



Traditional food preparations of Kerala

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Abstract

Traditional foods are food and dishes that are passed through generations or which have been consumed for many generations. Some traditional foods have geographic indications and traditional specialties.¹ Traditional foods have medicinal properties that help cope with the seasonal ailments. Through a rich variety of vegetarian food especially the leafy vegetable dishes are prepared in the Malayali households during different seasons. Kerala mainly have summer, winter and monsoon seasons, but there are no extreme conditions, still there are some traditional food preparations in various months such as *karkidaka kanji*, *uluva kanji*, *pathila thoran*, etc. which are dealt in the present study.

Keywords: traditional food, karkidaka kanji, pathila thorn

Introduction

In Ayurveda, food is considered as one among the *Trayopasthamba* that is one among *Ahara*, *Nidra* and *Abrhamacharya* ^[2]. *Charakacharya* in *Sutrasthana* mentions the *Nityapathya dravyas* ^[3] and also in 25th chapter he mentioned about the *Hita* and *Ahita aharas*. *Susruthacharya* also mentions about the time of food etc. in the 36th chapter of *Susrutha Samhitha* ^[4]. Thus, from these it is clear that *Acharyas* have given much importance to the food that we consume.

Keralites are blessed to be a part of the great traditional lineage of Ayurvedic medicines and healthy food diets. As it is the southmost state in India there is no extreme seasons. Coping to the different seasons in Kerala there are different food preparations practiced to best owe the health of individuals during these times. These traditional preparations are considered as the simplest way for rejuvenating the body as well as to boost immunity and protect against infections. The people who lived in the past were very well knowing about these preparations and they act as the brand ambassadors for these traditional preparations. The other peculiarity of these preparations are most of the ingredients are grown in their own household. Here are some of the traditional food preparations of Kerala which promotes health and longevity as well as reduces the lifestyle disorders which are suiting with the different seasons in Kerala.

Materials and Methods

Vatakara a village in Calicut district was identified and planned for the study. A group containing 5 Ayurvedic Doctors was formed a group and visited the village in regular intervals to gather information regarding folklore food habits using medicinal herbs. A detailed proforma was prepared containing information regarding folklore food habits and their medicinal values. Information thus collected was gathered, verified and documented.

Results

In the study the different folklore food preparations of Vatakara village was documented. The names of the ingredients are mentioned in Sanskrit. The herbal ingredients are identified and mentioned with their botanical names. Method of preparations along with its health benefits are documented and mentioned.

Ettangadi (*ettu* means eight and *angadi* means market which implies the eight ingredients which are easily available in market)

- Usually taken in *Sisira* and *Vasantha rithu* (Jan –May)
- Ingredients- *Surana* (*Amorphophallus parnifolius*), *Alupa* (*Colocasia esculenta*), *Tugakshiri* (*Maranta arundinacea*), *Romasakanthaka* (*Ipomoea batatas*), *Dioscorea esculenta*, *Tila* (*Sesamum indicum*), *Godhuma* (*Triticum aestivum*), *Kulatha* (*Dolichos biflorus*), *Mudga* (*Vigna trilobata*), *Ikshu* (*saccharum officinarum*), *Kadali phala* (*Musa sapientum*), *Narikela* (*Coccus nucifera*) and *Guda*.
- Method of preparation-The above said tubers are baked in fire and the grains mentioned here are roasted separately and they both are mixed well and is added with *Ikshu*, *Kadali phala*, *Narikela* and *Guda*.
- Benefits-This contains anti-oxidants thus it helps from preventing the diseases pertaining to heart, life style disorders etc.

Thiruvathira puzhuk (*puzhuk* means a traditional preparation thus in total a preparation which is made in the nakshatra *thiruvathira*)

- Thiruvathira is the nakshatra or star of lord Shiva as per the Malayalam calendar. It is believed that on this day the goddess Parvathi finally met Lord Shiva after her long penance and lord shiva took her as a saha-dharma-chaarini. Both shiva and Parvathi present this ideal to devotees in the form of Ardhanareeshvara. So the

married women used to take this [5].

