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An Overview on the Role of Armed Forces in the History & Geopolitics of Northeast India during 1941-47

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Abstract:

From 1941 to 1947, Northeast India emerged as a critical strategic frontier for British India amidst the geopolitical upheavals of World War II and the subcontinent's march toward independence. This article explores the role of the British Indian Armed Forces and local auxiliary forces in defending the eastern frontier, managing ethnic and political transitions, and laying the foundations for post-independence military and insurgency dynamics.

Through an examination of military operations, local collaborations, and the region's socio-political context, this paper provides an integrated understanding of the military and geopolitical transformation of Northeast India during a decisive historical juncture.

Keywords: Indian Army, northeast India, World War II, Japanese invasion, Indian National army, Independent India, tribal, strategic, geopolitics.

1. Introduction:

Northeast India, encompassing the modern states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Meghalaya, was a peripheral yet strategically vital region of British India during the colonial period. From 1941 to 1947, the region's military significance intensified due to World War II, particularly with Japan's advance into Burma and the threat to India's eastern frontier. The British Indian Army, supported by local forces like the Assam Rifles and tribal levies, was tasked with defending the region, maintaining internal security, and countering early stirrings of anti-colonial resistance.

This period also marked the beginning of political transitions, as nationalist movements gained momentum and ethnic groups in the Northeast articulated demands for autonomy. The armed forces, primarily under British command, operated in a complex environment shaped by colonial policies, wartime exigencies, and local aspirations. This article analyses the organization, operations, and impact of the armed forces in Northeast India during 1941–1947, addressing the following questions: How did the British Indian Army adapt to the challenges of wartime and



internal security in the Northeast? What roles did indigenous forces and local populations play? And how did military activities shape the region's transition to independence?

2. Review of Literature and Facts:

Scholarly research on the military history of Northeast India during World War II and the period leading up to Indian independence is relatively sparse compared to mainstream narratives centered around India's heartland. However, significant works have emerged that provide critical insights into this transformative era.

[Stephen P. Cohen's](#)¹ foundational studies on the Indian Armed Forces highlight the colonial structure of military command and the transformation of the Indian Army into a modern fighting force during World War II. His analyses serve as a backdrop to understanding military developments in the Northeast. [Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper \(2005\)](#)², in their seminal work *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia 1941–1945*, provide a broader view of the Southeast Asian theatre, including Burma and Northeast India, emphasizing the interconnectedness of imperial military operations and indigenous resistance.

[John Masters'](#) (1961)³ memoirs, particularly *Road Past Mandalay*, offer firsthand accounts of the Chindit operations launched from bases in Assam, illuminating the region's role in special operations warfare. Similarly, Louis Allen's *Burma: The Longest War* details the battles of Imphal and Kohima, portraying them as pivotal to Allied success in Southeast Asia.

On the Indian National Army, Peter Fay's *The Forgotten Army* is indispensable, chronicling the INA's campaigns and ideological motivations, including their engagements in Northeast India. Fay underscores the symbolic impact of the INA's actions on India's nationalist movement, even as their military success remained limited.

3. Research Gaps Revealed from the Literature Review/ Emergence of the Problem of the Study:

Despite the growing interest/ inquisitiveness in India's World War II history and postcolonial state formation, Northeast India remains underrepresented in mainstream military historiography. While the battles of Imphal and Kohima are acknowledged in broader Allied narratives, detailed analyses of local troop contributions, tribal collaboration, and the lived wartime experiences of indigenous communities are notably scarce. Additionally, there is a lack of interdisciplinary

¹ ["Stephen Philip Cohen"](#). Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy: National University of Singapore.

² [Bayly, Christopher](#); Harper, Tim (2005). *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941–1945*. London: [Allen Lane](#). ISBN 978-0-713-99463-6.

³ *The Road Past Mandalay* (1961)



integration between military history and ethno-political studies that examine how wartime military engagements shaped ethnic identities, political movements, and insurgency patterns in the region.

Moreover, the symbolic and strategic implications of the Indian National Army's operations in the Northeast, as well as their influence on anti-colonial sentiment and post-independence insurgencies, remain underexplored. There is also limited archival work and oral history documentation of tribal regiments' role in military engagements and how their wartime contributions were remembered or erased in post-independence narratives. This article seeks to bridge these gaps by combining military, political, and ethnographic perspectives to provide a more holistic understanding of Northeast India's wartime and transitional history.

