

# NEW IN NAGALAND

RAANA HAIDER

(CONCLUDING PART)

The war that changed India and the world had one of its history-changing battles take place in the sprawling hills of Kohima. Across from the Kisama show-case village built in 2003, is the War II Museum. Curated by the Imperial War Museum, London, here is a well-laid out permanent exhibition with strong visuals, maps and models and informative text that informs the visitor of the men, machineries, strategies and horrors of war. The Japanese Imperial Army was pushed back from the North-eastern gates of India by the Allied Forces in the Asia-Pacific theatre of World War II. The exhibition covers the myriad of military, political, supply, economic and social aspects of Kohima's strategic position and the most grueling campaigns in the global undertaking. One could not but become immersed in the momentous churning human grind of war. To mind came the prophetic words of Theodore Dreiser in 'A Traveller at Forty' (1913). "When one turns forty and faces one's first transatlantic voyage, it is a more portentous event that when it comes at twenty." We were all aged mid-60s plus...

Some momentous historical declarations by key players in the World War II eastern front 'Kohima Remembered' are there for us to ponder over:

In the words of Viscount Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander SE Asia. 'The Battle of Kohima will probably go down as the greatest battle in history. It was in effect the Battle of Burma.' 'He often addressed troops during the Burma Campaign with wit and humour, assuring those that they were not 'The Forgotten Army' - rather no one had even heard of them.'

Lt. General William Slim popularly known as 'Uncle Bill' declared: 'Both meant it to be decisive and so did we.' He commanded the Burma campaign and was acclaimed 'The first general World War Two produced' by Mountbatten.

On 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1944, Subhas

Chandra Bose addresses the I.N.A troops with a 'Special Order of the Day.' 'Comrades, Officers and Men of India's Army of Liberation. Let there be one solemn resolve in your hearts - Either Liberty or Death. Let there be one slogan on your lips - Onward to Delhi.'

On 18<sup>th</sup> February 1944, Lt. General Renya Mutaguchi issues his own Order. "The Army has now reached a stage of invincibility and the day when the day of victory in India is not far off...Both officers and men must fight to the death for their burden of duties which are the lot of the soldier of Japan. The will of the Emperor and our countrymen must be fulfilled."  
On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1944, Charles Pawsey, the British District Commissioner gives the officers of the battalion a farewell cocktail party in his bungalow. This is the last social occasion to be held there. An officer, Peter Steyn, later wrote about 'the beauty of the garden, the evening sunlight outside and the laughter and good fellowship inside the bungalow.' A photograph accompanies the write-up. It is the same bungalow that we visited as 'The Heritage.'

Arthur Campbell, in 'The Seige: A Story from Kohima' wrote: "In March 1944, the Japanese armies in Burma set forth to invade India...The only all-weather road over the mountains ran through Imphal (Manipur) Kohima to Dimapur where it joined the Ledo railway. These three small towns were held by British and Indian soldiers. The Japanese, basing their operations on this road, and first cutting the garrison in Imphal directed their famous 31<sup>st</sup> Division to Kohima and Dimapur. By the 5<sup>th</sup> April the Japanese had surrounded Kohima and were fast moving in on the garrison of some 2000 Indians most of them administrative troops classified 'non-combatants.'

By May 1945, it was all over. And we stood there solemnly some seventy-one years on to the day.

Kohima Cathedral dominates the densely built-up urbanized hill slopes. In

a tribute to the fallen World War II dead, the religious edifice encapsulates Naga inspired aesthetics. The architectural landmark completed in 1991 with its soaring roof is the largest in North-east India. Beautiful stained glass windows add to its serene and solemn inner beauty. The sixteen foot wooden crucifix is said to be the largest in Asia. In response to a question as to how an imposing Catholic cathedral stands tall when the majority of the population are Baptist Christians; the response was that much of the funds were provided by Japan and Italy - the defeated Axis Powers in World War II. In a meaningful

encountered at every turn. Much truth in the aphorism - 'delight in the journey and not just anticipate the destination.' Back home I thought it appropriate to delve into 'Zen and the art of travel' by Eric Chaline. And to contemplate the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: 'The difference between landscape and landscape is small, but there is a great difference between the beholders.'  
Ultimately, we stood at the base of the earlier known Garrison Hill which had at its top plateau the former British District Commissioner's tennis courts. We were standing in front of the 'Kohima Epitaph' - the historical site of the grim trench warfare. We stood in