- Taken in Sisira and Vasantha rithu
- Ingredients-*Surana* (*Amorphophallus parnifolius*), *Alupa* (*Colocasia esculenta*), *Tugakshiri* (*Maranta arundinacea*), *Romasakanthaka* (*Ipomoea batatas*), *Plectranthus rotundifolius* and *Dioscorea esculenta*, *Haridra* (turmeric powder), *salt*, *Mahamasha* (*Vigna unguiculata*), *Narikela* (*Coccus nucifera*), *Jeeraka* (*Cuminum cyminum*), green chili and onion.
- Method of preparation-The tubers and raw banana are cooked along with turmeric powder and salt. Then cooked *Mahamasha* is added and then coconut grinded with onion, *Jeeraka*, green chili salt and oil is added.
- Benefits- This contains anti-oxidants thus it helps from preventing the diseases pertaining to heart, life style disorders etc.

Kuvappayasam (a porridge made out of tugakshiri)

- It is taken in all the *Rithus* especially in *Sisira* and *Vasantha Rithu*.
- Ingredients-*Tugakshiri* (*Maranta arundinacea*), *Ela* (*Elettaria cardomomum*), *Guda* and *Narikela*.
- Method of preparation-*Tugakshiri* is mixed well with water and is cooked along with *Guda*. After proper cooking it is added with *Narikela* and *Ela*.
- Benefits-Supports healthy digestion, boosts metabolic rates, promotes healthy sleep, good for heart, promotes good circulation, improves kidney function, stimulate immune system.

Aushadha kanji/ karkidaka kanji (a special preparation of soup which is made in the month of *Karkidakam*) In the Malayalam calendar, the month of *Karkidakam* is considered to be a period of human body rejuvenation and healthcare. Traditional Keralites had a habit of preparing special diet supplies including spices and body purifying cereals. The famous *Karkidaka Rice Porridge* or *Medicinal porridge* is the main food item of *Karkidakam*. Excluding all other fatty fast foods and non-vegetarian menus from diet, people will have a different menu for over a period of one month [6].

- Taken in *Varsha Rithu*
 - Ingredients-*Dasapushpam-Samanga* (*Biophytum sensitivum*), *Dhararuha* (*Aerva lanata*), *Jyotishmathi* (*Celastrus paniculatus*), *Lakshmana* (*Ipomoea sepiaria*), *Sahadevi* (*Vernonia cineria*), *Durva* (*Cynodon dactylon*), *Musali* (*Curculigo orchioides*), *Sasasruthi* (*Emilia sonchifolia*), *Vishnukranthi* (*Evolvulus alsinoides*), *Bhrigaraja* (*Eclipta alba*), *Bala* (*Sida cordifolia*), *Nirgundi* (*Vitex negundo*), *Sashtikashali* (*Oryza sativa*), *Methika* (*Trigonella foenu-greacum*), *Chandrasura* (*Lepidium sativum*), *Narikela* (*Coccus nucifera*), *Asthisringala* (*Cissus quadrangularis*), *Jeeraka* (*Cuminum cyminum*), *Ghrita* and *Guda*.
 - Method of preparation- The *Kashaya* is prepared out of *Dasapushpam* and *Vatahara dravyas* such as *Nirgundi* and *Bala*. *Sashtikashali*, *Methika*, *Chandrasura* are cooked in this *Kashaya*. When it is properly cooked the paste of *Jeeraka*, *Asthisringala*, *Narikela* are added. *Ghrita* can be added and it can be served by adding sugar or salt.
 - Benefits- [7]
1. Helps in regaining strength and also improves immunity.

2. Rejuvenates the body in monsoon season.
3. Keep monsoon-related ailments like fever, cough, arthritis, etc. at bay.
4. Helps in regulating life style disorders.
5. Improves digestion and removes toxins from the body.

Uluva kanji (soup made out of *uluva* or *methika*)

- It is taken in *Varsha Rithu*
- Ingredients-*Uluva* means *Methika*. (*Trigonella foenu-greacum*), *Rice* (*Matta rice*), *Ghrita*, *Coconut milk* (*Coccus nucifera*) 1st and 2nd, *salt* or *sugar*
- Method of preparation- *Coconut* is grated and crushed then *milk* is collected. *Milk* collected without adding water is 1st *milk* and by adding water is 2nd *milk*. *Rice* and *Methika* is cooked in *coconut milk* 2nd. After proper cooking this is again added with *coconut milk* 1st and *Ghrita*. *Sugar* or *salt* can be added according to one's choice.
- Benefits-It is taken for 15-20 days in a month, as it regulates cholesterol and lowers the inflammation, it is also taken in post-delivery care as it promotes the lactation in women.

