Chapter IV

NAGA UNREST: II. GAIDINLIU'S MOVEMENT
1932-33

After the execution of Jadonang, the Government of India thought peace would reign in the tribal areas of Manipur and adjacent areas. But contrary to their expectations, a Naga Joan of Arch by the name of Gaidinliu emerged to revive the Jadonang cult adding to it elements of her own cult.\(^1\) This Jadonang-Gaidinliu cult was confined to the Kacha and the Kabui Nagas. Her pseudo-religion soon assumed political overtones and was to breed unrest again.

The Government, unaware of the implications of the new cult, did not immediately try to arrest the Sorceress who kept alive and continued to nurture the movement of Jadonang even after his death. Had the Government closely followed the activities of Gaidinliu, the 'witch-doctor', and suppressed her in time, the

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1. Gaidinliu had come into contact with Jadonang at an early age of thirteen. He found her a promising disciple. Around 1930, first, she met him when she went to him for an interpretation of her dreams. At that time she was ill. She once again met him for the same after two or three months. Then she came under the complete influence of her master Jadonang. She then became a maibi (medicine-woman). Gradually, she stepped into the shoes of the master.
commination in the hill areas of Manipur (and the Naga Hills) would have gradually subsided. As a matter of fact, the Government of India did not take any notice of the lasabi (unmarried girl) before Jadonang's arrest. A British administrator comments, 'Gaidilieu (sic), ... here is comparatively small fry: she is a girl, and I am not taking her along. We can get her later, if we want her, without sending an army for her.' She became prominent and popular only after the arrest of her master Jadonang.

She started her pseudo-religious and semi-martial political movement after the death of Jadonang. The political aims of her movement were (i) the subjugation of the Kukis, (ii) the suppression of the Meities, (iii) the overthrow of the British Government, and (iv) the establishment of the 'Naga Raj'.

She aimed at the subjugation of the Kukis whom the Nagas envied for the last many years. During the Kuki Rebellion of 1917-1919, the Kukis plundered and looted several houses of the Nagas. They also took many heads of the Nagas. Naturally, it developed in the form of hatred and enmity between the Nagas and

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2. Political Agent to Captain of the Fourth Assam Rifles, 13 March 1931, Political Agent File No. 12, 1931.
the Kukis, eventhough they lived side by side in many villages of the north-west hill region of Manipur. She thought that the right time had come to take revenge from the Kukis when her movement was in zenith. On the other hand, the Kukis opposed the Jadonang-Gaidinliu cult.

Secondly, it aimed at the suppression of the Meities. From the time immemorial the Meities bitterly looked down the Nagas and other tribes of Manipur. The plain people treated them as inferior human beings. The Meities employed them as their porters. Only menial jobs were given to them. The Maharaja was never interested in their development. Naturally, this psychological inferiority complex brought a bad blood between the Meities and the Nagas. The killings of the Meities were the first sign of revenge.

Thirdly, Gaidinliu aimed at the elimination of British administration. The Government was supposed to be a hindrance against achieving her objectives. Her no-tax campaign was the first kind of political disobedience to the British rule. This made it difficult for the British Officials to collect house-taxes from the tribal villages.
Lastly, Gaidinliu's aim was to establish a 'Naga Raj' in Manipur. She calculated that this could be fulfilled only when the first three were materialized.

The fulfilment of Gaidinliu's will was not so easy; she had to establish herself as a champion of the Naga cause. And she had to face the might of the British Raj. In order to achieve her plan she practised the same policy once adopted by her lord, Jadonang. Superstition was the main political weapon which she used to bring the Kacha and the Kabui Nagas under her loyalty. In every village, she took jointly an oath of secrecy and allegiance from the Nagas that they should not reveal her plan to the Kukis and the Government. She threatened the villagers that if anyone disclosed the matter to anyone, she would bring death to them. And those who disobeyed her would meet devastation and ruin in their life-time. But, on the other hand, with her triumph everybody would be blessed and glorified. She claimed herself not only as a goddess but also a magician. This was nothing but a political manœuvre to establish herself as a spiritual leader. Her propaganda of Jadonang's

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3. Foreign Department, Political File No. 189, 1932, NAI, New Delhi.
coming back to life was only a device to keep her hold on the movement. It was even rumoured that Jadonang had been travelling among them in spirit, and seeing them what they had been doing. She talked on the impersonation of Jadonang in some person who had been working with her.  

