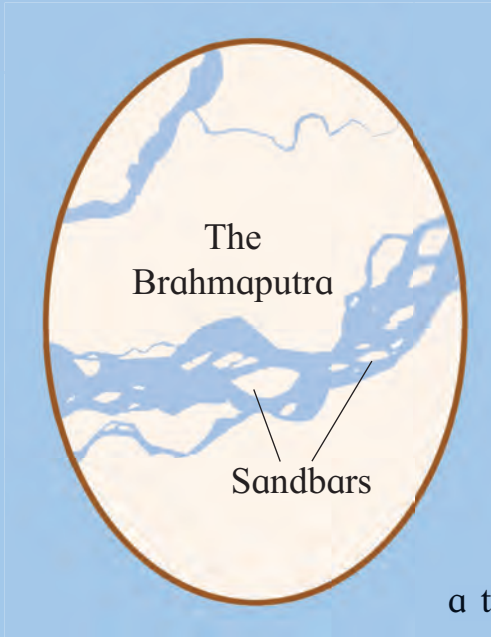


4.2. Molai's Kathoni



One day in the terrible summer season of 1979 changed the life of Jadav Payeng. He lived in a small village on the banks of the Brahmaputra. The Brahmaputra is a great river. In places, it is more than 7-8 kilometres wide. It has many sandbars and even an island known as Majuli island. Waters of the Brahmaputra often flood Majuli and the sandbars. At times, the river even sweeps away some of the sandbars.

When Jadav was about 15 years old, he saw a terrible sight. On one of the sandbars, thousands of snakes lay dead. They had been washed ashore with the flood. With no trees to protect them, they had all died in the scalding sun. Jadav was simply horrified. He sat down and wept. There and then he found his mission – to turn the sandy barren land green with trees! For more than 30 long years, Jadav Payeng toiled on the dry, barren area and transformed it into a forest.



Jadav Payeng's family and friends called him Molai. At first, Molai worked in a Forest Department scheme to plant trees. For some reason, that work stopped. All the other labourers left – but not Molai! He decided to carry on the work all by himself. He went to the forest department officers and the elders in his village.

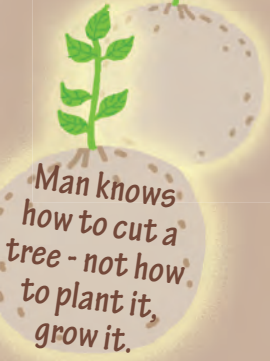
“Molai, nothing grows on the sandbars. Don't waste your time,” many of them advised. But someone told him to try growing bamboo. The forest department people gave him some saplings. Early next morning, Molai went to the island and planted his first tree carefully. After that, he visited the island every day, watering and tending the plants with

love. The plants began to grow. With them, Molai's hopes also grew. He began to look for more saplings and other types of trees – he brought silk cotton saplings next. To his delight, they took root on the island. Part of the island was now dotted with green.

Molai now spent all his time on the small island. Every day, without fail, he watered the plants, made fences around them, gave support to the saplings. He even carried good soil in his little boat and spread it near the plants.

Someone told him that red ants are good for the soil. They would make the sandy soil fertile. Molai then carried heaps of them to the island. He was not put out by the ant bites. He also took different types of grasses there. The green patches on the island became thicker and bigger.

For months and years, Molai worked all alone on the small patch of the island. He lived in the company of trees. He spoke to them. Maybe the trees understood his language – his words of affection. They responded by growing vigorously.



With trees came birds, insects and animals. They liked the place. Unknowingly, they brought many more seeds to the place. The place began to get rich with different forms of life. Even then, Molai did not abandon his work. The forest now became a second home for him. People in that area named it Molai's Kathoni – Molai's forest.



