

The 'Pāka darpaṇam': The text on Indian cookery by King Nala

Author: Mahārāja Nala

Translator: Dr. Madhulika

Editor: Prof. Jayaram Yadav

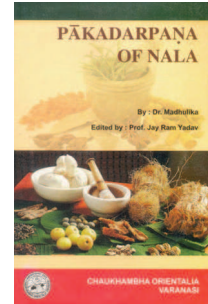
Year: 2013

Pages: vii+111

Price: Rs. 100

Binding: Paperback

Publisher: Chowkambha Orientalia, Varanasi



Every civilization has its own unique cuisine and cooking styles, and so is the Indian civilization. Indian cookery was significantly influenced by Ayurveda, its indigenous healthcare system that emphasizes dietary regimen for both the healthy and the ill. Ayurveda prescribes many daily food items as drugs in various medicinal formulations. Thus, Indian cooking is known for its medicinal properties. There are various dietary preparations (*pathya kalpanās*) explained in Ayurveda with specific indications of diseases and treatment methods. On the other side, there are various classic books written exclusively on cookery like *Bhojana kutūhala* by Raghunātha Pandita, *kṣemakutūhala* by Kṣemaśarman, *Pākacandrika* by Annaji Ballala Bapata Indurakara Vaidya and *Śiva tattva ratnākara*. *Pāka darpaṇam* is one such Indian text on traditional cooking written by King Nala of Niṣidha kingdom. *Pāka* literally means cooking or cooked food and *darpaṇa* means mirror. Thus title indicates that the work reflects the cooking methodologies.

King Nala, husband of queen *Damayantī* was a well-known cook in Indian epics, so much so that any delectable preparation of food is still eponymously termed to be *nala pāka*. However, there is not clear time period ascribed to him. He mentions himself as the author at the end (*upa-samhara*) of each chapter.

Meulenbeld mentions in his book that the earliest author to refer the work on cookery by Nala is *Cakrapāṇidatta*. Some names of plants may point to a period not earlier than about 1200 AD. Since red pepper (*Capsicum annum*) is absent from the *Pāka darpaṇam*, it dates probably before introduction of this type of pepper into India in the 17th century AD. The book is written in Sanskrit and its original edition was edited by Pt. Vāmacarana Bhattācarya. This book was translated into Hindi by Dr. Indradev Tripathi, and is published by Chowkambha Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, and the English

translation is done by Dr. Madhulika and is published by Chowkambha Orientalia, Varanasi.

The text comprises of 11 chapters, having 751 verses (as in Dr. Indradev Tripathi's Hindi translation version; and 760 as per Meulenbeld). Interestingly, the very first chapter contains 499 verses, i.e. about two thirds of the entire text. Eighth and eleventh chapters are the smallest ones having nine verses each. The verses have been composed as a dialogue between King *Ṛtuparna* and King Nala. The King Nala renames himself as *Bāhuka* after having lost his kingdom and worked as a cook under King *Ṛtuparna*.

The first chapter is titled as *granthopakrama* deals with the qualities of ideal cook and waiter (*pariveśaka*) and elaborately explains different origin. It lists a total both vegetarian and nonvegetarian food preparations of 16 kinds of dishes viz. *odana* (cooked rice), *sūpa* (preparation of de-husked legumes), *sarpis* (ghee), *vyāñjaka* (side dish), *māmsa* (meat) and *śāka* (vegetables), *bhakṣya* (munchable eatable), *pāyasa* (milk pudding), *rasāyana* (rejuvenative), *pāna* (drinks), *yūṣa* (preparation popularly known as *khichdi*), different rice preparations such as curd rice, ghee rice etc., *lehya* (lickables), *pānīya* (water), *kṣīra* (milk) and *takra* (butter milk).

The chapter claims that *anna* (cooked rice) has 63 tastes and eight defects. The author has enumerated only eight

Access this article online	
Quick Response Code: 	Website: www.ancientscienceoflife.org

defects and but not the tastes. The eight defects of cooked rice are *asrtānna* (rice preparation using rice whose qualities go against the season), *paicchilyānna* (over cooked, sticky rice), *kwathitānna* (only little quantity of rice taken for cooking and boiled), *śuškānna* (dried cooked rice), *dagdhānna* (burnt rice), *virūpānna* (cooking rice without proper size and shape), and *anartujānna* (rice against the season or stale cooked rice). Further the author explains the method of cooking of rice. Rice which is unpounded, dry and older should be taken and should be washed in hot water. A vessel should be taken and should be added with three parts of water. The vessel should be placed on fire. When water slightly boils up, the washed rice should be put in the vessel. When rice starts boiling, it should be stirred using a spoon repeatedly. At the same time, milk, butter milk or water should be sprinkled. Then the vessel should be taken out from fire for some time and again kept for boiling till it is cooked and smooth. This rice is good for longevity and health.

