

# **CHAPTER-1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 . Introducing the Study**

World War II (henceforth WW II) was one of the most disastrous events in the history of mankind. During this war, the whole world in pursuit of their individual strategic goals got divided into two opposite alliances: the Allied and the Axis. It started on 01 Sep 1939, when Germany attacked Poland, followed by a declaration of war on Germany by France and the United Kingdom(Record, 2009b). Japan, at that point in time, was a major power and was in control of a large part of the Western Pacific. It is believed that there were two reasons for the Burma campaign of the Japanese; firstly, the plan was to cut the lines of communication leading from Burma to China, thereby depriving the Chinese Army of supplies and thus facilitating the Japanese take-over of the whole of China. Secondly, control of Burma would place the Japanese at the gate of India, a boiling pot in pursuit of freedom from the colonial empire (Byers, 2014).

During the 1930s, tensions over territorial and economic dominance kept brewing amongst the conflicting nations. The Empire of Japan aimed to assert its dominance over Asia and the Pacific, a goal evident in its ongoing conflict with the Republic of China since 1937 (Duara, 2008). In 1939, the United States ended its trade agreement with Japan, starting economic pressure. One of the first steps was banning aviation gasoline in July 1940. Despite a number of skirmishes between China and Japan, the war between the two countries reached a stalemate by 1940. To further exert pressure on China and position its forces strategically in anticipation of potential conflicts with Western powers, Japan invaded and occupied northern Indo-China. In response, the United States imposed sanctions on Japan, including embargoes on iron, steel, and mechanical parts(Sagan, 1988).

By September 1940, the Tripartite Pact allied Japan with Italy, and Germany, solidifying the Axis powers(Spain et al., n.d.). Inspired by Germany's success in Europe, Japan increased pressure on Southeast Asian governments. The Dutch initially agreed to supply Japan with oil from the Dutch East Indies, but further negotiations failed in June 1941. In July of that year, Japan deployed troops to southern Indo-China, posing a threat to British and Dutch territories in the region (Garry Clifford & Okura, 2013). In response, the United

States, United Kingdom, and other Western nations froze Japanese assets and imposed a total oil embargo. Meanwhile, Japan considered invading the Soviet Far East, hoping to benefit from Germany's invasion of the West, but abandoned the plan after facing sanctions(Marshall, 1995).

In early 1941, the United States and Japan entered negotiations to ease their strained relations and address the ongoing conflict in China. Japan proposed several initiatives during these talks, which fell short of the American's expectations(Garry Clifford & Okura, 2013). Concurrently, the US, Britain, and the Netherlands held secret negotiations to defend their territories against potential Japanese aggression collectively. President Roosevelt bolstered defenses in the Philippines and cautioned Japan against attacking neighbouring nations. However, with negotiations stalling and faacing economic pressure from American-led sanctions, Japan also started preparing for the war. On 20<sup>th</sup> November, a new government led by Hideki Tojo presented a final proposal, seeking an end to American aid to China and the supply of vital resources to Japan in exchange for a commitment not to engage in military actions in Southeast Asia and to withdraw from southern Indo-China. In response, the American counter-proposal on 26<sup>th</sup> November demanded Japan's unconditional withdrawal from China and the establishment of non-aggression pacts with all Pacific powers. Essentially, Japan was confronted with a choice: relinquish its ambitions in China or seize the necessary resources from the Dutch East Indies by force. The Japanese military, viewing the former option as untenable, interpreted the oil embargo as a de facto declaration of war (Grace, 1979). (Figure-1.1)

In his study, Jeffrey Record provides a thorough re-evaluation of the factors that led Japan to enter WW II. He argues that Japan's decision was influenced by a mix of nationalistic fervour and perceived economic threats from the United States. Faced with the choice of either abandoning its ambitions in China or resorting to force to secure resources in the Dutch East Indies, Japan's military leaders saw the latter as the only viable option. The imposition of an oil embargo by the United States was interpreted by Japan as an implicit declaration of war, prompting a militaristic response. Japan's plan involved swiftly

capturing European colonies in Asia to establish a defensive perimeter extending into the Central Pacific. This strategy aimed to exploit Southeast Asian resources while weakening Allied forces through defensive warfare. A key aspect of this plan was neutralizing the

United States Pacific fleet and military presence in the Philippines to prevent American intervention and secure the perimeter.

Consequently, on December 7, 1941, Japan officially entered WW II by attacking the United States naval fleet at Pearl Harbor. This was followed by assaults on the United Kingdom in Malaya on December 8, 1941, and the Philippines on December 10, 1941. The coordinated attacks led to formal declarations of war against Japan by the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Australia, and several other nations. Despite these declarations, the Soviet Union engaged in hostilities against European Axis powers, maintaining neutrality with Japan. In a show of support for Japan, Germany and other Axis states declared war on the United States, citing American attacks on German war vessels authorized by President Roosevelt as justification.

Hereafter, in a series of rapid and decisive military campaigns, Japan swiftly captured key territories in Southeast Asia. By April 1942, Japanese forces had effectively conquered Burma, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, and Rabaul, inflicting significant casualties on Allied troops and taking numerous prisoners. Notably, there was a juncture where Japanese advancement suggested a potential expansion into India, had their momentum not been halted following the fall of Burma. Furthermore, Japanese naval forces secured victories in the South China Sea, Java Sea, and the Indian Ocean, demonstrating their dominance at sea (Figure-1.2). Additionally, the bombing of the Allied naval base at Darwin, Australia, underscored Japan's military prowess and strategic reach. These rapid triumphs over the unprepared United States and European enemies left Japan overconfident (Record, 2009a).

Following the British retreat from Burma in early 1942, an arduous journey unfolded, marked as the longest march in the history of the British Army. Covering over 1000 miles, the retreat took three and a half months to complete. By this time, the first wave of refugees from Burma began arriving in Kohima, with destitute groups of soldiers continuing to pour in by February. To address the influx of refugees, a shelter was established at the middle school in Kohima. The Governor of Assam's Daily Refugee Report to the Viceroy of India on May 14, 1942, documented large parties of refugees attempting to reach the railhead at Dimapur. By May 18, the governor reported that approximately 3000 refugees per day were making their way to Dimapur. The British suffered significant losses during this retreat, with 13,463 soldiers either killed, wounded, or succumbing to disease. The mass

movement of people, traversing traditional Naga communities, had profound psychological and physical impacts on the local population (Roy, 2016) (Figure-1.3).

In India, the emergence of the 'Quit India' movement in August 1942, precipitated a significant internal crisis, creating vulnerabilities ripe for exploitation. Indeed, had the Japanese chosen to attack India at this juncture, particularly in Eastern India, their prospects for success would have been considerably favourable (Record, 2009a). By mid-1942, British confidence in defending critical regions such as Bengal and Assam against a full-scale Japanese assault was notably low, prompting considerations of strategic withdrawal toward the Chotanagpur plateau (Sarkar, 1989).

Although the Japanese refrained from capitalizing on this opportune moment, they launched an offensive into India only in the spring of 1944, culminating in a series of battles in Manipur and Naga Hills. In these engagements, the Japanese and the Indian National Army (henceforth INA), under Subhas Chandra Bose, aligned against British and Allied forces (Jha, 2018b). The battles fought between the belligerents at Kohima and Imphal represented pivotal moments in the Southeast Asian conflict, particularly within the broader Burma campaign. Understanding these engagements is essential for grasping the significance of the overall war effort.

During these skirmishes, Kohima, Imphal, and Dimapur emerged as crucial logistical centres for British operations in the region. Kohima held strategic importance as a junction facilitating movement toward Dimapur in the northwest, Imphal in the south, and Jessami and Chindwin in the east. The Japanese viewed capturing Kohima as vital for controlling Southeast Asia, while the British deemed holding Kohima as crucial for defending the entire Indian subcontinent. These battles were integral to the ebb and flow of the conflict in Southeast Asia, highlighting the strategic importance of these key locations (Roy, 2016-c).

## **1.2. Japan's Evolving Geopolitical Approach in Southeast Asia**

During the 1930s, Japan initiated a bold endeavour known as the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.' This initiative aimed to establish an economic bloc fostering collective development among Asian nations while concurrently challenging Western imperialism in the region (J. M.-T. A.-P. Journal & 2011, n.d.). However, interpretations of this policy

have often diverged significantly between Eastern and Western perspectives. While Western observers often construed it as a guise for aggressive Japanese expansionism, particularly in relation to China and Southeast Asia, Japanese leadership vehemently argued for redressing global inequalities and advancing towards a more equitable international order(Ford, 2012).

