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Remains of the Past: History, Diary, and Collective Memory of the Battle of Kohima, 1944

K B VeioPou

The Second World War made huge impact to the Nagas living in some quiet corners of India's Northeast. When it finally made its way into the Naga Hills towards the beginning of 1944 the Nagas rudely woke up to a realization of what war could do to humanity. For the British the victory over the invading Japanese forces following the Battle of Kohima was 'the most decisive' one as it turned the tide of the war. Many historical accounts have been written about it, but have largely remained military accounts. When Easterine Kire's *Mari* (2010) was published, it became an eye opener for many as it tells how the people of Kohima experienced a war that was not of their making and yet changed their lives forever. This paper will largely focus on why *Mari* is important not just for its depiction of the struggle of a death defying girl but for its historical account from a native perspective of the war. In addition this paper will also engage with another book, *The Battle of Kohima* (2007), a collection of stories from those who survived the war and what it meant to experience it. A relook at these narratives is important in the re-imagination of the past events and how such events shape the lives of individuals who lived through it.

Keywords: Second World War, Naga Hills, Kohima, narratives, war experience, Easterine Kire

Introduction

War always transforms the lived reality of the people, often for worse than for the better. Though a distant phenomenon for a long time, the Second World War made its way into the Naga Hills in the beginning of 1944 and rudely awoken the Nagas to a realization of what war could do to humanity. However, since most people imagine the two great wars of the twentieth century to be largely an European phenomena, very little is heard of the wars/battles fought outside of it, no matter how 'fierce' and 'decisive' those battles were. And so, for the record, when an announcement from

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London was made in April 2013, international focus suddenly turned on ‘often-forgotten’ Northeast India, something that seldom happens. “Victory over Japanese at Kohima named Britain’s greatest battle” (Reuters, April 21, 2013) was the headline. At a contest organized by the National Army Museum the Battle of Kohima was named Britain’s greatest battle over-riding even the better known D-Day/Battle of Normandy (1944) against Hitler’s Germany and Battle of Waterloo (1815) against Napoleon’s France. Making the case for the battle fought in the “horrendous jungle conditions”, the military historian Robert Lyman said, “If Lieutenant General William Slim’s army of British, Indian, Gurkha and African troops had lost, the consequences for the allied cause would have been catastrophic.”

Often referred to as “the forgotten battle” and its veterans “the forgotten army”, the Battle of Kohima was fought only for about three months, from 4 April to 22 June 1944 (79 days). But the intensity of it and the outcome was decisive for not only the Allied forces but also for India. The War Cemetery in the heart of Kohima town stands today as a memorial of the battle with its epitaph that reads “When You Go Home, Tell Them of Us and Say, For Their Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today”. It has graves of more than 1400 of those who died in the battle, many of whom belong to Indian soldiers who served in different regiments under the colonial government. The large cemetery was once the tennis court of the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills and the pitch battle fought there also was known as the Battle of the Tennis Court.

While the war cemetery stands as “official” memory of the victorious British forces and its allies in the Second World War, the war memorial has no mention of the sacrifices made by the people on whose land the war was fought. The participation and contribution of the Nagas to the “Battle of Kohima” is discussed by Khrienuo (2013). This paper looks at two texts, *Mari* and *The Battle of Kohima*, which tells of the Naga experience of the battle. *Mari* (2010) by Easterine Kire is a biographical and an historical construct of the Battle of Kohima based on a diary that the protagonist kept during the war period. *The Battle of Kohima* (2007) by Mekhrie Khate, Aphriilie Iralu, *et. al.* is a compilation of narratives from people in different villages in and around Kohima, their experiences as witnesses of a war that changed the perspectives of the local people radically. Most Nagas abruptly woke up to find themselves caught between the warring groups, the British and the Japanese. Though the war wasn’t of their making, the Nagas found themselves dragged into it and worse still, made victims of it. And for those who encountered it, life was never the same again.

A snapshot of the War

After having overrun Burma in 1942, the Japanese had made plans to advance into India. In March 1944 the Japanese Army launched Operation *U-Go* under the command of Lieutenant-General Mutaguchi Renya and his Fifteenth Army (numbering 115,000). Of the three divisions under Mutaguchi, the 31st Division (30,000) under the command of Lieutenant-General Kotoku Sato was given the responsibility to capture Kohima. It may also be noteworthy that following the fall of the British

resistance in Malaya and Singapore in 1942, a large number of Indian soldiers fell into the hands of the Japanese, a section of whom formed the INA (Indian National Army) under the political leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. The INA had hoped that the alliance with the Japanese army in the invasion of India would eventually spark off a nationalist bush-fire across the whole of India against the ‘oppressive’ British Raj. With the slogan “Delhi Chalo” (March to Delhi), they even successfully hoisted their flag at Moirang, near Imphal, after overtaking it. [The various narratives considered here reveals that the INA soldiers were marching together with the Japanese soldiers.]

