

ABSTRACT

The nation is a sum total of people's collective memories centred on pivotal historical events. The importance of cultural memory in the realm of identity discourse arises from its mediality and capacity to be continually recreated despite being entrenched in the past. Because of its versatility, memory is a key political instrument for identity movements.

Within the context of cultural memory studies, this thesis firmly situates itself amid the contemporary discourse surrounding identity, focusing on the substantial contribution made by the brave people of Manipur and Naga hills to the wartime efforts. Amidst the tumultuous backdrop of the Battles of Kohima and Imphal, Indian soldiers and locals found themselves unwittingly thrust into the harrowing conflict between the Allied and Axis powers. Their unwavering resolve and courage illuminated the crucible of warfare, with these battles emerging as defining moments that decisively reshaped the trajectory of the global conflict. The historical records leave no room for doubt regarding the profound impact of Indian involvement in altering the course of history. However, it remains a poignant reality that, despite the undeniable loyalty and immense sacrifices made by Indian soldiers and the local population, the Empire, regrettably, never extended the recognition and gratitude they so justly deserved. These battles of Kohima and Imphal, which deserved monumental importance, were often overshadowed and underestimated, further underscoring the historical neglect of the remarkable feats achieved by those who fought and sacrificed for the British cause. This thesis seeks to rectify the historical oversight by shedding light on the significance of these battles and the enduring importance they deserved.

The battles of Kohima and Imphal, spanning just three intense months from April 4 to June 22, 1944, held decisive significance, not only for the Allied forces but also for India. Paradoxically, these events have suffered inadequate historical documentation, earning the moniker of the '**forgotten battles**' and their valiant veterans, the '**forgotten army**.' In stark contrast, WW II battles in other global regions, such as Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia, received abundant attention through books, documentaries, films, and oral accounts.

This Ph.D. thesis embarks on a careful exploration of the intricate interplay between war, collective memory, and identity discourse, primarily centred on the Battles of Kohima and

Imphal which were fought in the remote northeastern state of Manipur, transcended conventional military actions, embodying sacrifice, endurance, and extraordinary courage. Despite the strategic importance and remarkable valour displayed by both sides, these battles remained overshadowed in the broader context of WW II.

The research methodology employed for my research entailed a comprehensive analysis of archival records, oral histories, and cultural artefacts, squarely constructing a well-documented account of the Battles of Kohima and Imphal. This endeavour contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of WW II, recognising the sacrifices and contributions of those engaged in this lesser-known yet highly significant historical episode.

Comprising five comprehensive chapters, this thesis seamlessly navigates between the perspectives of Western historians and indigenous narratives within local communities, unravelling the intricate process of discursive nation-building thereby, delving into India's remarkable contribution to WW II, encompassing the contrasting narratives surrounding the INA's alliance with the Japanese.

Keywords: Cultural Memory, Collective Memory, WW II, Northeastern India, Identity Discourse, Historical Narrative, Identity Politics.