A complex interplay of social and economic dynamics, both internal and external influenced the geopolitical strategy pursued by Japan in Southeast Asia. Japan's historical trajectory since its modernization in the late 19th century was characterized by a persistent pursuit of territorial expansion, deeply entrenched within its military apparatus. This expansionist drive was not solely a product of historical imperatives but also stemmed from pragmatic considerations, notably the imperative of securing access to crucial resources for Japan to be a world power(F. K.-(No Title), n.d.). The imperative for territorial expansion curtailed Japan's reliance on external sources for critical raw materials, machinery, and foodstuffs, rendering its economy vulnerable to disruptions in international supply chains. For instance, Japan's heavy reliance on oil imports, which constituted up to 80% of its total consumption and were largely sourced from the United States, underscored a strategic vulnerability that was both humiliating and economically debilitating. Japan embarked on ambitious industrialization drives to mitigate such vulnerabilities, particularly in the iron, steel, and heavy engineering sectors. However, direct control over resource-rich territories in China and elsewhere was deemed indispensable by Japanese industrialists, policymakers, and military strategists.

In pursuit of its strategic interests and to undermine the dominance of Western colonial powers in the region, Japan undertook this campaign, called the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,' which advocated the notion of 'Asia for Asians' and aimed to garner support from indigenous populations while also advancing Japan's hegemonic ambitions. Even though Japan purported to champion the liberation of Southeast Asia from Western colonial rule under the banner of the Co-Prosperity Sphere, its primary motivation may have been its quest for economic self-sufficiency and resource acquisition(Mori, 2006).

However, despite the appeal of the 'Asia for Asians' rhetoric, which resonated with populations long subjected to colonial domination, Japan's true intentions became increasingly apparent. Barker and Calvocoressi noted that the Co-Prosperity Sphere was a thinly veiled pretext for Japanese imperialism to replace existing colonial structures with

a new Japanese-led order. The Japanese vision of a 'New Order' in Asia entailed gradually dismantling Western colonial footholds, unfolding through a widening circle of territorial conquests and strategic alliances(Peng, 1995).

To garner support from Asian people, Japan sought to demonstrate its commitment to the independence of Asian countries by convening a conference in Tokyo in November 1943. This gathering included representatives from Burma, the Philippines, Thailand, Manchukuo, and factions opposed to Chiang Kai-shek's regime in China. Notably, Subhas Chandra Bose, was also extended an invitation (Figure-3). The conference concluded with a joint declaration pledging mutual support for the independence aspirations of Asian nations(Gotō, 2003). However, Dower has suggested that the true intention behind the conference was to undermine Western allies and dissuade them from pursuing plans for the reconquest of territories under Japanese control. Through propagandist efforts, Japan aimed to convince the people of Southeast Asian countries that Japanese occupation would inevitably lead to liberation from European colonial rule(Dower, n.d.).

The concept of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, articulated by Japan, encompassed a vast expanse of territories, including the former German Pacific Islands, Hong Kong, French Indo-China, Singapore, Thailand, British Malaya, Borneo, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, and New Guinea. However, the precise boundaries of this sphere remained ambiguous, subject to expansion as dictated by Japanese civilian and military elites' objectives(Yellen, n.d.). As tensions escalated, Japan's strategic imperatives included additional territories within the Co-Prosperity Sphere, extending to Southeast Asia up to the Burmese frontier with India and encompassing the Pacific islands north of Australia towards Hawaii(Tarling, 2001). These geopolitical considerations ultimately drove Japan's decision to initiate military campaigns, including the incursion into India in the spring of 1944(C. Kolakowski, 2022a).

### **1.3. Cooperation to Conflict: A Shift in Anglo-Japanese Relations**

Anglo-Japanese rivalry emerged due to broader geopolitical dynamics that ultimately precipitated a significant conflict in Southeast Asia. During WW I, Britain and Japan enjoyed a cordial relationship as allies within a shared power bloc, reciprocally providing financial and logistical assistance. Japan's assistance to Britain resulted in the acquisition of numerous British markets across Asia and Africa(Olsen & McIntosh, n.d.). However,

this camaraderie dissolved during WW II, as Japan was positioned against Britain and its allies.

In the 1930s, while the Anglo-Japanese rivalry remained latent, Japan, embroiled in the conflict with China, avoided entanglements with other powers. Nonetheless, the rise of Japan as a formidable Asian power presented a challenge to British interests, compounded by the economic downturn of the British Empire following WW I. The Washington Naval Treaty further weakened Britain's presence in the Far East, compelling the withdrawal of capital ships and reliance on smaller vessels and garrisons, epitomized by the costly yet symbolic Singapore naval base. British defense strategy hinged on the retention of Singapore and the Dutch East Indies to deter large-scale incursions into Indian territories (Irwin & Woodcock, 1975).

By 1936, the British Indian general staff had formulated strategic plans to counter potential unilateral or multilateral threats, chiefly from Japan, Italy, and Germany, envisioning Japanese submarine activity as the primary menace. However, Japan's opportunism escalated after the outbreak of war in Europe, exploiting Britain's vulnerabilities (M. H.-(No Title) & 1981, n.d.). Britain, constrained by limited resources, adopted a policy of appeasement toward Japan, evident in the closure of the Burma Road to avoid antagonizing the Japanese.

The outbreak of the European War intersected with the Japanese-American rivalry, complicating Anglo-Japanese relations. American aid became pivotal for the European War efforts, necessitating a shift from appeasement to a more pragmatic stance toward Japan. Recognizing the imminent threat to its interests, Britain acknowledged the necessity of bolstering its defences in Southeast Asia. Despite Britain's reluctance to extend the conflict to Asia and risk alienating American support, the outbreak of war in the Far East in December 1941 marked the culmination of the Anglo-Japanese rivalry as Japan launched attacks on British colonies in Southeast Asia (Relations & 1600–2000, n.d.).

#### **1.4. Contextual Framework of the Current Study**

Burma, now known as Myanmar, occupies a key position in Southeast Asia, bordered by India, China, and Thailand. This nation was under British rule before WW II (Nyunt, 2016). The British administration, established in the mid-19th century, relied on local elites to

govern the territory. Key urban centres included Rangoon, a major coastal port, and Mandalay, situated along the Irrawaddy River. Burma's tropical climate is characterized by two distinct seasons; a dry period from November to May and a monsoon season from June to October. The monsoon drastically alters the landscape, inundating lowlands and swelling rivers, impeding movement and access. The geography of Burma features extensive river networks, dense jungles, and rugged mountain ranges. The Chindwin, Irrawaddy, and Salween Rivers dissect the country, hindering mobility and serving as formidable military obstacles. Among these, the Irrawaddy, stretching 1,300 miles and up to three miles wide, holds particular strategic importance. Mountain ranges run parallel to the rivers, acting as natural barriers separating Burma from neighbouring states(Murphy, 1931). These mountains, described as rugged and jungle-covered, present formidable challenges to ground-based operations. Such terrain complexity significantly influenced military strategies and operations in Burma.

During WW II, Burma became a theatre of conflict for various reasons. The British sought to maintain control over the region, while the Allies utilized northern Burma as a vital overland route to supply China. The Burma Road, crucial for Allied support to China, posed strategic dilemmas for the Japanese, tying down significant resources(Foundation, 2001). In January 1942, the Japanese launched a decisive offensive into Burma, employing strategic envelopment and roadblock tactics to swiftly overwhelm the Allied defenses. Their lightning three-pronged attack, executed by two divisions of the Fifteenth Army, capitalized on the terrain's complexity, particularly jungle passes originating from Siam and Malaya(Allen, 1990). The Japanese effectively hampered British mobility and severed their lines of communication. The British, reliant on motorized forces and missing air superiority, faced a formidable adversary. The ensuing defeat forced the longest withdrawal in British military history, spanning nearly one thousand miles through hostile jungle terrain over five months(Heath, 2021).

‘Operation U Go’, launched by the overconfident Japanese Army on March 8, 1944, aimed to secure strategic areas near Imphal and northeastern India to bolster the defense of Burma. The Japanese Fifteenth Army under General Renya Mutaguchi, 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(Science & 2021, n.d.). However, ‘Operation U-Go’ proved disastrous for the Japanese. The British



Fourteenth Army decisively defeated the Japanese 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(Y. Kangjam, Japan, et al., n.d.).

According to Crosthwaite, PS, the failure of 'Operation U Go' was a strategic miscalculation 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 examining 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.

'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.

