

**WAR AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY: A STUDY OF  
THE BATTLES OF KOHIMA AND IMPHAL (WORLD WAR II)**

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## Conclusion

The Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor in 1941 continues to intrigue historians due to its strategic implications and the apparent audacity of Japan's decision. Renowned naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison famously labelled Tokyo's move 'a strategic imbecility,' questioning how Japan, already embroiled in conflicts in China and contemplating potential confrontation with the Soviet Union, could embark on yet another war against a distant adversary with overwhelming industrial superiority. Despite being aware of the formidable capabilities of the United States, Japan opted to engage in a geographically limited conflict, launching an attack on Pearl Harbor(Record, 2009b).

The motives behind Japan's decision remain a subject of debate. Did the Japanese leadership fully comprehend the daunting odds stacked against them? Was their course of action driven by fatalism, delusional reasoning, or sheer desperation? And what alternatives, if any, did they consider to avoid war with the United States? These questions prompt us to delve deeper into Tokyo's strategic calculations and the complexities of Japanese military and political thinking at the time. Moreover, examining Japan's decision to initiate war in 1941 offers valuable insights into international relations and strategic planning dynamics. By understanding the interactions between U.S. and Japanese policies leading up to Pearl Harbor, we can glean important lessons applicable to contemporary national security decision-makers.

Against the backdrop of Japan's broader strategic ambitions and escalating conflict with the Allied powers, the subsequent Japanese military venture in the Manipur and Naga Hills under the codename 'Operation U Go' assumes added significance. This operation aimed to secure vital resources and strategic positions in the region. It unfolded amidst the context of the Burma campaign in 1944, a pivotal event that not only determined the outcomes for two empires but also catalysed profound transformations in the Indian freedom struggle and the lives of those residing in Manipur and the Naga Hills. Over nearly four months, a series of battles unfolded in these regions, shaping the fate of imperial powers and influencing the trajectory of the Indian struggle for independence. By exploring the motivations, challenges, and consequences of the Japanese offensive' to gain a deeper understanding of Japan's wartime strategy and its impact on the local populations in Manipur and the Naga Hills. Additionally, the study seeks to comprehend these events

through the lens of the local populace, capturing their perspectives and interpretations as they navigated through the tumultuous period of conflict.

## **1. Strategic Failures of Operation 'U Go'**

The key battles at Kohima and in the Imphal Valley significantly altered the colonial empires' fortunes. Japan's defeat in these battles marked the beginning of its irreversible decline, while for the British, it heralded the onset of triumph in WW II(P. Kumar, 2018). Moreover, these battles served as crucibles for the military leadership on both sides, leading to their removal or the bestowment of honours in the aftermath of the conflict. In May 1944, Mountbatten dismissed General Sir George Giffard, the Army Group commander. Similarly, on July 4th, 1944, General Grover was relieved of command of the British 2nd Division, much to the dismay of the division's soldiers. Conversely, on December 15th, 1944, Wavell knighted General Slim at Imphal, alongside his corps commanders, Christison, Stopford, and Scoones, on behalf of King George VI(Callahan & Marston, 2021).

On the Japanese side, General Sato was relieved of command of the 31st Division on July 7th, 1944, and subsequently dismissed on November 23rd, 1944. He was later assigned to Java before his final appointment to an army district in Japan, where he passed away in 1958 due to cirrhosis. Similarly, General Mutaguchi was sacked in December 1944 and placed on reserve status(Indonesia & 2009, n.d.).

These operations held significant strategic implications for both the British and Japanese forces. For the British, it served as a crucial turning point, halting the Japanese advance into the Indian subcontinent. Conversely, for the Japanese, the battle marked the end of their aspirations for further expansion westward. Kohima became emblematic of the British recovery of lost glory and honour, restoring their prestige despite the battle not fulfilling Churchill's hopes of saving the Raj. Nevertheless, the victory bolstered the British position, enabling them to negotiate the eventual end of their empire with a sense of restored authority.

