

Jadav Payeng: The Forest Man of India



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Ma Prem Naina 12 January 2017 56982 views

An exceptional, genuine and a compassionate person who surrendered his life to giving. Walking alone in the path of selflessness and humility is a true story of a man named Jadav 'Molai' Payeng.

This man has single-handedly created a thriving, 550 hectare forest from a 'barren' sandbar in the middle of the river [Brahmaputra](#) of Assam.

Payeng belongs to the Mishing tribe and since 1979 Jadav has been planting trees. His forest is larger than Central Park NYC (341 hectares). His forest has transformed what was once a barren wasteland, into a lush oasis. This place is full of trees Jadhav has planted them himself. In beginning he [found](#) planting trees very difficult and time consuming but later it became much easier for him [as](#) he started getting seeds from trees themselves.

Former [President](#) of [India](#) A. P. J. Abdul Kalam gave him the title 'Forest Man Of [India](#)'. In 2015, he was honoured with Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in [India](#).

Born in the [state](#) of Assam in northeastern [India](#) in 1963, he had a [normal](#) childhood [as](#) simple [as](#) it can be in one of the remotest parts of [India](#) before he heard the tiny voice of his [heart](#). During the floods of 1979, walking along the sandbars of the [Brahmaputra](#) River, Jadav [found](#) many snakes swept ashore but [found](#) them dead a few days later due to heat and the absence of trees. He approached the Forest officials to help plant trees but they told him to do himself.

Although it was a painstaking process,

Jadav started planting bamboos in the 

sandbars. A year later, in 1980, the Assam Forestry Division initiated a plan to reforest two hundred hectares of land in one of the sandbars of the [Brahmaputra](#), known then [as](#) Arun Chapori. Jadav enrolled for the [job](#) and started planting trees for the project. The project was finished in five years, but Jadav decided to stay back and since then, he remained in Arun Chapori, planting trees and taking care of them with utmost compassion.

A fruit of pure love and will – the sandbar and neighbouring area is a forest today, more than 1000 hectares in area and is known [as](#) Molai Forest, aptly named after its creator and caretaker. The flora and fauna has grown fascinating with tigers, rhinoceros, rabbits, and deers making Jadav's forest their home.

Jadhav lives with his family comprising of his wife, two sons and a daughter in a [bamboo](#) and wooden hut. He sells cattle milk to the nearby villages, which provides him with a meager but sufficient source of income.

Naina [meets](#) this amazing man at his residence in Kokilamukh, Jorhat. Clad in a simple gamucha dhoti and a naga shawl wrapped around him, he was very forthcoming to present his views in Axomiya language. Presenting here is an excerpt of the interview (translated from Axomiya into English) with the living inspiration for all - the forest maker of [India](#)

Patriotism

I have lived in the village since my [birth](#) and attended the village school. The beautiful village is located in the [heart](#) of nature and since childhood I have spent my time with botanists and learnt from them. That's why it doesnot matter what my country has given me, but what matters is what I can do for my country. Dr. [Bezbaruah](#) once told me that what I am doing will earn me lots of enemies and I really donot care for these people who protests on the [roads](#) because they are really not contributing anything to the society, to the country. They even donot know how to plant a sapling. The other day, [ULFA](#) Chief Anup Chetia told me that they are setting up a non profit organization and want me to join. I told him its of no use unless you all set an example by conserving the rhinos and other animals and help preserve and nurture nature. How can I be a part of an organization it itself allows or tolerates killing of animals and destruction of trees in its on areas. Anup chetia told me that he spent 30 years in a jail in [Bangladesh](#) but the question is coming from Lachit's own land why did you have to waste your life in a Bangladeshi jail? Why couldnot you do work in your own land? I have been planting trees, preserving nature and creating forests in in Lachit's land for the last 36 years, I have not wasted my time in some jail in [Bangladesh](#). I told him if he wants to do really good for the country and his own land he should do it here. Now Paresh Barua keeps fleeing to various countries and what is his credibility, killing people and destruction. Does this help in the development of your land. This is totally unacceptable. If he is really the son of the soil, then he should join with the Indian army and [fight](#) our enemies in the border. My life objective is totally different from theirs. I donot care even if someone kills me. My objective is to help provide oxygen to humanity, including a thief and a sinner, a president and a commoner. That is why I donot care what others think or do, my joy is in helping the trees to provide oxygen for all in this existence.

Questioning the World Economic Forum for [Climate Change](#)

In Paris, I raised this question to the Economical Forum for [Climate Change](#) which has [over](#) 200 countries [as](#) members, that why do you emphasize so much on the word economy, what value is of economy if there is no oxygen. I asked them to [stop](#) breathing for [2](#) minutes and then realize the importance of oxygen. We all know that trees give us oxygen and if these 20,000 individuals sitting in forum plant one tree, they will help themselves only. And if the whole [2](#) billion population of the world plants only one tree each, that will help [stop](#) climate change, other than that there is no way out.

