CHAPTER - VI

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The strategic bombings and atomic bombings of Japan in the Second World War were characterized by an unremitting vendetta on the part of Americans, assiduously nurtured since the attack on Pearl Harbour. It is quite ironical that the Americans, who in 1939 had sent out frantic messages to the belligerents indulging in the bombing of civilians, begging them to refrain from such inhuman barbarism, dropped 100,000 tons of incendiaries on sixty-six Japanese towns, wiping out 170,000 square miles of closely populated streets, destroying 2,250,000 buildings, leaving nine million homeless and killing 260,000 and injuring 412,000. And, by July 1945, the Allied fleets also had closed in on Japan's coastal cities and had commenced the bombing with heavy guns. On 1 August 1945 in a single day 820 B-29s unloaded 6,600 tons of explosives on five towns of North Kyushu.¹

Not being fully content with incendiary and explosive bombings, the Americans chose Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the experimental grounds for the world's first atomic weapons exhibiting no concern that they were detonated directly on the cities whose people had no way to anticipate, or to protect themselves from, their enormous destructive power.\(^2\)

By dint of naval blockade, ruthlessness of conventional bombings, sagacity of Emperor Hirohito's mounting concern to end the war, and a preponderance in the ranks of the peace faction, Japan would have certainly sued for peace on manageable conditions even without the terrific chastisement of the bomb or even without the terrible shock of the Russian attack.

According to Paul Johnson, after the bomb had obliterated Hiroshima the Japanese authorities had privately summoned to Tokyo Dr. Yoshio Nishina, head of their atomic programme, to find out whether the Hiroshima bomb was a genuine nuclear weapon and if so whether he could develop it

within six months.\(^3\) Dr. Nishina informed General Seizo Arisue, Chief of Japanese Intelligence, that it was, indeed, a uranium bomb, similar to the one he had been trying to develop. He did ask the Chief as to whether he should continue to work on his bomb but got no answer.\(^4\) There were many capable and reputed nuclear scientists in Japan, some of whom had, like Professor Ryokichi Sagane, worked in 1930s along with the American scientists in the Radiation Laboratory of University of California.\(^5\)

The trail of events following the dropping of Atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki does not suggest that the nuclear weapons really turned out to be decisive. The efforts of the Suzuki government and prodding by the Emperor and his Chamberlain, discussed in the previous chapter, indicate that if an assurance had been given about the position of the Emperor, a Japanese surrender could have been arranged. But the Allies continued to insist on unconditional surrender. This insistence was the main hurdle to an early end to hostilities. The attitude of key decision

5. Ibid., p.800.
makers of Japan remained the same after the atomic bombings as it was before 6 August 1945. They continued to demand a modification of terms of surrender. The only major change occurred when the United States had to make an official response to the Japanese offer to surrender. Having dropped the atomic bombs, the United States eventually dropped the demand for unconditional surrender. It was only after an assurance had been given regarding the continued existence of the Japanese monarchy that Japan finally surrendered.

According to some analysts including B.H. Liddell Hart, "the use of atom bomb was not really needed to produce surrender. With nine-tenths of Japan's shipping sunk or disabled, her sea and air forces crippled, her industries wrecked, and her people's food supplies shrinking fast, her collapse was already certain." Admiral Earnest King, the US Naval Commander in Chief had also noted that "the naval blockade alone would have starved the Japanese into submission through lack of oil, rice and other essential materials - had we been willing to wait".  

7. Quoted in ibid., p.697.
Admiral William O. Leahy, Chief Military Adviser to the US President, maintained that -

the use of this barbaric weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea-blockade and successful bombings with conventional weapons. 8

Winston S. Churchill, the former British Prime Minister and a close ally of President Harry S. Truman, stated emphatically that -

it would be a mistake to suppose that the fate of Japan was settled by the atomic bombs. It's defeat was certain before the first bomb fell, and was brought about by the maritime power. This alone had made it possible to seize ocean bases from which to launch final attack and force its metropolitan army to capitulate without striking a blow. 9

Even the United States Strategic Bombing Survey had concluded:

Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts, and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered, even if atomic bombs had not been dropped,

8. Ibid.

even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.10

Beyond the seemingly simplistic urge to cut short the agony of war by making use of the atomic bomb there lay complex post-war considerations. Firstly, the successful test of the plutonium bomb at Alamagordo, in the desert of New Mexico on 16 July 1945, had suddenly made the Americans feel all powerful. Churchill, while reminiscing about his own and President Truman's thinking on receipt of the news of the successful test, wrote:

We should not need the Russians. The end of the Japanese war no longer depended upon the pouring in of their armies... We had no need to ask favours of them... the United States does not at present times desire the Russian participation in the war against Japan.11

President Truman had, indeed, become increasingly anxious to avoid the Russians taking any credit for having been instrumental in the expected capitulation of Japan.12

The desire to manage the Soviet Union in the post-war world also contributed to the use of the bomb. It was hoped


that atomic bombing would hasten the Japanese collapse before Soviet military victories strengthened Stalin's claim to a share in the occupation of Japan. As Professor M.S. Blackett noted in 1948, "the dropping of the atom bombs was not so much as the last military act of the second World War, as the first major operation of the cold diplomatic war with Russia now in progress".13

Since the end of the Second World War, a myth has been created that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki hastened Japan's unconditional surrender. This study has shown that this is nothing but a myth. The two most important events hastening the Japanese surrender were the Soviet declaration of War, which dashed all Japanese hopes of Soviet mediation and modification of terms of surrender by the Allies.

The team of Japanese scholars and researchers has rightly come to the conclusion that the 'tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is that this historically unprecedented devastation of human society stemmed from essentially experimental and political aims'.14