The British, on the other hand, were under the command of Lieutenant-General William (Bill) Slim who commanded the Fourteenth Army, the largest army fielded by the United Kingdom during the war, comprising of roughly 58 percent Indian, 25 percent West African, and only 17 percent British (Lyman 2011: x). During the battle of Kohima two divisions of the Fourteenth Army, 2nd Infantry Division led by Maj. Gen. John Grover and the 7th Infantry Division led by Maj. Gen. Frank Messervy, were stationed. The Battle of Kohima was only fought for roughly 79 days, but the decisiveness of the battle let the military historian Robert Lyman to assert that it was “[t]he most desperate and bloody struggle in the entire war on the south Asian land mass” (2011: 215). And yet, “Only those who had fought at Kohima could appreciate the intensity of the fighting the desperate nature of the bloody, hand-to-hand struggle in some of the most inhospitable campaigning country on earth, in the full unrelenting fury of the monsoon, a struggle that for the Japanese, with the seemingly inexhaustible resources available to the enemy, had by now only one obvious outcome: withdrawal, or death” (*ibid* 215). At the end of campaign the British finally claimed victory over the starved Japanese soldiers but not before claiming huge casualties on both sides, over 4000 on the British side and over 7000 on the Japanese side (Lyman 2010: 88).

Now, one may ask, how important was Kohima to both the warring parties? Interestingly, Kohima was the principal town in the Naga Hills which covers some 20,000 kilometres (8,000 square miles) that lies between the Brahmaputra Valley and the Imphal Valley. Standing 5,000 feet (1,500 metres) above sea level, Kohima was not just the seat of the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills but the only road that connects the Dimapur with Imphal (222 km) runs through the town. Geographically, the Kohima ridge acted as a natural defense for the British, and its defense was crucial. Likewise, the Japanese also understood that they needed to lay siege of Kohima if they want to advance to the Brahmaputra valley and onwards. (At one point the Japanese took control of the Imphal airport, from where they launched air attack on Kohima.)

Books have been written on the historic war but they remain largely military accounts. Few of the well-known titles of the British reminiscence of the war include Robert Lyman’s *Kohima 1944: The Battle that Saved India* (2010), John Colvin’s *Not Ordinary Men: The Story of the Battle of Kohima* (1994), Leslie Edwards’ *Kohima: The Furthest Battle* (2009), Arthur Swinson’s *The Battle of Kohima* (1966), C.E. Lucas Philips’ *Springboard to Victory* (1966), Fergal Keane’s *Road of Bones: The Epic*

Siege of Kohima 1944 (2010), and General William Slim's own account published twelve years after the war as *Defeat to Victory* (1956). The Japanese reminiscences of the war can be found in Yukihiro Imai's *To and From Kohima* (1953), Tochio Imanishi's *Burma Front Diary* (1961) and K. Tamayama and J. Nunneley's *Tales by Japanese Soldiers of the Burma Campaign 1942-1945* (2000). Interestingly, not much is heard of the Japanese side story. Obviously, one may say, the vanquished has little to say, after all it's the victor who writes 'history'. But it may also be noted that the Japanese were bound by the Soldier's Code which obligated the true Samurai to die in the service of his country and emperor, rather than surrender, which was despised as cowardly. It is also said that most soldiers either committed suicide on retreat or greatly shamed on their return to Japan. That also tells of the silence of their story.

Though these books remain important in their own rights as historical accounts of the Great War, what has not been heard is how the people who were caught in between the two warring groups saw the war. *Mari* and *The Battle of Kohima*, therefore, becomes important works to study because they narrate stories of the native population who saw one of the fiercest actions of the Second World War fought in their land.

