

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Manipur and Naga Hills at the Crossroads**

#### **4.1. Untold Narratives of the War**

The commonly held view of Japan's attack on the United States in 1941 as an irrational and suicidal act raises perplexing questions. How could Japan realistically hope to prevail against a foe with an impregnable homeland and an industrial capacity dwarfing its own? The Pacific War, it seems, was a foregone conclusion for Japan; a conflict destined to end in defeat. Yet, delving deeper into the motivations behind Tokyo's decision reveals a complex interplay of factors. Jeffrey Record offers a fresh perspective, positing that Japan's choice for war stemmed from a potent blend of national pride and perceived economic peril at the hands of the United States. While Japanese aggression in East Asia undoubtedly set the stage for conflict, records suggest that the path to war in 1941 was strewn with misjudgments on both sides, fuelled by cultural misunderstandings and racial biases.

The record contends that Americans underestimated the significance of fear and honor in Japanese calculations while placing undue faith in economic sanctions as a deterrent. Conversely, the Japanese overestimated their own martial prowess, buoyed by a belief in their ability to overcome U.S. material superiority. In this mutual failure of deterrence, both nations found themselves hurtling towards war(Record, 2009a).

A deeper analysis reveals a convergence of factors that drove Japan's aggressive expansionist policies, its military strategies, and the subsequent outcomes of these actions. Initially, Japan's expansionist agenda in East Asia, marked by its occupation of China and alliance with Nazi Germany, laid the groundwork for escalating tensions with the United States and its allies. The occupation of southern French Indochina in 1941, in particular, triggered economic sanctions from the Roosevelt administration, compelling Japan to seek alternative resources and strategic advantages in Southeast Asia. The attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 marked a turning point, thrusting Japan into a seemingly favourable position as it swiftly conquered Southeast Asian colonies of Western powers, including Malaya, Singapore, and Burma. The Japanese initially had no intention of

attacking British India but aimed to stall Allied counterattacks and consolidate their gains in the region(Morgenstern, 2017). Collaboration with Subhash Chandra Bose and the INA further underscored Japan's ambitions to drive the British out of the Asian continent.

#### **4.2. Neglected Frontiers: British India's Blind Spot in WW II**

The confidential report from the Central Intelligence Officer in Lahore, dated 23 September 1940, disclosed critical Japanese objectives in Burma, obtained from sources within the Japanese trade consulate in Delhi. It revealed Japan's strategic intentions to advance through Yunnan towards Lhasa and eventually reach the Brahmaputra River, thereby obstructing British support for Chiang-Kai-shek(Best, 2016). Furthermore, Japanese interest in Manipur raised concerns about the vulnerability of the region. Despite these alarming reports, the response from the Assam governor appeared nonchalant. While the report was forwarded to Burma with an emphasis on enhancing cooperation, the governor primarily focused on the war effort and internal security, overlooking the defenceless nature of the North Eastern frontier.

British India's longstanding defense priorities were primarily concentrated on the North Western frontier due to the perceived threat from Russia(Walters, 2018). The north-eastern frontier, including Burma, was largely neglected, reflecting a lack of understanding and strategic importance attributed to the region. Even during WW II, India's defense priorities remained unchanged, with a persistent focus on threats from the west. The entry of Italy into the war and concerns about Afghanistan joining the Axis coalition further diverted attention away from the East. This neglect resulted in inadequate troop deployments and equipment shortages, leaving vulnerable regions like Burma and Assam ill-prepared for potential invasions. The Government of India's Defense Plans only marginally addressed the North Eastern frontier in 1941, emphasizing the prevailing fixation on threats from the west. This complacency persisted until 1942, despite increasing Japanese aggression in Southeast Asia(Colvin, 2012).

Additionally, there were occasional skirmishes with Afghan tribes, driven by the broader geopolitical context of the era. The perceived Russian threat extended into Central Asia, sparking what became known as the 'Great Game.' This competition was fuelled by the desire to control valuable resources, including the oil wells in Iran and Iraq. Consequently, the Indian Army concentrated its efforts on securing the north-western front, with a well-

established communication network that allowed for flexible deployment to safeguard British interests in the Middle East or even North Africa(Share, 2015). In contrast, the North Eastern frontier received scant attention and was often overlooked in strategic planning. Unlike the well-documented exploits of the western campaigns, the eastern region remained relatively obscure.

Winston Churchill's perceptions of India were also shaped by his experiences in the North West, where he served as a young officer and war correspondent. His admiration for Punjabi soldiers stationed in border areas influenced his views on the Indian Army. However, Churchill's limited interaction with the Indian populace left him with a narrow understanding of the country's diversity, particularly in the east. Like his predecessors, Churchill viewed the North Eastern region and Burma as peripheral and of little strategic significance(A. Kumar & Anas, 2021).

The War Cabinet's perception of the situation in Southeast Asia, Burma, and Assam was marked by a misguided sense of complacency. The North Eastern frontier was only marginally addressed in the Government of India's Defense Plans, reflecting a dominant focus on the perceived threat of invasion from the west until 1942. This mindset was somewhat understandable given Britain's precarious position, with France occupied by the Germans and the United States yet to enter the war, leading to a scarcity of troops and essential supplies(Bayly & Harper, 2008).

Despite warnings and suggestions to reinforce vulnerable positions like Hong Kong, strategic decisions were often influenced by a reluctance to allocate resources to perceived 'untenable' positions. However, the subsequent Japanese incursion into Malaya and Singapore shattered these assumptions, revealing the vulnerability of British defenses in the region. The fall of Malaya and Singapore was marked by desperate resistance and tragic outcomes, exemplified by the fate of ill-prepared reinforcements by the 45<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade(Hack & Blackburn, 2005). The dire consequences of inadequate preparation and strategic oversight in the face of advancing enemy forces were starkly evident in the experience of Kalyan Das, one of the few survivors recounted that the members of his brigade had received minimal training for battle, limited to basic proficiency with Lee Enfield 303 rifles and drill exercises. Furthermore, they were issued new weapons shortly before the battle, leaving them with little time to familiarize themselves with their use. As

a result, they suffered heavy casualties, with tragic outcomes such as the encirclement and near annihilation of the entire 45th Brigade during the retreat from the Muar River.

Following the Japanese occupation, Indian soldiers were segregated from their white counterparts. They were presented with a stark choice; either join the INA or endure captivity as prisoners of war. While approximately 45,000 Indian soldiers were faced with this decision, around 5,000 opted not to join the INA, motivated not by blind loyalty to the British but by a profound mistrust of the Japanese. Conversely, the roughly 10,000 Indian soldiers captured during the Malaya campaigns were not afforded any such choice(Douds, 2004).

The fate of those Indian soldiers who chose not to align with the INA remains largely overlooked and under-documented. Their experiences are obscured by the dominant narrative surrounding the INA, particularly in nationalist discourse led by figures like Subhas Chandra Bose. This oversight highlights the multifaceted and often nuanced experiences of Indian soldiers during the Second WW, underscoring the need for a more comprehensive understanding beyond prevailing nationalist narratives.

Kevin Blackburn and Karl Hack have brought attention to the overlooked experiences of those who refused to join the INA during WW II. They emphasized the selective amnesia surrounding the INA's glorification, highlighting forgotten stories of soldiers conscripted to work for the Japanese and those who endured everyday survival and victimhood. It is crucial to rectify this skewed interpretation of history, particularly concerning the fate of soldiers who abstained from joining the INA. Many soldiers who resisted joining the INA faced dire consequences, including torture and death at the hands of the Japanese. Kalyan Ram Das, for instance, endured harsh conditions at the Bidadari camp in Singapore, where dysentery took a heavy toll on the inmates. While Das eventually joined the INA and survived, others suffered even graver atrocities in torture camps or forced labour assignments, such as the infamous Burma-Thailand railway. John Baptist Crasta's story is a moving example of the horrors endured by prisoners of war. Captured after the fall of Singapore, Crasta endured three and a half years of brutal torture at Rabaul in Papua New Guinea. His memoir, *'Eaten by the Japanese: The Memoir of an Unknown Prisoner of War,'* recounts shocking accounts of torture, including fellow prisoners enduring dehumanizing treatment and forced labour. Despite surviving the ordeal, Crasta returned home profoundly changed, both mentally and physically. These accounts serve as stark

reminders of the enduring trauma inflicted upon those who endured captivity during WW II(Crasta & Crasta, 2011).

By the end of 1941, the Indian viceroy and General Archibald Wavell, the new Commander in Chief of India, began reassessing India's defense priorities. Just before the first Japanese air raid on Burma on December 10, 1941, Viceroy Linlithgow urgently requested additional aircraft due to the heightened threat and unease caused by the Japanese movement. However, the War Cabinet in London did not fulfil this request, leaving Wavell extremely concerned. Recognizing the significant threat in eastern India, Wavell emphasized the importance of defending Assam and Bengal as far forward as possible during a conference on March 17, 1942. He highlighted the inadequacy of manpower and equipment, which London seemed unwilling to address despite his repeated appeals through cables(C. L. Kolakowski, 2022). In April 1942, just before the Japanese aerial attack in Manipur, Wavell issued a stern note to the War Cabinet in London expressing his frustration and urgency:

*Our air forces are inadequate..... I have an entirely inadequate field. Force in northeast India of 3 incomplete divisions to defend Assam, Bengal and Orissa, whose threat has increased by recent events in Burma. I have seven brigades in Ceylon. For the remainder of India, my Feld Force is a partially trained division. In the Middle East, there are seven divisions, a much larger and better-trained force than in India. There is continuous pressure here for these troops to return to India and defend their home country. I cannot honourably continue to give these assurances if reinforcements for India are constantly diverted or deferred like this. I request this telegram to be laid before the War Cabinet(Saigal, 2022a).*

Secretary of State for India, L.S. Amery, responded to Wavell, stating that the Prime Minister did not deem it necessary to convene a special meeting of the War Cabinet to consider the telegram(Whittington, 2016).