'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. In the Burma Campaign, air superiority initially favoured the Japanese (till 1942) but later transitioned to the Allied forces, enabling them to control the battlefield.

'Operational reach' is the military's ability to employ its forces effectively in combat. This is influenced by terrain, weather, and logistical capabilities. The challenging terrain and weather conditions in Burma restricted both Japanese and British movements. In this 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, 2016a).

Before ‘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 operations in Manipur and Naga Hills in 1944, when the Fifteenth Army failed to secure British logistics installations in and around Imphal and Kohima (Figure1.4).

### **1.5. Implications of the Japanese Offensive in India**

Implications of the Japanese offensive in Manipur and Naga Hills in 1944 could be outlined from four significant perspectives:

1. Firstly, it served as a key moment for the British, marking a notable resurgence in their prestige and honour following previous setbacks.
2. Secondly, the Japanese ultimate downfall in WW II can be traced back to the battles at Kohima and Imphal, which signified a critical turning point in the conflict.
3. Thirdly, the societal landscape of the local communities underwent a profound transformation, with the battle catalysing the burgeoning of indigenous identity consciousness.
4. Lastly, the outcome of these battles had profound implications for the British, Japanese, and INA forces, decisively shaping their respective fortunes in the wider theatre of war.

### **1.6. Review of Literature.**

The accounts of the battles of Kohima and Imphal have garnered substantial attention from Western media and authors, largely from a military perspective. These narratives often emphasize the intricate details of arms, munitions, military tactics, and strategies employed during these pivotal engagements, portraying them as hard-won battles characterized by the resilience and sacrifices of various military forces (Devi, 2024). However, a notable omission in these accounts is the significant role local populations played in supporting

the British or Japanese forces. This support, ranging from logistical aid to active engagement in combat, was instrumental in shaping the outcomes of these battles.

Mainland Indian writers offer a nuanced perspective on the battles of Kohima and Imphal, exploring the complexities of wartime loyalty. They discuss local allegiance to the British and collaboration with the Japanese, revealing the intricate alliances and betrayals of the conflict. Furthermore, their analysis extends to broader historical and political contexts, including colonial policies that shaped the region during and after the war. This comprehensive approach illuminates colonialism's socio-political dynamics and enduring impacts on local populations, enhancing our understanding of these battles within the broader historical narrative.

Conversely, the voices of Japanese historians are nearly absent from the discussion, possibly due to language barriers or a lack of translation of their works into commonly spoken languages. This absence represents a significant gap in understanding the battles, as it deprives scholars of crucial insights into the Japanese perspective on the conflict. Naga, or local writers, offers a critical perspective that documents the profound changes brought about by the battles. They amplify the voices of local communities, expressing sentiments of betrayal and disillusionment following the war. Despite their sacrifices in support of the British, many locals feel abandoned and marginalized in the post-war era.

These narratives offer unique insights into the lives of the people of Manipur and Naga Hills during a war that fundamentally altered their existence. By revisiting these accounts, we seek to highlight the profound influence of war and its lasting effects on individuals and communities.

### **1.6.1. 'The March on Delhi'**

Historical narratives often reflect the perspectives of the victorious side, raising questions about the accuracy and completeness of these accounts in representing the experiences and perceptions of the adversaries. However, A.J. Barker's work, *The March on Delhi* (Corn & Barker, 2018), is a notable attempt to present a balanced portrayal of the British and Japanese perspectives during pivotal events. The study endeavours to incorporate insights from both sides of the conflict, providing extensive information about the Japanese previously lacking in historical works. He specifically delves into the perceptions and

experiences of key Japanese officers like Lieutenant Colonel Hayashi, Lieutenant General Mutaguchi, Lieutenant General Hanaya, and Lieutenant General Sato. Through this detailed examination, Barker aims to illuminate the complexities within the Japanese military leadership and their strategic decisions.

Moreover, Barker's work extends beyond military strategy to contextualize the political scenario in India during 1944. He explores the reactions of Indian leaders and the general populace to the British declaration of war on behalf of India. Notably, Barker discusses Subhas Chandra Bose's role, encouraged by the Japanese, in raising the INA from Indians residing in Japanese-occupied territories and among prisoners of war.

In addressing the Japanese perspective, Barker touches upon 'Bushido,' a moral code concerning samurai attitudes, behaviour, and lifestyle, formalized in the Edo period. While acknowledging its traditional interpretation as the 'way of the warrior,' Barker also highlights the symbolic depiction of Japanese soldiers as akin to cherry blossoms, reflecting purity, loyalty, and patriotism with a fleeting beauty. Moreover, Barker's narrative does not shy away from highlighting internal conflicts within the Japanese military ranks, particularly the discord between Sato and Mutaguchi. Furthermore, he underscores the harsh conditions and shared hardships endured by both Japanese and British troops during the battles.

### **1.6.2. 'Mari'**

In 'Mari' (Devi, 2024), Easterine Kire intertwines personal and historical narratives through the lens of the protagonist's diary, offering a distinct perspective on the battle of Kohima. Rather than focusing solely on military events, Kire delves into the emotional aftermath of the conflict, particularly how it affected the indigenous community. Through Mari's story, readers confront the human dimensions of war beyond battlefield accounts. This narrative invites reflection on our perceptions of war, emphasizing empathy for its impact on communities drawn into conflicts other than theirs.

In a scholarly interpretation, 'Mari' prompts broader reflections on endurance, compassion, and existential exploration amidst societal turmoil. Kire's literary technique underscores storytelling's ability to engage with the complexities of the human experience. Amidst contemporary challenges, 'Mari' serves as a beacon of introspection, urging readers to

critically engage with its narrative as a mirror to navigate our collective journey towards understanding and reconciliation amid adversity. The novel highlights the plight of local communities drawn into conflicts they did not initiate, shedding light on their struggles amidst the chaos of war.

### **1.6.3. 'Springboard to Victory'**

In C.E. Lucas Phillips' 'Springboard to Victory, the author, a participant in the battles of Kohima, offers a perspective that leans towards the victors' viewpoint. He extensively discusses the weapons, tactics, and strategies employed by both the British and Japanese forces, as well as the harsh conditions endured by soldiers, including insights into the British Royal Air Force and the Japanese Air Force. He also highlights the audacious yet ultimately flawed nature of Japanese plans, emphasizing their reliance on quick victories and their reluctance to adapt when faced with setbacks. He notes that the Japanese often reinforced their positions rather than admitting failure, missing out on opportunities due to their rigid adherence to orders. Additionally, Phillips touches on the attitude of the Nagas towards the conflict, highlighting their lack of respect for Indian forces and their indifference towards anti-British propaganda circulated by nationalist forces working at that time in India.

The scholarly work underscores the importance of strategic flexibility and adaptability in warfare. The British forces' ability to adjust their tactics and capitalize on Japanese shortcomings ultimately contributed to their success in turning the tide of the conflict in their favour.

### **1.6.4. 'Road of Bones'**

Fergal Keane's recent work, 'Road of Bones,' offers a detailed narrative of the Battle of Kohima, providing insights into both the British and Japanese perspectives, particularly focusing on the harrowing experience of the Japanese retreat. Based on extensive research in Japan, Britain, and India, Keane's book paints a vivid picture of an extraordinary struggle between two imperial powers against formidable odds.

The narrative delves into the economic motivations behind the Japanese military's expansionist agenda, driven partly by the need to secure vital resources, such as oil, which

Japan imported predominantly from the USA. Controlling resource-rich territories in Southeast Asia was seen as essential for Japan's aspirations as a global power. Additionally, Keane highlights the plight of the Nagas, with thousands relying on food relief by 1944, and the profound impact of the war on traditional communities, including the introduction of modern weapons. Keane also touches on the aftermath of the war, mentioning the political crisis in the Naga Hills and reconciliation efforts among former veterans. However, he acknowledges the need for a deeper exploration of the Nagas' perspective and their experiences during the conflict, including their reactions to the war and how they coped with its aftermath.

Overall, Keane's narrative underscores the importance of understanding the tactics and strategies employed by both sides in the Battle of Kohima, ultimately leading to the Allied forces' success in turning the tide in their favour.

#### **1.6.5. 'Not Ordinary Men: The Story of the Battle of Kohima'**

'Not Ordinary Men: The Story of the Battle of Kohima' Horace Ragnar Colvin provides a gripping narrative of a key yet often overlooked battle of WW II. With scrupulous research and expertise, Colvin delves into the Battle of Kohima, shedding light on its historical significance and the remarkable valour exhibited by the soldiers involved. The book outlines the strategic importance of Kohima and the intense combat that unfolded in 1944. He offers a detailed account of the actions undertaken by Allied and Japanese forces, providing valuable insights into the challenges they encountered and the sacrifices they made during the gruelling sixteen-day battle.