Mari: an extraordinary life lived in the yesteryears of Kohima

Based on a true story of a girl's account of the battle at Kohima and her life changing experiences, *Mari* takes us to re-visit the history of "the forgotten battle". A semi-fictional war novel, it is formatted in a diary form, perhaps to keep the reader as close to reality as possible with the diary that girl kept during the war. But while narrating the story of an individual Easterine Kire also tries to tell the story of a people who are caught in a war which was not of their making, or as she puts it in the preface to the book, it is also "the story of Kohima and its people" (p. xii). Life was easy for Mari (born Khrielievü or Aviü in short), before the war. But it all changed in 1943. For one, "the war that had seemed such a distant thing for so long, finally reached us," (p. 17) declared the young Mari in her dairy. For so long she only heard of the war being fought in the distant land but the Japanese invasion had finally brought Nagas into the war. She recounted this by narrating the tragedy of the Burmese refugees fleeing the invading Japanese forces: "They came in wretched bands; starving, diseased dregs of humanity, droves of them dropping down dead by the roadside or in the refugee camps. The Burmese refugees, as we called them, were not ethnically Burmese but largely of Tamilian stock, for many Tamilians had settled in Burma as traders before the war" (p. 17). Secondly, just before the war she had met Vic (short for Victor), a staff sergeant in the British Army Engineers, who would give her the name Marigold or Mari, in short, after they fell in love. Their romance, however, was cut short by the impending war. By the beginning of 1944, preparation for war has become intense and Vic had to respond to the call of duty. When the war began Kohima was bombarded and Mari had to run for cover along with her folks into the jungles and eventually to a safer place in Shillong.

Never did she think that the war would cost her so dearly. Vic had promised to meet her soon after the war and begin their lives together. But it was never to be. Vic

fell to the bullet of a Japanese sniper. When her cousin brought her the news she wrote, “My world collapsed at his words. Vic dead! Vic killed by a sniper’s bullet... I wanted to scream – but a choked cry was all that came out of my throat... I felt as though my heart was going to burst from the pain, and I hoped it would” (p. 86). The war ended after some intense months and people began to return to their homes, but life would never be the same for Mari. Despite the pain of loss, however, she chose to live and began life afresh, especially for the sake of Vic’s child inside her and she said: “Sometimes it is easier to choose death to end pain, and sometimes, great love will choose life in spite of terrible pain. I chose life; I hope it testifies to the greatness of my love” (p. 102). She was soon able to pick up the pieces and live on. The novel went on to tell of Mari’s life post war; her short romance with another soldier, Dickie, and final marriage with Patrick O’Leary. [Mari passed away in 2015, aged 88.]

One of the most enduring pictures of the novel was the struggles with life and death during the war time. Readers may also be let to draw a parallel here with another diary that was kept by another young girl around the same time in Europe, which latter got published as *Diary of a Young Girl* (also known as *The Diary of Anne Frank*) in 1947. Though Mari did not meet a tragic end as Anne Frank, perhaps by virtue of not being hunted down directly as was Anne and family, what stood out is the uncertainty of life that looms large as they made the struggles of each day into their diaries. For Mari, running for cover in the forest with no food to feed herself and the younger ones under her care were memories that will stay on. She entered, “I had never lived through a war before and had no idea how long it would take before we could return home. And it occurred to me that we were going away from home indefinitely. I began to weep silently and forced myself to wipe my tears away. I looked around my home, trying to remember everything in it” (p. 53). Despite the troubles, there was in her the spirit and the will to survive the tears and the pain. The survival instinct in her despite all odds shows the true of the strength of a woman, and she will be remembered for that spirit. Readers may also be able to find a semblance in Mari with that of Scarlett O’Hara, the notable protagonist of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With The Wind* (1936)! Not only because the two women endured the hardship of living through wars – *Gone With The Wind* was set at the backdrop of the American Civil War – but because they were uprooted from their homes and tested while running from place to place. An interesting common thread is that the war times changed both of them in many ways, more importantly in maturing to adulthood/womanhood.

It is never an easy task to faithfully depict the past which has little traces today. And it is all the more difficult when the recreation has to be through someone else’s memory! Yet, Easterine Kire has creatively worked on the novel to paint a realistic picture of Mari’s wartime experience and also to present the Kohima of yesteryears that has vanished into history. The anxiety of the impending war, the running away to safety not knowing when the war would end, the pang of being separated from the loved one, and the struggle to live on without food for days, are the poignant moments that has been finely reconstructed in the novel. *Mari* will be in the memory of its readers not only because it tells of the extraordinary endurance of a girl who braves all the hardships of living through the harshest moments in her lifetime – the

war times – but also because author has memorialized the Battle of Kohima which is hitherto little known in the history books of the modern world. It is also a book that throws light on the ills of war and the ravages it “could do to humanity”. It not only narrates the pain and suffering of the people of Kohima and the Nagas, in general, because of the war, but also tells of the experiences of the people on whose land the battle was fought.