The Japanese entered mainland Malaya through the northern and western parts, catching the British Indian battalions off guard. Despite a last-minute effort, they were outnumbered and overpowered. By January 27, 1942, Malaya was under Japanese control, and on

February 15, Singapore fell with shocking brutality. The prime minister's message to his Commander in Chief conveyed little comfort(Davies, 2012).

*'There must be at this stage no thought of saving the troops or sparing the population. The battle must be fought to the bitter end, and at all costs. Commanders and senior officers should die with their troops. The honour of the British Empire and the British Army is at stake(R. C.-(No Title) & 1977, n.d.).'*

#### **4.3. The Burma Exodus: Tales of Survival and Sacrifice**

The diversion of India's majority of the manpower and resources to the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe left Burma and eastern India devoid of fighting machinery when Japanese forces approached their borders. It was only after the invasion of Burma that London finally acknowledged the imminent threat from the east, but by then, it was too late. Lieutenant General W.J. Slim, stationed in Burma at the time, acknowledged that Burma received the lowest priority for essential supplies, including aircraft. As of January 31, 1942, the operational strength of British-Indian forces in Burma totalled to thirty-five aircraft only, compared to Japan's formidable fleet of one hundred and fifty. By mid-March, the Japanese Air Force had deployed fourteen regiments, totalling approximately four hundred aircraft, with a daily sortie rate of 260, while the British-Indian forces could barely manage an average of fewer than forty-five sorties per day(McKelvie, 2021a).

The consequences of this unpreparedness were severe, as Slim candidly admitted that they paid dearly for their lack of readiness when the Japanese struck. Appeals for reinforcements were denied by the UK Chiefs of Staff, who believed the threat and the need for additional forces were exaggerated. Nonetheless, despite the grim circumstances, the Burma Corps; comprising British, Indian, and Gurkha troops, stood valiantly to defend Rangoon until the tragic events unfolded at the Sittang River(V. Slim, 2000).

The retreat of the 17th division through the jungle towards the river saw strong Japanese forces flanking them, cutting off the leading brigade from the rest of the division. The two remaining brigades fought desperately to reach the vital Sittang railway bridge, their only means of crossing the 600-yard-wide river. Tragedy struck when the divisional commander was informed during the night that the Japanese were closing in on the bridge

itself. Faced with the dilemma of either risking the intact bridge falling into enemy hands or blowing it up, thereby stranding a significant portion of his force, he opted for the later. The order was given, and soldiers stripped themselves of gear and entered the water. Some managed to cross using makeshift rafts or petrol tins, while others swam, aided only by bamboo poles. However, the burden of equipment and arms made crossing impossible for many, resulting in drownings and casualties from enemy fire. By 24<sup>th</sup> March in the afternoon, only a portion of the eight battalions that had been cut off managed to reach the west bank, totalling under 2,000 officers and men carrying a meagre arsenal consisting of 550 rifles, ten Bren guns, and 12 Tommy guns combined among them(K. Roy, 2016b).

Following the fall of Rangoon on March 9, 1942, the Japanese advance prompted chaos and panic among British Indian troops and civilians in Burma. With around 1 million Indians residing in Burma, a diverse spectrum of individuals, ranging from labourers to entrepreneurs, faced the dilemma of evacuation. The primary escape route was via the sea from Rangoon Port. Initially, those with means could secure passage through air travel or bribes, but as the Japanese threat intensified, race became the determining factor for survival. Discriminatory practices barred Indians from air travel and restricted access to ships. Consequently, nearly 450,000 Indians, along with Europeans, were compelled to brave perilous mountain routes into India, facing unforeseen hardships. European and Anglo-Indian refugees, initially prepared for air travel, found themselves trekking in unsuitable attire, resulting in tragic outcomes.

Bengal Dinker Rao, a 24-year-old government employee at the time, recounted the harrowing journey to India, marked by torrential rain, encounters with looters, and desperate scenes of suffering. From Palel to Kanglatongbi, they encountered British soldiers afflicted by cholera and black fever, with many nearing deaths and unable to convey final messages to loved ones. Tropical diseases and insects posed unimaginable horrors, exacerbated by serious vitamin deficiencies among refugees. Naga sores, ulcerous wounds exacerbated by malnutrition, inflicted further suffering and were often infested with maggots. Accounts include the removal of hundreds of maggots from a boy's head and the tragic abandonment of an Indian student whose feet had been ravaged by Naga sores(Saigal, 2022a).

By the end of March 1942, a significant number of Indians and Europeans had traversed the route from Tamu to Palel and Imphal, with another wave of evacuees in April totalling

approximately a quarter million individuals. However, the evacuation process faced logistical challenges and financial disparities. While expenses for European evacuees were covered by the Central budget, the burden of Indian evacuation fell on the provincial budget of Assam, despite the region's economic limitations and lack of preparedness. Makeshift transit camps lacking basic amenities were hastily erected, exacerbating the hardships faced by evacuees. Shortages of food, water, medicines, and transportation further compounded the crisis (Lyman, 2011). Initially, those with means could hire porters or opt for alternative modes of transport such as bullock carts or elephants, albeit at considerable expense. However, as the influx of evacuees increased, options dwindled, leading to overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in transit camps. Infectious diseases like smallpox, dysentery, malaria, and typhoid ran rampant, claiming numerous lives and exacerbating labour shortages essential for relief efforts (Meyer, 2024).

In Manipur, Christopher Gimson faced the daunting task of managing the influx of evacuees, a challenge unparalleled in his career since 1911. Responsible for providing essentials like food, medical aid, and shelter, he also had to coordinate transportation to Dimapur's railhead and oversee civilian labour on the Palel-Tamu Road, intersecting with the refugees' path. However, railway congestion hindered evacuee movement, leading to dire consequences in transit camps due to shortages and delays. Gimson's correspondence with J.P. Mills depicted the dire situation and the administration's desperate plea for assistance. Issues such as water scarcity and labour disputes further exacerbated the crisis. Reports highlighted the lack of shelter and contaminated water along the evacuation route, contributing to the spread of diseases like cholera (Adeney et al., 2007).

Meanwhile, conflicting directives emerged regarding reception arrangements for European evacuees and concerns about potential enemy infiltration among refugees. Amidst these challenges, considerations arose for the closure of the Tamu-Palel Road to non-European evacuees, prompting Gimson's apprehensions about the fate of penniless Indians and homeless Burmese seeking refuge in Manipur. Abandoning the sole entry into India would have spelled disaster for the remaining evacuees still arriving in Manipur. Thankfully, this plan was scrapped due to the lack of alternative routes. Instead, the Home Department in Delhi proposed a segregation strategy, reserving shorter, better-equipped routes exclusively for Europeans. Thus, camps were categorized into three classes, with superior facilities for Europeans and Anglo-Indians, limited amenities for Indians, and



even more basic provisions for others. Additionally, the allocation of porters favoured Europeans and Anglo-Indians, further emphasizing the prioritization based on colour. The segregation of roads and camps along racial lines deeply perturbed the Indian populace, sparking outrage and condemnation against colonial rule. Provincial Congress members highlighted the dismal conditions faced by Indian evacuees, laying the groundwork for a powerful protest that erupted in the autumn of 1942 (Tyson, 1992).

The distress faced by evacuees deeply affected the people of Manipur and Assam during a critical period. Renowned artist Rajkumar Chandrajitsana Singh, then 18 years old, vividly captured the tragic scenes at Koirengei transit camp through his art. Many evacuees, sick and dying, endured appalling conditions waiting for transportation towards Dimapur or Silchar. Many individuals undertook arduous journeys on foot, enduring days of walking until they collapsed by the roadside. Tragically, even the deceased remained uncremated due to shortages of fuel, heightening the risk of disease outbreaks.

Amidst this crisis, acts of compassion shone through. Planters' wives and volunteers provided vital services at Pandu, while individuals like Mr. Alexander Beattie and Howard Denison W. Momin dedicated themselves to helping refugees, despite personal health risks. The efforts of relief societies and Congress volunteers in feeding and caring for evacuees were commendable, addressing urgent needs like food, water, medicine, and shelter. The governor of Assam, Andrew Clow, acknowledged the dire situation, emphasizing the need for better coordination among various agencies to improve relief efforts. His frank assessments and experience in administration were instrumental during this challenging period.

#### **4.4. Annoyance with the British and sense of affiliation with the Japanese**

Initially, the locals of Manipur and the Naga Hills aligned themselves with the Japanese and later gravitated towards the British. This dynamic transition was not merely a result of wartime exigencies. It was deeply rooted in a complex interplay of historical factors, promises of change, and the actions of key individuals. Annoyance with British colonial rule and a sense of cultural affiliation with the Japanese played pivotal roles in shaping local sentiments and determining their responses to the tumultuous events of the era. The initial alignment with the Japanese stemmed from a deep-seated annoyance with British colonial rule, which had long been perceived as oppressive and exploitative in Manipur

and the Naga Hills. Decades of British interference, accompanied by policies that eroded traditional governance structures and cultural practices, fostered a profound discontent among the local populations. The promises of change offered by the Japanese, portraying themselves as liberators from British oppression, found fertile ground among those disillusioned with British rule. Japanese propaganda strategically capitalized on existing grievances and anti-British sentiment, portraying the Japanese as champions of independence and self-determination, further solidifying their appeal among segments of the population.