At her order, Jadonang's death anniversary was celebrated in the early spring of every year. During the ceremonies, all the Kukis were barred from entering into the villages where the death anniversary of Jadonang was performed. The Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills reported that there was 'a fanatical determination to honour and obey Jadonang at all costs, fanaticism is always dangerous, and in this case it is particularly so owing to its definitely anti-Kuki.

4. Ibid.

5. On the occasion of Jadonang's death anniversary there would be drumming and singing in a state of dilirium. In honour of their god (Jadonang) the Nagas would dig a tank in spite of the warnings of the Deputy Commissioner, at an incident of Bopungwemi village (Naga Hills), that they should be punished. Rangkilang was the chief leader of the Bopungwemi incident. He was a ring leader and soothsayer who claimed to be the mouthpiece of Jadonang. He was already arrested by the Naga Hills police force.
Gaidinliu continued the practice of human sacrifices to the god. She told her people to sacrifice more human heads so that they could get happiness. Like Dadonang she constructed some temples at Nungkao and other places, where sacrifices of human heads and mithuns were performed. She advised the Nagas to offer more presents to the god for a better rice harvest.

A study of the inner core of the movement of Gaidinliu reveals her political ambitions. Her movement coincided with the Indian civil disobedience movement during the 1930s. Her no-tax campaign was a political manifestation of her disobedience of the British Government in India. She advised the villagers not to pay taxes to the government. At the zenith of her movement, she often used to remember the

6. Foreign Department, Political File No. 189, 1932, NAI, New Delhi. The Deputy Commissioner was afraid of such death anniversary of Dadonang as there had been chances of clash between the Nagas and the Kukis. He further said that ceremonies meant excitement, and, in this case, excitement meant anti-Kuki feelings.

name of Mahatma Gandhi. She asked the villagers to believe in one 'god Gandhi'. She regarded Gandhi as the son of Jadonang. U.A. Cosgrave, Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam says: 'Apparently the common people had been told that the day of the Kacha Nagas was coming, further they were to believe in a god Gandhi, about whom some vague information had filtered through from the outer Hills, to retain their faith in Gaidinliu and to be ready for war in the autumn'. If it were not so, the Nagas would not be coming to pay homage to the Congress President (Name is not mentioned).

In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, '... I heard a story which India ought to know and to cherish. It was the story of a young woman ... she was about nineteen about six years ago when civil disobedience blazed over the length and breadth of India. News of Gandhi and the Congress reached her in her hill abode and found echo in her heart. She

8. Foreign Department, Political File No. 459, 1933, NAI, New Delhi.

dreamed of freedom for her people and an ending of the galling restrictions they suffered from, and she raised the banner of independence and called her people to rally round it. Perhaps she thought, rather prematurely, that the British was fading out. But that Empire still functioned effectively and aggressively and it took vengeance on her and her people. Many villages were burnt and destroyed and this heroic girl was captured and sentenced to transportation for life... And India does not even know of this brave child of her hills, with the free spirit of the mountains in her. But her own people remember their Cindallo Rani (sic) and think of her with love and pride. And a day will come when India also will remember her and cherish her, and bring out of her prison cell. 10

Whether Gaidinliu's movement was really political, and for that she was in favour of the Indian National Congress. The answer to the questions is to be found from her interview by Sarabala Devi, Secretary of the Sylhet Mahila Sangha,

10. The Amrita Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), June 2, 1939, p. 16, ..
when Gaidinliu was in the jail. The Secretary wrote:

'... At first she declined to talk to me but when I gave her my credentials as a congress worker her face bleamed with delight ...'\(^{11}\) It was learnt that she had indicated her desire to see Gandhi as soon as she was set free. When Sarabala further enquired Gaidinliu whether she would remain under the custody of the Mahila Sangha if she be released conditionally, she very happily agreed on Sarabala Devi's proposal.\(^{12}\)

**Containment of Gaidinliu's Movement:**

As soon as Gaidinliu established herself as a Naga leader, her movement spread far and wide in the tribal areas of Manipur and Naga Hills. The tribal areas of the north-west of Manipur were the main centre of her movement. Particularly, the village of

\(^{11}\) *The Hindustan Standard* (Calcutta), October 12, 1946, p. 5, ...