4. Objectives of the Study:

The Present Study has been conducted by the researcher, who is a Military Officer, to find out the following-

- (i) To critically examine the role of the Armed Forces in shaping the historical and geopolitical landscape of Northeast India during the period of 1941–1947.
- (ii) To analyze the strategic importance of Northeast India during World War-II and its transformation into a key military frontier.
- (iii) Document and assess the contributions of the British Indian Army, Assam Rifles, and local tribal levies in military operations, particularly the Battles of Imphal and Kohima.
- (iv) To find out the interaction between military activities and the socio-political developments among indigenous communities of Northeast India.
- (v) To investigate the symbolic and practical role of the Indian National Army (INA) in the region.
- (vi) To identify the lasting impacts of wartime military operations on post-independence insurgencies, regional identity politics, and state formation in Northeast India.

5. Methodology of the Study:

This Study adopts a historical-analytical methodology, combining qualitative analysis of archival records, war memoirs, and secondary historical sources with a critical review of political and ethnographic literature. The study is interdisciplinary in nature, intersecting military history with regional political developments and identity formation in colonial and postcolonial Northeast India.

5.1 Key Sources Included:

- (i) Official war histories and military dispatches;
- (ii) Biographical and autobiographical accounts of military leaders and INA figures;
- (iii) Scholarly works on tribal politics and identity in Northeast India
- (iv) Reports and documents from the period of 1941–1947

The methodology is designed to construct a narrative that reflects both macro-strategic concerns and micro-level community experiences.

5.2 Study Area:

The seven States within the Northeast India, i.e., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, have been chosen as the area of this Research Study. This part of Indian continent has been selected, because these areas are situated in the extreme north-east part of India, surrounded by different Countries; as well as the demographically situated in the vulnerable position; and had been suffering for several types of disadvantages. And as a consequence, the peoples of Northeast India had been facing several odd situations; and obviously during the World War- II.

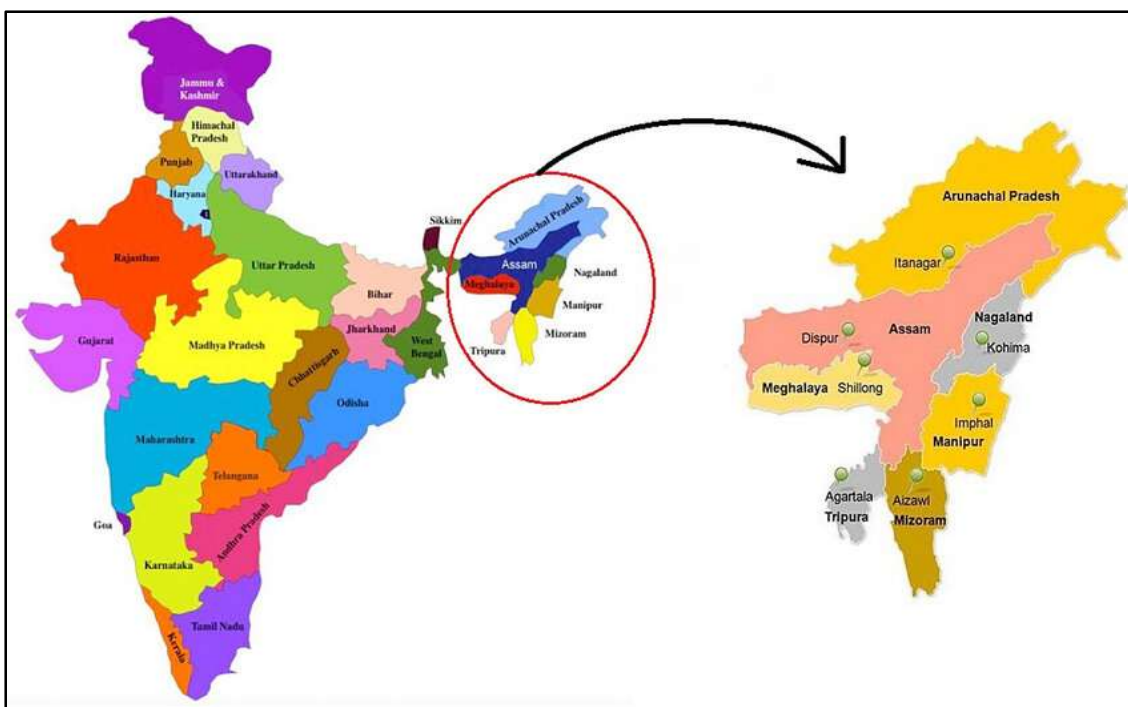


Figure-1: Map of India and the Highlighted portion of Northeast in the Study Area⁴

