



## Porridges Used in Varma Medicine - A Review

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of porridges in Varma medicine, an ancient healing tradition rooted in the principles of balance in the vital energy flow and nourishment of the body. Porridges, often made from a variety of grains, legumes, and medicinal herbs are recognized for their therapeutic and nutritional benefits in supporting health and wellness. The study delves into the significance of porridge in Varma practices, exploring its use of recovery from ailments and enhances overall vitality. Through an analysis of classic Varma texts, the article discusses how porridges are formulated to address specific health conditions, reflecting the holistic approach of Varma medicine, types of porridges, Siddha properties and pharmacological activities of ingredients. By integrating insights from nutrition science and ethnomedicine, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how porridge serves not only as a nourishing food but also as a vital component of healing practices in Varma medicine.

**Keywords:** Varma, Siddha, Porridge, Kanji.

### INTRODUCTION

Varma Medicine is a specialized branch in Siddha medical system which widely practiced in India. It emphasizes the holistic approach - practice of stimulating specific points of the body constituting the vital prana energy called Varmam points. In various literatures the Varma medicine is indicated in the management of neurological and musculoskeletal disorders. However, varmam therapy is not solely depend on physical techniques, it also significantly influenced by the diet. The concept of providing therapeutic diet is being followed traditionally in varma medicine. It is also considered to be the part of the treatment. It focuses to treat the specific medical issues by providing the essential nutrients and also by eliminating the food that may exacerbate symptoms.

Various therapeutic diet has mentioned in Varma medicine. Varma kanji (Varma porridges) has a significant role in traumatic care and during the period of rehabilitation along with the Varmam therapy.<sup>1</sup> Fast food has become the staple food in this modern world as trends. Now the world is focusing on the balanced and nutritional diet. This knowledge is traditionally transferred in Varma medicine to meet the nutritional and therapeutic need. This article delivers the list of varma porridges mentioned in various varmam literatures, their principle and benefits addressing various health benefits. Whether you are undergoing Varmam or simply seeking to support your health through diet, understanding the synergy between food and healing may empower you on your journey to optimal well-being.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Study type:** Literature review

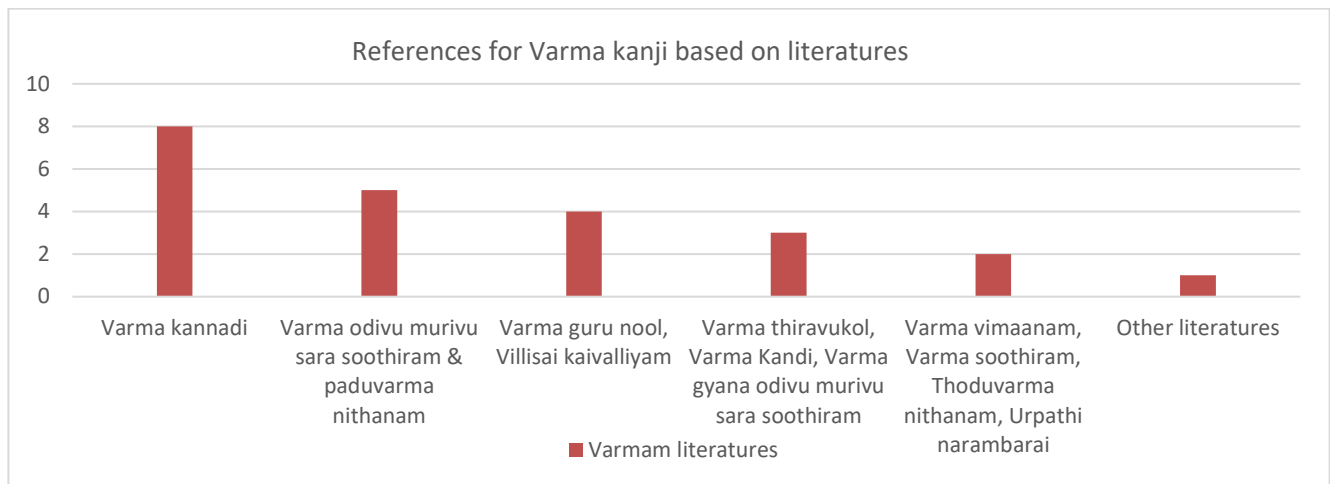
**Search strategy:** A literature search regarding porridges and their usage in Varma medicine was done analyzing various Varmam literatures and several electronic databases. The sources of the data include- varma & Siddha books available in the library and online data bases. Key word and search term includes Varmam, kanji, pathiyam, porridge. An initial search yielded over 432 books. Titles were screened based on relevance to varmam and diet, resulting in the selection of 62 books for further evaluation. Detailed evaluations were conducted on these titles, ultimately narrowing the selection to 20 core texts.

