Raami Shaami enthralled by elegant lotus

T. S. Suma

Raami was equally nervous and excited! On the occasion of the Independence Day, her class teacher had asked her to deliver a speech on “The National Flower”. Shaami on the other hand was to speak on “The National Flag”. “I want to make my speech interesting and I want to have a roaring applause which will make me feel good”, said Raami with her eyes already sparkling while imagining the sound of the claps. “That’s the spirit of a winner, dream for the best and then work towards the best”, chimed in their father who overheard the girl’s conversation in the next room.

“Oh, thank you Appa! But how do I go about it? I do not want to include the usual boring stuff, Lotus is our National Flower, it is pink or white in colour, and it is found in water and blah blah blah!” said Raami making a funny face, seeing which everyone burst out in a laughter. Ten minutes later, when the excitement subsided down, Raami was still thinking, “What should I do? Whom should I go to? Who will give me a brilliant idea? Who is an expert storyteller and knows a lot of interesting things? Oh yes! Now I know! How could I ever forget our favourite Ravi Uncle! Yes! Yes! He is the one I should go to!” said Raami jumping in the room joyously. Everyone immediately mooted the idea and Raami darted towards the telephone instrument to call up Ravi Uncle.

“Hello! hello! Hello! Why don’t you speak? Why are you mewing like a cat?” screamed Ravi Uncle on phone and then he recognized the familiar giggle. “You naughty girl, why do you always tease your Uncle? To which Raami then replied, “It’s with you only Ravi Uncle that we can take such liberties. So how are you? What are you doing now? I know it is a Saturday today, so you must be relaxing, listening to music, no? Have you had your breakfast? What did you eat? Are you free now? Can we come down…...” and the barrage of questions went on, when Ravi Uncle had to stop Raami, “Wait! Allow me also to speak! Yeah, I can very well read the excitement in your voice, so tell me what’s up? But please, one by one! Do not run like a train”.

“Uncle, I want your help, I have to prepare an interesting talk on Lotus plant which I have to deliver in my school assembly on Independence Day, so I am coming over to your house now, and also we will be having our lunch with you, something really yummy!” stated Raami in a matter of fact tone. “OK! OK! I got your point, but just look outside, the weather is so good, the birds are chirping and singing, would you really like to sit at home and waste such a beautiful day? Let me make a suggestion, why not we all have an outing today!”

“Uncle, you are super, super sweet!” squealed Raami in delight. “Where shall we go”? “Umm… We can go to the Botanical Gardens, a Flower Show also is going on there, you all can have a good time admiring the flowers and in the meantime I can tell you something about Lotus also”, answered Ravi Uncle. So the deal was struck, the twins got ready in a jiffy and off they were to their uncle’s place and from there on, to the Lalbagh Botanical Gardens.

Tourists and people had thronged the gardens to have a look at the beautiful flowers. It was a visual treat for all. After a while, Ravi Uncle guided the children towards the lake. They found reeds, cockspurs, grasses and trees growing along the lake. In the centre, they saw, blush pink water lilies, elegant pink and white lotus flowers. Raami exclaimed, “Wow! Ravi Uncle, I want lotus. Please get me some flowers… they look so striking and beautiful. I have never touched them. I only dream about them”. She pleaded and Ravi Uncle smiled at her and said, “Let’s see! But how do we go there?”

They continued walking around the lake. There were people collecting fodder grass and plants from the...
They had teppa, a small round boat. Ravi Uncle approached them and requested them to fetch a few lotus plants with flower and some lotus seeds. One of them reluctantly plucked a plant and came out. Raami eagerly grabbed the plant and stared at it keenly. The elegant flower seemed to have a hypnotic spell on her. She remembered her lessons about the elegant lotus flower. She caressed her cheeks with the cool and soft flower. “Wow, it is so soft, how I wish my cheeks were as soft as lotus petals”.

Raami opened the petals to peep in to the centre of the flower. As she opened layers of petals, a sweet fragrance just engulfed all over. In the centre, there were plenty of stamens with powdery pollen. She sniffed at them and her nose tip got coated with yellow powder. Shaami laughed at her slapped her hands and again said, “Look you are a joker… Hi… hi… haa haaa…”. Raami did not bother much and she also joined in, “Yes, yes, I am a joker, I have a yellow nose, ha ha ha… Achu achu…..” and she sneezed.

Shaami, took the plant from Raami. She was amused with the huge circular leaf and the long stalk. Soon, it started drizzling. Every body started rushing to stand in the shelter. Shaami held the leaf like an umbrella and started walking. Raami screamed and said, “Hey look, the leaf does not get wet. See, the water is sliding down!”. The twins tried holding water in the shallow leaf but all their attempts were in vain. Water drops just slid down the leaf. They touched the leaf surface and felt its shiny and smooth surface. Raami turned to her uncle and asked him, “Ravi uncle, why does lotus leaf not hold any water, it just slides away”? “That is because the leaf has a sort of wax polish! So nothing stays”, replied their uncle. Well, that was an interesting piece of information. Raami soon made a mental note of it.

Shaami then questioned her uncle, “how does the lotus plant float on water?” Amazed at her curiosity her uncle explained, “Look, dear, the Lotus plant has sort of floaters in its leaf and flower stalks. Take that leaf, let’s look at the stalk”. Raami closely observed the stalk, which resembled this fat stick with pricks on its surface. “Ouch!” Ravi uncle said, “Let’s break it”. Pat!

Raami quickly looked at the broken stalk section and said “hey Shaami look there is a wheel with spokes!”. Shaami came eagerly to see the wheels and asked Ravi uncle, “what are these wheels for”? “These helps in sending oxygen to the roots from leaves and keep the plant floating on the water surface”, replied their uncle.

“Now, do you want to know more about lotus?” asked Ravi Uncle, to which both shrieked in unison, “Yes!”
He started, “The Lotus plant is there on this earth since 160 million years. This is one plant, which has not undergone many changes. It loves to live on still water. Did you observe, its leaves are circular and float on the water, but as they mature they become more like an inverted cone and are held about the surface. In the center of the flower, there is a strange receptacle whose circular holes hold the seeds. These seeds can be eaten like groundnuts! Want to try them?” Raami and Shaami stretched their hands for the yummy seeds. As they walked, their uncle said, when he had gone to Kashmir, he saw a lake full of lotus. And there he ate piddles made of lotus stalk. They were just superb!

“In Delhi, there is a famous “lotus temple” built by the Bahai community, which has no form to worship. The temple looks like a Lotus flower from outside. In Indian mythology, Brahma, the creator of universe appeared from the lotus and created the universe. In the famous story during “Amruthamanyan” when the ocean of milk was churned by the Devas and Asuras, Goddess Lakshmi emerged from the waves with the “lotus” in her hand. This is the reason why she is always depicted sitting on a lotus or with a lotus flower in her hand”. As they walked, their uncle told them more about the fascinating lotus. Raami now had a lot of material to include in her talk. She could already hear her schoolmates clapping for her........

My
Botanical name:
Nelumbo
nucifera Gaertn.