⁴https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-map-of-the-north-eastern-states-of-India-with-their-capitals_fig1_373729247



6. Study Conducted on the Facts & Figures, related to the Research Topic:

6.1 Documents Used in the Study as the Research Tools:

Following three types of Documents have been used as the Tools for conducting the Study:

(i) *Primary Documents:*

The study was conducted through extensive desk research, involving the collection, review, and critical evaluation of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included war dispatches, government gazettes, military orders, INA records, and letters archived at public and institutional repositories. Memoirs and eyewitness accounts were used to reconstruct the lived experiences of soldiers and local communities.

(ii) *Secondary Documents:*

Secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and academic monographs, were analyzed to contextualize the military operations within the broader framework of British colonial policy and Indian nationalist movements. Ethnographic studies and postcolonial critiques were incorporated to understand the impact of military mobilization on tribal societies in the Northeast.

(iii) *Interview Schedule:*

Where possible, oral history interviews, available through published sources and archives, were included to capture indigenous perspectives, especially regarding the Assam Regiment, tribal volunteers, and local wartime support networks. The study was interpretive in nature, focusing on themes of strategy, resistance, identity, and transition, and aimed to provide an inclusive and multi-dimensional perspective on the region's military and geopolitical history.

6.2 Colonial Administration and the Northeast Frontier:

Under British rule, Northeast India was treated as a frontier zone, distinct from the rest of India. **The Inner Line Regulation of 1873⁵** restricted access to tribal areas, reinforcing their isolation. Assam, the largest province, was governed as part of British India, while hill areas like the Naga Hills and Lushai Hills were loosely administered as "excluded areas" under minimal colonial control. This policy preserved tribal autonomy but limited integration with broader Indian society.

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 transformed the Northeast's strategic importance. Japan's rapid conquest of Southeast Asia, including Malaya, Singapore, and Burma by 1942, brought the war to India's doorstep. The Northeast became a critical theatre for the Allied forces, serving as a base for operations in the Burma Campaign and a buffer against Japanese invasion. The region's

⁵ Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 Act 5 of 1873 Published on 27 August 1873 Commenced on 27 August 1873



rugged terrain, dense jungles, and proximity to Japanese-occupied Burma posed unique challenges for military operations.

6.3 Socio-Political Dynamics:

The period saw the rise of nationalist movements across India, but the Northeast remained somewhat detached from the mainstream Indian National Congress and Muslim League. Tribal groups, such as the Nagas, began articulating political demands, with figures like Angami Zapu Phizo forming the **Naga National Council (NNC)**⁶ in 1946. The British relied on the armed forces to maintain control while navigating these emerging tensions. The Government of India was directly subordinate to His Majesty's government in the United Kingdom, which had full control in all matters concerning the defense of India and her armed forces. This position, established since 2 August 1858, had remained unaltered by the **Minto-Morley reforms of 1909** and the **Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919** (Schmidt, K.J., 1994)⁷. The Government of India Act of 1935 (Singh, D. 2016)⁸ had also envisaged the continuance of the control of His Majesty's government over the armed forces of India.

The position was clearly stated by the **Simon Commission** (Chouhan, A. J. 2006)⁹ as follows:

"Constitutionally speaking, this means that the authority ultimately responsible for deciding the strength of the army in India is the Secretary of State. If some question of great importance connected with the army in India arises it may come for deciding before the Cabinet the strength of the army in India is the secretary of the state if some question of great importance connected with the army in India arises it may come before the cabinet and the Cabinet may seek the advice of the committee of Imperial Defence though of course responsibility for the decision reached rest with the cabinet. The Committee on such occasion invariably includes the Secretary of State for India and his advice as well as the Secretary of State for War and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. The Secretary of State for India always has at his service the advice of a soldier of high rank and long experience in India. In the cabinet, where of course the final decision is taken the Secretary of State for War has no overriding power; he is like the Secretary of State for India a member of the Cabinet taking his share in the joint responsibility for what is dedicated but with the important distinction that if Indian revenues are involved no acquaintances on the part of

⁶ Chaube, Shibani Kinkar (1999) [1973]. *Hill Politics in Northeast India*. Orient Longman. ISBN 81-250-1695-3

⁷ Schmidt, K.J., 1994. *India's role in the League of Nations, 1919-1939*. The Florida State University.