A notable aspect of Colvin's work is his focus on individual stories, effectively highlighting the bravery and resilience of the soldiers who defended Kohima against overwhelming odds. The author humanizes the conflict through these personal accounts, allowing readers to empathize with the individuals who fought and perished on both sides. Furthermore, his analysis extends beyond the battlefield, delving into the broader context of the war in Southeast Asian theatre and its repercussions on the overall outcome of WW II. Colvin emphasizes its significance in shaping the course of history by contextualizing the Battle of Kohima within this larger framework.

‘Not Ordinary Men’ is a story of the battle of Kohima’ significantly contributes to WW II literature. Colvin's meticulous attention to detail and his focus on the human aspect of the battle make the book essential for understanding the events of 1944 in Kohima. Importantly, Colvin's analysis encourages readers to consider the potential impact of the Axis forces' decision to conduct Operation U-Go on their Burma campaign and its implications for the Allied forces.

#### **1.6.6. ‘The Battlefields of Imphal: The Second WW II and North-East India’**

In ‘The Battlefields of Imphal’: The Second WW and North East India Hemant Singh Katoch masterfully unveils a crucial yet often overlooked chapter in WW II history. With meticulous research and compelling storytelling, Katoch brings to light the key battles of Imphal and Kohima, asserting their rightful place alongside the more widely recognised conflicts of the era. Undoubtedly, Katoch's work underscores the monumental significance of these battles for the Allied forces, the Japanese, and the people of North East India. While mainstream narratives of WW II tend to focus on well-known events in Europe and the Pacific, the author persuasively argues that the Imphal and Kohima campaigns were equally instrumental in shaping the outcome of the war. Katoch's narrative skilfully navigates through the strategic complexities, tactical brilliance, and human sacrifices that define the battles. His vivid descriptions of the landscapes, the valiant soldiers, and the communities caught in the crossfire transport the reader back in time, immersing them in the harrowing reality of war. One of the book's most striking features is its comprehensive examination of the staggering human toll exacted by the battles. The Japanese forces, incurring losses of nearly 30,000 soldiers to both combat and disease, suffered a devastating blow. This statistic alone attests to the ferocity and tenacity exhibited by both sides in the conflict. Furthermore, he skilfully contextualizes these battles within the larger framework of WW II, giving them their due prominence. By shedding light on the forgotten sacrifices of the North East Indian populace, the author pays tribute to a community whose pivotal role in the war effort has been largely overshadowed by more familiar narratives.

In ‘The Battlefields of Imphal,’ Katoch not only presents a rich tapestry of historical events but also delves into the profound impact of these battles on the geopolitical and cultural landscape of the region. The book is a witness to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable adversity.

Hemant Singh Katoch's 'The Battlefields of Imphal: The Second WW and North East India' is a tour de force in WW II historiography. Through careful research, evocative prose, and a deep respect for the sacrifices made, Katoch succeeds in giving Imphal and Kohima the recognition they truly deserve. This book is an indispensable addition to the library of any enthusiast of military history or anyone seeking a more complete understanding of the global impact of WW II.

#### **1.6.7. 'Burma Victory: Imphal and Kohima March 1944 to May 1945'**

David Rooney's 'Burma Victory: Imphal and Kohima March 1944 to May 1945' stands as an important work in WW II historiography, meticulously chronicling the major battles between Allied and Axis forces. While Rooney covers a wide array of terrains, it is his attention to the hitherto obscure North Eastern part of colonial India that distinguishes this work. This region, largely alien to Western media and historians at the time, emerged as the crucible of some of the conflict's most intense and consequential battles. The battles of Imphal and Kohima, situated in this remote and challenging terrain, assumed a strategic significance that far surpassed their initial obscurity.

One of the most glaring missteps in the Japanese Imperial Army's Burma campaign was the audacious but ultimately ill-fated operational plan that sought to seize control of the north-eastern part of colonial India. This plan, however, suffered from a critical deficiency in logistical support. The Japanese forces found themselves ill-prepared to grapple with the unforgiving terrain and the relentless monsoon season, leading to a series of operational setbacks and substantial casualties. In hindsight, this marked a significant blunder on the part of the Japanese High Command, as their failure to adequately assess ground and weather conditions proved to be a pivotal factor in their ultimate defeat.

Lieutenant General Mutaguchi, the commander of the Japanese 15th Army, bore the brunt of the campaign's cost. The battles of Imphal and Kohima exacted a heavy toll on both manpower and resources, severely undermining the Japanese position in the region. Mutaguchi's inability to grasp the intricacies of the terrain and weather conditions further compounded the difficulties faced by his forces. This campaign represented a stark reminder of the perilous consequences of strategic miscalculation.



Yet, amidst the strategic maelstrom, the battles of Imphal and Kohima bore witness to acts of exceptional courage and personal valour. Soldiers from diverse backgrounds, including the Japanese, British, and members of the INA, displayed a resolute determination in the face of formidable odds. These instances of bravery serve as enduring testaments to the indomitable human spirit under the most harrowing circumstances.

In the broader context of WW II, the battles of Imphal and Kohima emerged as a turning point in the Asian theatre. By staunchly resisting the Japanese advance and ultimately compelling their retreat from Burma, the Allied forces secured India and materially contributed to the overarching strategy of reclaiming Southeast Asia from Japanese control. Rooney's meticulous research and vivid narrative bring to life the pivotal role that these battles played in reshaping the trajectory of the global conflict. 'Burma Victory' thus stands not only as a comprehensive historical account but also as a tribute to the valour and sacrifice of those who participated in these epoch-defining engagements.

#### **1.6.8. 'On the Slippery Slope in Nagaland'**

The accounts of D.R. Mankekar, H. Bareh, and B.B. Ghosh shed light on the complex dynamics of Naga involvement during WW II, particularly in relation to the British and Japanese forces. Mankekar's work 'On the Slippery Slope in Nagaland' highlights the strategic importance placed by British authorities on capturing Japanese prisoners, incentivizing the Nagas with rewards for each Japanese captive. This offer was eagerly embraced by the Nagas, reflecting a significant loyalty to British interests.

H. Bareh, in his writings, portrays a nuanced image of Naga engagement with the Japanese, acknowledging some support for the Japanese and the INA during the Battle of Kohima, though he considers this support as relatively minor within the broader Naga context. He also underscores the hardships endured by Nagas under Japanese occupation, with significant agricultural and livestock losses. B.B. Ghosh's accounts further depict the Naga response to the conflict, highlighting how local men were trained by the British for air raids and military operations. Ghosh emphasizes the key role played by the Nagas in supporting the Allied Forces during the Battle of Kohima.

These narratives collectively underscore a crucial aspect of the conflict; despite some instances of Naga interaction with the Japanese, the broader narrative points towards the

Nagas ultimately aligning themselves with the British and the Allied cause. The Battle of Kohima, in particular, marked a turning point, halting the Japanese invasion of India and solidifying Naga history within the broader context of the war.

#### **1.6.9. 'Medical Support at the Siege of Kohima, April 1944'**

Matthew Roberts and Soundararajan Jagdish in their scholarly work 'Medical Support at the Siege of Kohima, April 1944' provides a detailed account of the medical challenges faced during the siege of Kohima in April 1944, amidst the larger context of the Burma campaign during WW II. It outlines the dire situation of the Indian Army Medical Service, chronicles the strategic imperatives of the theatre, and delves into the specific medical actions taken during the siege.

One of the critical aspects highlighted is the region's disease burden. The retreat from Burma into north-eastern India was marked by widespread suffering from tropical diseases like malaria and dysentery, exacerbated by the harsh jungle terrain. The influx of diseased refugees and troops strained already limited medical resources, leading to the deployment of military medical assets to address the humanitarian crisis. This situation underscored the importance of medical care for military personnel and civilian populations affected by the war.

During the siege of Kohima, medical personnel faced extraordinary challenges, including shortages of supplies and constant bombardment. Despite these obstacles, they demonstrated remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in caring for the wounded. The consolidation of medical assets into the Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) on Garrison Hill, led by Young, exemplified effective leadership and organization in the face of adversity. The scarcity of water and the prevalence of infectious diseases further compounded the medical crisis. Medical staff had to prioritize wound care and amputations, resorting to basic but lifesaving procedures under intense enemy fire. The resilience of medical personnel and patients and their ability to adapt to challenging circumstances played a crucial role in the survival and evacuation of casualties.