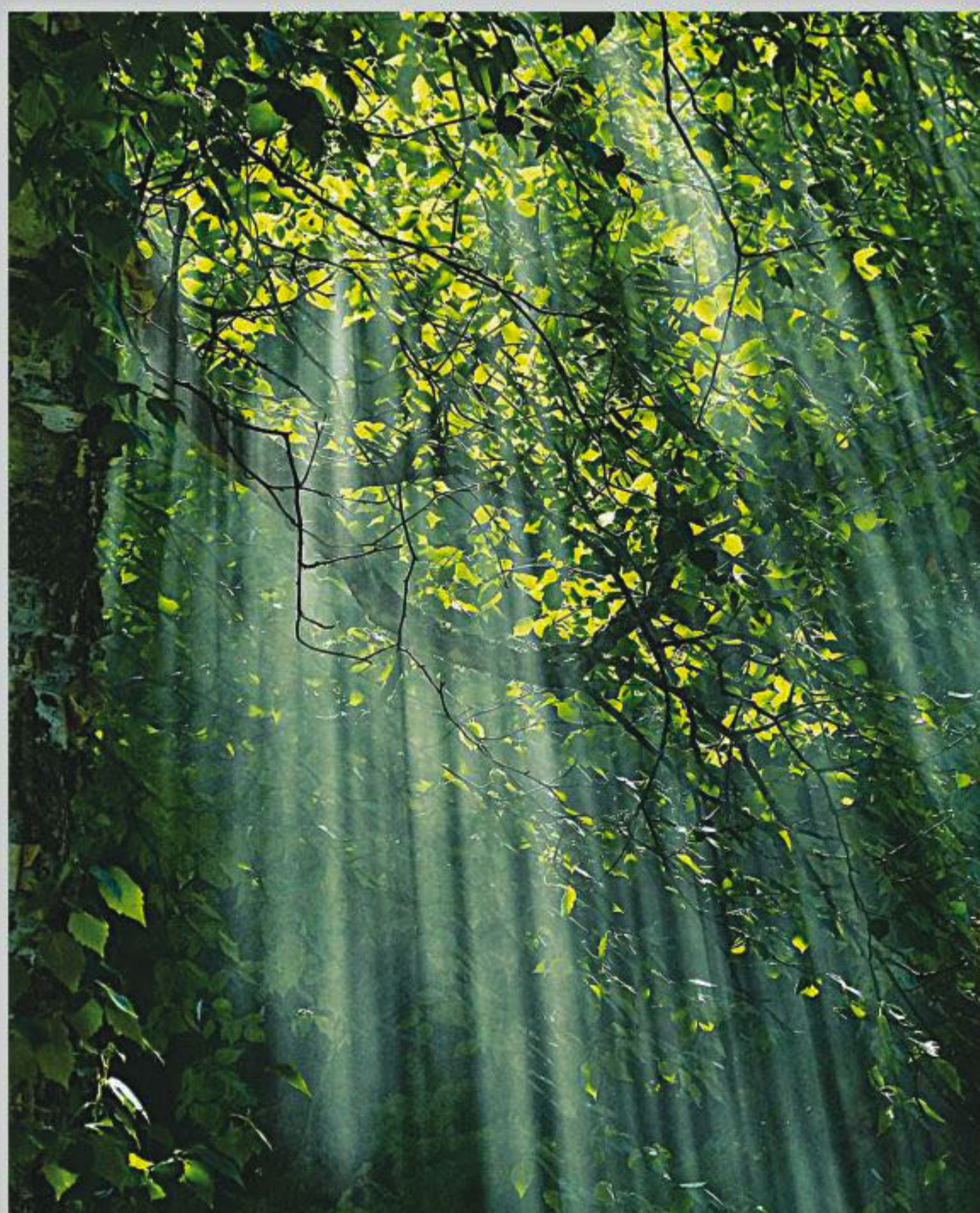
None but those who know can tell What is a parting without farewell Sepoy Sher Afzal, aged 19, of the 14<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment  
Majority of the memorial plaques bear testimony to the tender ages of the fallen. Most of the dead were in their twenties. A memorial cross is located atop the hill amidst the redrawn lies of the tennis court. Further ahead lie many memorial slabs in a Muslim section of the Allied War cemetery. The names of the Hindus and Sikhs who were war fatalities and whose remains were cremated appear in a large black marble plaque: 'In honour of these



act of reconciliation, Kohima Cathedral is the venue for meetings of Japanese and British war veterans. Here it is written: 'not a mere memory of war but also the healing place of the war memories, the real need.' Here is an inspirational symbol that is the negation of the Latin phrase: 'Damnation memoriae' (cancelled from memory).  
Prior to setting foot in Nagaland, I only knew that there was an Allied forces cemetery in a place named Kohima. It was my 'known' destination. Yet our four days of travel in the state enriched us - journeys that excited curiosity and challenged the mind. The unknown and unexpected were

silent tribute before the Kohima memorial:  
'When you go home tell them of us and say for your tomorrow we gave our today.'  
The multi-terraced and multi-faith cemetery is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The meticulously maintained green grandeur is an eloquent memorial to the 1,420 Allied War dead. Some of the tablets read:  
A Soldier of the 1939-1945 War - 'Known unto God'  
J.H. Anthony, aged 28, of The Royal Welsh Fusilliers

officers and men who died in battle and whose mortal remains were committed to fire.'  
From atop the Kohima cemetery; below us in the valley and across the horizon of hills buzzes every indicator of the hustle and bustle of humanity. On the rooftop of a building in the distance, a billboard has on it written 'Tashi Delek' - the Tibetan words so meaningful to the setting. 'May all auspicious signs come to this environment.'  
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## INTRODUCTION

MAZNU SHAH

Translated from the Bengali:  
SOFIUL AZAM

"A poem is never finished, only abandoned." - Paul Valery

May this afternoon's feeble shadows fall upon all the heady lines of my poetry, or may heaps of dry leaves blaze up in flames beside them today. On return, the hunter will see nothing but ashes flying to and fro.

