

KARKKIDAKA KANJI – ACCLIMATIZED AYURVEDIC DIET FOR MAINTAINING HEALTH IN VARSHA RITU

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ABSTRACT

Background: Karkkidaka, the Malayalam month that falls between mid-July and mid-August is the season that could be compared to *Varsha Ritu* which brings along with it a barrage of health problems that can be downright uncomfortable. In *Varsha Ritu*, there will be decreased *Jatharagni* and *Sharira Bala*. Cold and dry nature makes *Vata Dosha* get aggravated, and *Pitta Dosha* accumulates (*Caya*) during this season. Karkkidaka kanji (medicinal porridge) is one of the special therapeutic Ayurvedic diets that are prescribed in Kerala during the monsoon season to overcome many diseases and improve immunity. **Aims and Objectives:** Explore the concept of Karkkidaka Kanji and its role in the maintenance of health during *Varsha Ritu*. **Materials and Methods:** Detailed review of Karkkidaka Kanji is done using various classical and other relevant books and internet sources. The variations in the recipes of Karkkidaka Kanji are collected from various practitioners and the herbs were analyzed along with their properties to find out the rationale behind their inclusion in the recipe.

Observation: Karkkidaka Kanji is prepared with drugs that are *Deepana* and *Pachana* in nature and help in alleviating *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*. **Conclusion:** Karkkidaka kanji one of the Ayurvedic diet prescribed during the rainy season in Kerala helps in avoiding all the ailments and helps to flourish with good health.

Keywords: *Karkkidaka Kanji, Karkkidakam, Yavagu, Bala, Dashapushpa*

INTRODUCTION

The Malayalam month of Karkkidakam falls during monsoons, classically known as the *Varsha Ritu* (July-August). The sudden downpour and cooling of the environment after a harsh summer makes all the *Dosha* go out of balance in the *Varsha Ritu* (rainy season). Due to the reciprocally vitiating *Dosha* and the weak digestive power, mankind will be affected by various diseases. At this time taking Ayurvedic medicine can give promising results due to the therapeutic potential and medicinal values of herbs and spices used for its preparation. One of the unique healthcare practices in Kerala is the Karkkidaka *Chikitsa* which includes both internal and external medications taken during the month. One among them is a medicated gruel called Karkkidaka kanji, generously known as *Aushadha Kanji* (medicinal porridge). This gruel not only neutralizes many diseases caused by the change in climatic conditions but also helps in avoiding health problems that spring from the modern way of life and faulty eating habits.

Aims and Objectives: Explore the concept of Karkkidaka Kanji and its role in the maintenance of health during *Varsha Ritu*.

Materials and Methods

A detailed review of Karkkidaka Kanji is done using various classical and other relevant books and internet sources. The variations in the recipes of Karkkidaka Kanji are collected from various practitioners. The herbs were analyzed along with their properties to find out the rationale behind their inclusion in the recipe.

Review of literature

Effect of *Varsha Ritu* on *Dosha*:

The digestive power debilitated by the *Adana Kala* (Northern Solstice) further deteriorates and gets vitiating by *Dosha* in *Varsha Ritu*.¹ The *Dosha* gets aggravated by the effect of hanging thick clouds full of water, the cold wind having snow, dirty water because of rain, the warmth of the earth, and sourness. Due to the reciprocally vitiating *Dosha* and the weak digestive power, mankind will be affected by various diseases.²

Cold and dry nature makes *Vata Dosha* gets aggravated, and *Pitta Dosha* accumulates (*Caya*) during this season.³ In *Varsha Ritu*, the body is accustomed to the cold atmosphere, hence *Pitta* is accumulated (*Caya*) but fails to aggravate (*Kopa*) due to the frigid atmosphere.

Regimen of *Varsha Ritu*:

It is advisable to adopt regimens that mitigate *Dosha* and measures to increase digestion.⁴ One should undergo purificatory therapies (*Vamana and Virechana*) and should be administered with *Asthapana Vasti* (decoction enema) during this season.⁵ During this season, old grains, soup of pulses, *Mastu* (whey) processed with more *Sauvarchala Lavana* (salt), and powder of *Panchakola*, should be used.⁶ If the days are cooler due to heavy rains with storms, one should take diets that are *Amla* (sour), *Lavana* (salty), and *Sneha* (unctuous).⁷

Karkkidaka Kanji:

Karkkidaka kanji is one of the special therapeutic Ayurvedic diets that are prescribed in Kerala during the monsoon season to overcome many diseases and improve immunity. This grueling aids in good digestion.