⁸ Singh, D., 2016. Appointment of Simon Commission in Colonial India. *ZENITH International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(2), pp.106-113.

⁹ Chauhan, A.J., 2006. The Simon Commission and the Response of the United Provinces Legislative Council. *Facets of Indian History*, pp.340.



the Secretary of State for India can be effective without the concurrence of the majority of the Council of India."

6.4 Military Operations, 1941–1947 in Northeast:

The period from 1941 to 1947 was a transformative era for Northeast India, a region that emerged as a critical theatre of military operations during World War II and a crucible of political and ethnic tensions as India transitioned to independence. Geographically positioned along the border of Japanese-occupied Burma, Northeast India—encompassing Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and parts of present-day Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram—served as a strategic frontier for the Allied forces in their campaign against Japan. Simultaneously, the region became a stage for anti-colonial resistance, early insurgencies, and the logistical challenges of partition, setting the stage for post-independence conflicts. This narrative explores the military operations in Northeast India during this period, weaving together the global context of World War II, the role of the British Indian Army, the Indian National Army's (INA) campaigns (McGregor, Rafe (2016)¹⁰, and the nascent insurgencies that foreshadowed the region's complex post-1947 history.

The onset of World War II in 1939 reshaped global military dynamics, and by 1941, Northeast India's strategic importance became undeniable. The Japanese invasion of Burma in early 1942 brought the war to India's doorstep, transforming the region into a frontline for the Allied Defence of South Asia and a base for operations to support China via the Burma Road. Assam's tea gardens, airfields, and railway networks became vital logistical hubs, while the rugged terrain of Manipur and the Naga Hills posed both challenges and opportunities for military planners. The British Indian Army, a cornerstone of Allied forces in the region, was tasked with defending this frontier, supported by British, Commonwealth, and American units. By 1941, the Indian Army had grown significantly, with recruitment drives drawing thousands of volunteers from across the subcontinent, including Northeast India's tribal communities, who would later play pivotal roles in key battles.

The early years of the war saw limited direct combat in Northeast India, as the Japanese focused on consolidating their hold over Burma. However, the region was abuzz with preparatory activities. Airfields were constructed in Assam to facilitate the airlift of supplies over the Himalayas to China, a route known as '*The Hump*' (Correll, John T. (2009)).¹¹ These operations were critical to sustaining the Chinese war effort against Japan, and American pilots of the Air Transport Command, alongside Indian Air Force personnel, braved treacherous weather and enemy threats to keep the supply lines open. Meanwhile, the British administration fortified the region, aware that a

¹⁰ McGregor, Rafe (2016), "Enemy of my Enemy: In the quest for India's independence, one fervent nationalist made a pact with the Axis to overthrow the British Raj", *Military History*, **33** (1), [ISSN 0889-7328](#)

¹¹ Correll, John T. (2009). "[Over the Hump to China](#)" (PDF). *Air Force Magazine*. **92** (October): 68–71.



Japanese advance through Burma could threaten India's eastern flank. The **1st Assam Regiment (Infantry Indian Army)**¹², raised in 1941, was among the units deployed to secure the border, its soldiers drawn from the region's diverse ethnic groups, including the Nagas, Khasis, and Garos. These early deployments laid the groundwork for the intense fighting that would erupt in 1944.

The defining military operations of this period occurred between March and July 1944, with the Battles of Imphal and Kohima, which collectively marked a turning point in the Burma Campaign. The Japanese Fifteenth Army, under Lieutenant-General Renya Mutaguchi, launched Operation U-Go¹³, a bold offensive aimed at capturing the British supply bases at Imphal and disrupting Allied operations. The Japanese hoped to seize Imphal's strategic plain in Manipur and advance toward Kohima in the Naga Hills, potentially opening a path to the Brahmaputra Valley and deeper into India. The British Fourteenth Army, commanded by Lieutenant-General William Slim, was the primary defender, with its IV Corps, led by Lieutenant-General Geoffrey Scoones, stationed at Imphal. The corps included the 17th, 20th, and 23rd Indian Divisions, later reinforced by the 5th Indian Division, airlifted from the Arakan front. At Kohima, a smaller garrison under Colonel Hugh Richards faced the Japanese 31st Division, led by Lieutenant-General Kotoku Sato.

