Unit 1: Fundamentals of Herbal Pharmacology

PAPER 7 — Herbal Preparations & Oils

Unit 1: Fundamentals of Herbal Pharmacology

(Rasa-Guṇa-Vīrya-Vipāka-Prabhāva • Dravyaguṇa energetics • Role of herbs in Kalari Uzhichil • Common Indian plants for external use • Safety, toxicity & dosage)

1) Ayurvedic herb classification: Rasa, Guṇa, Vīrya, Vipāka, Prabhāva

Ayurveda classifies every medicinal substance through five lenses that predict **how it will behave in the body** and, for therapists, **how it will feel under the hands**.

Rasa (taste at first contact). Six tastes—Madhura (sweet), Amla (sour), Lavaṇa (salty), Kaṭu (pungent), Tikta (bitter), Kaṣāya (astringent). Rasa is the quickest predictor of doṣa effect and tissue feel.

- Madhura, Kaṣāya, Tikta tend to cool/compact (Kapha↔, Pitta↓, Vāta↑ or ↓ depending on vehicle).
- Kaṭu, Amla, Lavaṇa tend to warm/spread (Kapha↓, Vāta↑ or ↓ depending on oil/heat).
 In external therapy, pungent-aromatic herbs (e.g., dry ginger, vacha) feel mobilising; bitter/astringent herbs (neem, manjistha) feel drying/clarifying; sweet (bala, milk/rice in navarakizhi) feel soothing/nourishing.

Guṇa (20 qualities). Pairs such as snigdha-rukṣa (unctuous-dry), uṣṇa-śīta (hot-cold), guru-laghu (heavy-light), manda-tīkṣṇa (dull-sharp), sthira-cala (stable-mobile) describe texture and behaviour. Guṇa is what you literally palpate: a rukṣa-śīta (dry-cool) blend needs warm unction; a snigdha-guru (oily-heavy) state needs lightness and movement.

Vīrya (immediate potency). Typically uṣṇa (heating) or śīta (cooling). Vīrya determines whether a formulation opens and disperses (uṣṇa) or calms and compacts (śīta). In Kalari oils: sesame-based, spice-rich blends are uṣṇa; coconut/milk-processed media are more śīta.

Vipāka (post-digestive effect). Long-tail effect after metabolism—**Madhura**, **Amla**, or **Kaṭu**. For external therapies, Vipāka helps you anticipate **after-feel**: e.g., some pungent decoctions feel light during use but leave a **Kaṭu-vipāka dryness**, so you close with a brief nourishing oil to avoid rebound irritation.

Prabhāva (specific, idiosyncratic effect). A herb's "signature" action that **defies prediction** from the first four. Classic external examples:

- Manjişthā calms "hot" skin even when the vehicle is warm.
- **Murivenna's** leaf ensemble soothes sprain tissue disproportionately to its simple taste/temperature profile. Prabhāva explains why **named oils** are not interchangeable even if their base looks similar.

2) Dravyaguna: understanding herb energetics in practice

Dravyaguna integrates the five lenses above with context—form, carrier, dose, place, time. For therapists:

- **Rūpa (form):** leaf vs. root vs. resin drastically alters Guṇa. Leaves tend to be lighter/more diffusive; roots are anchoring; resins are penetrating.
- Samskāra (processing): frying leaves for ela-kizhi makes them more uṣṇa-tīkṣṇa (warming-sharp) than the raw plant; milk-processing (as in kṣīrabala) moderates heat and adds unctuous nourishment.
- Samyoga (combination): herbs modulate each other (ginger + vacha + kottam for Kapha heaviness; bala + milk

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for Vāta depletion).

- Anupāna/Yogavāhī (vehicle): the carrier determines reach—oil (taila) penetrates and softens fascia; ghee
 (ghṛta) soothes heat and nerves; decoctions (kaṣāya) are light, quick, and drying; bolus (kizhi/pinda) adds thermal
 and mechanical vectors.
- Deśa & Kāla (place & time): coastal humidity vs. dry inland climates shift default Guṇa; season (ṛtu) changes baseline doṣa—align your media accordingly.
- Mātra (dose): in external therapy, dose = concentration × area × time × temperature. Raising any one of these four increases effect—and risk.

Clinical translation. Before you reach for "a strong oil," ask: What are the dominant Guṇas in this tissue today? Which of my choices brings the **opposite** without overshooting? That is Dravyaguṇa thinking.

3) Role of herbs in Kalari Uzhichil therapy

Herbs are not decorations in Uzhichil; they are physiologic levers that you pair with stroke logic and heat.