In the same chapter, the author explains the method of preparation of nonvegetarian *biriyani*. For this, three parts of water and one part of rice should be taken and should be boiled. When the rice begins boiling, boiled or unboiled meat that are cut into small pieces to the size of rice, should be added along with little rock salt. It should be mixed well and little quantity of ghee should be added. When water is dried up, it should be taken out of the fire. The preparation is seasoned with coconut-milk and freshly prepared ghee along with attractive flowers of *ketaki* (*Pandanus fascicularis*). Pieces of *parpaṭa* are added and the preparation is given its unique fragrance using camphor and musk etc. Later the vessel should be closed with the upper lid and it should be kept on fire and mixed well. When the dish becomes soft, it should be served for eating. This *mamsodana* (meat *biriani*) is tasty, aphrodisiac, wholesome, light for digestion. It gives strength to the body and nourishes all the tissues and heals wounds. Specific nonvegetarian rice preparations include *mudga taṇḍula mamsānna* (green gram rice *biriani*), *lāvaka mamsodana* (sparrow meat *biriyani*), and *kukkuṭa mamsodana* (chicken *biriani*) etc.

Continuing with these meat preparations, the author has introduced the concept of *gara viṣa* or *samsargaja viṣa* (artificial poison/combinatorial poison). Anything which is healthy and safe can become toxic on wrong combinations. For example, a combination of sesame oil and camphor is poisonous, but as individual drugs both are safe themselves. This kind of combinatorial poison is called *gara viṣa*. The same combination along with meat and cooked rice become nontoxic. Even poisons become nectar or therapeutic agents when used in a proper quantity. On

the other hand, even nectarine drugs if used in improper quantity could become a poison.

The method of *sūpa* (dehusked legumes cooked) preparation has been explained. Horse gram (*Dolichos biflorus*), black gram (*Vigna mungo*), cow peas (*Vigna unguiculata*), and chickpea (*Cicer arietinum*) etc., which are cleaned of physical impurities using grain sieve (*śūrpa*), or de-husked green gram (*Vigna radiata*) should be taken in one part, and equal quantity of water has to be mixed and boiled. When legume is well prepared, suitable quantity of rock salt has to be added. Turmeric is used for colouring and asafoetida is used for its aroma. This has to be churned thoroughly using a spoon adding water. Later, this mixture is seasoned with camphor, and various aromatic flowers. This dal preparation appetizing, subsides *pitta* and lighter for digestion.

Different kinds of butter milk preparations have been dealt with. A few interesting combinations include butter milk being mixed with certain drugs like *ajamoda* (*Carum roxburgianum*), *trikaṭu* (equal combination of fruit powder of *Terminalia chebula*, *Terminalia bellirica*, and *Phyllanthus emblica*) and other drugs with good fragrances.

The book also deals with preparation of butter. The milk that is boiled and reduced to half should be taken, and curd should be prepared out of it. The curd so got is to be churned well to get butter. This butter should be washed 10 times with water. Butter thus obtained should be filtered in cloth having fine holes. And again washed and treated with flowers having good fragrance and stored in a vessel containing water. This butter is aphrodisiac, cosmetic, energizer and it increases power of sense organs.

The book deals with preparation of ghee. Whitish butter should be washed in water till it attains yellowish color. It should be melted in mild fire and be filtered. Again the heated butter so obtained is melted till the frothing stops and the melted butter turns into reddish color. Attractive flowers and a little wheat flour should be added. Camphor and black *Piper betle* (*tāmbūla*) leaves dipped butter milk may also be added.

Various vegetable foods prepared using different parts of the plants have been explained in the book. This includes preparations made using banana (*Musa paradisiaca*) fruit, body of banana tree (*raṁbhā sthambhā*), brinjal (*Solanum melongena*), jack fruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), cow pea (*Vigna unguiculata*), Elephant foot (*Amorphophallus campanulatus*), radish (*Raphanus sativus*), Basella (*Basella cordifera*), *caṇakapatra* (leaf of chick pea *Cicer arietinum*), *tikta*

ptola phala (fruit of *Trichosanthes dioica*), *jīvanti śakhā* (the herb *Caelogyne ovalis*), fruit and leaves of *kāravallaka* (*Momordica charantia*), and leaves of *punarnava* (*Boerhavia diffusa*), *kumārī* (aloe vera), *bimbī* (*Coccinia grandis*), *guḍūcī patra* (*Tinospora cordifolia*), *arka* (*Calotropis gigantea*), *vaṭa* (*Ficus benghalensis*), *dhatura* (*Datura metel*), *padma* (*Nelumbo nucifera*), *kiṃśuka* (*Butea monosperma*), *vanāśigru* (*Moringa oleifera*), *palāṇḍu* (*Allium cepa*) and *vāsā* (*Adhatoda vasika*) etc.