The Battle of Kohima: People’s experience of the Great War

The Battle of Kohima (2007) brought together stories of those who lived through the battle and what it meant to experience a large scale war. The documentation of those who experienced the war first hand was an important landmark in the narratives of the battle that changed the people in and around Kohima radically. While most of the narrators said that the war altered their lives completely, the impact of the war is perceived differently by different people. The Japanese soldiers’ march towards Kohima was from two primary fronts, first is the Somra-Jessami-Phek-Kohima route, and second the Ukhrul-Mao-Kohima route.

An interesting observation about the Japanese/INA soldiers was that the initial contacts were friendly but within weeks the relationship soured as the ration of the advancing party ran out. For instance, at Phek village, according to the narrator Sipohu Venuh (78 yrs), General Sato came with the Japanese troops and supposedly said at the village gathering, “Our skin colour is the same, the colour of our hair and eyes are same, our food is same but the British are different from us. Their skin is white, their eyes and hair are differently coloured and their food is different from us, so we Nagas [sic] and Japanese must unite together as one and work together since we are brothers and sisters” (p. 12). The Japanese’s effort to win the natives’ friendship was also notable not only in words but when the narrator continued, “The Japanese opened a school as soon as they settled in our village. They provided school books and other materials to the people and I too was enrolled in this school. Till today I can remember how to count and read [sic] 1 to 20 in their language.”

Similar friendly entry was made in other southern Angami villages. At Kigwema, Viketu Kiso (82 yrs), narrated of how they “became aware of strange happenings around us” by mid-March, before the actual appearance of the Japanese soldiers, because “footprints were everywhere”. But on the morning of 3rd April, 1944, they saw a phenomenon unfolding before their eyes:

The whole forest came alive and there was not one spot that was still, men poured out of the tree copses, from behind every rock and green plants, the Japanese soldiers with guns out-thrust, they made a terrifying sight, our hearts froze within us. They surged forward and even as we stood there transfixed, they had reached the village... But as they came closer, there were no signs of animosity. Indian officers [INA soldiers] led the Japanese into our village and when they spoke to our elders, they did not sound threatening... I am told that the Indian officers said this, “Don't be afraid of the Japanese. They are here to chase the British forces out of India and the Naga Hills. Once they have done that, they will go back directly to Japan...” They also said, “We request you to help us for a short time. Please give us rations. Give us all you have. Don't worry.

Great amounts of rations are coming from Burma so whatever you have given to us will be compensated in a few days..." We gave them ration, fed them for days believing that they would compensate whatever they had taken. (pp. 22-23).

However, the promise of compensation never came. Viketu said, "Slowly resentment grew towards the Japanese presence in our village as people realized that the rations were not coming from Imphal and every day they were finishing our food. Then, some soldiers shot at our pigs and our chickens. Others took away brew from people's homes. There was no food they overlooked" (pp. 24-25). In other villages too, similar stories were narrated. At Tenyiphe, NeiputhieRutsa said, "They were good in the beginning but as their rations dwindled, they began to threaten and terrorise and even destroy the village. Among the Japanese troops were some Indian soldiers too who destroyed our village" (p. 73). Zhovire, from Jakhama, tells of how the "village people saw that they (the Japanese soldiers) were famished and took pity on them... Some of the soldiers were so famished they ate the gruel meant for pigs which was being cooked on large pots in some houses" (p. 31). And he added, "Labour was paid in the beginning with Japanese money but as the war became more grim, forced labour and forced extraction of rations became the order of the day" (p. 32). The Japanese were more cruel at war front. At Kohima village, Neillhou Dziivichu (85 yrs), said, "The Japanese were very cruel to us. They killed our pigs and chickens and they ate our grain and warred with the British. They killed people and they frequently took men away to carry their loads" (p. 61). At Meriema, LhounoShiyya (93 yrs), had similar story to tell, "In the beginning we even thought of forming a Government with the Japanese because the British were stingy and miserly with us whereas the Japanese seemed to be very generous and liberal. But soon they began to mistreat us. They came to the village and enlisted young men to work as coolies. So we worked to carry their rations" (p. 77).

