



# Raami and Shaami Muse with Mussaenda



Raami and Shaami were thoroughly enjoying their summer holidays. After that refreshing visit to Agumbe forests and the memorable stay at their grandpa's place (see Amruth March- April 03 for Raami and Shaami's visit to their grandpas), they returned to their home at Mysore. Surprisingly they found, Mysore, otherwise a town with literary and theater activities was wearing a new look. Suddenly there were summer camps and art workshops coming up with lots of promises. Raami and Shaami decided to get themselves enrolled at one such summer camp which was promising a nature trail at Biligiri ranga hill forests.

On the specified day, the bubbling twins reached the summer camp office to find that there were about 20 other kids already assembled. There were 4 young organisers to take care of them. After a brief introduction by them, the group was soon heading towards Biligiri Hills for a 3 day stay. Every kid had come thoroughly equipped for the camp. There were trekking shoes, back-packs, packed foods, water bottles, binoculars, camera, field note books, pencils and field reference books etc. The group coordinator, soon after arriving at Biligiri hills briefed the kids about the 3-day program and the arrangements. On that day the kids were to just visit the temple and relax at the base camp after making necessary preparations for the next day's trekking inside the forest area. While on the second and third day they were to meet the forest officers and the local tribes.

The next day the kids got ready by 7.00 in the morning. They were being taken inside the forest area by the group leaders. Beside the group leaders the kids saw two armed forest officers. Raami started feeling uncomfortable at the sight of those two Khaki clad men. She whispered in the ears of

Shaami, " what for those khaki clad men have come here. Look at the first man, his big moustaches are scaring!". She held Shaami's hands. Shaami tried to comfort Raami and whispered back, " hey! don't you worry, those two are not the policemen! look at the badges on their shoulders, it reads forest department. I think they are coming with us as an escort and to show us the way inside the forest". While Shaami still whispering, one of the group leaders announced. "Look here my young friends, I have much pleasure in introducing to you these two officers from the local forest department. These officers will accompany us inside the forest and help us in knowing this forest better". The kids greeted them. After a brief introduction by the forest officers about the dos and donts to be observed during the forest walk, the kids were lead by them inside the forest.

The officers selected the Doddasampige forest area for the trekking. It was an ideal forest patch to trek. With lofty evergreen trees, open grassy blanks, good growth of other forest plants, refreshing streamlets and a clear path for walking, the forest was exciting and refreshing. During the walk at every 20 steps, the officers would stop and show something on the way and explain it to the kids. The officers showed them the crab's eye (the climber with red shiny seeds with a small black spot); they showed them the bird's hole in a dead tree; they showed them the different mushrooms on the fallen logs of wood; they showed them the anthills and the antidote plants; they showed them the epiphytic plants( plants that grow on other trees); they showed them the climbers from which the local tribes extract tubers for food- there was plenty to know about. Every such briefing would leave the kids with awe, amazement and much excitement. Every such briefing also witnessed an

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# Mussaenda

**My family and my names:**  
I belong to the coffee family, Rubiaceae

**Botanists call me:**  
*Mussaenda frondosa*

**While my local names are:**

1. **Kannada-** Bellotigida, Belloti, Balethaplu
2. **Tamil-** Vellai ilai, Velli matantai, Velliyilaicceti
3. **Malayalam-** Velliila, Vellilam, Vellilattali, Parathole
4. **Telugu-** Sribati
5. **Marathi-** Bhutakesi, Lavasat, Bhutkes
6. **Hindi-** Edina
7. **Sanskrit-** Shrivatte, Sribati, sriparnah



**How do I look and What is special about me?**

People praise me that I am one of the beautiful shrubs found in moist forests. You know why? The creamy white leaf-like appendages appear from a distance as though several butterflies have flocked my body. I usually grow up to 10-12 feet. I bear egg shaped thin leaves, which are bright

green in colour. At every node such leaves appear in pairs. The undersurface of these leaves has soft velvet like mat of white hairs.

I bear yellowish orange flowers. You know, I have an added attraction with my flowers. When these flowers are fully open you can see a yellow colored tube with orange colored petals. These are attached to 5 green appendages. One of the appendages enlarges to become a prominent creamish-yellow leaf like structure, which is oval shaped. This enlarged structure is quite conspicuous and contributes to my looks.

Scientists say that this modification, which appears like a

hood enclosing the orange flower, helps in attracting butterflies and moths for pollination. Since I depend on insects for pollination, I need to be bright and attractive in order to receive them. Since the flowers I bear are very small and inconspicuous, I would have faced the risk of losing the insect visitors. However, this large brightly coloured appendage helps me

overcome this lacuna and takes up the role of attracting the insects. That is how my requirement of meeting the insect companions is fulfilled. This special modification is not seen in other plants. That is why I am treated as someone special.