The second chapter, titled as *Rtu dharma nirūpaṇam* contains 42 verses and deals with foods that are wholesome in a given season. The author claims that there are changes of seasons even within a day and night. If time between sun rise and sun set is divided into six parts, the day's first part is the *vasanta* season; the second, *grīṣma*; the third, *varṣa*; the fourth, *śarat*; the fifth hemanta; and the sixth *śiśira*. Later, tastes of food to be taken in each season have been mentioned. In *vasanta* season, pungent, sweet and salt; in *grīṣma*, sweet, sour and salty; in *varṣā*, pungent and bitter; in *sharat*, sweet and bitter; in *hemanta*, sweet, pungent, bitter and astringent; and in *śiśira*, bitter or sweet tasting foods should be consumed. In this chapter, suitable meats have been separately specified for each season, such as *hariṇa* (deer) and *eṇ* in *Vasanta*; *meśa* (goat) and *āvika* (sheep) in *grīṣma*; *kukkuṭa* (chicken) and sea fish in *varṣa*; river fish in *sharat*; pig and rabbit (*śaśa*) in *hemanta*; *caṭaka* (sparrow) and *lāvaka* (sparrow) in *śiśira*. It is to be noted that specific vegetarian food is not mentioned according to season while nonvegetarian food prescription is specific.

The third chapter, *vibhinna bhakṣya padārthānām nirmāṇa prakāra nirūpaṇam*, contains 19 verses. Two different eatables (*bhakṣya*) made using wheat, coconut, *niṣpāva*, milk and fragrant flowers etc. have been mentioned. The term *bhakṣya* means that these are to be munched (eaten after mastication). The fourth chapter *Pāyasa prakāra nirūpaṇam* contains 33 verses, deals exclusively on milk pudding (*pāyasa*). *Pāyasas* like garlic *payasa*, and wheat *payasa* are described. In the fifth chapter, *Pānaka bheda nirūpaṇam*, with 25 verses deals with different drinks (*pānaka*). *Svarṇapātra* (golden vessel) and certain gems are prescribed to be used for the preparation of drinks. Different fruits of which *pānaka* preparations have been mentioned are mango (*Mangifera indica*), lemon (*Citrus lemon*), *parūṣaka* (*Grewia subinaequalis*), tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), *jambū* (*Eugenia jambolana*), banana (*Musa paradisiaca*), and flowers of *karavīra* (*Nerium odoratum*), *bakula* (*Mimusops elengi*), tamarind, and *punnāga* (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) etc.

The sixth chapter of 27 verses is titled as *Vividha anna yūṣa pāka prakaraṇam* in which method of preparation of various dishes of rice popularly known as *khichāḍi*. However, *yūṣa*

in the text is indicated for sticky consistency and is rice dominant product, added with certain other food items like curd, and certain fruits like lemon, *kumbhī phala* (*Careya arborea*) and different flowers.

The seventh chapter is named as *Ghṛtānna pāka prakaraṇam*, having 26 verses and it deals with rice preparations processed with ghee or curd or other juices like *cincā phala rasa* (juice of tamarind) or some pastes like *kaitarya* (*Murraya koenigii*) *kalka*, *sarṣapa* (mustard, *Brassica campestris*) *kalka* etc., Two preparations ghee rice and curd rice which are commonly prepared nowadays are almost same as explained in the text.

The eighth chapter, *Lehya prakaraṇam* with 9 verses, deals with preparation of the sauce like dishes using fruits like mango, etc. Fruits like mango etc. with their seeds removed are to be taken separately, mixed and heated with sugar, and when semi-solid, a little quantity of water should be added. Later it should be filtered through clean cloth having minute holes. All *lehyas* such as the one prepared out of mango have been prescribed to be seasoned with flowers having good fragrance.

The ninth chapter is titled as *Śaitya jala nirmāṇa prakaraṇam* having 49 verses deals with water cooling techniques. For cooling of water, various methods are mentioned like exposing the water to open air and passing through sand, fragrant flowers, adding certain drugs of cold potency such as like *kataka* (*Strychnos potatorum*) etc.

The tenth chapter is named as *Kṣīrādi Pāka Nirūpaṇam* having 22 verses and it deals with milk preparations. There are two types of milk preparations explained, buffalo milk is advised to be taken in both contexts. In the first method, equal quantity of milk and water should be taken in small vessels and boiled till complete evaporation of water. A suitable quantity of sugar is to be added and served. In another method, without adding any water, milk should be boiled and reduced to half or one-sixth or quarter and it seasoned with fragrant flowers.