How much of truth ever comes up near pleasure? I tell those driven out of a pilgrimage that all I've wished is to stuff the broken violin with all my sins.

May those birds, too, come back now, those that flew from the groves of mouri-flowers towards the sea.

On a terribly quiet night, you've known, especially after every kiss, that the weight of this foggy existence becomes a little lighter. Crested cocks and lyres - these were our last assets. Why do you hide away when the maddening rush of zebras starts! Should you wait a little, you'll see how a lonely drop of dew dissolves into the earth slowly, falling down the trunk of any of the tall trees lined along the edge of a path strewn with dead leaves and dead flowers on a morning.

See more, a few unknown birds often come up to roost among our olive trees, the birds I mistake for philosophers of a millennium before or after.

## Of Things

AZFAR HUSSAIN

1 Things matter.

2 Things are material in the hardest sense of the term. Things have shapes, textures, structures, and even timbres. Things have tones, tunes, and even resonances. Things are silent and loud. Things have forms and functions. Things have dimensions and directions. Things have surfaces and depths. Things have angles and arms. Things are in motion and things are still. Things proliferate and dwindle. Things multiply and divide. Things are dead and living. Things are spectral and corporeal. Things are transformed and distorted. Things are destroyed and created. Thus, things constitute--and are constituted by--a universe of things themselves, and relations between things, and their presences and absences, all of which together point to the materiality of things and the 'thinginess' of the material. Our world rests on--among other things--the dialectics of things.

3 Words are things themselves.

4 Bodies are things themselves.

5 I love the glossy shape of a layered onion, the textured pulp of a lonely tomato, the orange composed of the peels of flame, or even the tang of an abandoned lemon. Thus, I celebrate things themselves in the world of things--both the surfaces and substances of things.

6 When I think of the poetry of things and the poetics of things and the politics of things, I think of Pablo Neruda. I think of his "Ode to Things." I think of how he says, "I love things with a wild passion." I think of how he cherishes tongs and scissors; how he adores cups, hoops, hats--things small and things grand; how he loves dishes, vases, the curves of a shoe, or the glints of eyeglasses. He loves rings, talismans, clocks, compasses, coins, and of course the silken plushness of chairs. And he loves wondrous tables, floating ships, even broken staircases. And he loves buttons, cups, knives, shears--the

velvety depths of things, or the serene surfaces of things, or the multitude of things crafted by the human hand.

7 I think of another poet of things--Francis Ponge. He has a book of poems called "Things." He dissolves the borders and boundaries between theory and poetry while speaking of things--various things. He speaks of pebbles, handkerchiefs, fingernails, dusters, even spiders, and extra pages as things--sheer things--things that, however, clash, collide, control, resist, make, break, turn awry, and unite in the grand dialectics of things themselves.

8 Neruda again. His love of books-as-things, vibrant things, is again his love of life which is again his love of things. For Neruda, when a book becomes a little forest, and when a book reveals itself leaf after leaf, and when a book smells of the elements of the earth and fire, and when a book bears hunters and islands and roads and revelations and rebellious towns, and even when an occult book gets passed from pocket to pocket like a secret lamp--to borrow images from Neruda himself--and, above all, when a book bears human voices and is filled with human connections, things are humanized and humanity celebrates itself in the theater of things themselves, while things in turn participate as active agents and characters in the epic of humanity.

9 Things are both nouns and verbs.

10 The rage for the concrete is the rage for things themselves.

11 A thing-in-itself, a thing-into-itself, and a thing-for-itself constitute the dialectics of things which, in turn, characterize the worldliness of the world.

12 Things have histories. Things have stories.

13 When I think of the political economy of things, I think of Karl Marx. Things are given, produced, re-produced, exchanged, distributed,

and consumed within a horizon of specific social relations of production. The passage from natural things to social things under capitalism dialectically corresponds to the process of morphing a use-value into an exchange-value. Things are either useless or use-values incarnate. And the logic of capital enacts a microphysics of things such that their use-values are transformed into their exchange-values. In other words, both things-as-products-of-labor and things-provided-by-nature are turned into commodities.

14 Commodities rob things of their thingness and their lives, while treating them as containers of invisible blood--blood on sale. Or things commodified are things drenched with blood.

15 The commodification of things refers to neither a thing-in-itself nor a thing-for-itself, but to a thing-minus-itself.

16 The history of imperialism and colonialism from at least the eighteenth century onward directly attests to the colossal cycles of the capitalist extraction and commodification of an entire range of things--raw and non-raw materials, metals, minerals, and products--such as cotton, wool, coffee, cocoa, sugar, fiber, spices, rubber, silk, lumber, copper, gold, diamond, leather, coal, oil, gas, plastic, iron, steel, and so on.

17 Let's restore things to things, things to humanity, and humanity to things, inaugurating a new dialectics of things, and for that matter, new production relations of things. How do we do that? Revolution is still the answer.

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