There were more of such stories that showed a pattern in the treatment of the Naga villagers by the Japanese/INA soldiers, that as the war waged on and their ration ran out their relations soured. And though the Nagas in many villages were neutral towards the Japanese when they first appeared, the humane sympathy disappeared and they eventually turned hostile as time went by. Interestingly, from most of the narratives, it was the shortage of ration that caused hostility among Naga villagers and the Japanese soldiers, and not so much due to misbehavior by the soldiers. As long as they had adequate supply relations were stable. In fact, even during the war, some villages were known to have sheltered Japanese soldiers and help them disguise as Nagas. Kiezotuo from Riisoma even narrated of a "very beautiful" Japanese officer who married a local woman (p. 82). Elsewhere, in they spoke to the villagers in "gentle manner". And though the Japanese soldiers' misbehavior with the villagers were reported at few places, they were a matter of indiscipline and not ordered upon. For instance, at PhesamaNeideli said, "Incidents of soldiers misbehaving were few and far between because their Colonel was a stern man who kept them in check in the manner described" (p. 41). In the villages close to Kohima, villagers ran away to safety not so much for the fear of the Japanese but because they learned that the

British were targeting Japanese locations were told to evacuate.

The failure to receive supplies, both weapon and rations, was, according to Robert Lyman, one of the key reasons for the Japanese withdrawal from Kohima after having laid a siege over it for about six weeks. He said, "For the men of both 15th and 31st Division, starvation, exhaustion and the savage monsoon rains daily extracted their toll, many hundreds dying on the endless, cloud-covered mountain ranges that flowed like angry waves on a mighty ocean all the way to the Chindwin. The Japanese began to call the trail of rotting bodies the 'bleached bones road'" (2011: 243). The ugly exchange of words between Lt. Gen. Sato and his superior Gen. Mutaguchi testifies to this. With abject failure to receive supplies "Sato reported that the position was hopeless, and that he reserved the right to act on his own initiative and withdraw when he felt that it was necessary to do so, in order to save what remained of his battered division from inevitable destruction. In fact, later that day he signaled Mutaguchi: 'We have fought for two months with the utmost courage, and have reached the limits of human fortitude. Our swords are broken and our arrows spent, shedding bitter tears, I now leave Kohima.'" (Lyman 2010: 87).

As the war became more intense at Kohima, people from neighbouring villages stood in awe of the event unfolding before their eyes. As far as the distant Phek, Sipohu Venuh observed, "The bombing and firing by the war planes were amazing. It was beautiful and fearful to look at. Sometimes, the plane dived down firing thousands of its bullets into the jungle and throwing great sparks here and there... It was unforgettable" (p. 13). The "beautiful and fearful" sight was certainly an expression of a large scale war where the spectator/narrator could not help but refer to it as amazing despite the tragedy that the aerial bombings were causing. But it was not case for everyone. Niisacho Vero (80 yrs) had a frightful experience; "I still remember while we were returning from carrying loads of food stuff, ammunitions and other items of the Japanese, a British war plane zoomed past us and we were filled with such fear that we left all our loads on the road and we fled into the jungles" (p. 9). Similarly, Neilao (80 yrs) was with his friends when they first saw a war plane over Khonoma, "The others with me shouted "*Lei, Lei, Lei, kepruo lei* (look, look, look, a plane, look). We were so filled with awe at seeing that flying objects in the sky" (p. 58). Noumvio Khruomo (80 yrs) vividly remembered the first time he saw an aircraft at Kohima village, "It flew overhead and we stood in astonishment and cried out, "Oh, are we to witness this in our lifetime!" (p. 60). Unfortunately, the wonderful sights that the Nagas were entertained of were only signs of an unfortunate impending event. Within days their villages were bombed, probably by the same war planes they saw not long back. Most of the bombings were undertaken by the British targeting Japanese hide outs. Since Kohima was the headquarters of the British in the Naga Hills, the scene was horrific. Neidelie (from Phesama) had to say this, "After the battle began on the 4th of April, Kohima was always covered by a thick column of smoke so that we could not make out the houses or movement of people from afar, the sound of shell fire was incessant" (p. 41).

For most of the entire war period, villagers had to leave villages and stay in the jungles or seek refuge in some distant neighbouring villages. Neidelie was 13 yrs

when his village was bombed and the villagers ran away to safety to a distant neighbouring village. When they were told that it was safe to return to their village, this is what he said of the sight while on the way back;

Every few steps of our journey home, we count dead Japanese. Some hung out of trees, shot as they sat on their sniping perches in trees, others still clung on the barbed wire fences, their decomposing hands clasping the fences in the desperate gestures of men who had vainly tried to flee death. The group that we were traveling with was a large body of our villager so we buried the dead bodies when we came upon them on our way. But after some time, we gave up this humanitarian effort because there were just too many dead Japanese for us to bury all” (p. 44-45).