However, as the realities of the Japanese occupation became evident and their true intentions revealed, sentiments began to shift. The initial cultural affiliation with the Japanese gave way to disillusionment as the harsh realities of Japanese rule unfolded. Brutality, exploitation, and the suppression of local customs and identities under Japanese occupation shattered the illusions of liberation, prompting many to reassess their allegiances. Meanwhile, the British, recognizing the strategic importance of winning back local support, made overtures to communities in Manipur and the Naga Hills, offering promises of reforms, greater autonomy, and protection against Japanese aggression.

The eventual shift towards the British can be seen as a pragmatic response to the changing geopolitical landscape and the imperatives of self-preservation. Despite lingering annoyance with British colonialism, the perceived lesser evil of British governance, coupled with the realization of the true nature of Japanese occupation, compelled many to reevaluate their loyalties. Key individuals, such as local leaders and influencers, played instrumental roles in facilitating this transition, leveraging their influence to steer communities towards a course that promised stability and security amidst the chaos of war. In essence, the locals' reaction in Manipur and the Naga Hills during WW II reflects a nuanced interplay of historical grievances, promises of change, and pragmatic considerations. An initial alignment with the Japanese based on a sense of cultural affiliation and disillusionment with British rule gradually gave way to a realignment of loyalties in response to the shifting realities of war and occupation.

#### **4.4.1. Annoyance with the British.**

The indigenous communities of Manipur and the Naga Hills harboured grievances against British colonial rule due to number of factors such as(Tyson, 1992):

1. **Colonial Exploitation.** British policies perpetuated economic exploitation, leading to land alienation and unequal resource distribution. These practices marginalized the locals, fostering a sense of resentment and disenfranchisement.
2. **Cultural Suppression.** The imposition of British cultural norms eroded the rich tapestry of local identities, sparking resistance as communities sought to preserve their traditions. This cultural imposition heightened feelings of alienation and frustration among the indigenous populace.
3. **Perceived Injustice.** Instances of colonial oppression, such as arbitrary arrests and forced labour, intensified grievances against the British. The locals' firsthand experiences of British rule fuelled a desire for change and autonomy.
4. **Distant Rule and Neglect.** British governance from afar contributed to a perception of detachment and neglect. The lack of understanding and consideration for local needs exacerbated feelings of alienation and frustration, deepening the divide between the colonial rulers and the indigenous communities.

#### **4.4.2. Alignment towards the Japanese.**

When the Japanese initially arrived in Manipur and Naga Hills, they adopted a polite approach, seeking to befriend the locals by emphasizing racial affinity and promising economic development if they emerged victorious, Sato had. It is said that, initially General Sato established his headquarters at Phek (Naga Hills) he himself visited the locals with the Japanese troops and said that, 'our skin colour is the same, the colour of our hair and eyes are the same, our food is the same but the British are different from us ... we Nagas and the Japanese must unite together as one and work together since we are brothers and sisters.' Additionally, in order to win over the locals, the Japanese established rudimentary schools in Phek and Jakhama and also provided schoolbooks and other materials to learn Japanese language. Initially, the Japanese paid for goods and services using their own currency, although it held little or no value. Some villagers even refused payment, extending hospitality to the Japanese without expectation of recompense(Veiopou, 1944).

However, as the need to sustain thousands of troops for prolonged periods became apparent, the situation changed. Japanese forces began to compel locals into porter duty, transporting ammunition and supplies, disrupting normal village life significantly. Despite these challenges, evidence of goodwill towards the Japanese existed in certain areas. Many

villages forged close bonds with the Japanese and INA, welcoming them warmly as they passed through. For instance, in Lozaphuhu village, after the battle of Jessami, villagers voluntarily gathered rations and presented to the commanding officer, refusing any payment for their hospitality. Impressed by their generosity, the officer wrote a note for the villagers to keep and show to any future Japanese visitors, promising to reunite with them after the war. This letter was preserved until it was seized by Indian government officials later. Similarly, in Meriema village near Kohima, villagers greeted Japanese soldiers with a basket of eggs as a symbolic gesture of friendship. In Mima village, cordial relations developed between the Japanese and their hosts(Mukherji, 2009).

Even before the battle commenced, the locals started facing immense suffering at the hands of both the British and the Japanese. Villages were relentlessly bombarded and strafed by British forces targeting Japanese concentrations, exacerbating the plight of the villagers. Kohima village, among others, was engulfed in flames due to British bombardment, leaving no houses standing. Chedema, Aradura, Chanmari, and Viswema suffered similar fates, while Chizami, Kezoma, Kedima, and Khuzama endured prolonged and bitter fighting, forcing villagers to evacuate. Bombing raids, aimed at driving out the Japanese, destroyed homes and claimed lives. Villagers, sometimes forewarned of impending air strikes, were subjected to random attacks. Tragically, even those donning civilian attire were mistaken for Japanese soldiers and targeted. The British, in a bid to deny resources to the Japanese, set houses containing paddy ablaze, resulting in widespread destruction(H. S. Katoch, 2016a).

The villagers felt deep anguish and sorrow as they watched their homes being destroyed, which was truly heartbreaking for them. British records indicate that the villagers understood the necessity of such actions but still wished to safeguard their homes. For example, Nohol Khatso of Jakhama village pleaded with the British to spare his village from shelling upon learning of the impending attack. Unfortunately, despite such efforts, some villagers perished in the bombardment. It is noted that the Nagas endured more destruction and loss of life from British actions than from Japanese forces. Hargovind Joshi's assertion that Nagas willingly faced torture and death for the British overlooks the true sentiments of the Nagas, who, though amiable and cheerful by nature, were not necessarily willing participants in the destruction of their homes. Narrating the event at the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary programme of the Battle, the head G.B of Kohima village MedoKeretsü

said'...how can I not feel the anguish and pain when our home and houses were destroyed...?(Jamir, 2010).

The initial alignment of some locals with the Japanese was driven by several factors, such as:

1. **Asian Unity Narrative.** The Japanese promise of liberation from Western colonial rule struck a chord with locals disappointed by British governance. What sealed their support for Japan over Britain was the partnership with the INA. Japanese skilfully highlighted the INA's collaboration, legitimizing Japan's cause and aligning it with local aspirations for independence. Under Subhas Chandra Bose's leadership, the INA symbolized resistance against British oppression, resonating deeply with the populace's desire to break free from colonial shackles(Y. M. Kangjam & Katoch, 2021).

The INA's commitment to liberating the homeland from British imperialism forged a strong bond between locals and Japan, elevating Japan's image as a liberator and ally in the struggle for freedom. In contrast, British colonial rule was perceived as exploitative and repressive, further fuelling resentment. The INA's involvement alongside Japan not only symbolized a united front against Western imperialism but also provided tangible evidence of an alternative to British rule. Together, they painted a compelling picture of a future liberated from British colonialism, fostering optimism among the locals(Ethnicity & 2020, 2019).

2. **Positive Engagement of Japanese Forces.** Early interactions with Japanese forces, particularly by commanders like General Sato, emphasized cultural understanding and respectful engagement. This approach fostered favourable perceptions of the Japanese as potential allies in the fight against colonial oppression.
3. **Strategic Considerations.** The rapid advance of Japanese forces and promises of a new order offered an alternative to British rule(Aydin, 2008). Some locals viewed aligning with the Japanese as a means to break free from colonial oppression and chart their own course.

#### **4.5. Reasons for Shift in Allegiance towards the British**

As the Japanese situation grew desperate, their initial politeness faded, giving way to harsh realities that exacerbated tensions with the Nagas. Zhovire, an eleven-year-old Naga eyewitness from Jakhama village in 1944, recounted how some famished Japanese soldiers resorted to eating the pigs' gruel. The villagers were compelled to pound paddy daily, despite developing blisters on their hands. People grew increasingly rebellious as their food dwindled and forced labour intensified. Additionally, the villagers' granaries were emptied to feed the horses (Lyman, 2011).

As Japanese cruelty towards the locals intensified and British generosity, along with the supply of rations, persisted, more villagers shifted their allegiance towards the British, intensifying Japanese desperation. Yukihiro Imai, a Japanese War correspondent, candidly reported, 'As soon as we reached a village, we caught the women and children and locked them up. We then asked the menfolk to guide us to the next village, promising to release their families as soon as they had done so.' This brutal treatment extended to locals being coerced into acting as coolies, forced to carry heavy loads for long distances, and kept restrained at night to prevent escape, fuelling resentment (Swinson, 2015). As Japanese atrocities and misconduct reached intolerable levels, even civilians became actively involved in reporting Japanese movements and, in some cases, capturing or killing them. Asoso Yonuo, in his book 'The Rising Nagas,' noted that the Nagas, at one point, boasted of capturing more Japanese soldiers than the entire British 14th Army (A. Y.-(No Title) & 1974, n.d.). Havildar Zhavisie Vihienuo of the 1st Assam Regiment, bearing army number 1102, recounted, 'As people got fed up with the pestering for food by the Japanese soldiers, they began to report their every movement to the British (Chasie & Fecitt, 2017a).

The escalating brutality and misconduct of the Japanese not only eroded their support among the locals but also motivated active resistance and collaboration with the British forces. This shift in allegiance highlights the impact of Japanese actions on local perceptions and the dynamics of collaboration and resistance during wartime. Furthermore, there were numerous reasons for shifting of allegiance to the British:

1. **Personal Relationships and Trust.** British officers such as J.H. Hutton, J.P. Mills, and Charles Pawsey established close friendships and positive relationships with the Nagas, earning their trust and loyalty. They actively engaged with local

communities, respected Naga customs, and contributed to socio-cultural development. This rapport was instrumental in solidifying support for the British administration among the Nagas during colonial rule(V. Thomas, 2011).