Some strategists attributed blame to various Japanese commanders, including Sato, Mutaguchi, Miyazaki, and General Kawabe, for strategic failures and missed opportunities during the offensive in India in 1944. Despite potential victories at Imphal and Kohima, it would not have significantly altered the overall outcome of the war, given Japan's broader

struggle against American forces in the Pacific. However, the fall of Kohima and Imphal could have triggered severe political instability in British India, possibly leading to large-scale revolts against British rule, according to Major General Woodburn Kirby.

The offensive culminated in the ignominious destruction of Japan's 15th Army by July 1944, marked by disintegration in the command structure and significant casualties among troops. Japanese soldiers displayed courage and tenacity, yet their commanders' errors and disunity ultimately let them down. The British success was aided by air superiority, allowing them to sustain their forces with air-dropped supplies. The battles of Kohima and Imphal represented the largest, most intense engagements with a Japanese army during the war and have been regarded as one of Japan's most significant military disasters by historian Robert Lyman (Lyman, 2011).

## **2. Slim vs. Mutaguchi: Leadership in the Burma Campaign**

The Burma campaign of WW II witnessed a clash of contrasting leadership styles embodied by Generals William Slim and Renya Mutaguchi, whose decisions profoundly shaped the course of history in the Southeast Asian theatre. General Slim, revered for his strategic acumen and unwavering resolve, emerged as a paragon of effective leadership, while General Mutaguchi's hubris and strategic miscalculations proved costly for the Japanese forces.

General Slim's leadership during the battles of Kohima and Imphal exemplified a meticulous and adaptive approach to warfare. Recognizing the importance of defensive positioning and coordination, Slim meticulously planned defensive strategies and inspired confidence among Allied forces. His emphasis on adaptability and innovation enabled Allied troops to withstand the relentless Japanese assaults and ultimately secure victory in one of the most gruelling battles of the war. Moreover, Slim's commitment to his troops' well-being, effective communication, and problem-solving further solidified his reputation as a formidable military leader. In stark contrast, General Mutaguchi's leadership was marred by overconfidence and strategic misjudgements. Underestimating Allied forces' resilience and overestimating his army's capabilities, Mutaguchi launched a reckless offensive into challenging terrain without adequate preparation. His disregard for logistical challenges and failure to anticipate the harsh conditions faced by his troops resulted in staggering casualties and strategic setbacks for the Japanese forces. Furthermore,

Mutaguchi's reluctance to communicate openly with his commanders and his adherence to rigid principles, such as the Bushido code, hindered effective decision-making and exacerbated strategic errors (Citino, 2012).

Ultimately, the outcome of the Burma campaign hinged on the divergent leadership styles of Slim and Mutaguchi. Slim's strategic brilliance and commitment to his troops' welfare were instrumental in securing Allied victory and turning the tide of the war in the Southeast Asian theatre. In contrast, Mutaguchi's reckless gambit and lack of foresight contributed to the catastrophic defeat of the Japanese forces, underscoring the critical importance of effective leadership in determining the course of history on the battlefield.

### **3. Bushido and Surrender: Contrasting Soldier Codes in WWII**

The challenging topography and harsh climatic conditions significantly impacted the operations in Manipur and the Naga Hills. The mountainous terrain and dense jungle posed obstacles for vehicles, necessitating the use of animals like mules for transportation. Soldiers faced restricted mobility along narrow jungle roads, often getting lost in the thick vegetation. The unconventional use of gym shoes instead of military boots underscored the unique challenges of the terrain. The onset of the monsoon exacerbated transport and communication difficulties, particularly for the Japanese soldiers, who not only endured discomfort from the rain but also suffered from disrupted supply lines in the rugged terrain. Although British soldiers also faced rain-related discomfort, they did not experience shortages of supplies. The Japanese army's retreat from these areas subjected them to severe deprivation, disease, and death in harsh weather conditions. A significant portion of the Japanese 31st Division, which entered India, never returned, succumbing to the dire conditions encountered during their retreat.

