. Like most of the Japanese families, it is a patriarchal family , where all the family members honor and obey the words of the father. Gen's father, who has understood the futility of war, is against it. This makes the family unpopular in the town. The book shows the blind loyalty of the Japanese to their Emperor. It was this mistaken sense of loyalty which made them turn against anybody talking about the evils of war. The Japanese had a sense of honor which made them commit suicide in stead of finding practical solutions to the problems that faced them. Gen's father disapproved of this warped sense of values of his people. But his opposition to war was not supported by the others who regarded him as a traitor. The second volume tells us about what happened immediately after the Bomb was dropped. . " The city of Hiroshima had disappeared, buried under cries of pain and piles of corpses" (Nakazawa p. 4) The drawings of the dying Japanese with the flesh of their bodies oozing out is very disturbing, even though it is in black and white The hands of the victims, stiff and curled as if grasping at an ephemeral hope, tell their tale better than any words. Then

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there is the heartrending scene of the little girl Setsuko of first grade, who , while dying, requests Gen to tell her parents that she “ died here” (p. 2) Gen echoes the despairing cry of the nation as a whole, when he says, “ everything is gone...everything has disappeared. What will become of us?” (p. 7) The spirit of Gen’s father tells him to survive and take care of his mother. Here too, Gen echoes the will of the Japanese people, when he decides to survive.

The sight of the bodies lying everywhere, and the cry for water of the dying confronted Gen when he goes to look for some rice for his mother, so that his infant sister could survive. The first fury of the people’s anger was against the United States. In page 22, some people including a woman throw stones at a dead American prisoner of war. The old woman who has lost her whole family including her husband, daughter and grandson, cries, “ Why did you drop that horrible bomb on us?” She echoes the sentiments of countless other Japanese when she says, “ We didn’t do anything to you. Why do we have to suffer like this?”(p. 23)

When Gen becomes unconscious due to hunger and exhaustion, he is almost burnt alive by some soldiers mistaking him for a dead body. The soldier who rescues him and carries him, himself falls victim to the after effects of the Bomb. Nakazawa has described graphically how the soldier soils his pants by bleeding , and loses his hair in fistfuls. One page is full of drawings of dead people in water tanks. The people who had caught fire, had presumably jumped into the water hoping for respite. The physical and psychological damage the Bomb did is enormous. Barefoot Gen is a chilling tale of horrible suffering and death of the innocent caught in a war. .

In Barefoot Gen, the author shows how both those who opposed the war, like

Gen's father , and those who supported the war, like the soldiers come to a gory end. Although dropping the atomic bomb stopped the war, the bomb's legacy is too terrible to justify dropping it. As Mahatma Gandhi said, " I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary, the evil is permanent".

Works cited

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