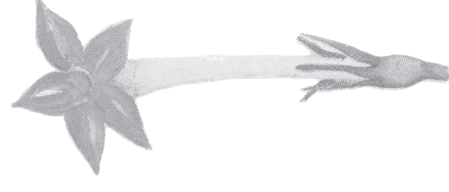


**How am I useful?**

I am quite useful. Several local communities adjoining the forests use the leaves and the yellowish appendages. They pluck my tender leaves and use it as potherb. My Leaves are also used as manure. The paste of leaves and flowers is used as external application on wounds, cuts and ulcers. Many communities in Assam use this leaf paste to reduce swelling in arms and limbs. Leaf decoction is used to remove intestinal worms. In Sikkim,

The flowers are used to cure breathing problems.

Decoction from the dried shoots is used as medicated Tea against cough, fever, and jaundice. The bitter decoction of the roots is used to treat eye and skin problems. The leaves also yield a Vegetable dye.



**How can you grow me?**

I can add colours to your garden. You can easily raise me by sowing seeds or by planting stem cuttings.

**Where can you find me?**

I am frequently found as a bush along roadsides, open blanks and forest fringes in the moist and deciduous forests of the country. I run all through the Himalayas from Dehradun eastwards, Khasi hills and into Deccan Peninsula extending into Andaman islands also.

Many of my garden cousins have already established their homes in the gardens and parks. They have pretty names and bear attractive orange, pink, scarlet colored flowers.

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exchange of excited whispers among the kids immediately after the briefing. The kids were mesmerized by the type of information and the new method of learning they were experiencing.

On one such briefing, Raami noticed a peculiar shrub alongside the path. It was a huge green bush dotted with white leaves. White leaves?.. Yes! those white leaf like structures attracted the attention of Raami. She poked Shaami and whispered to her, "look at that bush, it has some strange looking leaves. The leaves are white in colour; Ask that officer what it is." She was still not feeling comfortable in the presence of those Khaki clad forest officers. Shaami turned to Raami and looked at that bush she was pointing. She was equally surprised. Unlike Raami, she was a girl with courage. With out any hesitation, she asked one of the officers. " Sir, what is that strange plant? Why its selected leaves are white in colour? Is it due to some disease?" Shaami's question interrupted the

briefing and diverted the attention of the entire team for a while. Everybody started asking, "What Shaami?", "What did you ask?", "What is that?", "Where is that?".... All sorts of questions filled the air. For a while there was only noise and chaos. The group leader pleaded for silence. When the silence was restored, the officer said, "it is like any other bush here. We call it **belloti gida**. Its white coloured leaf like structures are not true leaves...." - he was still explaining.

However that was sufficient for the twin sisters to ponder. "Why is this plant looking unusual? What are those leaf like structures? What is their role in the plant's life cycle? Whether the plant is benefited by these structures? Why are they white in colour". Series of questions arose in them. Soon, the twin sisters flew into their own world to meet the plant with which they interacted later. ( Turn to page 14 to find out what did the twin sisters know from the plant)

## Crossword

### Across

2. I am a large showy bush with large flowers of different colours and commonly seen in home gardens. My leaves contain a slimy gum like sap and are used in shampoos while the flowers are used to prepare refreshing drinks. (8)
5. I am a popular salad. I am also used in face packs and cosmetics(8)
8. I am a spiny, desert tree and my twigs have been in use for centuries as natural toothbrush. I am now available as a ready-to-use toothpaste. (5)
9. I am a fruit with 5 tastes (sweet, sour, pungent, bitter and astringent) and used for making pickles, jams, and hair oil. I am a rich source of Vitamin C.(4)
11. I am a popular condiment and make a good mouth-freshener.(4)
12. I am the most preferred vegetable source of food colour and an indispensable condiment in every kitchen (8)
13. Perhaps I am the only tree from which plucking of flowers is forbidden. On the contrary, the fallen flowers are picked from the ground and are offered to Lord Krishna.(8)
14. I am a commonly seen sour fruit in the households. Even though I am considered a Fruit, you can not eat me.(5)
15. I am a popular palm in the gardens. I usually go with a vine and together we make an excellent carminative(8)

### Down

1. You would have had a taste of me during your recent visit to a chinese restaurant. You can find space for slush in my name (8)
3. I am a popular spice used as flavouring agent in sweet meats and confectionery. (8)
4. I am a large palm, and often in the olden days people used to extract starch from the soft core of my trunk.(4)
6. I am a tall tree found near temples. I bear creamy yellow, orange coloured fragrant Flowers.(8)
7. I am a popular condiment in the kitchen. My branches are called fingers(6)
10. I am a popular palm, frequently found in the courtyards in south Indian homes.(7)