Pathila thoran (*pathu* means ten and *thoran* is a preparation which together implies a preparation made out of 10 ingredients)

Bhavaprakasha in *Bhavaprakasha Nighandu* mentions the importance of *Saka Varga* as well as *Patra Saka*.⁸ Owing to this there is a preparation in Kerala using most of the medicinal herbs. Innumerable medicinal plants naturally grow in the rainy season. The newly formed fresh and tender leaves are used for this.

- Taken in *Varsha Rithu*
- Ingredients-The tender leaves of *Kushmanda* (*Benincasa hispida*), *Punarnava* (*Boerhavia diffusa*), *Rajamasha* (*vigna unguiculata*), *Bimbi S* (*Coccinia grandis*), *Mandukaparni* (*Centella asiatica*), *Duralabha* (*Tragia involucrata*), *Gudayogaphala* (*Curcubita maxima*), *Surana* (*Amorphophallus parnifolius*), *Alupa* (*Colocasia esculenta*) and *Narikela* (*Coccus nucifera*).
- Method of preparation-The leaves are cooked along with adding salt and turmeric powder and coconut is added.
- Benefits-Boost immune system, hepato- protective, anti-bacterial in action, anemia, reduces blood sugar level etc.

Taal and takara (*Taal* implies *Colocasia* and *Takara* implies *Chakramarda*)

- *Rithu*- Taken in *Sharat Rithu*.
- Ingredients- *Rice*, *Alupa* (stem of *Colocasia*) and leaves of *Chakramarda* (*Senna tora*)
- Method of preparation-The rice is cooked along with the stem of *Colocasia* and the leaves of *Chakramarda* along with *Narikela* and *Guda*.
- Benefits-Prevents skin diseases, eye diseases, obesity etc.

Discussion

The present study reveals that traditional food system plays a significant role in maintaining the well-being and health of the people. These traditional foods are having high medicinal value thus it can be used in various disorders of mankind. In *Ashtanga Sangraha Sutra Sthana Acharya*

Vagbhata mentions that the drug which is grown in the same land in which a person live will be ideal for that person⁹. These ingredients can be cultivated or is available at our own gardens. As in many of the traditional food preparations most of the ingredients will be available only on those particular seasons also owes its high medicinal value. As the lifestyle of the humans are changing day by day these traditional food preparations are also fast eroding which will be the major cause in developing lifestyle disorders in human. These traditional preparations are also rich in anti-oxidants which helps in preventing ageing by inhibiting oxidation reactions in the body. Oxidation is a chemical reaction that can produce free radicals, thereby leading to chain reactions that may damage the cells of organisms. The preparations such as ettangadi and thiruvathira puzhukk are rich in tubers which are the abundant sources for anti- oxidants which helps in preventing lifestyle disorders as well as ageing. Kuvappayasam helps in regulating the body circulation, improves the digestion, kidney function as well as improves the metabolic activity in the individuals. Aushadha kanji or karkidakappayasam is rich in medicinal plants which are vatahara, agni vardhaka, pacana, deepana etc. Varsha rithu will be of vata Chaya so having such traditional foods during this season helps in preventing the vataja rogas. Methika also rich in phytoestrogens which help in increasing the milk production in females. Owing to these medicinal utilities these food preparations are to be further studied scientifically for their nutritional values.

Conclusion

Life style disorders can be defined as diseases linked with and often caused by the way people live their life. These are non-communicable diseases. They are usually caused by lack of physical activity, unhealthy eating habits such as fast foods, alcohols etc. These are increasing day by day. So, it's time to rejuvenate our body and our fast-food culture. Early diabetic conditions, hypertension and strokes are increasing day by day and thus we should go back to the golden gems of real spices and herbal medicines and enjoy the elixir of life.

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