2. **British Reassertion and Reconciliation Efforts.** However, what truly swayed the favour toward the British were other factors. For example, when the British army burned down Kohima village against the DC's wishes, they promised to rebuild it after the war. This assurance likely spread to other villages through local intelligence networks, calming the villagers' anguish with the belief that their homes would be restored. Additionally, the British military provided generous rations and shelter to displaced natives, fostering goodwill. The longstanding rapport and trust built by colonial rulers, along with the network of Naga government agents, reassured natives and garnered their support for the British. The growing Christian population and educated class influenced by American missionaries further inclined them towards British allegiance. Moreover, families and relatives of those serving in the British Indian army, such as the Assam Rifles, Assam regiment, and Naga Levies, remained loyal to the British. Conversely, Japanese atrocities and harassment inflicted upon the Nagas further solidified support for the British. As the war progressed, the British further reaffirmed reconciliation efforts.
3. **Extraordinary Acts of Courage.** On the other hand, the sacrificial act of then-Deputy Commissioner Charles Pawsey turned the tide in favour of the British in the Battle of Kohima. As the Japanese approached, the bulk of the British Army abandoned Kohima, but Pawsey refused to leave even after being asked to do so, choosing to share his fate with the Nagas. His steadfastness resonated deeply with the Nagas, who saw him as a symbol of unwavering commitment and solidarity. Pawsey's decision was reinforced by the unwavering support of the Naga dobashis (interpreters) and government servants who chose to stay with him. These individuals held significant influence in their villages, making their allegiance a crucial factor. Moreover, Pawsey had earned the trust and support of the educated Nagas and the thinking class due to his efforts to unite the disparate Naga tribes. Once committed, the dobashis gathered around DC Pawsey, utilizing their extensive network across villages.

#### 4.6. Post War Confidence Building Measures

The reports from colonial administrators suggested that the residents of Assam, the Naga Hills, and Manipur were content with the wartime administration and the arrangements that had been put in place. On March 18, 1946, Dr. N. L. Bor, the Director of Assam Relief Measures, noted in his diary:

*this extraordinary and spontaneous display of loyalty from the locals is a very striking complementary upon the wisdom of the policies which has governed our dealings with the tribes and people of Assam, the Naga Hills and the people of Manipur during the war.*

However, following the cessation of hostilities, there emerged an urgent call for extensive relief and rehabilitation efforts in the region. Similar initiatives were observed across other war-affected regions worldwide in the aftermath of the Second WW. The primary objective of these relief measures was to provide essential provisions such as food, clothing, medicines, and other necessities to civilian populations(Reinisch, 2008).

In the aftermath of the war, the civil administration faced the formidable challenge of addressing the immediate needs of the populace, encompassing sustenance, shelter, clothing, and the facilitation of repatriation for displaced individuals. The provision of relief aid played a pivotal role in either reviving or establishing state institutions and authorities in regions ravaged by conflict. It is paramount to acknowledge that the relief and rehabilitation endeavours spearheaded by the colonial state transcended mere material assistance; instead, they were propelled by political and imperialist motives, with the aim of advancing broader agendas of imperial reconquest in Asia following the conclusion of WW II. The Manipur and Naga Hills regions, serving as strategic bases, emerged as focal points within this larger project of imperialist expansion and consolidation in the post-war era.

In response to the dire circumstances, a pressing imperative arose for extensive relief and rehabilitation efforts in the Naga Hills and Manipur states. By June 1944, a staggering number of individuals, estimated at 40,000 and 145,000 in the respective regions, found themselves displaced, devoid of both sustenance and shelter. With the onset of the monsoon season, the provision of immediate shelter and essential supplies, including



mosquito nets to mitigate the threat of malaria, became a matter of utmost urgency. Addressing this pressing need, the Assam Relief Measures (ARM) swiftly established depots in strategic locales, with Kohima emerging as the central base in the Naga Hills, while Imphal served as the primary hub in Manipur state.

The provisioning of sustenance emerged as a paramount concern for the ARM. Across various depots, a substantial number of individuals 28,995 in the Naga Hills and 105,281 in Manipur state were afforded daily sustenance by ARM. Furthermore, the ARM extended its support to a multitude of refugees traversing through the region from Burma en-route to Dimapur, the nearest railway station. To ensure the equitable distribution of essential commodities, the military administration introduced rationing and issued ration cards to households. This systematic approach effectively regulated the distribution of food and other vital supplies, thus ensuring fair access among the populace (Ethnicity & 2020, 2019).

In Manipur state, rice distribution was set at a rate of 5 seers per adult and 2 and a half seers per child per week, with similar provisions introduced in the Naga Hills. This practice continued throughout 1944 and into 1945, particularly in regions like Bishenpur, Oinam, Ukhrul, Pallel, and Moirang, which had suffered significant disruptions between 1943 and 1944. To meet the demand for sustenance, substantial quantities of rice and paddy were imported into the region by May 1945, with 60,088 9mounds of rice and 63,914 mounds of paddy allocated for the Naga Hills and 4,57,556 mounds of rice and 112,273 mounds of paddy allocated for Manipur state. These measures aimed to alleviate immediate hardships and support the recovery of the affected populations in the region (Naorem, 2020b).

Following the decisive battle, the British government initiated a series of confidence-building measures as a gesture of appreciation for the Nagas' invaluable contribution. With the expulsion of the Japanese from the Naga Hills, immediate attention was directed towards addressing the needs of the displaced individuals. Recognizing the urgent medical requirements, a grant of Rs. 40,000 was swiftly allocated by the Director of Assam Relief Measures. Medical facilities were promptly established to attend to villagers who had sought refuge in their cultivation field houses, resulting in the rampant spread of malaria and gastrointestinal diseases. Extensive inoculation campaigns targeting cholera, typhoid, and other digestive ailments were conducted, benefiting approximately 30,000 individuals.

Furthermore, a labour company was mobilized to undertake the cleanup of Kohima town, with allocated funds dedicated to restoring sanitary conditions, including the cleansing of springs. These measures not only addressed immediate humanitarian concerns but also fostered a sense of trust and cooperation between the British administration and the Nagas, laying a foundation for post-conflict reconciliation and stability(F. K.-(No Title) & 2010, n.d.).

Reconstruction and infrastructure development were among the first steps taken by the British to repair the war-torn Naga Hills. The region's infrastructure had been severely damaged, necessitating the rebuilding of roads, bridges, and communication networks. These efforts were aimed not only at restoring essential services but also at reintegrating the Naga Hills with the broader economy. Road construction projects were prioritized to reconnect isolated communities and facilitate the transport of goods, services, and aid. The rebuilding of key infrastructure was instrumental in revitalizing local economies and providing immediate employment opportunities for the affected population. Economic relief and rehabilitation programs were critical for supporting the war-impacted communities. The British initiated various relief measures, including the distribution of food, medical supplies, and rebuilding materials. These programs were designed to address immediate needs and support the most vulnerable groups, such as those who had lost their homes or livelihoods during the war. Rehabilitation efforts also included the provision of agricultural tools and seeds to help farmers resume their activities, thereby stabilizing food production and supporting economic recovery(Callahan, n.d.).

To enhance the welfare of the Naga people, the British focused on healthcare and education improvements. The war had disrupted access to healthcare and education, leading to a decline in living standards. The British established temporary clinics and health camps to address urgent medical needs and combat the spread of diseases that had proliferated in the aftermath of the conflict. Furthermore, efforts were made to rebuild and reopen schools that had been damaged or closed during the war, emphasizing the importance of restoring educational services as a foundation for long-term recovery and development. Community engagement and leadership inclusion were integral to the British approach to restoring confidence among the Nagas. Recognizing the importance of local leadership in the recovery process, the British involved Naga leaders in the administration and decision-making processes. This included reestablishing traditional councils and incorporating

Naga representatives into newly formed administrative bodies. Engaging local leaders helped ensure that the measures taken were culturally sensitive and aligned with the needs and aspirations of the Naga people.

The British also undertook social and cultural initiatives to repair the social fabric of the Naga Hills. Acknowledging the deep cultural impact of the war, the British supported community events, cultural festivals, and the preservation of Naga heritage. These initiatives aimed to restore a sense of normalcy and strengthen community bonds that had been strained by the conflict. By promoting Naga traditions and supporting cultural activities, the British helped foster a sense of identity and resilience among the Naga population. Security and Reconciliation Efforts were also vital in ensuring a stable post-war environment. The British reduced the military presence in the Naga Hills to alleviate fears of continued conflict and to signal a commitment to peace. They also facilitated dialogues between conflicting groups within the region to address grievances and promote reconciliation. Local militias were formed from Naga tribes to maintain security and order, thereby involving the Naga community in their own peacekeeping efforts.

#### **4.7. Difference in perspective between the Nagas and the Manipuris**

During WW II, there were notable differences in the perspectives of the Nagas and Manipuris regarding which side to support, primarily the Allied forces and the Axis powers. These differences can be attributed to a combination of historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors(Murayama et al., 2021):

##### **4.7.1. Historical Context.**

During WW II, the divergent perspectives of the Nagas and Manipuris regarding their support for the Allied forces or the Axis powers stemmed from a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors. Manipur, as a princely state under British suzerainty, had a direct association with British colonial rule, which significantly shaped its wartime perspectives. The established British presence, albeit through suzerainty, influenced a segment of Manipuri sentiment toward supporting the Allied forces, emphasizing continuity and perceived benefits under British governance(Noni & Sanatomba, 2016). In contrast, the Naga tribes lived in relative seclusion, maintaining independence and limited interaction with outsiders, primarily through the Ahoms of

Assam(Brul, 1982). The Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 marked their first awareness of British influence, though formal administration took time to establish. However, this region was still not directly governed by British colonial rule. The historical context of relative autonomy from direct British administration contributed to a distinct perspective among the Nagas. This autonomy fostered a different outlook, where some Naga communities viewed the war and the conflict of foreign powers as distant affairs, maintaining a degree of detachment from direct alignment with either side.