Method of preparation of Karkkidaka Kanji:

The main ingredient of this gruel is *Shashtika Shali*. *Shashtika Shali* is cooked with *Dashapushpa* extract and dry ingredients such as *Medhika* (fenugreek seeds), *Jeeraka* (cumin) topped with coconut milk or coconut paste, and shallots fried in *Ghruta*. The main ingredient, *Shashtika Shali* (*Oryza sativa*) is the best among the cereals and is having *Madhura Rasa*, *Sheeta Virya*, *Laghu Guna*, and *Snigdha Guna* and mitigates *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*.⁸ *Shashtika* removes the dryness of the skin, moisturizes the skin, and strengthens the facial muscles. *Dashapushpa*, a prominent traditional medicine is a group of ten herbs which is culturally and medically important, used by the people of Kerala, especially during the monsoon season. *Mudga* (*Vigna radiata*) having *Kashaya Madhura Rasa*, *Laghu Guna* and *Shita Virya* are also taken as an ingredient. It is also good for mitigating *Kapha* and *Pitta Dosha*.⁹ The *Dravya* having *Shita*

Virya like broken wheat is also used. *Palandu* used as an ingredient is having *Dipana* property, mitigates *Vata* and *Pitta* by its *Katu Rasa* and *Snigdha Guna*.¹⁰. *Jeeraka* helps in increasing *Agni* and mitigates *Vata Dosha*.¹¹. *Medhika* also helps in mitigating *Pitta Dosha*.¹². *Ghrita* used helps in alleviating *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha* and is also good for enhancing *Agni*.¹³. *Yavagu* (gruel) prepared with *Panchakola* is said to be *Dipana*.¹⁴. The method of preparation of Karkkidaka Kanji is similar to that of *Yavagu*. *Yavagu* is one of the common types of *Pathya Kalpana*. Its basic ingredient is rice which is easily digestible and has a lot of nutrients; making it the appropriate food article for patients as well as healthy persons, who have *Mandagni* (poor digestive activity). *Yavagu* is *Laghu*, having *Dipana* property, controls *Vata Dosha*, and helps in increasing *Jatharagni*.¹⁵. *Yavagu* is administered as *Samsarjana Karma* (post-therapeutic diet) to protect the *Agni* from further deterioration after *Panchakarma* procedures.¹⁶.

DISCUSSION

The boiled cereals and herbs used are *Dipana* and *Pachana* in nature which helps in mitigating *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha* and helps in improving digestion. The main ingredients are rice, pulses, *Medhika*, *Jeeraka*, and coconut cooked in the juice of medicinal herbs called *Dashapushpa*. Though these were the prime ingredients used for the gruel, the recipe is different in different regions. Another method of preparation of Kanji is by adding jaggery to the rice cooked with a decoction of herbs to make it sweet. Other cereals and pulses like broken wheat, *Mudga*, powder of *Trikatu*, *Panchakola*, *Dashamoola*, are also used. The local availability of the drugs played a significant role in making the recipe in various parts. The ingredients also vary according to the diseases. Patients of *Prameha* are advised to include *Medhika*, and *Mudga* in the preparation of Kanji. *Punarnava* and *Shigru* leaves have been incorporated in the preparation for hypertensive patients. For combating the renal difficulties also *Punarnava* is used. *Bala*, *Ardraka*, *Jeeraka*, and *Brihati* are the major additive of the Kanji prepared for Asthma. This rice gruel is pre-

pared and consumed fresh on all the days of this month. It is usually consumed in the evenings. While having Karkkidaka kanji, the consumption of tea or coffee is usually avoided. So are non-vegetarian and oily foods which may further deteriorate the *Agni*. Since it is a medicinal broth, it is advisable to take a rest for one to two hours after drinking the Karkkidaka Kanji for better digestion. The prepared Kanji may be consumed in the lukewarm stage. This Kanji may be taken either early in the morning on empty stomach or in the evening as dinner, or both times, if possible, for a minimum of seven days continuously. The course can be continued in multiples of 7 days, till 28 days. The barrage of health problems brought along with the rains can be downright uncomfortable. The *Jatharagni* and *Sharira Bala* are seen to be decreased in *Varsha Ritu*. The main aim during this time is to protect the *Agni* which is vitiated and adopt regimens that are *Tridosha Shamana* in nature. This may be the principle behind embracing Karkkidaka kanji to be used to maintain health.

CONCLUSION

Following a strict routine can cancel the effect of the sudden transition from the scorching summer to the cool monsoons. There are various recipes of Karkkidaka kanji which are followed in different parts of Kerala. Karkkidaka Kanji can be administered in *Varsha Ritu*, as *Yavagu* preparation is indicated in this season. This helps to maintain the *Agni* from further deterioration after *Panchakarma* procedures. The main aim of prescribing this recipe is to maintain the normalcy of *Tridosha* in the body and help improve the *Agni* by intake of light food which is mentioned for *Varsa Ritu* in *Samhita*.

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