

Medicinal Rice of Kerala

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Rice, one of the oldest foodcrops, is the staple food of the people of Kerala, where it has been under cultivation as in other parts of South India from very ancient times. It is the staple food of many millions of people. Ancient Indian records speak of the existence of rice varieties of curative or medicinal value for various ailments as detailed in Āyurvedic treatises of the 15th and 16th centuries AD. Medicinal uses of rice especially in Āyurvedic system of medicine as well documented in the Ancient, books on Āyurveda viz. 'Suśruta Samhitā, 'Charaka Samhita' and 'Aṣṭāṅga Hridayam'.

'Navara' is one of the rice varieties of medicinal rice which has been under cultivation in Kerala for about 2500 year since the time of Suśruta, the great Indian pioneer in medicine and surgery. Buchanan (1807) has recorded that Navara was grown in Kerala in the early 19th century. In classical Sanskrit books of Āyurveda it is grouped under 'Shāṣṭikam' due to its extra short duration, coming to harvest with in 60 days. Two types of Navara has been mentioned in the 'Aṣṭāṅga Hridayam', the white glumed (husked) and black glumed, both of which are used in Āyurvedic Medicine. The wild rice (vari) belongs to 'Śali' group and Navara under the subgroup 'Shāṣṭikam'. Navara is the variety exclusively utilized in what is called the 'Pancakarma' treatment involving baths and massages for treatment in Paralytic conditions.

‘Shāstiko Vrihiṣu Sreṣṭah’

Among the vreehi varieties, Shāstikam which matures in a short period of sixty days, is superior to others and the rice from this is also ‘laghu’ in contrast to other ‘Vreehis’. Kerala with its hoary traditions in the Ayurvedic system of medicine and many practising physicians use rice and rice products to a great extent as laid down in the classical works of Suśruta, Caraka and Āchārya Bhavana Misra. Śali rices are characterised by red husk, white Kernels and are mostly grown during the winter season. The Navara rice is easily digestible, alleviate thirst and reduce ‘vāta’, ‘pitta’ and ‘kapha’ (Tridoṣam) and are considered to be better from the medicinal point of view. Navara is known as ‘Shāstika’ ‘shaṣṭiśali’, ‘Shaṣṭijam’ ‘Shaṣṭiva rajess’ in Sanskrit.

Snigdham swādu laghu grāhi:

Thridoṣaghnām stīrahimam

Shāstiko vreehi sreṣṭa: Gawacha/Sitagauraru:

(Aṣṭāṅga Hrdayam, Chapter 6)

The śloka tells that Navara rice is superior to any variety of medicinal rice, it is very light food, which often avoids the Kapha, Pitta and Vāta. It is rich in proteins and minerals. It provides sufficient energy (Śakti) and the regular use of which keeps away the diseases.

‘Navara Kizhi Uzhichil’ as in ayurvedic treatment practised for muscular wasting. This treatment as known for muscular rejuvenation. The process is included under ‘Swedakarma’ of Āyurveda which is supposed to be a method of waste removal from the body. Navara is the variety which is exclusively utilized in what is called the ‘Pañcakarma’ treatment involving baths and Massages

for treatment in Paralytical conditions. Roots of Navara is used as a medicine for 'Kaṣāya' for the diseases of kidney and Urinary infection. Navara rice powder dusted thickly over the surface has a cooling and smoothing effect in prickly heat and other inflammatory conditions of skin. It finds applications in cases of burns, scalds as well. 'Kanjivellam' (water de - canted after cooking) as such is a good drink in gastric ulcer and mixed with lemon juice or salt is used as demulcent and refrigerant in fever as also in inflammatory conditions of stomach, bowels, and kidneys. Gruel made from Navara as considered as a good drink in dysentery and diarrhoea.

Another popular use of Navara is that it is the main ingredient of the medicinal gruel (Marunnu Kanji) consumed in the month of Karkidakom (July - August) together with selected medicinal powders. This gruel is considered a health tonic and effective for removing general fatigue.

Some other specialities of Navara reported form the experience of Āyurvedic Practitioners are - Psoriasis can be effectively controlled by the 'lepanam' or application of Navara rice faster. This paste as excellent remedy to remove skin lesions.

Another very potential use of Navara is the use of it as a weight gainer in the treatment of low weight new born babies by providing a dish made of Navara flour and dried powder made out of a banana variety called 'Kannan' much before their first feeding ritual.

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