#### **4.7.2. Geographic Isolation.**

Geographical isolation was another important factor in shaping local perspectives and allegiances of the Nagas and Manipuris concerning support for either of the belligerent forces during WW II. The Naga Hills and their surrounding tribal territories enjoyed a degree of seclusion, buffered from direct intervention by the British colonial administration. Despite the gradual extension of colonial influence into prominent urban centres like Kohima and Dimapur, the remote hinterlands remained largely insulated from external influences. This isolation cultivated a distinct sense of autonomy and cultural identity among the Nagas, imprinting their attitudes towards the war with a unique character.

In contrast, Manipur, positioned as a territory under British suzerainty, experienced more direct oversight from colonial authorities. Particularly in the Imphal Valley, which lay squarely within the jurisdiction of local rulers, alignment with the Allied powers was notably pronounced. Nevertheless, regions situated on the periphery of Manipur state showcased varied perspectives on the war, reflecting a complex interplay of geographical, political, and cultural dynamics.

#### **4.7.3. Propaganda and Influences.**

Propaganda indeed emerged as a potent tool during WW II, wielded by both the Axis and Allied powers to sway perspectives and gain support. In the context of the war fought on the soils of Manipur and the Naga Hills, propaganda played a crucial role in shaping the viewpoints of the Nagas and Manipuris. However, the propaganda efforts directed towards these indigenous communities differed significantly, tailored to their distinct historical and cultural backgrounds.

For the Nagas, renowned for their history of autonomy, propaganda campaigns often emphasized notions of sovereignty and self-determination. These messages aimed to dissuade the Nagas from aligning with any foreign power and instead encouraged them to preserve their independence. Propaganda tailored to the Nagas thus appealed to their desire for self-governance and cultural preservation, highlighting the risks of external influence on their traditional way of life (Goswami, 2020). Conversely, Manipuris likely encountered propaganda efforts that focused on regional interests, alliances, or promises of stability and security under different powers. As a princely state under British suzerainty, Manipur had closer ties to British India, potentially exposing its populace to pro-Allied narratives stressing the benefits of maintaining allegiance to the British Empire. Propaganda aimed at Manipuris might have highlighted the perceived threats posed by Axis powers and underscored the importance of maintaining stability and order within the region under British governance (I. K.-P. & Present & 2002, n.d.).

These contrasting propaganda messages, customized to resonate with the unique historical and cultural contexts of the Nagas and Manipuris, played a key role in shaping their perceptions of the war and potentially influenced their inclinations towards or against specific alliances or involvement in the conflict.

#### **4.7.4. Diversity.**

The diverse tribal landscape within the Naga region played a crucial role in shaping the perspectives of the Nagas during WW II. They fought on the soils of Manipur and the Naga Hills. This ethnic diversity, characterized by a multitude of tribes and clans each with their own distinct identities, customs, and loyalties, significantly impacted the way different Naga communities viewed the conflict. The varied tribal affiliations and historical interactions among these tribes often resulted in divergent perspectives regarding which side to support during the war. While some tribes might have leaned towards supporting certain factions based on historical ties or perceived advantages, others might have remained more neutral or resistant to aligning with external powers. These tribal dynamics contributed to a complex tapestry of viewpoints among the Nagas, with differing tribal identities and historical relationships influencing their stances on alliances or resistance during the war. Similarly, in Manipur, although with a different tribal landscape, the diverse ethnic groups might have held varied perspectives based on their unique

historical interactions and tribal affiliations, contributing to a mosaic of viewpoints within the region during WW II.

#### **4.7.5. Lack of Unified Leadership.**

The absence of a unified leadership structure in the Naga Hills had a profound impact on the perspectives of the Nagas, particularly when contrasted with Manipur's more centralized governance. The decentralized nature of Naga society, characterized by numerous tribes and clans, resulted in the absence of a single authoritative leadership or centralized governing body representing the entire Naga population. This lack of unified leadership presented challenges in forming a collective stance or a cohesive response to the war (Bergmann et al., n.d.). Unlike Manipur, which possessed a more structured governance system capable of potentially facilitating a more unified approach or decision-making process, the Nagas encountered difficulties presenting a consolidated viewpoint or forging a collective strategy amidst the conflict. The decentralized governance structure contributed to a scenario where different Naga tribes or communities might have held varying opinions or responses to the war, making it challenging to establish a unified front or a singular perspective among the Nagas during WW II. Consequently, this absence of centralized leadership significantly shaped the diverse and sometimes disparate perspectives within the Naga community during this critical period in history.

#### **4.7.6. Economic Factors.**

During WW II, economic factors played a critical role in influencing the locals' perspectives amid the conflict fought on the soils of Manipur and the Naga Hills. Access to trade routes, resources, and infrastructure significantly shaped the alignment of these regions with either the Allies or the Axis powers. Economic considerations were crucial in determining the strategic importance of these areas, potentially impacting the alliances or sympathies of the local populations. Control over trade routes, critical resources, or infrastructural development might have influenced the perspectives of the Nagas and Manipuris (Chakravarti, 2022a). The regions' geographical positioning and resources made them valuable assets, leading to attempts by both Allied and Axis forces to gain support or control. Economic advantages, such as access to trade and infrastructure development promises, might have influenced the perspectives of the local populations, potentially swaying their sympathies towards a particular side based on perceived

economic benefits. These economic factors, intertwined with the geopolitical context of the war, could have significantly influenced the perspectives and decisions of the Nagas and Manipuris during WW II, contributing to their strategic alignments and roles within the conflict.

The personal experiences of Nagas and Manipuris during WW II held immense influence over their perspectives amidst the conflict fought on the soils of Manipur and the Naga Hills. Individual encounters and interactions with Allied or Axis soldiers and the impact of wartime events on their daily lives played a profound role in shaping personal loyalties and perspectives. For many Nagas and Manipuris, direct experiences with soldiers from opposing forces significantly influenced their perceptions of the war. Positive or negative interactions, instances of support or mistreatment, and the impact of wartime actions on their communities deeply resonated with individuals, shaping their allegiances and sympathies. These personal experiences, whether witnessing acts of kindness or brutality, encountering varying forms of assistance or oppression, or even experiencing the disruptions caused by the war, had the power to mould individual perspectives, contributing to a diverse array of viewpoints among the Nagas and Manipuris. Ultimately, these personal encounters and wartime experiences were instrumental in shaping the nuanced and multifaceted perspectives of individuals within these communities during WW II.

#### **4.8. Reshaping Identity: The Impact of WW II on the people of Naga Hills**

WW II had a deep impact on the Naga communities in general, prompting a realization of their lag in the broader spectrum of human progress and development. The conflict underscored the importance of education, revealing that their traditional culture and practices alone were insufficient for modernity. Instead, it became evident that embracing modern education, often facilitated by Christian-sponsored initiatives, was crucial for personal growth and societal advancement(M. Longkumer, 2022).

As a consequence, the once formidable authority of village chiefs began to diminish. The traditional village-centric political landscape gradually gave way to a more modern concept of tribal identity and collective unity. The exigencies of the war era necessitated representation by educated individuals before various authorities, leading to the emergence of a new educated elite(Yanger, 2017). One notable figure exemplifying this shift was

Major Bob Khating, who achieved the distinction of being the first Tangkhul commissioned officer in the British Indian Army. In the post-war years, the Tangkhul people redirected their efforts towards rebuilding their lives, homes, and fragile economic foundations, ravaged by the conflict(Report & 2012, 2012).

The influence of Christianity, particularly in the realm of education, was profound. British political agents played a significant role in spreading modern education among tribal communities. This newfound access to education empowered tribal members to seize emerging opportunities, leading to the emergence of a nascent middle class. This middle class encompassed a diverse range of professions, including bureaucrats, police and military officers, educators, healthcare workers, legal professionals, theologians, pharmacists, writers, scientists, and scholars(Kughaka Sumi & Kumar Singh John Sema Head Supervisor, 2015).

#### **4.8.1. Bob Khating.**

Major Bob Khathing, an emblematic figure in Tangkhul history, transcended his role as a soldier to become a symbol of transformation for his people. Khathing's life reflects the resilience and adaptability of the Tangkhul community amid global upheaval. The outbreak of war spurred him to enlist, marking his transition from village life to military service. His journey exemplifies Tangkhul values of service and sacrifice, resonating deeply within his community. However, it was not merely the call of duty that propelled him forward, but it was the transformative power of education and exposure to foreign influences(Bob Khathing & Lt Col Bhuban Singh, 1992).

The arrival of British colonialism and the presence of Christian missionaries heralded a new era of enlightenment for the locals. Through education and interaction with the outside world, they began to perceive the virtues of a more developed and civilized life. This newfound awareness of development and civilization sowed the seeds of allegiance towards the Allied forces during WW II. The locals, recognized the value of aligning with the forces that espoused the ideals of progress and modernity. Their tilt towards the Allied cause stemmed not only from strategic considerations but also from a deeper ideological affinity forged through years of exposure to British influence(Chophy, 2021).



Amidst the chaos of the war, Khathing emerged as a key figure, rallying Tangkhul support for the Allied cause. His leadership provided hope in a time of turmoil, uniting his people for the defense of their region. His efforts mobilized locals and instilled a sense of unity and purpose. Alongside his comrades in V Force, Khathing's bravery and resilience exemplified the untiring spirit. Their alliance with the Allies reflected aspirations for a better future grounded in values of progress, education, and civilization (Subramaniam, 2021).

