

Unit 1: Fundamentals of Herbal Pharmacology

PAPER 7 — Herbal Preparations & Oils

Unit 1: Fundamentals of Herbal Pharmacology

(Rasa—Guna—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-tikṣṇa** (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:

- **Manjiṣṭhā** 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) Dravyaguṇa: understanding herb energetics in practice

Dravyaguṇa 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-tikṣṇa** (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

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** (rtu) 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, **kṣirabala** 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 • Doṣa 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** • *Śunṭhī* (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.

- **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, Kṣirabala, 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.

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	Kaṭu-vipāka may leave dryness—close with emollient
Prabhāva	Specific signature action	Why named oils aren't interchangeable	Manjiṣṭhā cools irritable skin; Murivenna soothes sprain

B) Dravyaguṇa 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 uṣṇa-śīta and snigdha-rukṣa to match day

C) External-use materia medica (quick)

Plant (Skt.)	Part	External actions	Doṣa 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/oil	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)

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	≤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



Closing synthesis

Think like a **formulator at the table**: read **Rasa-Guna-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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