



ROLE OF *KARKITAKA CHARYA* IN HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION: A TRADITIONAL *KERALEEYA VARSHA RITU* *CHARYA*

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Abstract:

The Malayalam month of *Karkitaka* fall during monsoon which is classically known as the *Varsha ritu* (July-August). “*Karkitaka Charya*” is a traditional seasonal regimen which includes both internal and external medications in form of *ahara and vihara*, in this month there will be reduced *agnibala* causing *tridosha* vitiation. Extreme environmental changes coupled with community financial collapse makes the month of *Karkitaka* particularly vulnerable to an outbreak of epidemics. An attempt to mitigate the adverse impacts of *Karkitaka* on both body and mind, the elder generation maintained a disciplined regimen. This article is an overview and study of the customs that are observed in the central region of Kerala during the *Karkitaka* month. The majority of the procedures were followed in expectation of an approaching environmental emergency. These practices cover nutritional, medicinal, and religious aspects which help to maintain the physical and mental and social health in the vulnerable season.

Index terms: *Karkitaka charya, Ahara, Vihara, Varsha rithu, Kerala*

Introduction:

The prime utility of ayurveda is “*swasthasya swasthya rakshanam*”^[1] To achieve that, ayurveda stresses the importance of *dinacharya*, *rithucharya* etc^[2]. *Rithucharya* is nothing but modified *dinacharya* according to the needs of different seasons to keep oneself healthy from the impact of climatic changes in body^[3]. *Karkitaka charya* is one among such practice which have been following since a long time. *Karkitakam*, or Varsha ritu, is a month which spans between July and August as per the Malayalam calendar^[4]. Charya means regimen. The month of *karkitaka* is the starting of *visarga kala* and end of *adana kala*. So *karkitaka* becomes the time frame of transition from a state of less *shareera bala* to increasing *shareera bala*^[5]

Kerala has two primary rainy seasons, ‘*idavappathy*’ and ‘*tulavarsham*’ i.e; the southwest monsoon and the northeast monsoon^[6]. As there is heavy rain and cold wind in this month it gives a really bad impact to both environment and human. *Varsha ritu* worsens the *Agni* (digestive power) which is already in *Alpa balaavsta* because of *kala prabhava*^[7]. *Agni bala* and *Deha bala* is reduced in this ritu and causes vitiation of all 3 doshas (*Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*)^[8]. The month of *Karkitaka* is particularly vulnerable due to the shift from *Aadana* to *Visarga kaala*^[9]. Heavy rain, *alpa agni bala*, *alpa sareera bala* along with all three vitiated *doshas* and communal economic disparities, makes the environmental circumstances conducive for disease outbreak. As the older proverb says “*Karkitakamdurghadam*” “(month of poverty, inauspicious)”, and “*Karkitakam panja masam*” “(month of poverty and diseases)” (k.rao)^[4]. To overcome these obstacles in this month, a number of ethnocultural activities have been carried out in accordance with customs and the crops that are available, considering the climatic and health condition in form of both *ahara* and *oushada*. Which plays an important role in prevention of diseases and promotion of health in all three dimensions of health. This article is critical analysis of *karkitaka charya* practice is central part of Kerala with classical *varsha ritu charya*.

Methods

The information has been collected from elder people, general practitioners, journals and other articles.

Results

1.KARKITAKA SANKRANTHI

It is the shift of sun from “*Mithuna rasi* (gemini zodiac) to *Karkitaka rasi* (cancer zodiac)” (k.rao)^[4] according to calendar while it is the transition from *aadana* to *visargakaala* according to Ayurveda. The rites begin one day before the *Karkitaka* month starts. Houses and premises are cleaned properly and the garbage is disposed that evening. The *Karkitaka samkranthi* is celebrated in different names and with different rituals all around India, considering climatic conditions. The intention behind this ritual is to observe personal and surrounding hygiene considering the upcoming bad weather^[4]

2.KARKITAKA PARAYANA

Spiritual books are also read in the month of *Karkitaka*.^[4] Traditionally Ramayana is often read (religious scripture of lord Rama).^[10] It is read early in morning and some continue throughout the day. This culture's philosophy is that following a spiritual path that can help people achieve mental peace and tranquillity. So that the mind stays peaceful which is worried about the ill effects of bad weather and the corresponding changes to be happen in economy, health etc.