The article validates that the weather and disease dynamics significantly influenced the course of the war in 1944. The harsh tropical conditions, coupled with the spread of infectious diseases, posed formidable challenges to military operations in the region. The

ability to provide medical care under such conditions was not only essential for the well-being of troops but also had strategic implications for the outcome of the conflict.

#### **1.6.10. 'Triumph at Imphal-Kohima'**

Raymond Callahan's work, 'Triumph at Imphal-Kohima,' presents a detailed examination of the battles that halted the Japanese advance and turned the tide of WW II. Through systematic analysis, he navigates the complex interplay of political aims, logistical hurdles, and strategic manoeuvres that culminated in the defeat of the Imperial Japanese Army in the India-Burma theatre.

A central thesis of the book revolves around the remarkable success of General Slim's leadership in revitalizing the Indian Army and orchestrating a stalwart defense against the Japanese onslaught. By implementing strategic policies aimed at curbing expansion and enhancing training protocols, Slim transformed a struggling force into a formidable fighting unit. Emphasizing jungle warfare training and standardizing tactics proved crucial in thwarting Japanese advances and securing decisive victories. Furthermore, he highlights the indispensable role of logistics in sustaining Allied operations amidst the rugged terrain of Burma. The author underscores the logistical challenges faced by the British Indian Army, including infrastructural inadequacies and competing demands from other Allied factions. Despite these obstacles, their endeavours to fortify supply lines and streamline logistics operations were instrumental in maintaining campaign momentum and ultimately achieving triumph.

Additionally, Callahan delves into the intricate dynamics of combined warfare in the China-Burma-India theatre, highlighting the divergent political objectives of the British and Americans. Tensions stemming from American support for Chiang Kai-Shek's forces clashed with British ambitions to reclaim colonial territories, posing significant challenges to coalition warfare. Personality clashes and strategic disagreements further complicated Allied efforts, yet cohesive leadership, epitomized by figures like General Slim, prevailed in surmounting these hurdles.

#### **1.6.11. ‘Slim, Master of War’**

Robert Lyman, in his book ‘Slim, Master of War’ probes into the crucial role played by General William Slim as the commander of the British Army during these decisive battles. Lyman lauds Slim as one of the eminent military leaders of his time, attributing to him qualities of resilience, sagacity, and approachability, thus epitomizing the essence of effective command.

In his exposition of Slim's life, Lyman offers effusive praise, underscoring Slim's astute leadership amidst the ravages of war. By quoting Slim's sombre reflection on the devastation wrought upon Kohima, Lyman vividly illustrates the grim reality of the battlefield, drawing parallels to the horrors witnessed during the First WW. Moreover, Lyman contends that the battle not only validated Slim's strategic acumen but also underscored his profound understanding of military logistics and the pivotal role of air support.

Indeed, according to Lyman, General Slim's meticulous planning and foresight were instrumental in devising a successful strategy to counter the Japanese offensive led by Mutaguchi. Furthermore, Slim's adept utilization of air supply and support showcased his visionary approach, positioning him as a preeminent commander of his era. By orchestrating a resounding defeat against the Japanese forces, Slim, in collaboration with his corps commanders, etched a significant chapter in military history. Nevertheless, Lyman's narrative, while lauding Slim's achievements, may be perceived as somewhat myopic, as it primarily espouses the victor's perspective. Thus, there remains an unexplored dimension of the battle that warrants examination beyond the confines of triumphalism.

#### **1.6.12. ‘The World of the Nagas’**

*M.S. Ramunny's The World of Nagas* offers a comprehensive examination of the historical, cultural, and political evolution of Nagaland, focusing on the period following India's independence. Ramunny provides a meticulous narrative that highlights the traditional life of the Nagas, emphasizing their self-sufficient village systems, ancient customs, and close relationship with nature, which sustained their contentment and happiness for centuries.

The book delves into the early contacts with outsiders, emphasizing the initial disruptive impact before detailing the relatively non-interfering British colonial administration. Ramunny also explores the significant influence of Christianity, which filled a spiritual void in the region while catalysing cultural transformations.

A core focus of the book is the political turbulence experienced during and after India's independence. Ramunny analyzes the rise of the separatist movement, marked by violent demands for sovereignty, and explores how independent India grappled with the challenge of integrating Nagaland while respecting its cultural identity.

#### **1.6.13. 'Tales by Japanese Soldiers'**

Kazuo Tamayama and John Nunneley's work exclusively delves into the experiences of Japanese soldiers during the Battle, providing touching insights into their struggles. Their book, 'Tales by Japanese Soldiers,(K. N. J. Tamayama, n.d.)' compiles 62 narratives from various soldiers who fought in the Burma campaign, including the daunting Kohima episode. Offering a fresh perspective, it vividly portrays the personal tribulations endured by these soldiers amidst the relentless turmoil of war. Through these firsthand accounts, readers gain a deep understanding of the enormous hardships faced by Japanese troops, particularly the pervasive scarcity of provisions leading to starvation and deprivation. Moreover, the work sheds light on the everyday realities of rank-and-file soldiers within the Imperial Japanese Army; their resilience in combat, their sacrifices, and their ultimate fates in the unforgiving theatre of war.

Beyond mere military engagements, these narratives unveil the harrowing ordeal of fighting in unfamiliar terrain, far from the comforts of home, and often devoid of essential resources like weapons and sustenance. The spectre of death loomed large, whether from combat, disease, or starvation, casting a grim shadow over the soldiers' precarious existence. In recounting the retreat from Kohima following their defeat, the book lays bare the profound anguish and desperation experienced by Japanese soldiers in the face of adversity. It serves as a poignant testament to their courage and suffering, offering a compelling narrative of human resilience amidst the brutality of war.

#### **1.6.14. Analysis of Scholarly work of Shizuo Maruyama and Takao Isobe**

Shizuo Maruyama's scholarly works are a thorough evaluation of the Imphal Campaign. Maruyama adopts a journalistic approach, highlighting the challenges faced by Japanese forces, such as harsh weather, diseases, and logistical issues. He explores the cultural isolation of the Naga regions, presenting them as insulated from external religious influences. Both scholars agree on the impracticality of the campaign, attributing its failure to strategic misjudgements and the logistical inferiority of Japanese forces compared to their adversaries.

Central to Maruyama's critique is the dominant role of Lieutenant General Renya Mutaguchi, whose authoritarian leadership and flawed military strategies precipitated the campaign's humiliating outcome. Maruyama astutely highlights Mutaguchi's critical lapse in failing to conduct a comprehensive assessment of terrain and logistical imperatives, culminating in a disastrous retreat marked by deprivation, illness, and significant casualties among Japanese ranks.

Echoing Maruyama's perspective, Isobe, drawing from his frontline experience as a soldier within the 33rd Division's 215th Infantry Regiment, offers a thorough analysis enriched by tactical insights and personal reflections. Notably, Isobe emphasizes the symbolic significance attributed to the regimental flag, emblematic of imperial allegiance, necessitating rigorous safeguards against enemy capture. Isobe concurs with Maruyama's indictment of Mutaguchi's strategic missteps, particularly his ill-conceived aspiration to seize Assam in anticipation of sustaining Japanese forces on captured enemy provisions.

Furthermore, Isobe elucidates the intricate socio-political dynamics animating indigenous Naga communities, unveiling their alignment with British forces and subsequent reluctance to cooperate with Japanese incursions. Isobe further underscores the strategic dissonance between Japanese and British forces, accentuating the former's inadequacy in intelligence gathering and tactical preparedness relative to their adversaries.

#### **1.7. Interpretive Analysis of the Reviewed Literature**

In the annals of history, there exist crucial moments concealed beneath the shadows of more celebrated victories, yet possessing an epochal resonance that transcends time.

Among these, the Battle of Kohima and Imphal in 1944 emerges as an epic, comparable to the hallowed battlegrounds of Thermopylae, Gallipoli, and Stalingrad. Robert Lyman, in his narrative, unveils a deep impact of these battles, once overshadowed by the grand finales in Europe and the Pacific (Lyman, n.d.-b). It is only with the passage of time, as the witnesses and participants fade into memory, that the cool light of history begins to illuminate the true significance of these Indian conflicts.

Lyman's meticulous excavation of original documents and published works stands as a testament to his profound understanding of the Burmese theatre of WW II. The triumph of General Slim's Fourteenth Army in Assam, culminating in July 1944, not only marked a turning point against the Japanese but also set in motion the improbable reconquest of Burma the following year (Allen & Allen, 1990). This victory, often overlooked, played a decisive role in altering the course of the war.