**Data Analysis:** The data collected was organized into spreadsheet for systematic analysis. Thematic analysis of the data was done as type of boiling base used for the porridge, most used drug in preparation and their indications to disease conditions. This review may be limited by the availability of certain texts and potential biases in the selection process, as only Tamil-language books related to Varma medicine were included.

### RESULTS

**Collection of Porridges from various Varmam literatures:** 39 different types of Porridge have been documented from 20 Varmam literatures. In which, the literatures containing more references for porridge preparation includes Varma kannadi (8 formulations), Varma odivu murivu sara soothiram (5 formulations) and Paduvarma nithanam (5 formulations) respectively as shown in (Fig:1)





**Figure 1:** Frequency of references to Porridges in Varmam literatures

Also, several types of porridges are mentioned containing same primary ingredients and varying secondary ingredients - Saamai arisi Kanji (5 types), Thinai arisi kanji (6 types), Uzhangai kanji (4 types), Karunchundai kanji (2 types), Sitramutti kanji (2 types) as shown in Table-1.

**Table: 1** List of porridges and Varma literatures

S.NO	Name	Varma Literatures
1.	Adathodai kanji	Varma odivu murivu sara soothiram - 1018/1200
2.	Uzhangai kanji-I	Varma kannadi- 325/500
3.	Uzhangai kanji-II	Varma kannadi- 330/500
4.	Uzhangai kanji-III	Varma thiravukol- 635/225
5.	Uzhangai kanji-IV	Sathuramani soothiram- 569/600
6.	Yela kanji	Varma thiravukol- 58/225
7.	Karunchundai kanji- I	Varma odivu murivu sara soothiram- 971/1200
8.	Karunchundai kanji- II	Varma odivu murivu sara soothiram- 972/1200
9.	Karuppu vali arisi kanji	Urpathi narambarai- 629/1000
10.	Kurunthotti ver kanji	Varma odivu murivu sara soothiram- 934/1200
11.	Kuruvai arisi kanji	Varma guru nool- 47/130
12.	Kondrai kanji	Varma guru nool- 62/130
13.	Saamai arisi kanji- I	Thodu varma nithanam, Varma aani-112, Padu varma nithanam -101, Varma Vimaanam, Paduvarma Nilaiya Vilakkam, Varma Thiravukol Thirattu, Varma Maruthuvam
14.	Sitramutti kanji- I	Varma beerangi vaithya soothiram
15.	Sitramutti kanji-II	Varma kandi- 51/60
16.	Thippili kanji	Varma gyana odivu murivu sara soothiram- 1511/2200
17.	Thippili moola kanji	Varma thiravukol-66/225
18.	Thirikadugu kanji- I	Varma soothiram-96/101
19.	Thirikadugu kanji -2	Varma soothiram-97/101 Varma gyana odivu murivu sara soothiram- 1512/2200
20.	Thinai arisi kanji- I	Paduvarma nithanam-42/101
21.	Thinai arisi kanji- II	Paduvarma nithanam-57/101
22.	Thoothuvalai kanji	Varma kannadi-332/500
23.	Narunandri kanji	Varma odivu murivu sara soothiram- 973/1200
24.	Pancha moola kanji	Varma gyana odivu murivu sara soothiram- 1373/2200
25.	Pazhaya varma kanji	Varma kannadi- 335/500
26.	Paal kanji	Varma guru nool- 125/130