The '*Bushido spirit*' (Nitobe, 2005) deeply ingrained in Japanese soldiers fuelled their resolve to continue fighting in battle, providing them with spiritual strength but ultimately resulting in uncertain glory and the sacrifice of thousands of lives when the 15th Army failed to feed them adequately. *Bushido*, instilled in Japanese soldiers from their early schooling, dictated a code of fighting to the death and refraining from surrender, seen as a shameful act bringing dishonor to oneself and one family. Surrendering Japanese soldiers were typically wounded or unconscious and captured by the British when they were unable to resist.

In dire circumstances, Japanese soldiers were instructed to opt for suicide using grenades or launch suicidal charges against the enemy, resulting in unnecessary loss of lives and resources and ultimately proving self-destructive. In contrast, British soldiers did not perceive surrender as a dishonourable act. When confronted with no viable alternative, they surrendered with dignity, upholding their sense of honour as soldiers and citizens. They even took steps to ensure their families were informed of their status, reflecting a profound commitment to duty and responsibility distinct from the Japanese approach. Notably, N. Hmar, a soldier of the 1st Assam Regiment, eloquently depicted the bravery and fearlessness of Japanese soldiers in his memoir. Throughout his campaign narratives, he underscored their courage and valour, highlighting their remarkable lack of fear and steadfast readiness to face death with unwavering bravery (Vaiphei, 2022).

#### **4. General Sato's Dilemma: Bushido Ethics and Military Defiance**

General Sato, the commander of the 31st Division tasked with advancing on the Kohima axis, faced a moral and strategic dilemma regarding his obedience to superior orders issued by General Mutaguchi. According to the tenets of the Bushido Code, which underpinned the ethical conduct of military officers, loyalty and obedience to one's superior were paramount virtues. However, General Sato's divergence from this principle arose from his reservations and disagreements with General Mutaguchi's strategic decisions and tactics, leading him to question and ultimately defy orders.

In the context of Bushido, such actions by a samurai or military officer would be viewed as a departure from expected conduct, emphasizing the importance of deference to superiors and the suppression of personal opinions or doubts. General Sato's defiance could be interpreted as a failure to uphold this aspect of the code. Nevertheless, the situation is complex and warrants nuanced consideration. General Sato's reservations regarding General Mutaguchi's strategy were legitimate, reflecting a conscientious concern for the welfare and safety of his troops. His decision to challenge orders may have been motivated by a genuine desire to prevent unnecessary bloodshed and protect his men, illustrating the ethical dilemmas often faced in military leadership.

Furthermore, post-war perceptions of General Sato's actions in Japan suggest a reinterpretation of his defiance. Rather than viewing it as a breach of the Bushido code, his conduct was regarded as a demonstration of integrity and commitment to the well-

being of his soldiers(D. C.-I. R. Journal & 2014, 2014; Lee, 1992). This interpretation underscores the intricate challenges of military leadership and the inherent tensions between traditional codes of conduct and pragmatic decision-making in the midst of warfare. Ultimately, General Sato's case exemplifies the complexities of ethical decision-making in military contexts, where rigid adherence to doctrine must contend with the exigencies of moral responsibility and the imperative of protecting those under one's command.

## **5. The Japanese Burma Campaign: Strategic Errors and Evolution**

Japanese offensive was aimed to secure strategic areas near Imphal and northeastern India to bolster the defense of Burma. Led by General Renya Mutaguchi, the Japanese Fifteenth Army executed a multi-pronged assault with divisions including the 15th, 31st, and 33rd. The objective was to disrupt Allied supply lines and compel their withdrawal from the theatre. However, 'Operation U-Go' proved disastrous for the Japanese. The British Fourteenth Army decisively defeated the Fifteenth Army, resulting in significant casualties. Japan lost 65,000 soldiers out of the 155,000 committed to the offensive, with staggering casualty rates within combat units(Century & 2018, n.d.).

