Unit 3: Preparation of Medicated Oils (Thailams)

PAPER 7 — Herbal Preparations & Oils

Unit 3: Preparation of Medicated Oils (Thailams)

(Snehapāka methods • Signature thailams • Cooling vs warming • Storage & QC • Hygiene & safety)

Traditional oil preparation methods (Snehapāka) -

What a thailam is. A medicated oil is produced by cooking a base oil (sneha) with a herbal paste (kalka) and a herbal liquid (drava: decoction, milk, buttermilk, etc.) until the liquid is driven off and the actives transfer into the oil. This is snehapāka.

Core ratios (starting guidance, then refine by "signs of readiness").

- A common working ratio is kalka: sneha: drava = 1:4:16 by weight/volume.
- For lighter leaves/flowers, drava can extend to 1:4:32; for dense roots/resins, drava can be slightly reduced.

Stages of cooking (pāka bheda).

- Mṛdu-pāka (soft cook): oil is infused yet mild; suitable for head/face or highly sensitive tissues.
- Madhyama-pāka (medium cook): the clinical workhorse; oil is fully medicated, stable for storage.
- Khara-pāka (hard cook): paste darkens and becomes brittle; used rarely (plasters/ointments), not for massage.

Siddhi-lakṣaṇas (readiness signs) to stop the cook.

- Sound & steam: bubbling (from water) subsides; gentle oil hiss only.
- Aroma & color: characteristic plant aroma over base oil; color deepens uniformly.
- Kalka test: a pinch of paste rolled into a wick does not stick to fingers and cracks lightly between them; no watery squeeze-out.
- Water test: a drop of hot oil in water should stay coherent, not disperse with a crackle.
- String/slip: a drop between fingers shows silky "rope" slip without grittiness.

Standardized workflow (repeatable in a training clinic).

- 1. Mise en place—weigh and record all inputs; soak coarse powders to a smooth kalka.
- 2. **Phase I (marination)**—combine **sneha + kalka** on low heat for 15-30 min to open the oil.
- 3. Phase II (reduction)—add drava; simmer with constant agitation (avoid sticking) until signs approach madhyama-pāka.
- 4. **Phase III (polish)**—lower heat; stir until all readiness signs align.
- 5. Hot filtration—press through layered muslin while still pourable; do not chill then filter (traps water).
- 6. Conditioning—allow fine particles to settle 24-48 h; decant bright oil to amber glass.
- 7. **Release**—QC (organoleptic + moisture check), label, and log **batch master record**.

Ingredients, process, and benefits of key Thailams -

Formulations vary by lineage. Below are **signature botanicals**, **process notes**, **and use-cases** that a practitioner must recognize; use pharmacopeial recipes when compounding.

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Mahanārāyana Tailam — comprehensive Vāta-māṃsa-sandhi support

- Base: sesame.
- Signature botanicals: Bala (Sida cordifolia), Aśvagandhā, Rasna, Daśamūla group, Devadāru, Tailaparivartaka aromatics; often finished with camphor in small quantity.
- Process notes: robust madhyama-pāka; aim for a supple, non-sticky film—overcooking dulls its glide.
- Therapeutic profile: nourishing, gently warming, analgesic—posterior-chain tightness, spondylotic aches, peri-articular stiffness, convalescence.
- Cautions: warm in temperament; avoid aggressive heat stacking; patch-test reactive skin.

Koṭṭamcukkādi (Kottamchukkadi) Tailam — decongesting Kapha-āma states

- Base: sesame.
- Signature botanicals: Kottam (Saussurea), Cukku (dry ginger), Vacha (calamus), Śigru (moringa), **Lasuna (garlic)** and other aromatics.
- Process notes: keep volatile notes alive—gentle finishing heat; do not add high-temperature steps late.
- Therapeutic profile: warming, penetrating, mobilising—excellent primer for cold, puffy limbs, morning stiffness, "damp" osteoarthritic patterns.
- Cautions: avoid on hot/inflamed joints and sensitive facial/neck skin.