27.	Varma kanji- I	Villisai kaivalliyam-298/300
28.	Varma kanji- II	Villisai kaivalliyam-298/300
29.	Varma kanji- III	Villisai kaivalliyam-298/300
30.	Varma kanji- IV	Villisai kaivalliyam-298/300
31.	Venthaya kanji	Varma guru nool- 124/130
32.	Saamai arisi kanji- II	Thodu varma nithanam,Varma kandi,Varma kannadi-500
33.	Saamai arisi kanji- III	Varma kannadi-500
34.	Saamai arisi kanji- IV	Urpathi narambarai
35.	Saamai arisi kanji- V	Sigitchai murivu sari- 250
36.	Thinai arisi kanji-III	Varma kannadi-500, Varma nithanam- 500, Varma Vimaanam
37.	Thinai arisi kanji-IV	Padu varma nithanam-101
38.	Thinai arisi kanji-V	Padu varma nithanam, Varma kannadi-500
39.	Thinai arisi kanji-VI	Varma soodamani, Varma kandi

**Types of Varma Porridge:** There are five varieties of porridges mentioned in Varmam literatures based on their boiling liquid and the method of preparation. They are

Water-based porridge: made by boiling ingredients in water

Milk -based porridge: prepared using milk as a boiling base (dairy or non-dairy)

Broth-based porridge: Cooked using a Savory broth (Chicken, mutton soups)

Decoction based porridge: using the decoction of raw drugs for boiling

Combination porridge: Made using a combination of water and milk or broth

Pouch (Kizhi)-immersed porridge: pouch containing ingredients immersed into the boiling liquid.

The method of immersing the pouch containing the raw drugs and ingredients is specially method only mentioned in Varmam literatures. Most of the porridges mentioned comes under the category of pouch- immersed in water-based method.<sup>2</sup>

**Classification of Ingredients based on Siddha Aspect:** 90 different medicinal ingredients are identified in these Porridge formulations from Varmam literatures. In Siddha, the ingredients are classified based on their source as:

Plant based ingredients: 82

Metals and Mineral based ingredients: 3 (Salt, Laccifer lacca, Saathira bedhi-bitumen)

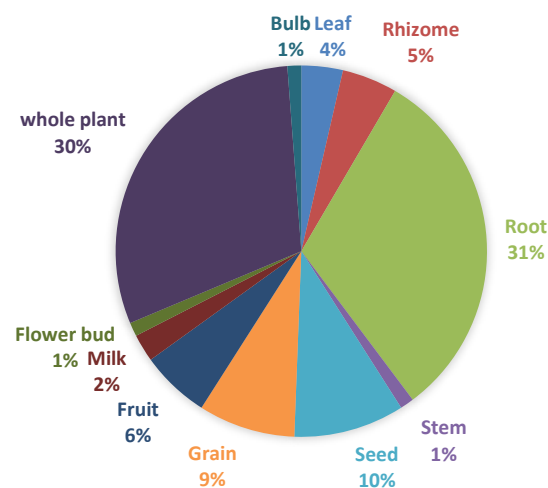
Animal products: 5 (Cow milk, Goat milk, Buffalo milk, Chicken and Goat meat).<sup>3</sup>

**Botanical description of the medicinal ingredients:**

**Morphology:** These 82 plant ingredients come under 69 plant species. Most of them were found to be Herbs-35 and Shrubs-14. Other categories include Tree-10, Climber-9, Creeper-1

**Family:** Plants belonging to 37 different Families were identified. Plants comes under the family Fabaceae, Solanaceae, Poaceae and Zingiberaceae are repeatedly used.

