

AYURVEDIC RATIONALE OF THE SOUTHERN INDIAN VEGETABLE SOUP SAARU OR RASAM

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Abstract: *Spices are historically known contributions to the world. The credit for identifying the spices with medicinal and culinary values goes to Ayurveda. Saaru or Rasam is a very popular soup used all over southern India. In this paper an attempt has been made to present the ayurvedic rationale behind formulating the receipt of saaru or rasam.*

INTRODUCTION

Saaru can be regarded as a classical example of an ideal recipe subscribing to the principles laid in ayurveda. Contrary to the modern concept of food as a nutritive input for the physical body, the Indian philosophical systems consider the qualities of constituents that nourish the mind as more important. *Satva shudhi* or purification of mind has been the prime concern of our acharyas since the state of mind is responsibly for the health of individuals, family society country and consequently the whole world. *Bhagvadgeeta* has dealt with these facts quite extensively. Maintenance of equilibrium of both body and mind qualities with bias towards the *satva* or the vital components is the guiding principle behind planning of food in Indian tradition.

In the classification of food substances a group called *Swastahita* or conducive to absolute healthy state has been described. The list comprises of substances which are'

1. being consumed since time immemorial
2. do not cause ill effects even if consumed regularly and

3. promote good qualities to the body and mind

They are milk, Rice, Wheat, Honey, Ghee, Amalaki, Dal etc.

Since body is a complex combination of *panchamahabootas* regular supply of constituents is necessary for maintenance and sustenance of its integrity. The six rasas or tastes indicate the *panchamahabhoota* constitution. Consumption of only one *rasa* constantly obviously leads to imbalance. Hence a balanced blend of all the six is recommended. The history of use of spices in food in India thus starts here. The spices carefully chosen not only provide the *rasa* but also provide supplementary effects conducive to health.

Saaru essentially contains Dal as base. Traditionally *Tur-dal* and Moong dal which are well known *swastahita dravyas* are used.

It is always consumed by mixing with rice. Addition of a small amount of ghee is customary. The spices which constitute about 5 percent by volume, dominate the

taste and provide the essential 6 rasas, to the food. The food value comes essentially from *madhura* contained in *Dal* and rice. The ghee provides the soothing effect, cooling and elimination and neutralization of toxins and toxic effects, the combination of all these which create an excellent taste is said to be cardiotoxic (*hrdya*) and gives a feeling of satisfaction. A feeling of total satisfaction after completion of a meal is characteristic of saaru.

Mysore Saaru

This is popular in old Mysore area comprising about 10 districts. The princely state of Mysore which patronized ayurvedic pandits appears to be the source of this receipt. The ingredients are same in all the surveyed areas. But there is slight variation in the formula.

Table 1 Composition of the Spices mixture of saaru or Rasam

Sl. No.	Ingredients		Weight in gms	
	Latin Name	Sanskrit Name	Formula A	Formula B
1	Coriandrum sativum	Dhanyaka	1000	500
2	Piper nigrum	Marica	150	100
3	Caper annum	Mleccha maica	600	500
4	Cuminum cyminum	Jeeraka	150	100
5	Trigonella foenumgraecum	Methika	150	100
6	Brassica juncea	Sarsapa	150	100
7	Curcuma longa	Haridra	10	10
8	Ferula foetida	Hingu	--	10
9	Murraya Koenigii	Kaidarya	--	100

These spices are fried under low fire on a heated iron pan after adding 1 Or 2 teaspoons of oil. Each ingredient is fried separately. This is done ingredient is fried separately. This is done careful to retain the aroma and to make it dry enough to be stored in powder form. After cooling, they are powdered manually or using a machine, care should be taken to mix the ingredients homogeneously. Generally 1 or 2 kgs are prepared at a time and used for 3 to 4 months. The process of choosing quality ingredients and frying them properly is an elaborate chore of the housewives and it is undertaken 3 to 4 times in a year. The spice powder popularly known as Menasinapudi is also marketed as product locally.

Saaru preparation

- Tur dal or green gram dal 100 gms
- The spices powder 20 gms (can vary depending on individual taste)
- Tamarind 15 to 20 gms
- Tomato is added occasionally and lemon is also used but traditionally tamarind is recommended.
- Salt and jaggery to taste
- Turmeric powder ½ tea spoon
- Curry and coriander - leaves

- Ghee 3 Teaspoons. Asofoetida – 1 pinch
- Jeera and mustard seeds- 5 gms each

Cook the dal well in pressure cooker or in a vessel separately and then add the saaru powder and boil in slow fire and add trimetric powder also. After 5 minutes add salt and jaggery., add extra water to required consistency. And tamarind juice and boil for 2-3 minutes. Along with this add curry and coriander leaves.