The failure of 'Operation U-Go' underscored strategic miscalculations by Japanese planners. The offensive exceeded the operational capabilities of the Fifteenth Army, lacking sufficient combat power to achieve its objectives. Mismanagement of finite resources and ineffective sequencing of tactical actions undermined the operation's strategic goals. The assessment of the Japanese Burma Campaign begins with an examination of three key criteria: massed effects at the decisive point, air superiority, and operational reach. Analysing the progress focusing on the Japanese Fifteenth and the British Fourteenth Armies, highlighting quantitative shifts in these criteria between 1942 and 1944, provides a comprehensive understanding of the campaign's evolution over time(Crosthwaite, 2016b).

'Massed effects at the decisive point' derives from Jominian principles of war, emphasizing the concentration of military power at critical junctures. The Japanese aimed to seize key terrain in the Manipur and Nga Hills, believing it would allow them to concentrate their forces against the British. Yet Field Marshal William Slim, recognizing the importance of controlling the skies, utilized air assets to reposition and resupply his

forces, ultimately achieving numerical superiority and massing effects at the decisive point(Crosthwaite, 2016b).

‘Air superiority’ is fundamental in warfare, granting the possessor greater flexibility in military operations. John Warden, a retired US Air Force officer and military theorist argued that no major offensive has succeeded against an opponent with air superiority(Barlow, 1994). In the Burma Campaign, air superiority initially favoured the Japanese (till 1942) but later transitioned to the Allied forces, enabling them to exert control over the battlefield(Ledwidge, 2018).

‘Operational reach’ is the military's ability to employ its forces effectively in combat. This is influenced by factors such as terrain, weather, and logistical capabilities. In Burma, the challenging terrain and weather conditions restricted both Japanese and British movements. In the Burma campaign, the Japanese relied heavily on pack animals for ground supply transportation, contrasting with the British, who had a vehicle-based army. Japanese tactics, emphasizing envelopment and jungle manoeuvres, suited their foot-based army and logistical system. Their aggressive strategy often depended on capturing enemy supplies to bolster their own operations, resulting in a narrow logistical margin for error(Crosthwaite, 2016b).

Prior to ‘Operation U Go’ the key characteristic for successful Japanese operations in Southeast Asia was their short lines of communication. However, their critical vulnerability lay in projecting and sustaining forces across long communication lines without access to captured enemy supplies which got starkly exposed during ‘Operation U-Go’ in 1944, when the Fifteenth Army failed to secure British supplies at Imphal and Kohima(Crosthwaite, 2016b).

The Battle of Kohima and Imphal, fought during WW II, represents a critical juncture in the global conflict and a defining moment in the histories of colonial empires. These battles, situated in the rugged terrain of Northeast India, not only shifted the tides of war but also left an indelible imprint on collective memory and historical consciousness. As this thesis on 'War and Collective Memory: A Study of the Battles of Kohima and Imphal (WW2)' draws to a close, it becomes evident that these engagements transcend conventional military narratives. They have become enduring symbols that resonate deeply within the psyches of nations, shaping narratives of sacrifice, resilience, and the



complexities of colonial power dynamics. In this concluding analysis, I explore the profound and lasting implications of these battles, examining how they continue to influence the construction of historical narratives and the remembrance of wartime experiences across generations.

## **6. WW II and Its Role in Shaping National Unity**

The memory of World War II continues to resonate deeply among the people of Northeast India, particularly in Manipur and the Naga Hills, where the conflict profoundly shaped historical consciousness. The war's impact extended beyond the immediate horrors of violence and suffering, as it brought significant exposure to global events and modern developments previously unfamiliar to the region. This interaction introduced new ways of life and connected the region more closely with the broader global landscape.

Various stakeholders have remembered and commemorated the war's legacy differently. The British, as the victors, have often emphasized narratives of heroism and triumph, celebrating their military successes and the valour of their soldiers. This is consistent with the broader tendency for historical narratives to be shaped by the perspectives of the victors. In contrast, the Japanese, having faced significant defeat, have demonstrated humility in acknowledging their wartime losses and have contributed to memorial efforts, such as the construction of the Cathedral Church at Kohima, which is dedicated to the soldiers who laid down their lives during the bloody war, features inscriptions honouring the fallen, and has served as a venue for reconciliation meetings between Japanese and British veterans, symbolizing a shared remembrance and a commitment to peace.

