Raami and Shaami were bewildered by wild mallows

Raami and Shaami would always look forward to their weekends, for, their weekends by and large would mean exciting and fun filled outings to a nearby wilderness area, or a forest. The twin sisters would profusely soak themselves in the wilderness watching the different varieties of plants, birds and insects.

On another such outing to Savanadurga Forest on the rural parts of Bangalore, the twin sisters came across with another unusual plant similar to the one they experienced at Devarayanadurga (see Amruth Aug 03 for the twin sisters adventure at Devarayanadurga).

Savanadurga is a fortress amidst the dry deciduous forests. A large monolithic Hillock stands majestically embracing the forest in the valleys. There are plenty of natural populations of wood apple, vast stretches of Bamboo, and a large diversity of unique medicinal plants. The forest is full of different thorny trees and spiny shrubs. There were several streams running through the forest.

Raami and Shaami wanted to have a feel of rock climbing. However for the want of right kind of equipments they gave up the idea and instead decided to leave behind their parents and sneak through the thorny bushes. When they had entered a bamboo thicket, and were trying to look at what was there in the thicket, they heard a strange sound from behind the thicket. At the first instance it was scaring. No, it was not the roar of an animal. It was neither the hissing of a ground snake.

But it was the voice of a man. It appeared that some one was talking to some one. The twin sisters stopped for a while and looked around. The voice was coming from behind the thicket. They quietly went behind the thicket and looked around. Yes! they found out the origin of the voice. There was an old man sitting in front of a bush and was talking to himself. Was he talking to himself?..... Becoming curious, the twin sisters quietly approached him. On seeing the twin sisters suddenly, he looked perplexed for a moment. However he enquired them who were they. The sisters plainly mentioned about themselves and asked what was he doing there. Talking to himself? On hearing their Innocent observation about him talking, the old man burst into incessant bouts of laughter.

After the laughter was ceased, while the sisters were unable to comprehend what was happening, the old man told them, “look my dear girls, I am a folk healer, do you know what a folk healer is? In other words I am a native doctor, I collect medicinal plants and drugs from this forest to prepare different medicines. Before collecting a medicinal part from a plant I usually pray before the plant. What you had seen a few minutes ago was me offering prayers to this plant. This is a medicinal plant. Look at this plant. Is it not attractive...” Saying so in an encouraging tone, he showed the plant to them. Raami and Shaami looked at that plant.

Oh that was a wonderful plant. Raami and Shaami had never imagined one such plant could be existing in nature. It was much much away from the other usual plants. For, Raami found that the fruits of the plant looked like ear stud!
wild mallows

How do I look?
I am a small but hardy bush. I often reach a height of about 2 meters. My body is made of fibrous stem. But I am covered with soft velvety bristles. I have plenty of heart shaped leaves having saw teeth like margins. When in bloom, I look pretty, because my flowers are bright and golden yellow in colour and resemble those of Hibiscus.

The tiny hibiscus like flowers are quite capable of attracting insects and the frequent visitors are Bumble bees, Honeybees, and lots of beetles. After such visits by the insects the flowers slowly wither and small fruits start to appear. As they grow these fruits look like wheels of a toy car. People also say that these fruits also look like a circular box without a lid while many others say that these fruits resemble an ear stud. These circular fruits have radially arranged thin compartments within which small seeds are seated.

How am I useful?
I am more a medicinal plant than an ornamental. My leaves and roots are used as raw drugs. Leaves are useful in curing boils, respiratory problems, piles and stomach ulcers, while the roots are used for curing cough. The Roots are used as a tonic. An Oil prepared from the roots is used in Kerala for the treatment of rheumatic complaints.

Several local healers and traditional doctors in Tamilnadu use the leaves for the treatment of different health conditions. The tender leaves are sometimes used as potherb.

The most interesting aspect is, however, the affinity shown to me by the children. My fruits are usually considered by the children as the material to play with. My fruits are usually considered by the children as the material to play with. They use the fruits as the wheels for their clay carts and toys, ornaments for the dolls, Stencils to print interesting designs.

Where do I grow?
I am a plant of the tropics. I like sunshine very much. That is why I comfortably grow in open fields, fallow lands, along the fence and roadsides. People say that I am a good coloniser on the wastelands.

How to grow me?
It is not a difficult task. You can grow me by sprinkling the seeds on wet soil.

My local names are:
English: Country Mallow
Hindi: Kanghi, Jumakka
Kannada: Pettige gida
Malayalam: Kurunthothi
Marathi: Petari
Tamil: Thutti
Telugu: Tuturabenda
Sanskrit: Atbala
Bengali: Potari

My botanical family:
I belong to Hibiscus family, botanically called Malvaceae

My botanical name:
*Abutilon indicum*
Fruits, Shaami, found them like the wheels of her toy car. That was not all. Raami recognised the flowers resembling the tiny hibiscus. Shaami added to the list - the fruits look like a tiny basket with out a lid. Raami didn’t fall behind, she added one more item it looks like a stamping seal. The Old man intervened, in a naughty voice, he said, don’t you think the fruit looks like a hair bun? Raami and Shaami nodded their heads in conformity. The old man was enjoying the pure and undiluted enjoyment of the twin sisters. Raami and Shaami were quite ecstatic to find five toys in a single plant - ear stud, hair bun, tiny wheels, a hanging basket, and a stamping seal. Added to all this the old man started praising the plant for its various medicinal virtues. With their eyes shining bright, as if they have discovered a treasure, Raami and Shaami came out of the bamboo thicket. The old man followed them. Later he took them around the forest showing them different medicinal plants of the area. He even showed them as to how to prepare a Decoction.

Next Monday in the school, the twins were the centre of attraction. They were busy using the dry fruits as stencils to make attractive imprints on a piece of card during their craft class.

CONTEST: CONTEST: CONTEST: CONTEST:

Yes Kids! In this issue, we are running a special contest, just for you! All what you need to do is to send in your own drawings of your favourite medicinal plant and write five sentences about the plant. The best entry would be awarded a prize decided by our jury members, and all the entries would receive a token of appreciation.

Rules of the Contest:
- Contest open only to children between 8 years-12 years.
- All entries to be submitted on A4 size paper.
- Please do not forget to mention your name, class and school.
- The best entry would feature in our next issue (Nov-Dec. Special on Children’s Day).
- All the entries should reach us latest by 7th November 2003.
- The entries to be addressed to: The Editor, Amruth, The Medplan Conservatory Society, # 74/2, Jarakabande Kaval, Yelahanka, Via Attur PO, Bangalore- 560064

Crossword

Across
1. A form of medicine in which the herbs are boiled in water and taken as a medicine (9)
6. Medicine applied externally (8)
7. Mad dog bite causes which disease (6)
10. A drug which causes unconsciousness (8)
11. Father of surgery (8)
13. A sour tasting berry, richest source of Vitamin C (10)
14. A small gland in the neck, which produces iodine (7)

Down
2. A spice in the kitchen, fragrant oil obtained from its flower bud and is used to relieve tooth ache (5)
3. I am used as a mouth freshener (4)
4. Longest bone in the human body (5)
5. A disease condition in which blood sugar is more (8)
7. I am used to repel mosquitoes, flies, bees, ants. Tell me who I am? (9)
8. Aromatic oil obtained from my wood, used in perfumeries and also as medicine (6)
9. In Ramayana, Sita sat under this tree in a pensive mood (5)
12. Medical system from Greek (5)

Crossword: Suma T.S, Amita Kaushal & Vivek Krishnan