Foreign voices, British and Japanese alike, converge to paint a vivid tapestry of these battles. From anthropologist C.V. Furer Haimendorf to the venerable William Slim, they attest to the unwavering loyalty and support of the Nagas. Haimendorf, in 'The Naked Nagas, (Furer-Haimendorf, n.d.) ' extols their steadfastness, attributing it to the affable British officers, lenient rule, and contentment under British administration. Slim's 'Defeat into Victory' (F. Slim, 2000) ' bears witness to the Nagas' unyielding loyalty, even in the bleakest hours of invasion. (Hill & Elwin, 1971)

As foreign writers, too, lend their perspectives, a more holistic understanding of the battles emerges. A.J. Barker, C.E. Lucas Phillip, Fergal Keane, and others bridge the chasm between British and Japanese narratives. Barker, in 'The March on Delhi,' skilfully weaves together both perspectives, shedding light on the political backdrop of 1944 India and the genesis of the INA. He introduces the ethereal concept of 'Bushido', both an imperial edict and a code of conduct for Japanese warriors.

John Colvin and Arthur Swinson further illuminate the Nagas' multifaceted roles as guides, stretcher-bearers, porters, and informants. Their extraordinary loyalty, transcending tribal boundaries, endured even under the duress of Japanese occupation. Swinson, in particular, vividly portrays the Japanese retreat, a harrowing saga eclipsing even Napoleon's fabled Moscow withdrawal.

Fergal Keane's 'Road of Bones' paints a vivid portrait of an arduous struggle against staggering odds. It lays bare Japan's dire need for Southeast Asian resources, which propelled their expansionist fervour. The Nagas, caught in the maelstrom, bore witness to a cataclysm that would alter their world forever. Yet, the narrative remains incomplete without the soldier's voice, etched in ink by the likes of Bryan Parrett, Arthur Campbell, and Louis Allen. Parrett's 'Tanks Track to Rangoon' exalts the pivotal role of British armour, a force that outstripped the unprepared Japanese. The moving sight of British tanks signalled inevitability to the victors and doom to the vanquished.

Through the works of Kazuo Tamayama and John Nunneley, highlights the Japanese soldiers' suffering. 'Tales by Japanese Soldiers' lays bare the brutal reality of conflict, where starvation and disease stalked the land. Shizuo Maruyama's journalistic account, while constrained by wartime censorship, provides a glimpse into the stark challenges faced by the Japanese. Takao Isobe's critical assessment unflinchingly confronts the impracticality of the Imphal Campaign. He scrutinizes the ill-fated decisions and lack of preparation, unmasking a campaign doomed from its inception.

In these multifaceted voices, a narrative of unwavering loyalty, staggering sacrifice, and unyielding resilience emerges. The battles fought at Kohima and Imphal stands as linchpins in the grand mosaic of WW II, altering the very course of history and forever etching the valour of the Nagas and soldiers from all walks of life into the annals of time.

The relative obscurity of these battles can be attributed to several factors, both historical and geopolitical. First and foremost, the location of Manipur on the world map played a significant role in the battles' obscurity. The northeastern part of India, where Manipur and Naga Hills are situated, was a remote and relatively inaccessible region during WW II. This geographical isolation made it challenging for information and accounts of the battles to reach the outside world. Unlike the European and Pacific theatres, where major battles were extensively covered and documented, the battles in Manipur and Naga Hills remained largely hidden from the global view Swinson, 'The Battle of Kohima.'. Secondly, the colonial context of the time cannot be ignored. India was under British colonial rule during WW II, and the colonial policy of the British Empire often downplayed the contributions and sacrifices of the Indian population, both civilian and military. This policy was rooted in the colonial hierarchy, which regarded the British as superior and the locals as inferior. As a result, the bravery and valour displayed by the Indian soldiers and the resilience of



the local population were not given their due recognition. This stepmotherly treatment was part of a broader colonial narrative that prioritized the interests of the British Empire.

However, with the passage of time and the benefit of historical hindsight, the world has come to understand the immense importance of the battles of Kohima and Imphal. These battles marked a turning point in the war against Japan in Asia, as they halted the Japanese advance into India. The significance of these battles in the broader context of WW II cannot be overstated. As more research and scholarship have shed light on the battles and their consequences, there is now a growing awareness of their historical importance. In the present day, it is indeed the correct time to give due recognition to the brave soldiers who fought under different flags, including the British and the INA led by Subhas Chandra Bose and the Japanese. These soldiers, regardless of their affiliations, displayed tremendous courage and determination in the face of adversity.

Additionally, recognizing the contributions and sacrifices of the local population in Manipur and Naga Hills is equally important. They endured great hardships and played a crucial role in supporting the war effort. These battles deserve a place in the accounts of global history, and their recognition should extend beyond just being a footnote in the broader narrative of WW II. These battles were not just localized events; these were the key moments that changed the course of the war in many ways. As the world increasingly acknowledges their significance, it is incumbent upon us to honour the memory of those who fought and remember the impact of these battles on the local population, making sure their stories are not lost to history.

### **1.8. Statement of the Problem**

India's substantial contribution of 2.5 million soldiers to the British Indian Army during WW II (Fennell, 2019), particularly in Southeast Asia, confronted a complex dynamic when the INA, led by Subhash Chandra Bose, aligned itself with the Japanese Axis Powers. The INA's objective was to overthrow colonial rule and establish indigenous self-governance, leading to a divergence in loyalties among Indian troops, some of whom sided with the Japanese against the British Indian Army (G. Singh, 2017). The consequential battles at Kohima and Imphal inflicted significant setbacks on both the Japanese and the INA, marking a critical juncture where victory eluded the Axis powers. Despite these defeats, the INA's collaboration with Japan conveyed a powerful message to colonial

authorities, underscoring the escalating resistance against colonial dominance in India and signalling the inevitability of its end(M. Thomas et al., 2015).

The battles of Kohima and Imphal, lasting merely three months from April 4 to June 22, 1944, held pivotal significance, not only for the Allied forces but also for India(Grehan & Mace, 2015). However, the inadequate documentation of these critical battles and their profound impact by historians has led to the labelling of the '*forgotten battles*' and the veterans as the '*forgotten army*.' In stark contrast, WW II battles across Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia received extensive coverage through various mediums such as literature, documentaries, films, and oral narratives(Forum & 1992, n.d.).

The historiography of the war in India, particularly concerning the Northeast region, reveals notable lacunae and oversights, highlighting the necessity for thorough and exhaustive research initiatives to rectify inaccuracies. It is imperative to accurately address any inadvertent or deliberate omissions and afford proper recognition of the significant events and courageous actions of soldiers, regardless of their national allegiance. Thus, renewed research endeavours are indispensable to accurately contextualize and commemorate these historical occurrences and the valor exhibited by soldiers on the battlefield.

### **1.9. Research Questions**

1. Was the Axis force's decision to conduct Operation 'U Go' detrimental to its Burma campaign, thereby presenting an opportunity for the Allied forces?
2. Despite their decisive impact and greater significance than Waterloo and Normandy, why are the battles of Kohima and Imphal still underrepresented in WW II histories?
3. Why are the twin battles of Imphal and Kohima referred to as the 'forgotten battles' and their veterans as the 'forgotten army'?
4. What were the implications of the outcome of the battles of Kohima and Imphal on the local populace of Manipur and Naga Hills, Japanese, Allied forces, and INA?
5. What were the reasons behind the Naga's loyalty towards the Allied forces rather than the Japanese in this war?
6. What were the different recruitment strategies adopted by the British to recruit Indians in the army?

### **1.10. Objective of the Study**

This research endeavours to investigate the factors contributing to the overlooked status of the Battle of Kohima and Imphal within the broader narrative of WW II and why it has not received due recognition compared to other battles of the war. The study also aims to comprehensively identify and analyse the battle's geopolitical, socio-political, cultural, and psychological impacts, emphasizing its enduring significance in collective memory and historical narratives.

Through meticulous examination of diverse sources, including archives, personal testimonies, and academic literature, this research seeks to address existing gaps and unravel the intricate dynamics of warfare and commemoration surrounding the battle. Ultimately, it aims to offer valuable insights into how the battle continues to shape perceptions, identities, and interpretations of global conflict, even in contemporary times.