In addition to this, Japan has also constructed the Peace Museum at Maibam Lokpaching, also known as the 'India Peace Memorial', to honour Japanese soldiers who joined the INA and fought alongside them against British colonial forces. This act of commemoration not only honours the Japanese martyrs but also reflects the shared historical experiences of wartime alliances and sacrifices.

The INA, under the leadership of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, played a huge role in inspiring nationalist sentiments across India. Despite limited military success, the INA's efforts significantly contributed to the broader struggle for Indian independence. Their defiance against British colonial rule challenged the authority of the British Empire and fuelled nationalist fervour.

WW II has hugely served as a catalyst for unifying Northeast India with the rest of the nation. Prior to the conflict, the people of the region had minimal or no idea of India as a unified nation. However, the shared experiences of wartime hardship and the subsequent rise in nationalistic consciousness fostered a stronger sense of belonging to the Indian nation-state. These events collectively underscored the transformative impact of WW II in reshaping the historical, cultural, and political landscape of Northeast India and beyond.

## **7. Findings**

7.1 Undertaking Operation U-Go by the Japanese forces was a significant turning point in the Burma campaign, marking a critical juncture wherein the fortunes of both belligerent parties diverged. Under General Mutaguchi Renya, the Japanese 15th Army undertook this ambitious endeavour to secure strategic objectives in the Imphal Plain and Kohima. However, while bold in conception, this strategic gambit proved ultimately detrimental to the Axis cause due to a series of critical misjudgements.

Fundamentally, Operation U-Go was premised on a flawed assessment of the British forces under General William Slim, erroneously perceived as weakened and demoralized. This erroneous assumption led the Japanese command to anticipate a swift and decisive victory, prompting a diversion of considerable resources to support the operation. Yet, the Japanese intelligence apparatus failed to accurately gauge the strength and resilience of the Allied forces, who had been reinforced and prepared to withstand the impending assault. Moreover, operational deficiencies further compounded the challenges faced by the Axis forces. Inadequate logistical planning, insufficient supplies, and a dearth of air support severely undermined the Japanese advance, impeding their ability to effectively prosecute the campaign. In stark contrast, the British forces, fortified by entrenched positions and robust supply lines, mounted a resolute defense that repelled the Japanese incursion.

The repercussions of Operation U-Go were profound and far-reaching for the Axis forces in Burma. Suffering heavy casualties exceeding 30,000 soldiers killed or wounded, the Japanese army found itself depleted of vital resources, rendering it susceptible to subsequent Allied counteroffensives. Conversely, the Allied triumph in thwarting Operation U-Go instilled them with renewed momentum, catalysing a series

of successful counterattacks that ultimately expelled the Japanese from Burma and facilitated Allied advance into Southeast Asia.

7.2. In April 2013, the battle of Kohima was acclaimed as Britain's greatest battle by the National War Museum, surpassing historically renowned engagements such as Waterloo and the Normandy landings. However, despite this notable recognition, the significance of Kohima and Imphal in the broader historical narrative of WW II remains relatively subdued. This phenomenon can be attributed to several interrelated factors that have contributed to their marginalization within historical discourse:

**7.2.1. Lack of awareness.** The battles of Kohima and Imphal unfolded in one of the remotest corners of northeast India, distanced from the primary theatres of WW II in Europe and the Pacific. Consequently, they received scant attention and coverage in contemporary media and historical accounts. This geographical remoteness hindered their visibility and contributed to their relative obscurity within the broader narrative of the war.

**7.2.2. British colonial legacy.** The battles pitted British colonial forces against the Japanese army, evoking a complex and sensitive legacy tied to British colonial rule in India. The colonial era remains a contentious period in Indian history, and the battles of Kohima and Imphal may serve as touching reminders of British imperialism. Consequently, discussions surrounding these battles may be fraught with nuanced historical interpretations influenced by post-colonial perspectives.