Who is God?

When I asked the Forum for [Climate Change](#) if they have ever seen or met God, not a single person could reply. Who is God? Your parents are God because they give you life and when they leave pass away, who do they leave you with? – Prakriti ([Nature](#)) and other than [nature](#) there is no God. Therefore he who loves [nature](#) can only love this world, only he can love the whole existence of flora, fauna and humanity. To talk or give lecture in a forum is not my subject.

Compulsory Subject on [Environment](#) in [Schools](#)

When JNU conferred this award – Forest Man of [India](#)- to me, the Dean told me that I should visit schools, colleges, universities and big meetings and conferences are not really my platform. I agree and visit schools and colleges in various parts of the country and the world. Because the tree that taught us to make a garment from it and the bird that taught us to fly donot speak, we started to play the role of a destroyer and hence the issue of climate change today. During my visits to various schools and colleges, I observed that they have been observing Vanamahotsav since Jawaharlal Nehru’s time and for this

occasion millions of saplings are purchased and given to these institutions but where are the trees? In 1972, in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, 136 nations pledged to work together to prevent climate change. But till today, we see no qualitative change. Is our education system such that adults cut trees and children uproot small saplings? Where is our awareness? I believe that our education system must have environmental science [as](#) a compulsory subject in schools and we should put emphasis in creating more environmental science research institutes and these research and awareness will bring a positive change in the eco system. If it is made compulsory for Lower Primary schools to make each Class I [student](#) to plant one sapling and nurture it till 5 years and he should be considered to Class [6](#) only if the tree is grown by then. Thousands of students take admission every year and imagine the number of trees the country will have in 5 years. In [ten](#) years [India](#) will become totally [green](#). The students must be taught to co-exist with the insects, birds and animals and this will bring a great balance in the whole eco system and students can help create this new [green](#) world. I urge the [Education](#) Minister of [India](#) to bring that change in the curriculum of the schools.

In September [2016](#), I went to Taiwan. Huen sang came to study in Nalanda University from China through the Himalayas and today our Indian scientists, engineers, all the creative and talented brains are leaving [India](#) to work abroad. They are contributing to the development of another nation which could have otherwise helped in contributing towards the growth of our own nation. It is a sorry [state](#) of affairs. In Taiwan I saw they are making 4 lanes, [6](#) lanes but without destroying the trees. But it saddens me to see that thousands of trees are being uprooted and destroyed to make 4 lane [roads](#) in [India](#). Why is this happening in [India](#) because we are an unaware nation. In the name of development we make policies which are not healthy for the environment. Hence I believe that this awareness towards our environment and for our survival, we must [start](#) to educate and spread awareness from Primary schools.

Message to [Narendra Modi](#)

My message to the prime Minister of [India](#) is Demonetisation and bringing back black money is all fine, but if humanity donot survive what is the value of money? So I would like to say to Mr. Modi to take measures on priority to save the ecology and environment of our country and focus on planting trees for the sake of the present and future generations.

On Women Empowerment

I am happy with [Pramila](#) Rani Boro, the Minister of [Environment](#) & Forests, for her efforts in empowering women of the region and she travels on foot through forest and terrain which shows her dedication and concern. Being a female she has done extremely good work than the previous [ministers](#). During the previous Assam forest [ministers](#)' time, what they have done is only destruction of nature, hundreds of animals were killed and nobody bothered about it. She has taken some good measures for the preservation of forests and nature and her role is very much appreciable. I convey my thanks to her. She deserves to be awarded for her work. Women can do much better than men and they must come forward. With their understanding, love and concern for another being, they can mother a child [as](#) well [as](#) a plant much beautifully than men.

Appeal to the Media

Media is very prompt to pick stories that is short lived and sensational but these issues which are of serious concern to humanity at large such [as](#) of climate change, or depleting eco system are never published. Media can bring about a great change if they so will by giving more coverage on environment and then we will surely have a beautiful [green](#) world and a eco system in which each individual contributes something to mother nature.

Ma Prem Naina

Ma Prem Naina born in Jorhat, Assam, was initiated into Sannyas in 2003 at Oshodham, New Delhi. She is an MBA and also holds a Master's degree in Mass Communication. Deeply inspired by the love and dedication of the founder of the Osho World Foundation in Delhi, Swami Om Prakash Saraswati, she left her career as a producer/journalist to join in Osho's caravanserai. She presently heads the publications and media relations at Osho World Foundation, New Delhi.

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