- To warm & mobilise (Kapha-heavy, cold-stiff states): spice-aromatic blends (dry ginger, kottam/saussurea, vacha/calamus, sigru/moringa) in sesame oil; brief ela/podi-kizhi to pre-soften rings around joints; follow with distal-proximal flows.
- To cool & soothe (Pitta-heat, reactive skin): manjiṣṭhā, sandalwood, yashtimadhu (licorice), coconut/milk-processed bases; even tempo, no friction heat; consider navarakizhi if Vāta depletion coexists.
- To nourish & steady (Vāta dryness, post-illness): bala (Sida cordifolia), milk/rice media, kṣīrabala or dhānvantara families; long forearm glides; traction > compression at joints.
- For sprains/contusions (acute local care): murivenna-type leaf oils; light coverage only; no deep pressure over the lesion; mobilise at distance until acute signs settle.

Key idea: Choose **medium and herb** to set tissue reactivity **before** you apply technique depth.

4) Common Indian medicinal plants used in external therapies (Kalari/Ayurveda)

(Names in English • Sanskrit • Typical part used • External actions • Doşa tilt • Notes/cautions)

- **Sida cordifolia** *Bala* root/whole plant calming, nourishing, nerve–muscle support Vāta↓ (can cool when milk-processed) avoid overheat if Pitta very high; patch-test sensitive skin.
- Saussurea lappa Kuṣṭha/Kottam root penetrating, decongesting, Kapha-moving Kapha↓ Vāta↓ (uṣṇa) pungent—avoid over hot/inflamed tissue.
- Acorus calamus Vacha rhizome aromatic channel-opener, antiedematous Kapha↓ Vāta↓ use in low %; avoid near eyes; keep away from pregnancy/children.
- Zingiber officinale Śuṇṭhī (dry ginger) rhizome warms, mobilises, analgesic adjunct Kapha↓ Vāta↓ (uṣṇa)
 not over acute heat/redness.
- **Pluchea lanceolata** *Rasna* leaves joint-muscle easing, anti-stiffness Vāta↓ Kapha↓ steady heat improves action.
- Cedrus deodara Devadāru wood/oil aromatic decongestant, anti-itch Kapha↓ essential oil is strong—use very dilute.
- **Rubia cordifolia** *Manjiṣṭhā* root skin-soothing, "blood cooling," discoloration modulator Pitta↓ watch for fabric staining; gentle on reactive skin.
- **Azadirachta indica** *Nimba/Neem* leaf oil antimicrobial, pruritus calming Pitta↓ Kapha↓ drying—finish with light emollient if overused.
- Curcuma longa Haridrā/Turmeric rhizome anti-itch, anti-irritant, post-bruise care Pitta↓ can stain; rare contact dermatitis—patch-test.

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- **Cinnamomum camphora** (natural camphor) *Karpoora* crystals/oil cooling analgesic vapour, decongestant Pitta ↓ Kapha ↓ (topical) never near infants' noses; avoid high % in pregnancy.
- Cocos nucifera Nārikela (coconut) oil cooling, emollient vehicle Pitta↓ oxidises—mind shelf-life; add antioxidants or use fresh.
- **Sesamum indicum** *Tila* (sesame) oil warming, deeply penetrating vehicle Vāta↓ Kapha↓ (if spiced) increases heat; don't combine with strong percussion over head/chest.
- **Ricinus communis** *Eraṇḍa* (castor) oil heavy, warming, disperses deep congestion Vāta↓ Kapha↓ very occlusive; keep thin; avoid on infected skin.
- **Moringa oleifera** *Śigru* leaf/seed sharp, decongestant, anti-stiffness Kapha↓ avoid on hot, irritated skin.

Practice note: Formulations (e.g., **Koṭṭamcukkādi taila**, **Kṣīrabala**, **Dhānvantara**, **Murivenna**) embody **balanced recipes**; use the named oil rather than "mixing your own" unless you are trained in sneha-pāka (oil preparation).

5) Safety, toxicity, and dosage considerations (external use)

General governance (always):

- **Screen**: fever, hot/swollen joints, suspected infection, open wounds, new neuro deficits, clotting risk, pregnancy—these define *if and how* you proceed.
- Patch-test new oils/herbs on inner forearm (24 h).
- Temperature limits: warm oils ~38-40 °C; boluses steamy-not-burning; never stack heat over Hṛdaya, Nābhi, Basti, Ādhipati.
- Dose = concentration × area × time × temperature. If you raise one factor, lower another.
- Vehicle safety: sesame penetrates deeply (more potent, more risk of overdoing); coconut cools but can oxidise—use fresh.