3.MUPPETTU VELLI

It is the 1st Friday of the month. People will visit *Bhagavaty* temples and recite spiritual books, apply henna (paste of *Lawsonia inermis* L.leaves)^[11] ^[4]on palms and feet on this day. In some areas consumption of *pattilathoran*[12,13] and *karkitaka kanji*[14,15,16] begins from this day.

4. KARKIDAKA KURI

During this month women will put paste of *mukkootty* (*Biophytum sensitivum* L.) (k.rao)on *stapani* marma (between their eyebrows).it is more practiced among married women. ^[4,17,18]It is believed that practicing this will enhance their concentration.

5.KARKIDAKA VAAVU

“*Karkidaka vaavu*” is the day of Amavasya in the month of *karkidaka*. On this day a ritual is performed to pay gratitude to ancestors. ^[4,19]Ritual starts with chanting mantras with the priest and offering a preparation made of cooked rice “(*Oryza sativa* L), with *Sharkara* (*Saccharum officinarum* L) *Kadali* (*Musa paradisiaca* L.), *Tila* (*Sesamum indicum* L), *Chandanam*(*Santalum album* L.), *Badra* (twig of *Aerva lanata* (L.) *Darbha* (*Desmostachya bipinnata* (L.) along with *Kshoudra* and *Go Ghrita*”(K.RAO). ^[4] These rituals are done beside river banks usually associated with any temples.^[19] The fasting should be observed by the person who is performing the offering on the day prior to that. which is called as “*orikkal*” means only one time meal, either eating meal with rice for one time that day or taking meal only once on that day .

6. ILLAM NIRA

This comes after the *Karkidaka vaavu*. In this ritual farmer carry newly reaped paddy spike bundles to the temple as a gratitude of good yield. And they say “*Nerayoo nira. Illam nera, vallam nera, vatty nera, kotta nera, pathayam nera nerayo nera, Nera nera polie polie*”.^[4] Which means may the prosperity come to home,in all kinds of savings,in all means of crop yields and it may fill the granary. And then these are taken inside to temple and offered to god and are distributed among devotees. It is then hanged infront of house with belief to attract prosperity. Even *dashapushpa* along with some other drugs are also tied with this.

7.ULUVA UNDA

This is the ritual of having a preparation made from about 10-24 number of medicines in which major ingredient is *methika* (Fenugreek) *uluva* is the malayalam name of *methika*,*unda* means bolus hence the name *uluva unda*.it is otherwise known as *Marunnu unda* meaning bolus of medicine .It is sweet in taste with slight bitterness of fenugreek and other *oushadis* along with jaggery. It is to be taken 2times daily for minimum seven days in whole month. ^[4,20]

8.KARKIDAKA KANJI

Karkidaka kanji is a special preparation exclusively followed in the month of *karkitaka*.^[14,15,16] it is prepared with *shashtika,njavara* (*Oryza sativa*)^[21] with twelve to twentyfour types of medicinal herbs. The preparation of *Karkitaka kanji* varies in different region of kerala, depending upon the flora and fauna of that region. Considering the advantages, it is still in practice throughout kerala. These are consumed with stir fry (“*Toran*”) of *pattila* or the juice of these leaves along with *dashamoola*, *methika* are added to the *kanji* or medicated gruel.

9.PATILLA TORAN

It is the practice of consuming ten leaves.^[12,13] These are consumed as stir fry(*thoran* -kerala preparation). In older times majority of population was farmers. Due to heavy rain in *karkitaka* the crops were either destroyed or the work was hampered,so there was scarcity of food. Hence the tradition of consuming the leaves as a dish came.it is also added as an ingredient in *karkitaka kanji* because of its medicinal properties.