Final process (vaggarane)

Heat ghee in a iron ladle and add mustard, cumin seeds and asafetida. The seeds crackle and an aroma fills the kitchen. Immerse the ladle and its contents into the mix. Tomato when used is cooked along with dal. Lemon is usually added after

Menasina saaru

For one litre			
Recipe 1		Recipe 2	
Black peper	15 gms	Black peper	15 gms
Cumin	10 gms	Cumin	10 gms
Urad gram	10 gms	Rice	10gms
Coriander seeds	10 gms	Dry coconut	100gms
		Urad dal	10 gms
Milk	100 ml	Milk	100 ml
Salt to taste and curry leaves			

Except cumin seeds and curry leaves the rest are fried with a little ghee and powdered. This powder is added to required quantity of water and boiled well for about 5 minutes. Milk is to be added only in the end. The cumin seeds and curry leaves are added to the heated ghee and added to the Saaru, Jaggery is optional. The powder is always made fresh.

cooking is completed. Saaru is more delicious when served hot and fresh.

This method of cooking is more or less uniform in all the areas, but in the coastal area the readymade spice powder method is not in practice. They prefer with coconut. The jeera or cumin seeds used is comparatively more. In coastal and hilly areas tamarind is substituted by locally available sour fruits like vatehuli (*Garcinia Morella*) Devanahuli or Murutanahuli etc.

Goddu Saaru

This is also a popular recipe in the old Mysore area and southern Andhra Pradesh. The same spice powder is used with more tamarind, tomato or lemon. No dal is used and it is popular due to convenience in cooking.

In the old Mysore area the saaru is Predominantly a Brahmin recipe and it is used almost everyday. People have adopted it with some modifications like adding garlic and tomato. In the rural areas also saaru is popular but they use horse gram in place of dal and avoid black pepper. The practice of readymade spice powder of saaru also is not in practice in the rural non-brahmin communities adds vegetables and coconut

with the same species and make the well known saambar or Huli.

Ingredients of Saaru and their Ayurvedic properties

Essentially there are six ingredients in *Saaru* and these spices make a perfect blend producing the unique aroma and taste. Ayurvedic literature provides the valuable information on number of varieties of spices for which India has been historically well known all over the worlds.

Dhanyaka or coriander is the major spice in the formula. It is *Madhura vipaka* with *kashaya thikta- madhura rasas*. It is also Deepana and pachana and Rochana, i.e. appetizer digestive, & taste stimulator respectively. These qualities makes it a good spice. In effect it is *Hridya* (cardiotonic) and *mootrala* (diuretic) also. Sushruta has made special reference as a well known spice in food of those days. Producing good taste and flavour and property of digestive and appetizer are very important. The cleansing of srotas and cardiotonic are the other important properties. Further Dhanyaka balances the 'ushna' or hot property of the other strong spices. This is a widely used spice all over India.

Maricha or black pepper is the second important spice. It is well known for its 'Katu' or hotness. This property is necessary. In sufficient quantity to mitigate kapha which is likely to rise during digestion and to counteract production of Ama (improperly formed final product of digestion, potential to become toxic) Pepper is specially chosen as it is also cardiotonic or Hridya and produces taste. It also has effect on intestinal parasites in addition to vishagna (anti-toxic) property. Counteracting an visha (poison) is a

important consideration in planning Ayurvedic diet. At present the red chillies is extensively used in place of or in addition to pepper. The study showed that all the formulations in use invariably contain red chillies. It is well known that chillies were introduced to India by Europeans who procured them from south America during the 1700's. Chilly has an edge over pepper in taste and color which appears to be the main reason for its popularity. However it is well known to be a cause of gastritis in India. The extreme irritative nature of chillies however is contained by coriander and Ghee.

Sarshapa or mustard is ho in potency and prevents Ama formation. It has Katu rasa different to that of chillies which helps in metabolism at katu and mala levels, mustard is useful in srotas cleansing and opening which ensures maintenance of flow paths in the body. The properties Rakshogna, grahanashaka and bhootanashaka suggest tat mustard is a good anti- microbial substance and antihelmentic. The mustard also act as a preservative which is necessary because the customary practice is to prepare saaru powder in quantities required for the family for 6 to 8 months. It has a pleasant aroma and adds to t taste of the recipe.

