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## INCREDIBLE WOMAN OF INDIAN HISTORY: RANI GAIDINLIU

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**Abstract:** *Rani Gaidinliu was a freedom fighter and a political, social and cultural awakener from the state of Manipur. She was of the active participants in the fight of freedom from British rule in India. She is recognized as the first female freedom fighter from Manipur. In the present paper, the author describes Gaidinliu as the goddess of the people and Daughter of hills. She fought with British Crown for their rights.*

**Keywords:** *Freedom Fighter, Nagas, British Rule, North Cachar Hills*

In the beginning, Rani Gaidinliu was a Naga spiritual leader as a follower of her cousin Haipou Jadonang. At the age of 13, she joined the Heraka religious movement. Heraka reformist religion recognises supremacy of one God who is behind creation of nature be it air, water or earth. The movement later turned into a political movement seeking to drive out the British from Manipur and the surrounding Naga areas. Within the Heraka cult, she came to be considered an incarnation of a goddess. Gaidinliu was born on 26 January 1915 at nungkao (or longkao) village in the present-day tousem sub-division of [tamenglong district](#), Manipur. She was from the [rongmei](#) tribe (also known as kabui). She was the fifth of eight children, including six sisters and a younger brother, born to lothonang pamei and kachaklenliu. The family belonged to the ruling clan of the village. She did not have a formal education due to the lack of schools in the area.<sup>1</sup>

The reformist religious movement steadfastly turned out to be a political movement against the British Raj. Sensing this, the British first caught Haipou Jadonang and then hanged him to death on charges of treason in 1931. Rani not to be cowed down by this heinous act took over the leadership. She urged the people not to pay taxes and not to work for the British which were the practices of the freedom struggle at that time. She even went underground and led many attacks on the British administration. The British authorities launched a manhunt for her so much so that monetary awards were put on her head for information to facilitate her arrest. This included a declaration that any villager providing information on her whereabouts will get a 10 years tax break, a great offer that time. But she continued to fight the Assam Rifles which was under the British administration then in armed conflicts in the region.<sup>2</sup>



Rani Gaidinliu was a freedom fighter and a political, social and cultural awakener from the state of Manipur. She was of the active participants in the fight of freedom from British rule in India. She is recognized as the first female freedom fighter from Manipur. She was born on 26 January 1915 at Nungkao, a Rongmei village in Manipur. She was born to Lothonang Pamei and kachakalemliu and was fifth child among her six sisters and a brother. She did not have a formal education due to lack of schools in the area.<sup>3</sup>

In 1927, when she was just 13, she came under the influence of haipou Jadonang. Jadonang launched a religious movement called the Heraka religious movement. He had emerged as a prominent local leader. Rani Gaidinliu grew restive on seeing the exploitation of the tribal people and Nagas by the British. The tribes' rights to jungle were being snatched away, making their lives dreadful and painful. she joined the heraka religious movement that sought to reform the Zealiangrong Naga communities. Soon the movement grew into political struggle to uproot British colonialism from Manipur. Within the Heraka cult, she was regarded as an incarnation of the goddess cherachamdinliu. In January 1931 the British officials received report that jadonang was planning to declare a war against them and there were reports secret meeting and collection of guns in the Naga villages. The British officers of the area decided to suppress the Jadonang's movement.<sup>4</sup>

Permanently On 19 February 1931 Jadonang was arrested while returning from the Bhuvan cave with Gaidinliu and 600 other followers. On 29 August 1931, on the bank of Nambul river behind the Imphal Jail, Jadonang was hanged to death. But the British could never expect that the delicate girl in Rani Gaidinliu could take up the leadership of the movement. She was only sixteen at the time, yet she took up the leadership of the armed guerilla force working against the British interest.<sup>5</sup>

She demanded for independence that was not exclusive for Manipur or for the tribal belt in the north eastern areas. It was in conjunction with independence for the whole of country. She saw her region as a part of the greater India. British were scared of the Indian youth, in other parts; they were doing away with the youth people like Bhagat Singh, Chander Shekhar Azad in a bid to make people submit before them. They decided to use the same tactics in this area too.<sup>6</sup>



Rani Gaidinliu openly rebelled against the British rule, exhorting the Zeliangrong people not to pay taxes. She also told about Gandhi's freedom movement against British rule. The British authorities launched a manhunt for her. The governor of Assam dispatched the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> battalions of Assam rifles against her under the supervision of the Naga Hills deputy commissioner J.P. Mills. Monetary rewards of 500 rupees were declared of information leading to her arrest. This included a declaration that any village providing information on her whereabouts will get a 10 years tax break. The guerilla rebels clashed with the mighty British army on two occasions on 16 February 1932 in North Cachar Hills and on 18 March 1932 at Hangrum village. In October 1932, Gaidinliu moved on the Pulome village, where her followers started building a wooden fortress. Assam Rifles contingent headed by Captain McDonald launched a surprise attack on the 17 Oct. 1932. Gaidinliu and her followers were arrested near the Kanoma village. Gaidinliu was taken to Imphal and sentenced her to life imprisonment for waging war against the British crown.<sup>7</sup>

Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru met her in Shilong Jail in the year 1937 and described her as the "Daughter of hills" and subsequently gave her the title of 'Rani Gaidinliu' or the queen of her people. After the Interim Government of India was set up in 1946, Rani Gaidinliu was released on Prime Minister Nehru's orders from Tura jail, having spent 14 years in various prisons in 1947. Even after release she continued to work for the upliftment of her people after her release. She stayed at Vimrap village of Tuensang with her younger brother Marang till 1952. That year, she was finally allowed to move back to her native village of Longkao. In 1953, Prime Minister Nehru visited Imphal where Rani Gaidinliu met and conveyed to him the gratitude and goodwill of her people. Later she met Nehru in Delhi to discuss the development and welfare of Zeliangrong people. Gaidinliu was opposed to Naga insurgency who advocated secessionism then from India. Instead, she campaigned for a separate Zeliangrong territory within the Union of India. The rebel Naga leaders criticized Gaidinliu's movement for the integration of Zeliangrong tribes under one administrative unit. They were also opposed to her working for the revival of the traditional Naga religion of animism or Heraka. After the Interim Government of India was set up in 1946, Rani Gaidinliu was released on Prime Minister Nehru's orders from Tura jail, having spent 14 years in various prisons in 1947. Even after release she continued to work for the upliftment of her people after her release. She stayed at Vimrap village of Tuensang with her younger



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In response to Phizo's declaration of the "Naga Federal Government", she set up her own quasi-administration named the "Zeliangrong Government of Rani Party". In 1964, the overground Zeliangrong leaders in consultation with underground leaders led by Rani Gaidinliu, demanded "a separate Zeliangrong Administrative Unit or Political Unit" within the Union of India. Gaidinliu's struggle did not end with India getting freedom. In order to defend the Heraka culture and to strengthen her position, she went underground in 1960 again. She organized a private army of about a thousand men equipped rifles to defend and press for her demand for a single Zeliangrong district. In response to Phizo's declaration of the "Naga Federal Government", she set up her own quasi-administration named the "Zeliangrong Government of Rani Party". In 1964, the overground Zeliangrong leaders in consultation with underground leaders led by Rani Gaidinliu, demanded "a separate Zeliangrong Administrative Unit or Political Unit" within the Union of India.<sup>11</sup>

In 1966, after six years of hard underground life in old age, under an agreement with the Government of India, Rani Gaidinliu came out from her jungle hideout to work for the betterment of her people through peaceful, democratic and non-violent means. She went to Kohima in January 1966, and met the Prime Minister LalBahadurShastri in Delhi a month after, demanding the creation of a separate Zeliangrong administrative unit. On 24 September, 320 of her followers reached an understanding with the Government and some of them were absorbed into the Nagaland Armed Police.<sup>12</sup>



After her release, she continued to work for the upliftment of her people. She organized a resistance movement against the Naga national Council led insurgents in the year 1966, had to go underground again. Thereafter on the request of the central government and state government of Nagaland and Manipur. She came over ground and stayed in Kohima from 1966 to 1992. She also met Smt. Indra Gandhi in New Delhi to put forward her demand for a separate Zeliangrong Administrative unit. The Zeliangrong people's convention was formed in 1980 at Tamenglong, Manipur and Rani Gaidinliu was unanimously elected as the president of the organization. The organization took up their objective of recognition of the tribe to the minister of state. Rani Gaidinliu returned to Lengkao in 1991 and died on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1993 on age of 78.<sup>13</sup> She was conferred Tamrapatra freedom Award in 1972, the Padma Bhushan in 1982 and the Vivekananda Seva Award in 1983. Rani Gaidinliu was also conferred the Birsa Munda Award posthumously. The government of India issued a postal stamp in her honour in 1996 and issued a commemorative coin in her honour in 2015. Government of India instituted Stree Shakti Puruskar in honour of five eminent women in Indian History which included Rani Gaidinliu in 2000AD.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

She was a legendary freedom fighter of whom India really proud of an Indian historian writes "Any nation or country would be proud to have such a gifted woman who sacrificed everything for her people and for the cause she believed was good and true. she became a living legend in her own life time"

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