**7.2.3. Overemphasis on European theatre.** Historically, the European theatre of WW II has commanded greater attention and focus in historical narratives, often overshadowing the significance of battles fought in other regions, such as Asia. This Eurocentric bias has diminished appreciation for the strategic importance and human sacrifices associated with engagements in lesser-known theatres like Burma.

7.2.4. **Limited documentation and records.** The remote and inaccessible nature of the region where the battles occurred posed challenges in documenting and recording the events. As a result, historical records and accounts of the battles may be sparse or fragmented, complicating efforts to reconstruct and analyze the events with precision. This scarcity of archival materials has contributed to gaps in our understanding of the battles' intricacies and consequences.

7.2.5. **Post-colonial narratives.** In the post-colonial era, there has been a discernible shift towards prioritizing national and regional narratives, often at the expense of colonial legacies. This shift may have diminished attention towards the battles of Kohima and Imphal, as they are situated within the broader context of British colonial rule in India. Post-colonial perspectives may engender critical reassessments of these battles within the framework of decolonization and national identity.

7.2.6. **Global perspective.** While the battles of Kohima and Imphal were integral components of a larger global conflict, their significance may be overshadowed by more prominent events and theatres of war. In the broader context of WW II, where multiple theatres vied for attention, the battles in Burma may have been eclipsed by other strategic engagements and geopolitical developments.

7.2.7. **Competition for attention.** The wartime period witnessed many significant events and battles, each vying for attention and recognition amidst a global conflict. In this milieu, the battles of Kohima and Imphal faced stiff competition for attention from other theatres and campaigns, potentially relegating them to the periphery of historical discourse.

7.2.8. **Historical context.** The battles of Kohima and Imphal unfolded within the historical context of British colonial rule in India, engenders complex and multifaceted interpretations. The legacies of colonialism, nationalism, and post-colonial identity politics intersect in discussions surrounding these battles, shaping perceptions and scholarly discourse.

This nuanced historical context underscores the challenges of comprehensively understanding and interpreting the significance of these engagements within the broader canvas of WW II.

7.3. The twin battles of Imphal and Kohima are often termed the ‘forgotten battles’ since these battles were fought in the remotest part of northeastern India, far from the main war theatres, with limited/no media coverage and public awareness. Though strategically important, these battles were smaller in scale compared to other significant engagements like Stalingrad or Normandy, which led to less prominence in historical accounts. Additionally, veterans of the Burma Campaign, including those from Imphal and Kohima, felt neglected in post-war commemorations and support programs. Over time, these factors combined to overshadow the significance of these battles and the sacrifices of those who fought in them, earning them the title of ‘Forgotten Army.’

7.4. The implications of the outcome of the Battles of Kohima and Imphal, indeed had profound implications for various stakeholders, including the local populace of Manipur and the Naga Hills, as well as the Japanese, allied forces, and the INA.

The battles brought significant suffering and upheaval for the Manipur and the Naga Hills local populace. Caught in the crossfire between the warring factions, civilians endured immense hardships, including displacement, loss of property, and casualties. The conflict disrupted their lives and shattered their communities, making a profound and lasting impact on the region's social fabric. Additionally, the disappointment felt by the Nagas, who fought alongside the British in the hope of recognition of a separate nation after the war, further exacerbated their sense of disillusionment and marginalization. The Japanese forces suffered a significant defeat in this operation, marking a turning point in their expansionist ambitions in the region. This defeat weakened their military capabilities and undermined their political and ideological influence. Similarly, the INA, which aligned with the Japanese, faced a setback that hampered its movement and almost diminished its relevance in the post-war landscape.

The British-Indian victory in the Battles of Kohima and Imphal undoubtedly elevated their stature as a significant power in Asia, underscoring their military prowess and

extending their political influence. This triumph not only thwarted Japanese ambitions for expansion but also solidified British control over key territories. However, this victory was not achieved without significant sacrifice. The human toll, encompassing both military personnel and civilian populations, was substantial, with casualties mounting on all sides. Additionally, the battles precipitated large-scale displacement, forcing numerous individuals to abandon their homes for safety. Despite the strategic gains, the British Empire grappled with the immense financial burdens wrought by the cataclysmic scale of WW II. This fiscal strain ultimately heralded the beginning of the decline of the British colonial empire, as the post-war landscape ushered in an era of decolonization and shifting global power dynamics.