Dhanvantaram (Dhanwantharam) Tailam — neuromuscular & postpartum mainstay

- Base: sesame.
- Signature botanicals: Bala, Daśamūla, supportive roots; in many Kerala lineages milk-processing (ksīrapāka) is included to temper heat and enhance nourishment.
- Process notes: moderate, unctuous finish—aim for a silk-grip feel, not slickness.
- Therapeutic profile: Vāta-pacifying, strengthening, restorative—postnatal care, low-back Vāta, peripheral weakness, general abhyanga.
- Cautions: if a milk step is used, enforce hygiene and water-removal meticulously (see QC).

(Cross-reference: other cooling thailams like Pinda/Manjisthādi and Ksīrabala and other warming thailams like Mūgaparni/Dhanvantara variants are mapped in Unit 1 & 2; the same snehapāka logic applies.)

Cooling vs. warming oils — therapeutic distinctions -

Think in terms of vīrya (immediate potency) and guṇa (qualities).

Warming (uṣṇa) thailams—sesame-based with pungent/aromatic botanicals (e.g., Kotṭamcukkādi, some batches of Mahanārāyana):

- Use for: cold, stiff, puffy tissues; Kapha-Vāta patterns; pre-movement priming; ring-work around joints.
- Feel: increases local circulation, reduces bogginess, improves glide-slide.
- Avoid/limit: acute heat, redness, or throbbing pain; head/neck in irritable Pitta; over chest/abdomen with

Cooling (śīta) thailams—coconut- or milk-processed bases, bitters/reds (e.g., Pinda/Manjiṣṭhādi, Kṣīrabala, Chandanādi):

- **Use for: hot, reactive** tissues; Pitta overlays; irritable skin; post-heat consolidation.
- Feel: calms, reduces burning, preserves lubrication without over-drying.
- Avoid/limit: dense Kapha bogginess unless paired with brisk-light technique.

Blending strategy. For mixed states, stage rather than mix: begin with a brief warming primer around (not on) the target, follow with a **cooling, even-tempo** regional finish; or vice versa when depletion dominates.

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Storage, shelf life, and quality checks of prepared oils -

Packaging & storage.

- Amber glass with tight caps or pumps; minimal headspace; label oil/base, batch, cook date, pāka stage, preparer.
- Store cool, dark, dry (ideally 15-25 °C); keep session bottles small to avoid reheating bulk.

Shelf life (practical clinic).

Fresh, unrefined, well-cooked thailams: 6-12 months post-prep when stored correctly. Cooling, coconut-forward
oils tend to oxidize faster—use sooner. Discard at the first sign of rancidity ("painty" odor, tacky feel, color shift).

Moisture control & water removal.

- Residual water shortens shelf life and fosters microbial growth. QC every batch:
 - Hot-drop crackle: a hot drop in water should not crackle (no water).
 - Karl Fischer or loss-on-drying (if lab support) target very low moisture.
 - Microscope dip-slide (optional) for bioburden.
- If in doubt, **re-polish** under gentle heat with constant stirring—**do not** scorch.

Organoleptic QC (at intake and at every decant).

- Look: clear, bright, no stratification/sediment after conditioning.
- Smell: clean plant-oil aroma; no rancid/solvent notes.
- Feel: expected slip and "rope"; no grittiness (indicates poor filtration).
- Wick test (kalka memory): a thin thread dipped and lit should burn with steady flame—excess water fizzles it.

In-use hygiene.

• Decant with clean utensils; **never double-dip**. Wipe pump tips daily; wash and dry bottles between refills; discard **end-of-day** leftovers from open bowls.

Hygiene and safety protocols in herbal oil production -

Facility & equipment.

- Dedicated, cleanable area; **stainless steel** kettles/paddles; calibrated **thermometers**, timers, and balances; **sieves/muslin** reserved for oils only.
- **Zoning**: raw herb handling, wet extraction, hot cook, filtration/decant, storage—**separate** to prevent cross-contamination.

Personnel & PPE.

 Hair/beard nets, masks, aprons, closed shoes; no perfumes; hand hygiene logs; health screening to exclude open lesions/illness on production days.

Raw material controls.

Approved suppliers; certificates of identity & absence of heavy metals/pesticides where available; visual check for infestation/mold; sieve and wash as needed; standardize particle size for kalka.

Process controls.