The Battle of Imphal began in March 1944, as Japanese forces crossed the Chindwin River and advanced toward Imphal from multiple directions. The town's strategic importance stemmed from its position as a logistical hub, with roads and airfields supporting Allied operations in Burma. The Japanese plan relied on speed and surprise, but the Indian Army's preparedness, bolstered by intelligence from local scouts, disrupted their momentum. The 1st Assam Regiment, stationed at outposts like Jessami and Kharasom, played a critical role in delaying the Japanese advance, buying time for reinforcements to arrive. Fierce fighting ensued across the Imphal Plain, with Indian troops engaging in close-quarters combat amidst monsoon rains and supply shortages. The Allies leveraged their air superiority, with RAF and Indian Air Force squadrons delivering supplies and conducting strikes against Japanese positions, while the Japanese struggled with overstretched supply lines.

Simultaneously, the Battle of Kohima (Dennis, Peter; [Lyman, Robert \(2010\)](#))¹⁴ unfolded in the Naga Hills, where a small Allied garrison faced overwhelming odds. Kohima's ridge, overlooking the road to Dimapur, was a choke point that the Japanese needed to control to sever Allied supply lines. The initial garrison, numbering just 2,500 men, included elements of the Royal West Kent Regiment and the Assam Regiment, supported by local Naga volunteers who provided intelligence

¹² <https://www.aviation-defence-universe.com/the-assam-regiment/> accessed on 05/08/2025

¹³ Allen, Louis (1984). *Burma: The Longest War*. J. M. Dent & Sons. ISBN 0-460-02474-4.

¹⁴ Dennis, Peter; [Lyman, Robert](#) (2010). *Kohima 1944: The Battle That Saved India*. Osprey. ISBN 978-1-84603-939-3



and logistical support. The Japanese laid siege to Kohima (Keane, Fergal (2010)¹⁵ in early April, cutting off the garrison and subjecting it to relentless artillery and infantry assaults. The fighting was brutal, often hand-to-hand, with the defenders holding key positions like the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow and Garrison Hill. The arrival of the 2nd British Division and the 7th Indian Division in late April turned the tide, as Allied forces launched counterattacks to relieve the garrison. By June, the Japanese were in retreat, exhausted by casualties, disease, and lack of supplies.

The victories at Imphal and Kohima were decisive, marking the greatest defeat of the Japanese Army in World War II (Allen, Louis (2000) [1984])¹⁶. The Fourteenth Army, the largest single army in the world at the time with one million troops, of whom 700,000 were Indian, demonstrated remarkable resilience. The battles showcased the Indian Army's evolution into a modern fighting force, with soldiers from diverse backgrounds, including Northeast India's tribal communities, proving their mettle. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries at Imphal and Kohima, with 1,600 and 1,420 graves respectively, stand as somber testaments to the human cost of these victories. The Allied success paved the way for the reconquest of Burma, with Slim's forces advancing southward in 1945, supported by operations like the amphibious landing at Rangoon (Operation Dracula) in May 1945, in which the Royal Indian Navy played a key role.

Parallel to these conventional military operations, Northeast India was a theatre for unconventional warfare through the Chindit campaigns, led by Major General Orde Wingate. The Chindits¹⁷, a special forces unit comprising British, Indian, and Gurkha troops, conducted long-range penetration missions behind Japanese lines in Burma, using Assam as a staging area. In 1943, Operation Longcloth saw Chindit columns disrupt Japanese supply lines, relying on air-dropped supplies to sustain operations in Burma's jungles. The 1944 campaign, Operation Thursday, was more ambitious, with Chindit brigades establishing fortified bases, or "strongholds," to harass Japanese forces. These operations, launched from bases in Assam, demonstrated the region's logistical importance but came at a high cost, with heavy casualties due to disease, malnutrition, and enemy action. Many Chindit veterans, including Indian troops, later formed the nucleus of the 44th Airborne Division, highlighting the lasting impact of these campaigns.