#### **4.9. Impact of the Japanese Offensive in North-Eastern India**

The Japanese Offensive in North-Eastern India, had a huge and multifaceted impact on Northeast India, leaving an enduring mark on the region's socio-political and economic landscape. As Japanese forces advanced through Southeast Asia, the British and Allied forces, aiming to defend India and secure crucial supply lines, engaged in intense battles across Burma, with Northeast India serving as a critical theatre of operations. The impact on the region was far-reaching, beginning with the large-scale influx of refugees and the displacement of local populations. Thousands sought refuge in Northeast India, creating a demographic shift and straining available resources (Agnihotri & Datta-Ray, 2002).

The strategic significance of Northeast India became evident as it transformed into a vital military base for the Allied forces. The region witnessed a rapid buildup of military infrastructure, including airfields, supply depots, and logistical networks, to support the Burma Campaign. This military mobilization had profound economic implications, boosting the local economy through wartime spending and employment opportunities but also disrupting traditional patterns of life (Chakravarti, 2022b).

The Burma Campaign also had a lasting impact on the indigenous communities of Northeast India. The conflict brought about changes in power dynamics, with various groups aligning themselves with different stakeholders, whether the British, Japanese, or the INA led by Subhash Chandra Bose. These shifting loyalties and alliances contributed to the complex socio-political fabric of the region.

The aftermath of the Burma Campaign left a legacy of war-wounded and traumatized populations, along with the scars of military conflict on the landscape. The return of soldiers and civilians, coupled with the geopolitical transformations that occurred during

and after the war, reshaped the region's identity and its relationship with the larger Indian context(Krammer, 2010).

#### **4.10. Role of Locals in the Allies' and Axis War Effort**

The contribution of locals to the war efforts of both the Allied and Japanese forces during WW II was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by the unique circumstances of different regions. In territories where the Allies sought support, locals played key roles in various capacities. They provided essential labour for the construction of military infrastructure, including airfields and supply depots, facilitating the Allied forces' logistical needs. Many individuals from local communities enlisted in the Allied armies, demonstrating remarkable courage on the battlefield and actively participating in combat operations against Axis powers.

On the other side, in areas occupied by the Japanese forces, the dynamics were different. Some locals, disappointed by colonial rule, collaborated with the Japanese as a form of resistance against their colonial overlords. However, others resisted the colonial occupation, either independently or by aligning with Axis-backed movements like the INA led by Subhash Chandra Bose. These locals, motivated by a desire for independence, fought against both the British and the Japanese. The contributions of locals were not limited to combat; they also played crucial roles in intelligence gathering. Locals, possessing deep knowledge of the terrain and cultural nuances, provided essential insights to both the Allied and Japanese forces, influencing military strategies and operations. Their understanding of local languages and networks often made them invaluable assets in navigating the complexities of unfamiliar territories(Y. Kangjam, Connectivity, et al., n.d.).

In the rugged terrain of the Naga Hills, amidst the tumult of WW II, a remarkable saga unfolded, showcasing the unwavering commitment of indigenous communities to the Allied cause. Ursula Graham Bowers, an anthropologist associated with the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University, embarked on an expedition to the Naga Hills in 1939 with the primary objective of conducting ethnographic research on the Naga people. Throughout her tenure there, she cultivated cordial relationships with the local Naga chiefs, fostering a foundation of mutual respect and understanding. When the region became embroiled in conflict, Bowers, operating as part of 'V' Force, assumed a pivotal role. Leading a contingent of 150 Zeme Nagas, she orchestrated clandestine operations

behind Japanese lines, gathering crucial intelligence on enemy movements and collaborating with Naga tribes to execute strategic ambushes against the invading forces. In addition to her military endeavours, Bowers extended her efforts to provide compassionate care and aid to wounded British soldiers, embodying a commitment to both scholarly inquiry and humanitarian service(V. Thomas, 2011).

Amidst the challenges of warfare, Bowers encountered a poignant moment when her personal Naga staff sought permission to temporarily depart. Despite harbouring reservations about their return due to the precarious circumstances, she was astonished when they reappeared twenty-four hours later. Prior to their comeback, these individuals meticulously attended to practical matters such as drafting wills, arranging familial affairs, bequeathing heirlooms to their progeny, and preparing for their own eventual burial. This poignant demonstration of loyalty and dedication underscored their unwavering allegiance to Bowers as their English ally, exemplifying a profound sense of camaraderie and selflessness in the face of adversity(Colvin, 2012).

Colvin's narrative (1994:35) encapsulates this remarkable episode, offering insights into the profound bonds forged between Bowers and the Naga people amidst the crucible of war. It serves as a testament to the transcendent power of human connection, wherein cultural and geographical divides are bridged by shared values of trust, solidarity, and resilience.

#### **4.10.1. Ursula Graham Bower.**

In the 1930s, a financial crisis in Britain forced Ursula to forego her dreams of attending Oxford University. Despite her initial intention to visit India as a tourist in 1937, her journey took a different turn. Ursula ventured into the jungles of northeast India, where she had the opportunity to accompany a civil servant and his wife on a mission to provide medical aid to remote villages. These areas were plagued by injuries from accidents and animal attacks, with limited access to proper medical care, leading to severe infections in the tropical climate. During this time, Ursula's interactions with the Naga hillmen and exposure to their rich culture and traditions marked the beginning of her enduring connection with these communities. Her keen observations and documentation of the Nagas' way of life, customs, and craftsmanship, particularly through her photography,

captured the imagination of those back in London who were fascinated by these ‘never-before-seen photos of tribes’(V. Thomas, 2011).

Ursula returned to India in 1938, and with the outbreak of WW II in 1939, she found herself in a unique position. This was a period of great uncertainty, with the Japanese rapidly advancing in Burma and Europeans fleeing the region. Ursula's determination and affinity for the Naga communities led her to assist in running a tea stall at Lumding station in Assam for refugees escaping the war(B. Turner, 2019).

During a time when societal norms restricted the involvement of European women in such spheres, Ursula Graham Bower's extraordinary actions stand out as a beacon of courage and innovation. Amidst the looming threat of Japanese invasion, Bower's association with the British 'V Force' commenced, marking a historic departure from traditional gender roles. Leading a group of 150 local scouts in perilous terrain behind Japanese lines, she spearheaded reconnaissance efforts along potential invasion routes, initially unarmed. Through her tenacity and foresight, Bower successfully advocated for the arming of her scouts, securing additional rifles to bolster their capabilities. Despite being officially designated as a typist, Bower's leadership and bravery were duly acknowledged, earning her the rank of 'Acting Captain'—a rare feat for a woman in that era. Assigned with the crucial task of monitoring and securing the mountainous jungles between India and Burma, where Japanese infiltration posed a significant threat, she became the sole woman to hold a de facto combat command in the British Army during WW II(Kakati, 2019).

Bower's remarkable commitment and the trust she garnered from the Zeme Nagas engendered enduring reverence from the local communities. Her narrative serves as a testimony to her courage, dedication, and profound impact on both the Naga populace and the Allied war effort. Despite the limitations imposed by societal conventions, Bower's exceptional leadership alongside the tribal warriors underscores the transformative potential of individual agency and cross-cultural collaboration in the face of adversity. Catriona Child, the eldest daughter of Ursula Graham Bower and Lt. Col. ‘Tim’ Betts, continues to nurture the deep connection her mother established with the Naga communities during the Second World War. Drawing inspiration from her parents’ stories of northeast India, Catriona has lived in India since 2005 and serves as the executive director of The Highland Institute, a research centre in Kohima. With a background in environmental science, she actively engages with the Naga people, revisiting the

communities her parents knew and collecting stories of their shared history. Her efforts reflect a commitment to preserving and strengthening the bond of trust and respect that her mother cultivated with the Nagas, ensuring its legacy endures across generations. (Figure-4,1).

#### **4.11. The Naga Movement for Secession and the War**

Following their consolidation of power in the Naga Hills, the British government introduced modifications to the region's political system. However, they largely allowed the Nagas to govern themselves internally, reducing the burden on the colonial administration. This approach aimed to maintain Naga autonomy while lightening the administrative load for the British. The traditional Naga polity and administration, suited to their unique circumstances, persisted and were even reinforced under colonial rule. The administration was structured around three tiers; Gaonburas (village chiefs or elders), Dobashis (interpreters), and the district administration (Alternatives & 2017, n.d.).

Recognizing the significance of village chiefs in Naga society, the British integrated them into the administration by appointing them as Gaonburas (commonly known as G.B.). Initially, Gaonburas were appointed based on local customs, with a head G.B. for each village and additional G.B.s for each khel (subdivision) within the village. Gaonburas collected taxes, settled disputes, and acted as local police, though serious matters were handled by the organized police force. Another key institution was the Dobashis, serving as intermediaries between the British and the Nagas. They facilitated communication between the two parties and acted as judges in local disputes. Dobashis also advised British officers on legal matters and helped pacify conflicts among Naga villages. At the apex of the administration was the Deputy Commissioner, overseeing all district affairs. The British effectively utilized native administrative agents to maintain their rule. Disputes were settled through the Deputy Commissioner's courts, with Dobashis serving as interpreter (Zhimo, 2021).

The establishment of British rule significantly transformed Naga political life, shifting power from traditional authorities to government-appointed figures. While initially maintaining Naga autonomy, the introduction of cash currency and the rule of law gradually altered traditional values and structures.