• Batch manufacturing record (BMR) with inputs, ratios, start/stop times, temperatures, stir rates, yield.

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- Deviation log for any adjustments (e.g., extended reduction due to ambient humidity).
- In-process tests: periodic moisture check, aroma/color benchmarks, small-aliquot water test near end-point.

Filtration & packaging hygiene.

- Use boiled-dried muslin; sanitize funnels/bottles; hot-fill when possible; label immediately.
- Traceability: each bottle tied to BMR; keep retain samples 6-12 months.

Safety & waste.

- Fire safety (class K extinguishers near hot oil); splash guards; burn first-aid kit.
- Dispose of spent kalka in sealed biodegradable bags; no sink disposal.
- Allergen control: flag sesame, coconut, mustard, milk in labels; keep allergen clean-down SOPs between different oil runs.

Summary Tables (LMS quick-reference)

A) Snehapāka workflow & readiness

Step	What you do	Why it matters	Stop when
Ratio set	1:4:16 (kalka:sneha:drava)	Enough liquid to transfer actives	
Marinate	Sneha + kalka, low heat	Opens oil to herbs	Aroma rises, paste loosens
Reduce	Add drava; simmer & stir	Extract & concentrate	Bubbling subsides; uniform color
Polish	Gentle finish	Avoids scorching actives	All siddhi-lakṣaṇas met
Filter hot	Muslin press	Removes water-laden fines	Oil runs bright
Condition	24-48 h settle	Clarity & stability	Clear top layer to decant

B) Signature thailams at a glance

Thailam	Base	Signature botanicals	Therapeutic use	Cautions
Mahanārāyana	Sesame	Bala, Aśvagandhā, Rasna, Daśamūla, Devadāru	Nourish + ease Vāta, spondylotic aches, peri-articular stiffness	Warm; avoid heat stacking; patch-test
		Kottam, dry ginger, Vacha, Moringa, Garlic	Mobilise Kapha-āma; cold, puffy stiffness; primer before movement	Not on hot/inflamed joints; avoid face/neck
Dhanvantaram	Sesame	Bala, Daśamūla; often milk- processed	Vāta pacification, postpartum care, neuromuscular support	Moisture control critical if milk used

C) Cooling vs. warming selection

Category	Examples	Use for	Avoid/limit
Warming (uṣṇa)	Koṭṭamcukkādi, warm-lean Mahanārāyana	Cold, stiff, puffy; Kapha–Vāta	Acute heat, head/neck in Pitta
Cooling (śīta)	Pinda/Manjiṣṭhādi, Kṣīrabala, Chandanādi	Hot, reactive tissues; Pitta	Dense Kapha bogginess (without primer)

D) Storage & QC checklist

Item	Standard
Container	Amber glass, minimal headspace, labeled batch/date
Temperature	15-25 °C, dark, dry; small session bottles
Moisture	No crackle; optional lab moisture test low/trace
Organoleptics Bright color, clean aroma, silky slip	
Shelf life	6-12 months practical; discard at rancidity signs

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E) Hygiene & safety SOPs

DomainKey controlsFacilityStainless equipment; zoned areas; calibrated toolsPeoplePPE, hand logs, health screeningMaterialsApproved vendors; ID & purity; particle-size controlProcessBMR, temperature/time logs, in-process testsPackagingHot filtration, sanitized bottles, traceable labelsAllergen/safetyDeclare sesame/coconut/mustard/milk; fire & burn SOPs

Key take-aways

- 1. **Cook to signs, not just time.** Snehapāka succeeds when **madhyama-pāka** signs align—sound, aroma, kalka behavior, and water tests.
- 2. **Signature thailams have personalities.** Mahanārāyana nourishes and eases; Koṭṭamcukkādi mobilises; Dhanvantaram steadies Vāta—use accordingly.
- 3. **Match vīrya to tissue.** Warming oils for cold, stiff patterns; cooling oils for hot, reactive states; stage or blend thoughtfully for mixed pictures.
- 4. **Quality is a habit.** Moisture removal, hot filtration, amber storage, and clean handling **double** the useful life of your oils.
- 5. **GMP thinking saves skin.** Batch records, PPE, calibrated heat, and allergen labeling turn tradition into **safe, reproducible medicine**.

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