

PAKADARPANA OF NALA: A BOOK REVIEW OF THE ANCIENT SANSKRIT TREATISE ON CULINARY SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Pakadarpana (The Mirror of Cooking) is a Sanskrit treatise attributed to *Maharaja Nala* of Nishadha and is regarded as the oldest Ayurvedic treatise on home science. The text is divided into eleven *Prakaranas* dealing with cooking fundamentals, seasonal dietary regimen, snacks and confectionaries, milk puddings, flavoured beverages, soups, ghee-rice preparations, jams, water cooling techniques, milk preparations and curd varieties. This book review presents a chapter wise account of the treatise, restricted strictly to the points found in the text. Chapter 1 classifies food into five categories, describes eight defects (*Ashta Dosha*) of cooked food, and gives standardised methods for rice and meat. Subsequent chapters give detailed recipes, preparation methods and therapeutic properties. The review identifies features that set the text apart: a granular eight-fold classification of cooking defects, the signature dish

Bhakshyaraja, the twenty-tube *Nalika* apparatus for dispensing multi-flavoured sherbets, repeated blanching of garlic to remove pungency, a staged trial comparing water-cooling methods, and the use of a hollowed citron rind as a fermentation and flavouring vessel for curd. The text shows that ancient Indian culinary science was an integrated system of food safety, seasonal medicine, sustainable technology and sensory craft.

KEYTERMS: *Pakadarpana*, *Nala*, *Paka Shastra*, *Ashta Dosha*, *Rtu Dharma*, Ayurvedic cookery, Book review, Food science.

INTRODUCTION

Pakadarpana (The Mirror of Cooking) is a Sanskrit treatise attributed to *Maharaja Nala* of Nishadha. It is called the oldest Ayurvedic treatise on home science and is divided into 11 *Prakaranas* (chapters).^[1] The text moves from the basic principles of cooking, through the dietary regimen of the seasons, to individual preparations such as snacks, puddings, beverages, soups, rice dishes, jams, chilled water, milk preparations and curds.^[1]

What distinguishes the work is that it treats cookery systematically. It classifies taste combinations into 63 types and describes 16 distinct dish categories, so that *Nala* treated cookery almost mathematically and not merely descriptively.^[2] This review summarises the book chapter by chapter, records the features that make it distinctive, and notes how its content corresponds to present-day food practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Source material: The primary source for this review is the Sanskrit treatise *Pakadarpana* of *Nala* with its English translation and commentary, in all eleven *prakaranas*.^[1]

Method: The text was read critically, chapter by chapter. For each chapter the following were recorded: the subject of the chapter, the preparations described, the method of preparation, and the properties (*Guna*) and therapeutic effects described in the text. Features that appeared specific to this treatise were then listed separately. Finally, the preparations and techniques were tabulated against their present-day counterparts. Only points drawn from the book have been included in the content section; comments from the commentary accompanying the text are identified as such.

REVIEW ON THE BOOK

The eleven *Prakaranas* of *Pakadarpana* are reviewed below in the order in which they occur in the text.

Chapter 1: *Grantha Upakrama and Paka Nirupana* (Introduction and Cooking Fundamentals)

The first chapter sets out the foundations of the work.^[2] It classifies all food into five categories: *Bhakshya*, *Bhojya*, *Lehya*, *Cosya* and *Peya*.^[2] It then names the eight defects

(*Ashta Dosha*) of cooked food: *Asruta*, *Picchila*, *Ashuchi*, *Kvathita*, *Shushka*, *Dagdha*, *Virupa* and *Anartu*. Each defect is described together with its specific harm to the person who eats such food.^[2]

The method for cooking rice is given step by step. Old rice is washed thoroughly and soaked in a vessel with rice and water in a ratio of roughly 1:3, and placed on fire. Once it boils and the grains stiffen slightly, it is stirred with a ladle, a little curd, milk or water is added, and the vessel is removed from direct flame and rested on embers. The rice is served once it is soft.^[2]