**Parts used:** Different parts of the plants are used for the preparation. Most of them are found to be Root and whole plant. 26 different roots and 25 as whole plant has been used. Seeds, grains and dried fruits are used as primary ingredients (Fig:2)



**Figure 2:** Parts of medicinal plants used in Porridges

**Phytochemicals:** Flavonoid-27%, Alkaloid-21%, Steroid-12%, Terpenoid-10%, Saponin-15% and Tannin-15% are mostly found in these ingredients.

**Pharmacological actions:** Most of the drugs possess anti-inflammatory, analgesic, diuretic and hepatoprotective actions. (Fig:3)

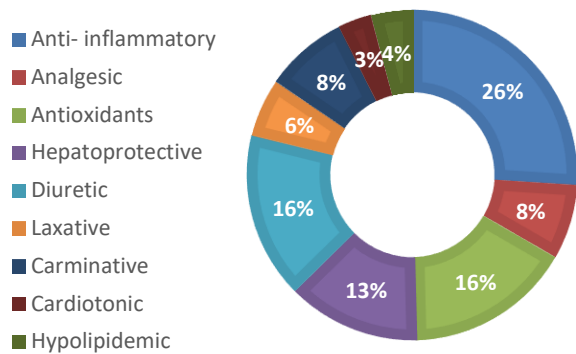


Figure 3: Pharmacological activities of medicinal ingredients

**Properties of ingredients in Siddha aspect:** In Siddha system, medicinal drugs are classified and also chosen on the basis of Siddha properties called Taste, Potency and Efficacy. One among the six tastes is destined for each drug as Sweet, salt, sour, bitter, astringent and pungent. The bio transformation of medicinal drugs is considered as potency and the post absorption character is referred as Efficacy. Most drugs identified in varmam literature for the porridge preparation is found to have Bitter in taste (33), Hot in potency (50) and Pungent in efficacy (50).<sup>4</sup> (Table: 2)

Table 2: Siddha properties of medicinal ingredients

S.NO	Taste	Fq.	%	Potency	Fq.	%	Efficacy	Fq.	%
1.	Sweet	24	26	Hot	50	72	Sweet	19	28
2.	Bitter	33	35	Cold	19	28	Pungent	50	72
3.	Pungent	23	25						
4.	Astringent	12	13						
5.	Sour	1	1						

**Indication for varmam and other symptoms:** The porridges in the varmam literatures are mentioned for various indications and also particularly mentioned for the specific varmam related conditions. The data collected for the use of porridge for various medical indications were presented on systemic basis as follows: **Respiratory system:** Cough, Asthma, Dyspnoea. **Gastro intestinal:** Colon pain, Hiccup, vomit, Haemorrhoids, Abdominal distention. **Excretory system:** constipation, oliguria, polyuria. **Musculoskeletal:** Pain, Swelling, spasm, osteomyelitis. **Generalized:** Disorientation, Anosmia and taste impairment, fatigue, fever, giddiness. **Immune system:** megam, Sayam, Ilaippu, Eelai (diseases related to suppressed immune). **Neurological:** epilepsy. **Thiridhosam:** Vadha diseases, soodu (pitham), kabam.

Varma porridges that are indicated directly to the Varmam points are given as follows: 38 different varma points were mentioned with porridge as their therapeutic diet. **Yela kanji** - Adivayiru varmam, **Varma kanji-I:** Ul varmangal- 6 types. **Saamai arisi kanji:** Type-1 for Utchi varmam, Poruthu varmam, Naadi adi Adangal varmam, Munpongi-pin pongi varmam, Aatral varmam, Vaadai varmam, Naadi varmam, Kondaikolli varmam, Suruthi varmam, Ottu Varmam, Moorthi kaalam. Type-2 for Poruthu varmam, Adakka yoga varmam, Thandellu varmam, Pidari kalam. Type -3 for Utchi varmam. Type -4 & 5 for Sevi kutri varmam. **Thinai arisi kanji:** Type-2 for Utchi varmam. Type-3 for Padu varma injuries -12. Type-4 Koombu varmam. Type-5 for Unthi Varmam. Type- 6 for Thandu varmam respectively.