Amidst the Allied efforts, the Indian National Army (INA), led by Subhas Chandra Bose, introduced a parallel narrative of anti-colonial resistance. Formed from Indian prisoners of war captured by

¹⁵ Keane, Fergal (2010). *Road of Bones: The Siege of Kohima 1944*. London: Harper Press. [ISBN 978-0-00713-240-9](#).pp5.

¹⁶ Allen, Louis (2000) [1984]. *Burma: The Longest War 1941–45*. London: Phoenix Press. [ISBN 978-1-84212-260-0](#).pp213.

¹⁷ Brayley, Martin (2002). *The British Army 1939-45 (3): The Far East*. Osprey Publishing. [ISBN 1-84176-238-5](#).pp18



Japan in Malaya and Singapore, as well as civilian volunteers from Southeast Asia, the INA sought to liberate India from British rule. In 1944, the INA joined the Japanese in the Imphal and Kohima offensives, with one division under Japanese command. Operating in Manipur and the Naga Hills, INA units faced logistical challenges and limited local support, as their campaign was far from India's heartland. Their military impact was modest, with heavy losses during the Japanese retreat, but their symbolic significance was profound. The INA's presence in Northeast India, coupled with Bose's radio broadcasts from Rangoon, stirred nationalist fervor across the subcontinent. The 1945–1946 trials of INA officers at the Red Fort in Delhi sparked widespread protests, accelerating the British decision to grant independence.

As World War II ended in August 1945, Northeast India transitioned from a wartime frontier to a region grappling with internal challenges. The British Indian Army, now preparing for partition, faced the task of reorganizing its units and personnel. Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck¹⁸, as Supreme Commander, oversaw the division of the army between India and Pakistan, a process formalized after the June 3, 1947, partition announcement. Northeast India, while not a primary theatre of partition-related violence, saw the reallocation of military assets and personnel, with some units moving to Pakistan. The region's strategic importance persisted, as its borders with East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and China raised concerns about future security.

The end of the war also saw the emergence of ethnic and political tensions that foreshadowed post-independence insurgencies. The Naga National Council (NNC)¹⁹, led by Angami Zapu Phizo, declared independence for the Naga Hills on August 14, 1947, a day before India's independence. This act, rooted in the Nagas' distinct cultural identity and wartime experiences, marked the beginning of a long-running insurgency. While no major military operations occurred in 1947, the Indian government's designation of the Naga Hills as a "disturbed area"²⁰ in 1956 and subsequent deployment of the Indian Army reflected the unresolved tensions of this period. The Naga insurgency, fueled by demands for autonomy, was an early indicator of the challenges Northeast India would face in integrating into the Indian nation-state.

The First Indo-Pakistani War of 1947–1948, while centered in Jammu and Kashmir, had indirect implications for Northeast India. The invasion of Kashmir by Pakistan-backed tribal militias in October 1947 prompted India to deploy troops, some of whom were staged from Northeast India's logistical bases. General K.S. Thimayya²¹, a veteran of the Burma Campaign, played a key role in

¹⁸ [Doherty, Richard](#) (2004). *Ireland's Generals in the Second World War*. Four Courts Press. ISBN 9781851828654. pp34

¹⁹ Chaube, Shibani Kinkar (1999) [1973]. *Hill Politics in Northeast India*. Orient Longman. ISBN 81-250-1695-3 pp73-74

²⁰ ["The Armed Forces \(Special Powers\) Act, 1958"](#) (PDF). [indiacode.nic.in](#). Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India.

²¹ ["Biography of General Thimmayya"](#). [Karnataka.com](#). Karnataka. Accessed on 05/08/2025



Kashmir, leveraging his experience from Northeast India. The war, which ended with an UN-mediated ceasefire in January 1949, underscored the region's role as a strategic hub, even as it grappled with internal challenges.

In reflecting on this period, Northeast India's military history from 1941 to 1947 reveals a complex interplay of global and local dynamics. The region was a crucible of Allied resistance against Japan, with the Battles of Imphal and Kohima standing as monumental victories that reshaped the Burma Campaign²². The Indian Army's contributions, alongside those of local communities, highlighted the region's integration into the broader war effort. Yet, the INA's campaign and the Naga declaration of independence underscored the anti-colonial and ethnic currents that would define Northeast India's post-independence trajectory. The British narrative of victory often overshadowed these alternative stories, but the INA's political impact and the Nagas' early resistance were critical in shaping India's path to independence and its subsequent challenges in the region. As India transitioned to independence, Northeast India stood at a crossroads, its military history a testament to its strategic importance and its unresolved aspirations.