\(^{12}\) But the British authorities never considered Gaidinliu as a political leader. She was regarded as a head-huntress. When she was in the jail she was never considered as a political prisoner and was given a 'C' class. A. MacDonald, President of the Manipur State Durbar said: 'The cult was suppressed because its chief and most essential rite was human sacrifice ...' Political Prisoners File No. G. 46, 1939, NMML, New Delhi.
Leng was the most disturbed spot, where, generally, religious ceremonies were performed. Gradually, it expanded up to other areas neighbouring Manipur. In Manipur all the Kacha Naga villages in the Barak Valley, west of Barak river and a few localities in the east were affected. The Renglomai and the Khungpung villages were not touched as these were closed to some bigger Kuki villages.

As the movement of Gaidinliu spread, it created a problem for the administrative machineries of the two Governments of Manipur and Naga Hills. The Government decided to take punitive measures to put down the movement. The Government ordered all the army headquarters that 'Every effort should be made to arrest the accused Gaidilieu (sic) who is absconding.' Once she was arrested by the lambus who left her under the custody of her village elders.

13. In the Naga Hills, with exception to a few villages, all the Kacha Naga villages were not free from the influence of the Gaidinliu cult. Bopungwemi village was the place where her movement was quite active. In the North Cachar Hills almost all the Kacha Naga villages were affected. Foreign Department, Political File No. 189, 1932, NAI, New Delhi.

14. Foreign Department, Political File No. 18(7), 1931, NAI, New Delhi.
who helped her to escape easily on the same day.\textsuperscript{15} The village elders were severely punished but she could be never traced out. As a result, Gaidinliu's movement spread like anything.

One of the rather disheartening consequences of her reappearance as a leader was that the estrangement between the Nagas and the Kukis became more widespread. On January 19, 1932, it was reported that Nohanrami and Bopungwem villages just north to Henima were in a very excited state. The Sub-divisional Officer of Haflong informed the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills that the Kukis were about to be massacred by the Nagas.\textsuperscript{16} The Deputy Commissioner rushed to the spot and warned the Nagas about serious consequence that would follow such an eventuality.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{15} Last year (1931) Gaidinliu came into contact with the Government column which set out in search of Jadonang, the leader of the politico-religious movement, but she was freed after a thorough interrogation as she was not a person to be counted as a trouble suitor. Political Agent to Officer Commanding, 13 March, 1931, Political Agent File No. 12, 1931.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{16} Foreign Department, Political File No. 189, 1932, NAI, New Delhi.
The Deputy Commissioner once again tried to capture Gaidinliu at Henima but she escaped hurriedly to the North Cachar Hills district. On February 16, 1932, a section of the Assam Rifles met with stiff opposition from Gaidinliu's party who took to their heels after opening fire on them. A report received from the North Cachar Hills described the presence of Gaidinliu at Guilong, a Naga village. The Sub-Inspector with two constables and two interpreters hurried up to the spot. The party met with stiff opposition from the villagers. The Nagas attacked them with daggers and spears and wounded three policemen. On receipt of the news, the Sub-divisional Officer (North Cachar Hills) accompanied by two sections of Assam Rifles marched on to Guilong on February 18, 1932, and seized all the spears and the daggers from the villagers. But they failed to arrest Gaidinliu. The movement of Gaidinliu seemed to be getting out of control. By an order of the Government of India, all authority was centralised in one person designated as Deputy Commissioner who established military outposts in the affected areas of Manipur, Cachar Hills and Naga

17. Ibid.
As a result, the disturbed Naga villages of Manipur, Cachar Hills and Naga Hills were brought under control very soon. The Nagas were heavily fined and their arms were confiscated. The villages where the Gaidinliu movement was active were burnt down by the Government columns with a view to suppress the movement. The Deputy Commissioner also threatened to punish and burn down all the Naga villages if they failed to produce Gaidinliu.

