

## A DOCTOR'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR AUGUST 6, 1945

Vikram Seth's "A Doctor's Journal Entry for August 6, 1945" is a brilliant poem that describes the horrors in the aftermath of an atomic bomb explosion. This **tragic poem** begins rather ironically in a "calm, beautiful and warm" morning, but goes on to depict the frightful condition of the survivors of the atomic explosion by the United States of America on Hiroshima (Japan) during the end of the World War II on 6th August 1945.

"A Doctor's Journal Entry for August 6, 1945" of Vikram Seth is an **anti-war poem**. We, the readers, are horrified when we go through the poem, thinking about the devastating effect of war on common innocent people. The poem also reflects the poet's humanity. He sympathizes with the war victims, and makes everyone think again over the disaster that war may cause. And this poem reminds us of some similar great war poems of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.

The poem, A Doctor's Journal Entry for August 6, 1945, is narrated by a doctor, as told in the title of the poem itself. And he narrates everything from his perspective. And, in the course of the poem, he is speaking with his wife, giving her some hope and assurance, and sometimes instructing her. But the doctor's wife says nothing in the entire poem. So the poem "A Doctor's Journal Entry for August 6, 1945" may be called a **dramatic monologue**.

The poem is written in **free verse** pattern, with no rhyme and no particular meter followed. Even the poem is not divided into stanzas. It is a continuous narration of the happenings, of what the narrator came across and what he thought or felt. It is in the form of a journal entry for the particular date. Irony, images, symbolism are used in the poem.

## *A Doctor's Journal Entry for August 6, 1945: Summary*

The poem, A Doctor's Journal Entry for August 6, 1945, begins in a fine morning with a calm and serene note. The doctor says that it was dawn and he was half-clothed as he had just got up from bed and stretching his arms and legs to remove the sleepy feeling. He was gazing outside at the gleam and the shadow of the leaves.

Suddenly he saw two strong flashes of light, and the old stone lantern in his room lit up by itself. The doctor wondered whether the flashes were magnesium flares seen during a war.

In the next moment, the doctor discovered that the roof and the walls of his house has collapsed and the debris were scattered all over. Dust covered up the whole place.

The doctor strangely found out that his drawers and undershirt disappeared from his body. They were all burnt in the flashes.

The doctor then tells us how he was wounded on his cheek and thigh and that he was bleeding in the right side. He removed a piece of glass that had entered into his body. He was wondering what had really happened to him.

Then the doctor came to his senses and remembered his wife. He called out his wife by her name, 'where are you, Yecko-san?' Yecko-san looks pale, frightened and had blood stains on her body, and she came out holding her elbow.

The doctor assured his wife that they would be fine. He suggests that they should get out of the house quickly. And they did get out immediately. Here we are amazed at the doctor's mental strength and presence of mind.

While walking, they stumbled over something on their way. Then he realized that it was the head of a man who was crushed to death under a gate and begged for mercy, 'Excuse me, please excuse me – '. The poet probably indicates the doctor's generous nature here.

*A Doctor's Journal Entry for August 6, 1945* then goes on to give a picture of the whole situation. The couple saw a house before them that 'tilted, swayed, toppled and crashed.' Fire erupted in the dust and was spreading fast by the wind.

They realized they must go to the hospital as they needed aid. The doctor also wanted to help his staff. But then he wondered how he could do good to others when he himself was injured.

His legs could take it no more and he sat down on the ground. He felt very thirsty but he could not find water to drink. He was panting but he gained some strength bit by bit and finally he got up and walked towards the hospital.

The doctor in *A Doctor's Journal Entry for August 6, 1945* then tells us that he was naked but felt no shame at his state, though somewhat disturbed at the thought. Then a soldier on the way gave him a towel. But his legs were so injured that he could not walk any more and told his wife to go ahead alone. She did not wish to go alone but they had no other choice in such a distressed condition. So finally she went ahead alone and the doctor felt 'a dreadful loneliness'.

The doctor says, his mind was working, running at a high speed but his body could not cope up with such fatal injuries. He saw shadow-like appearances of people, some looked like ghosts and some scarecrows but everybody was silent and numb. Some of the survivors were walking with their arms hanging loose from their body.

It took some time for the doctor to understand what had happened. He was thinking about the burns and the pain of the people. People who could, joined the parade to the hospital, walking naked as if it was a naked parade. The doctor saw in his way a woman with a child, both naked. He wondered whether they had come back right from the bath. Then he turned his eyes from her.

The doctor realized that something strange has happened that had burnt down people's clothes, only when he saw another naked man on the way. He also came across an old woman who was lying on the ground, with her face distorted in pain. But she was making no sound.

**Silence prevailed** all around and it was the common thing to all of the men and women present there. The doctor could hear neither a word, nor a cry of pain. They are all shocked to silence. This symbolizes that the powerful always dominates over the weak. The stronger suppresses the weaker and makes him keep silence.

Thus the poet Vikram Seth gives us a remarkable picture of what it felt like to be the victims of the bomb explosions. And this dreadful picture makes us aware of the destruction that war causes. So, we should keep peace and avoid wars for the good of the humanity. This is **the message** that the poet wants to convey through his poem.