Raami Shaami have a gala time with Golden Showers

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Yeah!! Here come the long awaited summer holidays! And the twin sisters Raami and Shaami had their bags full with fun and an action-packed holiday extravaganza. “Here is a surprise for all of you”, announced their father one evening, waving train tickets in his hands. Raami clung on to her father’s shoulder and in a pleading tone said, “What is it? Tell soon Appa!” Shaami eagerly added, “Please do not make us wait”. Clearing the suspense, their father said, “hey kids, we will celebrate your birthday at Guruvayur, a famous temple in Kerala. So get ready. Here are our train tickets”.

Immediately, there was an increased frenzy in the house all over. The girls were thrilled, and they immediately rushed to their rooms to do their packing. And mother rushed to the kitchen to prepare snacks and yummy sweets for the way. There was a buzz of excitement in the air.

Next morning they left for Coimbatore in intercity train and then took a connecting train to Palakkad. Enjoying their train ride, the twins observed that as they were nearing Palakkad, there was sudden shift in forest type, from a dry environment to humid, green patch. Raami squeaked, “Wow, what a pleasant change!” After having their lunch at Palakkad, they proceeded to Guruvayur in a bus. Enjoying the scenic beauty of Kerala, long stretch of coconut trees and greenery. Shaami exclaimed, “Wow, it’s a paradise!” There was one peculiar looking tree with yellow flower bunches drooping down like a chandelier. Raami was amused to see it.

They reached Guruvayur in the evening. They freshened up and went to the ancient temple of lord Vishnu. The temple was fully lit with lamps all along the walls. It was so splendid. Their father requested the priest to conduct special prayers for next day. Coincidently, it was also the first day of Magha masa, which happened to be the Kerala New Year, popularly known as Vishu. The temple priest asked their father to bring the children blindfolded so that they may also see “Vishu Kanni”, a special offering to Lord Vishnu on New Year day. As a custom in Kerala, on this day, the first thing in the morning everyone should see is “Vishu Kanni” and then take blessings from the elders.

Raami and Shaami were excited about the blindfold. Next day early in the morning, they could hear loud temple bells. Dhan, Dhan, Dhan! The twins jumped out of their bed, closed their eyes and called their parents. Their parents blindfolded them and walked with them to the temple. They could hear drum beats, elephants trumpeting, and birds chirping and chanting of prayers. On reaching the sanctum sanctorum, their parents removed the girls’ blindfold. With her eyes lit up, Raami exclaimed, “Wow, Vishu Kanni has yellow flowers, coconut, harvested grains, sweets, fruits, vegetables, kalaasha, bronze mirror and gold and silver coins”.

Shaami said, “Hey look there is toddler Krishna too. And remember those yellow flowers are the chandeliers”. Inquisitively Raami asked the priest.
Which flower is it? The priest replied, “Oh! That one, it is known as “Konna poo” in Kerala. It is a favourite flower of Lord Krishna”.

Another devotee who was standing next to them over heard all this conversation and he piped in, “There is a popular story about this flower:

Once upon a time, there was a little boy who was very fond of Lord Krishna. He used to worship Krishna daily and one day he fell in love with the idol’s waist belt that was studded with bells, jingles and gemstones. The boy secretly wished to possess one belt like that. So, in his prayers, he asked his friend, Lord Krishna for his belt. And lo and behold! That night the Lord appeared in front of the boy and gave his belt to the innocent child. Next morning when the priest found the belt missing from the idol, there was a panic and a frantic search was carried out. The priests found this little boy with Krishna’s belt, playing with his friends. When asked about the belt, the boy innocently replied that Krishna gave it to him in his dreams. Not believing him, the priests beat him up and took back the idol’s belt.

Next day, the boy told Krishna “what is this, you gave me belt and people take it back”? So again Krishna gave him his belt. But the poor boy was again beaten up the next day. Finally annoyed with this, the angry child on receiving the belt again throws it away on a tree. The belt gets stuck in the branches and gets transformed to a beautiful bunch of golden yellow flowers. This flower is a favourite flower of Krishna and resembles a golden waist belt”. There was a big applause once the uncle stopped narrating this interesting story.

Raami and Shaami then run towards the decorated temple elephants and touch them and take their blessing too. They spend some time in the temple premises, take bath in the holy pond, have their break fast and proceed to the elephant camp situated nearby. The mahout in the camp shows them the elephants. Raami, Shaami feed the elephants rice, jaggery and coconut as a treat. Shaami pointed to her sister, “look Shaami, the wonderful chandelier plant is here also!” Indeed the tree was looking very beautiful with golden bunch of flowers hanging down.

Meanwhile, the twins’ grandma trotted along and was visibly looking in pain. With her growing age, she was experiencing joint pain in her legs. Sensing her discomfort, the Mahout came running and said, “Amma, you can apply externally the leaf decoction of this same chandelier plant. This is will give you much relief”. Grandma smiled back promised that she would try it at home. “Oh, this plant has medicinal uses too. What else is this plant used for?” asked Shaami. Feeling quite important, the Mahout replied that the fruits of this plant were used for purgation, leaf decoction for blood purification and the leaves for skin disorders.

Raami ran towards the tree and tried to reach the golden hanging belts. Shaami commented, “Raami, don’t they look like cluster of yellow butterflies”. “Yeah, yes! I like these flowers, Amma please take our picture with these flowers”, pleaded Shaami to her mother. Her mother clicked their photograph. Mahout then called out saying, “hey kids brings that old black stick lying down there, and it is the fruit of this plant”. Raami picks it up and hits it hard on her hand. The fruit breaks open and many round coins roll off. “Wow”, follows soon.

Their Grandma then chirped in a popular Kannada proverb – “kalke laiyi donna ailla, bakku huliyalla” that simply translated meant the fruit though long and round was not a baton just like a cat, though looks like a tiger is not a tiger. The twins repeated what their grandma said and giggled. As they walked in the elephant camp, their mahout gave more information on the Golden Shower plant.

My Botanical name: Cassia fistula
My Botanical family: Caesalpinaceae