Specific cautions (topical):

- Camphor: keep concentration low; avoid infants' airways, pregnancy, seizures history.
- Vacha (calamus): use sparingly and externally only; avoid broken skin, pregnancy/children.
- Wintergreen/methyl salicylate (sometimes added in modern balms): risk of salicylate toxicity—do not combine with heat or occlusion; avoid in children/pregnancy and with anticoagulants.
- Castor oil: heavy/occlusive—thin film only; not over infected or macerated skin.
- Essential oils: Ayurveda traditionally uses decoctions/pastes; if aromatics are used, keep total EO load ≤ 1% for body, ≤ 0.5% for face/neck; avoid phototoxic citrus on sun-exposed skin.

Lepa/paste hygiene: make fresh; discard leftovers; apply in thin layers; remove if burning, itching, or headache occurs.

Storage & stability:

• Store in **amber glass**, cool and dark; label **batch/date**; most fresh herb oils are best used within **3-6 months** unless professionally stabilised; sniff-test for rancidity; do not reheat repeatedly—use a **water bath**.

Documentation & consent:

Record formula, batch, site, duration, temperature, and client response; for sensitive areas (chest, abdomen, groin periphery), explicit consent and chaperone policies apply.

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Summary Tables

A) Five-fold classification at a glance

Lens	What it means	In your hands it predicts	Quick examples
Rasa	First taste/chemesthetic profile	Initial tissue response	Pungent → mobilise; Bitter → dry/clarify; Sweet → soothe
Guṇa	20 qualities (e.g., dry/oily, hot/cold)	Texture under palpation	Dry-cool needs warm unction; Heavy-oily needs lightness
Vīrya	Immediate hot/cold potency	Opening vs. calming	Sesame blends (uṣṇa) vs. coconut/milk (śīta)
Vipāka	Post-metabolic effect	After-feel	Kaţu-vipāka may leave dryness—close with emollient
Prabhāva	Specific signature action	Why named oils aren't interchangeable	Manjisthā cools irritable skin; Murivenna soothes sprain

B) Dravyaguņa controls you can adjust

Lever	Options	Effect
Form	leaf / root / resin	light & diffusive vs. anchoring vs. penetrating
Processing	fry, milk-process, decoct	raises heat/penetration; moderates heat; lightens
Vehicle	oil / ghee / decoction / bolus	deep softening; nerve-cooling; quick drying; thermal + mechanical
Dose	concentration / area / time / temperature	potency rises with any ↑—balance with others
Context	season, climate, client state	adjust usna-śīta and snigdha-ruksa to match day

C) External-use materia medica (quick)

Plant (Skt.)	Part	External actions	Doșa tilt	Caution
Bala	root	soothe-nourish nerve-muscle	Vāta↓	watch heat with high Pitta
Kottam (Kuṣṭha)	root	decongest, penetrate	Kapha↓ Vāta↓	avoid on hot inflammation
Vacha	rhizome	aromatic channel-opener	Kapha↓ Vāta↓	low %; avoid pregnancy/children
Dry ginger	rhizome	warm, mobilise	Kapha↓ Vāta↓	avoid over hot joints
Rasna	leaf	ease joint stiffness	Vāta↓ Kapha↓	add gentle heat
Devadāru	wood/oil	aromatic decongestant	Kapha↓	dilute EO strongly
Manjiṣṭhā	root	calm "hot" skin	Pitta↓	stains fabric
Neem	leaf oil	antimicrobial, anti-itch	Pitta↓ Kapha↓	drying with overuse
Turmeric	rhizome	soothe, anti-itch	Pitta↓	staining; patch-test
Camphor	crystals/oi	l topical analgesic vapour	Pitta↓ Kapha↓	infants/pregnancy: avoid
Coconut oil	oil	cooling vehicle	Pitta↓	oxidises—use fresh
Sesame oil	oil	warming vehicle	Vāta↓	can overheat if overused
Castor oil	oil	heavy, dispersing	Vāta↓ Kapha↓	occlusive; thin film

D) Safety & dosing (checklist)

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Item	Standard
Patch-test	24 h inner forearm for any new product
Oil temp	~38-40 °C; never scalding
Heat + pressure	Never stack on Hṛdaya, Nābhi, Basti, Ādhipati
EO concentration	n ≤1% body; ≤0.5% face/neck (if used)
Session dose	Adjust one of: concentration, area, time, temperature
Storage	Amber glass, cool dark, label batch/date, 3-6 mo if fresh
Records	Formula, batch, site, time, temp, response, consent notes

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Closing synthesis

Think like a formulator at the table: read Rasa-Guṇa-Vīrya-Vipāka-Prabhāva, then choose processing and vehicle to deliver the opposite qualities the tissue needs today. In Kalari Uzhichil, herbs do the chemical lifting, oils and boluses do the mechanical and thermal lifting, and your touch coordinates them. When in doubt: lower the dose, widen the contact, slow the pace, and keep immaculate records.

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