10.DASHAPUSHPAM CHOODAL

Dasa means ten, *pushpa* means flowers. These are as considered auspicious and are kept in hair as ornamental for the whole month. The *dasapuspa's* juices are used to prepare *Karkitaka kanji* along with *dasamoola* . Classics of Ayurveda contain references on *dasapushpa* and *dasamoola* practice^[22]. The number of leaves is not constant at ten; it varies depending on availability in different region^[4,23].

11.“KARKITAKA CHIKITSA”

It means undergoing ayurvedic treatment in the month of *karkitaka*. Due to heavy rain, there will be extremely low temperatures and high levels of humidity. Which hampers the health, also it is believed that the treatment done in this time will give strength both physically and mentally for the coming year. The treatments include Panchakarma and other treatment modalities required for the condition. Rather than a treatment protocol it is considered as a preventive measure^[23]

12.KARKIDAKA CHARYA IN ANIMALS

• AANAYOOTTU

Kerala culture have a great relation with elephants specially in temples.. Elephants are also subjected to treatment during this period since there are no auspicious ceremonies in temples. It aims to restore the health of the animal by providing medication, medicated food, and giving it ample rest. Devotees have the chance to feed elephants at the “*Anayoottu*” ceremony, which illustrates the practical aspect of *Sathvritta* in day-to-day living^[24]

Discussion

Particularly, the rituals from the first day of *Karkitaka* to the end day of *Karkitaka* are focused on promoting both social and personal well-being. People who adhere to these beliefs and the principles of Ayurveda are compelled to maintain a rigid regimen for the entire month.

Table no 1

Name of Charya	Day of practice	Relevance / benefits	Classical <i>varsharitu charya</i>
<i>Karkitaka samkranthi</i>	Last day of <i>midhuna</i>	Aims in personal and social hygiene, and there by decrease the chance of emergence of vector borne diseases like dengue, chikungunya etc by destroying their breeding areas ^[4] Also preparing the land to absorb the water to the ground level. And there by preventing stagnation of water and replenishing the earth.	According to ashtanga sangraha as a precaution of <i>varsha ritu</i> one should do necessary requirements to avoid the presence of snakes, mosquitoes and fly's etc in home and surroundings. ^[25]
<i>Karkitaka parayana</i>	Whole month of <i>karkitaka</i> from first day	Sacred books like Ramayana are recited for a whole month. It is usually read in early morning after bath. it helps to begin the day with positive thoughts. like lord Rama overcome all the miseries in his life and came back to <i>Ramarajya</i> the dark days of sickness and poverty will end and hope goodness will come. ^[4] Thus, helps to maintain mental and there by physical health.	
<i>Mupattu velli</i>	First Friday of <i>karkidaka</i>	Friday is considered as auspicious day for <i>Bhagavaty</i> . So chanting <i>matras</i> will help to decrease the fear and anxiety of upcoming days, and improve mental condition. The weather is humid and damp in this season. It facilitates the growth of fungus, viruses, and bacteria which trigger athlete's foot. Applying henna leaves can help prevent conditions such as ringworm and tinea capitis ^[26] .	According to ashtanga sangraha it is mentioned to avoid walking in barefoot ^[27]

