

**Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times
by Sanjay Sondhi**

Published on 6 August 2010

The Glory Lily

A few days ago, when nature provided a welcome interlude to the torrential rains in Dehradun, a spectacular sight greeted me. Looking towards the plains, away from Mussoorie, a bright blue, detergent-washed sky greeted me, with white cotton clouds drifting across gracefully. As I swiveled around, the clouds turned darker and eventually, dirty brown rain clouds hovered over Mussoorie. What's up in the sky does not obviously reflect what's down below!

Lower down, all around me, the fresh green foliage was a pleasing sight. As I looked, I spotted a flash of orange and yellow amidst the bushes. It almost seemed as though a fire burned. Looking more closely, I realised that I had espied the flowers of the Glory Lily *Gloriosa superba*. The Glory Lily has a spectacular orange-and-yellow flower, so that it gives the appearance of a flame! Its petals are red initially, before they turn into a red-and-yellow colour with time. Its up-curved wavy petals form a cup-like structure while tiny water droplets adorn the petals like jewelry. Below each petal, six stamens protrude out, like boat oars surrounding a ship. In Sanskrit, this flower is called *Agnishika*, which roughly translates to "fire petal", a very apt description!



When the Glory Lily is not flowering, it is largely invisible. The plant is a climber, with a long fragile stem. Left to itself, the stem would collapse under its own weight. So it has two choices-get swamped by the fast-growing undergrowth. Or evolve and fight for its survival. It needs sunlight to produce its food, but unless the plant is higher up, it will not get enough sunlight. It has long lance-shaped leaves, at the end of which are tendrils. The tendrils curl up and cling to anything it can grab-leaves, stems and even flowers of other plants. Anything that can give it a leg up in its fight for survival. The higher the plant can get, the more sunlight it gets to produce food through photosynthesis.

The plant hides a mysterious secret-all of its parts contains toxic alkaloids. Its leaves and stem may cause irritation to skin, but its tubers (roots) have the highest toxicity. Consumed in sufficient quantities, it can even kill a human. It is used to induce labour pain and is used as a medicine for numerous other ailments. Over-collection has led to its decline. Unfortunately, it's a lesson that we don't seem to relish. Harvest earth's resources, but *sustainably*-when will we learn?

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Making a difference: The mantra-reduce, reuse and recycle is at the heart of sustainability. What do you use to store water in your home-plastic bottles? Well, don't-use glass bottles. Glass lasts longer, is produced from natural materials, and can be completely recycled. Plastic is made from petroleum products and its recycling has limitations. Also, glass is inert and hence safer from a health stand point.