7.5. The loyalty of the Nagas to the Allied forces during the Battle of Kohima was shaped by a complex mix of historical, cultural, and survivalist factors. Initially neutral, the Nagas held ambivalent feelings towards both the British and Japanese due to historical grievances against British colonial exploitation and shared cultural ties with the Japanese. However, their eventual alignment with the British and Allies was influenced by several key factors. Firstly, the longstanding relationship with the British, marked by governance structures and fair treatment by officials like Charles Pawsey, fostered trust and positive sentiment among certain Naga communities. Secondly, the aggressive behaviour of the Japanese, including the forcible seizure of livestock and resources, shattered any remaining sympathies towards them. These actions served as a wake-up call, prompting the Nagas to perceive the British as a more reliable protector against external threats like Japanese expansionism. Lastly, strategic considerations played a role, as the Nagas recognized the importance of British control in maintaining stability and safeguarding their communities. Aligning with the British was seen as a practical means of preserving their cultural identity and autonomy amidst the chaos of war.

7.6. The recruitment strategies employed by the British to enlist Indians into the army during the interwar period and WW II were multifaceted and deeply intertwined with their colonial objectives, including the infamous ‘divide and rule’ tactic.

Propaganda was primarily employed as a potent tool to exalt the Indian Army, portraying it as a symbol of British imperial might and aiming to instill pride and

patriotism among Indian populations. This narrative sought to garner support for British rule while simultaneously cultivating loyalty to the colonial administration. Furthermore, the British government's unilateral decision to commit Indian resources to the war effort without consulting colonial subjects epitomized their authoritarian approach to resource mobilization. By asserting control over Indian manpower and other resources, the colonial administration reaffirmed its dominance and highlighted the unequal power dynamics inherent in colonial rule. The implementation of coercive tactics, such as conscripting impoverished and marginalized individuals, underscored the exploitative nature of British recruitment strategies. These measures, driven by the imperative to meet recruitment quotas, demonstrated the lengths colonial authorities were willing to go to sustain their military strength.

Racial and regional considerations also influenced recruitment practices, with the British Army focusing on recruiting from specific '*martial races*' while simultaneously challenging stereotypes about martial abilities by enlisting from '*non-martial*' groups. This approach aimed to exploit perceived differences among Indian communities while fostering competition and division. Additionally, the British extended recruitment efforts to the lowest socio-economic strata, including untouchables (Dalits) and tribal communities, as part of a broader strategy to broaden the pool of potential recruits and address labour shortages.

In essence, the recruitment strategies adopted by the British were not only aimed at bolstering military strength but also served to reinforce colonial control and perpetuate divisions among Indian communities. The tactics employed, including propaganda, coercion, and racial profiling, underscored the exploitative nature of British colonialism and its reliance on divisive tactics to maintain power.

The battles of Kohima and Imphal during WW II, while initially relegated to the periphery of historical discourse, have emerged as critical touchstones in the exploration of war and cultural memory. Despite their geographical remoteness and the passage of time, these battles continue to resonate profoundly, underscoring the complex interplay between geopolitics, colonial legacies, and individual agency. Through a nuanced examination of the implications of these battles for various stakeholders, including local populations, combatants, and imperial powers, this study

has shed light on the enduring significance of these engagements within the broader canvas of WW II. Moreover, the exploration of recruitment strategies, loyalty dynamics, and post-colonial narratives has enriched our understanding of the intricate webs of power, identity, and memory that shape historical narratives. As we confront the challenges of reconciling divergent interpretations and commemorating the sacrifices of those who fought in these forgotten battles, this research underscores the imperative of preserving and interrogating cultural memory to reckon with the complexities of war and its enduring legacies. Through interdisciplinary inquiry and engagement with diverse perspectives, we can continue to unravel the multifaceted tapestry of war and cultural memory, illuminating the shadows of history and honouring the resilience of those who shaped its course.