A meat-handling protocol follows. Goat, sheep or bird meat is selected, the skin and intestine are separated and cleaned, the meat is washed with water, and it is then cooked with the bones in a separate vessel. This is a basic procedure for meat safety and for the sequencing of steps.^[2] The chapter also mentions varieties of *Supa nirmanavidhi*, *Takra nirmanavidhi* and *Navaneeta nirmanavidhi* along with their *gunas*.^[2]

Chapter 2: *Rtu Dharma Nirupana* (Seasonal Dietary Regimen)

This chapter assigns meats to the seasons: deer meat in *Vasanta*; goat and sheep in *Greeshma*; poultry and fish in *Varsha*; river and pond fish in *Sarad*; pork and rabbit in *Hemanta*; and sparrow and quail in *Sisira*. Each choice is justified by the heating or cooling quality of the meat matching the needs of the season.^[3] The chapter closes with a moral note: a cook who understands these seasonal *dharma*s and cooks accordingly is freed from the "sin" of a cook's errors, which links culinary discipline with spiritual merit.^[3]

Chapter 3: *Bhakshya Prakarana* (Snacks and Confectionaries)

The chapter gives the recipe of *Bhakshyaraja*, the "king of snacks". Cold wheat pieces, boiled chickpea or lentil paste, coconut kernel, cardamom, rock salt, fresh butter, dates and sugar are blended, shaped into balls, wrapped in fragrant packets (*Pugapatta*, probably arecanut leaf wrapping) and rested before serving.^[4] Its properties are that it relieves *Vata* and *Pitta*, is aphrodisiac, promotes digestive power and strength, and is light.^[4] An alternative method is also given in which a meat or grain paste is mixed with milk and jaggery, cooked into small dumpling like pieces and combined with fruit pulp (*Jambu*) into a rich dessert-snack.^[4]

Chapter 4: *Payasa Prakarana* (Milk Pudding Varieties)

Lashuna Payasa (garlic payasa) is prepared by peeling garlic cloves, threading them like a garland and boiling them repeatedly, about four to seven times, in fresh water so that the

pungency is removed each time. They are then cooked into a milk-based kheer with rice. This shows an ancient technique of neutralising a strong odour by repeated blanching.^[5]

Godhuma Payasa (wheat payasa) uses fresh wheat grains that are soaked and pounded to remove the husk, then cooked with milk reduced to one-third and combined with banana or jackfruit pulp.^[5] The chapter also mentions the fruit-flower *Panaka (Rasala)*, in which milk or fruit pulp is combined with flower petals such as jasmine and lotus for fragrance and served chilled.^[5]

Chapter 5: *Panakabheda Nirupanam (Flavoured Beverages / Sherbets)*

The chapter describes the construction of an elaborate multi-flavour sherbet apparatus. A large vessel carries 20 small tubes or reservoirs (*Nalika*) inserted through wrapped arecanut-leaf openings, each holding a different fruit or flower extract: mango, jackfruit, pomegranate, lotus, jasmine, *Kadamba*, *Ketaki* and citron.^[6] The central vessel holds sugar water (*Sarkarodaka*) infused with camphor and musk. Guests could draw flavoured water from whichever tube they preferred, so the set-up was in effect a flavour dispensing and mixing station.^[6] The whole arrangement is kept cool by fanning with palm-leaf or khus (vetiver) fans in a room with a controlled breeze.^[6]

Chapter 6: *Vividhanna Yusha Paka Nirmana Prakaranam (Soups / Broths)*

The *Yusha* of *Shali anna* uses approximately 1 kg of clean rice ground into a paste and mixed with buttermilk, then cooked with five times its quantity of water. Powdered *Kustumbari* (coriander) and *Kaidarya* (bay berry) are added, the preparation is combined with curd and strained through cloth, and it is stored in vessels perfumed with jasmine and other flowers.^[7]

The royal version, *Raja shali anna yusha*, is enriched further with tamarind pulp, mustard paste, asafoetida, cumin, fenugreek, ginger and onion, giving a fully spiced and complex broth fit for royalty.^[7] Its properties are that it pacifies *Pitta* (*Yusha piyusha*, the "nectar-broth") and relieves fatigue.^[7]