Haridra: Curcuma longa the vishagna property of haridra is the main factor for which it is being used. Ayurvedic principles of diet planning lay emphasis to neutralize any kind of toxin or visha which is likely to be present in the food or generated during metabolism. Haridra is taken as the best choice for this propose since it also as other useful qualities like Aruchinashini or elimination of tastelessness and vishuddini or to purify and clear the srotas. Further haridra is also a good anthelmentic. It also imparts unique color to the preparation.

Methika or fenugreek: a taste promoter in combination with other spices. It adds to initiate appetite, good to heart (Hridya) antihelmentic or doesn't allow intestinal worms to grow and prevents excess kapha a vata and ama and provides 'bala' or strength. It has a pleasing aroma and in spite of being bitter produces very good taste synergistically it is known to be very good for intestinal mucosa and prevents accumulation of malas.

Jeerka or cumin seeds: Although three types of jeeraka are available only white jeeraka is seed. It is the 'Soul' of the formulation for its excellent smell and taste, in fact in this aspect it scores over coriander although the quantity is proportionately only 1/5. Jeeraka is undoubtedly one of the best non-hot most acceptable aromatic spice with very good metabolic promoting properties. It has influence over kaphavata and prevents excess gas formation in during digestion. It helps to promote Agni and supports the intestinal movements to be in normal state. The presence of this spice in the food prevents constipation. The impact of jeeraka and Dhatvagni in terms of metabolic promoter and aiding excretion is well recognized. Jeeraka is Medhya (brain tonic) and chakshusya (eye toning). For women it is helpful in cleansing the uterus and purifying breast milk.

Hingu: *Ferula foetida* has excellent effect on the taste buds which in turn stimulate digestive secretions. It is thus a good carminative and digestive and inhibits the growth of parasitic organisms. Hingu reduces kapha and vata and removes constipation.

Ayurveda strategies in Saaru

Ayurveda recognises certain specific properties which are conducive and

recommended to be considered while planning food. The recipe saaru contains the following.

1. *Ruchi*: The taste is very essential for proper consumption and digestion. This blend provides it very effectively.

2. *Drava*: The food must not be solid or hard. It should be liquid dominated ensuring good digestion and help the structures. The Saaru is essentially made to this specification.

3. *Swatahita*: The food should be such that consumption should not create any extreme variations of the dose but provide enough material to sustain normalcy. The water and the Dal constitute 90% of this recipe which in turn mixed with rice and ghee during meal. All the ingredients subscribed to the principles of Swatahita. The ingredients are potential enough to provide the requirements of normal health individual. They are time tested to advocate for regular consumption.

4. *Laghu*: Easily digestible. Saaru not only gets digested easily but also helps digestion of other substances. The diet is considered as conducive only when it easily gets assimilated without producing any stress. All the ingredients invariably help in producing this effect in the Saaru efficiently. This is a major criteria to consider any food substance as conducive. Saaru undoubtedly contains this property in the best possible way.

5. *Avirudda*: The ingredients in any food recipe should contain mutually acceptable and synergistically compatible qualities and never contradictory to each other. In the formulation none of the ingredients possess contradictory properties and minor if any will be taken care of by other in built

consumption methods, like adding ghee, and balancing material like asafetida.

6. *Rasayana madhura*: *Saaru* with rice and ghee together produce both these qualities. Here madhurata (pleasant and sweet) for both mind and body are produced simultaneously. Excellent sense of pleasure of eating will be produced. Rasayana or nourishing of vital body constituents is well accomplished by dal, rice and ghee which is invariably consumed together. It is further supplemented collectively by spices.

7. *Shadrasopaukta*: Any good food should be a well blended recipe of Six rasas. The quantification or the recommended rasas is very well accomplished. The rice, dal and ghee provide the madhura rasas (constituting almost 90% by volume) which brings the food value. The spices provide Katu (pungent), Kashaya (astringent), Thikta (bitter), rasas, Amla (sour) and Lavana (salt) are separately added as shown in formula.

Generally *saaru* with rice is an easily digestible diet. The Brahmin community being confined to non-manual work (till very recently) has adopted this as main diet. Some vegetables and butter milk constitute their meal. This can be regarded as an ideal practice of simple and complete vegetarianism. The physically active class however, needs different form of diet. Our study also subscribes to the fact that *saaru* is predominantly a Brahmin diet. The well known saambar is only a modification by thickening it more dal and coconut. It is also evident that *saaru* is devoid of rajasika spices like garlic and onion which are often used in saambar.

In the recent years the scientific community has taken interest in understanding the values of traditionally used Indian spices. The published data on some of them clearly show the visionary facet of our ancient seers. Spices play a very important role in digestive function and hence the Indian tradition has a long history of use of spice in food.

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