From 1941 to 1947, the armed forces in Northeast India played a critical role in defending the colonial frontier during World War II and managing internal security amid rising nationalist sentiments. The British Indian Army and Assam Rifles, supported by local levies, demonstrated adaptability in a challenging environment. However, their operations also highlighted the tensions of colonial rule, setting the stage for post-independence conflicts. This period underscores the Northeast's strategic importance and the complex interplay of military, political, and social forces in shaping its history.

7. Collection of Data/ Information and Analysis of Collected Information from your Study:

The Collected Information have been analyzed accordingly. From the Analysis of the collected Information, it has been revealed that-

- (i) Northeast India was not merely a passive frontier during World War-II, but it was an active and dynamic arena where global conflict, colonial strategy, and indigenous agency intersected.
- (ii) The British military's strategy in the region relied heavily on both strategic geography and tribal manpower, as seen in the formation and deployment of the Assam Regiment and the use of local scouts during the Imphal and Kohima campaigns.

²² Slim, William Slim 1st Viscount (1972). *Defeat into victory* (Unabridged ed.). London: Cassell. [ISBN 0-304-29114-5](#).



- (iii) These battles were not only marked a military turning point in the Burma Campaign but also generated political consciousness among local populations, who observed firsthand both colonial militarization and nationalist alternatives through the presence of the Indian National Army (INA). The role of the INA, while militarily limited, introduced radical ideas of liberation, sovereignty, and cultural pride, which resonated with certain sections of the Northeast's tribal populations.
- (iv) Furthermore, the study revealed that how military infrastructure—such as roads, airfields, and supply depots—became permanent features that reshaped the region's political economy and increased its connectivity to mainland India. However, this integration was accompanied by marginalization and lack of political representation, leading to post-independence unrest.
- (v) The ethnographic and political dimensions of the military presence also became evident in the Naga Hills, where exposure to both colonial and anti-colonial military actors accelerated ethnic identity formation and demands for autonomy. The declaration of Naga independence on 14 August 1947—prior to India's independence—symbolized the unresolved tensions that the colonial military legacy left behind.
- (vi) Overall, the analysis underscores that military activity in Northeast India during 1941– 1947 was not a standalone wartime measure but a transformative force that catalyzed both political awakening and postcolonial resistance in the region. This reinforces the hypothesis that wartime experiences had a lasting influence on regional geopolitics and the trajectory of insurgent and separatist movements.

8. Findings of the Study/ Results and Interpretations:

Based on the historical analysis, the following key findings have been emerged from the present Study:

(i) *Strategic Militarization:*

Northeast India became a critical theatre of military operations due to its proximity to Burma and its role in Allied logistics and Defence during World War II.

(ii) *Local Military Participation:*

Indigenous communities contributed significantly through recruitment in the Assam Regiment, intelligence gathering, and logistics support.

(iii) *Impact of the INA:*

The symbolic presence of the Indian National Army inspired anti-colonial sentiment and raised political awareness, even though their military gains were limited.

**(iv) Infrastructure Development:**

The establishment of airstrips, roads, and supply depots in the region laid the foundation for post-war integration and economic transformation.

(v) Ethno-political Mobilization:

Wartime militarization contributed to the politicization of ethnic identities, especially among the Nagas, leading to early autonomy demands.

(vi) Enduring Geopolitical Importance:

Post-war transitions and the partition of India reinforced Northeast India's continued strategic and political significance.

9. Societal Impact of the Study:

The present Study has revealed the important insights into the broader societal consequences of militarization, conflict, and colonial governance in Northeast India during World War-II; the Key Societal Impacts are given below:

(i) Empowerment of Indigenous Narratives:

By highlighting the contributions of tribals, the study gives voice to often overlooked actors in military and nationalist histories. It promotes inclusivity in national memory and reinforces the importance of acknowledging regional agency.

(ii) Enhanced Historical Consciousness:

The research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how wartime experiences influenced identity formation, political mobilization, and collective memory in Northeast India. This is crucial for younger generations in the region seeking historical context for ongoing socio-political struggles.