Chapter 7: *Ghrithanna Paka Nirmanavidhi Gunaprakaranam (Ghee-Rice Preparations)*

Four preparations are described.^[8] (1) *Ghrithanna* is specially processed rice with *Saindhava lavana* and ghee, mixed with roasted papad pieces, garlic, ginger, fenugreek-cumin powder, coriander, *Kayaphala* and screwpine essence. (2) *Chinchaphala rasayukta shali anna* is rice infused with tamarind juice and cooked with garlic and asafoetida; it relieves *Shoola* and

helps regulate *Pitta* and appetite. (3) *Sarshapa kalka yukta shali anna* is rice infused with mustard paste and combined with citron juice and roasted cumin; it removes excessive heat (*Ushnata*) and acts as *Chardihara*. (4) *Dadhi yukta shali anna* is curd rice with mango pieces, garlic, dry ginger and spices, a direct ancestor of modern curd rice.^[8]

Chapter 8: *Lehya Prakarana* (Jam Preparations)

The chapter describes a fruit-based *Lehya* using mango and other fruits. Ripe fruit is peeled and deseeded, cooked separately with sugar until thickened, and strained through fine cloth. It is then perfumed with camphor and flower extracts, packed into small containers and cooled in a breeze-controlled room with fans.^[9] The therapeutic effect stated is the removal of dullness of the tongue (*Jadata*) and inability to taste (*Rasaaswadanaasamartya*); it pacifies *Pitta* and clears *Kapha* and *Vata*.^[9]

Chapter 9: *Shaitya Jala Nirmana* (Cooling Water Techniques)

This chapter describes cooling and perfuming water by evaporative methods using porous earthen pots, fanning and floral infusion.^[10] In the first method, fresh gourd pulp is combined with Ganga water in a gold vessel, perfumed with camphor paste, and placed on a breeze-cooled swing (*Dola*) for extended cooling. In the second, a pot with a cloth-covered mouth is filled with fragrant flowers and hung with small holes at the base, so that water drips slowly through a chamber lined with flowers and vetiver into a golden vessel below, an ingenious drip-filtration and aromatisation system.^[10]

The chapter includes a debate in which two disputants argue which is the cheapest and most effective cooling method: the sandy platform (*Baluka Vedika*), the palm-fan breeze (*Tala-Vrntha*) or flower infusion (*Pushpa Vasana*). They test it by wrapping perfumed cloth around a pot of hot water and cooling it by fan and evaporation, and the method that is coolest, most fragrant and most economical wins by public or royal judgment.^[10] The chapter also mentions using clearing-nut seed paste (*Kataka*) to clarify muddy water, an early water-purification technique.^[10]

Chapter 10: *Kshiraadi Paka Nirmana Prakaranam* (Milk Preparations)

The method for *Ksheera Paka* begins with carefully collected buffalo milk, reduced by slow simmering with continuous stirring (to prevent scorching) in a wide vessel over a controlled fire. The milk is thickened to specific fractions of its original volume (one-half, one-third, one-quarter), and each stage yields a differently named product: *Lehya* at half reduction,

Ghatika at one-quarter, and *Sarkara sadhaka* on further reduction. These correspond to rabdi, khova and condensed-milk stage products.^[11] Saffron, camphor, dates, lotus or jasmine flowers, banana and jackfruit pulp are added at various stages for perfume and flavour.^[11] The preparation pacifies *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*, gives strength, restores bodily and sensory strength, and relieves fatigue.^[11]

Chapter 11: *Dadhi Bheda Prakaranam* (Curd Varieties)

A large citron is hollowed out and its seeds and pulp removed. The inner cavity is coated with camphor paste and jasmine and filled with warm reduced milk together with *Manda* and butter. The opening is sealed with a cut piece of the same fruit and the curd is left to set, so that the citron rind acts as a natural flavour-infusing fermentation vessel.^[12] The commentary adds that this tradition survives in shopkeepers setting curd in small earthen pots (*kulhads*) and selling them separately, a practice still seen today, especially in Madras.^[12] The properties given are that the curd is *Ruchikaraka* (appetising) and *Pathya*, balances all doshas, promotes strength and bulk, and enhances digestive fire.^[12]

Distinctive Features of *Pakadarpana*

Reading the eleven chapters together, the following features appear distinctive to this treatise.