War and Changes

Interestingly, however, while the sufferings were enormous, some have seen some positivity in the war coming to their land. For instance, Neiselie said, “If the Japanese had not come, we wouldn’t have got our village road. People were given compensation...” (p. 56). Lhoutuo Shiiya also has this to say, “In a way I am grateful for the coming of the Japanese, because after 1940, life became better economically. Before that, life was hard... everything was thrown out of order and our daily wages were increased” (p. 76). It may be noted here that when the British had heard of the Japanese advance via the South East Asia they brought in their best engineers in roadways, the Royal Engineers Corps, to expand the only motorable highway in the Naga Hills.

The British government undertook restoration works in various villages, perhaps, to make up for the bombings they made on those villages during the war. Neidelie (from Phesama) said, “People who had had their houses destroyed were given tin roofing sheets by the Government and many new houses were built after the war” (p. 45). Likewise at Jakhama too when the villagers came to reclaim their village, “They saw their empty granaries and worried how to survive till the harvest. But in a few days, army trucks rattled up from Kohima laden with rations of food for the people, tins of bully beef, bags of rice and tinned sardines. There was more than enough food to last them the year” (p. 37).

Whatever may have been the experiences of the people, the war certainly changed a lot of things in and around Kohima. General Slim also recounted, “Kohima had been changed beyond recognition. Most of its buildings were in ruins, walls still standing were pockmarked with shell bursts or bullet holes, the trees were stripped of leaves and parachutes hung limply from the few branches that remained” (Lyman 2011: 104). For Mari and her family, the return to their hometown Kohima and seeing the ruins of the place was heart wrenching;

The next morning we were up early, eager to go to our house. We walked through what used to be the main part of the town. None of us was ready for the terrible sight of the ravaged town. Kohima, dear, dear Kohima, had changed much from the way we remembered it. Hardly any houses were left standing. The debris of war, bombed-out houses and shelters and empty bomb shells littered the streets, we had seen war debris

on our way up from Dimapur, so we were no longer shocked.

But we were not prepared for the dead bodies littering the streets. Dead Japanese soldiers lay where they had fallen, unattended and unburied. The British army was in the process of burying its dead...

We had never seen so many dead bodies before. True, we had seen some dead Japanese soldiers in the jungles. But there were many more bodies on the streets in the town and they lay in different stages of decomposition. None of us had the stomach for it... We couldn't believe this was Kohima, this mess of human destruction...

There was nothing left of our house. The corrugated iron sheets had been removed and had been used by British troops to line the stream below our house. I suppose they did that to have some shelter from the rain at night. The walls were missing and nothing remotely resembling a house was left. There were three or four wooden house posts still standing at the back of the house, yet even these were badly damaged by bombing. (pp. 92-93)

From most of what I've heard of the Japanese withdrawal after the battle of Kohima, the local population was more sympathetic to the starved and sickly Japanese soldiers that they readily helped the dejected looking fighters. Zhovire (from Jakhama) narrated of what he saw of the Japanese withdrawal; "almost all of the surviving Japanese were in retreat along the Manipur road, a sorry straggling bunch of men, such a contrast to the arrogant army that had marched in confidently in April along the same road" (p.36-37). Further away from Kohima and into other Naga areas of Manipur, many of the rather dispersed Japanese seemed to have gone back on different routes, and not the way they came.

Conclusion

Often, it is the war memorials that become the political memory of a nation (Moya 1988: 75). Yet, it is not just the politics of 'what' to remember, but also 'how' to remember the event. While the victorious soldiers of the Kohima battle are remembered by the beautiful memorial set up in the middle of the city, the most prominent item that memorializes the defeated Japanese soldiers is their war tank that got trapped in a small gorge between two hill locks a little away from the war memorial. The war tank is properly "imprisoned" by metal fence around it, symbolic of the being captured.

For the Nagas, their experience of the Great War is etched in their memory as a point of historical reference. Not only had it awoken them of what war could do to humanity, but also of their encounter with modernity, in a way. Things did change after the war, as was narrated by some in *The Battle of Kohima*. Narratives of the historical past as a genre hold immense importance in re-imagination of the past events and how they shape individuals who lived through it. It does not just illuminate history but also draws our interest to certain characters or events that may never be mentioned in other historical narratives. Like many narratives that are central to the people's experiences of an important phase in history, *Mari* and *The Battle of Kohima*

are essential in the reconstruction of people's history. It is stories like this that makes an important portion of history, not just of WWII but also of larger historical past. For the people of this part of the Northeast, Kohima will remain important landmarks in their memories.

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