Today, Molai's Kathoni covers an area of nearly 1500 acres. The acre is a unit of land area, which is approximately 4,047 square metres. And with Molai's efforts it is growing every day. It houses thousands of different trees and plants and birds and animals including deer, apes and even rhinos and tigers. To

cap it all, a herd of about a hundred elephants has started visiting the forest every year. They stay there for about three months. The elephant visits show that the whole forest is in very good health. Molai is a happy man today.

All this was not just smooth sailing. Apart from the hardships Molai had to suffer on the island – working there in heavy rains and scorching heat – he had to face opposition from the people, too. He never thought of ‘stealing’ from his forest, but others did. He had to guard his island against poachers. When people wanted to cut down the trees, he stood up in their defence like a rock. “You will have to cut me before you cut the trees!” he warned.



When the elephants came, they caused a lot of damage on the way. They destroyed the rice fields and huts – even Molai's own hut was destroyed. People wanted to beat up Molai because it was his forest that invited the elephants. Molai was not afraid. He was firm in his resolve to create and protect a ‘green cover’ for the land. In the end, most people left the area. They shifted the village to make way for the elephants.




Molai keeps cattle for his own living. Luckily, he has full support from his family. They help him in his work in all possible ways. Molai's children will carry on his work.



My family supported me. They did not ask for anything in return.

People outside Molai's own tribe didn't know about Molai's work. One day, a photographer roaming in that area found Molai working in his forest and guarding it. When he came to know that Molai had grown the forest single-handedly, he was greatly impressed. He told the media – newspapers, TV channels, etc – about Molai's single-handed achievement. The Forest Department was impressed, too. They decided to help Molai in his work. The Government honoured him with the Padma Shri award.

Molai now wants to spread his message throughout the country – each one of us should plant and grow at least two trees. The trees will take care of the carbon dioxide we produce throughout our life and give us enough oxygen to breathe! Are you ready to help?



Today, I am the happiest man in the world.



1. Underline the words you find difficult in the story :

- (a) Try to guess their meaning from the context.
 - (b) List 10 of the words you find difficult. Look them up in a dictionary. Present the meanings in the classroom.
 - (c) Form groups of 5-8. Compare the lists of difficult words, and their meanings. List the words whose meanings are not clear to the group and ask for your teacher's help.
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2. Find answers to the following questions from the passage :

- (1) What terrible sight did young Molai see ?
- (2) What did many of Forest Department people and village elders advise ?
- (3) What trees did Molai plant at the beginning ?
- (4) Apart from the saplings, what else did Molai carry to the island ?
- (5) What other things came to the island with the trees ?
- (6) How much area does Molai Kathoni cover today ?
- (7) What do the elephant visits show ?
- (8) What hardships did Molai suffer on the island ?
- (9) What did the elephants destroy ?
- (10) What does Molai keep for his own living ?
- (11) What is Molai's message to the world ?

Now, number the paragraphs in the passage

- **Against each of the questions above, write the number of the paragraph in which you found the answer.**

and/or

- **Against each paragraph, write the number/s of the questions based on it.**
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3. Write short notes on the following.

- The Brahmaputra
- Molai Kathoni
- Elephants come to Molai Kathoni
- The world comes to know about Molai Kathoni



4. Copy the quotations from Jadav Payeng (Molai) in good handwriting and display them in your classroom.

5. Prepare posters on ‘Plant at least two trees each !’

6. Find the names and locations of at least 10 different trees in your surroundings. Write one or two lines about each of them.

7. Imagine the following situations and write simple speeches or dialogues with the help of the passage. (Any 2.)

- (a) Molai talks to himself after he sees the dead snakes.
 - (b) Molai talks to the forest department people about his wish.
 - (c) Molai talks to his village elders about his wish.
 - (d) Molai’s friends advise him about growing plants on the island.
 - (e) The villagers quarrel with Molai about the elephants.
 - (f) Molai’s family tell him they support him.
 - (g) Molai talks to the trees and plants in the forest.
 - (h) The photographer tells the media (reporters) about Molai.
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