The eleventh chapter consisting 9 verses is termed as *Dadhibheda prakaraṇam* and deals with traditional method of preparation of curd. Though the word, *bheda* denotes types, only one method has been explained in this chapter.

The text gives a classical reference to the majority of Indian traditional dishes, prepared even now. Based on the consistency of prepared food, and the mode of intake, the author has divided all food into five categories namely, *bhakṣya* (munchable, i.e. what may be eaten

after mastication), *bhojya* (what may be eaten without mastication), *cośya* (suckables), *lehya* (lickables), and *peya* (drinkables). The preparations include both vegetarian and nonvegetarian food stuffs. It deals with preparation modes starting with cooling water to preparation of milk, butter milk, curd, butter, ghee, different vegetables including leaves, tubers, fruits etc., and meat of animals, fish and birds. Some of the leaves that are not used or rarely used as eatable vegetables nowadays were also part of preparations like *Dhattura patra śāka* etc.

The book also suggests that the food habits of this region were rice centric this is because the author lays special emphasis on preparation of rice and lists eight defects of

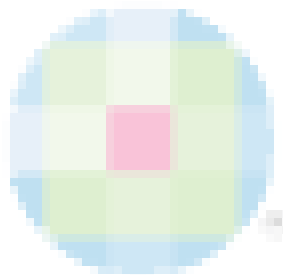
cooked rice. The author quotes “*sarveṣām prāṇinam prāṇam annam prathamamuccate.*” Which means: Food is the very life of all animals. Though the word *anna* refers to food, the context in which it has been said, it refers to cooked rice, since defects of cooked rice and method of cooking rice are explained along with this.

Certainly, it is an interesting book for one who wishes to know more about Indian cooking and who wants to discover such dishes on the classical guidelines.

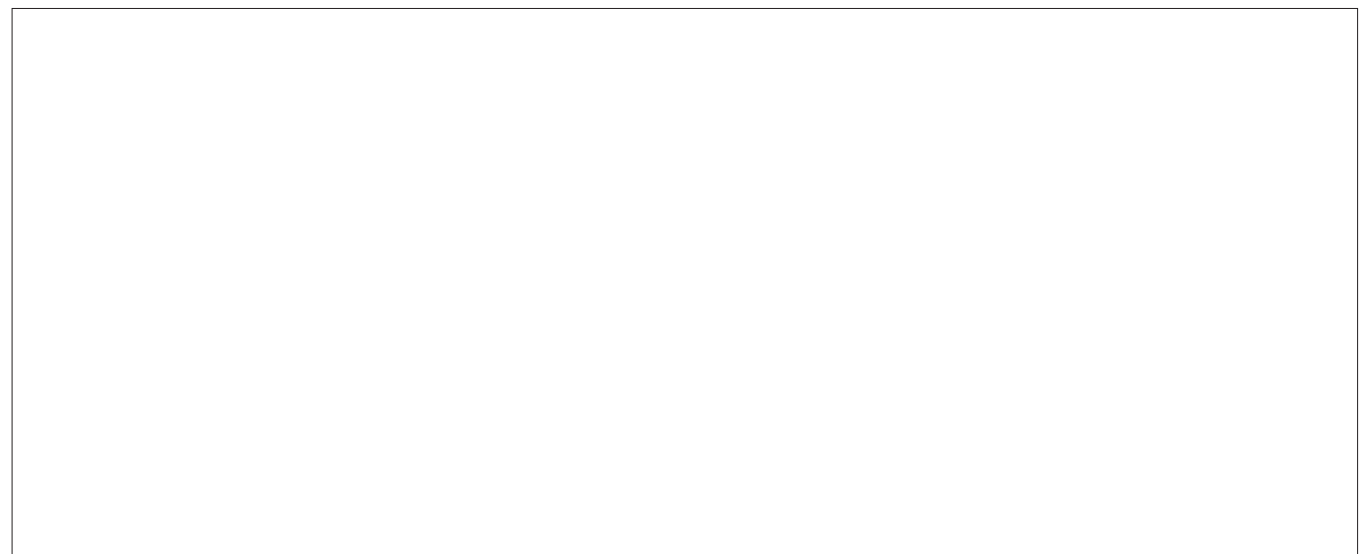
Dr. Naveen Kodlady,

SDM College of Ayurveda and Hospital, Hassan,
Karnataka, India.

E-mail: naveenkodlady@gmail.com



Author Institution Mapping (AIM)



Please note that not all the institutions may get mapped due to non-availability of the requisite information in the Google Map. For AIM of other issues, please check the Archives/Back Issues page on the journal's website.