Based on the research questions outlined above, the following study objectives have been formulated:

1. To understand how the war and its memories constantly shaped and reshaped cultural identities
2. To carry out a study on the forgotten battles of Kohima & Imphal and determine its overall impact on the subsequent direction of WW II
3. To understand the social construction of collective memory of the war through archival materials and oral history
4. To analyze the different strategies adopted by the British to recruit Indian soldiers

### **1.11. Research Methodology**

The research has been carried out duly examining the relationship between war and collective memory, with a specific focus on the battles fought in and around Kohima and Imphal. An immersive approach was employed, combining traditional secondary data research methodology with experiential investigations in the heart of the battlefield. This entailed wide-ranging interactions with war veterans and their families. Furthermore, it is complemented by the collection of local narratives, thereby establishing a connection with

those closely associated with this event. To maintain confidentiality, the participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms. The research methods included are as follows

#### **1.11.1. Literature Review.**

My research delved into WW II, focusing on the Battle of Kohima and Imphal and how people remember these events. After delving into the works authored by both Western and Indian historians, as well as those by local academics, it was endeavoured to discern the extent of our existing knowledge and identify the areas that remain to be explored. This exploration not only highlights areas where the literature falls short but also prompts insightful questions for further investigation.

#### **1.11.2. Archival Examination.**

This research focused on exploring archival resources like old documents, letters, personal journals, and official papers. These historical artifacts helped us understand past events and their ongoing impact by providing authentic glimpses into bygone eras. This approach allowed us to bridge the gap between then and now, capturing the essence of conflicts and their enduring effects.

#### **1.11.3. Local Narratives and Stakeholder Engagement.**

During the research, I engaged with a wide range of people to gather their stories and perspectives. This includes veterans/relatives of the British Indian Army, locals from the battlefields, members/immediate relatives of the INA personnel, residents sharing their experiences, and voices from Japan. By listening to these diverse voices, I tried creating a comprehensive picture of how collective memory shapes the aftermath of historical events.

#### **1.11.4. Analysis of Visual Records.**

In my research, I looked into documentaries, films, and visual records about the Battle of Kohima and Imphal. These visual narratives provided a captivating window into the vivid portrayal and perpetuation of this historic event through the medium of audio-visual storytelling. Few of the documentaries, films and audiovisuals referred for my research are as under:

### 1.11.5. Documentaries

1. **‘Burma: The Forgotten War’ (BBC, 1995)** ‘Burma - The Forgotten War (BBC) 1995 \_ VHS Print - YouTube.’. This documentary series includes segments on the Battle of Kohima and its significance in the context of the Burma Campaign.
2. **‘The Battle for Imphal’ (BBC Time watch, 1992)** ‘The Battle for Imphal’ (Bbc Time Watch 1992 Full - Yahoo Video Search Results.’. focuses on the Battle of Imphal, providing historical context and personal accounts from veterans.
3. **‘The Battle of Imphal’ (2013)** ‘Imphal 1944 (Short 2014) - IMDb.’. Directed by Junichi Kajioka, this documentary provides a comprehensive overview of the Battle of Imphal, including archival footage and interviews with historians and survivors.
4. **‘Kohima: The Bravest Battlefield of WW II’ (2014)**. Produced by the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, this documentary offers insights into the Battle of Kohima through interviews, reenactments, and historical analysis.

### 1.11.6. Films

1. **‘Merrill’s Marauders’ (1962)**. Although primarily about the actions of American forces in Burma, this film provided some depiction of the broader context of the Burma Campaign, which encompassed the Battle of Imphal.
2. **‘The Forgotten Army’ (2020)**. Directed by Kabir Khan, this Indian web series on Amazon Prime Video depicts the INA’s role in the Burma Campaign, which includes the battles of Kohima and Imphal.
3. **‘My Japanese Niece’ (2007)**. Directed by Yasuo Furuhashi, this Japanese film explores the perspective of a Japanese soldier’s niece visiting the Kohima War Cemetery, offering a poignant reflection on the aftermath of the battle.

### 1.11.7 . Visual Records

1. **Imperial War Museum (IWM) Collections**. The IWM houses various visual records, including photographs, film footage, and oral histories related to the battles of Kohima and Imphal.

2. **The National Archives of India.** The institute preserves a rich collection of photographs, films, and oral histories documenting the battles of Kohima and Imphal.

#### **1.11.8 . Exploration of Historical Narratives.**

In my research, I explored historical stories, personal memoirs, and firsthand experiences about the Battle of Kohima and Imphal. These perspectives, shared by soldiers, civilians, and others affected by the events, bring history to life, giving us a close look at people's experiences and the lasting memories they hold.

#### **1.11.9. Examination of Commemorative Sources.**

The study of commemorative sources like memorials, monuments, and ceremonies was also undertaken to understand how this event is reverently enshrined within the collective memory of contemporary societies.

#### **1.12. Significance of the Study**

In highlighting the significance of this study, it's crucial to recognize that beyond the immediate theatre of the Kohima-Imphal battlefields, the broader populace of northeast India encountered a unique form of warfare during WW II. The region's crucial role as a frontline against Japan placed immense demands on local resources and necessitated unprecedented levels of participation from its inhabitants. The impact of the war on individual lives was profound and diverse. However, these narratives have unfortunately been largely overlooked, leading to a widespread lack of awareness regarding the significant historical events that transpired in the region between 1939 and 1945. As time progresses, these stories are gradually slipping into obscurity. Therefore, this study assumes profound importance within the realms of historical understanding, cultural preservation, and collective memory.

##### **1.12.1. Historical Understanding.**

Examination of the battles of Kohima and Imphal sheds light on a vital but often neglected part of WW II. It shows the hurdles Allied and Japanese troops faced in the tough terrain of Northeast India, underscoring the battles' importance in the overall war effort. The

lasting impact of these battles stems from their portrayal of human endurance and sacrifice. This study looks into how memories of these events are formed, kept, and altered over time in the countries involved; Britain, India, and Japan.

#### **1.12.2. Cultural Significance.**

This battle is remembered through literature, art, and solemn ceremonies, leaving a lasting mark on national identities and stories, especially in India, Britain, and Japan. Examining these cultural portrayals helps us understand the significant impact of war on society.

#### **1.12.3. Relevance for Contemporary Times.**

In a time marked by global conflicts and changing geopolitics, studying the Battle of Kohima and Imphal reminds us of the consequences of war and the importance of diplomacy and peace. History's lessons guide us toward wise choices for today and tomorrow.

#### **1.12.4. Preserving Memory.**

As those who lived through WW II grow fewer, it's important to document and study events like this to make sure we remember the sacrifices and lessons of the past.

### **1.13. Limitations of the Study**

Conducting research on such a broad topic presented notable challenges, particularly in delineating its parameters. The extensive array of potential avenues for exploration was enticing, each offering fertile ground for investigation. However, I deliberately refrained from overextending arguments to maintain the study's coherence. As a result, certain essential aspects, such as the Japanese perspective, may not have received exhaustive examination within the thesis. The aim was to adhere to the fundamental objectives while circumscribing the scope of the work within defined bounds.

Moreover, the scarcity of credible written material necessitated reliance on oral narratives from locals. The absence of living war veterans, civilians, and soldiers, either due to their passing or advanced age, posed a difficulty. Recollecting events from 1944 was challenging, compounded by the lack of detailed coverage in newspapers, especially

concerning the remote areas of Manipur and Naga Hills. These battles, occurring within a British Raj colony, held insufficient importance for the empire to warrant extensive coverage of the heroic actions of native soldiers or the local community's contributions and hardships. Additionally, challenges arose from newspapers' poor condition or unavailability in the archives, resulting in potential gaps in the analysis despite efforts to cover most dates.

Maintaining objectivity was another significant challenge in a study involving contemporary and contentious issues like debates on national identity in India. Despite these constraints, the study endeavours to uphold objectivity and articulate arguments based on primary data analysis.

#### **1.14. Summary of the Chapters**

The study comprises six chapters, each tightly linked to its primary objectives. These chapters are fundamental to deepening our understanding of the subject. Below are the brief introductions to each chapter.

Chapter One provides a comprehensive overview of the research endeavour, encapsulating a succinct introduction, formulation of the research question, delineation of the problem statement, critical review of pertinent literature, elucidation of study objectives and methodologies, acknowledgment of study limitations, and a synopsis of forthcoming chapters.

Chapter two explores the evolution of the British Indian Army from the 18th century to WW II. It is important to remember that the Indian Army that fought in World War II was installed by the British. Thus, it is imperative that we look at some of the defining characteristics of this organization during its formative stages. This would be important to understand the sense of both internal coherence and the rise of disruptive voices from within.