1. Granular classification of cooking defects. The eight-fold *Ashta Dosha*, each linked to a specific symptom, is more detailed than the general treatment of food faults in other *samhitas*.^[2]
2. *Bhakshyaraja*. A named signature dish, the "King of Edibles", is singled out in the text itself and is not found under this name and composition elsewhere.^[4]
3. The *Nalika* apparatus. The 20-tube device for dispensing several flavoured sherbets from one vessel is closer to kitchen engineering than to a recipe; no other classical Ayurvedic or culinary text is found describing a mechanical multi-flavour dispensing apparatus of this kind.^[6]
4. De-odourising a pungent ingredient. In *Lashuna Payasa*, garlic is peeled and boiled in fresh water 4 to 7 times, an early technique for removing pungency before use in a sweet dish, rarely detailed in other texts.^[5]
5. A staged trial of cooling methods. The public or royal trial comparing three water-cooling methods is an experimental, evidence-based narrative that is rarely dramatised in Ayurvedic literature, which typically states conclusions rather than testing them.^[10]

6. Citron rind as fermentation vessel. Setting curd in a hollowed citron rind is not described in the major Ayurvedic *Samhitas*. It is a culinary invention specific to *Pakadarpana*, with documented continuity in the modern kulhad-curd trade.^[12]

Taken together, these show that *Pakadarpana* is not just a dietetic text restating Ayurvedic principles. It documents original culinary engineering, quantified food science and experimental method, and so holds a distinct place in the history of Indian food science.

Summary and Modern Relevance

Table 1 summarises the main theme of each chapter, the example drawn from the text, and the present-day practice to which it corresponds.

Table 1: Themes of Pakadarpana and their modern relevance.

Theme	Example from text	Modern relevance
Food safety science	8 <i>Doshas</i> of cooked food (Ch. 1) ²	HACCP-style quality checklist
Seasonal nutrition	<i>Rtu</i> -based taste / meat chart (Ch. 2) ³	Farm-to-table, chrono-nutrition
Functional snacks	<i>Bhakshyaraja</i> recipe (Ch. 3) ⁴	Energy balls / health bars
Flavour masking	<i>Garlic payasa</i> (Ch. 4) ⁵	Functional food R&D
Personalised beverages	<i>Nalika Apparatus</i> (Ch. 5) ⁶	Multi tube sherbet stations
Therapeutic soups	<i>Raja yusha</i> (Ch. 6) ⁷	Detox / recovery broths
Dosha-based rice dishes	<i>Ghrtanna</i> variants (Ch. 7) ⁸	Puliyodarai, curd rice, etc.
Fruit preservation	<i>Lehya</i> method (Ch. 8) ⁹	Jam-making, palliative nutrition
Zero-energy cooling	Evaporative pot cooling (Ch. 9) ¹⁰	Desert coolers, natural water purification
Milk reduction	<i>Ksheerapaka</i> (Ch. 10) ¹¹	Rabdi, khova, basundi
Natural fermentation vessels	Citron-set curd (Ch. 11) ¹²	Kulhad curd, biodegradable packaging

CONCLUSION

Pakadarpana demonstrates that ancient Indian culinary science was not merely a collection of recipes but an integrated system of food safety, seasonal medicine, sustainable technology and sensory craft.^[1] Its eight-fold classification of defects in cooked food, its season-wise meat chart, its recipes with stated properties, its evaporative cooling and water-clarifying techniques, and its use of natural vessels for fermentation each have a recognisable counterpart in food practice today. Much of this survives, sometimes unrecognised, in Indian

kitchens and markets.^[1,12] The treatise deserves wider reading by students of *Ayurveda*, particularly of *Swasthavritta*, as a source on dietetics and food preparation.

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