(iii) Recognition of Wartime Trauma and Resilience:

Through oral histories and community perspectives, the study documents not only heroism but also the disruptions and hardships faced by local populations. This can inform peacebuilding efforts by acknowledging historical grievances and validating collective trauma.

(iv) Contribution to Peace and Policy Discourse:

The historical roots of insurgency and separatism in the Northeast are often misunderstood or oversimplified in contemporary policy debates. This study provides a grounded historical analysis that can help shape more empathetic and context-sensitive governance, development, and reconciliation policies.

**(v) *Educational and Cultural Revitalization:***

The research can serve as a foundational resource for curriculum development in regional studies, military history, and political science. It also encourages cultural institutions, such as museums and archives, to preserve and showcase the region's wartime legacy.

(vi) *Bridge Between Academia and Civil Society:*

By combining scholarly rigor with accessible language and narrative, the study has the potential to reach beyond academic audiences and inform public discourse, civil society dialogue, and heritage preservation initiatives.

In essence, the societal impact of this study lies in its capacity to reframe the historical role of Northeast India in the national imagination, inspire inclusive history writing, and support efforts to build peace through historical justice and recognition.

10. Suggestions for further Study:

While this study provides a comprehensive overview of military and geopolitical developments in Northeast India from 1941 to 1947, it also opens several avenues for future research studies:

(i) *Oral Histories and Community Memory:*

Detailed fieldwork collecting oral testimonies from surviving veterans, tribal elders, and families of those involved in the war could offer richer, more personalized perspectives on the conflict and its aftermath.

(ii) *Comparative Frontier Studies:*

A comparative analysis between Northeast India and other frontier regions globally (e.g., North-West Frontier Province, Burma, or the China-Vietnam border) could offer broader insights into how borderlands mediate war and state-building.

(iii) *Wartime Infrastructure and Post-war Development:*

Studies could focus on how airfields, roads, and cantonments established during WWII influenced post-war urbanization, migration patterns, and economic integration in Northeast India.

(iv) *Gender Dimensions of War:*

There is significant scope to explore how women in Northeast India experienced the war—as caretakers, informants, laborers, or resistance participants—and how gender roles shifted during and after militarization.

(v) *Educational and Museum Studies:*

Future research could examine how Northeast India's wartime contributions are represented in school textbooks, memorials, museums, and popular media, assessing gaps and biases.



(vi) *Post-INA Legacy and Political Mobilization:*

A focused study on how the legacy of the INA in the region influenced political movements, party formations, and memory politics in the early decades of independence.

(vii) *Environmental Impact of Military Campaigns:*

Research can be extended to study the ecological consequences of large-scale troop movements, infrastructure building, and wartime deforestation in the hill tracts and forested areas.

These directions not only build on the foundations laid by this study but also contribute to a more pluralistic and multidimensional historiography of the Northeast. They will be valuable for scholars, policymakers, and civil society actors engaging with the region's complex past and present.

11. Conclusion:

This study examined the military, political, and social dynamics of Northeast India during the final years of [British colonial rule \(1941–1947\)](#)²³, focusing on its transformation into a vital theatre of World War II and a seedbed of post-independence insurgency and identity politics. Key insights include the strategic importance of the region during the Burma Campaign, the decisive role played by local forces in the Defence of Imphal and Kohima, and the broader implications of colonial militarization for ethnic and regional consciousness. The presence of the Indian National Army (INA) and the infrastructural development initiated by the British further accelerated political awakening, particularly among the Naga communities.

The study confirms that military operations and wartime governance had a profound and lasting impact on the region's post-1947 trajectory. Ethnic mobilization, demands for autonomy, and the continuing relevance of wartime memory underscore the enduring legacy of this period. By integrating military history with ethnographic and political analysis, the article challenges mainstream historical narratives and offers a more inclusive understanding of Northeast India's role in shaping—and being shaped by—the closing years of empire. It contributes significantly to the historiography of India's borderlands and highlights the need for further interdisciplinary research to capture the complexity of frontier regions in times of war and transition.

²³ British colonial rule (1941–1947) https://www.google.com/search?client=ms-android-oneplus-rvo3&sca_esv=7466096905fafdc9&q=British+colonial+rule+1941+47+wikipedia&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=2ahUKEwiYgpiXI4KPAXW5TmwGHVIpN0QQ1QJ6BAh8EAE&biw=360&bih=718&dpr=3



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