**DISCUSSION**

Porridge has been utilized in various traditional healing systems as a therapeutic food. Its usage in Varma medicine presents an interesting intersection of nutrition and traditional medicine. Varma medicine emphasizes the

balance of life energy circulation through various points interlinked with vital organs, thereby maintaining the normal well-being. The Porridges in Varmam literatures are indicated for the conditions of various organ systems of the body as previously mentioned in results. Insight to the symptoms of Varmam points suggest that these porridges should be given to the patients who are in acute care and rehabilitation criteria. The paduvarmam- 12 and ul varmangal-6 are considered to be the most vital points of the body.<sup>5</sup> If any damage to the vital circulation of varma points happens, it will lead to severe complications or even to death. Maintaining the proper nutritional intake, breathing, consciousness and excretion are found to be the primary goal of porridges from Varmam literatures. Porridge, typically made from whole grains such as oats, rice, or millet serves as a nutrient-dense food rich in fibre, vitamins, and minerals.<sup>6</sup> This provides a steady release of energy, which can be crucial for individuals undergoing Varma therapy, as it supports the body’s healing processes. The primary ingredients of these porridges include- Little millet (*Panicum sumatrense*), Foxtail millet (*Setaria italica*), Rice (*Oryza sativa*), Dried ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), Liquorice root (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) etc. The siddha properties of most ingredients resulted as to have Bitter taste- that removes toxicity from body, throat, balances vatham & pitham and improves the memory. Hot potency of drugs improves the digestion, balance the vatham, prevents from giddiness and fatigue. Efficacy of drugs maintains the equilibrium in three humors of body. The data from the indications mentioned in Varmam literatures shows these porridges are used for the patients who are in acute care in need for nutritional diet and proper digestion. The siddha properties of ingredients also suited to meet the necessity of the patients and promotes the health. The biomechanism of typical porridge also be viewed for the

scientific validation. The composition of porridges includes carbohydrates, fibre, protein, vitamin and mineral. The process of digestion begins with mastication (chewing) involves the breakdown of carbohydrates.<sup>7</sup> The consistency and warmth of porridge may also have a calming effect, promoting mental tranquillity, which is essential for the therapeutic process.<sup>8</sup> This adheres to the principles of maintaining harmony between the mind, body, and spirit. Fiber-rich foods often contain a variety of antioxidants, creating a synergistic effect.<sup>9</sup> This means that the presence of fibre can help to maximize the overall antioxidant capacity of the meal, allowing for better absorption and utilization of these beneficial compounds. The physiological effects are identified as the high fibre content contributes to a feeling of fullness, the gradual digestion of carbohydrates leads to a steady release of glucose into the bloodstream, soluble fibre particularly beta-glucans can help lower cholesterol levels, improve cardiovascular health and also supply healthy gut bacteria.<sup>10</sup> In recent years, the therapeutic diet has gained significant traction as more individuals seek holistic approaches to managing their health. Scientific community also works in the therapeutic diet to meet various factors especially on chronic diseases. Studies related to the preparation of instant multigrain porridges, analysing their physiochemical and functional properties are under process.<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, porridge not only serves as a nutritive and versatile food but also as a promising therapeutic component within Varma medicine. Its ability to provide essential nutrients, promote digestive health and enhance overall well-being aligns well with the holistic principles of this ancient healing art. Not only for varma medicine, the porridges can be utilised for geriatric care. As we continue to explore the synergy between diet and traditional therapies, Porridge will stand out as a simple yet effective ally in the quest for health and balance.

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