The Manipur Government offered a reward of Rs. 500 and guns, and any villager, either in the State or in British India, which gave reliable information leading to her capture, would be granted ten years full remission of house tax. But no village turned up as an informer. The Deputy Commissioner was of the opinion that the movement of Gaidinliu could be easily suppressed if she was


19. The burnt villages were Yang-Khulen, Hungrum, Guilong, Makui, etc.

On October 17, 1932, Gaidinliu was arrested at Pulomi village in the Naga Hills. J.P. Mills, Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, described Gaidinliu's last action in this way, 'Gaidilieu (sic) was at Pulomi for about ten days before she was captured. She was clearly desperate, for she was at the end of the Kacha Naga country and had nowhere to go. She said openly that in the next two months either she or Government would win. All she could do was to stage a theatrical stand. Apparently she hoped that an 'army' would collect round her. Meanwhile she made Pulomi build an amazing Palisade, ... It ran all the way round the village except the ground is precipitous, and to make it Pulomi worked like slaves and destroyed a great deal of their valuable firewood reserve to provide the thousands of tree trunks required.

Four thousand men with rifles behind it would have been formidable, but a few hundred Nagas inside it could either have thrown a spear over it nor wielded a dao. It had not been quite completed when she was captured. Her Orders on what was to be done when an attacking force were remarkable. She would strike the Shahibs dead with her magic and her supporters were then to use daos only, for they would be enough. When Captain Macdonald made his attack at down on information brought to Kohima by a Pulomi gaonbura her 'army' melted away and there was no magic. Pulomi shouted and brandished daos according to her orders, but were careful not to go beyond then. No blow was struck and the village was clearly relieved when sepoys ignomiously hauled out of a house the biting, scratching girl whom they had uselessly worked so hard and killed so many cattle though any mistake on the part of the commandant would probably have led to an attack in desperation by her supporters ...

In the court of the Political Agent of Manipur, she was convicted for abetment of murder, and sentenced for transportation for life. Her petition of appeal was also rejected by the Governor-in-Council. The suggestion of transferring her outside British India was brushed aside.

As a first reaction to the capture of Gaidinliu, some of her followers from the Leng and the Bopungwemi villages conspired to murder the Kuki Chowkidar of the Lakema Inspection Bungalow in the Naga Hills. The Chowkidar was suspected by the Nagas to be the informer of Gaidinliu's presence at Pulomi which led to her arrest. On December, 1932, the Chowkidar along with his wife and children were murdered by the followers of Gaidinliu. It was reported that even on the eve of her arrest her followers were so much agitated that they had stopped their daily work. 23

It was definitely thought that the movement of Gaidinliu might subside soon, but the unrest continued even after her arrest. Numerous fanatic and self-styled maibas sprang up as her successors. J.P. Mills

23. Gopinath Bordoloi to Jawaharlal Nehru, 22 May, 1939, Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, N.M.M.L.
once rightly said: 'The capture of Gaidilieu (sic) will not end the agitation ... She will be succeeded by one or more 'mediums'. To be 'mediums' is not an offence under any law. Yet they will continue to keep the people in a state of constant excitement, and Nagas will continue to be set over against Government and Kukis. The result from the administrative point of view will be serious'.

During 1933, the movement of Gaidinliu gradually subsided when the Naga ring leaders Dikeo and Ramjo were arrested. Besides, some of the minor maibas were also captured. Subsequently, the tension between the Nagas and the Kukis also subsided and disappeared.

Release of Gaidinliu under Political Pressure

There could be no question of releasing Gaidinliu so long as the country was ruled by the British. She was strictly guarded during her detention. For some time even an interview with her was not allowed. A Mac-Donald, President of the

24. Foreign Department, Political File No. 189, 1932, NAI, New Delhi.
Manipur State Durbar, thought that 'The immediate release of Guidallo (sic) is both undesired and undesirable, whether the Mahasabha (The Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha) agrees or not, no amount of agitation will procure the release of Guidallo...'25 The Political Agent of Manipur was also of the same opinion. Further, the State authorities were apprehensive of another movement breaking and if she were immediately released, and that she was a potential threat to the peace of Manipur and Assam.26