Under British rule in India, the army was seen as crucial for maintaining control. The British employed various strategies to manipulate Indian soldiers, exploiting divisions based on caste and community to ensure loyalty to the colonial regime. The chapter examines the recruitment methods used by the British, highlighting how propaganda and



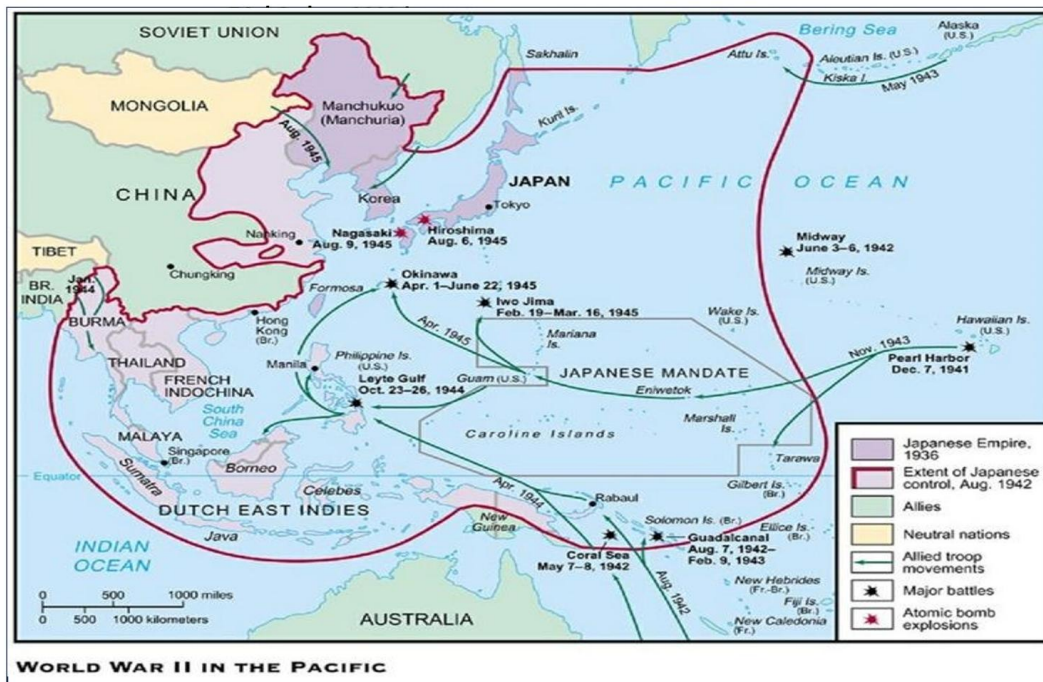
changes to the army's structure influenced its composition and allegiance. Through an analysis of colonial recruitment, this chapter covers the power dynamics and manipulation that shaped the history of the British Indian Army.

Chapter three delves into the historiography of WW II in India, exploring the political and social landscape of the 1930s and 1940s. It examines the war's political significance for Indians, highlighting the ideological clash between Gandhi and Bose as portrayed in the media of the time. Additionally, it discusses the backdrop of WW II in Northeast India in 1944.

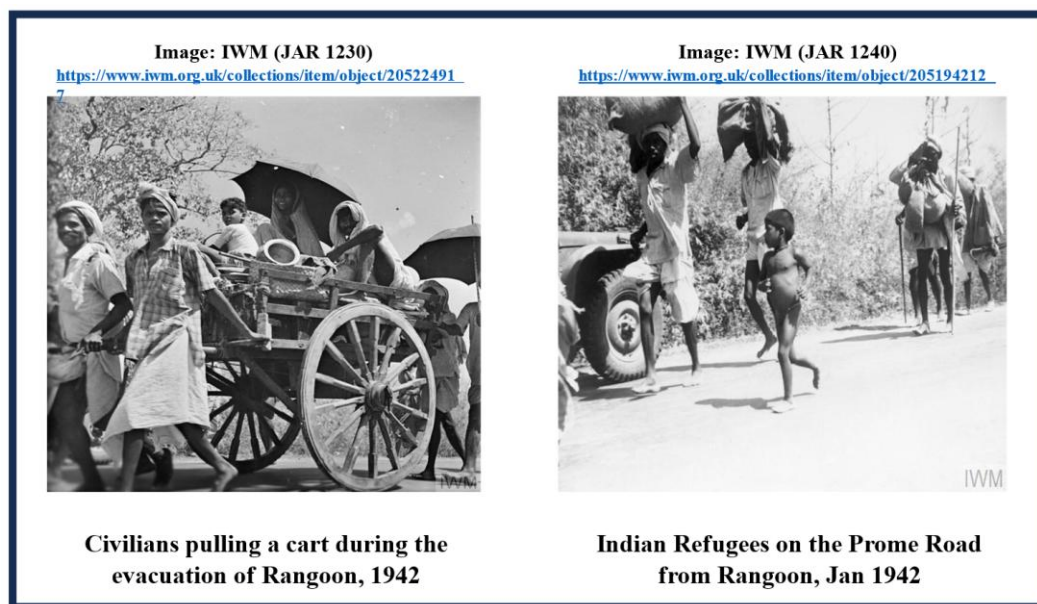
Chapter four examines the convergence of Manipur and Nagaland in 1944 during WW II. It uncovers lesser-known wartime experiences, such as resentment towards British policies and cultural alignment with the Japanese. The chapter also addresses the locals' sense of exploitation by the Japanese, prompting changes in loyalties. It emphasizes the contrasting viewpoints of the Nagas and Manipuris, the Naga secession movement during the war, and the influence of religion on wartime dynamics.

Chapter five probes into WW II and its historical progression, focusing on the strategic significance of these battles. It discusses the factors leading to the Japanese defeat and emphasizes the role of civilians in influencing the war's outcome. The chapter also explores the connection between the war and India's path to independence, highlights the contribution of Indian soldiers to the Allies' victory, and investigates the reasons for the historical oversight of these battles.

The sixth chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the entire study, highlighting key findings from the preceding chapters. It addresses the memory of the war in North East India, diverse perspectives on the conflict, and the significance of these battles in integrating the region into mainstream narratives. Additionally, it explores the untold stories of courageous soldiers and examines the role of war memorials in shaping public memory.



**Figure 1.1:** The Japanese Empire at Its Zenith; Territorial Expansion in the Pacific by 1942.



**Figure 1.2:** Exodus from Burma, 1942  
 (Photo Courtesy: Imperial War Museum (IWM), UK)

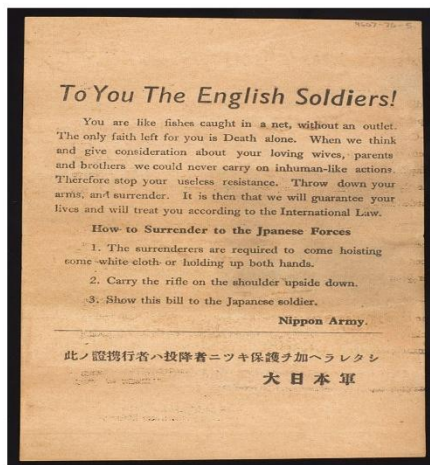


Subhash Bose with Asian Leaders in Tokyo, Nov 1943

**Figure 1.3:** Subhash Bose with Asian Leaders in Tokyo, Nov 1943

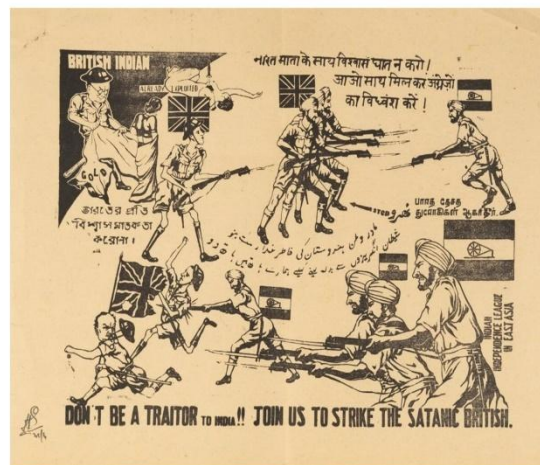
(Photo Courtesy: INA Museum, Moirang, Manipur)

<https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1996-07-76-5>



'Advice to Surrender'/ 'To You The English Soldiers!', Japanese propaganda leaflet, 1944

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1502006383>



Propaganda leaflet dropped by the INA in Chittagong Area

**Figure 1.4:** Propaganda Efforts by the Japanese and INA

(Photo Courtesy: Imperial War Museum (IWM), UK)