#### 4.12. Policies and Administration under Colonial Rule

The colonial government exercised minimal interference in the Naga Hills, avoiding complex administration similar to the plains and restricting the influx of outsiders. Various constitutional laws were enacted to govern the region, laying the foundation for Naga identity. In 1873, the British implemented the 'Inner Line' system, known as the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, to protect the Hills from external exploitation. This regulation required British subjects to obtain official passes from the Deputy Commissioner before entering tribal regions, reinforcing the natural boundary between the hills and the plains. Under the Assam Scheduled District Act of 1874, the Naga Hills came under the direct authority of the Chief Commissioner of Assam(Culture et al., n.d.). The Assam Frontier Tract Regulation II of 1884 extended this governance, exempting the Hills from certain legal procedures and establishing a separate administration. The British Indian government generally adopted a policy of non-interference in Naga customs, laws, religion, and traditions. The Government of India Act of 1919 categorized Naga areas within the Naga Hills District as 'Backward Tracts,' placing them under the administrative control of the Governor of Assam(Barkakoty, 1949). Subsequently, the Government of India Act of 1935 designated the Naga Hills as 'Excluded Areas' under the direct charge of the Governor of Assam. The district was administered through the Deputy Commissioner of Kohima, with no jurisdiction granted to the elected ministry, as clarified by Governor Sir Robert Reid(Congress & 1995, n.d.).

The Naga areas stood out from other excluded areas in India due to their distinctive features. Referred to as the Naga Hills District within the Excluded Area of Assam, they formed a contiguous block along the borders of and within Assam itself. Governor Reid highlighted these unique characteristics:

*Differ markedly among themselves but have... one characteristic in common, that neither racially, historically, culturally, nor linguistically have they any affinity with the people of the plains or with the peoples of India proper. It is only by an historical accident and as a natural administrative convenience that they have been tacked on to an Indian province*(Saigal, 2022b).

It's crucial to recognize that the Naga areas encompassed more than just the Naga Hills District, spanning approximately 4000 square miles and extending into unadministered

Naga territory between the district and the Patkai range, which served as a natural boundary between Assam and Burma. These administrative designations, like 'Excluded Area' and 'Unadministered Area,' delineated the ambiguous edges of British authority. Overall, the colonial policy of isolating the Naga Hills proved advantageous for preserving and fostering Naga identity. Despite being constitutionally part of Assam, the Naga Hills District functioned separately from normal provincial administration. The Nagas lived within the confines of the British-administered Naga Hills district, largely disconnected from practical administrative ties to Assam. However, it's important to understand that colonial administrative policies toward the Nagas were not entirely detached from British India. As J.H. Hutton remarked:

*For the last hundred years, they have been subjected to an increasing number of external contacts, and recently, largely owing to the activities of the American Baptist Mission in Naga Hills... there has been a spread of quasi-European culture*(Rustomji, 1983).

British administrators, who also functioned as anthropologists in the Naga Hills, maintained a calm, synchronic perspective on tribal society. This viewpoint influenced colonial tribal policies in India, which were primarily protectionist in nature. In regions with significant tribal populations, the colonial government implemented protective measures to shield them from exploitation by non-tribal groups and to facilitate their gradual integration into mainstream society, a process often termed 'reclaiming them to civilization.' Tribal communities like the Nagas were treated differently from those in the colonized mainstream areas, seen as in need of protection from assimilation and exploitation. Consequently, the colonial government assumed responsibility for their welfare, positioning itself as their benefactor. This approach reinforced the tribal self-perception as a distinct community. Naga regions were subject to protectionist policies aimed at preventing exploitation by non-tribal groups. Additionally, these areas were considered 'unadministered' regions on the frontiers of British India, and the Nagas embraced designations like 'Excluded Area' and 'Partially Excluded Areas' as integral to their political self-determination aspirations. Throughout the early 20th century, various Naga tribes interacted peacefully under colonial governance, fostering a sense of cohesion that later evolved into a shared desire for self-determination(Head, 2015).

#### **4.13. Emergence of Naga Identity**

The growth of Naga consciousness emerged organically in response to colonial rule, which deeply impacted Naga society, leading to gradual transformations in economic, social, and religious spheres. Despite being accepted as administrative units by colonial rule, the self-contained Naga villages acted as barriers to social cohesion and unity. This village system not only divided the Nagas but also weakened them, providing the British with easier control during law-and-order issues(Asia & 2013, n.d.).

The colonial policy of isolating the Nagas from the Indian freedom struggle further deterred the development of Naga consciousness. This policy artificially separated the people of the plains from those of the hills, reinforcing fears of the plains dominating over the hills, especially as decolonization approached. However, colonization also accelerated the formation of classes, giving rise to a new Naga middle class. This class, economically better off and exposed to modern education and Western culture, developed socio-political awareness and began to address the issues facing Naga society. Their consciousness eventually led to the emergence of Naga nationalism, fostered by their experiences under British administration and nourished by educated Nagas(FRANK, n.d.; Xaxa & Puia, 2020).

International events, such as the exposure of 2000 Nagas to France during WW I as part of the Allied Labour Corps, played a significant role in fuelling the rise of Naga consciousness. Following WW II, this consciousness gained considerable momentum, finding serious expression. The invasion and spread of new political ideas during this time further fuelled the nascent spirit of nationalism, acting as a unifying force among the Naga tribes(Frncke, 2004).

#### **4.14. Naga Political Evolution and Identity Formation**

The Battle of Kohima profoundly impacted Naga society, accelerating the development of Naga consciousness that had been brewing during the colonial era. The native Nagas were caught off guard by the sudden transformation of their land into a battlefield, underestimating the significance of the situation. Aviü, a 19-year-old daughter of a Treasury Officer working in the Deputy Commissioner's Office at Kohima, expressed



disbelief that Kohima would become a battleground, resulting in extensive destruction(Lyman, n.d.-a).

Many Nagas initially refused to leave their villages until the battle commenced and their homes were destroyed. This harrowing experience profoundly transformed the Nagas, shaping their future political discourse. The aftermath of the battle witnessed significant improvements in communication infrastructure, such as roads, railways, and air transport, linking the Nagas with other parts of India and greatly altering their socio-economic and political landscape. The Battle of Kohima, along with WW II, awakened the Nagas to a new sense of identity consciousness, leading to the internalization of the idea of a Naga nation. Contact with people of different nationalities during the war further reinforced their perception of themselves as a distinct entity. As reflected by Furer-Haimendorf, the war played a crucial role in reshaping Naga identity and consciousness:

*When the Japanese invaded Burma and India during the Second WW, the Naga Hills became a battleground. Soldiers of various races passed through, lived, fought, and died among the Nagas. Thus, new people, new weapons, new attire, new food, and above all, new ideas introduced to the Nagas, and when the war came to an end, they could not go back to the old secluded life(Studies & 2019, 1944).*

Involvement of Nagas in WW II provided them with valuable experiences that reshaped their perceptions. Villagers who served in the defense forces or worked as labourers in various locations returned with new ideas, influencing their communities. They quickly grasped the post-war political landscape and prepared themselves for future negotiations. The impact of the war was evident in the contrasting attitudes towards self-determination in administrative locations like Kohima and Mokokchung. While Kohima, being at the centre of the conflict, leaned towards advocating full independence, Mokokchung, untouched by direct war, adopted a more moderate stance, favouring autonomy within India. This divergence in opinion stemmed from their differing wartime experiences, particularly during the Battle of Kohima(Neli, 2021).

Individuals like T. Sakhrie, the first General Secretary of Naga National Council (NNC) based at Kohima advocated for a moderate approach towards Indian unions, but they were exceptions. This divergence persisted in the early discourse of the Naga National

Council (NNC). The Battle of Kohima prompted retrospective thinking among Kohima residents, leading them to pursue a destiny distinct from others (Chaube, 2008). Ramachandra Guha noted that Angami Nagas favoured a fully independent state, while Aos, more moderate, believed in coexistence with India, provided their land and customs were respected and they had autonomy over their laws (Guha, 2017). Mildred Archer, wife of William Archer, the Sub-Divisional Officer of Mokokchung, shed further light on this difference:

*On the Kohima side of the district, the Angamis and Kacha Nagas began to dream of a fully independent Naga Hills. 'Until the British conquered us, we ruled ourselves. We were never under the Assamese. Why should an Assam Raj be foisted on us now? During the war, we saw the plainsman. We know his tricks. We will never be safe without a Naga Raj.' But on the On the Mokokchung side, the Aos and Lhotas were much less hostile. The Japanese were halted at their borders. They have experienced no Indian exploitation, while a few who were educated in Jorhat and Shillong [Assam] had even imbibed some Congress ideas (Wouters, 1944).*

The conflicting political positions among Nagas can be attributed, in part, to their divergent historical experiences, particularly during WW II. While Kohima and most Angami villages suffered devastation during the war, Mokokchung was largely spared from similar disasters, witnessing fewer Japanese and Allied soldiers on its soil. After the war, Angami villagers expressed displeasure with the behaviour of Indian soldiers, feeling mistreated and betrayed. These experiences, coupled with a history of exploitation, especially in tea gardens during non-cultivating seasons, fuelled apprehension among Nagas, particularly the Angami, towards future political cohesion with the plainsmen and India as a whole. WW II and the Battle of Kohima injected momentum into the evolving Naga consciousness, which had been developing during decades of colonial rule. The war reactivated Naga politics, introducing new ideas, approaches, and techniques. Social, religious, educational, and political influences, along with pre-war transformations, stirred the political landscape among Nagas. With these developments, the freedom-aspiring Nagas sought to capitalize on the opportunities arising after the war, experiencing a newfound sense of common aspiration (Guyot-Réchart, 2017).