		It has medical properties and act as a barrier between skin and environment.	
<i>Karkitaka vavu</i>	<i>Amavasya</i> in month of <i>karkitaka</i>	Fasting is done prior to offering it can be considered as <i>langana</i> as the Agni is <i>manda</i> in this ritu following <i>langhana</i> will help in <i>ama pachana</i> and <i>angi deepana</i> . And the offerings given to forefathers ^[19] helps in gaining positive mental health.	In <i>varsha ritu</i> the <i>agni</i> which is already weak due to the <i>adanakala</i> will further deteriorated by doshas. ^[28]
<i>Illam nira</i>	Next day after <i>karkitaka vavu</i>	Believes to bring auspiciousness to home. ^[4] It symbolises the ill effect of <i>karkitaka</i> and the poverty is about to end. Helps to overcome the mental stress and giving a positive impact on mental health.	
<i>Karkitaka kuri</i>	Whole month	It is applied in <i>stapani marma</i> . Helps to calms the mind, [4,]increase the concentration. As the kala is <i>alpabala</i> along with <i>dehabala manobala</i> also should be considered. This practice helps in increasing immunity. Biophytum leaves possess antibacterial, antiepileptic, anti-diabetic, anti-lipidemic, rejuvenation, antiviral, anxiolytic, and memory-boosting properties ^[29,30,31] . These findings point out Biophytum's role in regulating the pituitary gland's hormonal harmony. Hence the <i>yukti</i> behind this may be to balance the pituitary function to maintain the reproductive health mainly as this is more practiced among married women.	Application of <i>chandana</i> and <i>agaru</i> are advised. ^[28]
<i>Dasapushpam choodal</i>	Whole month	This is followed to cultivate personal hygiene. ^[4] The anti-inflammatory, anti-arrhythmic, antibacterial, antidiabetic, antilipidemic, anti-diarrheal, anti-cancerous, antirheumatic, antifungal, anxiolytic, along with antipsychotic actions of	Wearing beautiful dress and garlands are advised ^[34] As <i>pitta</i> is in <i>chaya Avasta</i> it will help in <i>shamana</i> . And

		these ten herbs have been confirmed. ^[32,33]	clean cloths helps preventing fungal infections
<i>Uluva unda</i>	7 days or whole month	Fenugreek or <i>methika</i> is the main content. It is <i>vatanulomana</i> and <i>Deepana</i> . ^[35] as the ritu is in <i>vata kopa avasta</i> , this preparation helps in <i>vatanulaonmana</i> and correction of <i>agni</i> . It also acts as a <i>rasayana</i> . it is also given in <i>sutika</i> to get relived from <i>Garbha glani</i> and to aid <i>poshana</i> .	
<i>Pattila toran</i>	7,11,21 or whole month	10 leaves also have medical properties. it is the seasonal vegetation hence the apt food for that particular season. All of these have <i>vatanulomana</i> ^[12,13] properties.	
<i>Karkitaka kanji</i>	7,11,21 or whole month	The medicines used for preparation are <i>vatahara</i> , <i>deepna</i> , <i>balya</i> , <i>anulomana</i> and <i>balavardhaka</i> . it helps in improving the <i>agni</i> and there by keeping good health. ^[36]	<i>Purana shali</i> , <i>yusha</i> , <i>panchkola</i> etc are advised for <i>agni deepana</i> and <i>vatanulomana</i> . ^[37]
<i>Karkitaka chikitsa</i>	7 or 14 or 21 days	Enhances immunity, body purification and protect from ageing factors ^[23,39] It is believed that it helps to detoxify body from all the morbid accumulated <i>mala</i> and give strength for the coming year. There is a stigma among population that if it's done in once every year it should be done, otherwise it will cause diseases. It may have been told by older generation to make people follow this to maintain health and wellbeing.	After doing shodhana of body <i>astapana vasti</i> is indicated. ^[40]
<i>Anayoottu</i>	1 st day of <i>karkitaka</i> .	As a religious ceremony that teaches the importance of considering all living organism as important as ours. It improves the health of animals and improve immunity and strength. ^[24]	One should always have empathy and oneness even towards small creatures ^[41]

Conclusion

Among all the *Ahara* and *Vihara* of *karkitaka charya* explained here are observed as a precaution of upcoming threat of pandemic in rainy season. *Karkitaka charya* is a modified *varsha ritu charya* depending on the need and availability of the particular area. As we see through, it is so much similar to the classical *varsha ritu charya* mentioned in classics. In this *charya* not only the physical aspect of health, but the mental and social aspect of health is covered. Many practices which were practicing before is no longer practiced. It is difficult to uphold the traditional values' basic spiritual principles in the midst of today's shifting cultural crises.^[42] As the *charyas* differ from north to south of kerala further studies in detail of specific area is crucial as this traditional knowledge need scientific validation and as well as to pass this to younger generation.

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