The man who was most considerate towards Gaidinliu was Jawaharlal Nehru. He never failed to understand the underlying political core of her. Nehru was apprised of her movement during his tour in Silchar in 1935. He was greatly shocked by the story of her detention. He discussed the matter with Congress leaders. At the Congress Session held at Haripur in 1936, a resolution was adopted for the


immediate release of Gaidinliu. 27 The Assam Mahila Samity at the eleventh session of their conference held in Gauhati in January, 1939, also adopted a resolution of the early release of Gaidinliu. 28

The long silence of the Government of India regarding the release of Gaidinliu made some of the political minded persons more impatient. They started exposing the wretched health condition of her in the Shillong jail so that it might draw the sympathy of people. But the Indian Government seemed to be indifferent to the request of different political organisations for the release of Gaidinliu.

In pursuance of the resolution adopted at the Surma Valley Women's Conference, Saralabala Devi, Secretary

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27. The Hindustan Standard (Calcutta), August 28, 1949, p. 11. Since Nehru learnt about Gaidinliu, he was giving advice to Gopinath Bordoloi, Premier of Assam, in connection with Gaidinliu's release. As suggested by Jawaharlal Nehru, he took interest in finding out records about Gaidinliu. Even though he got the chance to go through the Government files, he was not allowed to publish it without further knowledge of the Governor of Assam. Nehru was well apprised of it. But he never failed to publicize about the tragic story of Gaidinliu.

28. A Shillong report dated October 22, 1938, said that a memorandum had been sent by the Shillong District Youth League to the Secretary of State for India through Ellen Wilkinson, the Labour representative of House of Commons, urging the early release of Gaidinliu. Further in another meeting held in Shillong on October 21, 1938, decided that an intensive India-wide agitation would be launched until Gaidinliu was released. The Amrita Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), October 23, 1938, p. 4.
of the Sylhet Mahila Sangha, appealed to the Government of Assam to release Gaidinliu unconditionally pending the decision of the Government of India.  

She further insisted the Assam Government to place Gaidinliu under the custody of the Sylhet Mahila Sangha.

Referring back to the movement of Gaidinliu, Biresh Chandra Misra, Secretary of the Sylhet District Congress Committee and a member of the All India Congress Committee, criticized the repressive military measures adopted by the Provincial Government of Assam to suppress the no-tax campaign of Gaidinliu in the Naga Hills and the North Cachar Hills. Disapproving the policy of the British Government of India towards Gaidinliu, R.C. Johnson, a scholar of the University of Melbourne, wrote:

'... This rather sentimental story (of Gaidinliu) implies that British rule in India is not only tyrannical but also unjust ...'  

29. Ibid, June 2, 1939, p. 16.  

30. R.C. Johnson to Editor of The Living Age (New York), Political Prisoners File No. C. 46, 1939, (Date is not mentioned).
Some time in 1944, the case of Gaidinliu was reviewed. Thereafter, she was interned in a village in Naga Hills under strict vigilance. Later, leniency was shown to her as she belonged to the weaker sex. Otherwise she would have met the same fate as Jadonang. In 1946, the question of withdrawal of ban on Gaidinliu received active consideration of the Central and Provincial Government. Gaidinliu was released in 1945 after having undergone fourteen years' imprisonment and was then interned in her native village. All in all, she spent fourteen years' imprisonment in the British Government jails: one year at Gauhati, Assam; six years at Shillong, Meghalaya; three years at Aijal, Mizoram; and four years at Tura, Garo Hills. With the independence of India she was given her full liberty at the behest of Nehru. All restrictions on her residence and movement were also removed.

31. The Hindustan Standard (Calcutta), October 18, 1946, p. 5.
33. After Gaidinliu's release on July 18, 1949 after rigorous imprisonment, Nehru presented her a sum of Rs500 to enable her to build a home for herself. The Assam Government also sanctioned her a pension for life of Rs75/- per month. July 19, 1949, p. 10.

The author met Gaidinliu in Kohima, on August 30, 1979. She lives in a Nagaland Government quarters. She is about sixty-five years old and gets, at present, a pension of Rs800/- excluding allowances and contingent grants.