The Indian National Movement had little influence on the growth of Naga nationalism, as Ramachandra Guha observed. Nagas remained largely detached from the Congress-led movement, with no instances of satyagraha or civil disobedience and no visits from Gandhian leaders. Guha noted that the Nagas' lack of cultural affinity, historical interaction, and racial lineage with the rest of India contributed to this disconnect. Additionally, the British policy of divide and rule further exacerbated divisions among communities based on language, religion, and region. While the influence of the Indian National Movement on Naga nationalism was limited, early NNC leaders did adopt non-violence and constitutional methods, reflecting some influence of Congress values. Despite this, Nagas remained largely outside the Congress-led National Movement, with little cultural affinity, historical interaction, or racial lineage with the rest of India. The British policy of divide and rule further deepened the divide among different communities based on language, religion, and region. Naga nationalism underwent a gradual development, finding expression, particularly after the Battle of Kohima. The departure of colonial rulers heightened the urgency among Nagas to shape their political destiny, facilitated by the ideological syncretism and availability of material resources following the war (GUHA, 2017).

The presence of large weapon dumps left by both the British and Japanese armies significantly contributed to the early stages of armed conflict. Nagas utilized these arms, which were largely forgotten by civil and military authorities but known to the Nagas themselves, as their main sources of weaponry. The influx of new weapons into the hills during and after the war, including Tommy guns and other modern weaponry, further fuelled the conflict (Mullik et al., n.d.).

The Naga Hills District was scattered with various arms, a consequence of several factors. The retreat of the British Burma Army in 1942 resulted in the abandonment of arms along their path. Additionally, as a precaution against Japanese infiltration, the government armed tribesmen, contributing further to the abundance of weapons. During the war, Nagas received military training from the British, including preparation for air raids and the use of modern weaponry, which had significant implications for later events. They were also utilized as scouts and spies by Charles Pawsey, Ursula Graham Bower, and others, providing them with valuable training in espionage. When these scout units were disbanded, Nagas were given gifts, including firearms, which they treasured and dispersed

to their villages. Many early leaders of the Naga nationalist movement were involved in WW II in various capacities. For example, Khodao Yanthan and Zashei Huire served as British guides, while Naga soldiers retired from the British Indian Army and joined the burgeoning Naga nationalism movement. Their expertise and skills acquired during the war proved instrumental in advancing the cause of Naga independence(Bower, 1939).

A.Z. Phizo, a prominent leader among the Nagas, was deeply involved with the Japanese and the INA during WW II. His leadership in the Naga national movement was significantly influenced by his experiences during the war, which provided him with valuable insights into international politics. While Phizo's upbringing in a village with strong anti-colonial sentiments likely shaped his worldview, his collaboration with the Japanese stemmed from the belief that Naga independence would be recognized if Japan emerged victorious in the war(Nibedon, 2013). The outcome of WW II could have altered the course of Naga's political destiny. The fervour for independence seen during the war persisted in the later Naga nationalist movement. The war period marked a tumultuous phase in Naga history, leading to significant socio-economic and political changes in the region. It stirred nationalism among the Nagas, particularly the educated middle class, and broke their isolation from the outside world. The war brought a large influx of people to the Naga Hills and increased communication with the outside world due to military needs.

The British and the non-Nagas failed to understand the shifting attitudes of the Nagas following WW II. Gordon Graham noted that, while British records documented the events of the siege of Kohima, they often overlooked the thoughts and perspectives of the Nagas themselves. The Naga Hills and Kohima were remembered merely as locations, not as the homes of distinct people(Graham, 2005). When Louis Mountbatten promised never to forget Britain's debts to the Nagas, he couldn't foresee the political future that awaited them, speaking in the euphoria of victory without imagining the civil strife that would later occur in the Hills(F. K.-(No Title) & 2010, n.d.). In the immediate aftermath of the war, Charles Pawsey confidently anticipated a return to the old way of life, believing that the war and the presence of British and Indian troops would not significantly influence the Nagas. However, the Nagas were already in a state of flux, having endured the hardships of war(F. K.-(No Title) & 2010, n.d.).

Why then did colonial officials, familiar with the administration of the Hills for decades, fail to grasp the changing mood of the Nagas? According to Iralu, these officials were

blinded by their prejudices and preconceived notions that the Nagas required guidance and governance. To the Nagas, accustomed to independence and self-sufficiency, the idea of independence seemed practical. This sentiment is evident in the Naga Club's 1929 memorandum to the Simon Commission, requesting to be left alone as in ancient times if the British were to leave India. Before leaving the Naga Hills for Britain, Pawsey, in the Naga Nation (the NNC's monthly official newspaper), suggested that autonomy within the Indian Union was the wiser path, cautioning that full independence would lead to tribal warfare, a lack of essential services like hospitals and schools, disrupted trade with the plains, and general discontent (Journals, n.d.; Thong, 2016). The British, preoccupied with wartime priorities, couldn't foresee the political future of the Hills and ultimately left the Nagas to navigate their way with India, which soon led to undeclared conflict in the region.

The battle played a crucial role in solidifying the emergence of a unified Naga identity among the diverse Naga tribes. Previously, inter-tribal conflicts hindered the Nagas from fostering a shared identity. Moreover, the battle served to detach the Nagas from their traditional customs and values, which were still influenced by British rule. This upheaval led to a blending of Western ways into their lives, causing confusion and uncertainty. Despite the trauma, the Nagas' interactions with various foreign powers had a significant impact on their society, economy, and politics, bringing about positive changes. These encounters accelerated communication among the Nagas themselves, prompting them to set aside their traditional feuds and collaborate for common goals. This unity persisted beyond the battle, bolstering the formation of a collective Naga identity. For this, Edmund Leach said:

*Thirty years ago, there were no Nagas; there were only Angami, Ao, Rengmas, Sema, Konyak, and so on, all busily engaged in perennial mutual hostilities. Today, the inhabitants of the Naga Hills are aware of themselves as Nagas, and on that account, they constitute a genuine political force of serious dimensions.*

At the socio-political level, rapid developments were underway, albeit amid the Nagas' efforts to recover from the aftermath of the Battle of Kohima. The collective experiences, both domestic and international, had fostered a sense of unity among them. Asoso Yonuo, a Naga writer in 1974, noted that the war had sparked significant political activity among the educated middle-class Nagas, particularly in the affected areas. The war exposed the

Nagas to diverse nationalities and varying ideologies, making them more worldly-wise, sophisticated, and politically aware.

S.K. Chaube highlighted that the war's greatest contribution was the creation of a tiny middle class among the Nagas.... which acted as the moderate solidarity movement in the Hills, and the emergence of the Naga National Council heralded the rise of this middleclass intellectuals. The emergence of the Naga National Council (NNC) marked the culmination of Naga consciousness as a tangible entity. By the mid-1940s, there was a notable shift in the dynamics of Naga consciousness. While the nationalist movements in India and elsewhere influenced Naga nationalism, it didn't match the intensity seen in other parts of the world. Nonetheless, leaders like Zapu Phizo were influenced by these movements, with Phizo even collaborating with the Japanese in Burma, hoping for Naga freedom in the event of a British defeat. Early NNC leaders, such as T. Sakhrie, were also influenced by Gandhi's principles of nationhood and non-violence(Yonuo, 1984).

Following the battle, the District Commissioner of the Naga Hills, Charles Pawsey, endeavoured to foster unity among the Nagas. His official residence became a gathering place for Naga leaders to discuss their shared political goals. In April 1945, Pawsey proposed the establishment of the Naga Hills District Tribal Council (NHDTTC) to mend the post-war fractures within the Naga community. Initially conceived as a non-political entity, the NHDTTC gradually evolved into a platform for Nagas to voice their political concerns. On February 2, 1946, the NHDTTC convened in Wokha and rebranded itself as the Naga National Council (NNC), transforming into a political organization dedicated to securing Naga freedom and asserting their identity. Despite advocating for local autonomy within Assam, the NNC's objectives evolved to encompass the unification of all Nagas under a single government. Initially, Jawaharlal Nehru endorsed the NNC's objectives, suggesting local autonomy for the Naga Hills within Assam(NEHRU, 1960).

The NNC emerged as the primary advocate for Naga interests, maintaining its position as the sole representative of the Naga people in negotiations with the Indian Union. Comprising 29 members representing various tribes, the NNC garnered widespread support, establishing a youth and women's wing. Village councils played a crucial role in fostering unity among the Nagas, even in the absence of mass communication channels. Initially, colonial officials viewed the NNC favourably as a unifying force, but as it became more politically active, apprehension grew among the authorities. The NNC transitioned

from social, economic, and cultural development to political activism, striving to realize the unification and solidarity of all Nagas under a single government. This shift marked a significant departure from its initial objectives, signalling the emergence of the NNC as a pivotal political force in the Naga Highlands(Sema, 1991).

#### **4.15. Economic and Infrastructural Changes During and After the War**

During WW II, Northeast India underwent significant economic and infrastructural transformations due to its strategic importance in supporting the Allied war efforts. The region witnessed a surge in infrastructure development driven by the necessity to create robust logistical networks for military operations. Airfields, roads, and supply depots were rapidly constructed to facilitate the movement of troops, equipment, and supplies to the Burma front. This substantial infrastructure buildup not only supported the war but also left a lasting impact, laying the groundwork for the region's future development. Wartime spending injected funds into the local economy, generating employment opportunities and boosting industries catering to the military's needs. The demand for labour surged as locals were engaged in building infrastructure and providing logistical support. Moreover, the region's natural resources, particularly tea and timber, became crucial for the war effort, leading to increased production and exports(Gogoi, 2019).

However, alongside the economic and infrastructural transformations, a spectrum of challenges emerged. The influx of refugees and military personnel exerted immense pressure on resources and engendered social disarray. Moreover, the cessation of hostilities introduced a climate of economic ambiguity as wartime industries downscaled operations, thereby complicating the region's transition to a peacetime economy.



**Figure 4.1:** Scholar with Catorina Child, daughter of Ursula Graham Bower, a renowned anthropologist in the Naga Hills (1937–1946).